REVIEW OF BOOKS ON THE BOOK OF MORMON

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# CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bible II (Royal Skousen)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Card, Orson Scott, <em>Homecoming</em>, vols. 1–5; <em>A Storyteller in Zion: Essays and Speeches</em>; and “An Open Letter to those who are concerned about ‘plagiarism’ in <em>The Memory of Earth</em>.” (Eugene England)</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curtis, Delbert W., <em>Christ in North America</em> (John Clark)</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Griffith, Michael T., <em>Refuting the Critics: Evidences of the Book of Mormon’s Authenticity</em> (K. Codell Carter, Christopher B Isaac)</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heimerdinger, Chris, <em>Daniel and Nephi</em>; Poulson, Clair, Samuel, <em>Moroni's Young Warrior</em> (Richard H. Cracroft)</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marquardt, H. Michael, and Wesley P. Walters, <em>Inventing Mormonism: Tradition and the Historical Record</em> (Richard L. Bushman)</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nyman, Monte S., and Charles D. Tate, eds., <em>The Book of Mormon: 3 Nephi 9–30, This Is My Gospel</em> (Jennifer Clark Lane)</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peay, E. L., <em>The Lands of Zarahemla</em> (Les Campbell)</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proctor, Scot Facer, and Maurine Jensen Proctor, <em>Light from the Dust: A Photographic Exploration into the Ancient World of the Book of Mormon</em> (Fred W. Nelson)</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Samson, Joe, Written by the Finger of God  
(Frederick M. Huchel) .......................................................... 150

Tanner, Jerald and Sandra, Answering Mormon Scholars: 
A Response to Criticism of the Book “Covering Up the 
Black Hole in the Book of Mormon, vol. 1  
(Matthew Roper) .................................................................... 156

Tanner, Jerald and Sandra, Answering Mormon Scholars: 
A Response to Criticism of the Book “Covering Up the 
Black Hole in the Book of Mormon, vol. 1  
(John A. Tvedtines) ............................................................... 204

Toscano, Margaret and Paul, Strangers in Paradox: Exploration 
in Mormon Theology  
(Brian M. Hauglid) .................................................................. 250

White, O. Kendall, Jr., Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy: A Crisis 
Theology  
(Louis Midgley) ...................................................................... 283

1993 Book of Mormon Bibliography  
(Donald. W. Parry) .................................................................. 335

About the Reviewers ................................................................. 349
Editor’s Introduction: Of Polemics

Daniel C. Peterson

Why, I and others associated with this Review have been asked on a number of occasions, do you have to be so polemical, so argumentative? The question is often put with some feeling, and sometimes even with a kind of sadness. Not infrequently, it comes from people who are, roughly speaking, “on our side.”

As a prelude to a partial answer, permit me to share a letter I recently received from a local leader of the Church in a distant foreign country:

Dear brother:

Has there appeared any refutation of the claims in New Approaches to the Book of Mormon? I read it and, together with Inventing Mormonism and Mormon Polygamy: A History, I am almost persuaded that Joseph Smith was the author of the Book of Mormon, the First Vision and—if I add Buerger’s articles in Dialogue—of the temple ceremonies.1

If their claims are valid, it deprives Mormonism of its special appeal. . . . Their arguments and evidences, I think, are solid. I’m asking for more compelling evidences or arguments.2

I was very pleased that we were able to send to this troubled member of the Church a copy of Review of Books on the Book of

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2 I have fixed certain very small English errors in the letter; otherwise, it is printed here as I received it.
Mormon 6/1 (1994), which is wholly dedicated to commenting upon New Approaches to the Book of Mormon. I cannot tell whether or not he will find our arguments persuasive; I know that many have. I am also happy that the present issue of the Review contains a discussion of Inventing Mormonism.

As usual, certain of the books and authors with whom we concern ourselves have received praise and approval from hardcore anti-Mormons. For instance, the Fall 1994 issue of the Christian Research Journal, published by the late “Dr.” Walter Martin’s Christian Research Institute in San Juan Capistrano, carries ads for such treasures as How to Rescue Your Loved One from Mormonism (by David A. Reed and John R. Farkas) and Mormonism: Changes, Contradictions, Errors (by John R. Farkas and David A. Reed). In a brief unsigned article, it also praises, along with Mark J. Cares’s Speaking the Truth in Love to Mormons, Brent L. Metcalfe’s New Approaches to the Book of Mormon, which it describes as containing “ten devastating essays” against the Book of Mormon, and Inventing Mormonism: Tradition and the Historical Record, by H. Michael Marquardt and Wesley P. Walters. Of the latter volume, it says, “Two of Mormonism’s most thoughtful and scholarly opponents join forces to prove that Joseph Smith’s testimonial claims conflict with the evidence of historical fact. Exhaustively documented—and strongly recommended.”3 Utah Missions Incorporated, of Marlow, Oklahoma, enthusiastically offers Inventing Mormonism for sale, along with classics like Latayne Scott’s Why We Left Mormonism and The Mormon Mirage, David Reed and John Farkas’s Mormons Answered Verse by Verse, and a volume of Colleen Ralson’s dreadful anti-Mormon cartoons.4 Luke Wilson, of Gospel Truths Ministries in Grand Rapids, Michigan, remarks of the same book that it provides “airtight and inescapable evidence” of Joseph Smith’s dishonesty.5

Well. The French have an ironic saying that, I think, is appropriate here: Cet animal est très méchant; quand on l’attaque, il se défend (“This animal is extremely vicious: when

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4 The Utah Evangel 41/7 (October 1994): 8, 9.
somebody attacks it, it defends itself). We did not pick this fight with the Church’s critics, but we will not withdraw from it. I can only regret that some may think less of us for that fact. (Certain of our critics have emphasized our alleged “nastiness,” I am convinced, as a way of distracting attention from our evidence and arguments.)

While thinking about these issues, I ran across a remarkable little essay in the remarkable journal *First Things.* Its author, James Nuechterlein, has faced the same question, “Why are you so polemical?” His answer is mine, as well. Such writing, such debate, such confrontation, he says, is not “everyone’s vocation, and it is not the highest vocation, but it is inescapably ours. It would be disingenuous of us to pretend to an attitude of disinterestedness and neutrality in the culture wars that rage about us. . . . And it’s hard to imagine that a journal of opinion that had no opinions would be of use or interest to anyone. Blandness in the pursuit of truth is no virtue.”

Dr. Nuechterlein points out that polemical writing is not necessarily the kind that he would have chosen for himself or for his magazine. “We take no particular pleasure in engaging the militant feminists and homosexual activists, the Nietzschean deconstructionists and relativists, the enemies of traditional morality and religious faith; indeed, the ongoing conflict with our various utopians and Gnostics is dirty business from which no one emerges with entirely clean hands or uncoarsened sensibilities.” This is precisely my attitude, and I am confident that it represents the attitude of most if not all of my colleagues. I am not, by native temperament, confrontational, and, with my associates, would rather write affirmatively. The gospel is an endlessly fascinating, rich, profound, and glorious subject, and it is more than a little tiresome, at times, to have to descend from its heights to reply to carping critics and to sworn, professional enemies of the Church. I have often felt like Nehemiah, when Sanballat and Tobiah and Geshem the Arabian, hoping to delay or even to stop the building of Jerusalem’s city wall, summoned him to a meeting for negotiations. “I am doing a great work,” Nehemiah replied, “so

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that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?" (Nehemiah 6:3).

The work of the Church is a far greater one than the building of any city wall. And I firmly believe that the kind of study of the scriptures represented by the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies offers at least a small contribution to the work of the Church. But the attacks of the critics create casualties. (I think of my correspondent from abroad. I think of others, presumably far more numerous, who may be troubled but who do not write.) Sometimes it is necessary to climb down from the wall. Sometimes it is even necessary, as Nehemiah’s construction workers did, to labor with one hand while the other holds a sword (see Nehemiah 4:13-23). “However regretfully,” writes Dr. Nuechterlein, “it is indeed a culture war in which my colleagues and I find ourselves engaged, and it is worth emphasizing that this is a conflict not of our making. This is no rarefied battle of the books, no mere esoteric disagreement among obscure scribblers. Ideas, as they say, have consequences.”

We who write for the Review have our own fields, in which we aspire to do good and creative work. Many of us hold responsible and time-consuming assignments in the Church. We would prefer to devote our sparse free time to seeking insights into the gospel and the restoration. Many of us have more ideas and research questions than we will ever find the time to develop. The negative work of criticism and, occasionally, of demolition, is something we approach with genuine reluctance. Again, James Nuechterlein expresses our feelings well:

We persist in the struggle because we think it is our simple duty to do so, and we frankly do not take it well that so many of our fellow intellectuals—who if they cannot join us in the struggle could at least offer moral support—prefer instead to strike ostentatiously Olympian poses above the fray and to chide us for our combative ways. But we remind ourselves that self-pity is to be avoided, and we soldier on, armed (we hope) against self-righteousness by the knowledge that the God of history sits in judgment over all the combatants in the wars of the earthly city, siding unambiguously with none, offering his grace to all. Precisely because we know, with the writer to the Hebrews,
that we have here no abiding city, we are from time to time tempted to retire from the fray, to set our minds on higher and better things. But the evils of this world, so far as it is given us to discern them, are to be resisted, not merely endured. And there is, we pray, a measure of honor and dignity even in our grim vocation. So restraining our naturally irenic impulses, we return to the struggle with all the courage, wisdom, and ingenuity we can muster. It is, to repeat, a matter of duty. And that is why—at least on occasion—we have to be so polemical.

The opinions expressed in this issue of the Review, like those in previous issues, are the opinions of the reviewers. They are not necessarily those of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or of the reviewers’ employers. As always, I am grateful to the many individuals who helped in the production of this issue: Dr. Fred C. Pinnegar and Dr. William J. Hamblin offered valuable editorial assistance. Dr. Melvin J. Thorne did much of the real work of editing. Brent Hall was, as usual, helpful in numerous ways. Sandra Thorne got the submissions into publishable shape. And, of course, without the contributors, the Review of Books on the Book of Mormon would not exist at all. I wish to express my thanks, too, to the many who have expressed appreciation for the Review. They have always far outnumbered our critics, and their support is one of the most satisfying rewards we can enjoy.
Reviewed by Royal Skousen

This volume has been advertised recently in Biblical Archaeology Review (on page 95 of the March/April 1994 issue) as "The book sure to shake the world! Written by Jews in America 600 B.C.-400 A.D. / The American Indian is the remnant of Israel that was established in the New World / During a great war that claimed the lives of millions, these records were hid up to again come forth in the due time of the Almighty Creator." It can be obtained from the New World Press Company (P.O. Box 50730, Midland, Texas 79710) for $19.93, plus $2.24 in postage.

As might be guessed, The Bible II is in fact the Book of Mormon, but with a number of interesting differences in addition to the name change. The title page found in other editions of the Book of Mormon is completely missing, as are the testimonies of the three and eight witnesses. Nor is there any mention anywhere of its translator, Joseph Smith. None of the books within (such as 1 Nephi, Alma, or Moroni) are titled, but instead each is designated by number: thus 1 Nephi is Book 1, 2 Nephi is Book 2, and so on, ending with Moroni as Book 15. The book summaries that are original with the Book of Mormon text (such as the summary that begins 1 Nephi—namely, "an account of Lehi and his wife Sariah and . . .") have all been removed.

In place of the LDS chapter system (originally devised by Orson Pratt for the 1879 edition of the Book of Mormon), this version uses the original chapter system, but still follows Orson Pratt's versification system except that the verses have been renumbered in accord with the original chapter system. Thus chapter 1 of Book 1 (1 Nephi) ends up with 135 verses, since the corresponding LDS chapters (1–5) of 1 Nephi have 20, 24, 31, 38, and 22 verses (which equals 135).

The copy text for this version of the Book of Mormon is clearly the 1981 LDS edition (as corrected in 1983). The Bible II
faithfully follows the textual changes that were introduced in that edition. This version does, however, systematically remove some of the King James language style from the Book of Mormon; for instance, *yea* is replaced by *yes*, the pronouns *thou/thee/thy/thine* by *you/your*, and the -th verbal ending by -s (thus *hath* > *has*). But generally the text is the same as the current LDS text.

Copyrighted material (including the chapter summaries) from the 1981 LDS edition is not, of course, used. In its place, there is an introductory passage, plus an epilogue of quotations from the Book of Mormon regarding the last days. Two other items appear in the appendix: an interesting outline of the Book of Mormon (which serves the same purpose as the chapter summaries in the current LDS edition), and a useful index of some of the main terms in the Book of Mormon.

If you do decide to order *The Bible II*, you will also receive “An Abridgment of The BIBLE II” entitled “How to Get to HEAVEN.”

**Mormon in the Fiery Furnace**

*Or, Loftes Tryk Goes to Cambridge*

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

“Setting aside this problem of ‘reality’ for the moment . . .”

John L. Brooke (p. 227)

**The Author and His Argument**

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

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² An earlier, shorter, and less documented version of some of Brooke’s ideas can be found in his “ ‘Of whole nations being born in one day’: marriage, money and magic in the Mormon cosmos, 1830–1846,” *Social Science Information* 30/1 (1991):107–32.
Things, where it is endorsed by Jan Shipps. Nonetheless, as he himself acknowledges, he is “not a Mormon historian”—and it shows. *The Refiner’s Fire*, he admits, “is not necessarily a well-rounded approach to early Mormonism” (p. xvii) or “a balanced history” (p. xvii), but is rather a “selective reinterpretation” (p. xvi), which is conceptually dependent on D. Michael Quinn’s *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View* (p. xvii).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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8 Ibid., 651.
that Brooke understands that both ideological constructs are reductionist.\footnote{Brendan McConville, review of John L. Brooke, \textit{The Heart of the Commonwealth}, in \textit{Journal of Economic History} 53/1 (March 1993): 186–87.}

Careful readers of Professor Brooke’s new book will find that it suffers, at a minimum, from the same flaws that these reviewers have noted in his previous volume. Regrettably, though, as we shall attempt to illustrate, Professor Brooke’s command of the data on Mormonism, as distinct from his evident specialist’s control of the facts about early Massachusetts, is far too weak to compensate for this book’s interpretive errors.\footnote{Brown, “Essay Review,” 647, says of \textit{The Heart of the Commonwealth} that it displays “a mastery of factual detail that we have not seen before.” The same thing cannot be said of the chapters on Mormonism in \textit{The Refiner’s Fire}, although its bibliography and notes are indisputably impressive, at first glance, for their range and quantity.}

\textit{The Refiner’s Fire} is divided into twelve chapters totaling some three hundred pages. Brooke first presents a very brief summary of the origins of hermeticism and alchemy, and of the possible influence of those ideas on various groups of the Radical Reformation of the sixteenth century (pp. 3–29). He then attempts to demonstrate how some of these ideas made their way to North America in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (pp. 30–58). His third chapter focuses on the ancestors of some early Mormons, and their (usually very tenuous) ties to various occultists and radical religious groups in eighteenth-century New England (pp. 59–88). His basic thesis here is that the family background of some early Mormon converts represents “predispositions of prepared peoples, traditions and predispositions shaped in great measure by familial connections and oral culture” (p. 91). (This seems to mean that, since there is no hard textual evidence of the supposed hermetic connections, Brooke must assume oral transmission of those ideas.) He then presents a collection of esoteric groups or ideas that existed in the United States around 1800, which he claims could have influenced Joseph Smith and other early Mormons. These include hermeticism, alchemy, Freemasonry, Swedenborgianism, Mesmerism, Rosicrucianism, and the musings of Luman Walter(s) the magician (pp. 91–104). Chapter five, “Alchymical
Experiments," focuses on "[treasure] divining, alchemy, and counterfeiting [which] formed a hermetic triad in popular culture" (p. 121)—the connection between them being that each offered a different avenue in "the search for easy wealth" (p. 128), either through finding buried treasure, transmuting base metals into gold, or counterfeiting coins and bills.

Brooke next attempts, in chapter six, to associate Joseph Smith's immediate ancestors with mining, alchemy, treasure-divining, Freemasonry, and counterfeiting (pp. 129–46). His book is thus half over before we reach Joseph's First Vision. In chapter seven, Brooke attempts to find hermeticism, Freemasonry, and alchemy in the translation process and text of the Book of Mormon (pp. 149–83). Thereafter, although chronologically presented, the subsequent chapters do not offer a coherent history of early Mormonism, and readers unfamiliar with LDS history will often be confused. Instead, Brooke searches for any and every thought or act of Joseph Smith and other early Mormons that he can see as related—however vaguely—to hermetic, Masonic, alchemical, or other occultic ideas. He first focuses on ideas of priesthood, mysteries, temples, cosmology, and preexistence (pp. 184–212). Joseph's marriage, sex life, and plural marriages are seen as "replicat[ing] the hermetic concept of divinization through the coniunctio, the alchemical marriage" (p. 214, cf. 212–18). The Kirtland Bank crisis is seen as having arisen from quasi-counterfeiting, which, in Brooke's metaphorical style of argumentation, makes it quasi-alchemical (since, figuratively speaking, it creates gold out of nothing), which somehow demonstrates that Joseph was a hermeticist (pp. 222–32). Brooke then focuses on the Nauvoo period, baptism for the dead, and the temple endowment, in which he sees the ultimate manifestation of hermetic influences on Joseph, representing a fundamental departure from the biblical primitivism of the Book of Mormon and early Mormonism. All of this culminates in Joseph's reformulation of "the dual gendered divinity that lay at the heart of the hermetic theology," which is the Mormon "androgynous God" (p. 258, cf. 235–61). Polygamy, the Kingdom of God, the murder of Joseph, and the fall of Nauvoo are the focus of chapter eleven (pp. 262–77), along with another healthy dose of alleged counterfeiting (pp. 269–74). In the final chapter, "Let Mysteries
Alone” (pp. 278–305), Brooke attempts to demonstrate that Joseph Smith’s original hermetic Mormonism was systematically dismantled by Brigham Young and other later prophets, who “deemphasiz[ed] the distinct doctrines of the church” (p. 305), such as blood atonement, polygamy, the gifts of the Spirit, and Adam-God. Temple ordinances were neglected to the point where, Brooke claims, “only the dead who had died outside the faith explicitly required the saving powers of temple ordinances” (p. 292). This results in the modern, oppressive, authoritarian Church, which “may well soon become essentially indistinguishable from conservative Christian fundamentalism” (p. 282), and which has recently excommunicated intellectuals who “advanced a hermetic interpretation of Mormon cosmology, and most centrally the hermetic thesis of a dual-gendered divinity” (p. 305). Brooke concludes by advising that Mormons would do well to return to their hermetic origins (pp. 302–5).

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

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

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

Brooke makes no serious attempt to define the term, let alone to deal with the

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


17 Gager, Curse Tablets and Binding Spells, 25.
intricacies of its meaning or the solid objections that have been raised against its use.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Throughout his book, Brooke’s approach might be characterized as scholarship by adjective (see, e.g., pp. 240, 294). Time and again, he places the adjective “hermetic” or “alchemical” before a noun relating to Mormonism and then proceeds as if the mere act of juxtaposing the two terms—essentially without argument—had established that the ill-defined adjective really applies. He holds that “certainly Joseph Smith was predisposed to a hermetic interpretation of sacred history and
processes from his boyhood" (p. 208). But what does this mean? What is a “hermetic interpretation” here? Although Brooke himself seems to have a predisposition to a “hermetic interpretation” of almost everything in sight, Joseph Smith and his followers undoubtedly did not have the remotest idea of what hermeticism was.

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

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

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

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

The Problem of Primary Sources

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

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

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\(^{23}\) The two possible exceptions are the well-known allegations of Joseph’s early treasure-divining and his late relation with the Masons. Brooke’s study offers no substantial new insights on either issue.

\(^{24}\) We used LDS Collector’s Edition (Folio Infobase, 1993).

\(^{25}\) TS 5:526.
hundreds of individuals have spent all their time in the pursuit of that vain phantom."26 Thus, the only mention of alchemy in this entire corpus is a negative one. "Cabala" occurs once, when an Elder Ewald, on a mission to England, relates a discussion with a rabbi who mentions it and the "Sohar" (Zohar).27 Elsewhere, John Taylor speaks metaphorically of things "mysterious or cabalistic."28 The word "occult" never occurs in any of these texts. "Magic" is more frequently mentioned, occurring twenty-two times, of which fifteen are metaphorical ("as if by magic," or "like magic").29 Two references are to theatrical magic tricks or shows.30 The other five are uniformly negative.31 "Witch" occurs thirteen times, nine referring to the story of the witch of Endor in the Bible,32 and four referring, unfavorably, to the Salem witch trials.33 Sorcery is never mentioned, while the one example of a sorcerer has reference to the Simon Magus story from Acts 8:9–24.34 Explicit positive references to the distinctively hermetic and alchemical ideas that Brooke maintains played a critically formative role in early Mormonism are noticeable in these early LDS texts only for their absence.35

26 JD 3:168, 295.
27 TS 3:780; the Sohar/Zohar is also mentioned in TS 4:222, by Alexander Neihbur. "Zohar" is found seven times, always in reference to a proper name in the Old Testament.
28 JD 5:260.
30 HC 5:19; TS 4:203.
31 TS 2:434, 5:427, 6:916; JD 2:46, 13:135; three of these will be cited below.
33 MA 388–89; TS 3:600; JD 6:361, 14:203.
34 TS 4:794.
On the other hand, there are a number of texts and incidents which indicate a basically negative attitude towards the occult by most early Mormons. Brooke himself notices several incidents manifesting such an anti-occult strain in early LDS thought: George A. Smith, for instance, destroyed magic books brought to America by English converts (p. 239). Likewise, “organizations advocating the occult were suppressed” by Brigham Young in 1855 (p. 287), while, “in 1900 and 1901, church publications launched the first explicit attacks on folk magic” (p. 291). But the evidence of negative attitudes among Mormons to matters occult is much more widespread than Brooke indicates.

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

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

36 As will be noted below, the 1900-01 publications are most certainly not the first explicit attacks on folk magic” in LDS history.
37 3 Nephi 24:5 also denounces sorcerers, but is a quotation from Malachi 3:5.
38 TS 2:434.
superstitious."\(^39\) As noted above, Orson Pratt described alchemy as "the pursuit of that vain phantom."\(^40\) His brother Parley was even more forthright:

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

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

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

\(^{39}\) *TS* 5:427.
\(^{40}\) *JD* 3:295.
\(^{41}\) Parley P. Pratt, *JD* 2:46 (April 6, 1853).
believe he was saying and doing. Thus, while it may be true that some early non-Mormons or anti-Mormons occasionally described some activities of Joseph Smith and the Saints as somehow related to “magic,” it is purely a derogatory outsider view. The Saints never describe their own beliefs and activities in those terms. Brooke has a disturbing tendency to cite standard LDS sources and histories on noncontroversial matters—thereby establishing an impression of impartiality—while, on disputed points, using anti-Mormon sources without explaining the Mormon perspective or interpretation. Thus, Brooke frequently and unquestioningly uses the affidavits published against the young Joseph Smith by his enemies in Eber D. Howe’s 1834 Mormonism Unveiled. He does not inform his readers that there is a strong contradictory commentary about these accounts by modern scholars—both LDS and non-LDS—who find them often tendentious and unreliable, or at least that the affidavits should be used with great caution. Yet these affidavits represent his primary source for his claim that “Joseph Smith was deeply involved in occult divination” (p. 30).

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

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

Primary Sources and the Atonement: A Test Case

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

Awkwardly for Brooke’s thesis, though, Latter-day Saints today clearly do believe in the necessity of redemption through Christ. He is thus forced to posit a vast but previously unremarked theological revolution within Mormonism. He needs to account for the obvious difference between contemporary Mormon beliefs and what he asserts to have been “the Nauvoo theology” (p. 289). Thus he speaks, without adducing much, if any, evidence, of “the church’s new focus on Christ’s atonement” in the late nineteenth century (p. 292; cf. 294, 297), and declares that “the Mormon theological transformation since the 1890s . . . ‘re-Christianized’ [the Church] to the point of confirming the centrality of Christ’s atonement” (p. 296). Furthermore, Brooke claims to see in contemporary Mormonism a new “‘neo-orthodox’ movement that ‘presses for further movement toward Christianity’” (p. 297), and that teaches, innovatively, a concept of
"sin from which only Christ’s atonement and God’s grace can save humanity" (p. 296).42

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

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

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

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

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

45 See, for example, the stories collected in Eugene England, ed., Converted to Christ through the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989).
It is fully possible, of course, that published materials in any given period do not adequately reflect all the beliefs or basic doctrines of the Latter-day Saints. Many beliefs are so basic that they are presumed in discussion, and there may be no need felt to make them explicit. Often, it is only problematic or disputed issues that receive explicit expression; what is commonly assumed hardly requires articulation. But this does not mean that such basic beliefs leave no trace. So where should we look for such traces in the case of nineteenth-century Mormons? It would seem that one good place to begin an examination of the beliefs actually held by members of the Church is in their hymns. Because the hymns are sung regularly and in various settings, they are at the devotional heart of the Church.

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

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

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

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

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

46 "Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken" is hymn 46 in the current hymnbook.
47 "I Know That My Redeemer Lives" and "He Died! The Great Redeemer Died" are, respectively, hymns 136 and 192 in the current hymnbook.
hold similar beliefs themselves? Clearly, they did. For the 1835 hymnal also included original works by Latter-day Saints, most notably by William W. Phelps. Phelps, whom Brooke identifies as one of those “alienated Freemasons” who accepted Mormonism out of openness “to a new way into the ‘ancient mysteries’ ” (p. 168), is precisely the type of fellow who ought to be an ideal paradigm of Joseph Smith’s supposedly radical, atonement-neglecting, hermetic Mormonism. Yet, contrary to what Brooke’s theories would lead us to expect, Phelps’s hymns sing of Jesus Christ’s as “the only name in which the Saints can trust” and recall the “grace” extended to us by the Savior.48 “His love,” writes Phelps of Jesus, “is great; he died for us.”49 And perhaps the most famous passage about “that offering divine” written by Phelps, one still popular in the Church today, is “O God, the Eternal Father.” It reads as follows:

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

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

48 The quotations are, respectively, from “We’re Not Ashamed to Own Our Lord,” hymn 57 in the current hymnbook, and from “Gently Raise the Sacred Strain,” which is hymn 146 in the current hymnal.
49 From “Come, All Ye Saints Who Dwell on Earth,” which is 65 in the current hymnbook.
50 Hymn 175 in the current hymnbook.
those who sang them were on the brink of denying the necessity of redemption, or of suggesting that humans can save themselves?

Furthermore, throughout the interval between 1833 and 1890, as in all other periods of the Church’s history, Latter-day Saints were meeting regularly to partake of the sacrament of the Lord’s supper. In that ordinance, the prayer over the bread asks God the Father “to bless and sanctify this bread to the souls of all those who partake of it, that they may eat in remembrance of the body of thy Son.” Similarly, the prayer over the water asks that it be blessed and sanctified “to the souls of all those who drink of it, that they may do it in remembrance of the blood of thy Son, which was shed for them.”

Once again, the most common ritual in the Church fails to provide any evidence for Professor Brooke’s daring reconstruction of Mormon doctrine and, indeed, suggests that he is wrong. But beyond the prayers, there were and are also hymns specifically associated with the ordinance of the sacrament. One of them reads as follows:

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

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

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

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

51 For the prayers, see Doctrine and Covenants 20:75-79; also Moroni 4 and 5.
52 “Again We Meet around the Board,” by Eliza R. Snow, is hymn 186 in the current hymnbook.
Snow (who, in Brooke’s mind, is prominently associated with the supposedly “hermetic” doctrine of human deification), the plural wife both of Joseph Smith and, later, of Brigham Young. She was the long-time president of the Relief Society, the women’s organization of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, in which role she was acclaimed as, among other things, the “leading Priestess of this dispensation.” She was also, as Brooke notes (p. 258), the author of the famous hymn “O My Father,” with its (purportedly hermetic) teaching of a divine Heavenly Mother. Surely if anyone understood Joseph Smith’s teachings, and if there was anyone who should have been an exponent of John Brooke’s claimed hermetic, radical, atonement-denying Mormon theology, it would have been Eliza R. Snow. But her hymns teach the standard Latter-day Saint doctrine of the atonement, just as the Church understands it today:

Behold the great Redeemer die,
A broken law to satisfy.
He dies a sacrifice for sin,
That man may live and glory win.\(^{54}\)

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

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

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

\(^{53}\) *Woman’s Exponent* 9 (1 April 1881): 165.
\(^{54}\) From “Behold the Great Redeemer Die,” hymn 191 in the current hymnbook.
Where justice, love, and mercy meet
In harmony divine!\(^{55}\)

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

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

\(^{55}\) From "How Great the Wisdom and the Love," hymn 195 in the current hymnbook.

\(^{56}\) Orson Pratt, "The Kingdom of God, Part II" (Liverpool: R. James, 1848), 3–4. Italics and capitalization in the original. Many other statements relevant to the atonement could be produced, including notable items from Brigham Young.
Faith alone will not justify; faith and repentance alone will not justify; faith and baptism alone will not justify; but faith, repentance, and baptism will justify and bring remission of sins through the blood of Christ.\textsuperscript{57}

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

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

\textsuperscript{57} Orson Pratt, \textit{A Series of Pamphlets} (Liverpool: Franklin D. Richards, 1852), 6.

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

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

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

**Errors of Evidence**

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

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

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59 D&C 76:69.
60 Roberts, History of the Church, 3:30.
61 Considerations of time and space have forced us to limit the number of examples of misreadings found in The Refiner’s Fire. We could easily have doubled or even tripled the examples given below.
book of Daniel itself) are said to have “anticipated [the language] of the Book of Mormon” (p. 78). This unfortunately disregards the uncongenial fact that Nebuchadnezzar’s dream is nowhere alluded to in the book. Brooke teaches us several new things about the prophet Mormon, too: His erroneous notion that the “lone Nephite survivor [was] Mormon” (p. 159) is, for instance, employed as evidence for the equally false assertion that “the [golden] plates were hidden by the hero Mormon for Joseph Smith to recover” (p. 156).

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

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62 It is alluded to in D&C 65:2.
63 Although elsewhere it seems that, correctly, “the surviving prophet [was] Moroni” (p. 185).
64 Cf. Brooke’s bizarre pseudo psychoanalysis of Joseph’s “problematic procreative intercourse with Emma” (p. 216) which Brooke sees as the basis for the “Nephite disciple [as] a ‘child in the furnace’ ” (p. 215).
multiplication of the furnaces allows him to speak with mock weariness of “the usual furnace scenes” (p. 176) and “the requisite saintly disciples [who] survive being cast ‘into furnaces of fire’” (p. 176, citing 4 Nephi 1:32), without informing us how one single incident can be seen as “usual” or “requisite.” And why focus on the furnace? Why not mention the prisons, or pits, or beasts? If Joseph was really so obsessed with alchemical imagery, why does the term “furnace” occur only five times in the Book of Mormon, but 30 times in the King James Bible? Were the ancient Hebrews also obsessed with alchemy?

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

The Doctrine and Covenants fares no better under Brooke’s scrutiny. His identification (on p. 201) of a hybrid “Adam-Christ figure” in Doctrine and Covenants 76 and 93, while obviously helpful to his attempt to locate a Mormon parallel to “the godlike powers of the primal Adam” of hermeticism (pp. 200–2), has no basis whatsoever in the documents he cites. Brooke maintains that Doctrine and Covenants 29:46–47 “ended with the comforting universalist note that children were innocent of original sin. Within months he [Smith] would totally abandon the doctrine of original sin, contradicting passages in the Book of Mormon” (p. 189). It is understandable that Brooke never informs us which passages in the Book of Mormon Doctrine and Covenants 29:46–47 is supposed to contradict, since it is in fact a paraphrase of the ideas presented on child baptism in Moroni 8. Citing Doctrine and Covenants 84:5–19, Brooke tells his readers that Joseph Smith’s “revelations restoring the biblical priesthood of the [sic] Melchizedek in the early 1830s included similar passages on the
passing of the priesthood from Adam through Enoch to Solomon . . . as Masonic mythology proposed” (p. 166). But the relevant verses never mention Solomon at all, and, since he is the crucial figure in “Masonic mythology,” Brooke’s case collapses. In another passage on the same page, Brooke identifies Joseph as “a latter-day Solomon,” stepping in to supply evidence for his thesis when the historical record obstinately fails to do so. Similarly, when he tries to show, on the basis of Moses 6:6-7, that Joseph Smith equated priesthood with the Adamic language, he actually inserts two of his own words into the text (p. 195)—words without which he would have no case whatever. He equates “sealing powers of Elijah” with being “sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise” (p. 256, cf. 260) despite the fact that his source, Doctrine and Covenants 132:7, never mentions Elijah.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

71 For a close analysis of these issues in an Islamic context, see Daniel C. Peterson, “Emanation and Creation Ex Nihilo in al-Kirmānī” (forthcoming, from Presses Universitaires de France, in the proceedings of the international colloquium, “Perspectives médiévales arabes, latines, hébraïques sur la tradition scientifique et philosophique grecque”).
Nonetheless, Brooke thoroughly confuses the two doctrines, and his resultant misunderstanding of the relationship between spirit and matter in Mormonism, which he labels "the core of Mormon cosmology" (p. 15), leads him into bizarre errors (as at 215).

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

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

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

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

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

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

74 Corpus Hermeticum 3.2, 11.7, Asclepius 19 = Copenhaver, Hermetica, 13, 38, 78.

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

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

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

76 White, Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy, 93, 131–32, 169–73.
77 See note 95 below.
prestigious (e.g., the Colonial Society of Massachusetts, Viola Sach’s Colloquia at the Maison des Sciences de l’Homme at the University of Paris, the Andover-Harvard Divinity School Church History Seminar, and the Atlantic History Workshop at Johns Hopkins University.) But, one wants to ask, why did he evidently never submit his speculations to the evaluation of informed Latter-day Saints at the Mormon History Association or, even, at a Sunstone Symposium? Why, when, on the same page, he thanks scholars like Jan Shipps, Larry Moore, David Hall, and Jon Butler, who read his manuscript in whole or in part, are there no thanks for reading the manuscript to respected Latter-day Saint historians such as Thomas Alexander, James Allen, Richard Lloyd Anderson, Leonard Arrington, Milton Backman, Davis Bitton, Richard Bushman, or Grant Underwood, etc.? (How would Cambridge University Press regard a Christian or Muslim writer who had submitted to them a major revisionist work on Judaism, but who had egregiously failed to engage in dialogue with contemporary Jewish scholars?) Yet Professor Brooke could have avoided many embarrassing errors had he opted to take a look at current Latter-day Saint scholarship, or to submit his musings to competent Latter-day Saint evaluation. Thus, to choose just one example from scores that could have been selected, when he alludes in passing to “the already shaky edifice of the Book of Mormon, a historical revelation far too accessible to the historian’s prying eyes” (p. 304), his is an uninformed judgment that relies far too confidently on the work of professional anti-Mormons like Jerald and Sandra Tanner (pp. 363, 380), to say nothing of Walter F. Prince’s widely-ridiculed speculations about the origins of Book of Mormon names (pp. 169, 368).78

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

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

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

The Methodological Imperative: Biblical vs. Hermetic Antecedents

Brooke recognizes that the question of “how to specify the role of hermeticism in relation to the many obviously Christian elements in Mormon theology” (p. xiv) is one of his major methodological problems. Yet the solution to this problem is, in fact, quite simple: Brooke must provide evidence for uniquely hermetic or alchemical terms or ideas in Mormonism—terms or ideas which are not paralleled in the Bible. Ignoring this principle, though, Brooke consistently downplays, and frequently altogether suppresses, the obvious and explicit biblical antecedents of Mormon thought in favor of obscure and vague parallels to hermetic, alchemical, Masonic, and occult texts and ideas, which themselves often derive from the Bible.
It is universally acknowledged that biblical quotations, paraphrases, and imagery fill all early LDS scripture, writings, and sermons. Time and again early Latter-day Saints explicitly point to biblical precedents for their doctrines and practices. Joseph Smith and all the early Mormon elders taught and defended their doctrines from the Bible. Even in the great King Follett discourse—which Brooke sees as a cornucopia of “hermetic” doctrine—Joseph declared “I am going to prove it [the doctrine of multiple gods] to you by the Bible.”79 The text is filled with biblical quotations and allusions. Never do the early Saints claim they are following hermetic or alchemical precedents. Brooke, however, generously sets out to correct this lapse for them, as the following examples will demonstrate.

- Anabaptists “posit Christ as . . . the Second Adam” (p. 14), as do Mormons; likewise, “touched by hermetic thought, the revolutionary [Protestant] sects interpret Christ as a Second Adam” (p. 204). No mention is made of 1 Corinthians 15:45–49 as the clear source for this idea.
- “Michael Quinn,” Professor Brooke reports, “has noted that the idea of three heavens, or degrees of glory, was available in Emmanuel Swedenborg’s cosmic system, in which three heavens—topped by a ‘celestial kingdom’—were associated with the sun, the moon, and the stars” (p. 205). But Michael Quinn also knows that “the idea of three heavens, or degrees of glory, . . . associated with the sun, the moon, and the stars” can be derived from 1 Corinthians 15:40–42 and 2 Corinthians 12:2. Is Professor Brooke unaware of this?
- The Paracelsian and Joachimite “hope that an Age of Spirit [the third dispensation] would commence with the second coming of Elijah” (p. 15) is posited as a source of “the visions of Elias and Elijah received by Joseph Smith” (p. 28). Brooke fails to mention Malachi 4:5 and Mark 9:11 as obvious sources for this idea.
- “The godly Monarchy prophesied in the Book of Daniel [is] a typology popular among both the chiliasm Munster

79 *Times and Seasons* 5/15 (15 August 1844): 613. Incidentally, the King Follett discourse also seems to teach, and to rely on, the basic doctrine of Christ’s atonement: “the salvation of Jesus Christ was wrought out for all men,” says the Prophet. Ibid., 616.
Anabaptists and the Latter-day Saints at Nauvoo and in early Utah” (p. 24)—and, we might add, with every other Christian and Jewish millenarian group in history.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- “The keys to the kingdom were about to be specified [through the temple ceremony], and they were being described in language that implied Masonic meanings. The key was a symbol of secrecy in Freemasonry” (p. 248). Nothing is said about Matthew 16:19, where Christ gives the “keys of the kingdom” to Peter. “Keys” have been a part of the papal coat of arms for centuries, inspired by this very passage.
- Brooke insists that “the rhetoric of ‘blood atonement’ mingled hermetic notions of condensing vapors, which carry us back to the ‘Old Rodsman’ ” (p. 285). As evidence for this he quotes Brigham Young, who speaks of “the smoke [of sacrifice, which] . . . might ascend to God as an offering” (p. 285)—an obvious allusion to Revelation 8:4 and 14:11. And just how does Brigham’s ascending smoke have anything to do with “hermetic notions of condensing vapors”?

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

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

**Problems of Method and Analysis**

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

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

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

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80 Jonathan Z. Smith, Drudgery Divine (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 47 n. 15. Scholars positing parallels between Mormonism and
It is agreed that the statement “x resembles y” is logically incomplete . . . [because it] suppress[es the] multi-term statement of analogy and difference capable of being properly expressed in formulations such as:

“x resembles y more than z with respect to . . .;”

or,

“x resembles y more than w resembles z with respect to . . .”.

That is to say, the statement of comparison is never dyadic, but always triadic; there is always an implicit “more than”, and there is always a “with respect to”.81

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

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

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

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

81 Ibid. 51.
after all, both involved digging. Brooke then shows that there were occasionally alchemical ideas associated with ores and metals (p. 77). Therefore, he concludes, the Smiths were in “contact with the metallurgical tradition” of alchemy (p. 75, cf. 75-7). Elsewhere we learn that Joseph had a seer-stone (p. 30), that some people with seer-stones used divining rods (p. 30), and that “divining often incorporated references to very specific knowledge of alchemy” (p. 31). Therefore, “diviners, near-contemporaries of Joseph Smith, conjure up images of the great alchemists of the seventeenth century” (p. 33). All of this may be true, but Brooke’s “conjured image” is just that—it is certainly not evidence that Joseph knew anything about classical alchemy simply because he used a seer-stone. We are also informed that Asael Smith, Joseph’s grandfather, was somehow linked with what Brooke calls “perfectionists” (pp. 132-33) and that “Asael’s perfectionism had alchemical and hermetic analogues” (p. 133). Asael quoted the Book of Daniel in a letter; “Radical English sectarians” also quoted from the Book of Daniel (p. 133). Therefore, Joseph Smith was influenced by hermetic and alchemical lore.

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

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

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

\textsuperscript{84} Of course it is not at all "undeniable" that the Gadiantons were based on Masonry; Daniel Peterson has made just such a denial—of which Brooke is apparently unaware (p. 368 n. 60). (See Daniel C. Peterson, "Notes on 'Gadianton Masonry','" in Warfare in the Book of Mormon, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1990], 174-224.) Brooke's "ample reason[s]" for equating the Gadiantons with counterfeiters are: (1) some counterfeiters were Masons, (2) "the episodic rise and fall [of the Gadiantons]...echoed the similar cyclical pattern of counterfeiting," (3) they both "prey[ed] upon the people's wealth," (4) they were both "suppressed by force" (5) they both fled into the wilderness, and (6) sometimes they both "go unpunished" (170). But these are far from sufficient reasons to justify such an equation. And, unfortunately for Brooke's argument, the one thing the Gadiantons apparently never did in the Book of Mormon was to counterfeit.
Brooke’s argument occasionally degenerates into the wildest of word associations. Susannah Goddard Howe was descended from the Goddard family whom Brooke links with “occult warfare” (p. 67) in early eighteenth-century New England. Susannah Howe’s daughter married a Mormon, John Haven, who remembered that Susannah Howe “believe[d] that Jacob’s ladder was not yet broken and that angels still continued to ascend and descend” (p. 70). Brooke asserts that “this seems to have been the residual influence of the bewitchment of the Goddards, apparently by Nat Smith, the Immortalist god,” and that her statement indicates that she was “convinced that spirit and matter were inseparably connected, the central tenet of the Mormon cosmology” (p. 70). All of this from a rather obscure secondhand allusion to Genesis 28:10–15!

Building on the “pioneering” methodology of Michael Quinn, much of Brooke’s argument rests upon the flimsiest of circumstantial evidence, including tenuous genealogical and geographical relationships (as at pp. 25, 50–51, 59–60, 63, 70–71, 73, 95, 266, 270, 359). He admits that much of this material “required some speculation and inference” (p. 336). That is putting it mildly. It is rather like using an alchemical recipe to make New England chowder by merely boiling water in the same room with the clams—never mind that the two never come together. Thus we learn that a certain Thomas Ingersoll had “connections to the Smiths’ circle of money-diggers” (p. 173). But what was the nature of those connections? Thomas “was either a brother or a third cousin of Peter Ingersoll, whom the Smiths had [allegedly] tried to recruit into their [alleged] money-digging club” (p. 174). And what significance is there, really, in the datum, noted above, that the counterfeiter Joseph Bill was “a second cousin once removed of Samuel Bill, who would marry Joseph Smith’s aunt Lydia Mack in 1786” (p. 108)? How many readers of this review, we wonder, can name a second cousin once removed of their maternal aunt’s husband? How many have been significantly influenced by him or her? Brooke also finds “a happy symmetry” in the fact that Heber C. Kimball’s first mission to England took him “to the birthplace of Lawrence Clarkson, who two centuries before” had held a few notions vaguely parallel to ideas Brooke claims to find in Joseph Smith (p.
238). Many readers will find it, as we do, irrelevant. Most amusingly, Brooke spends several pages (pp. 50–53) detailing the eighteenth-century occult religiosity of Joseph Stafford and describing the "magical documents" his family preserved from him after his death, only to admit, in passing, that it was a different branch of the family—his brother David's descendants, who did not have those documents—with which the Smiths had contact a century afterwards (p. 53).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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88 Analogously, Garry Wills complained about the constant use of “Ms. Brodie’s hint-and-run method—to ask a rhetorical question, and then proceed on the assumption that it has been settled in her favor, making the first surmise a basis for second and third ones, in a towering rickety structure of unsupported conjecture.” Wills, “Uncle Thomas’s Cabin,” 26.
that Joseph Smith read them, but that they influenced the plot of the Book of Mormon: The “white race of Nephites” is linked to “the white male seed of Aristotle’s Book of Problems.” But, he confesses, “these links . . . can only be speculative” (p. 216). Indeed.

The Masonic Connection

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

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

Brooke seems to recognize both the paradox that the alleged Gadianton-Masons would be an indication that Joseph was anti-Masonic, and therefore would not have borrowed ideas from the
Masons, as well as the *ante hoc* problem of Joseph being influenced by Masonic ideas before he became a Mason. He attempts to solve the anti-Masonic problem by claiming—without a shred of evidence, since the Prophet never made any statements about Masonry in his early years—that “Joseph Smith bore contradictory feelings about Freemasonry: he condemned the spurious tradition, while embracing the pure tradition” (p. 169). In other words, any positive links Brooke imagines between Masons and early Mormonism arise because Joseph was copying the “pure tradition,” while his alleged anti-Masonry represents Joseph’s rejection of the “spurious tradition.” Such a theory has the great advantage of being utterly unfalsifiable—every piece of evidence can be accommodated.

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

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

93 Ibid., 247.
Cumorah” (p. 159). But Joseph most emphatically did not! It is Brooke who claims that the golden plates, the sword of Laban, the Urim and Thummim, and the breastplate are Masonic artifacts—Brooke himself puts these words in Joseph’s mouth in order to make them seem similar to the Masonic sources he cites. Joseph never made any such connection.

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

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

94 All of the following citations in this paragraph are to Webb, Freemason’s Monitor.
BROOKE, THE REFINER'S FIRE (HAMBLIN, PETERSON, MITTON) 55

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

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

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

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

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

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96 George Oliver, *The Antiquities of Freemasonry*, (Philadelphia: Leon Hyneman, 1854); parenthetical references in this paragraph are to Oliver. We are citing from a later American edition rather than the earlier English edition which Brooke cites.
with its original Indo-European meaning as an auspicious symbol of the Sun-god, which it retains still today in Hinduism.97

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

The methodological key to solve this problem is comparison between ideas which are unique to Mormonism and antiquity, but which are not found in the hermetic, alchemical, or Masonic traditions, or in other nineteenth-century sources. With this in mind, all of Brooke’s vague links between Masonic Enoch legends and Joseph Smith pale in the face of Nibley’s identification of the proper name “Mahujah” in the Aramaic Enoch materials from the Dead Sea Scrolls, paralleling Moses 6:40 and 7:2.99 There is a vast and growing body of evidence showing increasingly complex analogues between Joseph’s

ancient scripture, the LDS temple endowment, and uniquely ancient religious ideas and practice.\textsuperscript{100}

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

\textbf{Conclusion}

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

\textsuperscript{100} Parry, \textit{Temples of the Ancient World}. 

*A Storyteller in Zion: Essays and Speeches*. Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1993. 215 pp., $11.95

"An Open Letter to those who are concerned about ‘plagiarism’ in *The Memory of Earth.*" Privately printed, 1993; available from Orson Scott Card, P. O. Box 18184, Greensboro, NC 27419.

**Orson Scott Card:**

**The Book of Mormon as History and Science Fiction**

Reviewed by Eugene England

In the first essay of *A Storyteller in Zion*, Orson Scott Card, probably the most widely-read and influential Mormon writer if you don’t count Joseph Smith, both argues for the historicity of the Book of Mormon and also tells why it makes a good basis for his fiction. He tells us the Book of Mormon is “the most important book in my life” (p. 13); one he has read many times from early youth; and one that influenced his writing style, his initial desire to be an archeologist, and his first efforts to write Mormon drama; and one that led to his writing of animations for Living Scriptures, his commission by the Brethren a few years back to rewrite the Hill Cumorah Pageant, and his current best-selling science fiction series, *Homecoming*.

Card is perfectly clear about the religious purpose of his latest sci-fi project: “These books are really just another dramatization of the Book of Mormon, only transformed into a science fictional
setting, where by fictionalizing it I have the freedom to explore questions of character and society in a way that I couldn’t in a more direct adaptation” (Storyteller, p. 14). I have now read the three published volumes twice and the two unpublished ones once, and my judgment is that Card succeeds very well in his project: the books are good literature and good psychological and social (thus religious) commentary—valuable to general readers and, in my view, even more valuable for Mormon readers. But the project raises an interesting question: If the historical truth of the Book of Mormon is so important (and it clearly is to Card, because that first essay, “The Book of Mormon—Artifact or Artifice?” is an extended argument for historicity based on Card’s expertise as a sci-fi writer), why does he need to “fictionalize” it (rather than merely writing commentary or personal essays) to be “free” to explore the most important moral and religious questions?

Card has an answer in his “Open Letter,” written in quite apparent anger after some of his Mormon readers had written to his publisher and General Authorities, accusing him of “plagiarizing” the Book of Mormon and treating it irreverently. In that letter he wittily explains why “you can’t plagiarize history.” He also plausibly argues that fictionalizing the Book of Mormon still gives “a taste of it” which “has the power to do good in the world,” claiming that skeptical non-Mormons remain “outside” the story of the Book of Mormon itself and thus are immune to the “transformative power” of sacred writing not their own—since they know what it is. In other words, a science fiction version of the Book of Mormon makes it a better missionary tool? No, it makes it a better influence for good on our civilization because readers won’t resist its moral and spiritual power because of religious prejudice.

Card even goes on to argue that he chose the form of Homecoming because “speculative fiction” (sci-fi and fantasy) is “the one literary tradition available today to writers who would like to deal seriously with great moral, religious, and cosmological and eschatological issues without confining themselves to members of a particular religious group” (“Open Letter,” p. 10). Say what? Surely Card knows that our greatest writers, from Shakespeare to Isaac Bashevis Singer and Flannery O’Connor, have dealt with such issues through both realism and fantasy—
sometimes even by describing a “particular religious group” (such as Southern Baptists and Hasidic Jews) but never thereby confining their readership to that group.

Card’s able defense of science fiction as a worthy genre for great subjects and issues goes too far when he claims it is not only as good as but superior to other forms for moral and religious exploration. But what matters is that for him “speculative fiction” apparently is the best form for such exploration—and Homecoming (and his Enders and Alvin Maker series) are where he does indeed, in my view, “deal with religious, theological, and moral issues with greater clarity” (p. 11) than in his realistic novels, Saints and Lost Boys.

Card demonstrates convincingly that his expertise as a sci-fi writer enables him to defend the historicity of the Book of Mormon with unique authority. It takes a good hoaxer to know one, and that’s exactly the full-time business he and his colleagues are engaged in: creating believable but totally fictional cultures—hoaxes. His basic premise is that “every storyteller, no matter how careful he is, will inadvertently confess his own character and the society he lives in,” that no matter how well-educated or clever, “if he tries to write something that is not of his own culture he will give himself away with every unconscious choice he makes. Yet he’ll never know he’s doing it because it won’t occur to him that it could be any other way” (Storyteller p. 20). He gives examples of how the best recent sci-fi writers, as well as the fiction writers of the 30s and 40s and TV sitcom writers of the 50s and 60s, constantly gave themselves away—and then gives a series of examples of how Joseph Smith, if faking it, would have given away cultural clues from the 1820s, but didn’t.

Card includes both some things Joseph unexpectedly left out (such as connecting Native Americans to the ten lost tribes, a central speculation of the 1820s) and things he inexplicably included (elected judges but no real democracy like the American one). And he argues that hoaxers can’t resist at least calling attention to their clever creations of cultural strangeness (flaunting “one’s fascinating ideas”), but Joseph never does.

My problem with all this is that if Card is clever enough to see all this cleverness, why isn’t it just possible that Joseph was clever enough to fake it—not only to invent cultural difference but to
disguise the process. Card seems to think Joseph simply *could* not be as clever as sci-fi writers: “We... have generations of experience to guide us, and we still can’t get it right. The author of the Book of Mormon, if it’s a hoax, managed to get it right—even in cases where getting it right looks *wrong* to most people, who haven’t thought it through. ... he did something so sophisticated that even those who do this sort of thing for a living still don’t usually get it right” (p. 36). Precisely! But, if so, that makes Joseph a genius, not a translator of an ancient document.

Card is aware of this dilemma, one which all of us who defend the historicity of the Book of Mormon must face: “Now, does this mean that I’ve proved the Book of Mormon true? Obviously not. You can always still suppose that perhaps Joseph Smith or whoever wrote the Book of Mormon was the greatest and luckiest creator of phony documents from made-up alien culture ever in history. The Book of Mormon only matters because it’s a life-changing book. ... the important truth of the Book of Mormon is only understood with the Spirit through faith. If you don’t believe in the book, it’s not going to change your life. And I mean believe in it in a way far different from believing it’s a genuine artifact” (p. 44). This, of course, is what our greatest Book of Mormon scholar, Hugh Nibley, has constantly reaffirmed—that the *historicity* of the Book of Mormon (which it has been his great life work to substantiate) means very little in comparison to its moral and religious messages (which he has tried constantly to explicate and highlight, with far too little appreciation).

Actually, the case for historicity is perhaps stronger and more important than Card recognizes in his statement above. His most persuasive examples are those where the text is not only “clever” in giving unusual cultural details and then not calling attention to them, but also where it gives unexpected cultural details that have in fact been verified since 1830 by new knowledge concerning Mesoamerica that was unavailable anywhere in Joseph’s time—such as “tribal organizations” that persist over centuries (pp. 30–31), instant creation of cities rather than forts or towns (pp. 33–34), swooning to show great emotion, and kings with sons as sub-kings (p. 39). And though the religious and moral content of the Book of Mormon is indeed what matters most—is the only part that is “life-changing”—still, I am convinced, through my own
professional expertise as a teacher of both fiction and “true” personal essays, that it matters very much to readers whether they believe that what they are reading is conveying moral and spiritual truth through made-up stories about things that could happen or on the other hand bearing witness fairly accurately of what actually happened to people like themselves.

In other words, for most of us (and this may be a weakness rather than a strength), “actual” truth has greater authority, greater power to impel us to change our lives, than fictive truth.

The moral and spiritual truths of the Book of Mormon seem to have more power for most of us when we believe that they are given divine authority as part of an actual history, written on real records and delivered by a real angel—and especially if we are convinced they were taught by a real Jesus Christ whose divinity and resurrection is dramatically and uniquely verified by his supernatural appearance on this continent after his death in Jerusalem. Again, I’m not sure this is a good thing (it seems we ought to be able to believe moral and spiritual truths for their intrinsic value, proven in our experience and verified by the Holy Ghost, rather than through external authority), but it seems nevertheless a fact—a fact God seems to recognize by giving us some but not conclusive evidence that the Book of Mormon is historical. Perhaps he doesn’t give us complete and certain evidence—which surely he could easily do if he wished—because in fact it is better if we can believe through experience and faith rather than authority.

Since I’ve ventured so far into this matter of the historicity of the Book of Mormon, let me, with the help of Card’s writings, unburden my soul. I believe the Book of Mormon is a translation of tangible ancient documents which in turn are an account of real people, that they were delivered to Joseph Smith by an angel, and that he “translated” them to produce a book of particular moral and spiritual value for all of God’s children in the last days. I cannot otherwise account for the significant and growing (though certainly not unassailable) evidence of the kind Card uses in his essay—and that Hugh Nibley and John Sorenson and F.A.R.M.S., etc., continue to provide—that Joseph “got it right” about a host of unusual cultural and geographical and language details.
However, I do not believe that either the ancient documents or the translation are literally “true” or “perfect.” The corollary to Card’s point about all hoaxers inevitably revealing their own cultural assumptions in all they write is that, as he recognizes, all historians and translators reveal themselves too, no matter how inspired: “Joseph Smith didn’t write the Book of Mormon, though he did translate it, so that his voice is present when we read it, including the flaws in his language and understanding. Those who wrote the original were also fallible human beings who will reveal their culture and their assumptions” (p. 45). God himself reminds us of this in Doctrine and Covenants 1:24: “These commandments are of me, and were given to my servants in their weakness, after the manner of their language” (“language” of course includes their culture and world view). I cannot otherwise account for the evidence, from the error-ridden original manuscript to the apparent racism and sexism and elitism of some Book of Mormon writers to the 1820s word choices, perspectives, and religious anxieties that seem to influence Joseph’s translation.

In other words, it seems to me that neither the position of David Whitmer (that Joseph shouldn’t edit his previous revelations because they were given from God word by word) nor the position of some modern Mormons and non-Mormons (that the Book of Mormon is of immense, even “scriptural,” literary and moral and spiritual worth but is entirely a fiction) accounts for all the evidence—or could be called an “orthodox” Mormon position. But between those two positions there seems to me a great deal of room for exploration and difference of opinion—and for a great variety of orthodoxy, from those who believe that only Joseph Smith’s limitations in punctuation and grammar affected the translation to those who believe a great deal of Joseph’s own genius and preoccupations and world view are there, in part through God’s direction in order to make the Book of Mormon more relevant to a modern audience and its particular religious needs than the literal ancient records were.

Card seems to me quite far to the “left” on this spectrum, though still perfectly orthodox. He recognizes that Joseph, like any translator, influences the text “in matters of word choice, consciously or unconsciously linking Book of Mormon events to experiences that he and his American readers could understand,
choosing the clearest language he had available to him, fitting ideas he found in the book into existing American concepts as best he could” (p. 16). He believes (and shows in a convincing way when he creates “Nafai” as the first record-keeper in Memory of Earth) that Nephí’s record was “written in the context of many wars against his brothers’ people, and therefore would include a great deal of justification of his own people’s rightness versus their enemies’ wrongness. It would not be an impartial history by any means, or even an impartial autobiography” (p. 16). Similarly, Mormon, the dominant author, was “a general since his youth, leader of armies, a man of war, and a man of God. We should expect to see reflections of that in the text. He is watching his people collapse and decay, and no doubt wondering about the mechanisms that cause nations to collapse and decay. . . . We’ll find his priorities and interests reflected in his selections of things to include” (p. 17).

Card even speculates (as part of his effort to defend the historicity of the Book of Mormon in the face of the complete lack of historical evidence to support the claim of King Zarahemla that his people, the Mulekites, were descendants of the youngest son of Zedekiah, King of Judah—and some linguistic and other evidence against it) that Zarahemla made up this story as part of his effort to establish credentials in his negotiations with Mosiah over who should rule. He points out that such a fiction by Zarahemla “does not imply that the Book of Mormon is somehow false. No one in the Book of Mormon ever claims that the story of Mulek came to anybody by inspiration. . . . That Mormon and other writers believed the story does not prove it true or false; it simply proves that it was part of the Nephite culture” (p. 33). Another part of Nephite culture that Card clearly believes is simply that—cultural, not divine inspiration—is the virtual absence from the record of women, which he again sees as, if anything, confirming rather than denying the historicity of the Book of Mormon, which is “quite startling in its omission of women from the events of Nephite history. This is quite foreign to attitudes in Joseph Smith’s culture” (p. 26). Sexism and other forms of discrimination are a central focus of Card’s retelling of the story in Homecoming—which becomes one long plea for tolerance of diversity as the central gospel principle, the chief
characteristic of the Christ-like divinity, the Keeper of Earth, who in the last book is anticipated as one who will come in person to the earth when his people succeed in becoming more like him in unconditional love.

Before I turn to the details of that very valuable fictional retelling, let me make one last, connected point about historicity. It seems to me that if, in our concern about the historicity of the Book of Mormon, we lose our tolerance for diversity, become less rather than more Christ-like in our actions, attitudes, and even our scholarly discourse, then something has gone badly wrong. What does it profit to find the Book of Mormon divinely inspired—but not capable of inspiring us to more gentle and loving lives? Let me be blunt: Some recent attempts to defend the historicity of the Book of Mormon have engaged in name-calling, 

ad hominem

attacks, intellectual and religious snobbery (yes, on both sides), and even false stereotyping of all scholars who try to examine the connections of the Book of Mormon to nineteenth-century culture as having exactly the same beliefs and agenda—and worst of all, defaming them all as "apostates" and "enemies of the Church."

I am not saying that all those who have questioned all or some of the historicity of the Book of Mormon are without their own agendas (even hidden ones) and vices. I am saying that there is room for a wide range of reasonable opinion about the nature of the Book of Mormon (about the relative amounts and importance of its historical and moral and spiritual truths) and about the manner of its translation (which after all took place in a highly unusual way, apparently without Joseph even looking at the plates) and that especially those who believe it has the extra authority of literal historical truth ought to demonstrate that faith by extraordinary allegiance to its teachings about tolerance and generosity. We should deal rigorously (and, yes, sympathetically) with all the arguments and evidence—period. Why "sympathetically"? Because the purpose of all of us ought to be understanding of the Book of Mormon and allegiance to its teachings—not mere proof—and even those who question the literal historicity of the Book of Mormon, but value its moral and religious teachings, can add to our understanding and allegiance.
But back to *Homecoming*, Card’s five-volume sci-fi version of First and Second Nephi and Mosiah. Earth’s advanced civilization has been destroyed by nuclear war, and its survivors leave to colonize other planets. Those who go to “Harmony,” a hundred light years away, establish a sophisticated computer at their landing site to protect their starships until some future need and, with a satellite network, to oversee the planet—especially controlling the human descendants, who have been genetically altered to be receptive to its influences, so they do not again develop weapons of mass destruction. Now, forty million years later, much longer than the original settlers thought it would take to produce naturally peaceful people, the computer, the “Oversoul,” is breaking down and losing control. Some strong-minded humans are resisting its influence and developing new weapons and starting wars, so the Oversoul calls other strong-minded but also responsive humans to take it back to Earth, where it can be repaired and return able to prevent another nuclear holocaust.

The first person who is called is, of course, Lehi (Wetchik), a desert-traveling merchant (much influence from Nibley here) who lives near Jerusalem (Basilica) with his sons, Laman (Elemak), Lemuel (Mebbekew), Nephi (Nafai), and Sam (Issib). He receives, from the Oversoul, a vision of the destruction of Jerusalem as a result of getting involved in the conflict between Babylon and Egypt (Goraynivat and Potokgavan) and a call to warn the city—which he does, with the natural result that he must flee for his life into the desert. Volume I, *The Memory of Earth*, takes this story through 1 Nephi 6, with the killing of Laban (Gaballufix) and the obtaining of the brass plates (the Index, a computerized ball shaped like the Liahona which gives direct access to the Oversoul, including its knowledge of the history and genealogy of Harmony, and gives directions to Wetchik for their journey through the desert).

Volume 2, *The Call of Earth*, covers only 1 Nephi 7, focusing on the character of Sariah (Rasa) and the women who become wives for Lehi’s sons and Laban’s servant Zoram (Zdorab). Volume 3, *The Ships of Earth*, 1 Nephi 8–17, takes the group on a journey of some years southeast through the desert, including Lehi’s “Tree of Life” vision and emphasizing marriage and
children and the struggle between Nephi and Laman—then a Liahona-led move to Bountiful (Dostatok). Volume 4, *Earthfall*, 1 Nephi 18–2 Nephi 5, tells of the building of one viable space-ship from parts of those left by the original colonists and the voyage (interrupted by a “storm,” another violent clash between the brothers) to America (Earth), where they find no humans but two races of intelligent life akin to huge bats (called “angels”) and huge rats (called “diggers”). Lehi dies and the two groups separate into Nephites (Nafari), allied with the angels, and Lamanites (Elemari), allied with some of the diggers, while Nephi and Jacob (Oykib) begin to keep two records.

The last volume, *The People of Earth*, Words of Mormon and Mosiah, skips forward 500 years to tell the story of Alma (Akma) the son of the high priest Alma (Akmaro) and his friends, the sons of King Mosiah (Motiak), who rebel against the religion of equality between humans, angels, and diggers, taught by their fathers. Finally, they are confronted by a messenger from Christ (the Keeper of Earth), who unlike the Oversoul is not a computer and speaks much more subtly, in dreams. The Keeper seems to have greater respect for agency than the Oversoul and has inspired its humble followers (the Kept) with assurance that, if they are faithful, it will someday visit them in person.

Card’s purpose, I believe, is the same as that of the Book of Mormon, to convince “Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, manifesting himself unto all nations,” but to do so indirectly, through an entertaining story that is not resisted because of prejudice about Mormonism or Christ but instead is able to move all readers with the “transformative power” of Mormon Christian ethics and doctrine. The ethics he focuses on is unconditional love and honesty—versions of what Lowell Bennion has called the two basic religious virtues, mercy and integrity. Card makes his whole series a continuing investigation of enormous relevance to contemporary Mormon as well as more general human struggles with sexism, racism, even homophobia and anti-handicapped prejudice, and at the same time he constantly explores crucial doctrinal questions concerning the nature of agency, revelation, spiritual experience, and priestly authority.
Let me just review some highlights to look for as you read these entertaining and valuable books. Card confronts directly the cultural gender bias of the Book of Mormon by not only making Rasa (Sariah) as interesting and powerful a spiritual leader as Wetchik (Lehi) but by creating a host of other women of enormous (and very believable) vitality, intelligence, human fallibility, religious force and insight, and importance to the story. He creates a culture where the male sexism of the Hebraic culture is present but confronted with opposed, female-centered cultural traditions in a way that reveals the weaknesses of both extremes and provides Card a way, in the exploration of the courtship and marriage of Wetchik (Lehi) and his sons, to reveal the problems of gender bias and suggest solutions.

Basilica (Jerusalem) is actually ruled by women, whose authority derives from their ability to be inspired by the Oversoul (whom they call "she") and use her power to heal and prophesy. Rasa (Sariah) is the most prestigious teacher among the women, and her two students, Luet and Hushidh, daughters of a wild prophetess from the desert, are powerful seers who become the wives of Nafai and Issib (Sam). Wetchik (Lehi) is part of the male religious cult, which is focused on sacrifice, even of the men's own pain and blood, to appease the Oversoul (whom they call "he").

Using some information he has learned about baboon societies and the survival requirements of nomadic societies, Card sets up some very challenging discussions and interactions among his characters that suggest that male superiority is an artifact of less civilized cultures and destructive of honesty, tenderness, and spiritual cooperation in marriage; that female withdrawal into its own sexism is a natural (and ultimately unsatisfactory) reaction to male sexism; that the gender we impose on God tells us more about ourselves than about God; and that male dominance in religion is always a tempting reversion but one that neglects the spiritual gifts of women and undermines the health of the whole religion and its society.

Card sets up some wonderful scenes for these explorations: Nafai suffering an anxiety attack as he considers marrying someone more spiritually powerful than himself (2:124–26); Elemak (Laman) explaining to Rasa the facts of male dominance
outside of civilization (3:43-44); Rasa confronting her husband when he names two rivers after the first two boys rather than children born on the journey (3:285-87) and him insisting on his right—but soon after, in a conciliatory move, naming a river after her, though the tension between men and women continues (3:294-95).

Perhaps the most painful, instructive, and moving scene concerning gender is one where Nafai, spurred by true dreams given to his wife and daughter, consults the Index and determines on a way to find the carefully hidden site of the ancient starships—but almost sets off without sharing his insight and intentions with his wife. She confronts him; he reacts in angry defensiveness ("Don’t you ever tell me again that because I don’t act like a woman wants me to act, that makes me an animal"); and she tells him the crucial truth: "Being civilized means transcending your own animal nature. Not indulging it, not glorying in it. That’s how you remind me of a male baboon—because you can’t be civilized as long as you treat women like something to be bullied. You can only be civilized when you treat us like friends" (3:324).

The two slowly, painfully, forgive each other, and that volume ends with a transcendent vision of what Nafai has learned from his wife, as he returns with the powerful electronic mantle of the Starmaster (which enables him to shock and repel the murderous Elemak and Mebbekew) and that night holds Luet: "She was willing to make love, if he wanted to. But all he wanted tonight was to touch her, to hold her. To share the dancing light of the cloak with her, so she could also remember all the things that he remembered from the mind of the Oversoul. So she could see into his heart as clearly as he saw into hers, and know his love for her as surely as he knew her love for him.

"The light from the cloak grew and brightened. He kissed her forehead, and when his lips came away, he could see that a faint light also sparked on her. It will grow, he knew. It will grow until there is no difference between us. Let there be no barrier between us, Luet, my love. I never want to be alone again."

In his "Open Letter" Card tells how he "loved the Book of Mormon from childhood on" and brought to the writing of Homecoming "the same love for the book, the same respect for it,
the same reverence, and the same sense of passion and vitality that I have drawn from the book since I first heard [its] stories at my parents’ feet. . . . I felt it was important . . . to make the story just as real and rich for women readers as for men, and therefore I caused the prophetic, spiritual role to be shared equally among characters of both sexes” (“Open Letter,” p. 12). I think he succeeded in showing “reverence” and creating “passion and vitality” in good part because of that decision to make the book equally rich for both sexes. And he does indeed create a marvelous range of fascinating (oops!) women, from the nymphomaniac wife of Mebbekew (Lemuel) and the misguided but courageous wife of Elemak (Laman) (she is the one whom Card imagines pleading successfully for Nephi’s life when his brothers attack him early in the desert journey, 1 Nephi 7:19) to the great leader Rasa and the spiritually gifted Luet and Hushidh—and their descendants who inherit their powers much later, the sisters of Akma and Mon (Ammon).

One of the most interesting women is Shedemei, a formidably intelligent scientist whom the Oversoul brings along to care for the frozen seeds and plants for regenerating useful plant life on the destroyed Earth. She proves herself and becomes the one, Nafai learns, who would be chosen next if he fails his calling—and in fact, when the Nafari escape to the Land of Nafai, she becomes the second Starmaster, kept alive in the orbiting spaceship through suspended animation, occasionally waking to help the Oversoul nurture the gardens of Earth and shepherd its people until she becomes the messenger who confronts Akma and the Sons of Motiak in the name of the Keeper of Earth. But first (and apparently as part of her trial) Shedemei is the wife chosen for Zdorab (Zoram), which provides Card with another vector into tolerance, because Zdorab, it turns out, is a homosexual.

Card is unpredictable (and certainly not “politically correct”) on this matter. He reprints in Storyteller his famous essay from Sunstone, “The Hypocrites of Homosexuality,” in which he condemns the “homosexual community,” including Mormon homosexuals who “instead of repenting of homosexuality, wish it to become an acceptable behavior in the society of the Saints” (p. 184); and he adds an addendum about the strong reaction of some to that essay, including accusations of “homophobia” and
attempts to censor him. My own sense is that the essay is neither homophobic nor a candidate for censorship but that, despite Card’s effort in it to distinguish between same-sex orientation and sinful sexual acts outside of marriage, his strongly emotive language, unfortunate stereotypes, and imprecise language (see the quotation above, where “homosexuality,” elsewhere a condition, suddenly becomes a behavior to be “repented”) tend to encourage the current tendency, even among Mormons, to confuse the condition and the behavior and to bash gays, verbally and even physically.

However, in Homecoming, Card gives us a very sympathetic homosexual person, one who is able to speak eloquently of his condition as exactly that, a condition rather than a choice, and describe the violent (even murderous) prejudice he and others like him (including one of his lovers) had experienced back in Basilica. He movingly reports the humiliation of having to cultivate a persona as “the most unnoticeable, despicable, spineless being” in order to survive in this male-dominant desert troop of near-baboons—which sometimes sounds much like our own society. Card also has Zdorab, chosen by the Oversoul to be the mate of the only remaining female, Shedemei, whose lack of traditional beauty and shyness makes her think no one will want her, gradually, over months, learn to open to her and show his strength and goodness and accept her—and they marry, at first simply for mutual protection and friendship.

Later Zdorab discovers in the Index evidence that homosexuality is not genetic but “just the level of male hormones in the mother’s blood stream at the time the hypothalamus goes through its active differentiation and growth” (3:170), which is pretty much in line with our present science and shows that Card, contrary to many Mormons, believes homosexuality can’t simply be “repented of” or removed with some kind of therapy. Zdorab decides he wants to be part of the biologic chain, part of the tree of life Wetchik has seen in vision; then, in wonderful scenes of difficult tenderness and pain and exploration, he and Shedemei decide to bear children and succeed—Zdorab even stating quite persuasively that he has been caught in “the great net of life” because, despite being pointed away from it at birth he had “chosen to be caught, who is to say that mine is not the better
fatherhood, because I acted out of pure love, and not out of some inborn instinct that captured me. Indeed, I acted against my instinct... Anybody can pilot his boat to shore in a fair wind; I have come to shore by tacking in contrary winds, by rowing against an ebbing tide” (3:252).

Card is not suggesting, and I certainly am not, that this is the only or best “solution” for homosexuals—the tragedies in Mormon culture of homosexuals who married, out of guilt or ignorance or hope, and damaged not only their own lives but those of many others are well known; what Card has done is give us a deeply sympathetic homosexual person, whose story can help us learn understanding and mercy through the imagination.

When Shakespeare wants to teach important lessons in understanding and mercy, he does not simply provide easy cases. He doesn’t just give us a good person being treated unmercifully and say, “See how wrong that is.” He gives us a bad person, one who doesn’t deserve any mercy—like Claudius in Hamlet—and then shows the terrible results when his protagonist, the one we identify with, turns away from mercy (with us cheering him on) toward revenge. Card does something similar in teaching tolerance. He doesn’t give us nice people of other races and suggest it would be nice to be nice to them; he gives us monsters, intelligent species that look like insects or hamsters—or in this case bats and rats—and shows his human characters struggling to know, love, and ultimately sacrifice for these alien others.

A dramatic shift occurred in the history of Mormon letters—and modern science fiction—when Card, in 1984, rewrote his award-winning first story from seven years before into Ender’s Game. He took a combination coming-of-age and computerized-spacewar story with a great surprise ending and made it into a profoundly serious novel about unconditional love for the “other”; and by making his hero into a “speaker for the dead,” a man whose guilt about xenocide, destroying a whole race of aliens, moves him to give his life to telling their story and eventually becoming a savior, Card began to transform himself into a speaker for the dead and different, an interpreter and defender of little-known and often misunderstood lives—including Mormon lives. Ender’s Game and its sequel, Speaker for the Dead, swept the two top sci-fi awards, the Nebula and Hugo,
two years running, and their sequel, Xenocide, as well as Card’s realistic novel about a contemporary Mormon family, Lost Boys, both received the award for best novel from the Association of Mormon Letters.

Card continues his Shakespearean device for teaching tolerance in Homecoming. Even early in Volume 2, the people on Harmony most sensitive to the Oversoul begin having dreams that the Oversoul itself can’t understand—because they come from the Keeper of Earth. They are dreams of batlike and ratlike creatures, of human size and intelligence, interacting in strange ways with each other and the dreamers. When the voyagers finally reach Earth, they soon find that such creatures literally exist, having evolved from bats and rats in the 40 million years since humans left. The fourth volume is in good part the story of how Nafai and his followers help and learn from and are helped by the “sky-people” and “earth-people” and how Elemak and his followers manipulate and use and finally unite with some of the more violent “diggers.” The fifth volume tells how five hundred years later the inhabitants of Darakemba (Zarahemla)—and those who left with Zenifab (Zeniff) and were divided into the followers of Ilihiak (Limhi) and Akma (Alma) until they are brought back by the Oversoul to Darakemb—have almost all reverted to both sexism and racism.

As a crucial measure of their increasing apostasy under the influence of the younger Akma, they become increasingly unable to live as a religious society of true equality. He even turns the innocent envy his friend Mon (Ammon) has for the sky-people (which allows Card to provide a nice touch for his Mormon readers when Mon exclaims, “Oh, that I had the wings of an angel!”) into prejudice against earth-people. As the elder Akma, who had been converted by Binadi, puts it to King Motiak during their sons’ rebellion, “I warned you from the start that it would be very hard to take this people from a place where diggers were hated and enslaved, where women were kept silent in public life, and where the poor had no rights against the rich, to a place where all were equal in the eyes of the Keeper and the law” (5:MS186). Card makes the parallel to our own time obvious by having one of the younger Akma’s followers call out to Shedemei, who has returned to earth to set an example of equality in a school where
women teach and the earth-people as well as humans and sky-people attend, "Digger-lover!"

Card clearly indicates, in an earlier volume, what is at stake religiously when he has Nafai request to have replayed for him his father’s dream of the “Tree of Life,” which has come from the Keeper of Earth but been recorded by the Oversoul. (Card does some interesting speculation about what it would be like to experience another’s emotions along with their vision; the experience of tasting the fruit is so physically painful and terrifying that Nafai nearly goes mad [3:175–76].) Afterwards, while contemplating the dream, Nafai is visited by Yobar, a baboon he has befriended who asks for food—and is changed, in a waking dream, the first Nafai has had from the Keeper of Earth, into a winged creature and then into a huge rat, whom Nafai gives some of the fruit of the tree and who gives it to his companions, who lay down their weapons of stone at Nafai’s feet. He wakes, in deep yearning, to find Yobar still near; he gives him the body of a hare he had killed earlier, which Yobar can use to ingratiate himself back into the baboon troop: “Buy what you can with this hare’s blood, my friend. I’ve seen the face of the Keeper of Earth, and it was you” (3:182). This fundamental Christian theme, “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these,” is continued 500 years later when some thugs in Darakemba, spurred on by Akma’s rebellion, break the wings of two young angels; Akma’s sister, named after the ancient Luet and like her a Seer, mourns, “The Keeper will never send her true child into the world when we still do things like this” (5:MS194).

Card is, as the scene of the dream of the tree of life shows, profoundly interested in the religious as well as the moral dimensions of personality. He dwells at length and usefully on perhaps the two most difficult aspects of Nephi’s character: his combination of righteousness and self-righteousness in relation to Laman and Lemuel and his combination of anguished contrition and anxious certainty about the killing of Laban. (At one point the Oversoul tells Nafai straight out, after one of his confrontations with the brothers: “Every time I speak to you, they hate you more. Every time your father’s face is filled with delight at your quick mind, at your goodness of heart, they hate you more. And when they see that you desire to have the privileges of
the eldest son...” Nafai interrupts, “I don’t want to replace Elemak... I want him to love me, I want him to be a true older brother to me, and not this monster who wants me dead,” and the Oversoul comes back, “Yes you want him to love you... and you want him to respect you... and you want to take his place. ...[You] will never be content unless your life is accomplishing something that will change the world” [2:122-23].)

Perhaps most moving are Card’s ability to convey the yearning of basically good people to repent and be better, to hear the voice of divinity and respond, and then his ability to give a sense of what that delicious fruit tastes like. This is Shedemei, as described in a conversation with the Keeper of Earth in a dream, in which Shedemei has been called to be the messenger to confront Akma the younger and the sons of Motiak: “Until you made this visit to Earth [the Keeper tells her], I wasn’t sure if you were truly part of me, because I didn’t know if you loved the people enough to share my work. You’re not the same person you were when I first called you here. Your work has changed, and now it’s the same as my work. To teach the people of Earth how to live, on and on, generation to generation; and how to make that life joyful and free. You made your choice, and so now, like [Akma the elder], I can give you what you want, because I know that you desire only the joy of these people, forever. ... I know what you do; I know why you do it; I can name you more truly than you can name yourself.

“For a moment, Shedemei could see herself reaching up and plucking a white fruit from a tree; she tasted it, and the flavor of it filled her body with light and she could fly, she could sing all songs at once and they were endlessly beautiful inside her. She knew what the fruit was—it was the love of the Keeper for the people of Earth. The white fruit was a taste of the Keeper’s joy. Yet also in the flavor of it was something else, the tang, the sharp pain of millions, the billions of people who could not understand what the Keeper wanted for them, or who, understanding, hated it and rejected her interference in their lives. ... Thus even in rejecting the Keeper’s plan they became a part of it; in refusing to taste the fruit of the tree, they became part of its exquisite flavor. ... Their hubris mattered, even though in the long flow of burning history it changed nothing. It mattered because the
Keeper loved them and remembered them and knew their names and their stories and mourned for them: O my daughter, O my son, you are also part of me, the Keeper cried out to them. You are part of my endless yearning, and I will never forget you—

“And the emotions became too much for Shedemei. She had dwelt in the Keeper’s mind for as long as she could bear. She awoke sobbing violently, overwhelmed, overcome. Awoke and uttered a long mournful cry of unspeakable grief—grief for the lost ones, grief for having had to leave the mind of the Keeper, grief because the taste of the white fruit was gone from her lips. . . . Here I am more alone than I ever was before because for the first time in my life I had the experience of being not alone and I never knew, I never knew how beautiful it was to be truly, wholly known and loved” (5:MS242-43).

Akma the younger has another kind of spiritual awareness of not being alone after he begins to recover from the shock nigh unto death Shedemei gives him as the emissary of the Keeper and he chooses life rather than continued spiritual death: “Underneath [all] there was something else. A sense that someone was watching everything that happened. . . . A constant judge, assessing the moral value of what he was doing. How could he now remember something that he hadn’t noticed at the time? And yet he knew without doubt that this watcher had been there at the time, and that he loved this voice inside him” (5:MS256).

Card seems to me to be one who speaks with unique authority of the spiritual and moral values of Mormon faith because he, like Akma, has that voice inside him and lives as well as writes by it. Yes, he can get carried away toward intolerance by his own hurts and enthusiasms—as when he creates a parody of the malicious academic intellectual in Bego, the teacher who leads Akma astray. But in the current climate of divisiveness and intolerance and even defamation in the Mormon intellectual community he remains a model for all of us. For instance, he dedicates Storyteller “To Scott Kenney, with love, respect, and gratitude.” Kenney was the founding editor of Sunstone magazine and the first editor of Signature books, both of which Card has published with and about which he and Kenney often “did not see eye to eye”: “We knew that even in disagreement, we were both trying in good faith to contribute some truth and light, as best we could understand it, to
the community of Saints. It was a time of sacrifice, and Scott more than anyone else I know gave selflessly to the Mormon community—even at times when some members of the Mormon community weren’t quite sure they wanted to accept the gifts he was offering" (Storyteller p. 213).

Card then thanks Elbert Peck, current editor of Sunstone, for responding a few years ago to Card’s criticism of some things in Sunstone, not with defensiveness but an invitation to write the kinds of things Card would like to see there—so he did, for a column, “A Changed Man,” from which some of the essays in Storyteller are reprinted: “I remain of the opinion that Elbert Peck is a genuinely fair-minded editor who truly cares about the Mormon community and seeks to help the Mormon people to grow. May his tribe increase” (p. 215).

Amen. And may the tribe of “Card” increase, people who love the Book of Mormon and can both defend its historicity and explore its fictional power with devotion to its central message of Christ-like mercy and love—rather than fear—of diversity.

The Final Battle for Cumorah

Reviewed by John Clark

In a period of less than 900 years the Hill Cumorah, or Ramah, twice witnessed the self-slaughter of once-righteous civilizations, and its slopes wept with the blood of hundreds of thousands of mutilated victims. This hallowed hill continues to receive victims today, but now the haughty combatants are those Delbert W. Curtis styles “Book of Mormon geography scholars.” Curtis’s *Christ in North America* is the most recent attempt to secure this eminence. Reacting to John L. Sorenson’s view of two Cumorahs printed in the *Ensign* in 1984, Curtis addresses the questions of (1) whether there are two Cumorahs or just one, and (2) where the final Nephite and Jaredite battles really occurred. He argues for a limited geography in the area of Lake Ontario and Lake Erie and is convinced that there is only one Cumorah. “All the landmarks in the area prove the Hill Cumorah in New York is the Hill Cumorah of the Book of Mormon” (Jacket Summary).

According to Curtis, the erroneous idea of two Cumorahs arose from the theoretical necessity of trying to place Book of Mormon lands in Mesoamerica. “For Book of Mormon geography scholars to admit that the hill in New York which we call Cumorah is the hill which the Book of Mormon named Ramah and Cumorah would leave them without foundation for their theories” (p. 6). Curtis’s book attempts to leave all other proposed Book of Mormon geographies without foundation. His is a clear challenge. It is as if, as of old, epistles have been exchanged and champions enjoined to meet for a final struggle for Cumorah. Curtis’s view allows no alternatives. In this review I consider Curtis’s challenge to limited Mesoamerican geographies and his promotion of a limited Great Lakes geography.
Critical evaluation of *Christ in North America* presents several novel challenges that require explanation before I proceed. Parts of *Christ in North America* display pseudoscholarship at its worst, but these are covered in a self-protective cloak of personal testimony. These testimonies complicate review of this book, as any critique of the arguments proposed in *Christ in North America* can be viewed, however unfairly, as an assault upon Curtis’s honesty, sincerity, or spirituality. Curtis bears frequent and fervent testimony concerning the divinity of the Book of Mormon throughout his book; I do not doubt his testimony nor question the sincerity of his witness. He also testifies that several landmarks in the Great Lakes region are those mentioned in the Book of Mormon and that these identifications were spiritually confirmed to him. These claims are a different matter. I do not doubt that Curtis sincerely believes his claims, but his beliefs are not binding on anyone else. It is poor practice to accept lay testimony as fact, and I will not do so here. The entire history of the Church, and my personal experience with numerous peoples’ personal witnesses concerning the location of the Nephite repository of gold plates, suggests that we should treat such diverse and contradictory testimonies with extreme caution. Here, I do not consider the evidence of personal testimony as relevant to scholarly argument.

Curtis proposes four major and many ancillary arguments to make his case for a New York battleground. I consider each of his principal arguments in the following sections. Each of the following sections addresses fundamental claims of Curtis’s thesis. I ignore minor claims and difficulties as they would merit consideration only if the major propositions are found to be logically consistent and convincing.

**Unstringing the Bow**

Joseph Smith once told a simple story of a hunter and his bow to some Church members who questioned Joseph’s undignified roughhousing with the boys.1 The gist of the story was that a hunter would not keep his bow strung at all times because it would

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lose its spring; in like manner, a prophet did not always act as such because he would become ineffective if he did so. Not everything a prophet says is to be taken as scripture. The question of what early statements concerning the Book of Mormon are prophetic utterances lies at the heart of the question of Book of Mormon lands.

The first issue confronting anyone interested in constructing a geography of Book of Mormon lands is to decide the textual corpus that should be considered. Should one be limited to the Book of Mormon, or should one also consider the statements of General Authorities of the Church? As Curtis points out, this depends on whether the statements of modern apostles represent personal opinion or the word of the Lord.

This is another cause for confusion when Book of Mormon geography scholars locate a site where they would like the Nephites placed they then search the secular history of the church [sic] looking for a statement by a General Authority which places the Nephites where they would like them placed. Those scholars disregard what is written in the Standard Works that may present different facts. It must be remembered that everything a General Authority says is not inspired, if what is said or written is not in tune with the Standard Works. It is opinion and nothing more. (p. 7)

This is indeed sterling advice, but in this book it seems to be more a blueprint for selecting quotes than an effective caution. Curtis's advertisement for the book suggests that he discounts most General Authority statements: "For 150 years LDS Scholars, even General Authorities, have made the geography of the Book of Mormon a mystery." Curtis dismisses statements by John Taylor, Frederick G. Williams, Orson Pratt, and Ezra Taft Benson that do not fit his theory. On the other hand, he accepts statements from Milton R. Hunter, Brigham Young, Joseph Fielding Smith, Ezra Taft Benson, and Mark E. Peterson that he thinks support the one-Cumorah-in-New York theory. The selection process for the evidence may leave many readers confused. I agree with Curtis in

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principle but not in practice. I think he should have avoided all statements by General Authorities and spent more time analyzing statements from the Book of Mormon. As Sorenson demonstrates in his recent source book of Book of Mormon geographies, none of the statements of General Authorities should be considered as evidence, especially when they contradict the text of the Book of Mormon.³

In his selection of quotes from General Authorities, Curtis is in a very difficult position because all of the early statements dealt with a pan-American geography that included North, Central, and South America or could be read as evidence for a limited Mesoamerica/Central America geography.⁴ Curtis is advocating a limited Great Lakes geography and must thus discount the early all-of-America statements as well as any speculation that Book of Mormon lands were outside the modern boundaries of the United States of America. Therefore, he discounts all statements about Book of Mormon lands except those that bolster his theory of a New York Cumorah/Ramah; he should probably have disregarded these also. The only evidence that Curtis can accept is for the continental United States of America. Most of these statements deal with the location of the promised land mentioned in the Book of Mormon.

¿Es Ud. Norte Americano?

I first heard of Curtis’s argument in 1989 when he came by my house and presented me with a copy of his pamphlet “The LAND of THE NEPHITES.”⁵ I was surprised that anyone could seriously argue for a limited Great Lakes geography, but I was intrigued with his argument concerning the promised land. To my knowledge, no one had used this particular approach to Book of Mormon geography. I was eager to read Christ in North America so I could evaluate his argument in its most thorough and developed form.

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⁴ See Sorenson, Source Book.
Unfortunately, the bulk of Curtis's argument appears to rest on a primal error that we would not expect from a seventh-grade student. He appears misinformed about the geographic extent of North America and confuses it with the continental United States. This reminds me of a frequent interchange I have with taxi drivers in Mexico City. I am invariably asked, "¿Es ud. norte americano?" I explain that I am indeed North American but so are they, as North America includes Mexico. Curtis does not think that Mexico (or Canada) is part of the "promised land" mentioned in the Book of Mormon. His claim on this matter deserves lengthy citation as it presents the pivotal evidence as well as his method of argument.

Book of Mormon geography scholars have stated, "Joseph Smith said that both North and South America are the land of Zion." Very few of them have read the statement which Joseph made, or they would know that is not what he said or what he meant:

"The whole of America is the land of Zion itself from the north to the south, and it is described by the prophets, who declare that it is the Zion where the mountain of the Lord should be, and that it should be in the center of the land."\(^6\)

Notice that all references to America and Zion are singular; the whole of America, and Zion itself should be in the center of the land. How is it possible for anyone to read that statement and not understand that Joseph was saying that Zion is from Mexico on the south to Canada on the north? Most importantly, "the prophets described it."

"But in the last days it shall come to pass that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the tops of the mountains and it

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shall be exalted above the hills, and the people shall flow unto it. And many nations shall come, and say, come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his path; for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem” (Micah 4:1–2; Isaiah 2:2–3; 2 Nephi 12:2–3).

“I established the Constitution of this land by the hands of wise men whom I raised up unto this very purpose.” (D&C 101:80)

How better can we describe the United States of America than the words of Micah? (p. 29)

The modus operandi of this book is clearly evident in this brief argument. Curtis (1) first attributes an unreferenced quote to a vague group of benighted Book of Mormon geography scholars, (2) chides them for ignorance or misunderstanding of basic scriptures and prophetic pronouncements, (3) asserts that the interpretation of the text in question supports his views, and (4) then cites text and scriptures that do not appear to support his argument. After the long citations, Curtis (5) repeats his assertion and considers the case closed. I find this style of exposition annoying and arrogant. Curtis claims to have an inside track on truth and presents all his arguments as counterarguments to supposed statements made by others. But these other scholars are never cited, nor is it clear that Curtis has read them with anything but disdain.

The central proposition of Christ in North America is that the United States of America is the promised land mentioned in the scriptures. Anyone with over a month’s experience in the Church knows that interpretation of scriptures is tricky business and that differences of opinion are rarely resolved, especially when it concerns what someone “meant.” The existence of Curtis’s book is clear evidence that the scriptures for Zion and the land of promise can be read in a narrow sense. The question, however, is whether they should be. The citation from Joseph Smith, as I understand it, appears to include “the whole of America.” That
this is “singular” only appears to weaken Curtis’s reading that “Zion is from Mexico on the south to Canada on the north.” Curtis appears to read the statement to mean that the land of Zion is in the center of the land; I think “center” refers to “the mountain of the Lord” as being in the center of the land. In any event, why would anyone want to read this statement so narrowly? The obvious suspicion is that it is the only reading that will support Curtis’s geography.

The same is true of the “Zion” scriptures. These appear to mention a Zion in “the tops of the mountains,” a reference that many have considered as an accurate description of the Salt Lake City intermountain region. It would be a poor description indeed for the Great Lakes area.

Given the importance of the prophecies of the promised land and Zion for his argument, it is surprising that Curtis does not attempt to abstract and list systematically all the characteristics of this land. The reader is presented with supposed quotations from the opposition, Curtis’s counterclaims, long citations of scripture, and a final “I-told-you-so” reassertion that the United States of America is the promised land, and Mexico, Canada, and Central and South America are excluded. This strains the interpretation at several points, but Curtis is up to the task.

The main text for Curtis’s argument, which he cites in full, is 1 Nephi 13. Given his narrow reading of the promised land, I was curious to see how he would treat the “Columbus” prophecy. If all these verses refer to the United States of America, how can Columbus be said to have discovered the promised land? Maybe the scripture referred to John Cabot or even John Smith. Curtis sticks to the Columbus interpretation of Nephi’s vision. A close look at some of these verses will allow a concrete evaluation of Curtis’s claims. To avoid the appearance of paraphrasing the text to suit my own argument, I present a portion of 1 Nephi 13 in full, starting with verse 12, and then consider Curtis’s claims concerning it.

And I looked and beheld a man among the Gentiles, who was separated from the seed of my brethren by the many waters; and I beheld the Spirit of God, that it came down and wrought upon the man; and he went forth upon
the many waters, even unto the seed of my brethren, who were in the promised land.

And it came to pass that I beheld the Spirit of God, that it wrought upon other Gentiles; and they went forth out of captivity, upon the many waters.

And it came to pass that I beheld many multitudes of the Gentiles upon the land of promise; and I beheld the wrath of God, that it was upon the seed of my brethren; and they were scattered before the Gentiles and were smitten.

And I beheld the Spirit of the Lord, that it was upon the Gentiles; and they did prosper and obtain the land for their inheritance; and I beheld that they were white, and exceedingly fair and beautiful, like unto my people before they were slain.

And it came to pass that I, Nephi, beheld that the Gentiles who had gone forth out of captivity did humble themselves before the Lord; and the power of the Lord was with them.

And I beheld that their mother Gentiles were gathered together upon the waters, and upon the land also, to battle against them.

And I beheld that the power of God was with them, and also that the wrath of God was upon all those that were gathered together against them to battle.

And I, Nephi, beheld that the Gentiles that had gone out of captivity were delivered by the power of God out of the hands of all other nations. (1 Nephi 13:12–19)

Curtis has as his working hypothesis that Nephi's vision "seems to be in order, time-wise" (p. 62). Preceding verses (1 Nephi 13:1–11) describe the Gentile nations and the Lamanites before the coming of Columbus. Curtis follows the popular interpretation that verse 12 refers to Christopher Columbus, but with a twist.

Columbus didn't actually come to North America, but he did start the flow of those seeking freedom from oppression, hunger, and bigotry, even though it was over 300 years before the next verse in the book of Nephi
began to be fulfilled. With the coming of Columbus, the Lord started to prepare the way. (p. 63)

Three hundred years? What is the justification for positing such a hiatus in Nephi’s vision? I have always read verse 14 as an accurate portrayal of the Spanish Conquest of the New World. If verse 12 refers to Columbus, then perhaps verse 14 refers to Hernán Cortés. What arguments does Curtis offer to counter such a simple explanation of these verses? His arguments vary from very broad to very narrow interpretations of the text, presumably as it suits his purposes. As already noted, Curtis gives a general interpretation of the “Columbus” verse without having to admit that Columbus actually discovered the land of promise. On the other hand, Curtis appears to have a very narrow (and bordering on racist) interpretation of the Gentiles.

Verses 13 and 14 state that “many multitudes of Gentiles” “went forth out of captivity” to the land of promise and that the seed of Nephi’s brethren “were scattered before the Gentiles and were smitten.” These Gentiles “were white, and exceedingly fair and beautiful” like unto the Nephites before they were slain. From these clues, Curtis infers that these verses cannot be talking about Mesoamerica or Central America but refer to the United States of America. The basic claims of his argument are as follows:

1. The Mayas of Mexico and Central America encountered by the Spanish were an educated people and do not fit Mormon’s description of the Lamanites who survived the Nephite holocaust. Mormon prophesied:

   “And that the seed of this people may more fully believe his gospel, which shall go forth unto them from the Gentiles; for this people shall be scattered, and shall become a dark, a filthy, and a loathsome people, beyond the description of that which ever hath been amongst us, yea, even that which hath been among the Lamanites, and this because of their unbelief and idolatry.” (Mormon 5:15)

   “The differences in the two people should be easy to see. In Central America was a united and educated people; in North
America was a people described in the Book of Mormon as a people full of all manner of wickedness” (p. 65).

2. Verse 13 states that the Gentiles came forth out of captivity. “The captivity mentioned is the hold that great and abominable church held over the people of the nations of the Gentiles.... The people of Central America were not freed from the great and abominable church.” (pp. 65–66).

3. Curtis also sees that the scourges that came upon the seed of the Nephites are additional evidence of a setting in the United States of America.

“And I beheld the wrath of God, that it was upon the seed of my brethren” (verse 14). The Gentiles brought with them diseases which destroyed many of the Lamanites. This was true all over the Americas. However, the next sentence narrows the location: “and they were scattered before the Gentiles and were smitten.” In all parts of the Americas the Lamanites were conquered and enslaved, but they were not scattered and smitten like they were on the land that became the United States of America. (p. 66)

As we look at the two Americas, even today a great difference is evident; The Lamanites are still looked on as lower-class people in the United States of America, and only now are beginning to break out and show their true potential. In Mesoamerica, the people are almost all Lamanites and look to the U.S.A. as the land of promise, and most are still under the influence of that great and abominable church. The Gentiles did not possess the lands of Central America, and while it is true that the Lamanites were treated badly over all of the Americas, it was only the United States which became a nation of Gentiles. (pp. 67–68)

4. “The ‘Gentiles’ which came to this land were ‘white’ races of Europe: the English, French, German, Dutch, Swedish, and later the Irish by the thousands” (p. 68). Curtis calculates that from 1819 to December 1855, 4,212,624 immigrants came to the United States. “Where else on the Americas can be found such an influx of white races from Europe, and where, on all of the
Americas other than North America, can be found such a flow of the 'fair and beautiful' people?'” (p. 69).

5. The Gentiles that came to the land of promise “did humble themselves before the Lord; and the power of the Lord was with them” (1 Nephi 13:16). Following Mark E. Peterson’s interpretation in The Great Prologue, Curtis interprets this verse as those who came to the Americas seeking religious freedom rather than gold. According to Curtis, this disqualifies Mexico and lands southward but fits our view of the United States of America.

6. Verse 20 mentions the coming forth of the Bible among the Gentile nations. This does not appear to have occurred in Latin America.

The padres carried the book into Central America. However, the book was not had among the people; only the men of the church had a Bible and could read the Bible. The situation was much the same in Canada. . . . On the land that became the United States of America. . . . All who wanted a Bible could have one, and all were encouraged to read it. (p. 72)

7. Many other passages also proclaim that the land which became the USA is that land choice above all other lands (2 Nephi 10:10–19).

The vision is seen by Jacob and reviewed once more; Jacob adds: “. . . there shall be no kings upon the land . . . ” (verse 11). “For I, the Lord of Heaven shall be their king” (verse 14). No part of the Americas fill [sic] all the particulars of this great vision but the land which became the United States of America. (p. 75)

Many of Curtis’s preceding claims sound quite reasonable, but others appear stretched and based upon inadequate information. The whole argument is presented as a choice between the USA and other parts of the Americas. Is this an appropriate dichotomy, and do the scriptures support such a view? In my mind, some of the verses dealing with the promised land appear to fit better in Latin America and others appear to fit better the

history of the USA. It is worth stressing that if one interprets the scriptures broadly to encompass all of the Americas (or even all of North America), the problem disappears and all of the verses are easily reconciled. The problems arising from forcing all of the verses into commentary on the USA suggest that such an interpretation may not be the best one. A closer look at each individual claim highlights several difficulties.

Claim 1. Curtis's claim that the Indians of Mexico and Central America were too educated or too civilized to qualify as Lamanite descendants is based upon gross ignorance of what the Spanish actually encountered in the New World. One cannot read accounts of Aztec human sacrifice and priestcraft and give any credence to the view Curtis advocates in his book.

Claim 2. Curtis's claim that the peoples of Mexico and Central America were not freed from the captivity of the great and abominable church appears exceptionally weak and requires a narrow interpretation of this church such as published in the first edition of Mormon Doctrine. If the great and abominable church represents all those that are not the true church of Christ rather than just the Catholic Church, then Curtis's claim on this score is unacceptable.

Claim 3. Curtis makes several related claims about the scattering of Nephi's "seed" and the promised land that do not hold up well. The bulk of his argument concerns the meaning of "scattered." Does this refer to all the people in the promised land, individual groups of people, or individuals? And is a minimal distance of displacement necessary before we can claim they were "scattered" rather than just conquered and enslaved? For me, this is one of the most outrageous claims that Curtis makes in his book. Although I do not have general estimates before me (precise estimates are not possible), it is quite probable that more Indians died in Latin America during the first 30 years of Spanish contact there than were living in what was the continental USA. Many millions died in Mexico and Central America, and many thousands were displaced.

Curtis concedes that the Indians of Mexico and Central America are Lamanites and that they look toward the USA as the promised land. This cute argument is merely a semantic illusion that confuses some modern peoples' views of the land of
economic opportunity, or the "promised land," with the Book of Mormon "land of promise." Part of this argument is that Latin America is still under the sway of the great and abominable church. This argument is hard to take under any interpretation of Satan’s church. It is quite probable, for example, that the relative percentage of Mormons in Mexico and most of the rest of Latin America is greater than the relative percentage in the USA. In neither case is the LDS Church dominant. I would contend that the good ole USA is under the sway of the great and abominable church even now, and to an equal or even greater degree than is Latin America. Curtis’s final claim is that the USA is a nation of Gentiles and the rest of the Americas are not. I consider this claim below.

Claim 4. Many of Curtis’s arguments appear to derive from a narrow interpretation of the term “gentile.” His claims on this score amount to blatant racism or gross ignorance, or both. True, the Book of Mormon describes the Gentiles as “white, and exceedingly fair and beautiful, like unto my people before they were slain” (1 Nephi 13:15). Use of this language is not offensive, but to attribute these attributes solely to the immigrants of England, France, Holland, Germany, Sweden, and Ireland is another matter. One gets the distinct impression that Curtis has never seen a Spaniard nor looked up any pictures. They are fairer than he or I. But surely the term “gentile” goes beyond relative evaluations of the whiteness of one’s skin or the beauty of one’s visage.

Moroni’s use of “gentile” in his preface to the Book of Mormon indicates that the term includes all who are not Jews (or the House of Israel); the Spanish, Portuguese, and Italians would seem to qualify under this broad interpretation. Curtis’s limited interpretation of “gentile” runs counter to some of his own arguments. He is willing to admit that 1 Nephi 13:12 refers to Columbus. It should be recalled that Columbus was “a man among the Gentiles.” This would seem to indicate that people in Spain (or Italy) could be considered gentiles. Following this narrow interpretation of “gentile” for the next several verses of Nephi’s vision, one could easily argue that Spain was included in the nations of the gentiles and that the multitudes of gentiles that came to the land of promise included Spaniards. I think such an
interpretation does less violence to the scripture than Curtis’s interpretation.

Claim 5. Curtis’s claim about humble gentiles is difficult to evaluate. What does it mean that the “gentiles did humble themselves before the Lord” (1 Nephi 13:19)? Does it refer to the initial, purported motives for colonization, as claimed by Curtis? Or does it refer to basic life-style, religiosity, and humility of a people? I would welcome the evidence that the early inhabitants of the USA were more humble, religious, etc. than their contemporaneous neighbors in Canada or Mexico. I think we need to be extremely careful in accepting ethnocentric histories of our country versus those of others. I think the counterclaim that the USA is the most arrogant nation in the hemisphere could be more easily demonstrated with historic documentation. In the final analysis, however, it is foolish to put so much analytical weight on a vague scriptural pronouncement of relative humility. The inherent comparison in this scripture, I think, refers to the “mother nations” of the gentile nations of the promised land rather than to Canada, Mexico, and the rest of Latin America.

Claim 6. Curtis’s argument about the Bible appears to be his most concrete case, but is it? The Spanish in Mexico, Central America, and South America, for example, had been preaching from the Bible to the natives for about a century before the English first settled in the New World. Could this be a fulfillment of Nephi’s vision that a book “was carried forth among them” (1 Nephi 13:20)? I think it can. If one is not worried about pedagogical methods for “spreading” the Bible, it could easily be said that the Spanish brought “Christianity” to more natives than did any other Gentile nation. Indeed, the people of the USA appear to have done almost nothing to take the Bible to the Indians.

Claim 7. The claim concerning kings appears to be heavy on rhetoric and thin on substance. We are told that there were to be no kings in the land of promise. Does this somehow signal the USA over Mexico, Canada, and the rest of the Americas? I think not. If the original USA colonies were under the hegemony of a king, then one must allow the same condition to the rest of the Americas. If the meaning of the verse concerns breaking the yoke of distant kings, then the question becomes one of relative timing.
I do not think we can put too much weight on Curtis’s interpretation of this verse. The preceding consideration of Curtis’s claims has perhaps given them more credence than they deserve. I find no convincing evidence for believing his claim that the land of promise is the USA and that Canada and Mexico are excluded. One fundamental problem with the argument for a land of promise as the USA is that it confounds a “land” with a “political entity.” I can easily conceive of “land” meaning a piece of real estate of unknown size, but I have difficulty in assuming a priori that it refers to a political territory. I do not consider the argument worth making in detail, but I think the most parsimonious view of the land of promise is that it included “the whole of America . . . from the north to the south” and not just the United States of America. There is no evidence in Christ in North America that Curtis has researched recent statements by General Authorities about Latin America. I think it would be instructive to see what the brethren have told the Saints in Latin America about the location and extent of the land of Zion.

Ramah by Any Other Name

Commenting on the final battle of the Jaredites, Moroni informs us that the hill Ramah is the same hill where his father “Mormon did hide up the records unto the Lord” (Ether 15:11), or the hill Cumorah (see Mormon 6:6). For the first 22 years of my life I thought the location of Cumorah was well-known, as Joseph Smith received the plates from Moroni at that spot. My father occasionally told us stories about the New York Cumorah that he had heard while serving a mission there during World War II. I was told of tremendous earthworks and defensive trenches encountered by the earliest settlers in Palmyra, and of large deposits of metal weapons. I also heard of a vision wherein his mission president saw a red-headed Moroni lamenting over the destruction of his people. These were moving images in my youth. As with Curtis, I was extremely offended when I first heard the two-Cumorah theory, and I reacted strongly against it.

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8 Smith, Teachings, 362.
Until I heard the two-Cumorah theory after returning from my mission, I had no idea that the location of Cumorah was even a question or that the location of Book of Mormon lands was a topic of research. My initial reaction was to take offense and to argue the point with my roommate who was taking a class in Book of Mormon archaeology from M. Wells Jakeman. In the course of our arguments, it soon dawned on me that I had unthinkingly accepted a traditional view of the matter and had never seriously looked at the statements from the Book of Mormon. The internal evidence from the Book of Mormon eventually convinced me that I had been naive in accepting the traditional view and that there must be two hills called Cumorah: that of the Book of Mormon and one in New York.

The internal evidence from the Book of Mormon for Cumorah is most clearly presented by David Palmer in his excellent book, *In Search of Cumorah: New Evidences for the Book of Mormon from Ancient Mexico.* It is noteworthy that this book is not cited by Curtis, nor are its arguments for the internal evidence for the hill Cumorah considered. This is not polite or serious scholarship. The location of the hill Cumorah is the primary strut in Curtis’s argument for Book of Mormon lands, yet he presents no analysis of the statements from the Book of Mormon which reveal features of this hill. He assumes that the New York Cumorah and that mentioned in the Book of Mormon are one and the same. All his arguments for the configuration of Book of Mormon lands (see next section) follow from the assumption that the hill Cumorah is the one known Book of Mormon location in the New World.

Setting aside all of the claims of the proponents of the Mesoamerica theories, let us examine the one spot in all the Book of Mormon which is identified without question, or should be without question, as the Hill Cumorah. It is named specifically in the Book of Mormon as the burial spot of the plates, as well as being the place where Joseph Smith received them. It was also near the city of Zarahemla. (p. 87)

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The meager evidence adduced to support this claim come from the "traditional" view and a few early statements of dubious origin. Curtis's primary text is the Oliver Cowdery story of the Nephite records repository, as related by Brigham Young many years later. Until now, it has been quite easy to ignore this story as being devoid of specific content. But in light of its place in Curtis's argument I cite it here and consider it briefly.

On June 17, 1877, Brigham Young addressed the Saints in Farmington, Utah, on the occasion of organizing a stake there. The primary focus of the first part of his discourse was to warn the Saints against seeking after money and precious metals. As part of this message he conveyed the following story:

Oliver Cowdery went with the Prophet Joseph when he deposited these plates. Joseph did not translate all of the plates; there was a portion of them sealed, which you can learn from the Book of Doctrine and Covenants. When Joseph got the plates, the angel instructed him to carry them back to the hill Cumorah, which he did. Oliver says that when Joseph and Oliver went there, the hill opened, and they walked into a cave, in which there was a large and spacious room. He says he did not think, at the time, whether they had the light of the sun or artificial light; but that it was just as light as day. They laid the plates on a table; it was a large table that stood in the room. Under this table there was a pile of plates as much as two feet high, and there were altogether in this room more plates than probably many wagon loads; they were piled up in the corners and along the walls. The first time they went there the sword of Laban hung upon the wall; but when they went again it had been taken down and laid upon the table across the gold plates; it was unsheathed, and on it was written these words: "This sword will never be sheathed again until the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of our God and his Christ." I tell you this as coming not only from Oliver Cowdery, but others who were familiar with it, and who understood it just as well as we understand coming to this meeting, enjoying the day,
and by and by we separate and go away, forgetting most of what is said, but remembering some things. 10

If we accept this story at face value, it would seem to indicate that the hill Cumorah in New York is indeed the one in which Mormon deposited all of the plates. There is no indication in this story that Joseph and Oliver were carried away in vision, rather, the circumstances appear quite pedestrian—a walk to the hill with the plates to return them to the angel. This story also indicates that at least two visits were involved and that other people were familiar with this story.

Heber C. Kimball alluded to a slightly different version of the story with the significant difference that a vision experience is mentioned.

Brother Mills mentioned in his song, that crossing the Plains with hand-carts was one of the greatest events that ever transpired in this Church. I will admit that it is an important event, successfully testing another method for gathering Israel, but its importance is small in comparison with the visitation of the angel of God to the Prophet Joseph, and with the reception of the sacred records from the hand of Moroni at the hill Cumorah.

How does it compare with the vision that Joseph and others had, when they went into a cave in the hill Cumorah, and saw more records than ten men could carry? There were books piled up on tables, book upon book. Those records this people will yet have, if they accept of the Book of Mormon and observe its precepts, and keep the commandments.11

Now, it makes a great deal of difference whether we are dealing with a vision of a record repository or with a less miraculous event. The two statements cited above suggest that the matter will remain ambiguous until we receive further revelation on the matter. Given this uncertainty, it seems unfortunate to place so much emphasis on these cave stories one way or the other.

Contrary to some claims I have heard, the remainder of Brigham Young’s discourse in Farmington that day gives no indication that this was one tall tale among many that he fabricated for the occasion. The direct historical background to this story, and the accuracy of the version recorded in the *Journal of Discourses* (or Brigham’s memory of Oliver’s account), are both important questions but are beyond my abilities to address. The story should raise a few questions for most Mormons, however, because it does not appear to conform to other information we have about the plates. Joseph Smith’s official history indicates that the plates were returned to Moroni in a different manner than indicated in “Oliver’s story.”

I soon found out the reason why I had received such strict charges to keep them safe, and why it was that the messenger had said that when I had done what was required at my hand, *he would call for them*. For no sooner was it known that I had them, than the most strenuous exertions were used to get them from me. Every stratagem that could be invented was resorted to for that purpose. The persecution became more bitter and severe than before, and multitudes were on the alert continually to get them from me if possible. But by the wisdom of God, they remained safe in my hands until I had accomplished by them what was required at my hand. When, according to arrangements, the messenger called for them, *I delivered them up to him*; and he has them in his charge until this day, being the second day of May, one thousand eight hundred and thirty-eight.12

Of course, this account can be taken as an allusion to a return trip to Cumorah to deliver the plates as Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball mentioned, but it can also be read that Moroni visited Joseph and took the plates back.

I would further suggest that the circumstances surrounding the vision given to the Three Witnesses, their stories of the experience, and Joseph’s relief that others had seen these things, do not fit Brigham’s version of Oliver Cowdery’s story about returning the

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12 Joseph Smith—History 1:60
plates to an angel at the hill Cumorah, or of paying a return visit. Moreover, Oliver's and Joseph's awkward silence about this event certainly cannot be attributed to hesitancy about testifying of angels, gold plates, and the like. There are issues of the timing of events and the reasons for silence here that I am not competent to address. Certainly this story deserves more analysis in its historic context and more comparison to other claims we have for events surrounding the plates. Parts of the story do not square with other, more reliable information. Therefore, it would seem poor procedure to take the story "at face value" as certain evidence that Mormon's Cumorah was in New York.

Curtis has proposed a procedure for dealing with conflicting claims from the early brethren. He argues that one give precedence to the standard works. What does the Book of Mormon tell us about the location of Cumorah? Palmer reviews the detailed evidence for the hill that indicates that the small hill in New York is an unlikely candidate. More convincing evidence for the location of Mormon's Cumorah/Ramah comes from a relative geography of natural features. The Book of Mormon clearly indicates that the hill Cumorah was (1) near a narrow neck of land in a land northward and (2) close to the borders of an East sea. These minimal and incontrovertible geographic relationships are not met by the hill near Palmyra, despite Curtis's claims to the contrary.

One if by Land, Two if by Sea

The major clue to the location and extent of Book of Mormon lands is the identification of the "seas" mentioned in the Book of Mormon. Curtis argues that some of the Great Lakes were the seas referred to rather than the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, as presumed by most scholars. This is certainly a plausible hypothesis, but does it hold water?

The Book of Mormon is full of geographic details, but the most significant are those that describe relationships among various features, and from different points of reference. The most important of these concern the lands northward and southward, a narrow neck of land between them, the River Sidon, the location of wildernes ses, and the locations of uplands and lowlands. In a previous evaluation of a Book of Mormon geography, I proposed
a simple list of ten significant geographic relationships that are clearly described in the Book of Mormon and which can be used to evaluate any proposed geography. I draw on information summarized there for the following discussion.

The major criterion for evaluating a geography is how well it can account for the complexity of detail in the Book of Mormon without recourse to special assumptions. The geography described by Sorenson, for example, that Curtis reacts against, can account for all of the unambiguous details of the Book of Mormon by making only one special assumption; the assumption is that the hill Cumorah in New York is not the one mentioned in the Book of Mormon. Curtis’s geography makes the opposite assumption: that the hill Cumorah in New York is the Cumorah/Ramah mentioned in the Book of Mormon. Does this assumption allow Curtis to make sense of the geographic detail in the Book of Mormon in a parsimonious manner?

If the principal test of a Book of Mormon geography is its explanatory power without recourse to special assumptions, we must conclude that Curtis’s geography is an unmitigated disaster. In giving up the possibility of two Cumorahs he is forced to argue for (1) two lands of Nephi (p. 111), (2) two lands northward (various maps), (3) two lands southward (ibid.), (4) many lands of desolation (p. 117), (5) a hill Cumorah that is south of the East Sea and east of the narrow neck of land (various maps), (6) a River Sidon that is only 40 miles long (p. 127), and (7) an East Sea that is north of a West Sea and both to the east of a North Sea and a South Sea (p. 108). This is a surprising amount of special assumptions given the limited geographical features that Curtis considers in his study. A detailed evaluation of these geographic details is beyond my purpose here. I will consider only a few claims and point to some of the principal difficulties with the geography.

It is appropriate that we begin at Cumorah as does Curtis. Secure knowledge that the hill in New York is indeed the one mentioned in the Book of Mormon allows Curtis to read the text

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in a creative manner. Any ambiguities in the text are hammered into conformity to fit this fact. I think the Book of Mormon clearly describes a small land that has an East sea and a West sea, a land northward connected by a narrow neck to a land southward, and a major river in the land southward that runs northward. The hill Cumorah is described as in the land northward, north of the narrow neck, and near the East sea. Curtis’s hill Cumorah, in contrast, is located to the east of his narrow neck of land, and to the east of the River Sidon and Zarahemla, and south of the East Sea. To make these descriptions work, Curtis has had to fabricate a dual geography that has at least two of everything. This is too much special pleading.

For most proponents of Book of Mormon geographies, the major clues in the text concern the narrow neck of land, the East and West seas, and the River Sidon. The narrow neck of land is the pivotal geographic feature in the geography described by Mormon, as this is the point where the East and West seas come closest together and is the land that connects the land northward with the land southward. In Curtis’s geography, the narrow neck of land is located between Lake Ontario and Lake Erie. It connects “Alma’s Land Northward” east of the narrow neck to the “Land Southward” and the “Land of Nephi,” located directly to the west. Clearly, directional labels lose all significance in this geography. I do not consider Curtis’s creative semantics a plausible clarification of the text.

A final example should suffice as an indicator of the plausibility of Curtis’s limited Great Lakes Book of Mormon geography. He identifies the River Sidon as the Niagara River. This 40-mile-long river connects Lake Ontario with Lake Erie. There is no reasonable way in which the Book of Mormon references to the River Sidon can be crammed into a 40-mile stretch of river between two seas. At a very minimum, the Book of Mormon describes the city of Manti near the headwaters of the Sidon, the city of Zarahemla at least three or four days or more downstream, and the city of Sidom about the same distance downstream from Zarahemla. We are not told which sea the river

runs into, but it is quite clear that the mouth is a considerable distance from Sidom. It is simply absurd to think that a 40-mile river can be the River Sidon.

Curtis’s reconstruction of Book of Mormon lands defies the laws of logic and distorts the text, as I understand it, beyond recognition. It is an interesting document to puzzle over for those who enjoy issues in the philosophy of science and textual criticism but is best avoided by those seeking a clear description of Book of Mormon lands. It is full of inconsistencies and contradictions. The principal contradiction is that it violates Curtis’s discussion of the land of promise as the United States of America. More than half of his proposed geography is in present day Canada. It is hard to imagine how such an oversight could have occurred.

It Never Rains in Southern California

As Curtis notes, one of the issues raised by those advocating Mesoamerica geographies concerns the description of weather. If the hill in New York is Cumorah/Ramah, why is there no mention of snow, ice, or the bitter cold? Curtis addresses this issue nearly head-on.

I was told, “If the Nephites lived near the Hill Cumorah, they would have said something about the weather.” Picking up a Book of Mormon, it fell open to Helaman 5. Reading along, the word “hail” in verse 12 caught my eye. Helaman was teaching his sons a lesson. Hail must have been common or the lesson would have had no meaning.

I went to the phone and called the U.S. Weather Information and asked, “Where does it hail?”

“What are you talking about?” he asked.

“This is the U.S. Weather Information office?”

“Yes,” he replied.

“Can you tell me where it normally hails at sea level?”

“I will need to call you back,” he remarked.

A few minutes later the phone rang. “It can hail almost anywhere,” he spoke.

“I understand, but normally at sea level?” I asked.
"Between the 30th and the 60th degrees of latitude. Below the 30th it melts before it hits the ground; above the 60th it is too cold to form," he said.

This put Helaman a long way from Mesoamerica, yet the Hill Cumorah is right in the middle of the hail belt, and not far above sea level. That area can also be reached from the Atlantic Ocean in a sailboat. (p. 10)

It is comforting to know that the U.S. Weather Information service supports Curtis's designation of the hill Cumorah! That this dialogue is presented as serious evidence for the location of Book of Mormon lands speaks volumes for Christ in North America. Nonetheless, given the denunciation of a limited Mesoamerica geography based upon this weather information, we should accord it some attention.

Curtis slips two important assumptions almost unnoticed into this argument, at the same time avoiding the real "weather" issue. First, he claims that Helaman was teaching a lesson; therefore, "Hail must have been common or the lesson would have had no meaning." This is clearly too strong a claim. But if it were true, would it not make more sense to describe weather that was even more common than hail in this area, such as snow? The second assumption comes out in his conversation with the weatherman. Why are we only interested in hail at sea level? What is the basis of this qualification?

I think it would be more accurate to claim that for Helaman's lesson to have impact, it was only necessary that his children know of hail storms and their effects, not that they be common. And we certainly have no basis for only considering hail at sea level. Helaman refers to a mighty storm and says that we must build our foundation on the rock of our redeemer lest we be blown away when the devil "shall send forth his mighty winds, yea, his shafts in the whirlwind, yea, when all his hail and his mighty storm shall beat upon you." (Helaman 5:12; cf. Alma 26:6). The Book of Mormon refers to mighty winds, some hail and rain, but no snow. I have experienced all of this weather on numerous occasions while living in southern Mexico. Therefore, I consider Curtis's argument for excluding this area from consideration on the basis of the sea-level "hail belt" to be unacceptable. Weather patterns and related aspects of geography certainly should be considered
in delimiting Book of Mormon lands. Sorenson’s *Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* is still the best word on the subject. All of the details of physical geography mentioned in the Book of Mormon, and those that can be inferred, fit more comfortably into a Mesoamerican setting than a New York setting. In this regard, what is not mentioned or alluded to requires explanation if the Book of Mormon writers lived in New York. I cannot imagine Moroni in a cave in New York Cumorah working through the winter scratching out the history of the Jaredites on gold plates. Rather than lamenting his weakness in expression (Ether 12:25), Moroni should have complained of numb fingers, freezing cold plates, and inability to hold his stylus.

**No Evidence Is the Best Evidence**

Curtis devotes 101 pages to a discussion of “artifacts,” meaning archaeological evidences for the ancient inhabitants of New York. His initial arguments merit citation here.

While seeking knowledge from Book of Mormon geography scholars, the comment was often heard, “But there are no artifacts up there.”

The lack of impressive monuments, temples and other artifacts in North America actually gives us more evidence that the ones who kept the records from which the Book of Mormon was translated must have lived in North America [sic] rather than in Mesoamerica. The Lamanites destroyed all who wouldn’t deny the Christ (Moroni 1:1–2). This would have left no one around in A.D. 400 to build those great mounds and temples like the ones found in Mesoamerica. Even if a powerful leader had managed to bring all of the people under his rule, and had brought peace to the people, it would have been four or five generations before there would have been enough people to even start one of those great pyramids.

At the time Moroni finished his father’s record, he was surrounded by a people who had degenerated into blood-thirsty and probably, illiterate savages (Mormon 6:6, 8:8). (p. 150)
When it comes to questions of "Just what type of artifacts should we be looking for in the area covered by the Book of Mormon?" (ibid.), scholars have been treated to some of the most artful dodges on record. Curtis is asking profound questions here and has several solid ideas worth considering, as well as his own artful dodges. It is a particularly useful ploy to suggest that no evidence is the best evidence. Curtis may be correct about the conditions at A.D. 400, but what of the preceding 2000–3000 years? What of the Jaredites, the people of King Benjamin, and so on? Should we not expect some evidence of their existence?

Curtis proposes the following artifactual expectations for the Book of Mormon:

1. From the time of Christ to A.D. 200 the people lived the United Order and had all things in common. "Having all things in common, there were no rich, no poor, and no elite or ruling class for whom to build huge monuments. Their temples would have been plain working temples, not large ornate temples to pagan gods" (p. 151).

2. After A.D. 200, the people divided into small groups and thus lacked the manpower to erect impressive monuments.

Just as today many small religious groups cannot build great buildings, so would the people near the narrow neck of land be unable to build those huge and ornate temples found in Meso- and South America.

Kings and absolute rulers cannot abide contention, and would have put an end to what is described in 4 Nephi. There must have been very little contention in Mesoamerica. (ibid.)

3. Near the end of Nephite history, the people were so preoccupied with war that they had little time to put up impressive buildings. "It is impossible to maintain a war of extermination and at the same time build great monuments to their elite and to their pagan gods" (p. 152).

4. The remnant of the Book of Mormon peoples were not industrious enough to build great buildings.

When the Gentiles came to the promised land, they found a people just like the people that Nephi, Mormon,
and Moroni described: dark, filthy, and loathsome, whom the Gentiles did their utmost to exterminate, just as the Book of Mormon stated. The people of Mesoamerica were nothing like those in the Book of Mormon. They were a well-educated and industrious people under powerful leaders. They would need to be, to build the great temples and other buildings which they left.

The great ruins of Mesoamerica prove two things: the Book of Mormon is true, and the people of Nephi did not live there. (pp. 153–54)

5. We are told that the Nephites built fortifications and fortified cities. Many of these have been found in the area Curtis considers Book of Mormon lands.

6. The Lamanites would not have left artifacts to be found.

There is no mention of the Lamanites burying the dead. In fact, at the rate they were covering the area, murdering, looting, ravishing, and laying waste to the land, the Lamanites could not have taken the time to bury even their own dead. Thus, the bodies of several million people lay scattered and heaped on the land to molder and decay, leaving only spear points, axes, arrow heads, and stone clubs that felled soldiers, wives, and children to mark their passing. As the years passed, the survivors’ children would find the area a good spot to look for gold, silver, and copper trinkets. The implements of war would also be in great abundance, needing only to be fitted with new handles and shafts. Then came the Gentiles with their spades and plows, turning up some and completely destroying other artifacts. However, John L. Sorenson said, “You cannot prove anything with artifacts.” Today little is left except the words of a few early men who recorded what they saw on the land as they traveled the woods and hills before modern man. (pp. 156, 163)

7. The archaeology of Mesoamerica does not conform to Curtis’s expectations for Book of Mormon lands because it is too complex. “With conditions like those described in the Book of
Mormon, it would be impossible to build anything like the ruins of Mesoamerica” (p. 167).

8. Curtis claims that at A.D. 400 there were two very different peoples in the Americas: the Lamanites and the peoples of Mesoamerica. “Those around the narrow neck of land and on the land of promise would leave only burned cities and the bones of the dead” (p. 171).

9. Any buildings or artifacts would have been destroyed by the Gentiles.

For almost 300 years the “Gentiles” have systematically pillaged, leveled, plowed, and cultivated the land of northeastern United States of America. Almost all of the mounds, the wasted cities, and the trenches filled with bones, and the mounds of bones with a very thin cover of earth have been obliterated. Yet there is still enough evidence to show that a people with a high degree of civilization lived and died there. (pp. 171–72)

10. “What we should be looking for are the remains of fortified cities and of a people at war, not great pagan temples and burial mounds built by a people united and at peace” (p. 174). The bulk of Curtis’s chapter is devoted to listing this evidence. He does this by reprinting most of McGavin and Bean’s *Book of Mormon Geography*,16 now long out of print. This book focuses on the early accounts of upstate New York that describe fortified sites and remains of weapons. The only parts of this book not reprinted are those sections where McGavin and Bean discuss Mesoamerica as part of Book of Mormon lands, which, in Curtis’s view, is an unfortunate oversight on their part (pp. 196–202).

Some of Curtis’s suggestions are right on the mark and others are just plain silly or misinformed. His sweeping generalizations for Mesoamerica come from one recent *National Geographic* article about the lowland Maya. Curtis’s portrayal of Mesoamerica is wide of the mark. His treatment of the archaeology of New York is even less appropriate. His lengthy citation of McGavin and Bean is a repetition of information that was out-of-date even in 1948. Has nothing new been learned about the archaeology of

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16 Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1948.
New York since then? Should it not be incumbent upon Curtis to read at least one of these recent books or articles?

The overall impression of Curtis’s discussion of artifacts might appear impressive, but such an impression would be misleading. *Christ in North America* exhibits the common failing of amateur excursions into archaeology. Curtis lacks any appreciation of time, either in his construction of archaeological expectations or in his handling of the archaeological information. Curtis is interested only in showing that forts, weapons, and bones have been recovered in the narrow neck region in abundance. This is a good start. The critical question is: What do they date to? We are not told; Curtis does not cite any study that would contain this information. Archaeological dating techniques have come a long way since 1948.

The general cultural-historical picture for upstate New York, as I understand it, does not support Curtis’s scheme. Our minimal expectations for the Book of Mormon are at least two traditions of civilization: Jaredite and Nephite/Lamanite. Curtis devotes all of his energies to discussing the period from the time of Christ to A.D. 400. What of the earlier periods? Is there any impressive archaeological evidence in New York for an early tradition? No. Most of the sites and weapons Curtis recapitulates from McGavin and Bean probably postdate A.D. 400. Undoubtedly much information has been destroyed, modified, and even misunderstood, but we would expect some information to survive.

One of Curtis’s main claims for archaeological expectations is that we are looking for things that we ought not. I think he is absolutely correct on this score. It does not follow, however, that his anemic list of archaeological expectations resolves the problem, especially when he ignores the bulk of the text. True, the Nephites did not move to the land northward until quite late in their history, but the Jaredites had lived there for over a thousand years previous to Nephite occupation. This is not a trivial point. Curtis’s silence on the Jaredites is inexplicable.

Detailed discussion of the archaeological expectations of the Book of Mormon is better left to a more appropriate forum. I need only note here that attempts at minimizing them are not helpful. The Book of Mormon clearly indicates a network of large cities and complex culture and not merely fortifications. A few
specific remarks to Curtis’s claims will suffice in closing this discussion.

1. Curtis’s conjectures concerning the absence of ornate buildings in Nephite lands during the first two centuries after Christ’s visit are sound. We should probably not expect many impressive buildings for the time period of A.D. 30–200. But what about all of the rest of the time?

2. Curtis’s related claim that small groups could not erect impressive monuments is worthy of comment. We do not expect small groups to make themselves noticed in the archaeological record. But we lack indications of the “smallness” of the groups involved in this instance. Curtis asserts that kings cannot abide contention. He takes evidence of large building projects as evidence for the absence of contention. This is patently absurd as stated. Recent understandings of Mesoamerica, for example, show it was rife with contention.

3. Curtis mentions that the Nephites were so preoccupied with war that they could not put up impressive buildings. This is a good point and possibly true. However, many large buildings do get constructed during wartime. Curtis’s view here is overly narrow as it really only considers the Nephite view. What of the Lamanites? What percentage of the Lamanites were involved in war? There are too many unknowns to be confident of Curtis’s projections of building activity during wartime. What was done between wars? In our own culture, the brief period between World War I and World War II witnessed tremendous building activity. Who suspected that another world war would occur so soon?

4. Curtis’s claim that the ruins of Mesoamerica both prove the Book of Mormon to be true and that the Nephites did not live there is a classic case of having your cake and eating it, too. Curtis thinks the Mesoamericans were too civilized to have been part of the Book of Mormon story and that the evidence of all of the impressive building activity there demonstrates that the Nephites did not live there. Even if we stretch the bounds of scholarly charity to their breaking point and concede Curtis’s assertion on these matters, how would their presence prove the Book of Mormon true? In fact, we cannot concede either of Curtis’s assertions nor accept his conclusions. Mesoamerica was not as he
pictures it, and Nephite and Lamanite culture and history were also more complex than he describes them.

5. Fortified sites are one of the clear archaeological expectations from the Book of Mormon, but finding one does nothing per se to prove the case. These fortifications must be in the areas described and date to the proper time periods. Much is being made of fortifications these days, with little attention to details. The irony of Curtis's claims is nearly overwhelming. He is using the same arguments and data that anti-Mormons use to prove that Joseph Smith made up the Book of Mormon and incorporated local lore in doing so.

6. Curtis does a good job in his considerations of the possible archaeological evidence that one would expect to find at Cumorah. We need to worry a great deal about the archaeological evidence as it was laid down—and picked up again or plowed under. We should consider various classes of evidence and how they would be affected differently. We would not expect to lose all information on a city in the same manner we could lose sight of a great battle. Picking up axes is one thing; plowing under a city wall is quite another.

7. As mentioned previously, Curtis's views on Mesoamerica are not credible. His claims that the conditions described in the Book of Mormon precluded the erection of large buildings are outrageous.

8. Much of the archaeological record of the area considered by Curtis has been damaged severely over the years, as he mentions. We have two options in reacting to this tragedy of frontier expansion: (1) claim that the data are too badly damaged to deal with—and maybe with a great deal of relief as none of our claims for how it might have been can now be checked, or (2) study the record very carefully and try to compensate for known biases for certain parts of the record. Surely anyone interested in a Great Lakes geography ought to pursue the second option.

9. The early evidence for the archaeology of New York compiled by McGavin and Bean is a good start for a consideration of the culture-history of this area, but no more than that. It is difficult to believe that Curtis has chosen to ignore the recent information. The tragedy of Christ in North America is that the thesis is so inexpertly argued, and it is argued on the basis of
assertion rather than evidence. A much better case could be constructed using the evidence in "creative" ways, something that Curtis demonstrates some flair for.

To summarize, the archaeological case that Curtis attempts to provide for his one-Cumorah thesis is unconvincing. His research displays a lack of seriousness and/or ability. He consistently ignores recent scholarly work in the two areas that he pretends to be comparing. As a reader, I was not able to take his claims seriously because he does not appear to have done the basic homework required by his thesis nor even appear to know what that research should entail. It is clear that he has "talked" with many "Book of Mormon geography scholars" in his search for truth. There is no indication in Christ in North America that he ever took the time to listen to anything they had to say. His book is the worse for it.

Towards a Book of Mormon Geography

In this final section, I want to view Christ in North America in a broader context. It is my impression that no other topic in Book of Mormon studies lends itself so readily to poor scholarship as the subject of geography. Christ in North America is merely the latest, but not the last, in a long series of highly improbable geographies based upon dubious assumptions, minimal research, fallacious logic, and wishful thinking. I find little of redeeming value in the substance of Curtis's book. But can anything of lasting value be salvaged from it? Yes. Christ in North America will stand for the next few years as an example of what not to do in writing a Book of Mormon geography. I do not mean to be cruel or flippant in this claim; often a poor example of "scholarship" is more useful to the cause of science than a good one. Scholars wishing to write Book of Mormon geographies should heed the tragic lessons of Christ in North America and profit thereby.

What are some of the scholarly traps that one should avoid in writing a Book of Mormon geography? What can we learn from Christ in North America? First, one should avoid the trap of obvious facts. Curtis begins his study where it ought to end—with a known geographical Book of Mormon location in the New World. Most of the distortions of the Book of Mormon text in Christ in North America are a logical consequence of assuming a
priori that the Cumorah in New York is the one mentioned in the Book of Mormon. Curtis’s unconvincing attempt to make this point serves as a useful caution for anyone seduced by this easy “fact.”

The second caution is related to the first. Curtis’s assumption of one known geographic point compromised the rest of his geography. One should work out a consistent geography based upon the information provided within the Book of Mormon itself, independently of any locations in real space that one thinks might be Book of Mormon spots. Very few Book of Mormon geography scholars have followed this procedure, but it is absolutely fundamental. It is hard to be convinced of a Book of Mormon geography when it is clear the author has not studied the book in enough detail to get the basic facts clear. In Curtis’s book, his discussion of the River Sidon, the narrow neck of land, and the location of Cumorah in relation to Zarahemla all signal a basic misunderstanding or misreading of the text.

One useful resource that Curtis ignored, to the detriment of his geography, was the work published by other scholars. It is one thing to have honest disagreements over the meaning of the text and the relationships implied in it and quite another to ignore others’ arguments altogether. The combination of disdain and arrogance in Christ in North America is lethal. Curtis bases his whole argument on the location of Cumorah but does not see the need to review even one of the books detailing the arguments for two Cumorahs. Nor does he review the basic facts of the hill given in the Book of Mormon. When one considers that the Book of Mormon text comes out on the short end of the stick, it is not too surprising that scholarly studies are also ignored.

A series of interpretive difficulties are also apparent in Christ in North America. Curtis reads prophecy as history, and along lines that are very self-serving for his argument. He considers statements of General Authorities concerning these same prophecies, and speculations about geography, as evidence when it suits his purposes. In neither case is the reader presented with a comprehensive view of what these statements might mean. The same naive method of interpretation is apparent in Curtis’s treatment of geographical details in the Book of Mormon. His treatment of Zion and the land of promise is a classic case of his
reading of the text. One is surprised to learn that only the USA is the land of Zion and that Canada, Mexico, and the rest of Latin America do not qualify.

Apparent in many of Curtis’s interpretations is the ethnocentric trap of allowing cultural biases to serve as data. This is most evident in Curtis’s treatment of the Gentile and Lamanite questions. Curtis claims that the natives of Mesoamerica were too civilized to have been the peoples described in prophecy by Moroni. Only USA Indians are seen as sufficiently savage to qualify. On the other hand, the fair races that populated the USA are seen as “the gentiles,” and the rest of the continent is left out. I suggest that Curtis’s interpretation of the “great and abominable church” should also be considered as culturally biased.

Finally, most studies try to locate Book of Mormon lands in terms of modern geography; this brings up the question of archaeology. This is the death trap for most proposed geographies, including Curtis’s. Use of archaeological information requires some basic knowledge of how such information is obtained and what parts of it are most susceptible to error. This is not to say that only archaeologists can deal with this information, only that one is on very swampy ground here and should proceed with caution. It helps if one reads at least one archaeology book on the area he or she is proposing as Book of Mormon lands. There is no evidence that Curtis did this, either for New York or Mesoamerica. How can one take Christ in North America seriously when the extent of Curtis’s archaeological research is one dubious article in National Geographic and an LDS book printed in 1948?

Finally, the major weakness in Christ in North America is that nothing is analyzed or argued thoroughly. Impressions replace logic, and assertions stand in for data. This may be adequate for one’s personal witness, but this is not the way to persuade others. Curtis misses every opportunity to make his case through careful analysis of the Book of Mormon text (e.g., Zion, land of promise, Cumorah, Gentiles, etc.), analysis of General Authority statements (e.g., what has been said of Latin America), or analysis of the archaeological evidence (e.g., fortifications, cities, weapons).

In summary, although I think Christ in North America fails to reach minimal standards of scholarship, prose, and publishing
excellence, I think that some good may eventually come from the book if it is viewed as the road most frequently traveled by Book of Mormon enthusiasts. I have tried to point out here some of the most obvious pitfalls to be avoided along the way by those who wish to pursue similar research. The real tragedy of the book is that the argumentation is so poor that dismissal of the book does not allow dismissal of the hypothesis argued in it. It is highly likely, therefore, that the New York theory will surface from time to time. I only hope that future scholars do a better job of it and that we can eventually verify or falsify the one-Cumorah hypothesis on logical grounds. Curtis’s principal intention with Christ in North America was to counter the Mesoamerica theories. His poor showing for New York only strengthens the case that Book of Mormon lands lie elsewhere, perhaps in Mesoamerica.
One Response to a Singularity Worthless Genre

Reviewed by K. Codell Carter and Christopher B Isaac

Michael T. Griffith's *Refuting the Critics: Evidences of the Book of Mormon's Authenticity* (Horizon Publishers, 1993) is an attempt to answer a range of more-or-less familiar arguments that have been raised again and again, typically by fundamentalist anti-Mormons. Seven of Griffith's eight chapters address specific issues: Can the Book of Mormon be correct in claiming that Jesus was born "at Jerusalem" (Alma 7:10) rather than "in Bethlehem"? Can a benevolent and just God have been responsible for all the destruction reported in 3 Nephi? Is the Book of Mormon "in serious conflict with what modern archaeology tells us about ancient America and the Near East?" (p. 39) Was Solomon Spaulding's 1812 novel *Manuscript Story* the source for the Book of Mormon? Can the Book of Mormon be ascribed to ideas that were simply "in the air" at the time it was produced? If there have been changes in punctuation and wording in the Book of Mormon, how can it be said to be a perfect book? Is the Book of Mormon consistent with what is now Mormon doctrine? In addition to chapters dealing with these questions, there is a brief introduction in which Griffith discusses, along familiar lines, issues such as the proper role of evidence in relation to personal revelation. The concluding chapter refers the reader to some of the better works supporting the Book of Mormon. There is also a good bibliography that includes works
for and against the Book of Mormon as well as several major background works on the ancient Near East and Mesoamerica that do not focus directly on the Book of Mormon.

As most readers will recognize, the arguments that Griffith addresses are not new; indeed, for the most part, they can be traced back a century or more. Moreover, as Griffith himself explains more than once, the arguments have all been totally refuted—demolished—again and again (see pp. 16, 39, 63, 87, etc.). So why the need for this book? The simple fact is that these arguments (like the quest for a perpetual motion machine), however inane, will not go away. They are motivated by the desire to undermine, at any price, belief in the Book of Mormon, and so, in the absence of any better possibility, the critics come back, again and again, to poor old Solomon Spaulding et al. For whom is Griffith's book intended? Griffith states that his book is intended to help those who desire to have a testimony receive one (p. 10). In other words, this book is not written to persuade the critics themselves, but to help those who are open to the possibility that the Book of Mormon may be true and who may be troubled by the arguments of the critics. For this audience, the book seems about right. It surveys a range of the more famous arguments that have been raised against the Book of Mormon; it is interesting, readable, well documented, and more-or-less persuasive; and where appropriate it refers the interested reader to more thorough discussions.

As relative neophytes to anti-Book-of-Mormon literature and as natural-born skeptics, our first reaction to Griffith's book was this: "Good grief! the criticisms Griffith considers can't possibly be the most telling that have been made by these critics against the Book of Mormon." In other words, we immediately suspected that Griffith must be misrepresenting the critics to whom he was responding. But as P. T. Barnum pointed out, try as you might, you simply cannot underestimate human nature: after tracking down several of the original critical essays to which Griffith responds, we reluctantly report that, in our opinion, they are even stupider than Griffith makes them out to be.

For example, in his fourth chapter, Griffith considers Vernal Holley's 1983 revival of the Spaulding theory. Holley's main argument goes like this: there are lots of similarities between the
Book of Mormon and Spaulding’s *Manuscript Story*; therefore, the second was the source for the first. Griffith takes this argument seriously—as indeed he must given the nature of his project—but, we confess, it wasn’t easy for us to do so. Griffith attacks some of Holley’s parallels (pp. 67–71), he dismisses others as too general to be of significance (p. 65), and he points out differences between the Book of Mormon and Spaulding’s novel (pp. 78–83). Griffith also discusses recent discoveries (e.g. chiasmus, wordprint patterns, and ancient Near Eastern name patterns) that—however one is to account for them—clearly show the Book of Mormon could never have been simply derived from Spaulding’s story. But Griffith devotes less than half a page to what seems to us to be the most glaring hole in Holley’s argument—namely (as Griffith puts it) “the total lack of any hard evidence connecting Joseph Smith with Spaulding’s *Manuscript Story*” (p. 62). Regarding this connection, Holley himself says this:

The possibility exists that the Joseph Smith Sr. family members were not strangers to Solomon Spaulding. During the time the Smith family lived in Sharon, Vermont, Solomon Spaulding’s uncle, Ruben Spaulding, also lived there, Ruben was a deacon in the Sharon Congregational Church for forty-two years and was the justice of the peace for fifty years. His children would have been contemporaries of Joseph Smith Sr.’s children: Alvin, Hyrum, and Joseph Smith Jr. It is also likely that, while attending nearby Dartmouth College, Solomon Spaulding made visits to his uncle Ruben’s home in Sharon and became acquainted with the Joseph Smith family. (Holley, pp. 10–11; emphasis added)

What about the facts that (a) the Smith family had moved from Sharon several years before the Spaulding manuscript ever appeared, and (b) the Smiths finally left Vermont before Joseph was ten years old—given these facts, what kind of transcendental influences are we to envision from Holley’s conjectures? But, disregarding all such details, the claim that there is a direct influence between two works can only be justified by positive evidence of an actual connection—not by conjectures, possibilities, and what (Holley happens to think) may or may not
be likely. In fact, in the absence of any evidence that Joseph had ever seen or even heard of Spaulding's manuscript, there is no point in discussing supposed parallels or differences between the Book of Mormon and the Manuscript Story.

Holley also tries to demonstrate a connection between the Book of Mormon and the Manuscript Story by citing phrases that can be found in both books. But as anyone with access to a computer-readable edition of the scriptures can easily determine, about eighty percent of the phrases that, according to Holley, Joseph could only have derived from Spaulding can also be found in the Bible. So these shared forms of speech provide no significant evidence that Joseph was drawing on Spaulding.

Having read both Holley and the Spaulding manuscript, our conclusion is that no one with honest intent could ever seriously maintain that the Book of Mormon was derived in any way from the Manuscript Story. Thus, we think Griffith is far too easy on Holley: Holley's pamphlet isn't just error ridden and weak—it's either an hilarious exercise in sarcasm (perhaps by a closet Mormon) or is nauseatingly dishonest. Unfortunately, the dullness of the text forces us to the second alternative.

Of course, Griffith (in contrast to his present reviewers) can't really tell it like it is and still satisfy conventional expectations about politeness and fair play. So his generously tender treatment of Holley et al. is excusable if not entirely warranted. But the fact is, the numerous refutations (many cited by Griffith) of these boring, warmed-over, semi-digested so-called criticisms are so much more conclusive, original, and just plain interesting than the criticisms themselves that any fair-minded and neutral observer must conclude (with a non-LDS friend of ours): "I may not believe in the Book of Mormon, but if anything were to make me do so, it would be these arguments against it" Unfortunately for those of us who value logic, these inane arguments seem destined to be endlessly recycled. As a survey of the traditional fundamentalist criticisms of the Book of Mormon, and for the audience for which it was intended, Griffith's little book may be useful in limiting the damage inflicted by the latest round of publications in this singularly worthless genre.


**Through a Glass, Brightly: Happenings in Book of Mormon Fiction**

Reviewed by Richard H. Cracroft

In my 1990 review-essay of Robert H. Moss’s *The Nephite Chronicles*,¹ I suggested, after surveying the paucity of imaginative literary renderings of Book of Mormon figures and events, that Moss’s seven-volume *Chronicles* was “something like an event in the history of fictional treatments of the Book of Mormon.” In the same volume of *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* Elouise Bell reviewed Chris Heimerdinger’s *Tennis Shoes Among the Nephites*, a novel which has turned out to be, now in its eighth printing, not only another event in the rise of Book of Mormon–centered fiction, but a harbinger of further such literary happenings.

In fact, Clair Poulson’s *Samuel, Moroni’s Young Warrior* becomes such an event, with a well-told, fast-paced, exciting first novel about Samuel, a sixteen-year-old who becomes a Nephite hero through freeing his village and, on joining Captain Moroni, freeing the entire land from the Lamanite yoke. LDS teenagers will enjoy this work, as will parents willing to wait their turn patiently.

This recent upswing of *new events* in Book of Mormon–centered fiction is good news to those of us who see reading the Book of Mormon as one indicator of the spiritual health of our people. This increase in Book of Mormon–based fiction suggests

a general increase in familiarity with and integration of the stories and message of the Book of Mormon into Latter-day Saint lives. Such familiarity and, one hopes, mastery, promotes among the Saints, young and old, a fiction-engendering common knowledge and confidence upon which a writer of fiction can build his or her stories and extend the borders of our understanding.

Chris Heimerding is “anxiously engaged” in the good cause of doing just that. In Tennis Shoes among the Nephites, the reader may recall, Heimerding time-launches, via a cave-too-deep, three contemporary kids from Cody, Wyoming, into the midst of Book of Mormon warfare, including Helaman and Captain Moroni. In his second Book of Mormon-based novel, Gadiantons and the Silver Sword, Heimerding flips the plot and transports Gadianton robbers into a present-day confrontation with the same “Tennis Shoes gang,” now nearly a decade older.

Now, his dynamic imagination unflagging, Chris Heimerding has produced—for adult and teenage reader alike—another event of Book of Mormon and biblical proportions. In pondering a response to an off-the-city-wall question, “What if Daniel and Nephi had known each other as children,” Heimerding comes up with a plausible, entertaining, and thought-provoking answer in Daniel and Nephi, subtitled A Tale of Eternal Friendship in a Land Ripening for Destruction. Daniel and Nephi begins with Daniel, in Babylonian captivity, reflecting upon his long-ago adventures with Nephi, who has since disappeared into the Arabian wasteland. The novel ends with Nephi’s recollections, while on a ship bound to Heaven-Only-Knows, of his preteen adventures with Prince Daniel, who has now disappeared into Babylonian captivity.

Recollecting those adventures, Daniel and Nephi takes the reader on a whirlwind of Indiana-Jones-like adventures which range from betrayal, murder, and abduction to stealth, ambush, lion attacks, terrible flood, snapping crocodiles, and pitched battles—all played out in a milieu rich in F.A.R.M.S.-substantiated, authentic history and anthropology of Israel, Judah, and Egypt, circa 609 B.C., and featuring, in what must be a first-time occurrence, a cast of biblical and Book of Mormon characters.
Daniel and Nephi, the protagonists, are two proud and stubborn boys who, enroute to their destinies as men of God, must learn to shed their pride, struggle to keep their faith intact, and make profound moral decisions, all-the-while waging battle with worldly ideas and fending off the treacheries of scheming men.

Other characters are Lehi, Sariah, Laman, Lemuel, Sam, and their dying (and unscriptural) sister Hannah; as well as King Josiah and Queen Hamutel and their son Eliakim (later King Jehoiakim); and, of course, Shadrach (Hananiah), Meshach (Mishael), and Abednego (Azariah).

Though the two lads are sometimes a bit too precocious and articulate for their age, Heimerdinge r’s characterization of Daniel and Nephi is plausible and dynamic. His portrayals of Laman and Lemuel are as rich and imaginative, but very different from, Orson Scott Card’s stereotype-shattering handling of the errant brothers in his Homecoming saga. Heimerdinge r’s Lemuel is, surprisingly, a devout religious zealot who becomes disillusioned in the face of adversity and turns his back on God. Laman, on the other hand, is an agnostic who embraces a carpe diem worldview and revels in the fleshpots of Egypt.

Heimerdinge r reveals in the merchant Lehi and his sons the seeds of character which will later blossom into the events of 1 Nephi. For example, at one point in the novel Lehi must suffer the consequences of his failure to heed the warning of the Lord, a failure which will prepare him (the reader understands) to heed, obey, and act when, sometime later, he is commanded to take his family and flee Jerusalem. Each of Heimerdinge r’s characters struggles, with varying success, to find the true God, understand his relationship with God, build faith and trust in God, and learn to love his fellow beings.

This knowledge comes piecemeal to Daniel and Nephi, as the intrepid pair, in an attempt to save King Josiah and the kingdom from the treachery of palace intrigues, embark on a series of Spielbergian adventures which will take them from Jerusalem to Memphis and back to the battlefield of Megiddo, too late to undo the treachery which leads to King Josiah’s and Israel’s undoing—and eventually triggers the Babylonian captivity and Daniel’s role as exiled prince/prophet. But not before he gives his friend Nephi
the present of (ahal) a costly bow, which Nephi will carry with him into his family’s self-imposed exile/pilgrimage.

One of my students wrote sagaciously, “Reading Daniel and Nephi is like eating breakfast cereal. It’s quick, delicious, and underneath it all may be hiding some fortified nutrients if you read the side of the box carefully.” Enjoy the meal—though, from the looks of things, it seems we can anticipate more of these plenteous (if nutritionally thin) repasts from the table of Book of Mormon fiction.
Just the Facts Please

Reviewed by Richard L. Bushman

The title of *Inventing Mormonism* arouses expectations that are not actually realized in the reading of the book. Latter-day Saints use verbs like *revealed* or *restored* to explain how Mormonism came about. The word *inventing* implies that somebody concocted Mormonism; it was made up by an inventor of religion. The name of Wesley Walters as second author increases the expectation that the book will tell how Joseph Smith invented his visions, the doctrines, the Book of Mormon—the whole story. Walters’s 1969 *Dialogue* essay on the Palmyra revival had concluded with the thought that Joseph got mixed up about the date of the revival—saying it was 1819–20 rather than 1824 when the records all say it happened—because he was fabricating the story of the vision. The logical extension of this line of attack would be to discover more contradictions between the “tradition” that Joseph made up about himself and the facts of the “historical record.” The tone of the book would be iconoclastic, skeptical, and argumentative, and the book would expose Joseph Smith in the act of inventing the Mormon religion.

If Wesley Walters had not died in 1990, the book might have taken that tack. Walters had a debater’s temperament. He loved to take on an opponent’s proposition and score points against it. A mild-mannered, courteous explication of historical documents would not have been to his taste. Michael Marquardt writes in another spirit. He makes no effort to show Joseph making up Mormonism. Marquardt claims only that “as the documents
reveal, some events differed from what has been traditionally taught.” He explicitly refuses to say Joseph was a charlatan: “we have long since abandoned the simple prophet-fraud dichotomy that others still find so compelling. Our intent is to understand, not to debunk” (p. 197). Marquardt rejects the conscious-fraud hypothesis; in his opinion Joseph was sincere. “Smith believed that he spoke with supernatural beings, and he produced impressive transcripts of interviews with them. Whether he actually did is ultimately a matter of faith” (pp. 197–98).

Marquardt and Walters have searched the archives for thirty years looking for documents related to Joseph Smith’s story of his evolution from farm boy to prophet. In that time, they have dug up a lot of material, not elaborate new reminiscences, but tiny fragments, like Joseph Smith, Sr.’s, name on a Palmyra road tax list. These small clues can be helpful, especially when there are questions about the exact location of the family at a given time. Since Joseph Smith looms so large today, we want to know everything about him. For the early years before he stepped into his public role, these tiny details are especially valuable. The authors deserve full credit for their arduous search and for adding new material to the record of Joseph Smith.

The chief target of Marquardt’s and Walters’s analysis is the story Joseph wrote about his early life in 1838, the familiar account now found in the Pearl of Great Price. In their prologue, the authors quote the story in its unedited form up through the first meeting with the messenger at Cumorah in 1823. Although Marquardt and Walters deal with events through the fall of 1830, they highlight this account of the early years as the core of the “tradition” against which they wish to compare the “historical record.”

What is new or interesting in their findings? There are lots of small matters that elaborate the story and can be incorporated without controversy. For long stretches in the book the narrative seems to follow a slightly idiosyncratic path dictated by sources that the authors have discovered or choose to emphasize, but without veering far from the traditional account. In these passages, a reader will encounter few surprises while appreciating the new light thrown on familiar events and people.
In three places, however, narrative gives way to argument as the authors attempt to dynamite a segment of the traditional story and cut a new path. The first argument has to do with the time when the Smiths moved to their Manchester farm. The main point is that they could not have purchased the land until July 1820 when power of attorney was passed from the owners of the land, the Nicholas Evertson heirs, to their agent in the Manchester area. Before that date, no one in the Palmyra area had the authority to sell the farm. Moreover, as late as April 1822, Joseph, Sr., and Alvin were still listed on the Palmyra tax list, suggesting that they did not move to the farm until the following summer.

The late date is troublesome because the First Vision events which occurred on the Manchester farm are dated by Joseph Smith to the spring of 1820, three months before title could have passed. The point is that Joseph’s chronology does not appear to jibe with the historical record taken from documents in Palmyra and Ontario County archives.

The impact of these facts, however, is mitigated by others that the authors turn up. The most important is that by April of 1820—perhaps as early as the spring of 1819—Joseph Smith, Sr., was residing at the southern boundary of Palmyra, on the edge of what was to become Manchester, land which belonged to Samuel Jennings, a Palmyra merchant. The family built a cabin on a site within fifty feet of the farm they were to buy formally in the summer of 1820. They may not have purchased the farm until July 1820, but they were there in time for the traditional dating of the First Vision.

The question, then, is why build a cabin so near the farm and yet not quite on the property? A variety of explanations for that peculiar fact suggest themselves. The misplaced cabin could have been an error on the Smiths’ part, as Larry Porter has argued. The Smiths simply misjudged where the boundary was. We can imagine how the mistake came about. The family was interested in the land and was waiting for the power of attorney to be transmitted before closing the deal. While they continued with odd jobs and sales of craft items to support themselves, they wanted to start clearing land so as to be able to plant in the spring of 1820; a few months’ delay would have deprived them of an entire year’s harvest. The Evertson agent would have been happy to have them
clearing land and putting in crops before title passed; cleared land was more valuable than forested in those days. The Smiths were the ones taking the risk, and as impoverished farmers who had rented land for over fifteen years, they were more than willing. Why else would they have built a cabin on the Manchester boundary if not to work on the land, which they fully expected to contract for within a few months? Without the benefit of the owner’s surveyor, they misjudged the location of the boundary and built on the wrong spot.

The authors say Samuel Jennings “would hardly have allowed Smith to mistakenly build on his land” (p. 11). But why not? He would get a log cabin out of the deal with possibly no expense to himself. Many owners of large tracts granted developmental leases at extremely low rents for the very purpose of having land cleared and buildings constructed. If Jennings was anything like other landowners, he would have been delighted to have the Smiths dropping trees and putting up buildings.

Possibly neither Jennings nor the Smiths knew where the cabin stood when it first went up. One of the authors’ valuable findings is a Palmyra record that says the Stafford road was laid out from the Smiths’ cabin to Main Street in the village center. The survey was run on June 13, 1820, which means that there was not a road to the cabin when the Smiths built it in 1819. It was probably on a tiny path deep in the woods. With no sign at the Manchester boundary telling them where their property began, they could easily have erred.

A simple explanation of the episode comes from Pomeroy Tucker, a Palmyra resident who claimed to know the Smiths. He says the Smiths squatted on the Everton land before they contracted for it. In his memory, the farm was in Manchester and the “one-story, smoky log-house, which they had built prior to removing there” was on the farm.¹ The fifty-foot discrepancy did not register with Tucker.

The confusion caused by the location error plagued the official records for two years. In 1821 and 1822 Joseph, Sr., continued to be listed on the Palmyra road tax list, because the cabin was in the town, and yet in 1820 he appears on the U.S.

Census as a resident of Manchester since his farm was there. For a couple of years, the Smiths were of two towns.

In the end, the new documents amplify rather than disrupt the traditional record. Indeed they confirm it in a number of small ways. We now have further evidence that the Smiths were living within fifty feet of Manchester by the spring of 1820 when the First Vision occurred, just as Joseph’s 1838 account says. At the end of the chapter, the authors attempt to insert one new twist. They claim that the Smiths had two cabins, one on the Jennings property before they purchased the farm, and the other on their own farm erected probably by 1822 when Joseph, Sr., finally moved out of Palmyra to his own land. But that puts the Smiths in the anomalous position of building a new cabin in 1822, at the very moment when they were planning an expensive new frame house. With the evidence given us, even accepting some dubious chronology in the authors’ account, the second cabin hypothesis looks like an implausible surmise.

The Palmyra revival, the subject of another of the argumentative chapters, presents more serious problems. There are two incongruities to be explained. One is the date of the “unusual excitement on the subject of religion” in the place where Joseph lived. The other is an apparent chronological contradiction in Joseph Smith’s own story.

Palmyra underwent known revivals in 1816–17 and 1824–25, but none in 1819–20 in the months preceding the First Vision. The authors assemble evidence from many sources to demonstrate the intensity of the 1824–25 revival and claim this emphatic experience must have been the memory that Joseph referred to. Milton Backman and I have assumed that Joseph was thinking of revivals in nearby towns; “the place where we lived” included more than Palmyra village or Manchester. That still may be the best explanation, with newly discovered evidence now available of Methodist camp meetings going on through the spring of 1820 in the “vicinity” of Palmyra. But Marvin Hill accepts the

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3 Walter A. Norton has discovered a Palmyra Register article in the 28 June 1820 issue that reported the death of an intoxicated man in Palmyra village and claimed he obtained liquor at “a camp-meeting held in this vicinity.”
Marquardt–Walters argument that “the place where we lived” must have meant Palmyra. Other little scraps of evidence support the 1824–25 date.

The second incongruity is a chronological contradiction in Joseph’s 1838 account. He says that his father moved from Vermont to Palmyra in Joseph’s tenth year, which by all historians has been interpreted to mean when he was ten, or in 1816. (In other accounts he says he was ten, and a number of facts make 1816 the logical date.) Then Joseph says that “in about four years after my father’s arrival at Palmyra, he moved with his family into Manchester.”4 Taking advantage of the word about, and the question of how to count half years, and knowing that the Smiths made their move to the Manchester boundary before April 1820, we can still fit Joseph’s account with the known facts and put them in their forest cabin perhaps in the fall of 1819 or maybe the winter of 1819–20.

But then comes the contradiction. Joseph goes on to say that “sometime in the second year after our removal to Manchester, there was in the place where we lived an unusual excitement on the subject of religion.”5 That sentence moves the vision to at least 1821; Marquardt thinks the text implies 1822 (p. 1). And since the First Vision came after the revival, the vision would be still later by Joseph’s reckoning here, either 1821 or 1822. Yet he says that he was in his fifteenth year during the religious strife, which would be 1820, and states specifically that he went to pray in the spring of 1820. That date and the total of around six years since the move to Palmyra do not jibe.

Marquardt exempts the 1832 account of Joseph’s vision from this chronological tangle. Joseph does not enmesh that experience in family or town history, nor does he make any mention of a revival. He reports that “from the age of twelve years to fifteen I criticized, the editor exonerated the Methodists from blame, as if they were the chief users of the campground, but asserted that the dissolute frequently resorted to the campground for liquor, implying that the grounds were commonly in use.

“Comparative Images: Mormonism and Contemporary Religions as Seen by Village Newspapersmen in Western New York and Northeastern Ohio, 1820–1833” (Ph.D. Diss., Brigham Young University, 1991), 255.

4 Jesse, Papers, 269.

5 Ibid.
pondered many things in my heart concerning the situation of the world," and says nothing about a revival.\(^6\) Because of the absence of contradictions with the historical record, Marquardt believes that in 1820 or 1821 Joseph experienced the personal forgiveness of sins reported in the 1832 account. The problem lies with the later story where so much is made of the revival as a driving motivation for Joseph's religious inquiry.

Can we reconcile all of the conflicting evidence and get back to the actual chronology of events from 1816 to 1824? At this point, I think we must acknowledge the possibility of an error somewhere in Joseph's chronology, simply because of the internal contradiction. On the other hand, we are well-advised to take care in overthrowing the report of a person who was on the scene merely because circumstantial evidence raises doubts. Can we be absolutely sure that we know Joseph must have been referring to the 1824 revival when he wrote his story? Marquardt speculates that he conflated events: "Perhaps Smith in retrospect blended in his mind events from 1820 with a revival occurring four years later" (p. 32). Possibly, but that conclusion, based on the confidence that we know better than the person who was there, seems premature to me.

While the evidence is still under review, another hypothesis should be kept in mind. This reconstruction of events grows out of two facts. One is that Joseph's 1839 story says very little about a revival. It mainly discusses religious turmoil, the contention among pastors and priests over the denominational choices of the converts. Religious competition, not conversions, stirred Joseph's feelings. So far none of the historical records have shed light on this sectarian warfare, although it loomed larger in Joseph's mind than the revivals themselves. We will understand the chronology better when we locate evidence of these battles, not the revivals alone. The revivals were usually depicted as times of denominational cooperation and general good feeling, and all of the accounts that the authors cite offer no hint of competition. The stories add up the new members in all of the denominations as if the combined conversions mattered most. Can these be the revivals that Joseph had in mind?

\(^6\) Ibid., p. 5.
The second fact is that in the 1832 account Joseph does not brood over these matters for six months or a year as is assumed in the usual interpretation of the 1839 account. Religious confusion troubled him from his twelfth to fifteenth year. For three years he suffered “grief to my soul” as he contemplated “the contentions and divisible[ns]ions the wick[ed]ness and abominations and the darkness which pervaded the minds of mankind.” During this time he became convicted of his sins and found that mankind had “apostatized from the true and living faith.”

Nothing in the 1838 account contradicts the protracted chronology of the 1832 story. In the later version, Joseph says that the revival started the contention; how long it took before the conflicts broke out, or how long before his questions came to a head is not indicated. In fact, the chronologies of the two would coincide if one word in Joseph’s 1839 account were changed. If the text read “sometime in the second year after our removal to Palmyra,” rather than “after our removal to Manchester,” the stories would blend. Two years after the removal to Palmyra, Joseph was twelve, the year in the 1832 account when his mind became “seriously impressed.”

While we are reexamining the various stories looking for a key to reconcile the contradictions, we should search the years around 1817, Joseph’s twelfth year and the second year after the Smiths’ removal to Palmyra, for signs of religious turmoil. We know there was a revival in 1816–17. How does it fit the description of the 1839 account? Is there evidence of denominational competition in its aftermath that could account for Joseph’s three years of religious grief? Oliver Cowdery reported that the Methodist minister George Lane had an influence on Joseph. Lane attended a conference in the town next to Palmyra in the summer of 1819. An interview then might have brought Joseph’s anguished quest to a point and led to the prayer in the woods. The authors try to move the date of the revivals forward to 1824–25. In the search for the religious turmoil that prompted Joseph’s inquiry, we should also look back to 1817.

In the final argument, the authors take up the strange matter of the place where the Church was organized. How can there be a

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7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
question when so many people were present, and we have agreed on Fayette and the Whitmer house for so long? The authors argue for Manchester and Hyrum Smith’s house because of three primary bits of evidence. (1) In the spring of 1833, *The Evening and Morning Star* twice named Manchester as the location; (2) the headings of six revelations in the original Book of Commandments are dated April 6, 1830, and are located in Manchester, including the current D&C 21 which is associated with the organization of the Church; and (3) William Smith in his later account of Mormonism, published in 1883 as *William Smith on Mormonism*, located the organization at Manchester.

The story changed by May of 1834. The later editions of *The Evening and Morning Star* published in Kirtland, Joseph’s 1838 history, and virtually every other history named Fayette. The two exceptions, anomalously, are Orson Pratt’s 1840 *Remarkable Visions* and Joseph Smith’s own letter to John Wentworth in 1842. In his 1887 *Address to All Believers in Christ*, David Whitmer insisted the Church was organized in his father’s house.

Where does this leave us? Not a lot is at stake in terms of the prophet’s integrity, the divinity of the Church, or the ongoing flow of the story. The authors quote T. Edgar Lyon on the importance of accuracy about trivial facts, and who can disagree? It is just that right now there seems to be no way of definitively adjudicating the conflict. In the meantime, Joseph’s and David Whitmer’s naming of Fayette as the site of the organization must be given due weight. The presumption of truth is in their favor considering that both were present. The case for Manchester is weakened because the evidence in *The Evening and Morning Star* and the Book of Commandments can be accounted for by the error of one man, William W. Phelps, the editor in Independence who oversaw the publication of both texts. Once an error like that creeps in, shadows can turn up in subsequent accounts, such as Orson Pratt’s *Remarkable Visions* and even William Smith’s story of Mormonism. It seems more parsimonious to attribute an error to Phelps than to both Joseph Smith and David Whitmer, eyewitnesses of the organization. The authors have assembled various scraps of additional circumstantial evidence in support of their case, but not enough to be determinative. While they try to
explain why Joseph may have changed the story, we should look equally hard for reasons why Phelps would err.

These are Inventing Mormonism’s substantive challenges to the traditional story. Beyond the specific findings, however, the book raises questions about method. The investigation makes certain commonsense assumptions which may not be as evident as the authors say. The structure, the tone, and the claims of the book are based on the distinction between interpretation and fact, a distinction which they believe is obvious. The authors’ primary endeavor is to bring forward the facts, leaving the interpretation to their readers. As they say in the conclusion, “Although it has become fashionable in some quarters to quote Martin Heidegger’s axiom that ‘there are no facts, only interpretation,’ we believe that facts exist and that an array of different interpretations is possible” (p. 197). In the opening pages, they present an eleven-page “Chronology of Mormon Origins” where they summarize the facts as they understand them. The authors’ narrative posture is that they have assembled these facts from trustworthy historical documents, some of which are in clear contradiction to the traditional account. The readers are then left to choose between the facts of the historical record and the “fabrications” of the traditional account.

The authors are probably right in thinking that most readers believe facts can be separated from interpretation. We all know what they mean by the distinction. But Inventing Mormonism moved this reader to reconsider the truth of Heidegger’s insight about “facts” being inevitably enveloped in interpretation. The distinction may not be entirely obvious after all.

Interpretation trespasses upon fact in one clear instance in the chronology of Mormon origins. The authors list under 1825 the admission of Lucy and three of the Smith children into the Palmyra Presbyterian church as if this were a well-attested fact. But the authors have no direct evidence that this highly contested event occurred in 1825. It takes a number of less-than-rock-solid deductions to turn a collection of circumstantial scraps into a fact.

More significant is the entire cast of the chronology and what the authors choose to deem as fact and what they choose to leave in the realm of interpretation. One of the interpretive themes of the book is the large role of money-digging in Smith family
culture. In a chapter titled “Manchester Scryer,” the authors quote liberally from the Staffords, Willard Chase, and a collection of others who spoke of treasure-seeking. Since the magical culture of nineteenth-century Yankees no longer seems foreign to the Latter-day Saint image of the Smith family, the decision to include material from E. D. Howe, Mormonism Unveiled or Naked Truths about Mormonism does not itself provoke debate.

The question is why these factual materials are introduced while others from sources equally close to the time period produced by people who were indisputably present are left out. A book with a title so encompassing as Inventing Mormonism implies that all the relevant facts will find a place. Why then are the statements of the three witnesses to the Book of Mormon plates not listed in the chronology? Martin Harris, David Whitmer, and Oliver Cowdery are cited for other purposes, particularly Martin Harris. Their statement about the angel and the plates appeared in the first edition of the Book of Mormon published in 1830 and was never repudiated by any of them. It is one of the earliest texts on early Mormon history. Why is it not part of the “invention” of Mormonism?

The answer is obvious. The appearance of an angel with golden plates is so far beyond the realm of conventional experience that the authors are reluctant to consider it among their “facts.” The testimony of the three witnesses exists in the realm of the fabulous along with Joseph’s revelations, even though the documentation, from a narrow methodological viewpoint, is entirely authentic. Revelations cannot be facts in the schema of this book. Events recorded in contemporaneous documents only become facts if they are judged believable. As Heidegger was trying to tell us, facts presume interpretation.

To give the authors credit, they weave at least one fabulous occurrence into their account. Honoring sources close to the event, they include the trip to the hill for the plates among their facts. Their methodology compels them to list that event because it appears in the sources, not just in Joseph’s official account, but in Lucy Smith’s and Joseph Knight’s. Despite any wish to explain away the plates, the authors remained true to their methodology.

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9 Painesville, Ohio: By the author, 1834.
10 Yale University Library.
and bravely recorded in their chronology under 22 September 1829, “Joseph Jr. visits a nearby hill taking Emma with him in Joseph Knight’s wagon. He finds gold plates in a stone box and hides the plates in a fallen tree top” (p. xxx). The reason for the inclusion is clear. To eliminate the trip to the hill, along with the transportation of the plates and the hours of translation, requires tortuous textual acrobatics. In terms of the raw materials of history, it is far easier to tell the story of Mormon origins with the divine events left in because people close to the history told it that way.

All in all, Inventing Mormonism is a far cry in both spirit and substance from the iconoclastic studies of Mormonism that descend from E. D. Howe and Alexander Campbell to Fawn Brodie and the early Wesley Walters. The book assembles material that has not been part of the record before, and in good faith offers variant readings of Joseph Smith’s history. I have taken exception to the most critical conclusions, but I like the book. I admire the research, and I appreciate the generous, fair-minded tone of the writing. The book makes a genuine effort to be irenic, and I hope that Mormon readers will accept the work in the spirit in which it is offered.

Reviewed by Jennifer Clark Lane

The collection of articles in *The Book of Mormon: 3 Nephi 9–30, This Is My Gospel* serves as another witness of the richness and depth of the Book of Mormon account of the Savior’s ministry in the Americas. Like the previous volumes from annual Book of Mormon symposia held at Brigham Young University, this collection contains a variety of faithful interpretations of and insights into the Book of Mormon. Most of the authors explore the complexity of Christ’s message, focusing on such topics as missionary training, Exodus typology, the command to be perfect as a command to have charity, repentance, prayer, the Twelve, covenant, ministering, and coming unto Christ.

Of course the power and excitement of scriptural studies is that even while one analysis can provide a new insight to spiritual truths, it cannot begin to encompass or explain the entirety of the text. Each of the arguments in this collection provides an interesting, and sometimes crucial, insight into the message of Christ in the Americas, but none precludes the insights of another. This is why the scriptures are always the source and why writings about the scriptures must always justify themselves by giving us an increased ability to return to the source more able to read and understand.

These articles justify themselves with varying degrees of success. Some of the most powerful manage both a close reading of the text combined with insight as to how this can make a difference in our lives. As Robert L. Millet comments in his article, “This is My Gospel,” “some things simply matter more than others. Some topics of discussion, even intellectually
stimulating ones, must take a back seat to more fundamental
verities” (p. 11). In his article he does not attempt to break new
ground, but by focusing on the doctrine of Christ as taught in 3
Nephi he presents a powerful discussion of what the Book of
Mormon is all about. Although many of the articles are more
textually oriented and present more original analyses of the text,
this is the article that I would send to a friend with whom I wanted
to share a vision of what the Book of Mormon is intended to
teach.

The gospel is the glad tidings concerning the infinite and
eternal atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. The
Atonement is central. It is the hub of the wheel; all other
matters are spokes at best. The good news is that we can be
changed, be converted, become different people in and
through Christ. The good news is that we can come to
perceive an entirely new realm of reality, a realm unknown
to the world at large. It is a new life, a new life in Christ.
(p. 22)

Millet persuasively demonstrates how this good news of Christ’s
atonement is central to 3 Nephi.

One of the most original and insightful papers in the
collection draws its strength from a careful rhetorical analysis.
Neal E. Lambert’s “The Symbolic Unity of Christ’s Ministry in 3
Nephi” examines the symbols and reality of Christ’s body and
his invitation to come to him in a way that connects the expression
of the message to what the message means for us. Lambert’s
careful literary analysis reveals connections between the Nephites’
experience of touching and being healed by the resurrected Christ
and his establishment of the sacrament. This analysis and insight
make the too-often abstracted invitation to “come unto Christ”
take new life. By looking at both what is said and how it is said,
Lambert avoids the trap of reducing the events to simple doctrinal
or historical statements. He notes Christ’s repetition of the words
feel and see in his invitation to the people. “Clearly the
implication of this repetition is that this experience is not exclusive
to the first encounter” (p. 204), but instead is an invitation to the
whole world. He argues that experience beyond mere intellect is
connected to the establishment of the sacrament,
it would seem that the Savior intended in *feel and see* the notion that, at least for those who are prepared, imbedded in the sacramental experience are the means of sensing and knowing, of feeling and seeing almost exactly the same as those physical means of knowing with which the Nephite faithful were first privileged earlier that day. Indeed the central focus and the grand pattern of 3 Nephi is the testament that Christ lives and that we can come unto him. (p. 205)

This analysis extends the same invitation to each of us to participate in a saving and healing relationship with Christ.

Another outstanding article that draws its strength and insights from a thorough textual analysis is S. Kent Brown’s “Moses and Jesus: The Old Adorns the New.” He carefully demonstrates how Christ repeatedly referred to Moses to explain his own mission. This analysis of Christ’s words and actions in light of Moses and the redemption of Israel from Egypt adds meaning to both the Old Testament account and Christ’s role as Redeemer. Particularly interesting is his development of the parallels between the Israelites’ bondage and redemption and that redemption which Christ provides from sin. Here Brown offers a detailed analysis of the need for the identification of an agent of redemption, applying the ancient Near Eastern elements to both Moses speaking before Pharaoh and Christ speaking to the Nephites. This comparison adds strength and meaning to Christ’s message of redemption.

If, then, Jesus was the envoy or representative who came in his own name and in that of the Father and if his purpose was to rescue his people from both Satan and their own sinful state what, we might ask, did he bring as his credentials? We need not look far. He bore the proofs of his rescue mission in his own body. (p. 97)

He further discusses Christ’s use of the phrase “I AM” in light of Moses at the burning bush and the Gospel of John’s “I am” sayings, providing further insight into the role and importance of Christ’s self-identification.
Two other articles that offer distinctive new interpretations are Robert A. Cloward’s “The Savior’s Missionary Training Sermon in 3 Nephi” and Joseph Fielding McConkie’s “The Doctrine of a Covenant People.” They both provide fresh insights, but sometimes in the attempt to establish their own reading over familiar interpretations they risk offering an exclusive interpretation. Readers will be interested to read and consider the claims for themselves.

Cloward argues that the teachings in the Sermon in Bountiful “stand apart in their missionary training purpose from the remainder of Jesus’ personal ministry among the Nephites and Lamanites” (p. 134). This is an impressive effort to defend the unity and practicality of the Beatitudes, but the attempt to find a single explanation sometimes seems too single-minded. It may very well be that this message was directed at the Twelve and others preparing to be missionaries, but does this mean that the message applied only to missionaries, as Cloward argues?

“Seek ye first the kingdom of God” (v 33), though often quoted out of context to apply to everyone, is actually counsel directed only to those involved in full-time ministry. Jesus promised his Twelve that their needs would be met if they would build his kingdom as their first priority. For the rest of us, whose ministry is only part-time, we must indeed take thought for our physical upkeep and not expect that God or others will take care of all our needs. (p. 133)

Of course the responsibility to support oneself is not applicable to full-time missionaries and the Twelve, but does that mean that the rest of us do not need to seek first the kingdom of God, trusting that God will add unto us what we need? President Benson has recently renewed this promise, saying, “When we put God first, all other things fall into their proper place or drop out of our lives.”1 Efforts to narrow scriptural meanings in order to defend against misinterpretation often cause the loss of less concrete dimensions of the commandments.

Another challenging interpretation is provided by Joseph Fielding McConkie in “The Doctrine of a Covenant People.” This article stresses the vitality of the principle of covenants to both 3 Nephi and the gospel. Covenant is very important to Christ’s appearance and teachings, and McConkie offers important insights. In addition, he offers an interpretation that is both intriguing and possibly problematic. McConkie suggests that “what we have traditionally supposed to be the ordinance of sacrament” (p. 172) in 3 Nephi 18 and 20 is instead a covenant meal like that which the elders of Israel ate with the Lord on Mt. Sinai (Exodus 24:11). This is a rich and important suggestion. Clearly “something more is taking place” (p.172), but to suggest that Christ was not also establishing the sacrament at this point is to ignore his explanation that this was a model for further use: “And this shall ye always observe to do, even as I have done, even as I have broken bread and blessed it and given it unto you” (3 Nephi 18:6).

Indeed, to all of the authors’ credit, the articles in this volume are primarily centered on what Christ did and taught. Even with a collection of sixteen papers, there are, of course, several sections of 3 Nephi 9–30 that receive less attention. The two last chapters, Mormon’s prophecies and warnings, were basically ignored; had they been connected with the preceding text, they could give an interesting insight into the message of the section as a whole. Another section that may seem less vital, but that could have been profitably discussed in more depth, is the citation of Malachi and Isaiah. While these are not new texts, their inclusion in this section is significant and promising for further study.

These cursory evaluations only touch on the rich variety of insights found in The Book of Mormon: 3 Nephi 9–30, This Is My Gospel. The sixteen authors offer a wide assortment of observations, reflecting different backgrounds and perspectives. Although they may not all agree with each other, or we might not agree with them all, it is encouraging to know that Christ’s teachings in the Americas are receiving a thoughtful evaluation.

Reviewed by Les Campbell

The book *The Lands of Zarahemla* by E. L. Peay, one of the latest attempts to explain Book of Mormon geography, generally follows the geographical chronology outlined in the Book of Mormon. Peay's commentary begins with the departure of Lehi into the wilderness and ends with Alma 52. I assume the author plans a second volume.

Peay's interpretation of Lehi's travels is shown on the map on page 40. According to the author, the eight years of travel by the Lehi group took them 530 miles south of Jerusalem to the Red Sea. Somewhere close to the imaginary Tropic of Cancer lies Umla, where Peay has the travelers turn east and traverse the Arabian Peninsula just north of the Empty Quarter. They arrive at Al Kasab, just south of the Straits of Hormuz. A map of the possible oases used by Lehi along the route is included on page 36. Peay then has Lehi's party cross the Persian Gulf, presumably in a boat of some sort, and from there east across the plains of northern India. Barges are built at least twice for travel on the Yamuna and Ganges Rivers. This allows for 800 miles of travel on the water. On the next leg of the journey, Lehi follows the Brahmaputra River through Burma and eventually arrives at the East China Sea. In Peay's second option to this last leg, Lehi floats down the Honghui River, arriving at Macau near the South China Sea.

Peay suggests the present-day city of Hong Kong as a probable land of Bountiful, part of a route used in 1000 B.C. by the Chinese, Indians, Asians, and Europeans. As Lehi traveled through this area, Peay believes he was exposed to many cultural traits that later show up in the promised land. Peay believes that all the requirements of Bountiful met in this area. He also believes that the sea currents and prevailing winds to be right to help Lehi arrive at the promised land.

I was extremely disappointed in the lack of sources in a book 300 pages long which claims "amazing cross-referencing between
the Book of Mormon and the work of anthropologists and archeologists in Central America” (back cover; see also p. iii). This book does not deliver the goods. Peay used eighteen sources outside the scriptures and referred to them forty times. Half of these references are from Ferguson and Royce’s book Maya Ruins in Central America in Color1 and The World Book Year Book of 1968.2 Another quarter come from a variety of atlases, issues of National Geographic, Time-Life books, and encyclopedias.

The author very nearly ignores all major research of the last twenty-five years. Names of anthropologists and archaeologists that could and should have appeared in his footnotes and bibliography might have included Carter, Coe, Freidel, Houston, Jett, Kelly, Scheale, Stephens, Stuart, and Thompson—all world-renowned scholars in the area of Peay’s study.

With the exception of two quotes from Nibley’s “Lachish Letters,” Peay also seems to ignore entirely the research of respected LDS scholars who have made significant contributions to our understanding of the many cultural and geographical facets of potential relationship to the Book of Mormon. The only hint of Peay’s awareness of LDS scholars is some similarity in his geography to Joe Allen’s arrangement of Nephite cities along the east coast of the land of Zarahemla.3 In the same vein, the book contains no bibliography, index, table of contents, or list of maps or illustrations. The book is also marred by a number of typographical errors and inconsistencies in references.

For the most part, Peay simply has not provided enough information to persuade readers that his interpretation merits consideration, or even to allow readers to test his interpretation. For example, are there ruins in each of the areas in which he has

1 William M. Ferguson, and John Q. Royce, Maya Ruins in Central America in Color (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984). This book is a rather common tourist guide book, available in most bookstores. It is very simple and popularized in its approach to the anthropological and archaeological aspects of the Mayan ruins. No serious student of the scriptures or archaeology would make it the foundation of their research.


placed cities on his model? Do his cities date archaeologically to the proper Book of Mormon time window? Do his sites really correlate in space and time with other related sites? Furthermore, nearly one-half of the book is taken up by quotations from the Book of Mormon and some of the remainder is nothing more than a restatement of Book of Mormon passages just quoted. For example, in Peay’s commentary following 1 Nephi 3:28 we read, “Having fled beyond the city, they were told by an angel to return and the Lord would make it possible for them to get the brass plates.” These comments follow 1 Nephi 4:5: “Not knowing beforehand what he would do, Nephi came to the drunken Laban. He fought the impression to kill him because it was unlawful.” This commentary is offered after Peay quotes 1 Nephi 16:30: “Nephi subsequently brought food to the families. The families were grateful for this needed blessing.”

Maps

Peay is to be commended for giving us numerous maps on which he places his interpretation within a real-world framework. I know from my own experience the danger of maps that claim to show the internal geography of the Book of Mormon. There is a temptation to place sites to meet one’s own interpretations (after all, isn’t that what we expect in such a commentary?) while ignoring or compromising the real physical features present. After one has once “fudged” on a map, it is hard not to keep doing it. On the other hand, the use of actual maps forces one to conform his model to the geography as it is. This makes fudging most difficult, because we can’t just create a river or mountain range to suit our model. Readers may disagree with Peay’s interpretation, but his use of maps does help readers to visualize the author’s views.

Nevertheless, the maps do have problems. Some maps were “painted with a broad brush,” when in fact the reader is hoping for more detail. Maps on pages 40 and 85, for example, create far more questions than they answer.

Some map titles are incomplete and confusing. The map on page 34, for instance, has no title, though the intent is obvious. The title for the map on page 190 reads, “Ammonihah and Now Goes to Sidon.” The title for the map on page 171 is “Alma and
His People Fought" but there is nothing to identify Alma's army or where they fought or whom they fought.

A study of the maps on pages 82, 178, 206, 223, 266, 270, 285, reveals seven different configurations for mountain ranges in northern Yucatan. Furthermore, all the maps I am familiar with indicate there are no mountains in the northern Yucatan. All are hand-drawn maps and support the reviewer's caution about such dangers.

In addition to these kinds of problems, I believe a fatal flaw in the book is reflected in this comment by the author: "The Mayan capital city in the Yucatan is now called Tikal and there are many other ancient cities with modern day names that just happen to be in the same location as the writers of the Book of Mormon place them. But it would be very confusing to attempt to use the modern day names. So we shall only refer to the capital city and its modern day name Tikal occasionally as we relate to and compare it to the city of Zarahemla" (p. 77). Failure to include modern-day sites actually creates more confusion than omitting them. The one thing that could have improved understanding of the model was omitted. Acceptable scholarship would demand that such a list be included so that archeological dating and geographical relationships can be compared with those in the Book of Mormon.

**Peay's Geographical Parallels**

Rather than critique each map, I thought it easier and shorter to list some of the parallels between the Book of Mormon text and the author's model.

- Bountiful (Old World) = Macau near Hong Kong (p. 41)
- Bountiful, land of (New World) = central Yucatan (p. 78)
- Cumorah, land of = land around Laguna de Terminos (p. 113)
- Desolation, land of = northern Yucatan (p. 78)
- Desolation, land north of = Ohio River valley, Indian mounds (p. 85)
- East Sea = Gulf of Honduras (p. 265)
- East wilderness = Maya Mountains of Belize (p. 266)
- Gideon, valley of = Macal Valley in Belize (p. 173)
- Hagoth's ship launching area = Laguna de Terminos (p. 85)
Hermounts, wilderness of = Lacandone Mountains (p. 171)
Land of many waters = Laguna de Terminos (p. 113)
Lehi’s landing site = Pacific coast of Guatemala (p. 52)
Mormon, waters of = Lago Amatitlan (p. 126)
narrow neck of land = sand bar separating the Gulf of Mexico from Laguna de Terminos (p. 275)
narrow pass = water gap connecting the Gulf of Mexico with Laguna de Terminos (p. 275)
Nephi, city of = Guatemala City (p. 107)
Ripliancum, waters of = Laguna de Terminos (p. 113)
Sidom = at the mouth of the Belize River (p. 79)
Sidon river = Belize river (p. 77)
Zarahemla = Tikal (p. 77)
West Sea = Gulf of Mexico (p. 84)
West Sea north = Gulf of Mexico (p. 206)
West Sea south = Pacific Ocean (p. 206)

In addition, Peay locates the following Book of Mormon sites in a south to north line between the Maya Mountains and the east coast of the Yucatan Peninsula, beginning with Moroni near the eastern end of Lake Isabela and extending north to the Bay of Chetumal: Moroni’s camp, Lehi, Morianton, Hill Onidah, Aaron, Omner, land of Jershon, Gid, Melek, Ammonihah, Mulek, and Bountiful.

Things to Consider

In spite of all my criticisms of The Lands of Zarahemla, I did find many new thoughts to consider. Some are direct challenges to what I have read by other scholars on the subject of Book of Mormon geography and culture; others were entirely new and stimulating. Scholars may wish to pick up Peay’s challenges and do further research on his ideas, like the following (a few examples will suffice to show the kind of ideas that may merit further study):

1. Peay believes that burnt offerings were made only at the first camp, using the animals the Lehites brought from Jerusalem. Because “wild game would not be an acceptable offering,” he concludes there were no sacrifices during the twelve-year journey to the promised land (p. 7). Though nothing specific is mentioned in the Book of Mormon about this, I doubt that a prophet as
Righteous and obedient as Lehi would ignore the requirements of the Laws of Moses for twelve years.

2. Peay believes that Lehi’s youngest sons, Jacob and Joseph, were given names that Lehi learned from the plates of Laban, and that they were probably twins (p. 18).

3. “The terrible storm [that drove them back for three days] was part of the Lord’s plan to place Lehi and his family in the proper path to be carried and blown to Central America by the prevailing sea currents and winds” (p. 50).

4. “Mormon was taken to Zarahemla at the age of 11 and apparently left there, probably at a school. It appears to me that he was going through a spiritual training, starting with his baptism, wherein he learned the scriptures. . . . Then at age 16 he was given the command of the Nephite army, indicating that he had had extensive training in the field of combat” (p. 94).

5. “When it says that the Lamanites ‘carried them back’ are we to take that literally, such as, did the Lamanites transport them back on animals or on wheeled vehicles? This is especially likely considering horses are mentioned twelve times in the Book of Mormon” (p. 133). This is a new argument for the use of the wheel, as far as I know.

6. Peay has this to say concerning the name Sidon: “Today, the name Sibun appears frequently on maps of that area: the Sibun River [sic] (a small, short river), Sibun Gorge (a steep-banked gorge), and the Sibun Forest. They are all in the same general area by the north end of the Maya Mountains. I think, considering it has been over two thousand years since Book of Mormon times, these names have not been altered very much because the name of the major river in the Book of Mormon is Sidon” (pp. 188-89).

Conclusion

One of my friends once said to me, “I never review a book which I cannot recommend to others.” I now know what he meant. I could not recommend this book to serious students except as a curiosity. I would not recommend the book to novice Book of Mormon students for fear that it would mislead them into mistaking The Lands of Zarahemla for good scholarship, which it is not. In sum, the author has spent much time in developing and
preparing his ideas. He is obviously serious about his research, but I question how seriously his work will be taken when it appears he has ignored relevant and readily available research that could have enhanced his own efforts. A few minutes in the library or conversations on the phone with local Book of Mormon scholars would give the author enough sources to research for another four years. There needs to be a table of contents, a list of illustrations, an index, and a bibliography to really make it a serious work. The author needs to limit his commentary to the subject of the book and not pass ideas about irrelevant items. A pervasive naiveté throughout the whole book alerts the reader to be careful. However, I also found the book intriguing and challenging in regard to the new views proposed by Peay, a few of which have been mentioned above.

Reviewed by Fred W. Nelson

The subtitle of the book, "A Photographic Exploration into the Ancient World of the Book of Mormon" states what the authors hoped the book would be. The photographs the Proctors have published are excellent and show scenes of the area around Jerusalem, the coastal border area of Yemen and Oman, and southern Mesoamerica. About one-fourth of the book contains photographs of the Jerusalem, Yemen, and Oman areas that the authors believe to be the area traveled by Lehi and his party and where they built the ship as they prepared to come to the promised land. Three-fourths of the book contains photographs of the Mesoamerican area thought by the authors to be the area of the Book of Mormon in the New World. The photography is excellent. Beautiful landscapes are shown along with details of flowers, artifacts, and some specific archaeological sites. Unfortunately the photographs are much better than the figure captions and the text.

The text consists of a narration and commentary which uses many Book of Mormon scriptures to make it flow. There is usually no correlation between the text and the photographs. This is frustrating. One reads the text and looks at the photographs and wonders why the photograph is near that particular text or vice versa.

The same is true for the captions to the photographs. The first sentence in the caption usually identifies the photograph. Then there follows a statement the authors have written or quoted that is not related to the photograph nor to the closest text. The following is an example:
Common food of the Bedouin since ancient times are these rock-hard Jamid, which are made from a mixture of herbs, meadow grasses, and camel’s or goat’s cheese. The mixture is placed in a skin bag, then kneaded and dried on the tent roof in the hot sun. Concerning a teaching of Joseph Smith, Erastus Snow said that Ishmael’s “sons married into Lehi’s family.” Marrying cousins is a Near Eastern custom that survives to this day. It is poignant that Lehi and Sariah were anxious to bring Ishmael’s family into the wilderness. Their own daughters would have been in that group. (caption, p. 22)

The second half of the caption has no relation to the first half, and none of it relates to the nearby text. Other examples:

Clouds capture evening light in Chiapas, Mexico. It is poignant that Nephi made the small plates thirty years after leaving Jerusalem. As he wrote, he had already lost his parents, was separated from his older brothers, was living in a new land, and was nearly fifty. Surely his feelings were deep as he abridged the experiences of the past thirty years. (caption, p. 86, for the photograph on pp. 84–85)

Illuminated jungle ferns at a Guatemalan nature preserve. The constant and faithful prayers of Alma the elder for his son are telling of the efficacy of prayer. “He has prayed with much faith concerning thee,” the angel said to Alma the younger about his father. (caption, p. 103)

Bright morning sunlight bursts through trees at Izapa near Tapachula, Mexico. One can learn a great deal here about the plan of salvation, including the nature of death, resurrection, and the knowledge of a pre-mortal existence. When the Lord comes, the Jews will look upon Him and say, “What are these wounds in thine hands and in thy feet?” (caption, p. 169)

According to the authors, F. Richard Hauck was their archaeological advisor. Hauck spent three weeks with the Proctors of the six weeks they were in Mesoamerica taking photographs.
The photographs, text, and captions reflect this influence. Hauck's ideas regarding Book of Mormon geography have been published and reviewed and found wanting.\(^1\) Notwithstanding Hauck's involvement, the book contains errors in archaeology. For example, it is interesting that so many photographs of Mixco Viejo were published since most archaeologist believe it was established during Late Classic times (A.D. 600–800)\(^2\) and its defensive works date to Early Postclassic times (A.D. 1000–1200)\(^3\) long after the Book of Mormon period. The caption on page 111 for the photograph on pages 108–9 states that the Temple of the Cross at Palenque is a Postclassic temple and that Palenque is in Tabasco, Mexico. But Palenque is in Chiapas, as is correctly stated in the caption on page 66, and the Temple of the Cross dates to Late Classic times. The caption for the photograph on page 89 states: "Stela of Mayan warrior-leader Pacal located at Palenque in the state of Chiapas in Southern Mexico." This figure is not a stela. It does not represent Pacal, according to Merle Greene Robertson.\(^4\) The caption on page 138 (for the photo on page 139) states that "The Comitan River valley in southern Mexico is one of the ancient travel corridors to the Pacific," when in fact the Comitan River valley is in southern Guatemala and empties into the Gulf of Honduras in the Caribbean Sea and not into the Pacific Ocean. An interesting example is found in the caption on page 141 which reads in part, "Trees generally grow only on one side of these trenches today." The authors then show a trench with trees growing on both sides.

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In addition to factual errors, there are some interpretations that seem poor at best. For example, the caption on page 152 identifies the site of Nueve Cerros (Nine Hills) as possibly Zarahemla. This does not follow the theories of the majority of Book of Mormon scholars. In addition, the authors make the assumption that the major industry of Zarahemla might have been salt production, an assertion that has no basis in the scriptures and, in fact, is misleading in a book such as this. There is a photograph of Lake Atitlan in Guatemala with a caption (p. 166) that identifies the lake, gives a brief description of the Aztec calendar, and then relates them both to Book of Mormon scriptures—associating two things far apart geographically and 1000 years apart chronologically. I know of no basis for the statement in the caption on page 172 (for the photograph on pages 170–71) that the mound complex at Izapa, near Tapachula, Mexico, “is an exact model of the Temple of Solomon but in grander proportions.” The above statements and others like them detract from the value of the photographs published in this book.

In summary, the photographs of what many consider to be the Book of Mormon area in the New World and the land of Bountiful in the Old World are excellent and should be interesting to many who have not had the privilege of seeing these areas in person. However, it seems to the reviewer that the authors would have had a much better book if they had just published the photographs with a brief statement of identification. They never say why a particular photograph was published nor what its importance is to the stated theme of the book. The text and a portion of each caption do not relate to the photographs. Neither text nor captions add anything to Book of Mormon scholarship, and both contain errors and dubious interpretations.

Reviewed by Frederick M. Huchel

Virtually no one would disagree that Joe Sampson’s *Written by the Finger of God* is an unusual book. However, that may be the end of consensus on this treatise concerning Joseph Smith’s translation of ancient documents.

This book does not make for light reading. It is, at best, a difficult book; but then, it treats a difficult subject, and one which has been a topic of debate since the very beginning of the latter-day Restoration. Questions concerning Joseph Smith’s unorthodox methods of translating, and indeed, questions regarding Joseph Smith as a translator, have sparked lively debate in both scholarly and nonacademic circles for over 160 years.

Enter Joe Sampson, a man as unorthodox as his subject. Part of his unorthodoxy is his paucity of formal linguistic or scholarly training. His background does not bode well for serious consideration of his book by academics. And that’s a pity. Latter-day Saint scholars should be the last to ask, “Have you been to college and received training?”

Joe Sampson has waded in where none has dared tread until now. He has taken on a daunting task. The result—while not without serious flaws—not only shows the earmarks of considerable study and labor, it also makes some significant points which should be triggers for much study by those with the skills to continue where Mr. Sampson has begun. He has poked holes in the veil concealing the structure underlying the ancient languages translated by the Prophet Joseph and the system of knowledge contained in those languages, and in so doing he has illuminated the intricate fabric which resulted from Joseph Smith’s translation labors.

In taking Joseph Smith seriously as a translator, Joe Sampson seems to be moving against a swelling current of antagonism. One
of the main contributions of this book is to point out once again that Joseph Smith was not a country bumpkin making up wild tales; Sampson dismisses the theories of those who reject Joseph Smith as an authentic translator with condescending remarks about his translations being productions of his own mind and products of “the times in which he lived.” Here the untrained Joe Sampson takes the role of teacher and provides evidence that many of those with formal training are really the “so-called” scholars.

Joe Sampson takes Joseph Smith not only seriously, but at his word. He starts with the “given” that Joseph Smith was honest, and was what he claimed to be. Some of the resulting insights, perspectives, and nuggets of information scattered through the pages of Written by the Finger of God are enlightening and even downright impressive.

Unfortunately, the book falls far short of what it might be. The pity is that many who might otherwise learn what Joe Sampson has to offer will quickly lose interest because of the book’s shortcomings. Perhaps part of the problem is inherent in the subject. It is said that ancient Hebrew and Egyptian are largely intuitive. The principles of both language and religion of those cultures far removed from our own are alien to our language and religion in both context and logic. Nephi himself lamented the difficulty of understanding the “manner of prophesying among the Jews,” saying that it was “hard . . . to understand” (2 Nephi 25:1). That being the case, Joe Sampson is doubly disadvantaged in his efforts to explain the intuitive nature and labyrinthine perplexities of an ancient language and logic system.

In important ways, Joe Sampson has not succeeded in explaining to the reader a system which he seems to have well defined in his own mind: the Kabbalah. It seems clear that, like the parables, the scriptures contain encrypted information, available to those with “ears to hear.” They are, by that encryption, kept from the unprepared mind. One of the developments from that corpus of secret knowledge is what has come to be called Kabbalah. That “mysteries” are part and parcel of the Hebrew language itself—and therefore of scripture—is hardly arguable. Even so, Sampson makes some enormous extrapolations. He seems to imply that Joseph Smith spent a great
deal of time studying the Kabbalah. While one may agree that Joseph Smith understood the patterns placed in the Hebrew scriptures through revelation, there is no credible evidence that Joseph Smith was a student of the Jewish Kabbalah. The Kabbalah is a degenerate production of later Judaism. It is a tattered and debased version of the original. The Kabbalah is doctrinal debris. Much like Gnosticism, it is a tattered relic of the original, but it is not the original.

One problem with Sampson’s references to the Kabbalah is that he never defines exactly what he means by “Kabbalah.” He asks the reader to take his word that the scripture is filled with a system of Kabbalistic encryption, but he never outlines for the reader how the system works. On page 15, he tells the reader, “I will now start to play the Kabbalah game in earnest.” Nowhere, however, does he list the rules for the game. Even if he does have in mind some set of Kabbalistic rules, he does not lay them out in his book, leaving the reader to wonder if he is making them up as he goes along.

The second problem in his references to the Kabbalah is that he implies that all scripture is “Kabbalistic.” It is like the erroneous notion that all of the Book of Mormon is chiastic. Portions of the scripture are undoubtedly Kabbalahistic; but it is a mistake to try to force the entire text into that structure.

Along with not adequately defining rules or terms, Sampson makes colossal jumps, such as expecting readers to accept without question that “although this chart [the Sephiroth] is called the Tree of Life, it really functions better as the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil” (p. 37). He expects readers to accept something he “knows” is true, but never explains.

Perhaps the greatest fault of this book is its lack of form and structure. It presents the appearance of a hodgepodge of bits and pieces of knowledge, without pattern and shape. It is almost as if the author is playing peekaboo with the reader, daring the reader to make sense of it all.

*Written by the Finger of God* could have been a much better book—even in simple ways. The footnoting is grossly inadequate. Some passages beg for references (for example the information on page 29 and the quotation from Joseph Smith on page 38). In other places, vague references are given without page numbers.
(page 26, note 3; and no date or page number given for the graphic from the Deseret News on page 5); or incorrect references are given (footnote 2 on page 118 should be Ibid., p. 348).

That said, there is much of value in Written by the Finger of God. For one thing, Sampson takes Joseph Smith seriously, and brings into focus a number of heretofore unnoticed elements which point to Joseph Smith as an authentic translator, factors which cannot be explained by theories about Joseph being a “product of his times.” He also reinforces what Hugh Nibley has been stressing for years, that one of the chief secrets to understanding both scripture and ordinance lies in the intricacies of language itself. Understanding the original languages in their own context is invaluable in making sense of the corpus of knowledge originally encrypted in those languages. Perhaps more important, Sampson has directed attention to that most-neglected product of Joseph Smith’s translating efforts: the Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar. For years, Nibley has pointed out how ludicrous it is for scholars to condescendingly wave aside Joseph Smith’s translations while proudly (here read arrogantly) trumpeting the fact that they have never read the works themselves. Not only, however, has the Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar received that treatment by secular academics, it has received exactly the same treatment from Latter-day Saint scholars! Honest students can no longer deny that the Alphabet and Grammar was Joseph Smith’s work. The Prophet himself claims ownership in the document.¹ Latter-day Saint scholars should be ashamed of being ashamed of Joseph Smith’s Alphabet and Grammar. Joseph Smith was onto something. The Alphabet and Grammar is a key. Latter-day Saint scholars will someday find the evidence which vindicates the Prophet and his work on the Alphabet and Grammar. Sampson has provided some tools for that effort. He notes that we are indebted to Robert Fillerup for the prodigious labor of transcribing the Alphabet and Grammar into computer format. Through the marvels of computer wizardry, for

the first time, the Alphabet and Grammar is now available in printed form, standardized in spelling, and indexed.

Even with all his own work studying and synthesizing the meaning of the Hebrew characters as he understands them, perhaps Sampson's greatest contribution is showing the connection between Hebrew and Egyptian noted by Nephi, and providing the reader with Joseph Smith's own study-document on the subject in a form which can be utilized by future students (printed *in extenso* in an appendix). This connection has been staring Latter-day Saints in the face since 1830, when Nephi's words were printed: "Yea, I make a record in the language of my father, which consists of the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians" (1 Nephi 1:2). What Sampson seems to be trying to convey to the reader (not altogether clearly) is that there is a consistent pattern in all scriptural writings. He posits that the key to the structure of written scripture is to be found in the elemental definitions inherent in the root words, and consequently in the very characters of the Semitic languages. The story being told in the Hebrew Old Testament text is inherent in the root definitions of the words and characters of which the text is constructed. The validity of this heretofore unnoticed pattern can easily be tested by recourse to a good concordance.

With that in mind, Sampson extends his study to the oldest of all written languages, Hieroglyphic Egyptian. He proposes that Joseph Smith approached the Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar from a different standpoint than linguists would, and that what was going on with the Alphabet and Grammar followed the same pattern he finds in the Hebrew scriptures. That being the case, what Joseph was doing in the Alphabet and Grammar can be uncovered by simply comparing the characters of the language with the root definitions of the words themselves. Sampson takes Nephi's statement in 1 Nephi 1:2 as indication that the Egyptian and Hebrew languages were related, and therefore tries to prove his thesis first in the Hebrew scriptures, and then in the Egyptian characters in the Alphabet and Grammar. Not content, he finds parallels in ancient New World languages as well.

*Written by the Finger of God* takes the position that there is a consistent, underlying pattern in all scriptural writings. Instead of finding it in chiasmus, as others have done, he finds the structure
of that pattern in what has come down to us as the “Sacred Tree of the Sephiroth.”

Some of Sampson’s assertions are difficult to prove. Others, however, hold great promise and provide fruitful areas of study for Latter-day Saint scholars. Many readers will tire of wading through the poorly organized text and trying to follow the frayed thread of narrative in search of the nuggets of significance. The book will likely be of greatest interest to those with a penchant for linguistic study.

Whatever the faults and failings of Written by the Finger of God, Joe Sampson has made a valuable contribution to the study of Joseph Smith, the Book of Mormon, the Kirtland Egyptian papyri, and prophetic translation. It can only be hoped that those with formal linguistic training will not turn up their noses at his efforts.

A Black Hole That’s Not So Black

Reviewed by Matthew Roper

“Since we began publishing in 1959,” write Jerald and Sandra Tanner in their most recent booklet, “the LDS Church has never put forth any official rebuttal. We have waited in vain for thirty-four years for the Church itself to make a response to our work. Although a large number of people have left the Mormon Church because of our publications, and many others have been very concerned... Mormon leaders seem to feel that the best policy is silence. Since they apparently cannot find a way to successfully refute our allegations, they believe that the less people know about our publications the better. Consequently they have maintained a conspiracy of silence for thirty-four years while we have continued to distribute books throughout the world.” While LDS scholars in the past have, in the authors’ words, “followed Church leaders’ advice” by ignoring them, now, faced with the imposing bogeyman of their recent book, Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon, “Mormon scholars have suddenly [come] out like an army to attack us” (p. 1–2). According to the authors, this can only be because their revolutionary ideas “were having a significant impact upon some,” nay “thousands of members of the Church” (p. 2, emphasis added). Naturally, “it was time to speak up” (p.1).

Reading their rebuttal, I was reminded of several observations made by non-LDS historian Lawrence Foster a few years ago.

Editor’s note: a longer, more complete version of this review can be obtained from the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1-800-327-6715.
With the Tanners, "Every bit of evidence, even if it could be most plausibly presented in a positive way, is represented as yet another nail in the coffin being prepared for the Mormon church. . . . Even when they backhandedly praise objective Mormon historical scholarship, they do so primarily as a means of twisting that scholarship for use as yet another debater's ploy to attack the remaining—and in their eyes insurmountable—Mormon deficiencies."¹ Speaking of the Tanners' reaction to an earlier critique of their work by an anonymous historian, Foster reflects, "One is amused at the exaggerated sense of self importance that the Tanners' rejoinder reveals. . . . The Tanners' own response would seem to be the best possible vindication of the argument . . . that they lack a sense of balance and perspective."²

And some things never change.

After a few introductory comments on responding to Book of Mormon criticisms in general and a few preliminary observations regarding the work in question, I will discuss the issue of biblical influence on the translation of the Book of Mormon, the issue of sacrifice as it relates to King Benjamin's speech, and finally, the Tanners' so-called "Black Hole" theory, discussed in their earlier work, Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon,³ and

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now repeated in their recent rebuttal—the accusation that the loss of the 116 manuscript pages left a “black hole” in the Book of Mormon that Joseph Smith tried to cover up chiefly by plagiarizing from the Bible. Since the authors discuss many issues that I did not address in my earlier review, I welcome this opportunity both to discuss those issues and to clarify a few of my earlier remarks.

**Answering Mormon Critics**

When I previously reviewed several of the Tanners’ publications, I of course recognized that, generally speaking, criticisms such as theirs do little to impede the growth of the Church; however, I saw the reviews as an excellent opportunity to help any individuals who might have been negatively influenced by the Tanners’ work by suggesting some of the reasons why I found their work unpersuasive. There is a substantial body of Book of Mormon scholarship, much of it available for years, which should be carefully and systematically addressed by those who are interested in serious scholarly discourse on the Book of Mormon and the Church. By reviewing the Tanners’ work, I was able to discuss some of those issues which the authors and others sympathetic to their position have generally ignored. Thus, I stated in one of those essays that two chapters on the Book of Mormon from their book, *Mormonism: Shadow or Reality?* merited review,4 which was another way of saying that they provided a convenient foil against which to highlight several elements in the Book of Mormon that I found significant. The authors, however, in a desperate attempt to find legitimacy, have now on at least two occasions cited my offhand comment as evidence that they have somehow “arrived.”5

93, which was in part a response to the Tanners’ brief retort, “Roper Attacks Mormonism: Shadow or Reality?” *Salt Lake City Messenger* 82 (September 1992): 12–14.

4 Roper, Review of *Mormonism: Shadow or Reality?* 169.

Concerning the Tanners’ allegation that there has been a conspiracy of silence, “what accounts for this reluctance [among both conservative and liberal scholars] to discuss the Tanners,” asks Foster in his most recent evaluation of the Tanners’ work.

The Tanners’ answer is simple: The Mormon church is afraid of them. In their view, it has been engaged in a “conspiracy of silence” because it cannot answer their objections. The Tanners argue that if the church were to try systematically to answer their objections, it would realize the error of its ways and collapse. By failing to deal with them directly, the church, in the Tanners’ opinion, is providing yet another proof of its underlying fraudulence and repressive mind control. This interpretation fails to deal with many complex factors that have contributed to Mormon reticence about discussing the Tanners in print. The most obvious point is that neither conservative nor liberal Mormons think that the Tanners are really serious about wanting a truly open discussion or considering approaches that differ from their own chip-on-shoulder, anti-Mormon mindset. On the one hand, the Tanners have repeatedly demanded that Mormonism live up to standards of rectitude impossible for any human organization to achieve or else give up its truth claims. On the other hand, the Tanners simultaneously tell the Mormon church that even if it were somehow able to live up to its impossibly high standards, it would still be false because it is not normative Christianity as they understand it . . . Faced with such resolute unwillingness to consider anything Mormonism does in a positive light or to engage in a constructive dialogue about differing approaches, the Mormon Church, as an organization, has understandably chosen to ignore the Tanners as much as possible . . . The Church sees no advantage in engaging in vitriolic polemic with virtual unknowns and thereby giving them publicity.6

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6 Foster, “Apostate Believers,” 353–54, emphasis added. Foster’s observation finds support in the Tanners’ recent work in which if Church officials or LDS writers ignore them, it can only be because they are “unable to respond” (p. 1), and are engaged in a “conspiracy of silence” (p. 1), yet when
Given the miraculous growth of the Church today, why should anyone respond to critics of the Church at all? When Nehemiah was trying to build a wall, his enemies employed every means to try to stop that work from progressing. When these efforts failed, his frustrated and desperate opponents, much like the Tanners, sent messages to Nehemiah demanding that he come down and speak with them. Nehemiah refused to do so. “And I sent messengers unto them, saying, I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?” (Nehemiah 6:3). Given the tremendous responsibility that Church leaders are under and the challenges of administering a rapidly growing Church, I think that the Tanners merit little of their time and attention. This does not mean, however, that individual members cannot or should not ever respond to attacks upon the Church or criticisms of the Book of Mormon. Thus, “It is not necessary to publish everything of a scurrilous character that is said against us, as it would engross too much of our attention to the exclusion of subjects that are more profitable. It is necessary that the Saints should know what is said against them, and that some one should show the other side. When the Church is belied there ought to be a refutation of the misstatements.”

The first forty pages or so of Answering Mormon Scholars is largely a defense of Brent Lee Metcalfe and a review of the Hofmann episode (pp. 3–45). Metcalfe’s recent book, New

LDS writers do respond, it is because they are “agitated” (p. 1), “concerned” (pp. 1–2), or “burning” with anger (p. 8), and by the way, it’s really not very nice for the Latter-day Saint to respond anyway, since somebody somewhere said that the Tanners were a waste of time (p. 1).

Approaches to the Book of Mormon, received detailed and thoughtful attention in a recent issue of this Review. Why do the Tanners spend so much time in Metcalfe’s defense? I suspect that they were hoping to use Metcalfe’s work to respond to recent reviews of their own writings and to further their efforts in attacking the historicity of the Book of Mormon. That Metcalfe’s work received such a thorough pounding at the hands of some very competent scholars was obviously a serious blow to the Tanners. At various points in the Tanners’ rebuttal they cite the articles by John Kunich (pp. 86–90), Stan Larson (pp. 160–64), David Wright (pp. 163–64), and certain arguments by Brent Metcalfe (pp. 54–57), without acknowledging the thoughtful and frequently devastating reviews of those articles. The Tanners’ refusal to acknowledge such work only reinforces the impression that they were caught unprepared for such a response and are ill-equipped to deal with such matters.

Much of their discussion of the work of Brent Metcalfe provides only a distorted picture. Reading their polemic, the uninformed reader may get the impression that no one has responded to the substance of Metcalfe’s work and that reviewers can only resort to *ad hominem* arguments. This is certainly not the case. William Hamblin, for example, has discussed many of the problems inherent in Metcalfe’s published work and

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12 While the Tanners argue that Metcalfe’s argument on nonrandom sequences of lexical variants is “irrefutable” (p. 56), they have not come to grips with Royal Skousen’s discussion in “Critical Methodology and the Text of the Book of Mormon,” *RBBM* 6/1 (1994): 140–43.
methodology.\textsuperscript{13} If the Tanners, or Metcalfe for that matter, believed that Hamblin’s assessment was incorrect, they should have demonstrated why and on what basis Metcalfe’s stated approach and methodology is better or more sophisticated than that of Hamblin and others.

This penchant to misread or misinterpret the arguments of other writers can also be seen in their response to comments by Daniel Peterson regarding Metcalfe’s role in the Hofmann affair (pp. 16–17). They spend over twenty-eight pages showing that many people were fooled by Mark Hofmann (pp. 15–43). Unlike many in the LDS community, however, Metcalfe was more than just a bystander in the Hofmann episode, but was in fact one of the chief advocates of the Salamander Letter and apparently got a great deal of pleasure out of undermining the faith of others.\textsuperscript{14} In any case, the fact that Hofmann deceived a lot of people was, as the Tanners know very well, not the issue.

Peterson’s point was that Latter-day Saints were being asked to abandon a long-held tradition of faith on the basis of evidence they were not permitted to see and examine for themselves—evidence that Metcalfe would not show, so that we had to trust Metcalfe and his “extremely reliable source,” Mark Hofmann. Ironically, the Tanners themselves have described similar examples from their own dealings with Mr. Metcalfe in the past.\textsuperscript{15}

\textbf{The Bible in the Book of Mormon}

One of the glaring inconsistencies in the Tanners’ work is that while they accept the testimonies of those who witnessed Joseph


Smith dictate the Book of Mormon, such as David Whitmer and Emma Smith (p. 160), they still argue that Joseph deliberately pilfered from a Bible. As I have argued previously, none of those who witnessed Joseph Smith dictate the Book of Mormon mention his use of a Bible, and its apparent absence during the translation of the Book of Mormon poses serious problems for the Tanners’ theory of deliberate biblical plagiarism. The Tanners go to great lengths to show that some LDS writers, such as B. H. Roberts and Sidney B. Sperry, have suggested that, when the Prophet came across passages which paralleled the King James translation, he may have taken out a Bible and simply followed the KJV insofar as it agreed with the ancient text. The point is quite irrelevant, since the argument for Bible use, whether made by Latter-day Saints or the Tanners, contradicts the testimony of those who watched the Prophet work.

The Tanners cite David Whitmer’s description of the Prophet placing the seer stone in his hat, and, putting his face into the hat, drawing it closely around his face to exclude the light and then dictating what he read from off the stone. Yet while the Tanners clearly accept David Whitmer’s testimony and that of other early witnesses who describe the Prophet’s use of the seer stone, their rebuttal reveals a failure to come to grips with some of the implications of that testimony. For example, in responding to my earlier point regarding the lack of a curtain to conceal the translator, the Tanners said, “we do not believe that it would have been necessary for Joseph Smith to use a curtain. He may have had a Bible open on the table before him or on his lap. If he felt that he had to conceal its presence, he could have had loose pages from a Bible hidden in the bottom of the hat he used when translating the book.” Then, after referring to the testimonies of Whitmer, Emma Smith, and the others, they make the incredible statement that “it would have been easy to read anything in the bottom of the hat by simply letting some light shine in. For that matter, by this same method he could have had notes or even pages of material which he had previously written to read to his

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16 Roper, review of Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon, 171.
scribe” (p. 160).\textsuperscript{17} The testimonies of those who witnessed the translation of the Book of Mormon do not allow for the Tanners’ interpretation.

Father Whitmer, who was present very frequently during the writing of this manuscript affirms that Joseph Smith had \textit{no book or manuscript}, before him from which he could have read as is asserted by some that he did, he (Whitmer) having every opportunity to know.\textsuperscript{18}

Emma Smith also testified to the same thing.

In writing for your father I frequently wrote day after day, often sitting at the table close by him, he . . . dictating hour after hour with nothing between us.

Q. Had he not a book or manuscript from which he read or dictated to you?
A. \textit{He had neither manuscript or book to read from.}

Q. Could he not have had, and you not know it?
A. If he had anything of the kind he could not have concealed it from me. . . .

Q. Could not father have dictated the Book of Mormon to you, Oliver Cowdery and the others who wrote for him, after having first written it, or having first read it out of some book?
A. Joseph Smith . . . could neither write nor dictate a coherent and well worded letter; let alone dictating a book like the book of Mormon. And, though I was an active participant in the scenes that transpired, it is marvelous to me, ‘a marvel and a wonder,’ as much so as to any one else.”\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{17} This is another example of what Foster describes as the Tanners’ “skillful shell game in which the premises for judgment are conveniently shifted so that the conclusion is always the same—negative” (Foster, “Apostate Believers,” 353; see also 350).

\textsuperscript{18} \textit{St. Louis Republican} Interview, Mid-July 1884, Richmond, Missouri, \textit{St. Louis Republican}, 16 July 1884, in Cook, 139-40, emphasis added.

\textsuperscript{19} “Last Testimony of Sister Emma,” 51, emphasis added.
The witnesses describe the extreme poverty of Joseph Smith and his family, making it unlikely that they even owned a Bible. They testify that the relatively unlearned Joseph Smith dictated hour after hour, day after day, correcting mistakes without seeing them, without the use of Bible, manuscript, or notes of any kind. Those who were there, whose firsthand testimony regarding the dictation of the Book of Mormon text the authors appear to accept, adamantly affirmed that he had none, that he could not have had books or manuscripts without their knowing. "Joseph Smith dictated the Book of Mormon, without apparent hesitation, as fast as a scribe could write it in long hand. There is no chance for error on this point." Moreover, "The dictation from start to finish proceeded while the Prophet's eyes were thus hidden from seeing anything by the natural light . . . he did not stop to hunt up the passages which resemble, or are identical with, passages in the King James' Version of the Bible. Such an interruption could not have escaped detection, and would surely have been noted in the accounts of the listeners. The quotations, therefore, whether direct or indirect, must be regarded as having come precisely like the rest of the matter, and probably . . . without the conscious knowledge of the translator."20 That is one of the reasons these early witnesses considered the event a miracle.

Plagiarism or Translation?

That the Book of Mormon translation was somehow influenced by the Bible has been clear to every person who has read it. If Joseph Smith did not use a Bible during the translation, how can we account for the obvious similarities between portions of the Book of Mormon text and passages found in the King James Version of the Bible? The Prophet said that he translated the Book of Mormon through "the gift and power of God." Since the testimony of those who observed the dictation of the Book of Mormon makes it clear that he did not have a Bible in front of him while translating, it seems reasonable that the Holy Ghost conveyed the translation to the Prophet in a scriptural register. Since the language of the King James Bible was the

accepted version of the day, it would have been the most appropriate style in which to convey a new scriptural record.

The Tanners argue that Book of Mormon passages which follow the language and style of the New Testament are particularly anachronistic since the works of New Testament writers would not have been available to Nephite prophets. Thus, according to our authors, the problem arises in “the ancient Nephites making extensive quotations from works which were not even in existence at that time” (pp. 137–38). However, the Book of Mormon purports to be a translation of an ancient document which comes to us through a modern translator, so although the King James English of our authorized version would not have been used by Alma or Mormon, the King James Bible, with both its Old and New Testaments, was a part of the modern translator’s reservoir of language and expression and could therefore quite properly have been used in translating an ancient scriptural text like the Book of Mormon.

By way of illustration, the first time I read Homer’s classic *The Odyssey* I was struck by a passage in Book XI where Odysseus attempted to comfort his friend Achilles, who was dead, by stating, “For you, Achilles, Death should have lost its sting.”21 Being new to classics, I wondered if maybe Paul had borrowed this phrase from Homer (1 Corinthians 15:55). I was surprised to discover, after some investigation, that this translation was in fact not a precise rendering from the Greek.22 Yet when I discussed this fact with my instructors, I was assured that this was considered an excellent translation, since it accurately conveyed the sense and meaning of the passage. Thus, contrary to the Tanners, New Testament language, even King James English, in a pre-Christian pagan document can at times be a legitimate translation if it adequately conveys the proper meaning. This is why modern translators of ancient documents sometimes employ New

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Testament biblical language in their translations of documents which are pre-Christian: "The king is my eldest son who split open my womb," begins Faulkner's translation of the ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts. "He is my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased" (compare Matthew 3:17).\textsuperscript{23} Allen renders a passage from the Egyptian Book of the Dead as "Father who art in heaven" (Matthew 6:9).\textsuperscript{24} A popular translation of Pindar speaks of that which "neither moth nor rust doth destroy."\textsuperscript{25} If such usage can sometimes be appropriate in translations of ancient pagan documents, how much more so for a translation of an ancient Christian scriptural document like the Book of Mormon?

Revelation and Nephi

The Tanners' observation that the language of Nephi and Jacob sometimes parallels that of John in Revelation (pp. 166–69) is interesting but not surprising, since we are explicitly told that Nephi was shown the same vision as John (1 Nephi 14:18–30) and that Jacob and Isaiah apparently saw what Nephi saw (2 Nephi 11:1–3). Contrary to the Tanners (p. 138), the Isaiah chapters are not irrelevant to Nephi's and Jacob's prophecies since these chapters supplement and help to expound their own visions and prophecies. Moreover, while I have not yet explored this issue in detail, it appears to me that the Isaiah chapters on the small plates are thematically related to John's prophecy, just as Nephi seems to indicate. Like John, Isaiah alludes to the plagues to be poured out upon the wicked (1 Nephi 21:26; 2 Nephi 6:18; compare Revelation 16:4–7), the conflict with the dragon (2 Nephi 8:9; compare Revelation 12:1–17), a curse of darkness (2 Nephi 7:3; 15:30; compare Revelation 8:12–13; 15:10–11), the sun and stars being darkened (2 Nephi 7:3; 23:10; compare Revelation 6:12–13), the wicked wanting to hide in the rocks (2 Nephi 12:10–22; compare Revelation 6:15–17), the siege of Jerusalem (2 Nephi


\textsuperscript{24} Thomas George Allen, \textit{The Book of the Dead or Going Forth by Day} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 158.

17–20; compare Revelation 11:1–2), the mission of the two witnesses (2 Nephi 8:18–20; compare Revelation 11:3–13), the fall of Babylon (2 Nephi 23–24; compare Revelation 14:8; 17–18), the Millennial peace (2 Nephi 21–22; compare Revelation 20:1–6). It should also be remembered that John’s apocalypse is deeply couched in Old Testament themes and ideas, which are not original to the Christian era. In fact, Revelation 4–22 alone has at least four hundred allusions to the Old Testament. While Nephi and Jacob gained their information from their own revelations, one can easily see how they used Isaiah to explain their own prophecy. Consequently, one should not be surprised to find Book of Mormon prophets using similar themes and symbols such as the “rod of iron,” the “fountain of living waters,” and the “tree of life” in their teachings or in describing their revelations.

In my earlier review I faulted the Tanners for failing to acknowledge close linguistic and conceptual parallels between certain Old Testament passages and the Book of Mormon (Roper, review of Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon, 174–81). Much of the Tanners’ rebuttal rests upon the mistaken assumption that I was arguing for direct borrowing by Book of Mormon prophets in each of these cases; however, if I was insufficiently clear, I will clarify: There are numerous examples from the Old Testament which provide close linguistic and conceptual parallels to Book of Mormon language and ideas. The Nephites had the brass plates, a record much like our Hebrew Old Testament, but substantially larger. This would have included part of our current Old Testament as well as additional material which is not presently found in the Hebrew Bible. We do not know, at this point, what that included, but it is reasonable to assume that Book of Mormon prophets were influenced by the thought, language, and teachings of their scriptures, just as New Testament writers were influenced by our Old Testament. In addition to this, however, the modern translator, Joseph Smith, whether he consciously drew upon his own memory and biblical background in the translation, or whether such language flowed directly from the Holy Ghost, would have been influenced by biblical language

from both the Old and New Testaments, as he conveyed the translation of this ancient document into his own English language. Biblical parallels are inconclusive, since the authors cannot show whether this is evidence that the Joseph Smith deliberately plagiarized or whether, as translator, he used language appropriate to convey an ancient Christian text.

To summarize, the Tanners’ theory of deliberate plagiarism from the Bible during the dictation of the Book of Mormon is seriously hampered by the testimony of witnesses to the event. Moreover, that theory fails to take into account the fact that the Book of Mormon, like other translations of ancient documents, can quite properly contain King James biblical style from the Old and New Testaments and still be an authentic translation from an ancient document. Finally, there are legitimate reasons to question the authors’ assumptions regarding the uniqueness of New Testament language and ideas.

Firstlings, Sacrifices, and Burnt Offerings

Part two of the Tanners’ rebuttal treats the question of Israelite festivals as they relate to King Benjamin’s speech. Since much of this section deals with the issue of comparing ancient and nineteenth-century paradigms, and since I am currently preparing an article dealing with this subject for another publication, I will reserve my comments for a future time. There is one issue, however, which is simply too good to pass by, and that is the reference to sacrifice in Mosiah chapter two.

Mosiah 2:3 reads, “And they also took of the firstlings of their flocks, that they might offer sacrifice and burnt offerings according to the law of Moses” (Mosiah 2:3). In 1887 M. T. Lamb countered, “According to the law of Moses, the firstlings of their flocks were never offered as burnt offerings or sacrifices. . . . This one little blunder, then, proves beyond the chance of question that the Book of Mormon could not have been inspired.” Moreover, “This passage is precisely such a passage as Joseph Smith or any other ignorant man like him might have written; it could not have been found in the book if God . . . had
to do with its preparation.” Following Lamb’s lead, the Tanners add that this verse “actually shows that the author of the Book of Mormon really didn’t understand the law of Moses” and “was unfamiliar with the biblical material concerning offerings. Moreover, it appears that he was not even aware of the other kinds of Jewish offerings commanded in the Bible” (p. 96). However, these criticisms are doubly flawed since Book of Mormon critics have both misunderstood the nature of the Mosaic provisions and built their criticisms upon an interpretation of the Book of Mormon text which is highly questionable.

First, while firstlings, as we currently understand their use in ancient Israel, were probably not offered as the olah or burnt offering in ancient Israel, as Anderson notes, “It would not be accurate to say that the requirements for the burnt offering, peace offering, and reparation offering were rigidly fixed; there was room for variability”; “for the burnt offering one had to offer a male animal from the herd or flock. . . . The peace offering could be either a male or a female from the herd or flock.” There is no question, however, that the firstlings of clean domesticated animals were sacrificed in the peace offering, as were other animals. “In early Palestinian experience the firstlings of the flock and herd were sacrificed at the local sanctuary.” In fact,


29 “First-born,” in The Interpreter’s Bible Dictionary, 4 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), 2:271. Menahem Haran argues that it was held by some Jewish authorities that, “not every type of sacrifice would be deemed suitable for solitary altars. Many offerings were held to be reserved for the temple, and it was obligatory to take them exclusively to the temple altar. Such were the firstlings of cattle and sheep,” the various forms of the peace offering, including the thanksgiving offering, and possibly others (Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel: An Inquiry into Biblical Cult Phenomena and the Historical Setting of the Priestly School [Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1985], 16)
"Any domesticated animal from the herd or flock, male or female (Leviticus 3:1, 6, 12), was permissible" for the peace offering.\textsuperscript{30} Under Mosaic law the firstlings (i.e. firstborn animals) of flocks and herds were dedicated to the Lord (Exodus 13:12, 15) and were given to the Levites. The Israelites were forbidden from using them for work or gain (Deuteronomy 15:19–20) and were required to bring them to the temple during their pilgrimage festivals, where they would be sacrificed (Deuteronomy 12:5–6). Their blood was sprinkled upon the altar and their fat was burned (Numbers 18:17–18). What was left then was given to the individual and his family to eat that same day (Deuteronomy 15:19–20). Thus Lamb and the Tanners grossly misunderstand the sacrificial role of firstlings when they claim that the firstlings were not sacrificed. While apparently not used for the burnt offering, firstlings could and frequently were used along with other animals in the sacrificial peace offering. The Book of Mormon correctly states that the Nephites brought their firstlings to the temple to be sacrificed, for firstlings clearly were sacrificed at the temple.

Mosiah 2:3 is also consistent with the commandments given to Moses in Deuteronomy:

> But unto the place which the Lord your God shall choose out of all your tribes to put his name there, even unto his habitation shall ye seek, and thither thou shalt come: And thither ye shall bring your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, and your tithes, and heave offerings of your hand, and your vows, and your freewill offerings, \textit{and the firstlings of your herds and of your flocks}. (Deuteronomy 12:5–6)

These verses indicate that the Israelites were to bring the firstlings of their flocks and herds to the temple along with other unspecified animals to fill various sacrificial and dedicatory purposes. It is noteworthy that although this verse mentions several forms of sacrifice associated with temple worship (burnt

\textsuperscript{30} Encyclopaedia Judaica 14:603 (hereafter \textit{EJ}).
offerings, heave offerings, freewill offerings, etc.), the only animals actually mentioned are the firstlings, even though the firstlings were, as far as we know, never offered as the burnt offering under Mosaic law. However, the mere mention of “burnt offerings” in this biblical passage clearly implies animals other than firstlings, even if no other animals are explicitly mentioned. Similarly, it is reasonable to interpret the Mosiah 2:3 reference to “sacrifice and burnt offerings” as an allusion to two distinct forms of sacrifice—the sacrifice of firstlings in the so-called peace offering and the burnt offering taken from other animals. Thus, the Nephites, in accordance with the legal prescriptions of Mosaic law, “took of the firstlings of their flocks, that they might offer sacrifice” and they also took other animals to offer as “burnt offerings according to the law of Moses” (Mosiah 2:3).

Second, there are legitimate reasons to reject Lamb’s and the Tanners’ interpretation of this Book of Mormon passage, especially in light of biblical passages which use similar language. Using language reminiscent of the Book of Mormon, Moses told Pharaoh, “Thou must give us also sacrifices (zebah) and burnt (olah) offerings, that we may sacrifice unto the Lord our God” (Exodus 10:25). In reference to the term used for sacrifice in this and numerous other biblical passages (zebah), Gary Anderson, an authority on Old Testament sacrificial practices, warns that “one should not infer that the zebah, ‘slain sacrifice,’ [KJV “sacrifice”], refers to any slain sacrificial animal. In spite of its name, which is quite general, this sacrifice designation often occurs in the pair zebah and ola [i.e. “sacrifice and burnt offerings”]. In this type of usage there can be no doubt that

31 Critics are clearly mistaken when they claim that the peace offering was not really a sacrifice, for it certainly was, although it probably had no expiatory value.
32 For similar Book of Mormon references see 1 Nephi 5:9; 7:22; 3 Nephi 9:19. One can also interpret Mosiah 2:1–4 as a brief summary of why the people of Zarahemla gathered together. They did so: (1) to go up to the temple (Mosiah 1:1), (2) to hear the words of King Benjamin (Mosiah 1:1), (3) to offer sacrifice of their firstlings, (4) to offer burnt offerings according to the law of Moses (Mosiah 1:3), and (5) to give thanks unto the Lord their God.
zebah refers specifically to the *selamim* [peace] offering."\(^{34}\) In
fact, scholars usually assume that these references to the burnt
offering and the peace offering must be understood as cliches or
"merisms for the entire sacrificial system."\(^{35}\) Mormon is, of
course, abridging the account of these events.

There are several reasons why the sacrifice of the peace
offering may have been particularly appropriate for the occasion
described in Mosiah 1–5. According to Anderson, the peace
offering was "emblematic of moments of joy or celebration."\(^{36}\)
King Benjamin’s people sacrificed and gave thanks to the Lord
for blessing them "that they might rejoice" (Mosiah 2:4). Other
elements of King Benjamin’s speech indicate that this was a time
of joy and great rejoicing (3:4; 4:3, 11–12). The peace offering
was also particularly appropriate during important national events,
such as the coronation of new kings, the renewal of the authority
of an already functioning leader, or other times of national or
spiritual renewal.\(^{37}\) Likewise, the people of King Benjamin offer
sacrifice following a period of serious contention and apostasy led
by false prophets and teachers (Words of Mormon 1:12–18).
These sacrificial practices may have been viewed as adding
legitimacy to King Benjamin’s or Mosiah2’s position and
authority. The peace offering was particularly appropriate for the
celebration of victory, such as Saul’s victory over the Ammonites
at Jabesh Gilead,\(^{38}\) or at the “successful conclusion of a military
campaign."\(^{39}\) Similarly, the people of King Benjamin gather to
the temple for sacrifice after the Lord has delivered them from
their enemies, the Lamanites (Mosiah 2:4; see also Omni 1:24;
Words of Mormon 1:13).

There were at least three different kinds of peace offerings.
These included the thanksgiving offering, the vowed sacrifice, and
the freewill offering.\(^{40}\) Although “all three sacrifices were
motivated by the same general circumstances,” Levine notes that,

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\(^{34}\) Anderson, “Sacrifice and Sacrificial Offerings,” 878, emphasis added.

\(^{35}\) Ibid., 878, 882; Baruch Levine, *In the Presence of the Lord: A Study of


\(^{39}\) *EJ* 14:604.

\(^{40}\) Anderson, “Sacrifices and Sacrificial Offerings,” 878.
“the rodah [i.e. thanksgiving offering] was particularly appropriate for expressing gratitude over one’s deliverance from danger or misfortune.”41 “Its purpose was to render an expression of thanks for deliverance or blessings granted.”42 One is immediately reminded of King Benjamin again, during whose reign the people gathered to “offer sacrifice and burnt offerings... And also that they might give thanks to the Lord their God... who had delivered them out of the hands of their enemies” (Mosiah 2:3–4). Benjamin’s pointed references to giving thanks may also be relevant here (Mosiah 2:19–20).

The Loss of the 116 Pages

After the loss of the 116 pages of the Book of Mormon, the Lord told the Prophet that evil men had altered the words of the lost translation manuscript so that they read contrary to the original translation (D&C 10:10–11), and so that if he translated the same again evil men would publish an altered version claiming that he could not really translate. “And behold they will publish this, and Satan will harden the hearts of the people to stir them up to anger against you, that they will not believe my words” (D&C 10:32). The Tanners and several other critics reject this explanation: “If Satan did cause Joseph Smith’s enemies to alter the words,” they argue, “these wicked people would have had to produce the original pages to prove that Joseph Smith could not produce an accurate duplicate of the original. It would be almost impossible to alter a manuscript without detection. The Mormons could have taken the case to court and easily won a significant victory” (pp. 58–59).

I find such reasoning to be unpersuasive in light of the hostile environment in which early Mormonism emerged. In the face of poverty and persecution the Prophet’s earliest supporters were convinced that Joseph had the power to translate, a fact that was the polestar of their faith. If the plot against the Prophet had

41 Levine, In the Presence of the Lord, 43.
42 E. E. Carpenter, “Sacrifices and Offerings in the OT,” in International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, 4:268. “In many contexts the term thanksgiving offering is used as a virtual synonym for peace offering (e.g. II Chron. 29:31; Jer.17:26; cf. II Chron. 33:16)” (EJ 14:604).
succeeded, it could conceivably have undermined the faith of some of Joseph’s closest supporters, whose help and devotion were crucial to the success of early Mormonism. Early Mormons already faced an uphill battle. The Prophet’s enemies would hardly have needed to produce the original manuscript to harden the hearts of the people and hinder the work from progressing. All they would have had to do was print the altered version. After that, the manuscript might have been destroyed or lost, but the effect would have been the same. They would have claimed that the corrupted version was the earlier one. In the end, it would have simply been a case of the Prophet’s word against theirs. The whole affair would have been reprinted and rumored abroad by other newspapers within the region and would have tended to undermine the Prophet’s credibility at a time when most people were only too willing to find an excuse to disbelieve the Book of Mormon. “Considering the state of transportation and communication in antebellum America,” notes Leonard J. Arrington, “newspapers were able to ‘get away with’ ambiguous writing, if not palatable falsehoods. This partly accounts for the pertinacity with which early Americans held on to the false and damaging image of Mormonism” conveyed by writers and publishers.43

The Plates of Lehi and Nephi

The Tanners note what they feel is a discrepancy between the preface to the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants 10:44. The 1830 preface states that the lost 116 pages of the Book of Mormon were “taken from the Book of Lehi, which was an account abridged from the plates of Lehi, by the hand of Mormon,” while the revelation in the Doctrine and Covenants states that they were translated from “an abridgment of the account of Nephi” (D&C 10:44). Because of this apparent

discrepancy the Tanners argue that "Joseph Smith first conceived of the Book of Mormon as an abridgment by Mormon of a set of plates prepared by Lehi." When the 116 pages were lost, according to the Tanners, Joseph Smith "could not accurately reproduce the material which he claimed Mormon had abridged from Lehi's plates, [so] he found it necessary to have Lehi's son, Nephi, create an entirely different set of plates known as the 'plates of Nephi'" (p. 38). While the Tanners argue that the 1830 preface and Doctrine and Covenants 10:44 are contradictory, I believe that these two passages can easily be reconciled with the text of the Book of Mormon, without viewing the plates of Nephi as an expedient afterthought.

Nephi tells us that Lehi had indeed written a record of his own, "for he hath written many things which he saw in visions and in dreams; and he hath also written many things which he prophesied and spake unto his children" (1 Nephi 1:16). Nowhere does the Book of Mormon text state that Lehi originally wrote his record upon plates. S. Kent Brown, for instance, has suggested that this record was initially written upon perishable materials and that it was only later copied onto the large plates by Nephi where it would have been preserved. After Lehi and his family arrived in the New World, the Lord commanded Nephi to make the large plates of Nephi "that I might engrave upon them the record of my people. And upon the plates which I made I did engrave the record of my father, and also our journeyings in the wilderness, and the prophecies of my father; and also many of mine own prophecies have I engraved upon them" (1 Nephi 19:1). Nephi's statement that he engraved the record of his father Lehi upon the large plates suggests that he engraved the entire record of his father and not simply an abridgment as some have argued.

45 There appears to be no scriptural justification for assuming that Nephi abridged his father's record when he inscribed it onto the large plates, as some have suggested (S. Kent Brown, "Nephi's Use of Lehi's Record," in Rediscovering the Book of Mormon, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1991], 4), although there is for the smaller record, where Nephi is clearly abridging his father's much longer account (see 1 Nephi 1:16–17; 6:1–3; 8:29; 9:1).
materials was eventually copied by Nephi onto the first section of the large plates and seems to have been what became known on both that record and in Mormon’s abridgment as “the Book of Lehi.”

Nephi tells us that the large plates and the small plates were both known as the “plates of Nephi” (1 Nephi 9:2); however, that section of the small plates containing the account of Jacob and his descendants was known as the “plates of Jacob” even though they were in fact “made by the hand of Nephi” (Jacob 3:14). Consequently, the term “plates of Lehi” mentioned in the preface to the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon need not be viewed as an anachronism but likely refers to those leaves of the large plates which contained Lehi’s account, even though the actual plates upon which that portion of the record was inscribed were made by Nephi. The 116 pages were then an English translation of Mormon’s abridgment taken from the Lehi section of the large plates and were known in Mormon’s record as “the Book of Lehi.” With this interpretation most of the confusion expressed by the Tanners can be easily resolved.

At the time Joseph received the revelation now known as section 10 of the Doctrine & Covenants, his primary concern was obviously over what he should do about the temporary void left by the loss of the 116 pages. In answer to this concern the Lord explained that the Prophet was not to retranslate the Lehi portion of Mormon’s plates but to complete the translation of the remainder of Mormon’s record (D&C 10:38–46). The Lord explained that “an account of those things that you have written, which have gone forth out of your hands, is engraved upon the plates of Nephi” (D&C 10:38). While, as noted above, the term “plates of Nephi” could, depending on the context, refer to either the large plates, the small plates, or both, as John Tvedtøes has pointed out, section 10 can only refer to the small plates of Nephi.

46 The colophon introducing the book of Helaman on page 368 of the 1981 edition states that Mormon’s abridgment for this section of the Book of Mormon was taken from “the record of Helaman and his sons, even down to the coming of Christ, which is called the book of Helaman.” This may suggest that the book titles in our current Book of Mormon basically follow the titles found upon the large plates. If this assumption is correct it would follow that Lehi’s record or the “plates of Lehi” were also known upon the large plates as the “book of Lehi.” However, this is far from certain.
since only the small plates were found on Mormon’s record. With this in mind the meaning of section 10:38–45 becomes clear. “An account of those things that you have written, which have gone forth out of your hands [the 116 pages of translation], is engraved upon the plates of Nephi; Yea and you remember it was said in those writings [the 116 pages] that a more particular account was given of these things upon the plates of Nephi; And now, because the account which is engraved upon the plates of Nephi is more particular concerning the things, which in my wisdom, I would bring to the knowledge of the people in this account—Therefore, in order to fill the void left by the loss of the 116 pages,

you shall translate the engravings which are on the plates of Nephi, down till you come to the reign of king Benjamin, or until you come to that which you have translated which you have retained; And behold, you shall publish it as the record of Nephi; and thus I will confound those who have altered my words.... Behold, they have only got a part, or an abridgment of the account of Nephi [the translation of Mormon’s abridgment from the large plates]. Behold, there are many things engraved upon the plates of Nephi which do throw greater views upon my gospel; therefore, it is wisdom in me that you should translate this first part of the engravings of Nephi, and send forth in this work. And behold, all the remainder of this work [our current Book of Mormon] does contain all those parts of my gospel which my holy prophets, yea, and also my disciples, desired in their

47 Tvedtines, review of Black Hole, 206.
48 As discussed below, the part “retained” refers at the very least to the beginning of the original book of Mosiah (now lost), the Words of Mormon, and the beginning of our current book of Mosiah.
49 The reference to the “first part” refers to what is to be published as the first part of the Book of Mormon. “Hence, he was to provide, as the first part of the Book of Mormon, a translation from the ‘engravings of Nephi’ ” (Tvedtines, review of Black Hole, 207).
50 The preposition “of” should be understood as meaning “from.” Noah Webster, An American Dictionary of the English Language (New York: S. Converse, 1828), 2:25.
TANNER AND TANNER, ANSWERING MORMON SCHOLARS (ROPER) 179

prayers should come forth unto this people. (D&C 10:41–42, 44–46)

The Title Page of the Book of Mormon

The Tanners point to what they feel is another discrepancy between the contents of the current Book of Mormon and the contents described in the Book of Mormon’s title page. The title page says that the Book of Mormon is “an account written by the hand of Mormon upon plates taken from the plates of Nephi. Wherefore, it is an abridgment of the record of the people of Nephi; and also of the Lamanites. . . . An abridgment taken from the Book of Ether also, which is a record of the people of Jared.” The Tanners feel that this is inconsistent with the fact that the small plates were really not written by Mormon but by Nephi, Jacob, and others. However, as we noted above, among Book of Mormon writers the small plates were simply known as the “plates of Nephi” since they were made by Nephi and were continued afterwards at his command: “For the plates upon which I make a full account of my people I have given the name of Nephi; wherefore, they are called the plates of Nephi, after mine own name; and these plates also are called the plates of Nephi” (1 Nephi 9:2). Both sets were known by the same name, “the plates of Nephi,” even though they were separate records and had different functions. Consequently, the term “plates of Nephi” in the title page quite properly could include all of Nephi’s plates and need not be confined to the large plates. Mormon’s record was truly “an account written by the hand of Mormon upon plates taken from the plates of Nephi”; that is, the account prepared by Mormon was taken from both the large plates and the small plates.51 “Wherefore, it is an abridgment of the record of the people of Nephi.” Again, this is doubly true in that Mormon abridged the large plates and also included within his record Nephi’s small plates that are also, in part, an abridgment of certain elements of the Nephite history and teaching.52

51 The word “taken” is appropriate whether the small plates were recopied or simply inserted into Mormon’s record.
52 The small plates were an abridgment of both secular and religious material. Scriptural evidence for this is abundant. See for example 1 Nephi 1:6,
The Tanners complain of the apparent disparity between the lack of reference in the title page to 143 pages from the small plates and the mention of the record of Ether, which is only about thirty pages in our current Book of Mormon. "The fact that the title page of the Book of Mormon gives such a careful description of the 'Book of Ether,' a book of less than thirty-two pages, but either incorrectly describes or omits the small plates of Nephi, comprising over 142 pages, makes one wonder how such a serious mistake could be made in a book purporting to be divinely inspired" (Black Hole, 40). However, the Book of Mormon record of Ether also contained the sealed portion of the Book of Mormon which took up at least one-third of Mormon's plates.53 In terms of our current Book of Mormon, this sealed material added to our current Book of Ether would be about 203 pages, not simply 32 as the Tanners mistakenly assume. Thus, contrary to the Tanners, Mormon's mention of the Jaredite account is perfectly reasonable, as is his description of the Book of Mormon as an account taken from the plates of Nephi.

Knowledge of Christ's Coming

The Tanners find it unreasonable that "the prophet Alma, who lived hundreds of years later, seem[s] to know nothing about this remarkable prophecy [Nephi's 600-year prophecy] which pointed out the exact year when Jesus would be born" (p. 45) and, since he in their view should know of it from the small plates, that this passage "is a serious contradiction in the Book of Mormon which cannot lightly be dismissed" (p. 46). In order to clarify these verses it is helpful to cite the entire passage:


53 David Whitmer suggested that the sealed portion may have actually been somewhat larger: "About half the book was sealed" (P. Wilhelm Poulson Interview, no date, Richmond, Missouri, Deseret Evening News, 16 August 1878, in David Whitmer Interviews: A Restoration Witness, ed. Lyndon W. Cook (Orem Utah: Grandin Book, 1991), 21.)
Now is the time to repent, for the day of salvation draweth nigh; Yea, and the voice of the Lord, by the mouth of angels, doth declare it unto all nations; yea, doth declare it, that they may have glad tidings of great joy; yea, and he doth sound these glad tidings among all his people ... wherefore, they have come unto us.... Therefore, we are thus highly favored, for we have these glad tidings declared unto us in all parts of our vineyard. For behold, angels are declaring it unto many at this time in our land; and this for the purpose of preparing the hearts of the children of men to receive his word at the time of his coming in glory. And now we only wait to hear the joyful news declared unto us by the mouth of angels, of his coming, for the time cometh [i.e., the day of salvation], we know not how soon. Would to God that it might be in my day; but let it be sooner of later, in it I will rejoice. And it shall be made known unto just and holy men, by the mouth of angels, at the time of his coming, that the words of our fathers may be fulfilled according to that which they have spoken concerning him. (Alma 13:21–26)

The Tanners' interpretation of this passage is not the only, nor even the most reasonable, explanation of it. As I see it, one may reach several different conclusions depending on how one interprets the references to Christ's "coming" in verses 24–26. Here I will suggest four possible interpretations. Alma's reference to Christ's coming could refer to: (1) Christ's birth, (2) Christ's atonement, (3) Christ's postresurrection appearance to the Nephites in the New World, or (4) Christ's general coming, including all aspects of his life and mission in the meridian of time—his birth, life, teachings, suffering, death, and resurrection, culminating for the Nephites in his appearance to them shortly after he rose from the dead. Here we will briefly examine each of these possibilities in contrast to the Tanners' objections to the first two, as expressed in their rebuttal.

1. Christ's Birth. In responding to the Tanners' and Metcalfe's claim that this verse poses a serious problem for the Book of Mormon, John Tvedtines has argued that Alma and perhaps other Book of Mormon prophets in Mosiah–Moroni may have been unfamiliar with the prophecies on the small plates of
Nephi.\textsuperscript{54} The Tanners argue that this explanation is unreasonable because Alma had received all the plates from Mosiah\textsubscript{2} before becoming chief judge (pp. 49–50) and should therefore have been familiar with their contents, including the 600-year prophecy. The Tanners’ objections dissolve when we recall that Alma had a voluminous library of scriptural records, far beyond anything we have today—not merely a few books. He possessed the brass plates, a record that the Book of Mormon explains was a great deal larger than our Old Testament (1 Nephi 13:23). He had the record of Ether on gold plates, containing an account of the Jaredites, of which we do not even have a hundredth part in our current Book of Mormon (Ether 15:33). He had the record of the Nephites on the large plates; references to this record in the Book of Mormon text strongly suggest that it an extremely large record, perhaps consisting of numerous volumes (Helaman 3:13–16). In addition to the brass plates, the account of Ether, and the voluminous record of the Nephite history on the large plates, Alma also would have had the record of the Zeniffite colony (Mosiah 9–22), the record kept by Alma at Helam from which Mormon made part of his abridgment of the book of Mosiah (Mosiah 23–24), and perhaps other records as well—including the small plates. This would be a fairly imposing corpus to read, much less to master and remember. Previous to Alma’s conversion he had been a very wicked and idolatrous man (Mosiah 27:8–10). It is doubtful that he spent much time at that earlier period searching the scriptures. He received the library of records and other sacred things from King Mosiah\textsubscript{2} only shortly before becoming the first Nephite chief judge (Mosiah 28:20). For his first eight years as chief judge he did double duty as high priest over the Church (Mosiah 29:42; Alma 1–4:18). These were very difficult years for both the Nephite people and the members of the Church—so busy in fact that during those years Alma had not even had time to visit the nearby city of Gideon (Alma 7:1–2). At the beginning of the ninth year Alma retired from the judgment seat and devoted himself to full-time missionary work and the labor of running the Church (Alma 4:16–19). Alma delivered his sermon at

Ammonihah just over a year or so after retiring from political office. Much of his two-year ministry was spent traveling (Alma 5–16), so it is unlikely that he carried all the Nephite records around with him to study in his spare moments. In addition to keeping possession of the records, he also had to keep his own record (Alma 9:34; 11:46; 13:31; 35:16; 44:24), fight and direct wars (Alma 2:16–38; 3:20–25), judge the people (Alma 1), run the Church (Alma 6), and deal with all of the vicissitudes and challenges of raising a family (Alma 36–42). Is it really unreasonable that Alma did not spend much time on this little record of Nephi until several years after receiving them?

One may, therefore, reasonably interpret Alma’s statement as a reference to Alma’s ignorance of the 600-year prophecy at the time of his mission in Ammonihah during the tenth year of the reign of the judges. It seems clear to me that Alma was familiar with at least some of the prophecies on the small plates by at least the fourteenth year of the reign of the judges, since we are told that between the eleventh and fourteenth years “Alma and Amulek [did] go forth, and also many more who had been chosen for the work... Holding forth things which must shortly come; yea, holding forth the coming of the Son of God, his sufferings and death, and also the resurrection of the dead. And many of the people did inquire concerning the place where the Son of God should come; and they were taught that he would appear unto them after his resurrection; and this the people did hear with great joy and gladness” (Alma 16:15–20). This suggests to me that Alma had some knowledge of the small plates by this time, since Nephi had prophesied of this appearance (2 Nephi 26:1).

2. Christ’s coming to atone for the sins of mankind and redeem them from death. Several statements by Alma regarding the coming of Christ clearly refer to his coming to redeem man from sin and death. In describing his own conversion, for example, Alma states, “I remembered also to have heard my father prophesy unto the people concerning the coming of one Jesus Christ, a Son of God, to atone for the sins of the world” (Alma 36:17). Later he could testify, “I know that Jesus Christ shall come, yea, the Son, the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. And behold, it is he that cometh to take away the sins of the world, yea, the sins of every man who steadfastly
believeth on his name” (Alma 5:48). Thus there is scriptural precedent for the interpretation that the coming of Christ discussed in Alma 13:25 may refer to Christ’s coming to atone for sin and break the bands of death. The Tanners might perhaps object to this interpretation on the basis of verses 25 and 26, in which Alma states that his coming would be declared by “the mouth of angels” (Alma 13:25) and that this event would “be made known unto just and holy men, by the mouth of angels, at the time of his coming” (Alma 13:26); however, when Jesus was resurrected many of the departed Saints also arose and appeared unto many of the Nephites and did minister to them. Resurrected beings are certainly angels. Given the time of their appearance, it is reasonable to assume that they announced the fact that Christ’s atonement was fulfilled.

3. Christ’s appearance to the Nephites. In a review of the Tanners’ previous book, Tom Nibley suggested that Alma in Alma 13 had reference to Christ’s appearance to the Nephites, since he speaks of “the time of his coming in his glory.” In responding to Brent Metcalfe, I also indicated that I believed this was “an interesting phrase.”55 The Tanners have pointed out that the idea of Christ coming in glory is not unique to allusions to his resurrected appearances, but could also refer to mortality. Even if this term were not unique to a resurrected appearance, it would still be an appropriate one to describe the Savior’s glorious New World appearance.56

4. Christ’s general coming. By referring to the coming of Christ Alma may simply have reference to Christ’s coming in a general sense. Under this interpretation, Alma means Christ’s coming, beginning of course with his birth, but also including his perfect life and teachings, his atoning sacrifice and death, and his

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56 The Tanners objected to this interpretation on the grounds that footnotes to Alma 13:25–26 reference scriptures that speak of the Savior’s birth and also because it differs from the position set forth in several LDS commentaries, such as the former manual for Institute-level students of the Book of Mormon. Most Latter-day Saints are sensible enough to realize that helps like scriptural footnotes and commentaries, even when published by the Church, are simply study aids and do not carry the same weight as the standard works themselves, which have always been the standard by which all doctrines and teachings are measured.
resurrection, culminating for the Nephites in his resurrected appearance to them when he delivered his teachings. The Tanners might object to this on the basis of verses 25–26, which state that angels would declare his coming (Alma 13:25) and “it shall be made known unto just and holy men, by the mouth of angels, at the time of his coming” (Alma 13:26). Clearly angels appeared to some at the birth of Christ, but Alma’s statement could easily refer to other periods as well. Nephi the son of Nephi was certainly a just and holy man: “For behold, it was a just man who kept the record—for he truly did many miracles in the name of Jesus; and there was not any man who could do a miracle in the name of Jesus save he were cleansed every wit from his iniquity” (3 Nephi 8:1). Angels appeared to him as well: “And it came to pass that Nephi—having been visited by angels and also the voice of the Lord, therefore having seen angels, . . . went forth among them in that same year, and began to testify, . . . for so great was his faith on the Lord Jesus Christ that angels did minister unto him daily” (3 Nephi 7:15, 18). The resurrected Saints appeared unto many of the Nephites at the time of Christ’s resurrection and ministered unto many (Helaman 14:25; 3 Nephi 23:9–12), and numerous angels ministered to those who were gathered at the temple in Bountiful (3 Nephi 17:24; 19:14). In speaking of events during this time, Mormon uses a phrase similar to that used by Alma to refer to the death of the prophets during the reign of Lachoneus2: “Behold I say unto you, Yea many have testified of these things at the coming of Christ, and were slain because they testified of these things” (3 Nephi 10:15). This is an obvious reference to 3 Nephi 6:20–23, yet it speaks of these events as occurring “at the coming of Christ” even though this is years after Jesus’ birth and three years before his death. This suggests that Alma’s reference to angels making things known unto just and holy men at the time of his coming could refer to the entire period from Christ’s birth to his resurrected appearances. Under this interpretation, Alma’s uncertainty need not refer to knowledge of Christ’s birth, but could refer to the date of Christ’s atoning sacrifice, his resurrection or his appearance to the righteous Nephites. In fact, the references to Christ giving his word to the Nephites in fulfillment of the prophecies of Alma’s fathers could be seen as an indication of Alma’s familiarity with the small plates.
Words of Mormon

The Tanners cite a passage from Words of Mormon which says, "I found these plates, which contained this small account of the prophets, from Jacob down to the reign of king Benjamin, and also many of the words of Nephi" (Words of Mormon 1:3). The Tanners object that

[Mormon's] statement would lead a person to believe that [the small plates] were not written by the prophet Nephi... A comparison of his statement with our present Book of Mormon seems to indicate that he either gave an inaccurate description of these plates or else read from a different set of plates... Mormon completely overlooked Nephi in the first part of his description claiming that the record was an account of 'the prophets, from Jacob down to this king Benjamin,' and then he tacked on the end of the verse that these plates also contain 'many of the words of Nephi.' This, of course gives the impression that while some of the words of Nephi are included, the plates were actually authored by Jacob and his successors."

Here it appears that the Tanners are trying to create problems that just aren't there. Whatever the order, Mormon states that Nephi's words are "many" while those of Jacob and his descendants are "small." This is a very accurate description of the record on the small plates; they obviously do contain many of Nephi's words in addition to a much smaller record of the prophets from Jacob down to Amaleki, who lived at the time of King Benjamin.57

Prophetic Knowledge of the Small Plates

The Tanners argue that Nephite prophets in Mosiah—Moroni seem to be unfamiliar with the small plates of Nephi. They further reason that the absence of such knowledge is clear evidence for

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57 Perhaps Mormon makes the distinction between the "words of Nephi" and those of "the prophets" because of Nephi's political role as king, while singling out Jacob and his descendants because of their religious role.
Tanner and Tanner, Answering Mormon Scholars (Roper) 187

their theory that the small plates were only an afterthought in the mind of Joseph Smith. "The obvious lack of citations to Nephi’s words in the last nine books of the Book of Mormon is certainly not consistent with what one would expect to find if the Book of Mormon were a true record." The Tanners believe that this is easily explained by their black hole theory: "Since the first 116 pages of Joseph Smith’s manuscript were either stolen or lost and Smith did not know exactly what material he would use to replace the missing section, he could not cite anything from Nephi as he wrote the last nine books of the Book of Mormon because there was nothing to quote" (p. 52). Unfortunately for the Tanners, however, there is persuasive evidence that some of the Nephite prophets were in fact familiar with information on the small plates of Nephi. 58 While I have not made an exhaustive search, examples are not difficult to find.

**Small Plates**

For there is nothing which is good save it comes from the Lord; and that which is evil cometh from the devil (Omni 1:25).

**Large Plates**

For I say unto you that whatsoever is good cometh from God, and whatsoever is evil cometh from the devil (Alma 5:40).

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58 Some have suggested that since Amaleki gave the small plates to King Benjamin shortly before his death, members of the Zeniffite colony would not have been familiar with them (John Gee, "Limhi at the Library," Journal of Book of Mormon Studies 1/1 [Fall 1992]: 64). This may not necessarily be so, however, since Amaleki’s brother was part of that colony (Omni 1:30) and may have carried knowledge of that record with him to the land of Nephi. Moreover, Benjamin’s statement that the prophecies of the Nephite fathers were well known to the people and had been taught to them (Mosiah 2:34) indicates to me that the small plates of Nephi may have been better known to the people than is generally thought.
Yea, even the very God of Israel do men trample under their feet; I say, trample under their feet but I would speak in other words—they set him at naught and hearken not to the voice of his counsels (1 Nephi 19:7).

It is better that one man should perish than that a nation should dwindle in unbelief (1 Nephi 4:13).

And being thus overcome with the Spirit, he was carried away in a vision, even that he saw the heavens open, and he thought he saw God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels in the attitude of singing and praising their God (1 Nephi 1:8).

And as I partook of the fruit thereof it filled my soul with exceedingly great joy; wherefore I began to be desirous that my family should partake of it also (1 Nephi 8:12).

Ye know that the Egyptians were drowned in the Red Sea, who were the armies of Pharaoh (1 Nephi 17:23–24, 27).

Can ye lay aside these things, and trample the Holy One under your feet (Alma 5:53).

It is better that thy soul should be lost than that thou shouldest be the means of bringing many souls down to destruction (Alma 30:47).

Yea, methought I saw, even as our father Lehi saw, God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels, in the attitude of singing and praising their God; yea, and my soul did long to be there (Alma 36:22).

I have labored without ceasing, that I might bring souls unto repentance; that I might bring them to taste of the exceeding joy of which I did taste (Alma 36:24).

For he has brought our fathers out of Egypt, and he has swallowed up the Egyptians in the Red Sea (Alma 36:28).
Ye know that [the children of Israel] were led forth by his matchless power into the land of promise (1 Nephi 17:42).

And he led them by his power into the Promised Land; yea and he has delivered them out of bondage and captivity from time to time (Alma 36:28).

Wherefore, the Lord hath commanded me to make these plates for a wise purpose in him, which purpose I know not (1 Nephi 9:5).

Keep all these things sacred which I have kept, even as I have kept them; for it is for a wise purpose that they are kept. . . . And now remember, my son, that God has entrusted you with these things, which are sacred, which he has kept sacred, and also which he will keep and preserve for a wise purpose in him. . . . For he promised unto [Alma's fathers] that he would preserve these things for a wise purpose in him (Alma 37:2, 14, 18).

Upon these plates . . . the things which were written should be kept . . . for other wise purposes, which purposes are known unto the Lord (1 Nephi 19:3).

And it came to pass that my father, Lehi, also found upon the plates of brass a genealogy of his fathers. . . . And thus my father Lehi did discover the genealogy of his fathers (1 Nephi 5:14, 16).

And these plates of brass, which contain these engravings . . . have the genealogy of our forefathers, even from the beginning (Alma 37:3).
And now when my father saw all these things, he was filled with the Spirit, and began to prophesy concerning his seed—That these plates of brass should go forth unto all nations kindreds, tongues and people who were of his seed" (1 Nephi 5:17–18).

Wherefore, he said that these plates of brass should never perish; neither should they be dimmed any more by time (1 Nephi 5:19).

And thus we see that by small means the Lord can bring about great things (1 Nephi 16:29).

For behold, ye yourselves know that he counseleth in wisdom, and in justice, and in great mercy, over all his works (Jacob 4:10).

For behold, he hath all power unto the fulfilling of all his words (1 Nephi 9:6).

Behold, it has been prophesied by our father, that they should be kept and handed down from one generation to another, and kept and preserved by the hand of the Lord until they shall go forth unto every nation, kindred, tongue and people, that they shall know the mysteries thereon (Alma 37:4).

And now behold, if they are kept they must retain their brightness; yea, and they will retain their brightness" (Alma 37:5).

Behold I say unto you, that by small and simple things are great things brought to pass; and small means in many instances doth confound the wise (Alma 37:7).

For he doth counsel in wisdom over all his works (Alma 37:12).

For God is powerful to the fulfilling of all his words (Alma 37:16).
The compass, which had been prepared of the Lord (1 Nephi 18:12).

The ball, or compass, which was prepared for my father by the hand of the Lord (2 Nephi 5:12).

And it came to pass that as my father arose in the morning, and went forth to the tent door, to his great astonishment he beheld upon the ground a round ball of curious workmanship; and it was of fine brass (1 Nephi 16:10).

And within the ball were two spindles; and the one pointed the way whither we should go in the wilderness (1 Nephi 16:10).

And it came to pass that I, Nephi, beheld the pointers which were in the ball, that they did work according to the faith and diligence and heed which we gave unto them (1 Nephi 16:28).

And thus we see that by small means the Lord can bring about great things (1 Nephi 16:29).

And now, my son, I have somewhat to say concerning the thing which our fathers call a ball, or director—or our fathers called it Liahona, which is, being interpreted, a compass; and the Lord prepared it (Alma 37:38).

And behold, there cannot any man work after the manner of so curious a workmanship (Alma 37:39).

And behold, it was prepared to show unto our fathers the course which they should travel in the wilderness (Alma 37:39).

And it did work for them according to their faith in God; therefore, if they had faith to believe that God could cause that those spindles should point the way they should go, behold, it was done (Alma 37:40).

And it did show unto them marvelous works (Alma 37:41).

Nevertheless, because those miracles were worked by small means
And it came to pass that after they had bound me insomuch that I could not move, the compass, which had been prepared of the Lord, did cease to work. . . . and we were driven back upon the waters (1 Nephi 18:12–13).

And it came to pass after they had loosed me, behold, I took the compass, and it did work whither I desired it. . . . And it came to pass that I, Nephi, did guide the ship, that we sailed towards the promised land. And it came to pass that after we had sailed for the space of many days we did arrive at the promised land (1 Nephi 18:21–23).

Wherefore, the ends of the law which the Holy One hath given, unto the inflicting of the punishment which is affixed, which punishment that is affixed is in opposition to that of the happiness which is affixed, to answer the ends of the atonement (2 Nephi 2:10).

They were slothful, and forgot to exercise their faith and diligence and then those marvelous works ceased, and they did not progress in their journey (Alma 37:41).

For behold, it is as easy to give heed to the word of Christ, which will point to you a straight course to eternal bliss, as it was for our fathers to give heed to this compass, which would point unto them a straight course to the promised land (Alma 37:44).

Now repentance could not come unto men except there were a punishment, which also was eternal as the life of the soul should be, affixed opposite to the plan of happiness, which was as eternal also as the life of the soul (Alma 42:16).
And they perish because they cast out the prophets, and the saints, and stone them, and slay them; wherefore the cry of the blood of the saints shall ascend up to God from the ground against them (2 Nephi 26:3).

And behold, that great city Moronihah have I covered with earth, and to inhabitants thereof . . . that the blood of the prophets and the saints shall not come any more unto me against them (3 Nephi 9:5; The same announcement is made regarding numerous other cities 3 Nephi 9:7–9, 11).

But behold, the righteous that hearken unto the words of the prophets, and destroy them not . . . behold, they are they which shall not perish (2 Nephi 26:8).

And it was the more righteous part of the people who were saved, and it was they who received the prophets and stoned them not; and it was they who had not shed the blood of the saints, who were spared (3 Nephi 10:12).

And by the opening of the earth (1 Nephi 19:11).

And by the opening of the earth to receive them (3 Nephi 10:14).

And they that kill the prophets, and the saints, the depths of the earth shall swallow them up, saith the Lord of Hosts (2 Nephi 26:5).

[The righteous] were not . . . buried in the earth (3 Nephi 10:13).

And by mountains which shall be carried up (1 Nephi 19:11).

And the earth was carried up upon the city of Moronihah, that in the place of the city there became a great mountain (3 Nephi 8:10; Some sites are made into "hills" 3 Nephi 9:8).
I saw the vapor of darkness (1 Nephi 12:5).

And it came to pass that there was thick darkness upon all the face of the land, insomuch that the inhabitants thereof who had not fallen could feel the vapor of darkness (3 Nephi 8:20).

By smoke and vapor of darkness (1 Nephi 19:11).

[The wicked were] overpowered by the vapor of smoke and of darkness (3 Nephi 10:13; see verse 14 for "smoke").

I heard . . . all manner of tumultuous noises (1 Nephi 12:4).

All the tumultuous noises did pass away (3 Nephi 10:9).

because of the groanings of the earth (1 Nephi 19:12).

And the dreadful groanings did cease (3 Nephi 10:9).

I saw many cities that they were sunk (1 Nephi 12:4).

And many great and notable cities were sunk (3 Nephi 8:14; see 9:4,8).

I saw many [cities] that they were burned with fire (1 Nephi 12:4).

Behold, that great city Zarahemla have I burned with fire and the inhabitants thereof (3 Nephi 9:3).

And behold, that great city Jacobugath . . . have I caused to be burned with fire. . . . And the city of Laman, and the city of Josh, and the city of Gad, and the city of Kishkumen, have I caused to be burned with fire (3 Nephi 9:9–10).
And it came to pass that I saw a mist of darkness upon the face of the land of promise (1 Nephi 12:4).

And I saw many cities... that did tumble to the earth, because of the quaking thereof (1 Nephi 12:4).

And they that kill the prophets, and the saints... buildings shall fall upon them and crush them to pieces and grind them to powder (2 Nephi 26:5).

So great were the mists of darkness which were upon the face of the land (3 Nephi 8:22).

And many great and notable cities... were shaken till the buildings thereof had fallen to the earth, and the inhabitants thereof were slain (3 Nephi 8:14).

The Tanners may now argue that Joseph Smith, while dictating to his scribe, day after day without hesitation, without books, manuscript or notes of any kind, was somehow able to keep track of all these passages in his mind. I would suggest that such a position would require a great deal more faith than my own.60

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60 The Tanners seem to be aware of the difficulty posed by such a scenario: "It is possible, of course, that Joseph Smith could have made up some material while he was working on the last nine books and attributed it to Nephi in those books, but if he did this, he would have to remember to add that material to the..."
The Nature of the Small Plates

Pages 71–90 of the Tanners' work provide both a restatement of their earlier arguments regarding the lack of details on the small plates and a partial rebuttal to the comments of several reviewers who have criticized their theory. The authors insist, contrary to the position of these reviewers, that the small plates should contain a great deal of historical information on dates, names of kings, geography, wars, etc., which is not there. According to the Tanners, comparisons noted by the reviewers between the small plates and portions of the Old Testament which have likely been abridged are invalid because, "the material that comes from these plates [the small plates] has not been abridged. It in fact purports to be a first-hand account written by people who were present as Nephite history unfolded. . . . A condensed account can hardly be compared with one written by nine contemporary eyewitnesses" (p. 75). Speaking of the lack of geographical details on the small plates: "We certainly felt that a first-hand account should be more precise with regard to geography and dating" (p. 82). Such statements show that the Tanners have built much of their case for their black hole theory upon the erroneous assumption that, because the men who wrote on the small plates personally witnessed Nephite history and their account is a "first-hand" account, the small plates cannot be an abridgment and should then contain more historical details. Reading such statements, I honestly can't help but wonder if the Tanners understand what an abridgment is, since an "account," even a "first-hand account," can be short or long, abridged or unabridged, and a witness can give a full account or a summary depending upon the circumstances.

Although not abridged by Mormon, the small plates are quite clearly an abridgment of early Nephite history, teachings, and prophecies. This can be demonstrated on several grounds. First we know that in the first portion of Nephi’s record, he abridged the record of his father Lehi. Material not recorded in full included

first two books of Nephi when he began working on the first part of the Book of Mormon. It would, of course, be very easy to forget to include this material when it came time to rewrite the two books of Nephi" (p. 52, emphasis added).
the genealogy of Lehi's fathers, which he discovered on the brass plates (1 Nephi 6:1–2; 19:2); the full account of his family's journeyings in the wilderness, or as Nephi puts it, "the more part of our proceedings in the wilderness" (1 Nephi 19:2); the chastening words which the Lord spake to Lehi (1 Nephi 16:24–26); the words frequently found upon the ball (1 Nephi 16:25–27); and many other promises of the Lord (1 Nephi 15:11; 17:12–14). In addition to historical matters, Lehi's record probably also included a full account of his prophecies and teachings, of which Nephi gives only a summary, such as his prophecies and teachings, to the Jews at Jerusalem (1 Nephi 1:18–20); his prophecies regarding the brass plates and his seed, which Nephi said were "many" (1 Nephi 5:17–19); his exhortations to Laman and Lemuel following his tree of life vision and other teachings given in the valley of Lemuel (1 Nephi 8:37–38; 9:1); his teachings and prophecies regarding the coming of the Messiah, his forerunner, and the scattering and redemption of the Jews (1 Nephi 10:1–16; 15:1); his teachings regarding the Lord's mercies upon the waters (2 Nephi 1:1–3); his commandments regarding plural marriage and chastity (Jacob 2:25–34); and many things which he taught Laman and Lemuel before his death (2 Nephi 4:14). In addition to historical information and doctrinal teachings and prophecies, Lehi's record also would have included many of his visions and dreams, such as the full accounts of his first vision of a pillar of fire (1 Nephi 1:6), his second vision regarding God's judgments upon Jerusalem (1 Nephi 1:13; 2 Nephi 1:4), the coming of the Messiah and the redemption of the world (1 Nephi 1:14–15, 19), a full account of his vision of the tree of life (1 Nephi 8:29–36), and many other visions and dreams that he revealed to his children (1 Nephi 1:16–17).

Not only are First and Second Nephi a partial abridgment of Lehi's record, but Nephi's account is also an abridgment of his own history, teachings, and prophecies. These abridged materials included Nephi's teachings regarding the restoration of the Jews in the latter days (1 Nephi 15:19–20), his exhortations to his rebellious family in the wilderness (1 Nephi 16:24–26), a full account of his words to his rebellious brethren at Bountiful (1 Nephi 17:52), the Lord's instructions regarding the construction of the Lehiite vessel (1 Nephi 17:7–9; 18:1–4), the words of the
angel regarding the 600-year prophecy of Christ’s coming (1 Nephi 19:8), his teachings from the brass plates and the books of Moses (1 Nephi 19:21–23), his words to his rebellious brethren following the death of Lehi (2 Nephi 4:14), the words his brothers murmured against him after Lehi’s death (2 Nephi 5:4), many of his prophecies (1 Nephi 19:1), a revelation from the Lord regarding the Lamanites (2 Nephi 5:20–25), Nephi’s commentaries and teachings to his children regarding how the judgments of God that came upon the Jews were a fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecies (2 Nephi 25:6), other details regarding Nephi’s vision that he was not forbidden to speak of or write (1 Nephi 14:24–30; 31:1–12, 14–15), and many other things taught among the Nephites (1 Nephi 33:1).

Third, like Nephi, Jacob and his descendants touch only lightly upon Nephite history, which was included on the large plates and contained the record of Lehi (1 Nephi 19:1); genealogical matters (1 Nephi 6:1–2; 19:2); the full account of Nephite history (1 Nephi 9:2; 2 Nephi 4:13–14; 5:33; Jacob 1:3; 3:13; Omni 1:11), including the reign of kings (1 Nephi 9:4; Jacob 3:13; Jarom 1:13–14; Omni 1:11); and their wars, contentions, and destructions (1 Nephi 9:2; 19:4; Jacob 3:13; Jarom 1:13–14). Although we frequently refer to the large plates as containing secular matters, it is apparent that they also contained more spiritual matters as well. Thus they included many prophecies and teachings of Lehi and Nephi mentioned above, and also a more detailed account of those of Jacob and others as well, which the small plates only touch upon briefly. These included, among other things, many of the words of Jacob to the people of Nephi (2 Nephi 6:1–3; 11:1; 31:1–2); the details of Jacob’s own vision (2 Nephi 6:8–11; 10:3); other words of Jacob against unchastity and other sins (Jacob 3:12); teachings of Nephite prophets, teachers, and priests during the time of Enos, Jarom, and others (Enos 1:22–23, 26; Jarom 1:4, 10–12); an account of the destruction of the more wicked part of the Nephites during Amaron’s time (Omni 1:5–7), the prophecies and teachings of Mosiah as he traveled with his people into the wilderness (Omni 1:12–13); the genealogy of Zarahemla (Omni 1:18); and the words on the Jaredite stone (Omni 1:20–22). Thus the small plates, from beginning to end, were quite clearly an
abridgment, not only of historical matters, but of spiritual matters as well.

**Nephi's Theme**

Finally, the small plates are not simply any kind of abridgment, but one with a very focused purpose. Near the beginning of his record Nephi states,

And now I, Nephi, do not give the genealogy of my fathers in this part of my record; neither at any time shall I give it after upon these plates which I am writing; for it is given in the record which has been kept by my father; wherefore, I do not write it in this work. For it sufficeth me to say that we are descendants of Joseph. And it mattereth not to me that I am particular to give a full account of all the things of my father, for they cannot be written upon these plates, for I desire the room that I may write the things of God. *For the fulness of mine intent is that I may persuade men to come unto the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob and be saved.* Wherefore, the things which are pleasing unto the world I do not write, but the things which are pleasing unto God and unto those who are not of the world. Wherefore, I shall give *commandment* unto my seed, that they shall not occupy these plates with things which are not of worth unto the children of men. (1 Nephi 6:1–6)

I find it significant that the writers on the small plates are consistent in sticking to Nephi's theme. Although Nephi does provide some historical background on the small plates,61 this is largely to provide a context for his own prophecies and teachings regarding Christ. Yet even these historical sections often have profound doctrinal overtones relating to salvation and the gospel of Jesus Christ.62 Jacob states that before Nephi died he “gave me,
Jacob, *commandment* concerning the small plates, upon which these things are engraved." Jacob was commanded

that I should write upon these plates a few of the things which I considered most precious; that I should not touch, save it were lightly, concerning the history of this people which are called the people of Nephi. For he said that the history of his people should be engraved upon his other plates, and that I should preserve these plates and hand them down unto my seed, from generation to generation. And if there were *preaching* which was sacred, or *revelation* which was great, or *prophesying*, that I should engraven the heads of them upon these plates, and touch upon them as much as it were possible, for Christ's sake, and for the sake of our people. (Jacob 1:1–4)

Nephi's whole purpose in making the small plates was to persuade men and women to come unto Christ. Jacob and his descendants were specifically commanded by Nephi "not to touch, save it were lightly, concerning the history of this people," the reign of kings, etc. They were commanded to be selective and to choose from among those teachings, revelations, and prophecies that they considered sacred, great, or precious those that would be most appropriate to Nephi's theme of persuading men and women to come unto Christ and be saved. This is exactly what Jacob and his descendants do. Jacob makes a few brief historical comments (Jacob 1) and then discusses his teachings against pride and unchastity (Jacob 2–3); then he makes a few prophetic comments regarding Christ and his rejection by the Jews and cites Zenos's allegory of the olive tree (Jacob 5:1–77), in addition to some further comments of his own (Jacob 6:1–13), to show how the Jews "after having rejected the sure foundation [Christ] can ever build upon it" (Jacob 4:17). Finally, he provides an account of his encounter with the anti-Christ Sherem, who attacked the prophecies about Christ.

Enos gives an account of how he received a remission of his sins through the atonement of Christ and how that experience affected his life thereafter (Enos 1:1–27). Jarom, clearly aware of Nephi's commandment to his grandfather to choose prophecies and revelations that were precious, states that he “shall not write the things of my prophesying, nor of my revelations. For what could I write more than my fathers have written? For have not they revealed the plan of salvation? I say unto you, Yea; and this sufficeth me” (Jarom 1:2). He then shows how the Lord blessed and prospered the Nephites in fulfillment of the prophecies of their fathers that if they would keep the commandments of God they would prosper in the land (Jarom 1:3–10). Omni does not write much, stating that he considered himself a “wicked man” who presumably did not have many revelations (Omni 1:1–3), but his son Amaron tells how the more wicked part of the Nephites were destroyed in fulfillment of the prophecy that if they would not keep the commandments of God they would not prosper (Omni 1:4–8). While Chemish only makes a brief comment on how the record was passed down, his son Abinadom makes a brief historical comment (Omni 1:10) and then states “I know of no revelation save that which has been written, neither prophecy; wherefore, that which is sufficient is written” (Omni 1:11). This is again suggestive of Nephi’s commandments to Jacob and his seed to be selective regarding the revelations or prophecies they would include on their record. This verse probably does not suggest, as I once thought, that Abinadom did not have revelations or did not prophesy, but rather that he did not consider it necessary to include any of those on the small plates. Finally, Amaleki provides some necessary historical information regarding Mosiah1 and his exodus from the land of Nephi and his ascension to the throne in Zarahemla, but he also provides a few comments regarding Christ, inviting all men to “come unto God, the Holy One of Israel,” and to believe in revelations, prophecies, and other spiritual gifts and to seek after things that are good. “And now, my beloved brethren, I would that ye should come unto Christ, who is the Holy One of Israel, and partake of his salvation, and the power of his redemption. Yea, come unto him, and offer your whole souls as an offering unto him, and continue in fasting and prayer, and endure to the end;
and as the Lord liveth ye will be saved” (Omni 1:25–26). These are certainly appropriate words for one who is the last writer on a record dedicated to persuading people to come unto Christ, the God of Israel. In short, the writers on the small plates from Nephi to Amaleki are both consistent in what they write and obedient to Nephi’s commands given at the beginning of the record.

Here we should also note that the small plates were made for other purposes than just replacing the lost 116 pages. They in fact served at least two purposes and not just one. Nephi said that they (1) were to be “kept for the instruction of my people, who should possess the land,” and also (2) “for other wise purposes, which purposes are known unto the Lord” (1 Nephi 19:3). Thus, the small plates had already served an important purpose for the Nephite people, long before Mormon placed them in his own account.

Black Holes and Other Singularities

In 1974 physicist Stephen Hawking surprised his colleagues by suggesting that, contrary to popular understanding, black holes actually emit particles of radiation and must, therefore, eventually evaporate. According to Hawking, this implies that “gravitational collapse is not as final and irreversible as we once thought.”

Regarding this theory, William J. Kaufmann explains, “As material pours out of a primordial hole, new information is being introduced into the universe. In principle, the matter erupting from one of these holes carries color, texture, chemical composition—all fresh, new data that never before existed in the universe. A primordial (black/white) hole is therefore an ‘information source.’”

Since its publication in 1830, one could say that the Book of Mormon has been the focus of a great deal of “negative energy.” I have always found it somewhat remarkable that Book of Mormon criticisms through the years have inadvertently had the tendency to bring the Latter-day Saints to a deeper understanding.

and appreciation for that book by highlighting significant elements that might otherwise have been ignored.

What the Tanners have characterized in the small plates as a mundane conglomeration of odds and ends strikes me as an extremely sophisticated text, with many significant historical, literary, doctrinal and spiritual insights, which are both relevant and profound—rays of light, as it were, out of what the Tanners ironically call a “black hole.” As the criticisms of the doubters and disaffected continue to shrink and evaporate, those who accept the Book of Mormon for what it claims to be can look forward to the not-too-distant information explosion, in which all that was once lost will be restored (2 Nephi 27:11; 29:13–14; 30:16–18; 3 Nephi 26:6–11; Ether 4:13–19; D&C 121:33). In the meantime, as Hugh Nibley reminds us, “There is no point at all to the question: Who wrote the Book of Mormon? It would have been quite as impossible for the most learned man alive in 1830 to have written the book as it was for Joseph Smith. And whoever would account for the Book of Mormon by any theory suggested so far—save one—must completely rule out the first forty pages.”

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Reviewed by John A. Tvedtnes

Jerald and Sandra Tanner seem to have gotten what they want at last—a debate. For thirty-four years, they complain, the LDS Church never rebutted their work and failed to “refute our allegations” (p. 1). This “conspiracy of silence,” they believe, was broken when several LDS scholars undertook to write reviews of their book, *Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon.* Evidently gearing up for a response to the reviews of their second book, the new volume has been labeled “Volume 1.”

The Tanners’ complaint that the LDS Church and LDS scholars ignored them for so many years struck me as strange. It’s like saying, “We shot cannon at their wall and failed to dent it, but the damned fools don’t have enough sense to shoot back!”

Why is it so important to the Tanners that “Mormon apologists” respond to their writings? Does it give them a sense of legitimacy? of scholarship? of importance? They claim that their work is “having a significant impact upon some Mormon scholars” (p. 1). Who are these scholars? They also complain that Daniel Peterson “was very careful not to mention the fact that our work has had a significant effect upon thousands of members of the church” (p. 2). Perhaps Dan doesn’t know any of these people. I have yet to meet anyone—scholar or no—who has claimed that the Tanners’ work influenced his or her thinking.

Editor’s note: a longer, more complete version of this review can be obtained from the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1-800-327-6715.
Unlike the Tanners, I don’t have the luxury of spending most of my waking hours researching the subjects into which they delve. I have a job to hold down, a family to support, and I have never been paid for any of my reviews of anti-Mormon literature. There are some professional anti-LDS critics, but no professional apologists; all of the apologists earn their living doing other things.¹

For the record, the decision to write a review of the Tanners’ Answering Mormon Scholars was my own. That decision was made because it became clear that the Tanners have misunderstood, misinterpreted, or misrepresented some of what I wrote in my review of their Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon. The majority of my comments in this present review will deal directly with what they have said about my earlier review. For the most part, I shall let the other reviewers deal with what has been said about their work. In some cases, however, I shall add insights that might otherwise be missed and comment on the Tanners’ methodology.

The “Conspiracy of Silence”

All of the statements regarding the Church’s wish to ignore them are hearsay only. For my part, I can categorically state that, contrary to the Tanners’ assertions regarding the LDS Church’s actions in regard to them (p. 1), no church leaders have ever encouraged or discouraged me to respond to the Tanners.

According to the Tanners, the LDS Church has conducted a “conspiracy of silence” to ignore their work (p. 1). To me, declining to take the Tanners seriously is not evidence of a “conspiracy.” But in the world of anti-Mormon publishing,

¹ Matt Poulsen has been complaining that, despite the passage of a long period of time, I have not responded to his response to my response to some of his anti-Mormon writings. What he fails to tell people is that he took nearly two years to write his response. My failure to spend more time debating with Poulsen can be attributed to my 40-hour-per-week work schedule and the fact that I have been trying to complete a book and a number of articles. Poulsen is not my top priority, especially when I have no forum in which to publish a reply (F.A.R.M.S. does not publish reviews of privately-circulated correspondence, only of published books).
words like *conspiracy* add to the sensationalism that sells books.\(^2\) And that is, after all, how the Tanners make their living.

When Latter-day Saints ignore their work, the Tanners believe that we are participating in a “conspiracy of silence.” When we review their work, it shows that we are “concerned.” Either way, the Tanners conclude that the Mormons have something to fear. We’re damned if we do and damned if we don’t. But I don’t think they’re really interested in a dialogue. I believe that nothing short of total capitulation to the Tanners’ view of things would really satisfy them.

The Tanners claim that their book *Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon* “certainly agitated some of the scholars at the Mormon Church’s Brigham Young University and the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies” (p. 1). I cannot speak for others, but I, for one, was not agitated. I was asked to review the book and did so. Moreover, I was never party to a “plan . . . to have a number of scholars simultaneously tear into our work” (p. 2). I had no idea that others had reviewed or would review the book and no one at F.A.R.M.S. knew what I would write. In fact, until I was asked to review the book, I hadn’t even heard of it. I hadn’t followed the Tanners’ work for about two decades.\(^3\)

On another occasion, I was agitated by a booklet written by Brenton Yorgason, *Little Known Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, which, unlike the Tanners’ work, was supportive of the Book of Mormon. What bothered me about the work was that it

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\(^2\) Joseph McCarthy built his political career using terms like *conspiracy*. The Tanners have built their publishing career using a similar list. Some of their published materials give one the impression that they believe that all Mormons (or at least all General Authorities) are involved in a gigantic conspiracy.

\(^3\) Though I have appreciated the fact that the Tanners have reprinted old LDS materials (hence the original name of their publishing concern, Modern Microfilm), I have often found it difficult to take their own works seriously. Several years ago, I noted an article in the Salt Lake *Tribune* announcing that Sandra Tanner would give a class for non-Mormons to help them understand their Mormon neighbors. The article indicated that Sandra was an expert on the Mormons. I had a good laugh and felt sorry for the class attendees, who would not learn anything about their neighbors, but only about Mormon beliefs with which the Tanners disagreed. I wrote a letter to the editor, questioning Sandra Tanner’s motives and her “expertise” on the Mormons, but the *Tribune* declined to publish it.
really contained no valid evidence whatsoever for the Book of Mormon, and I so stated in my review. Though not asked by F.A.R.M.S. to review that work, I sent a review anyway because of my deep concern for its complete lack of scholarship. So I wasn’t just picking on the Tanners. If anything, I was picking on Yorgason’s pro-Book of Mormon work. Surely this says something about the fairness with which I approached the subjects and is evidence that I am not a rabid apologist, willing to accept anything favoring the Book of Mormon and reject anything opposing it.

The Tanners seem to believe that F.A.R.M.S. is out to get them because it published negative reviews of their book. But even some of the books published by F.A.R.M.S. have gotten negative reviews in the F.A.R.M.S. Review of Books on the Book of Mormon, including some in the same issue (volume 3) in which the Tanners’ book was reviewed. This included one of my articles, a book written by John W. Welch, founder of F.A.R.M.S., and an article by Hugh Nibley. On another occasion, some negative comments were made about an article by Noel B. Reynolds, F.A.R.M.S. president (volume 4). The Tanners draw attention to some of these reviews (pp. 123–24, 145), but don’t note the implications. Surely they indicate a measure of fairness in the way books are reviewed by F.A.R.M.S.

The Tanners’ claim that the LDS Church has conducted a “conspiracy of silence” to ignore their work. This is what I call a “Brodieism,” from the remarkable ability of Fawn Brodie to read the minds of long-deceased historical personages such as Joseph Smith and Thomas Jefferson. Rather than use terms such as “we believe” or “we suggest,” the Tanners often make statements of absolute fact about what others are thinking. Thus, to the Tanners, it seems, anyone who disagrees with them must be “upset.” “Mormon scholars were very upset with us” (p. 3). In their Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon, they try the same mind reading technique on Joseph Smith, saying that “he must have become very tired, discouraged and concerned that he

could not adequately reconstruct the story found in the missing 116 pages” (p. 42).

**An Assessment of Joseph Smith**

In their *Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon*, the Tanners actually introduce two theories. But the “black hole” theory and the “Bible plagiarism” theory are at odds one with the other. The latter assumes that Joseph Smith’s fantastic memory enabled him to recall biblical expressions and incorporate them wholesale into the Book of Mormon. The former has Joseph Smith “forgetting” what he had written on the 116 lost pages and having to avoid discussing the same topics, lest he contradict what he had dictated earlier. We are left to wonder if the Tanners consider Joseph Smith to be a brilliant charlatan with a near-photographic memory or a dimwitted fool who believed he could foist his inconsistent story on a gullible public.

The Tanners also seem to vacillate between allowing Joseph Smith to borrow from his earlier dictation when it serves their purpose, while denying him the ability to remember what he had already dictated when *that* fits their argument. For example, they have him borrowing from Alma 36:22 in 1 Nephi 1:8 and 1

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5 On this issue, too, the Tanners unwittingly contradict themselves. On the one hand, they have Joseph Smith recalling vast numbers of phrases from the Bible (see pp. 101–17 in the current work and part 2 of *Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon*). On the other, they write that the lack of accurate information on Old Testament sacrifices in the Book of Mormon indicates that Joseph Smith, whom they see as its author, had no “real understanding of Old Testament sacrifices and other Jewish customs” (pp. 99–100). How could he know the Bible so well and yet not know as much as the Tanners about these subjects? I shall return to a discussion of sacrifices and Jewish festivals later in this review.

6 There are, in fact, a number of examples of promises in the Book of Mormon to return to a topic which were fulfilled. If Joseph Smith authored the book, then he had to remember these promises and fill in the details in subsequent passages. The Book of Mormon attributes them to Mormon. See the discussion in my “Mormon’s Editorial Promises,” in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book & F.A.R.M.S., 1991), 29 n. 31.
Nephi 8:4 (pp. 50–51). On the other hand, they maintain that Joseph “could not remember exactly what he had written in the last nine books of the Book of Mormon” (p. 53). Consequently, when he dictated Lehi’s 600-year prophecy in 1 Nephi 10:4, he “seemed totally oblivious to the fact that he had already recorded a prophecy by Samuel the Lamanite regarding the birth of Christ” (p. 53). To believe that Joseph Smith could remember words from an earlier part of his dictation (Alma 36:22) but could not remember one of the most outstanding prophecies in the Book of Mormon that was dictated later (Helaman 14) stretches the imagination beyond reasonable bounds. Besides, the Tanners seem to want it both ways, for they appear to agree with Brent Lee Metcalfe that Joseph Smith borrowed the 600 years from 3 Nephi 1:1 to write the prophecy in 1 Nephi 10:4 (p. 54).

The Hofmann Affair

The Tanners hyperbolically declare that “all of the Mormon Church’s top scholars accepted the authenticity of the Hofmann documents” (p. 17), despite the fact that they cite a Los Angeles Times article that “some Mormons” claimed that the “salamander letter” was a forgery (p. 23). I accepted the Lucy Mack Smith letter and the Anthon transcript as authentic, based on the judgment of others, but I had my doubts about other

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7 The Tanners hint that the words “methought I saw... God sitting upon his throne” in Alma 36:22 were taken by Joseph Smith from a sermon of George Whitefield, published in 1808, in which he declared, “Me thinks I see... the Judge sitting on his throne” (p. 50). If Joseph Smith borrowed from Whitefield or other writers of his time or earlier, he must have had either a fantastic memory or kept the books at his side while dictating the Book of Mormon. I repeat the question that I asked in my review of Brent Metcalfe, ed., New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: “How large was the Smith Farm Library, anyway?!

8 But the Tanners note that Joseph Smith was so “repetitious in his writings” in the Book of Mormon that “if Joseph Smith were the author of the book, as we maintain, one would expect to find similar phrases or sentences in both the first and last parts of the Book of Mormon” (p. 52). This blanket statement, with only one example (the final battles of the Jaredeites and the Nephitess), may be intended to explain instances where early and later passages of the Book of Mormon are in harmony.

9 See Brent Lee Metcalfe, New Approaches to the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993), 416–17.
documents, such as the “salamander” letter and the Joseph Smith III blessing. My doubts were not based on the controversial nature of these documents, but on the timing of their appearance. I was unaware that a single person—Mark Hofmann—was the source of all of the documents. Historians sometimes become a little suspicious when two or more letters of different provenance suddenly appear on the scene supporting a new version of an historical event. A second consideration was the very fact that the documents had been preserved. What were the chances, for example, that a letter written by an obscure backwoods New York farmer would have been kept for a century and a half? Had I known, I would perhaps have been suspicious of the others as well.

The Tanners ask why “the Mormon leaders,” as prophets, did not detect the fraud perpetrated on the Church by Mark Hofmann (p. 19). The answer lies in Joseph Smith’s declaration that “a prophet was a prophet only when acting as such.” I presume that President Hinckley need not have been exercising prophetic gifts when he made business purchases for the Church. Moreover, we have, in the Bible, examples of prophets who believed lies (Joshua 9:3–27; 1 Kings 13:14–19). As human beings, even prophets can make mistakes, though when they act as prophet and president we should accept their word and live accordingly.

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10 I do agree with the Tanners’ assessment (pp. 41–43) of how some scholars dealt with the “salamander” issue. To me, the letter was a possible forgery, but even if authentic it was only secondary evidence for what Joseph Smith had said. To me, the most important fact was that Martin Harris and William W. Phelps had joined the Church despite the contents of the letter and that they never challenged the angel Moroni story told by Joseph Smith. Besides, other early sources spoke of an angel, while only anti-Mormon sources had published the story of a toad, from which, as it turns out, Hofmann got the idea of a salamander.

11 The Tanners’ expectation “that the president of the Mormon Church,” as a seer, should be able to “translate all records that are of ancient date” (quoting Mosiah 8:13) is unrealistic, since the Book of Mormon passage has reference to one possessing the Urim and Thummim. As far as I know, these instruments were not returned to the Church after Joseph Smith gave them back to the angel Moroni. (HC 5:265).

12 It may even go beyond this. I know of at least three cases in which a man guilty of serious sin would not have been caught had he not been called to a position in the Church. In each case, the sin would not have been discovered had the call not been made. I believe that the Lord sometimes uses this to make such
In their discussion of the Hofmann affair, the Tanners repeat what they have long asserted—that the LDS Church is “suppressing” documents it does not want made public by placing them in the First Presidency's vault (p. 24). But placing an historical document in a safe place hardly implies suppression. Burning the document would be a safer way of getting rid of negative evidence. Placing it in a vault only preserves it for future use. We have the example of the Joseph Smith papyri, which lay for decades in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, only to be brought to the Church's attention by a professor doing research there. Yet no one has accused the Metropolitan of “suppressing” these documents! They were their guardian, just as the Church is the guardian of many documents. Recent history has shown us how people like the Tanners misuse such documents—sometimes literally publishing what does not belong to them—to promote their own ends. Consequently, one is not surprised when the Tanners, unable to obtain documents they want, accuse the Church of suppression.

I find it ironic that the Tanners, after condemning Dan Peterson's passing reference (in a footnote!) to Mark Hofmann's opinion of Brent Metcalfe (pp. 17, 21), go on to cite Hofmann's confession to prove that President Hinckley was trying to hide the truth by keeping supposedly dangerous documents out of the hands of the Church's enemies (pp. 29–30). It seems that, to the Tanners, it is all right to use Hofmann's statements as evidence only when it supports their view of the world. Strangely, the minutes the Tanners quote from a meeting of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve (p. 31), rather than suggesting a cover-up, indicate that the Church was going to publicly announce the acquisition; clearly, this does not support Hofmann's story.

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discoveries known to Church leaders. He may have used the same tactic to trap Mark Hofmann. I realize that the Tanners will see this as a "cop out" and that it will not sit well with many people in the Church. Some may object that the Lord would not have let it get to the point of murder. In response, I suggest reading Alma 14:8–11.
Issues or People?

The Tanners complain that, “instead of just dealing with the issues, Mormon critics have spent part of their energy trying to impugn our motives and belittle our research” (p. 64). This is a kettle/pot issue since, in their long history of writing anti-Mormon literature, the Tanners have typically sought to impugn the motives of those with whom they disagree and have attempted to belittle their research. Motives are important, but I agree that issues are more important.\textsuperscript{13} I can honestly say that I have tried hard to deal mostly with issues. In my review of their Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon, I gave the Tanners a fair amount of credit for their work, while disagreeing with many of their conclusions.\textsuperscript{14} In this current review, I shall also give them credit where it is due, while showing why I disagree with much of what they have written.

“Proof”

In their publications, the Tanners frequently cite opinions and documents as “proof” for the ideas they present. They are not proof, but evidence, to be considered and weighed in connection with other pieces of evidence. Historiography, like criminology, is

\textsuperscript{13} The Tanners complain (pp. 6–7) that four of the reviewers in vol. 6 no. 1 of RBBM attack Brent Metcalfe’s academic qualifications. The implication is that, when LDS apologists turn to such tactics, they must not have anything valid to say about the issues themselves. But what about the ten other reviewers who apparently did not discuss Metcalfe’s lack of academic credentials? I, for example, addressed issues, not personalities.

\textsuperscript{14} I also agree with a few of the issues they have presented in their recent book, such as their discussion of whether the Nephites are “Jewish” (pp. 92–94). Latter-day Saints often go overboard in trying to distinguish between Jews and other Israelites. While there was usually a differentiation anciently, most people today consider the terms Jew and Israelite to be synonymous. Once, when a group of our BYU students went to visit Israel’s chief rabbi in Israel, one of them tried to explain that while Jews were descendants of Judah, Mormons were descendants of Joseph. Rabbi Goren interrupted to say that he, at least, was not a descendant of Judah, but of Joseph. While most Jews do not know their tribal affiliation, it is clear that they include representatives of all or most of the tribes of Israel. Jewish descendants of Levi and Joseph frequently have family traditions tying them to those tribes.
the process whereby all pieces of evidence are examined and a determination of probability is made. It is a lesson that both LDS and non-LDS researchers must learn.

A case in point is the Tanners’ declaration, cited from page 23 of Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon, that “all the evidence points to the fact that Joseph Smith had to be extremely evasive with regard to the war material he had originally prepared in the 116 pages because he could not accurately reproduce it again” (p. 88). “All the evidence” is rather hyperbolic, especially since the evidence of the text itself is that the small plates were not to be used for recording history. The Tanners may choose to reject this latter evidence, but it would nevertheless be more accurate for them to write something like “some evidence leads us to believe” or “based on our examination of the evidence, we conclude.” Their a priori assumption that Joseph Smith was a charlatan determines what they consider “evidence.” To be sure, the same could be said of those who accept Joseph Smith as a prophet and consider only his explanation as valid. For my part, I can say that, having examined the evidence for the Tanners’ theory and for Joseph Smith’s declarations, I find the former unconvincing and the latter reasonable if one admits the possibility of divine revelation. Removing the divine aspects from Joseph Smith’s story would make the Book of Mormon untrue, but would not validate the “black hole” theory.

The Book of Abraham

The Tanners devote six pages of their new book to an appendix entitled “Tvedtnes’ Attempt to Save the Book of Abraham.” Since the book purports to be a response to critics of their “black hole” theory, the appendix seems rather out of place. I can only conclude that it has been included to cast doubts on my abilities as a scholar. I suppose I could simply respond by pointing out that, at the time Richley Crapo and I published our first articles on the subject, I was still an undergraduate student.

15 We shall see other examples of their hyperbole when we discuss their views about the Dead Sea Scrolls as evidence against the Book of Mormon, later in this article.
Since that time, I have earned four degrees and a modest reputation, for which, however, I do not claim infallibility.

Nevertheless, the Tanners have erred in their assessment of my work on the Book of Abraham. It is clear from his statements that Professor Baer did not understand that we were postulating a preexistent Abrahamic text to which a mnemonic key was later added. Otherwise, he could not have said what he did about the insignificance of the word the or this. Baer made some minor points with which I agree and that I hope to reexamine when time permits. Despite these, the theory is, as Richley and I pointed out, a working theory designed to explain how the Book of Abraham may have come about.

Richley’s comments about the study of how students divided the Egyptian words on the small Sensen papyrus do not affect the theory. I did not see that part of the study. The portion of the study that fell into my hands was different in nature and showed that the students in two groups (a test group and a control group) did not reproduce Joseph Smith’s work. I would like to see the word-division test performed with a larger group that would provide us some statistical probabilities.

Since I did my work on the Book of Abraham in 1968–71, a lot of new discoveries have been made by me and by others. Some of my own work was presented in detail three years ago in a series of lectures I gave on the Book of Abraham and summaries of the work of several people were presented about two years ago in a F.A.R.M.S. working group. Unfortunately, I don’t think that the LDS reading public is going to rush to purchase a new book on the topic.

The “Problem” of Doctrine and Covenants 10 and 132

In Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon (pp. 37–38), the Tanners cite the theory of “Mormon scholar Max Parkin” that Doctrine and Covenants 10 is a composite of two different revelations received at two different times, then declare that “the idea of two different dates does not give one a great deal

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of confidence in Joseph Smith's methods." What we're dealing with here is not known facts about how Doctrine and Covenants 10 came to be, but Parkin's conjecture. I fail to see how an unsubstantiated theory can reflect poorly on Joseph Smith. I know of no evidence whatsoever that Joseph Smith combined two different revelations of different dates to give us Doctrine and Covenants 10.17

The Tanners respond by saying that their words referred to Parkin's theory, not to the fact that Doctrine and Covenants 10 had been assigned different dates in various editions of the Doctrine and Covenants. However, in the context of their original wording (though not necessarily their intent), repeated on page 69 of the present work, the Tanners' words "the idea of two different dates"18 still seem to refer to the dates assigned to the revelation in different editions of the Doctrine and Covenants rather than to Parkin's theory, which comprises only part of the paragraph and which is based on the different dates. In their new book (p. 70), they admit that they agree with Parkin's assessment. I pointed out in my earlier review (cited by the Tanners without noting the implications) that both times the revelation was published under Joseph Smith's direction (1833 Book of Commandments and 1835 Doctrine and Covenants), it bore the date of May 1829 and that the alternate date of "summer 1828"

17 In my review of Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon, I indicated that "The Tanners believe (p. 35) that the real date [of D&C 10] was May 1829" (RB BM 3 [1991]: 210). In their response, they correct me on this issue (p. 70), indicating that they said no such thing on page 35. I had assumed, from their quote of Parkin as support for their views (p. 34, not 35) that they agreed with his evidence for the 1829 dating. This assumption was bolstered by the fact that the Tanners also appear to have accepted Parkin's conclusion that D&C 10 was an amalgam of two revelations, the later of which was written in May 1829, which would make the whole an 1829 production, especially in view of the suggestion that Joseph Smith may have made changes in the original. I was pleased that, in their response, the Tanners corrected my misreading of their intent and that they quickly returned to the issue they were addressing rather than expanding on my failing eyesight (reading p. 35 instead of 34).

18 If, instead of "the idea of two different dates," the Tanners had written "the combining of two revelations from different dates," I might have grasped their meaning. But even their real intentions make no sense, since they are discussing Parkin's theory which, unless proven to be factual, cannot possibly reflect on Joseph Smith's work.
was added by later editors. Parkin’s theory is therefore not even based on Joseph Smith’s own indications of the date. To judge Joseph Smith on the basis of such guesswork is hardly fair.

The Tanners also fault Joseph Smith for assigning a date of 12 July 1843 to the revelation on plural marriage (D&C 132), when it is clear that he had been engaged in the practice for several years (pp. 69–70). (This is hardly news; it has been noted in LDS records since the mid-nineteenth century.) Indicating that the “same sort of methodology” was used in this case as in that suggested by Parkin for Doctrine and Covenants 10, the Tanners imply that Joseph Smith is being deceptive in assigning an 1843 date to the revelation. The fact is that Joseph did not record a revelation when he was first told to practice plural marriage. He wrote the 1843 revelation only after Emma insisted that she would no longer support the principle unless she had the revelation in writing. A divine revelation need not be written, only obeyed.

The Tanners, again following Parkin, take Joseph Smith to task for changing some of the wording in Doctrine and Covenants 10 after its original publication. This “really bothers us,” they declare (p. 70). They have long been bothered by this and other changes to some of Joseph’s revelations. Strangely, these changes seem to have not concerned Joseph Smith’s early followers, who were acquainted with both the “before” and the “after” versions. They readily accepted the idea that God was the source of the revelations and that he could reword them at will. This may be too simplistic for the Tanners, but it fits the pattern of at least one Bible prophet, Jeremiah, who redicted his earlier book, burned by order of the king, and added more information to the second edition (Jeremiah 36:32).

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20 See the footnotes to the discussion of D&C 132 in Lyndon W. Cook, *The Revelations of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1985), 347–49. This was not the only time that early Latter-day Saints, based on their Protestant heritage of adherence to the written “word of God,” insisted on a written document before believing revelations declared by Joseph Smith.

21 Compare the apocryphal story of how Ezra, with divine assistance, restored lost Bible books to compile what we now call the “Old Testament” (4 Ezra 14:18–48).
The Book of Lehi "Problem"

Repeating what they wrote in Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon, the Tanners see problems with Joseph Smith’s statement, in the preface to the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon, that the 116 pages came from the "book of Lehi." They point out that "the Preface was completely removed from later editions" (p. 65), implying that the removal was necessitated by the fact that the preface contradicted the assertion in Doctrine and Covenants 10:44 that the 116 pages were from "an abridgment of the account of Nephi." (On p. 38 of Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon, they say that "it was embarrassing to the church and is no longer included in the Book of Mormon.") That the 116 pages had to comprise more than just the account of Lehi (or an abridgment thereof) is clear from the fact that, by the time those pages were taken, Joseph Smith had already reached the time of King Benjamin (D&C 10:41), who lived four centuries after Lehi. This fact alone argues against the idea that Joseph Smith changed his story in midstream.

In Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon (p. 38), the Tanners wrote, "Since Joseph Smith could not accurately reproduce the material which he claimed Mormon had abridged from Lehi’s plates, he found it necessary to have Lehi’s son, Nephi, create an entirely different set of plates, known as the ‘plates of Nephi.’ These plates also passed down to Mormon who abridged them in the same way he did the ‘plates of Lehi.’" That Joseph Smith didn’t invent the plates of Nephi after the 116 pages were lost is clear from Doctrine and Covenants 10:38–39 where, referring to "those things that you have written, which have gone out of your hands" (the 116 pages), the Lord tells Joseph, "You remember it was said in those writings that a more particular account was given of these things upon the plates of Nephi." Clearly, the 116 pages had to have mentioned the plates of Nephi; otherwise, Joseph Smith would have been placing himself in a position of being exposed for fraud, since (1) Martin Harris would have known whether those pages spoke of such plates, and (2) Joseph believed that the pages could be produced by those who had possession of them.
The Tanners suggest that, when the 116 pages were stolen, Joseph Smith aborted a plan that had Mormon abridging the plates of Lehi (p. 65). If he gave up this plan, why did he even mention the supposedly “earlier” plan by speaking of the book and plates of Lehi in the preface to the 1830 Book of Mormon? Wouldn’t that work against him? And why speak in the small plates of “the record which has been kept by my father” (1 Nephi 6:1)? Surely by the time Joseph Smith dictated this chapter, if he were making up the story as he went along, he would have gotten straight in his mind how he would explain the material. Why add items that the Tanners or others could readily show to be “inconsistent”?

The Tanners’ insistence that “the plates of Lehi” were the source from which, according to Joseph Smith’s 1830 preface, Mormon abridged the book of Lehi, is hardly evidence that the Prophet changed his story and had Mormon abridging the “plates of Nephi” instead. As I pointed out in my original review, the “plates of Nephi” are mentioned as the source of Mormon’s work several times in that part of the Book of Mormon dictated after the 116 pages, beginning as early as Mosiah 1:6, 16. If Joseph changed his story that early, why would he include the information about Lehi in the preface, which he obviously wrote later, perhaps after dictating the whole book? And if the 116 pages claimed to have been taken from the “plates of Lehi” (as separate from Nephi’s work), then wouldn’t Joseph Smith be opening himself to exposure as a fraud by having the rest of Mormon’s abridgment claim to have been taken from the “plates of Nephi”? Had someone made the 116 pages public, he would have been caught in a lie.

That there is no real contradiction in speaking of both the “plates of Lehi” (in the 1830 preface) and the “plates of Nephi” (in D&C 10) is indicated in the fact that the small “plates of Nephi” (1 Nephi 9:2) are later called “the plates of Jacob . . . made by the hand of Nephi” (Jacob 3:14), though several others also wrote on them. Nephi copied his father’s record onto the large plates (1 Nephi 19:1–2).

If, as the Tanners believe, the 116 lost pages contained only the “Book of Lehi,” then where did Nephi write the things to which he refers in the small plates. He says that he (not his father
Lehi) had written a history, including stories of warfare, on his "other plates" (1 Nephi 9:2-4; 19:4). If the 116 pages still existed in Joseph Smith's day, would he not be jeopardizing his work by making such references in the small plates—references that could be shown to be incorrect simply by producing the 116 pages?

The Small Plates

This brings us to what the Tanners have to say about Mormon's declaration that the small plates comprised a "small account of the prophets, from Jacob down to the reign of this King Benjamin, and also many of the words of Nephi" (Words of Mormon 1:3). The fact that Nephi is not mentioned at the beginning of this statement prompted the Tanners to suggest that this is evidence that Joseph Smith may have, at one time, considered deriving the small plates from a set of plates kept by Jacob and the prophets. That suggestion, however, makes sense only if Words of Mormon was written before 1 Nephi through Omni, at a point where, in the Tanners' "black hole" theory, Joseph Smith had not yet settled on his final plan for replacing the 116 lost pages. If Words of Mormon was written last, as the manuscripts suggest, then it seems unlikely that Joseph Smith could have forgotten that he had just dictated the small plates, most of which comprised Nephi's record. Had Joseph Smith been the author of the Book of Mormon, would it not be more logical that he list Nephi first? But if Mormon had read the small plates along with all the other materials that had come into his possession, he might very well have spoken of the line of "the prophets, from Jacob down to the reign of this King Benjamin," in whose hands the plates remained for most of the time during which their writings were engraved.

The Tanners fault me for writing in my review that "it is much more logical to assume that Mormon singled out Jacob because most of the writings on the small plates were by his descendants and because the plates were passed down in that line." 22 I am not so ignorant of the size of Nephi's writings compared to the others on the small plates as to suggest that the

writings of Jacob and his descendants covered more pages. Yet this is what the Tanners accuse me of, repeating their count of the chapters (p. 68). It was not more chapters that Jacob and his descendants wrote, but more separate entries or books. Had I used the singular “writing,” I would have been wrong. But my words “most of the writings” should not be interpreted as “most of the chapters,” as the Tanners have done.23

The Timing of Christ’s Birth

The Tanners devote pages 45–49 of their new book to what they see as a fatal discrepancy in the Book of Mormon account. Since Lehi and Nephi knew that Christ would be born some 600 years after they left Jerusalem, it is inconceivable, to the Tanners, that Alma could indicate that “we know not how soon” Christ would come and wish “that it might be in my day” (Alma 13:25). They point out that Tom Nibley, Matt Roper, and I have responded to this “problem” in three different ways. Nibley and Roper, for example, pointed out that verse 24 made it clear that Alma was referring not to Christ’s birth, but to “his coming in his glory.” Roper and I both suggested that the 600 years of 1 Nephi 10:4; 19:8; 25:19 is an approximation—six centuries, not precisely six hundred years. I suggested that Alma may not have been aware of the prophecies of Nephi and Lehi. All of these can, in fact, be true simultaneously. The Tanners may accuse me of “trying to ride two [or three] horses at the same time,” as they did on a related subject (p. 49). But since there is nothing mutually exclusive in the three approaches, it is a non-issue. The Tanners are merely following their usual ploy of pitting LDS scholars against each other, describing differences of approach rather than of real facts.

The Tanners note that when Alma said of Christ’s coming, “would to God that it might be in my day” (Alma 13:25), he held a belief that the “event might occur in his day” (p. 46). Actually, the opposite is true. There are two Hebrew expressions that the King James translators rendered “would [to] God that”

23 The current chapters are a late division of the Book of Mormon. To count them makes as much sense as counting pages. I was not discussing the number of pages, but the number of entries or books.
or “would that.” In all but one case that I found in the Bible (Genesis 30:34), the situation being described is clearly one that is impossible of fulfillment. Note the following:

- “Would to God we had died” (Exodus 16:3); “would God that we had died” (Numbers 14:2 [twice]; 20:3); “would God I had died for thee” (2 Samuel 18:33); the speakers obviously hadn’t died.
- “Would to God that all the Lord’s people were prophets” (Numbers 11:29); unfortunately, they were not.
- “Would to God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side Jordan” (Joshua 7:7); they had, however, crossed the river.
- “Would to God this people were under my hand! then would I remove Abimelech” (Judges 9:29); the speaker did not govern the people.
- “I would there were a sword in mine hand” (Numbers 22:29); there wasn’t.

In addition to Alma 13:25, the Book of Mormon uses the expression “would to God” in two other passages, both of which reflect an impossibility of fulfillment:

- “Would to God that we could persuade all men not to rebel against God” (Jacob 1:8); they couldn’t.
- “I would to God that ye had not been guilty of so great a crime” (Alma 39:7); the crime had already been committed.

The Tanners indicate that Samuel’s declaration about the coming of Christ “appeared to be a startling new prophecy” and that if Lehi and Nephi had really foreseen his coming in 600 years, as the small plates indicate, “the Nephites should have already known exactly when Christ would come into the world,”

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24 Neither Hebrew idiom mentions God. The King James translators similarly added the divine title in another Hebrew expression, changing “may the king live” to “God save the king,” to correspond to the formula used in the British coronation ceremony (1 Samuel 10:24; 2 Samuel 16:16; 2 Kings 11:12; 2 Chronicles 23:11).

25 Even this may have been intended by Laban as an expression of impossibility.
so Samuel’s five-year prophecy would be of no value (p. 53; see also p. 51). But since the Nephites of Samuel’s day were wicked, we should not expect that they were well-versed in the scriptures, even in prophecies of Christ’s coming.26 Besides, the new element in Samuel’s prophecy is not the five years, but that he gives signs of Christ’s coming. It was because they had not yet seen the signs—not because someone had watched the calendar to see when 600 years had passed—that the nonbelievers decided to execute the believers unless Samuel’s prophecy came to pass (3 Nephi 1:5–9).

The “Black Hole”

According to the “black hole” theory, Joseph Smith had to replace the lost 116 pages with material that he pretended came from another source, which he called the “small plates of Nephi.” In composing the story, he had to avoid details that might conflict with what was on the 116 pages, lest they be produced and thereby prove him a liar. But an examination of the Book of Mormon shows that material taken from Mormon’s abridgment (notably Mosiah and Alma) reflects information that is also found on the small plates. Since, according to the Tanners’ theory, Joseph Smith had not yet conceived of the idea of the small plates, we must presume that this information was included in the 116 pages. In this case, if Joseph were the author of the Book of Mormon, rather than its translator, wouldn’t he be placing himself in the same danger by including this material in later portions of the Book of Mormon? I refer to the following passages:

- Mosiah 1:16–17 contains information about things, such as the plates of brass, the plates of Nephi, the sword of Laban, and the ball or director, that are mentioned in the small plates.
- Mosiah 10:12–16 discusses events in the life of Nephi that are also reported in 1–2 Nephi.

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26 Metcalfe does note that Helaman 8:22 indicates that Lehi and Nephi and others had prophesied the coming of Christ (New Approaches to the Book of Mormon, 417). But he, like the Tanners, who cite him (pp. 53–54), does not recognize the importance of that statement in the light of the fact that such prophecies were subsequently dictated by Joseph Smith from the small plates.
• Mosiah 11:13 speaks of a tower north of Shilom that "had been a resort for the children of Nephi at the time they fled out of the land" of Nephi. The flight obviously refers to the departure of Mosiah I from his homeland, which is mentioned on the small plates in the book of Omni. In this case, Mormon's abridgment includes details not known from the small plates and which, consequently, had to be on the large plates and most probably included in the abridgment that formed the 116 lost pages.

• Alma 3:6–17 speaks of the skin curse imposed on the Lamanites, which is known from the small plates. Significantly, it includes words uttered by the Lord to Nephi (verses 14–17) that are not found on the small plates.

If these items were not recorded on the 116 lost pages, they would have made little or no sense in the books of Mosiah and Alma. Were Joseph Smith the author of the Book of Mormon, he would have placed himself in danger of being caught in his fraud by talking about these items in the small plates, where he might have contradicted what he had dictated earlier. This is particularly true of the detailed descriptions of the liahona (1 Nephi 16:10, 27–29) and the sword of Laban (1 Nephi 4:9). All of this suggests to me that there is no "black hole."

One of the most unconvincing parts of the Tanners' "black hole" work has been their insistence that "important material that should be found on the small plates of Nephi is missing" (p. 75). But the list of what "should be found" is their own. The fact that the express purpose of the small plates is said to be religious, rather than historical, in nature, is unacceptable to the Tanners.

**Missing Festivals**

The Tanners find fault with the Book of Mormon for not naming any of the Jewish festivals of the Old Testament. Why they should insist on the very names and ignore the evidence for the observance of some of these festivals is beyond me. Their mathematical game doesn't really shed any light on the matter. Most of the Old Testament references to the festivals are found in the law of Moses (Exodus through Deuteronomy), where they are instituted. One cannot compare this legal code with the Book of Mormon, which is mostly prophecy, preaching, and history. It
would be more reasonable to compare Mormon’s abridgment with the main history of the Israelites, found in Joshua through 2 Kings. Most Bible scholars agree that the books of Joshua, Judges, 1–2 Samuel, and 1–2 Kings were compiled or redacted at the same time and comprised the essential history of ancient Israel from the time of the conquest of the promised land down to the exile therefrom. In this sense, it is roughly parallel in nature, though not in time, with the Nephite record.

Noting that Passover is mentioned 77 times in the Bible (I found only 45 in the Old Testament) and unleavened bread 43 times, the Tanners write, “We would expect, therefore, to find a significant number of references to that festival in the Book of Mormon,” along with references to its associated Feast of Unleavened Bread (p. 94). In their count, they fail to tell us that some biblical references to “unleavened bread/cakes” are not in

28 1–2 Chronicles are a later rewriting of the books of Samuel and Kings, which they contradict at many points. Prepared by priests and designed to reflect post-exilic Judaism, the Chronicles, while useful and sometimes incorporating materials from other sources, are not as reliable as the earlier records. Since the Chronicles reflect Jewish beliefs that postdate Lehi’s departure from Jerusalem, they are, along with the New Testament, less instructive about how the Nephites would have seen the festivals. The books of Chronicles in our Bibles are not the ancient “chronicles of the kings” of Judah and Israel sometimes referred to in 1–2 Kings as a source of additional information. Of interest to Latter-day Saints is the fact that the books of Samuel and Kings (which are termed 1–4 Kings in the Septuagint) are evidently abridgments of earlier contemporary annals of the kings. In this respect, they are a precedent for the two sets of records kept by Nephi (one a shorter version with emphasis on spiritual matters) and the abridgment prepared by Mormon.
29 The Tanners note that the feast of unleavened bread and possibly the Sabbath are mentioned on ostraca from Elephantine (p. 132). Might we find the same kind of thing on Nephite ostraca? They also note that since the Nephites were “orthodox” in following the law of Moses, while the Jews at Elephantine were “heterodox,” “one would expect to find much more detailed material in the Book of Mormon relating to Jewish religious practices than in the Elephantine papyri” (p. 129). A lot of assumptions are being made here. By all accounts, Lehi found himself differing with the Jews at Jerusalem (1 Nephi 1:18–20), who drove him out of Jerusalem because he taught of the Messiah to come (Helaman 8:22). As for the Jews of Elephantine, I suspect that they viewed themselves as orthodox Jews, despite what those at Jerusalem might have thought of their wayward practices and beliefs.
the context of a festival and are simply mentioned as things eaten (Genesis 19:3; Judges 6:19–21; 1 Samuel 28:24; 1 Chronicles 23:29).

Most references to the two festivals of Passover and unleavened bread are found in the law of Moses. But in the main history portion of the Old Testament (Joshua through 2 Kings), there are only two references to them. Joshua and the Israelites celebrated the two feasts after crossing the Jordan river into the land of Canaan (Joshua 5:10–11). It is likely that this was the first time they had celebrated the feasts since the exodus. Joshua 5:2–9 expressly states that, prior to the celebration, they circumcised all Israelite males for the first time since leaving Egypt. (In Exodus 12:43–48, we read that uncircumcised males cannot participate in the Passover feast.) Later, we read that when a copy of the law (Deuteronomy, according to most Bible scholars) was inadvertently discovered in the time of King Josiah, he and his people celebrated the Passover with unleavened bread (2 Kings 23:9, 21–23; 2 Chronicles 35:1, 6–9, 11, 13, 16–19). In both cases, we are dealing with the reinstatement of the festival, not an annual observance. The chroniclers later credited King Hezekiah with a similar celebration (2 Chronicles 30:1–2, 5, 15, 18, 21), but this may have been an attempt to build up Hezekiah, who was highly revered in post-exilic times. In this case, too, we are dealing with a reinstatement of the festival, of which, we are informed, there had not been “the like in Jerusalem” “since the time of Solomon” (2 Chronicles 30:26).

In the historical text of Joshua through 2 Kings, there is no mention of the feast of Tabernacles or of booths. Indeed, when it was reinstituted in the days of Ezra, it was noted that the feast had not been celebrated “since the days of Jeshua [Joshua]” (Nehemiah 8:17). The only reference to circumcision in Joshua–2 Kings is the one performed in conjunction with the celebration in Joshua 5, noted above. Almost all the other references to circumcision are in the Pentateuch (Genesis through Deuteronomy). The Tanners cite Moroni 8:8, which speaks of the abolition of circumcision by Christ, and declare that it is “a very strange statement because there seems to be no evidence in the

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30 Later Jewish tradition makes Hezekiah a prime candidate for the Messiahship.
Book of Mormon that it was ever practiced” (p. 95). We could say the same of the historical record of the Israelites, with the sole exception of Joshua. Moreover, the very fact that circumcision is mentioned in Moroni 8:8 shows that Joseph Smith, if he authored the Book of Mormon, was aware that it should have been a normal practice among an ancient Israelite group. Why, then, would he avoid mentioning it earlier in the Book of Mormon? My answer, which will undoubtedly not satisfy the Tanners, is that he did not author the Book of Mormon and that its true authors, like the author(s) of Joshua–2 Kings, accepted circumcision as a given and saw no need to explain it. As for the complaint that the only other references to circumcision in the Book of Mormon are to circumcision of the heart (p. 95), we should point out that this concept began with Moses (Deuteronomy 10:16) and was repeated by Jeremiah (Jeremiah 4:4), a contemporary of Lehi.

I believe that the Nephites, like the ancient Israelites, accepted the festivals, the sabbaths, and other ceremonial aspects of the law of Moses as a given and therefore found no need to mention them at every turn in the road. That they did, indeed, practice unnamed ceremonies is confirmed in Mosiah 19:24, where we read, “And it came to pass that after they had ended the ceremony, that they returned to the land of Nephi.” The fact that “the ceremony” is mentioned only in passing and is not described suggests that it was such a normal thing that there was no need to explain it. I believe that these Nephites, who had just slain their king and perhaps others in battle, underwent the purification required under the law of Moses for those who had touched dead bodies. I have submitted an article on this subject, entitled “The Nephite Purification Ceremony,” to the Journal of Book of Mormon Studies.31

The Tanners criticize John Welch for suggesting that the “trump of God” in Alma 29:1 shows that the Nephites practiced the blowing of the shofar at the new year.32 They write, “It is hard

31 Like my feast of Tabernacles work, I happened upon the ideas given in this article. I was not looking for “evidence” to support the Book of Mormon. Rather, when, on an occasion more than a decade ago I was reading the passage, I suddenly realized the implications of the word ceremony.

for us to understand how the mention of the ‘trump of God,’ which appears about 120 pages after King Benjamin’s speech in the Book of Mormon, provides evidence” for this practice (p. 123). Anyone unacquainted with the use of the shofar would naturally be confused. It is necessary to understand that, for the Jews, the blowing of the shofar at the so-called “new year,” the first day of the month of Tishre, is considered an announcement to mankind to repent and prepare for the judgment, which is precisely what Alma is saying in Alma 29:1. That judgment, they believe, takes place on Yom kippur, the “day of atonement,” nine days later, when the names of the righteous are “sealed” in heaven. Four days after that, when the danger of damnation is past, the people celebrate the feast of Tabernacles.

**The Feast of Tabernacles**

There is abundant evidence in Mosiah 1–6 that the Nephites, on this occasion at least, observed the feast of Tabernacles. Yet the Tanners state, “We are so certain that these six chapters contain nothing concerning the Feast of Tabernacles or any other Jewish festival that we are including the entire text in this response” (p. 100).

Simply saying that there is no evidence that Mosiah 1–6 has a relationship to the feast of Tabernacles is not enough. I wrote two lengthy articles on this subject, detailing features shared by the Jewish and Old Testament feast of Tabernacles and the Nephite assembly under King Benjamin. Unless the Tanners can show

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33 Only the Tanners can tell us the relevance of the “120 pages” that separate King Benjamin’s speech from Alma’s declaration. Welch did not indicate that Alma was discussing King Benjamin’s assembly. I suspect that this is just another way of emphasizing what the Tanners see as the absurdity of the situation. Following such reasoning, we should perhaps count the number of pages that separate Moses’ declaration about the special prophet to come (Deuteronomy 18:15) from its fulfillment in Christ (Acts 3:22).

34 Hence the Jewish new year greeting, hatimah tovah, literally, “a good sealing.”

that these shared features do not exist, they should refrain from their strong assertions. They have completely failed to address the evidence.

The following is a list of features associated with the ancient Israelite feast of Tabernacles that are also found in connection with the Nephite assembly under King Benjamin.

- The people assemble at the temple
- The king or political leader presides from a raised platform
- People dwell by families in booths or tents
- Special sacrifices are offered
- Exhortations addressed to the adults specifically exclude children
- The law is read (especially the “paragraph of the king”)
- God’s mercy and salvation are mentioned
- Recitation is made of God’s dealings with his people
- Recitation is made of the commandments of God
- Recitation is made of the curses and blessings of the law
- The people are exhorted to love and serve God
- The people are promised prosperity if they obey God
- The people, in chorus, make a covenant of obedience
- The people prostrate themselves to worship
- Sometimes the coronation of the king is involved
- Sometimes the names of the covenanters are taken
- The king blesses the people

It should be readily apparent that the Nephite assembly parallels the feast of Tabernacles in a large number of features. By contrast, only a few of these features can be found in the nineteenth-century camp meetings to which the Tanners compare Mosiah 1–6 (pp. 134–35). Indeed, some of these may not have been typical of such meetings. For example, the fact that families brought their tents to one meeting, as cited by the Tanners (p. 135), is not evidence that this always happened and, indeed, from other contemporary descriptions, this appears not to be the normal thing to do. (I suppose it depended on how far away the meeting

was from the settlements.) The building of the platform for the camp meeting speakers seems to be a logical thing to do, in view of the large numbers of people who had to be addressed. From this standpoint, Joseph Smith, had he authored the Book of Mormon, could have used the same logic or simply described what he saw in camp meetings. But the fact that the Book of Mormon says Benjamin had a tower constructed moves us from nineteenth-century America to ancient Israel, where the Hebrew term for the platform constructed for the feast of Tabernacles is, in Nehemiah 8:4, called migdal, the normal Hebrew word for “tower” (which is the way it is usually translated in KJV).

Metcalfe suggested that aspects of the camp meetings were drawn from the biblical feast of Tabernacles.\textsuperscript{36} To be sure, this would have made it easier for Joseph Smith to borrow the idea from preachers of his time. But if he knew that they were copying the feast of Tabernacles, why didn’t he use that term in the Book of Mormon? More important, however, is the fact that Benjamin’s assembly includes features of the Feast of Tabernacles not mentioned by the Tanners or Metcalfe in connection with the camp meetings.\textsuperscript{37} This includes the references to parts of Deuteronomy (notably the paragraph of the king in Deuteronomy 17:14–20) used anciently in the liturgy of the feast of Tabernacles, the fact that the king (rather than the high priest) presided, the coronation ceremony, the assembly at the temple (camp meetings typically being in the countryside), and the fact that, during the meeting, each family remained in its own tent.

One piece of evidence given by the Tanners to refute the idea that King Benjamin presided at a celebration of the feast of Tabernacles is that he had to call the people together (Mosiah 1:10), whereas the ancient Israelites “knew when these festivals took place and automatically gathered to worship the Lord” (p. 118).\textsuperscript{38} But in New Testament times, when we have more information about the festivals, people awaited word from Jerusalem to declare the beginning of the month with the appearance of the new moon. Fire signals were lit on hilltops

\textsuperscript{36} Brent Metcalfe, \textit{New Approaches}, 421, n. 31.
\textsuperscript{37} I noted this in my review of Metcalfe in \textit{RBBM} \textit{6/1} (1994): 48.
\textsuperscript{38} I discussed this in “King Benjamin and the Feast of Tabernacles,” 2:234, n. 65.
across the country (and into Babylon) to send the message, later to be replaced by runners.\textsuperscript{39} For festivals like Passover/Unleavened Bread and Tabernacles, which each began at sundown on the fourteenth day of the month (i.e., at the full moon), people had about two weeks’ warning. We do not know what the procedure was in Old Testament times, but it is likely that people didn’t have calendars hanging on the wall by which they could check the dates of the festivals. Indeed, after Joshua’s conquest of Canaan, the only Old Testament festival celebrations in Israel were \textit{declared by the king} (2 Kings 23:1–99, 21–23; 2 Chronicles 30:1–2) or other political leaders (Nehemiah 8:13–15), just as in the Book of Mormon. We cannot reject these parallels simply because they denote a restoration of a discontinued practice; for all we know, King Benjamin may have reinstituted the feast in his day.

\textbf{Firstlings of the Flock}

The Tanners, citing M. T. Lamb, point out that, under the law of Moses, the firstborn of the flocks belonged to the Lord and were turned over to the high priest and, while they could be offered as a peace offering, were never used as a sin or burnt offering. Consequently, they say, Mosiah 2:3 is wrong in saying that the Nephites “also took of the firstlings of their flocks, that they might offer sacrifice and burnt offerings according to the law of Moses” (p. 96). Various responses to this dilemma have been given, including the one cited by the Tanners (p. 99) in which L. Ara Norwood indicates that the word \textit{firstling} could have been a mistake made by Mormon in his abridgment.\textsuperscript{40} While this is not impossible, I think there is a simpler answer. Since the Nephites were not descendants of Aaron, there were no Aaronic priests to whom the firstlings could be given. In Genesis 4:4, we read that Abel, who lived long before Aaron and consequently could not deliver his animals to priests of that line, brought “of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof” and offered sacrifice to the Lord. In the case of the Nephites, since there were no Aaronic priests to whom the firstlings could be given, it probably made

\textsuperscript{39} Mishnah \textit{Rosh ha-Shanah} 2:2–4.

perfectly good sense to offer them directly to the Lord as burnt offerings, as had been done in earlier generations. This is perfectly logical, in view of the fact that they, as Israelites but not descendants of Aaron, would not have been permitted to consume the firstlings or make other use of them. (The law of Moses even forbade working a firstborn bullock or shearing the wool of a firstborn sheep).

**Bible Plagiarism**

The Tanners repeat some of their earlier assertions that Joseph Smith plagiarized the Bible to compose the Book of Mormon. Some LDS writers believe that the Lord revealed the translation of the Book of Mormon Isaiah passages and Jesus’ sermon in the language of the King James Bible (KJV). If one accepts the principle of divine revelation, that is certainly an acceptable possibility. For my part, I have no problem with Joseph Smith using the Bible directly and making changes only when there were serious differences. Not having been present at the time, I do not know if he had a Bible with him when he dictated the Book of Mormon to his scribes. The fact that he usually eliminated words that in the KJV of Isaiah are italicized hints that he may have used the Bible itself. But it is not impossible that the Lord had him eliminate these words, which, after all, represent English words added to the text to make more sense out of the underlying Hebrew.

I am convinced, at any rate, that had Joseph Smith given a totally new rendition of Isaiah for these passages, the Book of Mormon would not have been as well accepted as it was. When Robert Lisle Lindsey began his work with the gospel of Mark in Israel, he initially translated it “into simple modern Hebrew from the Greek text. The text was then distributed to Hebrew-speaking readers and comments invited.” Many of those who reviewed the work expressed “the desire that the Gospels, as ancient works, should be read in Old Testament Hebrew style.”

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41 The Tanners note that this was the view of B. H. Roberts and Sidney B. Sperry (p. 158).
42 Robert Lisle Lindsey, in his Introduction to *A Hebrew Translation of the Gospel of Mark* (Jerusalem: Baptist House, n.d.), 76; see also 78–79.
Hebrew translation subsequently received great reviews. I suggest that the same thing would have happened had Joseph Smith rendered the Isaiah passages into early nineteenth-century English. Indeed, it was not until the turn of that century that scholars were even prepared to modify the KJV text and even after they did so, many people (even today) found it hard to accept.

In explaining their position on biblical "plagiarism" in the Book of Mormon, the Tanners note that, while they are not opposed to the use of Bible passages per se in the Book of Mormon, "what we do object to is [Joseph] Smith appropriating Bible verses and stories into his own works . . . and claiming that he is translating from ancient documents" (p. 140). Ironically, what they describe is precisely what the translators of the King James Bible did.

Written instructions to the King James Bible translation committee told them to revise the Bishop’s Bible (largely a revision of William Tyndale’s translation) rather than to begin a new translation, but to make any necessary corrections based on the Hebrew and Greek. After the work had begun, the translators were given permission to consult the translations of Tyndale, Coverdale, and Geneva, and to use their wording "when they agree better with the text” of the Hebrew and Greek. They were also instructed to retain familiar passages “as they were vulgarly used.” But the committee also referred to Spanish, French, Italian, and German translations, as also to the Vulgate and other Latin versions, the Syriac New Testament and the Aramaic Targum, and even to the new English Catholic Rheims-Douay Bible, from

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43 The Tanners reject Dan Peterson’s suggestion (RBBM 5 [1993]: 51–2) that nineteenth-century Bible readers would expect that scriptural works would be written in the KJV language (p. 138).

44 Whenever someone asks me why Latter-day Saints continue to use the KJV rather than a more modern English translation of the Bible, I refer them to statements by the First Presidency and add that we to abandon the KJV, the Bible parallels in the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants would no longer make sense. The Tanners will probably like this one!

45 There is "plagiarism" in the ancient Bible texts as well. Anyone who knows the Bible well is aware that Isaiah 2:2–4 parallels Micah 4:1–3. We cannot be sure which of these prophets was quoting the other, but it is significant that neither gives credit to the other. Should we apply the Tanners' standards for plagiarism to these Bible passages as well?
which they took some Latin terms (e.g., "firmament") that had been left untranslated from the Vulgate.

Though archaic, Tyndale’s English was retained in the King James Bible, of which 90% comes from Tyndale (e.g., “lilies of the field” in Matthew 6:28, despite the fact that lilies are not meant). In some cases, Tyndale’s wording was kept but some key terms changed (e.g., “love” changed to “charity”). In other cases where the Bishop’s Bible had changed Tyndale’s wording, KJV returned to the original. So the King James Bible is blatant “plagiarism.” The revised Bible versions produced at the turn of the century in the U.S. and Great Britain were produced in the same manner. So Joseph Smith did nothing different from what the KJV translators had done. Having laid this foundation, let us now turn to some of the Book of Mormon’s borrowings of KJV language.

The Tanners note that there are a number of occurrences of the expression “the Holy One of Israel” in 2 Nephi 9 (verses 11-12, 15, 18-19, 23-26, 40-41, 51) and conclude that it was picked up from Isaiah 50:1-52:2,46 cited in the two preceding chapters, 2 Nephi 7-8. It is hardly news that Jacob used terminology drawn from Isaiah’s writings; I thought everyone had noticed. However, the expression, though it is used 26 times in Isaiah (including Isaiah 49:7), is not used in the Isaiah passages (49:22-52:2) quoted in this portion of the Book of Mormon.47 The Tanners predictably conclude that “there can be little doubt that Joseph Smith picked up these words from the prophet Isaiah” (pp. 121-22). It is quite possible that the words were adopted from Isaiah, but, in order to assume that Joseph Smith picked them up, one must a priori believe that he is the author of the Book of Mormon. If, on the other hand, one believes, as 2 Nephi 6:1 reports, that all of 2 Nephi 6-9 is a discourse by Nephi’s brother Jacob, then one can conclude that it was Jacob who borrowed the words from Isaiah. The Tanners’ “little doubt,” like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder.

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46 Actually, earlier in the same discourse, Jacob quotes Isaiah 49:22-23 (2 Nephi 6:6-7) and Isaiah 49:24-26 (2 Nephi 6:16).

47 It is also found in 2 Kings 19:22 and three times in Psalms. A variant form, “the Holy One of Jacob,” is found in Isaiah 29:23.
The Tanners conclude that, since 2 Nephi 9 "is actually supposed to be Nephi’s report of a speech by his brother Jacob[,] we would expect, then, that when we come to the actual book of Jacob, it would be filled with this phrase . . . in fact, Jacob never uses this expression in any part of his book" (p. 122). They gloss over the fact that, in 2 Nephi 9:1 (also 6:8), Jacob makes reference to what he had just read from Isaiah, then proceeds to give an explanation of the passage. Since he was expounding on chapters 49–52 of Isaiah, we should think it very unusual if he did not use words from the prophet whose writings he was explaining. But in the book of Jacob, he was not explaining passages from Isaiah, so we should not require him to use the term “Holy One of Israel” there. Similarly, were I to give a public address on the Fourth of July, I might use words such as independence, patriot, founding fathers, and the like—words that you probably won’t find in any of my other writings.

After having noted the distribution of the term “Holy One of Israel,” the Tanners note that, in another of his discourses, Jacob uses the term “Lord of Hosts” six times (Jacob 2:28–30, 32–33). While noting that “these words are found 47 times in the book of Isaiah,” they fail to tell us that they are common in other parts of the Bible as well (252 times), and that it is one of the oldest of the divine titles. To the Tanners, “it is interesting to note that Jacob never uses these words in any other part of his book,” and that, in his quote from the prophet Zenos in Jacob 5, Jacob uses the term “the Lord of the vineyard” thirty-three times, though the term, also found in Mark 12:9, is not used elsewhere in the Book of Mormon, (p. 122). They conclude, “From the above we can see that Joseph Smith sometimes latched on to a biblical expression, used it for a short time and then abandoned it for another phrase which caught his attention” (p. 122). They make similar statements in regard to the term “the Lord God Omnipotent,” known from the book of Revelation, noting that “Joseph Smith used the words . . . only in the portion dealing with King Benjamin’s speech.” Similarly, the term “Lamb of God,” found only in John 1:29, 36, shows up “35 times in the Book of

48 Indeed, in anticipation of his reading of the Isaiah passage, he used the term “Holy One of Israel” three times in chapter 6 of the same discourse (2 Nephi 6:9–10, 15).
Mormon, but . . . 28 are located in the first two books of Nephi.” The Tanners see, in these examples, “cases where [Joseph Smith] became fascinated with some word or expression he plagiarized, used it a number of times and then suddenly dropped it” (p. 121).

I suppose that’s plausible, if one assumes that he was thumbing through a Bible. But let’s look at the distribution again. “Holy One of Israel” is frequently used by Jacob in a discourse explaining Isaiah passages. “Lord of Hosts” is used extensively in another discourse by Jacob on a different subject. “Lord of the vineyard” is found only in the prophecy of Zenos. “The Lord God Omnipotent” is found only in King Benjamin’s speech. “Lamb of God” is used almost exclusively in Nephi’s writings. This looks suspiciously like evidence for independent authorship of Nephi, Zenos, Jacob, and King Benjamin’s speech.

As part of their discussion of the assembly over which King Benjamin presided, the Tanners quote all of Mosiah 1–6, comparing some brief passages with New Testament passages from which they believe Joseph Smith plagiarized the words (pp. 101–17). While they admit that some of these could be “only a coincidence,” an examination of the text suggests not that Joseph Smith deliberately used King James Bible wording, but that it was part of his vocabulary and therefore naturally came to be used in the translation. To illustrate, let’s do a similar study of the first two paragraphs of Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address.50

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gettysburg Address</th>
<th>King James Bible</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Four score and seven years ago, our fathers brought forth</td>
<td>fourscore and seven (1 Chr. 7:5) their fathers, which brought forth (2 Chr. 7:22)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

49 The words said to have been taken from the Bible are, for the most part, not specific, but simple expressions of normal speech. In some cases, the New Testament is clearly quoting from the Old Testament (e.g., Mark 12:30 derives from Deuteronomy 6:5; which is repeated in Deuteronomy 10:12; 11:13; Joshua 22:5; and paraphrased in Deuteronomy 13:3; 30:6).

50 My selection of the Gettysburg Address for this comparison was prompted by the Tanners’ mention of this document (p. 140).
on this continent a new
nation, conceived
in Liberty and dedicated to
the proposition
that all men are created
equal.

dedicated unto the (1 Chr.
18:11)
that all men (Job 37:7; John
1:7; 5:23)
that all men were (1 Cor. 7:7)
all men are (Psalm 116:11)
a man mine equal (Psalm
55:13)

Now we are engaged in a
great civil war,
testing whether that nation
or any nation so conceived
and so dedicated
can long endure. We are met
on a great
battlefield of that war.
We have come

we would have come (1 Thes.
2:8)
we . . . are come to (Matt. 2:2)
to dedicate (2 Chr. 2:4)
the portion of the field (2
Kings 9:25)
a portion of (Deut. 33:21)
a resting place for them
(Num. 10:33)
gave their life (Psalm 78:50)
might live (Gen. 17:18; Deut.
4:42; Gal. 1:19; 1 John
4:9)

It is altogether fitting and
proper
that we should do this.

that they should do (Neh.
5:12)
that ye should do that (2 Cor.
13:7)
Now, I don’t believe for a moment that Abraham Lincoln was deliberately “plagiarizing” passages from the King James Bible, though it is clear that there are some very close parallels here. In fact, there are many more parallels by volume of text than the ones shown by the Tanners for Mosiah 1–6 and the KJV. To what, then, can we attribute Lincoln’s use of these expressions that seem so clearly to be biblical? There are two obvious factors: (1) Both Lincoln and the King James translators spoke English. (2) Lincoln, as a Bible-reading man, would have these expressions as part of his vocabulary. What is important here is that the Bible words were used to describe entirely different circumstances, and yet were appropriate to those circumstances. I suggest that the same can be said of Book of Mormon passages that resemble the Bible. If, as I have suggested, Joseph Smith deliberately used the King James style so the Book of Mormon would sound like scripture, there is even more reason to find such parallels between the Book of Mormon and the Bible. Using language and expressions also found in the King James Bible is not plagiarism.

Bible Names in the Book of Mormon

The Tanners note that they found, in the Elephantine papyri, 26 biblical names, while the Book of Mormon had only one, Isaiah, in 3 Nephi 19:4 (pp. 126–27). They excluded, of course, references in these documents to known Bible characters such as Adam and Eve, Abraham, Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc., which is right, since they are comparing only actual Book of Mormon characters. I find it ironic that they should consider it important that Book of Mormon people have names known also from the Bible; usually, critics of the Book of Mormon point to such parallels as evidence that Joseph Smith just copied from the Bible. But, as the Tanners point out, extrabiblical documents such as the Elephantine papyri show that we should expect names like this to show up among expatriate Israelites. Nevertheless, their count comes up short, for there are quite a number of Book of Mormon

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51 In a few cases (e.g., “men are created equal” vs. “a man mine equal”), I have gone beyond the exact words to find a parallel, just as the Tanners did. But the parallels are at least as close as the ones the Tanners list and most of them are identical.
characters who have a biblical name. The following descendants of Lehi have names that are also found in the Old Testament: Aaron (two men), Amos (two men), Benjamin, Enos, Gideon, Helem, Ishmael, Jacob (two men), Jeremiah, Joseph, Lemuel, Noah, Samuel, Shem, and Zedekiah. In addition, we have Ishmael, whose daughters married Lehi’s sons, and Laban, from whom the brass plates were taken, both of whom bear biblical names. In all, I found seventeen Old Testament names (including Isaiah, which the Tanners mention) in the Nephite record. In addition, we have three instances of Lehi and his descendants bearing the same name as a place or a people in the Bible (Ammon, Helam, Lehi). The distinctions blur even more when one realizes that some Bible names were transliterated in different ways by different King James translators. For example, for the Hebrew name normally rendered Isaiah in English, we have, in the KJV, the variants Jesaiah (1 Chronicles 3:21; Nehemiah 11:7) and Jeshiaah (1 Chronicles 20:3, 15; 26:25; Ezra 8:7, 19). Keeping this in mind, we can compare Mulek (Mosiah 25:2) with the biblical personal names Melech, Melchiah, Melchishua, Melchi-zedek, Abi-melech, and Ahi-melech, all from the root meaning “king,” and Nehor (Alma 1:15) with Nahor (Genesis 11:22–29).

A very large number of the names in the Book of Mormon can be explained in terms of Hebrew or Egyptian etymology and, in a few cases, of other ancient Near Eastern names. The evidence is much too extensive to include in this review. Some of the nonbiblical names in the Book of Mormon have also been found in other ancient Near Eastern documents.

Isaiah Quotes in the Book of Mormon

In Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon (p. 23–24), the Tanners complained about Joseph Smith’s use of Isaiah passages as “filler” on the small plates because he had run out of ideas. “The fact that we already have the same material in our Bible makes the situation even more ridiculous.” I responded that this is no more ridiculous than the fact that the Bible itself repeats information in various books. Among my examples, I noted that Isaiah 36–39 contains material found in 2 Kings 18–
In their new book, the Tanners say that "there is far more to this issue." Ignoring what I had said in my review, they add their inability to believe that Nephi would copy chapters from Isaiah onto plates, since it was so hard to engrave words on plates. Referring to my statement that they applied a double standard, allowing the Bible to repeat earlier passages but denying this right to the Book of Mormon, they note that they had, on pages 79–80 of Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon, openly noted that Isaiah and 2 Kings shared material. But they still don't get the point. They clearly term "ridiculous" the repetition in the Book of Mormon while accepting it in the Bible, yet proclaim that "there was no double standard used with regard to the repeated material" (p. 136). They then quote from Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon (p. 80) a criticism that 1–2 Nephi quote works not yet in existence in Nephi's time. While this is certainly a valid topic for discussion, it has no relevance to their comments about the repetition of Isaiah passages in the Book of Mormon, since Isaiah clearly predates Nephi. This changing of subject, hopping from one topic to another, and not dealing with the issue at hand, gives the appearance of subjectivity but is wholly inadequate. It gets a little old seeing the Tanners changing the subject to avoid the issue.

What surprised me is that, after the run-around when responding to my comments on how the Tanners treat the Bible and Book of Mormon repeats differently, they return, in their discussion of Craig Ray's review, to the same old thing. In their response to Ray, they write that they have no objection to the Book of Mormon quoting from Bible books that existed prior to Lehi's time, but add that "the extensive quotations from the Book of Isaiah, however, seem to serve no useful purpose, and the use of King James language in these chapters points strongly to the conclusion that they were actually plagiarized from a nineteenth-century Bible, not from ancient plates" (pp. 137–38). I have dealt with the King James language earlier in this review, so let's look at whether the Book of Mormon Isaiah quotes are gratuitous or whether they serve a purpose and, if the latter, whether that purpose is consistent with Nephi's purpose for the small plates.

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In 1 Nephi 20–21, Nephi quotes Isaiah chapters 48–49, introducing them with an explanation that, as a remnant of Israel, the Nephites could liken these passages to themselves (1 Nephi 19:23–24). After quoting the two chapters, he expounds on them, speaking of the scattering and gathering of Israel (1 Nephi 22:3–12, 24–25) and of his vision of the scattering of Lehi's seed in the New World and the restoration (1 Nephi 22:7–11). During his explanation, he alludes to the following passages that he had just quoted: Isaiah 49:1 (1 Nephi 22:4), and Isaiah 49:22–23 (1 Nephi 22:6; also v. 8, which includes part of Isaiah 29:14), Isaiah 49:26 (1 Nephi 22:12; cf. Isaiah 60:16, which also has parallels with Isaiah 49:23). He also alludes to some of Isaiah's other writings: Isaiah 29:14 (1 Nephi 22:8), Isaiah 29:18 (2 Nephi 22:12; cf. Isaiah 58:10; 59:9), Isaiah 52:10 (2 Nephi 22:10–11), and Isaiah 60:16 (1 Nephi 22:13).

In a lengthy discourse (2 Nephi 6–10), Jacob quotes from Isaiah 49:24–52:2 (2 Nephi 6:16–8:25). In an earlier part of his discourse, he had quoted Isaiah 49:22–23 (2 Nephi 6:6–7) and paraphrased Isaiah 29:6 (2 Nephi 6:15), explaining that he would read passages "concerning all the house of Israel" that could be "likened unto" the Nephites (2 Nephi 6:4–5). He explained that the people of Jerusalem had, in fact, been taken captive (2 Nephi 6:8), but that they would, as Isaiah had prophesied, ultimately be gathered (2 Nephi 6:9–11). He expounds on the comments about the Gentiles in Isaiah 49:22–23 (2 Nephi 6:12–13), adding information from Isaiah 49:24–26 (2 Nephi 6:14, 16–18). Other Isaiah passages used by Jacob in 2 Nephi 6 to discuss the scattering and gathering of Israel include Isaiah 29:8 (1 Nephi 6:13) and Isaiah 29:6 (1 Nephi 6:15). After quoting another lengthy Isaiah passage (Isaiah 50:1–52:2 in 2 Nephi 7:1–8:25), Jacob again expounds on the subject of the gathering found in the passage (2 Nephi 9:2, then turns to the subject of Christ and the atonement (2 Nephi 9:4–42). This is precisely what Abinadi later did when he was asked to explain Isaiah 52:7–10 (Mosiah 12:20–24; 13:3), except that Abinadi quoted all of Isaiah 53 (Mosiah 14) and explained how it referred to Christ (Mosiah 15). Jacob adds a quote from Isaiah 55:1–2 (2 Nephi 9:50–51), then returns to the subject of the destruction and scattering of Israel and the promised gathering (2 Nephi 10:6–13). In this, he refers to both
Isaiah 49:22–23 (2 Nephi 10:8–9) and Isaiah 60:12 (2 Nephi 10:13, 16).

After recording Jacob’s discourse, Nephi noted that he would record “more of the words of Isaiah” (2 Nephi 11:2), saying that his readers could “liken them unto you and unto all men” (2 Nephi 11:8). Then follows the very lengthy extract from Isaiah 2–14 (2 Nephi 12–24). Nephi then proposes to speak about the words of Isaiah that he had recorded (2 Nephi 25:1). Like Jacob, he refers to the scattering and gathering of the Jews (2 Nephi 25:9–11), then goes on to add that there will be wars and speaks of the coming of Christ among the Jews (2 Nephi 25:12–14). He notes that the Jews will be scattered and gathered a second time after Christ’s appearance among them (2 Nephi 25:14–17) and that they must ultimately come to believe in the Messiah (2 Nephi 25:18–20). His prophecy of Christ continues into the next chapter.

In short, both Nephi and Jacob, after quoting from the words of Isaiah, draw upon those words to expound prophecies of the future, including items only hinted at by Isaiah or of which Isaiah may not have had a full understanding, such as the fact that Christ is the Holy One of Israel. There is purpose behind the use of Isaiah in each of these cases.

Isaiah Variants in the Book of Mormon

The Tanners downplay the importance of my study of the “Isaiah Variants in the Book of Mormon.” 53 Regarding the shorter version published in a book edited by Monte Nyman, they write, “We would assume that Tvedtnes has given his best examples in this book” (p. 144). Actually, I tried to select a variety of some of the most supportive parallels to illustrate what I had done, but not all of the best examples. I now have additional supportive material that I will, when time permits, add to my earlier study.

53 See my article in Isaiah and the Prophets, ed. Monte S. Nyman (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, BYU, and Bookcraft, 1984). This paper is a much abbreviated version of a longer study by the same name that is distributed by F.A.R.M.S.
Regarding the Isaiah passages in the Book of Mormon, the Tanners dogmatically declare that "the evidence, including the Dead Sea Scrolls, points to the unmistakable conclusion that Nephi was a fictional character and that Joseph Smith himself was plagiarizing these words from the King James Version" (p. 140). This hyperbolic statement is totally unwarranted by the evidence.

Wesley P. Walters is essentially correct in saying that the text of the main Dead Sea Scrolls Isaiah, discovered near Qumran in Cave 1 and hence named 1QIsa, follows the Hebrew text from which KJV was translated. However, the passage from his book that the Tanners quote (p. 144) fails to note that it does not always agree and that this longer Isaiah scroll is more at variance with the Masoretic text behind KJV than the more fragmentary 1QIsb. In Isaiah 52:13–53:12 alone, 1QIsa has 34 variants with the Masorah. The Tanners note that "John Tvedtnes does not even refer to the evidence that the Dead Sea Scrolls provides (sic) regarding this matter in either of his two studies" (p. 144). In fact, I dealt only with the variant passages, not with the entire text of Isaiah, which would have been beyond the scope of a study entitled "Isaiah Variants in the Book of Mormon."

Referring to my article in Nyman, the Tanners wrote that I "referred to the Masoretic text forty-two times; the Septuagint Version of the Bible twenty-one times and the Isaiah material in the Dead Sea Scrolls only sixteen times. This seems to indicate that he found less to discuss in the extremely ancient texts found at Qumran than in the Septuagint Version and the Masoretic text" (p. 144). They then claim that the same pattern follows in my longer F.A.R.M.S. study and indicate how "strange" it is "that Tvedtnes devoted so much of his attention to the Masoretic text but had little to say about the material from Qumran. Since the Dead Sea Scrolls are about a thousand years older, one would think that they would play the predominant role in his study" (p. 144).

Though having the outward appearance of valid arguments against my work with the Isaiah variants in the Book of Mormon, the Tanners' words lack substance, for the following reasons:

54 Their declarations can be seen as either willfully deceptive or as ignorant of the nature of the texts. I prefer to give them the benefit of the doubt and assume that the latter is correct. Neither the Tanners nor Walters, whom they
1. While I may have mentioned the Masoretic text (MT) more often (since it is the basis of the King James translation), I did not use it as evidence more often. I reread my article in Nyman and found that I referred to MT as evidence for the Book of Mormon version of Isaiah only six times, two of which were variant Hebrew manuscripts. On the other hand, I listed support from 1QIs\(^a\) (the more complete of the Dead Sea Isaiah scrolls) fourteen times—more than twice as many times as MT. I also noted support from the Greek Septuagint (LXX) in seventeen of my examples. While I have not made a count from my longer study, I suspect that a similar pattern exists there. Simply put, the Tanners misrepresented the numbers.

2. Since 1QIs\(^a\) is essentially the same text as MT, I did not elicit support from the Dead Sea Scrolls Isaiah except where it differed from MT. In reexamining my article, I found that in three of the examples in which I indicated that MT supports the Book of Mormon version against KJV, 1QIs\(^a\) agrees. So we can add these to the fourteen examples already listed in the article. Since the Tanners know full well that 1QIs\(^a\) and MT are essentially the same text (as they note in their quote of Walters, p. 144), I can only surmise that they deliberately avoided counting these other examples in their pseudostatistical study of my article.

3. While mentioning the antiquity of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Tanners do not tell their readers that the Greek Septuagint (LXX) was translated from the Hebrew Old Testament in the third century B.C. While it is true that we have no copies of LXX that go back that far, the Greek text was translated from an earlier Hebrew text that in many cases disagrees with MT and 1QIs\(^a\). First-century B.C. Greek LXX versions of Leviticus and Numbers were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. In addition, some of the Hebrew manuscripts in that corpus are closer to LXX. For example, while the Masoretic version of Jeremiah was found at Qumran, one Hebrew text of Jeremiah (4QJer\(^b\)) follows the shorter Septuagint version. One of the Dead Sea Scrolls Exodus scrolls (4QEx\(^a\)) reflects LXX, while another (4QEx\(^\delta\)) is closer to the Samaritan version than to MT. Similarly, one Hebrew copy of Numbers

quote, are qualified to deal with the Dead Sea Scrolls and other Bible texts, not having the linguistic tools necessary for such a study.
(4QNum\textsuperscript{b}) is closer to the Samaritan than to MT and closer still to LXX. One of the Samuel scrolls (both comprise 1–2 Samuel), 4QS\textsuperscript{a}Sam\textsuperscript{a}, is also closer to LXX than to MT. The other Samuel scroll (4QS\textsuperscript{b}Sam\textsuperscript{b}), thought to have been written no later than 200 B.C. and hence one of the oldest scrolls found at Qumran, is a variant of the Hebrew version from which LXX was translated, having many variants from MT.

We should note that the Tanners misunderstand the nature of the transmission of Bible books. They evidently presume a linear progression, with the Qumran scroll that generally agrees with MT being in the genealogy. In truth, however, there were already divergences, as LXX and 1QIs\textsuperscript{b} and other Qumran texts show. In my longer study of the “Isaiah Variants in the Book of Mormon,” I note that there are times when some of the ancient versions disagree with both MT/KJV and Book of Mormon and that this is to be expected. We shall not always find support for the Book of Mormon, nor shall we always find support for KJV, in ancient texts, because variants existed already in very early times. Because of this, the brass plates of Laban, though closer in time to the original, need not always represent Isaiah’s original intent.

At one point, the Tanners take me to task for noting the Septuagint’s partial support for 2 Nephi 12:16 (=Isaiah 2:16). They cite Wesley P. Walters regarding the Septuagint parallel in 2 Nephi 12:16 saying that it “did not come from the Septuagint, but from a well-known Bible commentary written by Thomas Scott” (p. 144). They then add, “John Tvedtnes used the example set forth by Sperry as evidence for the Book of Mormon’s authenticity [but] failed to mention” that the Dead Sea Scrolls don’t support it. There are, however, really two issues here. The first is whether the variant is represented in the Septuagint, the second whether the Dead Sea Scrolls support the variant. The latter point is really irrelevant, since various ancient versions often disagreed with each other. In this particular case, 1QIs\textsuperscript{a} agrees with the Masoretic text and, consequently, with the King James Bible. The Tanners and Walters notwithstanding, I have correctly represented the Septuagint wording in my article and in the longer study on the Isaiah variants. I did not get the idea from Sperry and only discovered what he had done some time after I wrote the original draft of the study. I have never seen Scott’s commentary.
This brings us to the question of Walters, who, based on the Tanners’ report of his words, has grossly misrepresented a number of things. They quote him as saying that he “checked” the Isaiah text from the Dead Sea and found that it follows the Hebrew text underlying the King James Bible (p. 144). If this is correct, then Walters must not have done a very good job or must not have known Hebrew. While it is true that, in the main, 1QIs\textsuperscript{a} has the same Hebrew text as the Masorah from which the King James Bible was translated, there are a fair number of variants. An Israeli scholar, Yehezke’el Kutscher, wrote a rather lengthy study of these variants, and other scholars have discussed some of them in various books and articles.\textsuperscript{55} Anyone who compares the two texts can see the variants (indeed, different Masoretic documents vary in some respects). One need go no farther than the \textit{Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia} to find some of the Qumran variants in its footnotes for the book of Isaiah. (Unfortunately, this revision of Kittel’s \textit{Biblia Hebraica} was not available when I did my study; it would have made things much easier.)

Saying of my Isaiah variants work that “the oldest Hebrew manuscript of the Isaiah text does not sustain his theory” (p. 144), the Tanners accuse me of following a “double standard” by covering up and then accusing them of the same things. Since I have no “theory” to support, I wasn’t looking for evidence to sustain it. The fact is that the Isaiah text in question supports the Book of Mormon version at several points. I have never covered up the fact that it does not lend support for each and every variant. Indeed, in my longer study, I clearly noted the variants for which the Book of Mormon has no version support. Since 1QIs\textsuperscript{a} is mostly like the Masoretic text, I didn’t mention it except where it differed from MT and supported the Book of Mormon. Consequently, in all other cases, MT and 1QIs\textsuperscript{a} have the same reading. Because I am aware that ancient manuscripts often

disagree among themselves, this doesn’t bother me as it does the Tanners.

The Tanners are wrong when they assert that Isaiah scrolls from Qumran provide no support for the Book of Mormon (p. 141). The longer scroll (1QIs a) supports the Book of Mormon Isaiah text in a number of cases. Their inclusion of comments from LDS writers who expressed a belief that the scrolls would not prove valuable to Latter-day Saints (pp. 141–44) is totally unwarranted, since most of these comments deal not with the Isaiah variants but with such issues as the “plain and precious parts” that Latter-day Saints would like to see show up in newly-discovered documents. The Tanners credit Sidney B. Sperry with “a painstaking study of the Dead Sea Scrolls” (p. 141). I did not know Sperry personally, but I have heard from several LDS scholars who know Hebrew that Sperry had only a superficial acquaintance with the language. From the few examples I have seen of his work on the Isaiah variants, it is clear to me that he could not have examined the Dead Sea Scrolls carefully or he would have noted some of the same variants I found.

The Tanners also write that “for years Mormon scholars . . . have attempted to show parallels between the text of Isaiah found in the Book of Mormon and that found in some ancient manuscripts. In our book, Mormon Scriptures and the Bible, pp. 9–11, we show that these parallels are of little value” (p. 141). In fairness, I should perhaps read that book (of which I had not previously heard) before passing judgment. But knowing that the Tanners lack the linguistic skills to judge the kind of work I did with the Isaiah variants, I suspect that it would be more lay hyperbole and less scholarship than the subject deserves.

New Testament Passages in the Book of Mormon

The Tanners repeat that “our main problem with plagiarism in the Book of Mormon is the material taken from the New Testament” (p. 140). They gave a large number of examples of such parallels in part II of Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon and cite others in their current work. When I began looking into the subject after reading their book, several thoughts came to me:
1. Many of the supposed New Testament borrowings could just as easily come from the Old Testament; indeed, in a number of cases, it was clear that the New Testament passage was actually a quote (a "plagiarism," I suppose, since credit is not always given) from the Old Testament.

2. Many of the parallels were just common idioms and phrases that could not be said to be specifically New Testament, although found in that scripture.

3. If the terminology was truly part of Joseph Smith's vocabulary, as the Tanners sometimes imply, then it should not be surprising to see him use it in his translation, provided the meaning of the Nephite text was reflected in the English.

I originally considered responding to each and every one of the suggested "borrowings" and, indeed, checked on a fair number of them using the computer. It soon became obvious that it would require an entire book to discuss this large corpus. Meanwhile, the reader can consult my earlier review to see a sampling of the kinds of problems I found with the Tanners' list.

I must respond, however, to one of the Tanners' statements from Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon that they repeat in the follow-up book: "It should be obvious that the presence of many portions of the New Testament in the Book of Mormon is more out of place than to find the following words in a speech attributed to George Washington: 'Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation . . .' These words alone would be enough to prove the speech a forgery. While less than a century separated George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, in the Book of Mormon we have Lehi quoting from the New Testament book of Revelation almost seven centuries before it was written!" (p. 140). The hyperbolic words "more out of place" are clearly not supported by the example they give. Lincoln's Gettysburg Address includes a date ("four score and seven years" after the "fathers," including Washington, "brought forth . . . a new nation"), while the New Testament passages they compare with the Book of Mormon do not. Were the datable elements not part of the speech, one might just as easily suggest that Lincoln borrowed the speech from Washington after discovery of a document attributing the words to Washington.
Similarly, many New Testament passages are known from earlier Jewish works (some of them pseudepigrapha of the second century B.C.) which may have quoted from still older writings. The fact that a passage in one of Paul's epistles, for example, is also found in the Book of Mormon does not prove that Joseph Smith put it there. Both sources could have borrowed from earlier documents, some of them no longer extant. Some evidence for this has been elicited in a number of Book of Mormon studies and we can look forward to more.\footnote{56 Again, the Tanners will see this as a "cop out." But the evidence for such quotes in the New Testament, commonly accepted even among non-LDS scholars, shows that one cannot reject the Book of Mormon out-of-hand on such grounds.}

More to the point, however, is that King James language was known to both Joseph Smith and his contemporaries. With this, the Tanners would agree. Where we disagree is that they see Joseph Smith expropriating Bible texts to compose the Book of Mormon, while I consider that Joseph Smith, like any other translator, would naturally render an ancient text in language familiar to the audience for whom he is translating. A more recent parallel to the Book of Mormon is the way the British scholar Robert Henry Charles imitated KJV language in his translation of ancient Jewish documents in *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* (Oxford, 1913).

**Conclusions**

I am even less impressed with the Tanners' latest effort than with their original book on the "black hole" theory. Most of it is a rehash of what was said in their earlier work, rather than a real "response to criticism" of that work. Mere repetition and avoiding the issues by dwelling on insignificant items is not going to make their case. I am particularly concerned with the way in which they address things for which they have no expertise. For example, their pontification about the Dead Sea Scrolls, of which they know virtually nothing, marks the work as lacking in any real understanding of scriptural and documentary issues.

Nevertheless, I should be somewhat grateful to the Tanners for writing both books. Each time, I have had to examine the evidence
a bit more closely and, in doing so, have come away more convinced than before that we have, in the Book of Mormon, a translation of an ancient document that has stood the test of time and criticism. Were I not so swamped with other projects, I would look forward to volume 2 of Answering Mormon Scholars: A Response to Criticism of the Book “Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon.”

**Article Title**

Reviewed by Brian M. Hauglid

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

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

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1 *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1961), 368–69. This incidence has reference to a dream of the Prophet Joseph Smith in which he "was overtaken and seized by William and Wilson Law and others saying, 'Ah! ah! we have got you at last! We will secure you and put you in a safe place!' and dragged me out of my carriage, tied my hands behind me, and threw me into a deep, dry pit, where I remained in a perfectly helpless condition, and they went away. While struggling to get out, I heard Wilson Law screaming for help hard by. I managed to unloose myself so as to make a spring, when I caught hold of some grass which grew at the edge of the pit. I looked out of the pit and saw Wilson Law at a little distance attacked by ferocious wild beasts, and heard him cry out, 'Oh, Brother Joseph, come and save me!' I replied, 'I cannot, for you have put me into this deep pit.' On looking out another way, I saw William Law with outstretched tongue, blue in the face, and the green poison forced out of his mouth, caused by the coiling of a large snake around his body. It had also grabbed him by the arm, a little above the elbow, ready to devour him. He cried out in the intensity of his agony, 'Oh Brother Joseph, Brother Joseph, come and save me, or I die!' I also replied to him, 'I cannot, William; I would willingly, but you have tied me and put me in this pit, and I am powerless to help or liberate myself.' In a short time after my guide came and said aloud, 'Joseph, Joseph, what are you doing there?' I replied, 'My enemies fell upon me, bound me and threw me in.' He then took me by the hand, drew me out of the pit, set me free, and we went away rejoicing."
Eve surrounded by a variety of symbols. Some of these symbols include an all-seeing eye, a ministering angel, the cross, a lion, a handclasp (looking much too familiar), and an oak leaf. These symbols are interpreted in an illustrator’s note on the bibliographic page. The title intrigued me because of the common bond shared by many Mormons, described in the scriptures as feeling like “strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (Hebrews 11:13), and because this life is filled with multifaceted ironies that make up some sort of paradoxical puzzle. However, above all, I felt excited to read something new on this subject because I love to read theology, especially LDS theology.

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

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

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

4 New Webster’s Dictionary of the English Language (1975), s.v. “Theology.”
the practice; theology is the theory.”5 Perhaps some of us feel that the practice of religion is more important than the theory of religion, and therefore do not spend much time in the abstract, ethereal study of LDS theology when there is so much practical, down-to-earth work to be done in religion.

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

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

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

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6 Ibid.
7 TPJS, 343.
attempt to justify changing the doctrines, or more accurately, changing our understanding of the nature of God, in order to lobby for changes in Church policy, especially policies related to the sisters of the church.


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

Strangers in Paradox is written very well, with a clear statement of the thesis from which the book never strays, and with
an intelligent approach to many of the aspects of that thesis. The prose is smooth and in some instances almost poetic. On the whole, the volume should be given high marks for clarity of thought, persuasive arguments, creativity, and overall readability. Because of the general reader-friendliness inherent here, the authors facilitate understanding of their ideas and, at the same time, clearly reveal weaknesses inherent in their arguments.

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

The introduction constitutes a good description and validation of their liberal methods. It is interesting to note that the authors base all their theological musings on “the ideas, teachings, and revelations of Joseph Smith.” (I will call their explorations “theological musings” because in the truest sense this is not a book of theology. If it were, it would be much more systematic [which the authors disclaimed] in its presentation, somewhat akin to a study of specific theological topics which are carefully arranged. Here, however, each of the chapters is a thoughtfully
prepared essay on a general theological subject.) Joseph Smith endorsed and invited liberal thinking on the doctrines of the gospel. In April 1843, Peletiah Brown was called up before the high council "for erring in doctrine" concerning the beasts mentioned in the Book of Revelation. Not only did Joseph Smith dislike Brown's being called up before the Council, but he also declared, "I want the liberty of thinking and believing as I please. . . It does not prove that a man is not a good man because he errs in doctrine." Yet the Prophet saw limitations to this liberality. He said in July 1839:

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

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

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

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8 HC, 5:340.
9 HC, 3:385.
Strangers in Paradox: Professed First Principles

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

\textsuperscript{12} TPJS, 256.
on revelation. The idea of sacrifice is usually present in these God-ordained paradoxes also, not as much in the sense of a physical sacrifice as in a sacrifice of our will in submission to God's will. Significantly, the perfect expression of a paradox can be found in the life of Jesus Christ, "who suffered greater sufferings, and was exposed to more powerful contradictions than any man can be. But notwithstanding all this, he kept the law of God, and remained without sin, showing thereby that it is in the power of man to keep the law and remain also without sin."13 Hence, though we are all placed in these God-ordained paradoxes, we have the power to keep the law and remain without sin by assiduously following his commandments as found in the scriptures and in the revelations given to his prophets and apostles.

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

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

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

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

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

The first two paradoxes discussed in this chapter are obviously attached to the main argument. However, the paradox of history and myth is not as readily seen as part of the overall purpose of the book. The authors argue that the study of mythologies gives meaning to history, even though history is often looked at as contradictory to myth—hence the (man-made) paradox. After dispelling the negatives about myths, the authors conclude that,
“from a mythical perspective, the event of Moses leading the people of Israel through the wilderness, through the waters of the Red Sea, and eventually into the promised land may or may not point to a historical Hebrew epic, but can serve as a symbol of the journey of the soul.” Myth then transports one from the realm of the facts and figures of history to finding meaning in religious life. However, here the authors take the opportunity to point out where the Church is going wrong. They state that in Mormonism there is a “negative reaction toward myth” (p. 12), implying that members of the Church do not, or perhaps cannot, find meaning in existence. There may be some kernel of truth in their allegations for some individuals in the Church, but to make it general with the term Mormonism shows the authors’ tendency towards irresponsible oversimplification and judgmental assertions. Be that as it may, the “mythic interpretation,” as the authors term it, or the finding of religious meaning in the present through symbolic representations found in mythology, is the vehicle the authors employ to justify their main objective.

Chapter two, “Keystones,” lists seven “keystones for the interpretive method” used in this book (p. 15). Before commenting on these keystones, I should note that the authors postulate that anyone “serious about understanding a particular religious tradition must carefully examine its primary texts for provenance and historical context” (p. 14). I assume (since it is not specified) that by primary texts the authors are referring to the scriptures or sacred writings of the religious traditions, such as the four standard works for the Latter-day Saints, the Koran for the Muslims, the Torah for the Jews, the Bhagavad Gita for Hinduism, etc. A primary text, according to the authors, must be interpreted as much as possible without imposing one’s prejudices upon it. The assertion is made that, to avoid “extreme subjectivity and extreme objectivity,” one must “reinterpret” the text by being “drawn” into it, while at the same time “relinquishing our own biases.” By this method one is “changed by the text,” and receives a “new capacity for self-knowledge,” and becomes an “extension of the text” (p. 15). The authors demonstrate that they will be using a nontraditional method for achieving theological enlightenment or certitude. In other words, instead of employing the prescribed methods (which they never mention)
for gaining a testimony, such as fasting, prayer, and guidance from inspired leaders, they invite us to go to some higher level of self-awareness through the study of myths. In reality this sounds like a variation on a theme brought out in the Book of Alma by another who sought to justify his lack of submission to the basic requirements of the gospel—Korihor. One of the most insidious ways this “mythic interpretation” accomplishes its task is by replacing the absolutes of life with relativistic speculations. It is nothing more than the existential philosophy that “what is true for you may not be true for me” or “what is true for me may not be true for you.” So live and let live, there is no absolute Truth, only truth that fits the individual; no absolute Beauty, only beauty in the eye of the beholder; no absolute Wrong, only wrong in the sense of unconventional behavior patterns established genetically or environmentally; and so on. In other words, the authors are implying that the Church needs to get with the program and start changing the capital letters of these absolutes to small case in order for the Church to be right for them.14 I again tip my hat to the authors for coming up with something so unique, creative, and crafty as this “mythic interpretation” to state and justify their case. However, it is just the same old issues dressed up in new garb.

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

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

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

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14 See Allen Bloom's *Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987) for more thorough treatment of the concept of changing the absolutes. Bloom feels the only absolute left is tolerance.
should rise above these biases to honor and respect these people's belief-structure. The authors further base this on the premise that because of the many different viewpoints in the world (religious, cultural, and intellectual), the scriptures can be interpreted in many ways. In fact, they state that "God's mind and will are not easy to discern. Genuine revelation is usually paradoxical and ambiguous and, therefore, susceptible to multiple interpretations. Finally, we do not believe God speaks in only one voice" (p. 16). Again, in light of previous declarations of the authors, it is clear that they stand against the First Presidency and the Twelve and particularly against the idea of one prophet on the earth at one time who holds all the priesthood keys and acts as God's vehicle for divine revelation to the entire Church.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

15 See D&C 8, 9, 76, 77, 138 as good examples of asking questions before receiving revelation.
beyond” what the prophets and apostles have clearly spoken concerning the scriptural basis for women in relation to the Church and the priesthood. Somehow the authors see this keystone as an integral support to their main argument for women in the Church holding the priesthood, whereas I see it as the keystone by which they justify themselves making a clean break from mainstream Mormonism.

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

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

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

The authors argue that each viewpoint has its positive and negative aspects. Neither one should completely replace the other. Accordingly, sacral societies tend towards “dogmatism, authoritarianism, and denigration of naturalistic experience,” while those of the secular world “are susceptible to materialism, superficiality, and alienation” (p. 22). The authors conclude this
section by stating: “Though Mormonism shares with the sacral world view the belief in the supernatural and the sacred origin of humanity, still it views religion mostly from a secular perspective, as evidenced by its pragmatic approach to salvation, its literal interpretation of the scriptures, and its general aversion to symbols and ritual” (p. 23). Here, again, is a good example of an irresponsible oversimplification and a judgmental assertion.

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

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

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

This keystone principle seems to attempt to square the literal and figurative approaches to interpreting texts. On the one hand, if one is too figurative, then the text loses applicability. If, on the other hand, as the authors view Mormonism, one is too literal in interpreting texts, one becomes imprisoned “in a single, rigid, and often elitist world view” (p. 25). Furthermore, the authors
describe individuals in this literalist state as being "trapped" in their own reality, in which they cannot see "beyond" their own "culture or personal experience. . . . Strict literalism closes the window to the unknown and can lead to the false assumptions that our pictures, images, or models of God are complete and final. This view is extremely damaging because it forecloses inquiry and with that further knowledge" (pp. 24–25). The authors then promise to take a more compromising and fair approach by trying to employ both views simultaneously.

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

Before proceeding to the next sections of their book, the authors note that "these interpretive principles and the assumptions set forth in the previous chapter have guided us in the discussions that comprise the balance of this book" (p. 26). Indeed the authors do stay close to their intended purposes laid out in these first two chapters. From this point on, there is nothing really new, except some specific examples from ancient Judaism, Christianity, and mythology to further support the argument for democratizing the priesthood in the Church. However, their
“mythic interpretations” do bring out some speculative statements, which they use to create interesting new doctrines such as “Christ's God and father is not our God and father” (p. 64), the implied wife-swapping of Adam and Christ, and the “mystical union” between male and female contained in a lengthy version of a new myth (used to express difficult concepts) created by the authors (pp. 68–70). As will be shown, their “mythic interpretation” is equally hard on the Book of Mormon.

Strangers in Paradox:
Professed Book of Mormon Tenets

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

19 McConkie, The Promised Messiah, 352.
It is perfectly clear that faithful saints become the sons and daughters of Jesus Christ by adoption. But there is more than this to the doctrine of becoming sons of God. Those who so obtain are adopted also into the family of Elohim. . . . The reasoning is perfect. The Father had a Son, a natural Son, his own literal seed, the Offspring of his body. This Son is his heir. As an heir he inherits all things from his Father—all power, all might, all dominion, the world, the universe, kingship, eternal exaltation, all things. But our revelations speak of men being exalted also and of their ascending the throne of eternal power. How is it done? . . . They are adopted into the family of the Father. They become joint-heirs with his natural Son. . . . This means that through the infinite and eternal atonement, those who are true and faithful on all the endless creations of Christ are adopted into the family of the Father as heirs, as joint-heirs, who will with him receive, inherit, and possess all that the Father hath.20

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

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

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

20 Ibid., 354–57.
21 Talmage, Articles of Faith, 465–73.
Another example of the authors using the Book of Mormon to justify unorthodox doctrines is found in the chapter “Bringing Good out of Evil.” The authors cite 2 Nephi 2:11 and surmise that “the potential for evil in God means the [that?] God could ‘cease to be God’ ” (p. 111). Dealing with the problem of evil is at best a theological nightmare, especially in relation to God. Here the authors correctly state God’s finite or temporal nature instead of the Augustinian view that he is absolute and not able to relate to his children. However, it is difficult to ascertain whether God chooses not to do evil, as the authors suggest, or whether evil is not in God’s nature because he enjoys a fulness of truth, justice, righteousness, power, etc. It is the authors’ contention that both human beings and God are able to choose good or evil, that evil is an inherent part of our soul, and that the whole purpose of evil is to bring good out of the evil. Enjoyable as this discussion was at the beginning of the chapter, the authors finally conclude that human beings are “spiritually deficient” and in need of a “spiritual transformation,” demonstrating that redemption represents “receiving God’s spirit” (true up to this point), but it is “not a matter of legislation, moral exhortations, proper examples, rules, regulations, and good education” (p. 114). These, of course, are among the very things that have been taught by the Brethren and the standard works which will enable one to receive the spirit. I believe the authors are here incorrectly employing the Book of Mormon to espouse and justify their unfounded, albeit somewhat interesting, assumptions about some of these doctrines and Church leadership generally.

One of the more familiar phrases in the Book of Mormon that the authors use to validate their belief that the Church is off course is contained in 2 Nephi 28:21. The authors declare, “The Book of Mormon repeatedly warns that we should not think that ‘all is well in Zion’ ” (p. 209). The chapter “Women, Ordination, and Hierarchy” is based on the assumption, extrapolated from this verse, that since the Church is not “well,” the only way to secure a change of policy is to lobby for it. Implicitly, anyway, it seems that this can be accomplished through protestation by members of the Church. In one place, the authors quote from Elder Boyd K. Packer’s article in the July 1989 Ensign, “A Tribute to Women” Elder Packer made it clear that “from the beginning the
priesthood has been conferred only upon men. It is always described in the scriptures as coming through the lineage of the fathers.” Commenting on this, the authors state that “Elder Packer is correct in part” and then proceed to explain that the scriptures referring to the priesthood can be reexamined without a “dominant male orientation” (p. 211) in order to find equal treatment of women. Members of the Church are accused of looking at the leaders as perfect and of blindly following their misguided counsel. However, the authors never concede that most members put their faith and trust in the leadership of the Church because these men have been called of God to serve in these capacities in spite of their weaknesses. True discipleship, in this sense, emerges through a patient, forgiving, and sometimes restrained approach to following our leaders in their weaknesses without a judgmental and critical voice.

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

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

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

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

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

The conversion of Alma the Younger is the most detailed Book of Mormon story about an individual receiving an
unmediated calling to preach. . . . That Alma rests his authority to preach and teach upon this unmediated calling is clear: “For I am called to speak after this manner according to the holy order of God, which is in Christ Jesus” (Alma 5:44). . . . Alma rests his authority to preach the gospel upon his vision. The text mentions nothing about an ordination. (p. 156)

The “holy ordinance” involves at least a designation or appointment through the mediation of a human intercessor and perhaps the laying on of hands. (p. 156)

The text presents the holy calling as coming before the ordination: “Thus being called by this holy calling, and ordained unto the high priesthood of the holy order of God” (Alma 5:6). Alma the Younger relies upon his holy calling to preach and upon his father’s act of consecration to preside. (p. 156)

The calling coming from God without mediation establishes the relationship between the called individual and God, and for this reason we believe this calling is the most important feature of priesthood conferral. (p. 157)

Apparently if this calling comes to those living within an already existing authorized church structure, the calling empowers individuals only to preach repentance and teach the gospel. (pp. 157–58)

If the calling comes to one living outside such a church structure, it seems to carry as well authority to baptize, to ordain, and even to organize a church. (p. 158)

These Book of Mormon teachings on priesthood have significant implications for the modern church. First, it seems to us that the Book of Mormon advances two types of priesthood authority. The most familiar one is ecclesiastical, the authority to preside in a church office. The other is charismatic or spiritual authority. (pp. 158–59)
These two authorities have different purposes. Charismatic authority (or inward priesthood, as we have called it previously) comes by the "holy calling" and is the heart of the priesthood. . . . This authority is attended to by prophecy, healings, tongues, and other charismatic gifts. . . . Ecclesiastical authority (or outward priesthood) comes by a holy ordinance and exists to develop, maintain, and protect the church, to promote the teachings of Christ, to perform the ordinances of the gospel. (p. 159)

Ideally these authorities should exist in each priest. . . . The charismatic is endowed with spiritual gifts: insight, knowledge, truth, the power to teach and convince. The ecclesiastic is endowed with the resources and corporate power of the church and the responsibility to watch over the community. (p. 159)

Mormonism began with a short charismatic period—marked by institutional chaos and doctrinal ferment. Since then ecclesiastical authority has predominated with its concern for institutional order, fiscal stability, doctrinal simplicity, categorical morality, and public image. (p. 159)

The existence of a charismatic priesthood authority transmitted directly to individuals by supernatural means has important implications for women, who traditionally have been excluded from ordination into priestly orders. (p. 160)

To receive the priesthood in the modern church is not to be empowered in any real sense. It signifies only that one has been deemed qualified to serve if and when he is set apart to a church office. What this means is that the authority to act for God is never vested in individuals. It is always retained by the institutional structure. Thus institutional perceptions rather than spiritual gifts drive the church. (p. 162)
The Book of Mormon clearly leaves open the possibility that individuals called of God but not necessarily ordained or acknowledged by the institution might arise and reprove the wayward organization. (p. 163)

The equality of the Book of Mormon is personal and voluntary. People are admonished to esteem others as themselves, to freely give as they would freely receive, to relate to others as loved ones. (p. 164)

Every bishop and stake president and apostle should esteem every other person as if he or she were called to a like calling. We believe it means that no priesthood leader should hear a confession of sins unless he is willing to confess his sins to the person whose confession he is about to hear. (p. 165)

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

*To be called of God by prophecy* means to be called by the spirit of inspiration. It means that the one making the
call has the gift of prophecy, which is the testimony of Jesus. . . . In other words, the call comes from the Lord, by the mouth of his servant, as that servant is moved upon by the spirit . . . . The Lord’s house is a house of order.\textsuperscript{22}

\textit{To be called by the laying on of hands of those who are in authority} means that more than one person approves the call and that the Lord’s servants—formally, officially, and by the performance of an ordinance—convey the power and authority needed to do the ministerial work involved. Men who desire to serve God are not left free to assume, because of some inner feeling, that the Lord wants them to labor in his vineyard. They must receive a formal call from a legal administrator, and they must feel the hands of the Lord’s servants on their heads as the words of ordination or conferral or authorization are spoken. The Lord’s house is a house of order.\textsuperscript{23}

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

\textsuperscript{22} Bruce R. McConkie, \textit{A New Witness for the Articles of Faith}, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 323–24; emphasis added.

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 324.
of other scriptures and the counsel of the Brethren (which they will not accept).  

Conclusions

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

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

President Joseph F. Smith said:

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

President Smith also taught:


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

Elder Bruce R. McConkie has written:

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

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

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

26 Ibid., 116–17.
Priesthood will attempt for one moment to run before his file leader or to do anything that is not in strict harmony with his wish and the authority that belongs to him. The moment a man in a subordinate position begins to usurp the authority of his leader, that moment he is out of his place, and proves by his conduct that he does not comprehend his duty, that he is not acting in the line of his calling, and is a dangerous character.\(^\text{28}\)

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

Nominal Christianity outside the restored church stands as an evidence that the blend between worldly philosophy and revealed truth leads to impotence.\(^\text{29}\)

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

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

\(^{28}\) Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, 185.

\(^{29}\) Ezra Taft Benson, *Charge to Religious Educators*, 2d. ed. (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1982), 50–51.
as exalted man shall stand, priest and king unto the Most High God. Mortal eye cannot see nor mind comprehend the beauty, glory, and majesty of a righteous woman made perfect in the celestial kingdom of God.\textsuperscript{30}

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


A Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy Challenges Cultural Mormon Neglect of the Book of Mormon: Some Reflections on the "Impact of Modernity"

Reviewed by Louis Midgley

I am particularly interested in the impact of "modernity"—the challenge to religion posed by secularization.

O. Kendall White, Jr.

Previously in this venue books dealing with the Book of Mormon have received detailed attention, as have books in which the Book of Mormon has received sustained or at least modestly significant treatment. Obviously there is a large literature on Mormon things, both scholarly and unscholarly, which neglects or barely mentions the Book of Mormon. Some of what appears in this genre deserves thoughtful attention precisely because it does not take seriously the Book of Mormon. Kendall White's *Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy* is a fine example of such a book. Hence, with this essay I inaugurate a new type of review—the detailed, critical assessment of books that display a serious impediment to the understanding of Mormon things because they are silent about the Book of Mormon, or brush it aside, or ignore the competent literature dealing with it.

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1 O. Kendall White, Jr., *Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy: A Crisis Theology* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987), xxii. Hereafter references to this book will be parenthetical.
A "New" Account?

In 1987 Signature Books described *Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy*, in some promotional hype, as an "exiting new book" (back cover). It was, however, even then not "new." It was, instead, a slightly updated rehash of a University of Utah master's thesis that was completed in 1967.\(^2\) So it turns out that White's book—in 1970 it was announced as "forthcoming" from the University of Utah Press—\(^3\) is not new, but its contents can be traced back to 1967.

In addition, core portions of White's thesis were published between 1969 and 1971.\(^4\) So there is little not previously accessible to interested scholars in *Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy*.\(^5\) But where the thesis and the essays drawn from it have enjoyed a decent obscurity, since Signature Books published it as a book in

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\(^2\) O. Kendall White, Jr., "The Social Psychological Basis of Mormon New-Orthodoxy" (master's thesis, Sociology Department, University of Utah, June 1967).

\(^3\) For the announcement "of his forthcoming book . . . to be published by the University of Utah Press," see O. Kendall White, Jr., "The Transformation of Mormon Theology," *Dialogue* 5/2 (Summer 1970): 9, headnote. For reasons that are not clear the University of Utah Press backed away from publishing White's master's thesis.


\(^5\) When White's 1967 master's thesis was eventually published as *Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy* in 1987, some cosmetic changes were made in the text, including the substitution of alternative phrasing, the removal of some gender-specific language, the addition of a preface and a few pages to provide an introduction, to call attention to a few writers like Paul Toscano, and to conclude the book, but there is little to suggest that White revised or modified (with one exception, which I will take up later) the opinions he expressed in 1967.
1987 and promoted it as an exiting new study, it has drawn some attention in Mormon studies.

One of the more glaring deficiencies in Kendall White's earliest work on Mormonism and also in *Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy* stems from his indifference to the Book of Mormon and its place in the life of Latter-day Saints. To see why White brushes aside the Book of Mormon, it is necessary to understand what he is attempting to do in his book.

### Modernity and "The Challenge to Religion"

The following passages provide an outline of his argument in his own words. His underlying assumption is that religion—faith in God—is challenged by modernity. This is hardly a new idea. He also assumes that believers ought to reach an accommodation with modernity by adopting its assumptions and reflecting its values. Given these assumptions, the following passages express his understanding of what has been taking place within the Mormon academic community since World War II:

Emerging from the optimism of the nineteenth century, Mormonism . . . was likewise forced to negotiate the traumas of modernity, effecting a unique synthesis of American religious and secular culture. (p. xiv)

As a pluralistic metaphysics became the philosophical foundation of Mormon doctrine, the concepts of human nature and salvation contained in the Book of Mormon disappeared from traditional Mormon theology. (p. 140)

Suggestions of a Mormon neo-orthodoxy do not imply a return to the early theology of Joseph Smith, though I believe a case can be made for some tenets of neo-orthodoxy [being present] in both the Book of Mormon

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6 White's book was advertised by Signature Books as "the decade's most important new book" on what was described as "Latter-day Saint theology" (quoted from the cover of *Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy*).
and Smith's earliest theology, but rather a parallel with developments within Protestantism.7

Like these Protestant movements, Mormon neo-orthodoxy is a response to the experience of "modernity"—the secularization of society and culture. (p. xi)

In response to secularization, Mormon neo-orthodox theologians have embraced some fundamental doctrines of Protestant neo-orthodoxy. . . . These doctrines typically reflected the sensations experienced during neo-orthodox crisis with liberalism and modernity. (pp. 159–60)

In both the Protestant and Mormon cases, liberal theologies celebrating the "progress" entailed in the advent of modernity were jettisoned for theologies emphasizing human limitations and proclaiming greater dependence on supernatural deity.8

White seems to be aware that both the Book of Mormon and the other early revelations to Joseph Smith provide the content for much of what he labels pejoratively as "Mormon neo-orthodoxy." He claims, however, that the teachings found in the Book of Mormon and those early teachings of Joseph Smith were jettisoned (his word) as "traditional Mormonism" was modified by Latter-day Saint "theologians" to craft an accommodation with the secularizing forces of modernity. It may come as a shock to Latter-day Saints to discover that the Book of Mormon has played virtually no role in their faith subsequent to an accommodation with modernity reached by Mormon "theologians," but White flatly denies that "traditional Mormonism," as he understands such things, rests on or reflects the teachings found in the Book of Mormon.

For White, in order for Mormon "theologians" to reach this accommodation with modernity, faith in man—in the essential goodness of man, whatever that might mean—had to replace the

7 O. Kendall White, Jr., "Reflections on Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy" (paper read to the Religious Research Association, Salt Lake City, Utah, October 1989), 1.
8 Ibid., 2.
notions of sin and dependence upon deity that are found in the
Book of Mormon and in the early revelations to Joseph Smith.
But, according to White, a cultural or social crisis has
unfortunately caused a movement, which he labels "Mormon
neo-orthodoxy," that rejects "faith in man." White describes this
retrograde movement as politically conservative, authoritarian,
anti-intellectual, and out of harmony with the latest fashions found
in the secular culture; it is also presumably a turning away from
"traditional Mormonism."

White and Brooke

When Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy has gotten attention, its
influence has been rather noxious. For example, drawing upon
White's book, Professor John L. Brooke, a non-Mormon historian
at Tufts University, argues that "in the last three decades a body
of Mormon thinkers have been pressing for greater change in
Mormon doctrine. Though there are variations on the theme, the
central tenet of these 'neo-orthodox' or 'redemptionist'
Mormons is the rejection of the traditional optimistic view of
human nature." Presumably these "neo-orthodox" Latter-day
Saints are striving to move the Church back to the teachings found
in the Book of Mormon and early revelations, and hence away
from what Brooke describes, following White, as the "traditional
optimistic view of human nature," and at the same time away
from what he considers the occult, hermetic, magical core of
Mormonism.

Brooke also holds that "neo-orthodox" Mormon theologians
want to reemphasize the Fall of Adam and at least a variant
of the theme of original sin, sin from which only Christ's
atonement and God's grace can save humanity, rather
than mere works. In 'making a case for grace,' the 'neo-
orthodox' . . . stress . . . 'redemption' and spiritual
transformation, the new birth of sinful humanity,

9 John L. Brooke, The Refiner's Fire: The Making of Mormon Cosmology,
10 And also away from what Brooke considers, following D. Michael
Quinn's speculation and Mark Hofmann's forgeries, the occult, hermetic
substance of the post-1832 teachings of Joseph Smith. Ibid., 300-301, 304-5.
promising salvation rather than merit-based exaltation in the celestial kingdom. Clearly, this position builds on the developments of the last century, particularly the church’s reemphasis on the atonement. In addition, the ‘neo-orthodox’ are able to press their argument by using texts from the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith’s earliest revelations, while ignoring the doctrine developed in the late 1830s and at Nauvoo.11

Brooke supports this and other similar and related opinion by citing Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy,12 apparently unaware that a thoughtful examination of White’s book indicates that an undistinguished master’s thesis should have been allowed the obscurity it once enjoyed and thoroughly merited; certainly it should not become an important source upon which genuinely competent historians ground their conclusions.

Brooke unfortunately accepts White’s account. Like White, he also understands that the Book of Mormon is, as he puts it, unambiguously “redemptionist,”13 and that, by teaching that “only Christ’s atonement and God’s grace can save humanity, rather than works,” Latter-day Saints are simply following what is taught in the Book of Mormon. And Brooke also seems to recognize that what he calls the “‘neo-orthodox’ or ‘redemptionist’” stance of current Latter-day Saints “builds on the development of the last century, particularly the church’s reemphasis on the atonement.”14 And like White, only more emphatically, Brooke grants that “the ‘neo-orthodox’ are able to press their argument by using texts from the Book of Mormon and

11 Ibid., 296–97.
12 Ibid., 319 n. 28, 391 n. 81, 404 nn. 76, 80. Brooke has a tendency to rely upon outrageous sources. For example, he builds part of the conclusion to his book on the shoddy work of a journalist, James Coates. For evidence of dependence on Coates, see ibid., 298, 402 nn. 56, 57, 58. Coates, In Mormon Circles: Gentiles, Jack Mormons, and Latter-day Saints (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1991) is a striking example of badly-informed, secular anti-Mormon propaganda masking itself as a new and important contribution to the literature on Mormonism.
13 Brooke borrows this label from White (see Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy, 148–49).
14 Brooke, 296–97.
Joseph Smith’s earliest revelations, while ignoring the doctrine developed in the late 1830s and at Nauvoo.”¹⁵ In all of this, Brooke has rather slavishly followed White.

Brooke acknowledges that the Book of Mormon provides authoritative grounding for Latter-day Saint commitment to the atonement of Jesus Christ. And yet both White and Brooke seem rather oblivious to the significance of the Book of Mormon for understanding Mormon things. There are, however, some passages in Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy in which White mentions the Book of Mormon and also calls attention to what he regards as “a renewed emphasis on Christ as the center of Mormonism” (p. 175).

White also grants that this “renewed emphasis on Christ” is a manifestation of Mormon neo-orthodoxy. No mention of such an emphasis appears in White’s thesis in 1967, but it turns up briefly in his book. If there is a renewal, what exactly is being renewed? Is it the traditional understanding? Not according to White, for he also complains that this “renewed emphasis” is not on the life of Jesus, which he imagines to have been at the center of the traditional Latter-day Saint focus, but on the cross of the Christ (p. 106), by which he means the atonement; he finds such a focus contrary to his own understanding of “traditional Mormonism,” which he also thinks stressed an optimistic “salvation by merit” (pp. xix, xvi, xxii, xxiv) or “salvation by works” (p. 80, cf. p. 81—“through one’s own meritorious efforts” and so forth) rather than what he considers a negative, pessimistic “necessity of salvation by grace” (p. 26, cf. pp. xxv, xxiv, 86).

The Relevance of the Book of Mormon to the Question of Whether There Is a Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy

From White’s perspective, a “renewed emphasis on Christ” (p. 175), the Christ of faith and hence on the atonement, rather than attention to stories about the “life” of Jesus that may provide a kind of moral ideal, is a betrayal of what he understands as “traditional Mormonism,” which he sees as having more or less abandoned belief in the necessity of an atonement for sin. He

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¹⁵ Ibid., 297.
claims that Mormon theologians reached an accommodation with those elements of modernity\(^{16}\) that frame the justifiably normative elements of the larger American culture.

The product of this accommodation to modernity is "traditional Mormonism," which is a form of optimism not unlike Protestant liberalism. "Emerging from the optimism of the nineteenth century, Mormonism . . . was likewise forced to negotiate the traumas of modernity, effecting a unique synthesis of American religious and secular culture" (p. xiv). But unfortunately, according to White, we have a movement bent on achieving a "renewed emphasis on Christ." Thus, what he understands as "traditional Mormonism" is merely a product of an accommodation with modernity in much the same way as Protestant liberalism was a product of a similar coming to terms with the Enlightenment. Hence, "until the early years of the twentieth century," when it was replaced by Protestant neo-orthodoxy, according to White,

Protestant liberalism, a product of the Enlightenment, was perhaps Christianity's most promising theological development with its celebration of science and reason. Some liberal Protestants came to see God as an ideal—the embodiment of the finest human values—while others regarded him as a finite being. Virtually all liberal Protestants espoused an optimistic conception of human nature. Through moral and rational progress humanity would solve many of its problems. The Kingdom of God as a just, peaceful, and harmonious society had become a real possibility, requiring only the adequate development of reason, science, and technology. Instead of awaiting the direct intervention of Christ the Redeemer, liberalism depended on the example of Jesus the teacher. The good society would result from humans acting out the moral teachings of Christianity. (pp. xii–xiii, emphasis added)

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\(^{16}\) The word modernity turns up in Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy at pp. xi, xiii, xiv, xxii, 47, 111, 118, 119, 123, 137, 160. In his eleven-page "Reflections on Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy," White referred to modernity twelve times (pp. 1, 2, 8–11).
White insists that "traditional Mormonism" was a product of exactly the same causes that produced Protestant liberalism, and that it reached an essentially similar accommodation with those forces. Hence, by "incorporating the general optimism of American culture and Protestant liberalism, the Mormon synthesis formulated during the 1840s, and elaborated during the latter part of the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth centuries," according to White, managed to reduce God and especially Jesus to something like the moral ideal of liberal Protestantism. It also taught "the fundamental goodness of human nature, and a doctrine of salvation based primarily on merit" (p. xxiv). In addition, White holds that it is from what he calls "this liberal optimism that Mormon neo-orthodox theologians typically dissent" (p. xxiv).

By 1987 White could see as evidence for this presumably retrograde tendency bent on abandoning liberal optimism about man "the recent decision by church officials to expand the title of the Book of Mormon to include the subtitle: Another Testament of Jesus Christ" (p. 175). In reaching this conclusion, he neglects to look into the teachings found in the Book of Mormon to see whether this "renewed emphasis" is warranted by the contents of the founding text. Why? He is simply not interested in the truth-claims of the Restoration. From his perspective, all religion is merely a product of culture. If it is optimistic, it has been a positive response to culture; if it is pessimistic, it is an unfortunate product of cultural crisis. White sees the Book of Mormon as having become essentially irrelevant to "traditional Mormonism," which he pictures as a healthy appropriation of the "general optimism of American culture and Protestant liberalism" (p. xxiv). And he insists that this accommodation to modernity was happening even when Joseph Smith was alive.

Hence White imagines that either or both a social or cultural crisis (see pp. xxiii, 21 for the distinction) somehow caused the post-World War II renewed emphasis on the atonement of Christ among Latter-day Saints. He never considers the possibility that this emphasis has been generated by attention to the teachings found in the scriptures or inspired by God. Nor does he consider the possibility that such attention to the atonement of Christ is in any way warranted. For White, what causes people to hold ideas
are movements within the larger culture. These somehow cause movements in religious subcultures. Religion, for White, is necessarily a mere product of or response to culture and especially to crisis in culture. He simply ignores the possibility of divine revelations. Hence, when Latter-day Saint scholars begin to take seriously the contents of their scriptures, he discovers irrationalism and anti-intellectualism, which he pictures as unfortunate responses to cultural crisis. Such “isms” are for him produced and sustained by crisis.

And yet White grants that the “notion of saving grace provided by the death and atonement of Jesus Christ” is among the “prevailing themes in the Book of Mormon.” However, from his perspective at least, it is a notion that is radically out of harmony with his understanding of “traditional Mormonism,” though he also admits that they “were apparently beliefs of the earliest Mormons” (p. xix).

Quite ironically, White is at least partly correct in claiming that there is what might be called, for want of a better label, a “Mormon neo-orthodoxy.” He is, however, profoundly confused about what constitutes this movement, how much and in exactly what ways it differs from earlier understandings, what has caused it, and especially whether it draws upon or even resembles developments in European Protestant circles after World War I and in the United States after World War II. And at least partly because of White’s neglect of the Book of Mormon (he mentions it in passing only at pp. 139–41, 154, 169–71, 175), his description of what he constantly labels “traditional Mormonism” (pp. xxi, 81, 85, 89, 95, 101, 102, 103–4, 106, 141, 142, 145, 149, 151, 156, 157, 159, 161, 163, 174, 175, 176, 178) is an essentially false understanding of Mormonism. For the most part White ignores the Book of Mormon, entirely neglecting its truth claims, and the account of its coming forth—he seems to see it as inimical or at least irrelevant to what he imagines as the optimistic contents of “traditional Mormonism.” Hence, it should not be surprising that he reacts to signs of serious attention being given to the teachings found in the Book of Mormon as an indication of the emergence of a movement bent on foisting on the Saints a pessimistic, malevolent, dark, negative, life-denying, unfortunate “theology” that he labels Mormon neo-orthodoxy.
Though White brushes aside the Book of Mormon as a source for what Latter-day Saints either believe or ought to believe, it turns out that he still senses that it contains teachings that, if taken at all seriously, get in the way of his bizarre notion of what constitutes “traditional Mormonism.” Since the prophetic message in the Book of Mormon—the gospel of Jesus Christ—is not part of White’s “traditional Mormonism,” what exactly is the source and content of the ideology that he thinks somehow swept aside belief in an atonement for sin by Jesus Christ and replaced it with faith in man, whatever that might mean? White sees secularizing forces at work, and in the larger culture they become for him the crucial element in producing or generating the content of what he calls “traditional Mormonism.” That is, he insists that Latter-day Saints at some point in their history reached an accommodation with modernity in which the teachings found in the Book of Mormon and early revelations to Joseph Smith were jettisoned.

“Cursed Be the Man That Trusteth in Man”
(Jeremiah 17:5)

Is there actually a version of Mormonism—of something called Mormon “theology”—in which the Book of Mormon and its prophetic teachings have been jettisoned? White claims that there is; it is what he “and others esteem to be traditional Mormon thought” (p. xi). In a curious way he is correct. His notion of what constituted this “traditional Mormon thought” turns out to be an invention of those on the fringes of the Church bent on transforming the Mormon community into something more or less resembling what they find attractive in the larger American culture and perhaps also in Protestant liberalism if not naturalistic humanism.

Sterling M. McMurrin, professor emeritus of history at the University of Utah, and one of White’s former teachers (p. ix), is the primary source for the notion that there is a Mormon “theology” that includes an optimistic and hence liberal doctrine of man that simply ignores what can be found in the Book of Mormon and early revelations to Joseph Smith. Following McMurrin, White understands Protestant liberalism, with its
presumed optimistic assessment of human things, to be a wholesome and desirable effort to reach a more or less satisfactory accommodation with elements of modernity—that is, the secularizing forces—at work in European and American culture. In fact, White claims that liberal Protestantism is no less than “Christianity’s most promising theological development” (p. xii). And White sees “traditional Mormonism” as incorporating something similar to the liberal Protestant assessment of man.

With an additional laying on of sociological jargon to try to explain the presumed casual links between something called either social or cultural crisis and the elaboration of what are described as optimistic or pessimistic assessments of man (pp. 1–26), White’s work turns out to be imitation McMurrin, or at least it would not be entirely false to describe it this way. Even at the level of causal explanation of what produces optimistic or pessimistic theologies, McMurrin foreshadows White. For example, McMurrin maintains that the “anti-liberal return to a form of biblical orthodoxy or near-orthodoxy” in Europe “was clearly a crisis theology produced more than anything else by the destruction and disillusionment of the First War.” If we substitute “caused” for “produced” we see more clearly what McMurrin had in mind. And what White does in his book is attempt to explain how very complex and subtle theological movements are mere products of culture and hence can be said to be caused by cultural crisis. White is thus heavily dependent upon McMurrin in a number of ways, though this dependence is not always fully acknowledged.

We must ask whether White is taking sides or merely trying to tell a story that describes what has taken and is taking place in Mormon circles. Is he a partisan who is telling a story in such a way as to champion a cause? Does White hold that, by rejecting the general optimism of American culture and Protestant liberalism, Latter-day Saints involved in a “neo-orthodoxy” have taken a step backwards? In his earliest response to his critics, he insisted that he is merely a detached observer “describing” what

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17 Sterling M. McMurrin, Religion, Reason, and Truth (Salt Lake City: University of Utah, 1982), 71, emphasis added.
18 If White had given more attention to McMurrin’s essays, he could have avoided some confusion and strengthened the coherence of his case.
he believes "to be a new theological movement" at work in Mormon circles after World War II. But he also grants that it is "obvious enough" (his words) that he holds that "some implications of the growth of [both Protestant as well as Mormon?] neo-orthodoxy to be unfortunate." Why?

White insists that at least some of those he labels "neo-orthodox theologians" manifest an "inordinate reliance upon grace as they discuss salvation." Unfortunate? Inordinate? Though he would probably deny it, White clearly mounts a pulpit to preach against what he labels "Mormon neo-orthodoxy." Nothing in his book suggests that this supposed new "movement" is anything other than retrograde and harmful to the Mormon intellectual community and the Church generally. Why? He explains that the "basic point" he was trying to make in his essay in 1970 in Dialogue (and in his master's thesis and hence later in his book) "is that traditional Mormon theology locates the primary responsibility for salvation in man, not God. Man must act to work out his own salvation." His "basic argument" is that "Mormon neo-orthodoxy's pessimistic conception of man" betrays what he considers the optimism of "traditional Mormonism."

White, again following McMurrin, sees only two possibilities: either faith in God and pessimism about man or faith in man and a wholesome optimism. And, if there is anything White still likes about Mormonism, it is the optimism he attributes to what he calls a "faith in man" that he imagines is the heart of what he calls "traditional Mormon theology." Abandoning faith in God for an optimistic faith in man seems to constitute, for White at least, a congenial way of reaching an accommodation with the secularizing forces at work in American culture that he associates with modernity. And, of course, modernity is the norm; efforts to resist its impact on faith are presumably unfortunate, though he does not explain why this is so. He merely assumes that churches ought to go with the flow of culture—as long as that flow yields

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20 Ibid., 98.
21 Ibid., 99.
22 Ibid., 100.
an optimism about human things in which divine things can be more or less set aside.

Borrowed Slogans, Shoddy Scholarship

Did White invent his “basic argument”? The answer is that he did not, but seems to have borrowed it from Sterling M. McMurrin (pp. xvii–xviii, 58, 60).23 White’s master’s thesis, early essays, and book contain an account of Mormonism the basic ingredients of which were first advanced by McMurrin. What evidence is there that this is the case? What is there in White’s writings that indicates that he borrowed anything of crucial importance from McMurrin? The first sign of McMurrin’s influence is White’s habit of labeling different ways of understanding man and human affairs as either “optimistic” (pp. xii, xiii, xiv, xvi, xvi, xix, xxiv, 39, 41, 42, 57, 70, 79, 86, 100, and so forth) or “pessimistic” (pp. xiii, xvi, xvii, 38, 48, 70, 76, 96, 99, and so forth). This is pure McMurrin. It was McMurrin who started it and has popularized it on the fringes of the Mormon intellectual community.24

23 In Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy (pp. xvii–xviii), White cites and quotes from McMurrin’s The Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion (Salt Lake City: University of Utah, 1965). Cf. White’s master’s thesis, 5–6, 85, 106, as well as the essays drawn from this thesis. White also acknowledges some assistance from George T. Boyd (pp. xvi–xvii), a teacher in the Church Education system—first in 1941 and then from 1945 to 1973, and in some sense a rather naive McMurrin disciple and popularizer. White cites a fugitive version of Boyd’s essay entitled “The Moral Nature of Man” (a paper presented to the LDS Institute and Seminary Convention BYU, 1962). Versions of this essay are available in published form. See Boyd, “The Mormon Concept of Man,” Dialogue 3/1 (Spring 1968): 55–72; and also Views on Man and Religion: Collected Essays of George T. Boyd, comp. and ed. James B. Allen, Dale C. LeCheminant, and David J. Whittaker (Provo: Friends of George T. Boyd, 1979), 15–48, for a somewhat different published version of this essay. Granted, Boyd’s essay was not published until after White had completed his thesis, but it was published before any of the essays drawn from the thesis were published. And two versions were in print when White eventually published his thesis in 1987. By itself this is hardly something about which to complain, but it turns out that this lacuna is typical of White’s familiarity with Mormon scholarship generally.

24 McMurrin’s most articulate effort to set out his theory that the “theologies” that presumably undergird “religions” are best understood as ways
It is certainly no secret that McMurrin at least once was severely critical of anyone who suggested anything that he did not feel was sufficiently optimistic about human nature, at least in what he called the proximate sense. He is quite indifferent to any ultimate optimism about man because he sees no reason to believe that there is anything ultimate, that is, life after death or eternal life. Hence he has a reputation for frowning upon those who take the Book of Mormon seriously either as history or for what it teaches, since, because it has much to say about sin and the need for an atonement by the Christ, it does not fit his notion of what constitutes an appropriate optimism about man.

One of McMurrin’s ways of setting out his complaints about Latter-day Saint scholars who take scripture and divine revelation seriously is as follows:

Moreover, there is currently a kind of Jansenist movement in Mormon academic circles that appears to be dedicated to the celebration of whatever Augustinian elements may be discernible in the scriptures. . . . Nevertheless, such negativism in the assessment of man, whether scriptural or otherwise, is a betrayal of the spirit and dominant character not only of the Mormon theology but also of the Mormon religion. 25

We have in this passage, with a slight shift in terminology, the substance of White’s thesis and book.

of reflecting on human nature and, hence, that they can be distinguished on the basis of whether they are “optimistic” or “pessimistic” about man can be found in the Eighteenth annual Frederick William Reynolds Lecture, which McMurrin delivered at the University of Utah on January 18, 1954. This paper was originally published as a thirty-six page pamphlet under the title The Patterns of Our Religious Faiths (Salt Lake City: University of Utah, Extension Division, 1954). It has subsequently been republished under the title “The Primary Forms of Religion in Judaeo-Christian Culture,” in McMurrin’s Religion, Reason, and Truth, 83–112. His way of doing intellectual history has been to tie authors and “isms” to a matrix of optimism and pessimism, either proximate or ultimate.

25 McMurrin, The Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion, 67–68. Jansenism is a name applied to a 17th- and 18th-century western European Roman Catholic reformist faction which stressed moral determinism. McMurrin clearly applies the label to the Mormon context as a slur.
As is well known, McMurrin rejects the prophetic truth claims of the Book of Mormon with the dogmatism "that you don't get books from angels and translate them by miracles, it is just that simple." 26 This statement is his way of denying the prophetic truth claims upon which the Church rests. On the other hand, White simply ignores the question of whether there is anything to those claims. "The problem of the truth-claims of Mormon theology," according to White, "was well beyond the scope of my paper. I did not," he says, "assume that either traditional Mormonism or Mormon neo-orthodoxy is true or false." 27

To take the Book of Mormon seriously is to be confronted with the question of whether it and Joseph Smith's prophetic claims are true. And it seems difficult if not impossible to confront Mormonism without reaching some conclusion about the truth of the Book of Mormon. 28 But White affects at least a surface neutrality on the question of whether the Restoration is true or false. Hence, for the most part White simply ignores the Book of Mormon, and neglects to consider its prophetic truth claims or the account of its coming forth. Instead, he sees the Book of Mormon as inimical or at least irrelevant to what he imagines as the optimistic contents of "traditional Mormonism" as he understands such things. Hence, it should not be surprising that he, like McMurrin, reacts to signs of serious attention being given to the teachings found in the Book of Mormon as an indication of the emergence of a movement bent on foisting on

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the Saints a presumably malevolent, dark, negative, pessimistic, life-denying "neo-orthodoxy." 29

Two related developments—a concern with the historicity and also the teachings of the Book of Mormon—are logically linked from the perspective of genuine faith. 30 Hence, if there really is a post–World War II movement among the Saints that constitutes a revival or rejuvenation of Mormon "orthodoxy," it flows from and is to be identified with the growing emphasis on the content of the Latter-day Saint scriptures, and especially the content and historical authenticity of the Book of Mormon. It necessarily includes the increasing scholarly attention given to the Book of Mormon since Fawn Brodie got the attention of the Saints in 1945 with her attack on the historical foundations of the faith. 31 Those involved in this movement, unlike those White thinks constitute a "neo-orthodox" movement among Mormons, actually know each other, communicate back and forth, debate issues, publish essays and books, hold conferences, and so forth. 32

White, unfortunately, seems unaware of the post-Brodie literature on the Book of Mormon, and he only mentions the Book of Mormon a few times and then only casually. In Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy, the only author he mentions who has done

29 And also as a manifestation of irrationalism, anti-intellectualism, and other naughty things.


31 Fawn McKay Brodie, No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith the Mormon Prophet (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1946; 2nd ed. 1985). This attack on the Book of Mormon eventually took the form of a biography of Joseph Smith. Brodie made it clear that she began with the Book of Mormon as her target. See "Fawn McKay Brodie: An Oral Interview," Dialogue 14/2 (Summer 1981): 104-5. This is a shortened, somewhat modified, and also garbled version of Shirley E. Stephenson's oral history interview with Brodie. See Stephenson, "Biography of Fawn McKay Brodie," (California State University, Fullerton, 30 November 1975). The material that appeared in Dialogue was taken from Stephenson, 7-10, 22-23.

32 White simply ignores the vast differences between Protestant theologians and the Latter-day Saints he identifies with them.
serious work on the Book of Mormon—that is, work that has had any influence on the Mormon scholarly community—is Hugh Nibley. Although White occasionally mentions Nibley, it is always in some other context than his role as student of the Book of Mormon. In 1967 White was aware of Nibley’s *World and the Prophets* and also a letter written by Nibley. But he was apparently entirely unaware of or indifferent to Nibley’s work on the Book of Mormon. So instead of seeing a renewal of “orthodoxy” in the post–World War II scholarship on the Book of Mormon, White sees only a small group of authors who seem to hold little if anything in common, except that some of them seem to have shared a then-trendy political ideology. However, by 1987 White had discovered by reading some of Nibley’s essays that Nibley did not fit his notion of what constituted a “neo-orthodoxy” among Latter-day Saint intellectuals. White describes this movement as charged with a radical political conservatism, terrified of creeping socialism, and frantic about the threat of communism (pp. 166, 173). But, by 1987, White had discovered that Nibley simply did not fit this stereotype, and he had to try to recategorize Nibley.

When White looked just a little deeper into a few of Nibley’s vast number of writings, he discovered a social criticism grounded in the Book of Mormon that did not fit his stereotype of “Mormon neo-orthodoxy” at all.

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34 Having characterized Mormon neo-orthodoxy as authoritarian, anti-intellectual, and irrational, he is in a position to complain that Nibley has had the audacity to suggest that God sometimes reveals things to prophets that are superior to what humans can figure out for themselves (p. 93). White charges that Nibley believes that “the only way to acquire meaningful knowledge is through revelation” (p. 99, where he cites *The World and the Prophets* without page numbers; emphasis added). If this is an accurate paraphrase of Nibley’s position, one wonders why Nibley ever bothered to consult the vast literature he cites and quotes in his many writings. On this issue White has clearly misunderstood the point that Nibley has frequently made. There is nothing anti-intellectual or irrational about the stance taken by Nibley or his efforts to defend that stance, though that does not mean that others may not disagree or that he may not be wrong. But that is a different issue than the one White raises.
Given his social critique, Nibley differs from other Mormon neo-orthodox theologians who seem obsessed with anti-Communism, the extension of the franchise, government regulation of business, government intervention in [for?] civil rights and social relations, and the expansion of the "welfare state." Where other Mormon neo-orthodox theologians see governmental intrusion, Nibley has found political and social responsibility. In this sense, he has more in common with Protestant than Mormon neo-orthodox theologians. (p. 173)

Clearly this is a clumsy summary of Nibley’s stance, but it does indicate that White was, from the beginning, working with a stereotype with which he could hardly begin to make sense out of what has been going on in Latter-day Saint intellectual circles since 1945.

The core of White’s stereotype—that there is a strange and radically conservative political ideology being advanced by his so-called “Mormon neo-orthodox theologians”—he seems to have fashioned when he somehow discovered that a few faculty members at Brigham Young University were busy in the 1960s peddling a conservative political ideology dressed up in some religious language. White seems to have melded into his stereotype notions about post-World War I developments in Protestant theology, which he had learned from Sterling McMurrin, to describe what he imagined was a “movement.” Clearly White laced his argument with a vocabulary he absorbed from McMurrin and perhaps a few other cultural Mormons at the University of Utah.35

We have seen that, when White actually read some of what Hugh Nibley has written, he had to admit that Nibley did not fit

35 White gives credit for his understanding of Mormon things to Lewis Max Rogers, Ray R. Canning (p. x), who one might assume looked upon his thesis favorably, and Lowell L. Bennion, who may have been the one who he indicates demurred on unidentified parts of his thesis (White’s thesis, unpaged “Acknowledgments”), and also to Sterling M. McMurrin and Waldemer P. Read (p. ix). All of these have or had at least some links to the Church. He also thanks Thomas F. O’Dea, a non-Mormon sociologist who had interests in Mormonism.
his stereotype of a Mormon neo-orthodox "theologian."\textsuperscript{36} White still had left over from his 1967 stable of so-called neo-orthodox theologians the following individuals: Hyrum Andrus, Lynn McKinlay, Glen L. Pearson, Chauncey Riddle, Rodney Turner, and David H. Yarn. His familiarity with the work of these people was often limited to a single talk, essay, or book. He had made no effort in 1967 or for his book in 1987 to read all of what they had written or even to consult a representative sample. He neglected to interview any of those he labels "neo-orthodox." He also failed to offer a full paraphrase of the position of any of these people or provide a context for the language he lifts from their writings to support his case.

Did White even bother to look for evidence, for example, that Hugh Nibley, who has published hundreds of times,\textsuperscript{37} drew anything from or even knew of this stable of supposedly "neo-orthodox" writers? Or that any of them paid attention to Nibley? And since he seems to find a radical political ideology as typical of those he labels "neo-orthodox," did he try to discover whether all of them shared the same or even a similar ideology? White simply provides no evidence that McKinlay, Turner, and Yarn ever published a word that would constitute a clue to their political thinking. And White makes no effort to demonstrate that the political ideology of Andrus and Pearson has influenced the other writers he labels "neo-orthodox."\textsuperscript{38} Why then speak of a "movement"? Or, given those he lists as "neo-orthodox," what could White possibly mean by a "movement"?

If White had paid closer attention to Protestant neo-orthodoxy he would have discovered that the leading figures in that movement—it was after all, among other things, a literary movement—knew each other, that they borrowed from and quarreled with each other, and so forth.\textsuperscript{39} Protestant neo-

\textsuperscript{36} Nibley would gag at being labeled a "theologian."
\textsuperscript{37} See Midgley, "Hugh Winder Nibley: Bibliography and Register," in By Study and also by Faith, 1:xv–lxxxvii.
\textsuperscript{38} And if a political ideology was an essential ingredient of "Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy," why not include W. Cleon Skousen?
\textsuperscript{39} Of course, what I am calling a literary movement may have impact on the wider culture, and no doubt those who got labeled as Protestant neo-orthodox did precisely that, because pastor and layman alike read books and articles by them.
orthodoxy, to the extent that the label identifies anything, has a history and its story can be told. If there really is a Mormon neo-orthodoxy that parallels or resembles a Protestant movement, it would also have a history that can be told. In fact, White tries to tell a story of a supposed movement among certain Mormon academics. So we must ask what is the quality of the story that White tries to tell of what he thinks is a movement in Mormon intellectual circles? Not very good. A glance at his bibliography shows that White consulted only a few published and unpublished items and hence apparently knows little about what has been going on in Mormon intellectual circles since 1945.\footnote{In addition to those authors mentioned in his master's thesis in 1967, White has added a few new names to his list of neo-orthodox Mormon theologians, including Janice M. Allred, Donald P. Olson, Paul J. and Margaret M. Toscano, and J. Frederic Voros, Jr. Since White's book was published, some of these have become well-known as Mormon dissidents or former Mormon intellectuals. Be that as it may, these names hardly constitute the first or even second team among Mormon intellectuals. And in some cases they are downright quirky. They are known at all because Dialogue and Sunstone will currently publish virtually anything, especially if it seems idiosyncratic.}

White does not cite a single instance of a Latter-day Saint familiar with Protestant theology. But he could have, if he knew the literature better. Let me illustrate. Has any Latter-day Saint had anything to say about Karl Barth (1886–1968), the famous Swiss-German Protestant theologian who is generally credited with removing Protestant liberalism from the theological map? The answer is yes, but White seems quite unaware of this fact.\footnote{Midgley, "Karl Barth and Natural Law," \textit{Natural Law Forum} 13 (1968): 108–26.} Or has any Latter-day Saint published on Paul Tillich (1886–1965)? Again the answer is yes.\footnote{Midgley, "Religion and Ultimate Concern," \textit{Dialogue} 1/2 (Summer 1966): 55–71. In 1967 White was familiar with \textit{Dialogue} and had consulted the first issue of this magazine, since he mentions Leonard J. Arrington's "Scholarly Studies of Mormonism in the Twentieth Century," \textit{Dialogue} 1/1 (Spring 1966): 15–32 in his master's thesis (p. 181). It is more understandable that he was and perhaps still is unaware that both Truman G. Madsen and I had previously completed doctoral dissertations on the thought of Paul Tillich. And if White had wondered if any Latter-day Saints have published on Reinhold Niebuhr, he might have noticed Dennis L. Thompson's essay entitled "The Basic Doctrines and Concepts of Reinhold Niebuhr's Political Thought," \textit{Journal of Church and State} 17/2 (Spring 1975): 275–99.} Did White manage to show that any of
those on his list of “Mormon neo-orthodox theologians” have
drawn upon or even mentioned or cited those he described as
Protestant neo-orthodox theologians? This answer is no. What
then could he mean when he claims that some Latter-day Saint
writers have “embraced” (his word) “some fundamental
doctrines of Protestant neo-orthodoxy”? How can one embrace
ideas that one does not know exist?

Could White, if he had done his homework either in 1967 or
1987, have found Latter-day Saints who were familiar with and
also in some way indebted to some of those writers he lists as
Protestant neo-orthodox theologians? The answer is again yes.
One such example is instructive as well as ironic. According to
Sterling McMurrin, Paul Tillich’s lectures affected his own “views
on religion—not his existentialist theology, . . . but rather his
interpretations of the history of Christianity, particularly of
Calvinism and Lutheranism.”43 His own teacher admits to being
influenced by such a one as Paul Tillich. Certainly this does not
make McMurrin a “Mormon neo-orthodox theologian.” But not
one of those White thinks of as involved in a movement he labels
Mormon neo-orthodoxy has shown an interest in bringing
Protestant thought into the discussion of Mormonism.44

In a lecture now available under the title “The Primary Forms
of Religion in Judaeo-Christian Culture,” McMurrin opined that
“religion is man’s ultimate concern and commitment.”45 One at
all familiar with Tillich’s thought should recognize this definition
as having been borrowed from Paul Tillich.46 And the definition is
important since the object of an ultimate concern may not
necessarily be the God pictured in the Bible, and may, instead, be
an idol. Even or especially those who flatly reject what the
scriptures have to say about God have an “ultimate concern” and
in that sense are religious, according to Tillich. Finally, if one can

43 McMurrin, Religion, Reason, and Truth, ix. One only needs to know a
little about Tillich’s thought to see his influence in some of McMurrin’s
vocabulary and outlook. White could have located this when he was a student
at the University of Utah, if he had bothered to look beyond the one published
item by McMurrin that he seems to have consulted.
44 White cites only McMurrin’s The Theological Foundations of Mormon
Religion.
46 For the details, see Midgley, “Religion and Ultimate Concern,” 55–71.
flatly reject prophets and divine revelations and still be “religious,” since everyone will still have concerns and perhaps even a controlling or “ultimate concern” of some kind, why did not White notice among his teachers at the University of Utah an effort to indoctrinate him in a secular “religious” ideology?

We may wonder whether White means by “embraced” that Latter-day Saints actually have read and appropriated ideas from Karl Barth, Heinrich Emil Brunner (1889–1966), Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1971), or Paul Tillich. I doubt that he does. As we have seen, White presents no evidence that any Latter-day Saint authors actually borrowed from Protestant neo-orthodoxy. But I have already quoted White as saying that “Mormon neo-orthodox theologians have embraced some fundamental doctrines of Protestant neo-orthodoxy” (p. 159); but presumably they did this without knowing that they were doing it, because they were merely responding in some entirely thoughtless way to a cultural crisis that impelled them to produce something very much like what some Protestants produced when confronted with the same or a similar crisis. How, we might ask, does a crisis, social or cultural, produce an ideology? To discover White’s answer to this question, we must look into his use of certain sociological literature to provide a cause for the effects he thinks he sees in Mormon culture.

**An Argument—By Analogy or What?**

How does White advance his argument that a “Mormon neo-orthodoxy” has surfaced that is in radical opposition to what he understands as “traditional Mormonism”? At least part of his 1967 master’s thesis and his *Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy* is an analogy between developments, as he sees them, in European Protestant theology after World War I and what he wants to see taking place in Mormon academic circles after World War II. To ground this analogy, White provides an account of Protestant intellectual history following the collapse of Protestant liberalism

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47 If White wanted to find evidence of people who have a hankering to devour Protestant theology, he should have had a look at the RLDS, some of whose “appointees” (professional clergy) and leaders and theologians have had specialized training in Protestant seminaries.
that is not entirely unlike that offered by McMurrin, who in the early 1950s when I studied with him was wont to trace a progress from an original invidious, pessimistic Protestant orthodoxy to an enlightened, optimistic liberalism, and then a subsequent regress to a terrible pessimistic neo-orthodoxy. But, in 1967 and at least up to 1971, White did not feel that he could apply all of this kind of account of theological developments in the Protestant world directly to the Mormon situation. Why?

In 1967 White did not see an original set of Mormon beliefs that paralleled, corresponded to, or were analogous with Protestant orthodoxy. Instead, he declared that “Mormon neo-orthodoxy” was merely a rejection of what he imagined was an original optimistic, liberal Mormonism or what he constantly refers to as “traditional Mormonism.” And White still believes that what he considers “traditional Mormonism” simply had no place for any such thing as an atonement for sin made by Jesus of Nazareth; White’s “traditional Mormonism” rests on a presumably “optimistic,” positive, life-affirming, liberal assessment of human nature in which sins are overcome merely by “works” and not through anything resembling a gift from God through Jesus Christ.48

In the late 1960s and early 1970s White insisted that what he then called “Mormon new-orthodoxy” was not “a return to the theology of Joseph Smith nor early Mormonism,” but a “theology” similar to what he understood as Protestant neo-orthodoxy, which had its beginnings primarily with Karl Barth. After World War I, Barth began vigorously challenging Kulturprotestantismus (that is, the efforts of post-enlightenment European liberals to harmonize Christianity with some of the fashions of the increasingly secularized culture).49 Because Barth


49 For the use of the term Kulturprotestantismus, see The Beginnings of Dialectic Theology, ed. James M. Robinson (Richmond, Va.: John Knox, 1968), 14, 21, 22. When I first read this book, and noticed the term Kulturprotestantismus, I immediately started referring to a Cultural Mormonism to describe the drift among so-called Mormon “liberals” toward something like the denatured Protestant stances found in pre-World War I European and then later American sectarian theology. See Midgley, “The Secular Relevance of the
spurned Cultural Protestantism (or what might also be called “modernism,” or “liberal” theology), he was seen as returning to something like the earlier teachings of the Reformation. Hence Barth’s views, as well as those of certain of his associates, acquired the label “neo-orthodoxy.” White thus offers an analogy between very complex, subtle, and even competing strands and developments in post–World War I Protestant theology and at least in part the political ideology being advanced by the likes of Pearson and Andrus.

On both the Protestant and Mormon sides of his analogy White works with simple binary polarities such as “optimism” and “pessimism” about man, expressions which clearly describe moods rather than concepts, and which are clearly judgmental, whatever his expressed intentions of merely describing from a neutral position, or he works with polarities such as “salvation by grace” or “self-salvation,” and the “sovereignty of God” contrasted to the notion that God is an ideal—the embodiment of the finest in human values, and so forth. In virtually every case he neglects to explain or justify the use of such categories or labels. And he neglects to explain why the rather simplistic polarities he adopts exhaust the possibilities or why the notions he favors are preferable even if his analysis were accepted.

In several ways, as we have seen, Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy is imitation McMurrin. But it lacks the literary grace and intellectual

Gospel,” Dialogue 4/4 (Winter 1969): 76–85. I am, of course, gratified that the expressions “cultural Mormonism” and “cultural Mormon” have become fashionable. Earlier I claimed that I invented the label. See Midgley, “The Current Battle over the Book of Mormon,” 208 n. 24. But it turns out that I was wrong, for unbeknown to me John L. Sorenson used the expression in his dissertation and elsewhere prior to my efforts to popularize it. I very much appreciate Sorenson pointing out my mistake.

50 Neo-orthodoxy was not Karl Barth’s label. His views were variously known by other descriptive titles such as “theology of the Word of God,” or “dialectical theology.”

51 White neglects to explain why he labels as “pessimistic” the belief that through the atonement of Jesus Christ the sins of man may be forgiven, or why it is “optimistic” to think that man can somehow save himself, whatever that means, especially since he seems to dispense with notions of immortality and resurrection, both central to the understanding of Latter-day Saints.
The subtlety of McMurrin’s writings, which accounts for much of the fervor and also some of the weaknesses found in his book. And White’s description of the views of Protestant theologians like Barth, Brunner, Tillich, and Reinhold Niebuhr is sometimes muddled and always cursory precisely because it seems to depend on a casual proof-texting done in 1967 to make those authors fit simplistic labels identifying moods more than the actual concepts and arguments found in the writings he cites and quotes.52

White also seems to have been led to believe that “traditional Mormonism” is a form of or at least analogous to Protestant liberalism, if not, following McMurrin, naturalistic humanism.53 It seems that McMurrin might be somewhat less critical of the Church if it would only move toward a variety of “liberal” theology, if not “naturalistic humanism.”54 In other contexts,
however, McMurrin makes it abundantly clear that what he calls “naturalistic humanism” is entirely devoid of God in any genuine sense. Be that as it may, what White actually discovered in 1967 was not a new movement (or heresy) attempting to move Mormon beliefs toward something like a Protestant neo-orthodoxy. Instead, what he noticed, more than anything else, was a few political ideologues whose views seem to have had no influence on Mormon intellectual life. And he managed to turn them into a movement, while failing entirely to notice that a different group of Latter-day Saint scholars was beginning to take seriously the Book of Mormon and the early revelations to Joseph Smith. The small group of political ideologues apparently seemed to him to be a turning away from his illusory original “liberal” theology towards something negative and dark that he imagines is somehow analogous to Protestant neo-orthodoxy.\(^55\)

In addition, instead of really figuring out what Latter-day Saints have believed since 1830, White invents a “traditional Mormonism” that has little similarity to what the Saints have believed. However, it may well be that White’s understanding of “traditional Mormonism” is the ideology entertained by a few on the fringes of the Church who are unhappy with the increasingly sophisticated understanding of the restored gospel and also especially with the increasing attention given to the Book of Mormon in Latter-day Saint academic circles.\(^56\)

If there is a revival of an orthodoxy within the community of Saints, it is a result of more careful attention to the actual contents of the scriptures and especially the Book of Mormon that has been growing since World War II,\(^57\) rather than a continuation of

\(^{55}\) But White also notices that the political ideology advanced by some of his stable of “Mormon neo-orthodox theologians” was entirely unlike the political stance typically taken by Karl Barth, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Paul Tillich, each of whom at least started out as a socialist of some variety.

\(^{56}\) A recent manifestation of this irritation can be found in McMurrin’s remarks on the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*. He complains that “the *Encyclopedia* is saturated with references to the Book of Mormon, reflecting the recent church movement to give the Book of Mormon greater attention.” McMurrin, “Toward Intellectual Anarchy,” *Dialogue* 26/2 (Summer 1993): 212.

\(^{57}\) In addition, some rather good work has produced a more subtle and rich understanding of the unfolding of teachings through the revelations to Joseph Smith contained in the Doctrine and Covenants, as well as in his later teachings
an earlier tendency to capitulate to the latest fads and fashions of enlightenment and post-enlightenment modernity. And this emphasis on the authentic teachings found in the Latter-day Saint scriptures has nothing much in common with developments in continental Protestantism, nor has it borrowed anything from more recent developments in either European or American Protestant theology.

A "Crisis Theology"?

White describes what he labels Mormon neo-orthodoxy as "a crisis theology." Where did that idea originate? It turns out that the very first of Emil Brunner’s books in English carried the title The Theology of Crisis. A crisis is, as Brunner points out, a climax of an illness or a turning point in an enterprise. And Brunner felt that Christian faith "is in a state of complete decomposition," for there has been a turning away from Christian understandings. Hence there is a crisis in both of its generally accepted meanings. Is this really an admission on the part of Brunner that modernity has caused a theological movement to which he belongs? Hardly. But that is the way it has been understood by White.

McMurrin has also set out the argument that a "crisis" has caused a retrograde, neo-orthodox reaction in the following way:

The anti-liberal return to a form of biblical orthodoxy or near-orthodoxy within the context of sophisticated thought and scholarship was already well established in Europe when it took root in America. In Europe it was clearly a crisis theology produced more than anything else by the destruction and disillusionment of the First War. Best expressed by Karl Barth, who was dominated by the Calvinistic dogma of the divine sovereignty and who

in the Nauvoo period. On these issues a number of historians have done a yeoman's service of sorting out these matters and making them accessible to the Saints.

59 Ibid., 2.
60 Ibid., 3.
undertook to reestablish religion on the indisputable word of God, it was an anti-philosophical, anti-scientific, anti-cultural movement that reveled in paradox, dogmatics, and subjectively interpreted revelation.61

McMurrin cites Barth’s massive *Church Dogmatics*, presumably in support of or as an illustration of his views. But that book consists of five volumes (with multiple parts) and comes to some 8,432 pages in its English translation, with an additional 552-page index. And this is only a portion of Barth’s published works. McMurrin brushes all this aside by claiming that “it now seems justifiable” to label Barth’s theology as a case of “just plain irrationalism.”62 Apparently, if one does not like the views of an author, even if his or her work must be described as “sophisticated thought and scholarship,” and it is massive, one can simply brush it aside as “just plain irrationalism”—no argument is necessary. But one must recall that this comes from one justly famous for the dogmatism “that you don’t get books from angels and translate them by miracles, it is just that simple.”

McMurrin clearly wants to claim that events somehow directly produce shifts in theology—it is just that simple. Hence he claims that

under the impact of the depression of the thirties, Barthianism became influential in the English-speaking world, but whatever its appeal in a world that was anxious to retreat from reason, common sense, and faith in itself, it lost heavily when Barth refused to lead continental Protestantism in a commitment against the threatening specter of Communist power. It was a repetition of the neutral stand he had taken in the early days of Nazism.63

The fact is that Barth was fired from his position in a German university for his refusal to take a loyalty oath to Hitler. And he was the guiding figure behind the so-called and much celebrated

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62 Ibid., 13. He also refers to “the irrationalism of Karl Barth—who argued not only against rational theology but even against religious philosophy.” Ibid., 9. This is simply name-calling.
63 Ibid.
Barmen Declaration (May 1934) that attempted to rally Christians in Germany against the so-called “German Christians” who had sided with Hitler and the Nazi movement.64

White is also deeply involved in the same kind of inaccurate description and loose causal explanation of theological movements. After arguing that Protestant neo-orthodoxy was produced by a “crisis,” White shifts to explaining what he considers a parallel development among Latter-day Saints:

The encounter with secularization produced a similar cultural crisis for Mormon neo-orthodox theologians. Experienced as a ‘limit situation,’ where ordinary intellectual and psychological means of coping breakdown, the individual becomes profoundly aware of his limitations. He feels inadequate and helpless. The only way out appears to be to grasp a power beyond himself. These reactions combine with sensations of contingency and helplessness to become the social and psychological foundation of the doctrines of divine sovereignty, human depravity, and salvation by grace. Indeed, this theology crystallizes the basic elements of the neo-orthodox religious experience. As the crisis is a revelation of the human predicament and the divine/human relationship, neo-orthodox theology is a generalization of those sensations encountered during the crisis. (p. 160)

This reductionist explanation would presumably account for Hugh Nibley’s writings and anyone else labeled by White as “neo-orthodox.” Should White not at least tell us exactly what assumptions are at work in this explanation and how one would

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64 For an introduction to “Barth’s encounter with National Socialism,” see Will Herberg, “The Social Philosophy of Karl Barth,” in Community, State and Church: Three Essays by Karl Barth (Garden City, NY: Doubleday-Anchor, 1960), 38–55. There is really no question about Barth’s passionate hostility to Hitler. For example, according to one author, “Barth’s detestation of and opposition to the Nazi regime was absolute and total.” This same author notes that even “liberals are inclined to forgive much to the man who took such a strong stand against Adolf Hitler and who was the moving spirit behind the Declaration of Barmen.” See Rene de Visme Williamson, Politics and Protestant Theology: An Interpretation of Tillich, Barth, Bonhoeffer, and Brunner (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976), 53.
test them and their specific application? This he neglects to do. White, it should be noted, complains about the irrationalism of others. I must go on record as one more than just a little skeptical of such explanations.

The subtitle of Kendall White’s book—A Crisis Theology—thus indicates something of his mode of explanation for what he sees taking place among Latter-day Saints. He argues that Mormons are experiencing a terrible “crisis” of some kind. The end result of this supposed “crisis” is a return to Joseph Smith’s earliest revelations and especially to the Book of Mormon. White sees these texts as inconsistent with Joseph Smith’s post-1835 teachings and hence with the “traditional Mormonism” that he feels eventually emerged. For White, “traditional Mormonism” became, instead of a dark “pessimism” in which it was thought that Jesus needed to atone for the sins of mankind, a positive, liberal “optimism” in which human beings “save themselves,” if there is any “saving” to be done. But by “save” White has in mind merely temporarily cleaning up some of the mess in the world, and not attaining eternal life in the presence of God. He would seem to have us believe that Mormonism after 1835 became merely a kind of social welfare movement.

As we have seen, White seems to recognize that no real causal links can be found between developments in the Protestant world and what he describes as Mormon neo-orthodoxy, including especially the growing attention being given to the contents of the Book of Mormon (and the other scriptures) among the Saints by an increasingly sophisticated Mormon academic community. He has found no indication that Latter-day Saints have actually borrowed anything from Protestant theology. He merely offers an analogy between what presumably caused Protestants after World War I to begin to turn back to older beliefs found in the Reformation, and what has caused Latter-day Saints to begin to take seriously the teachings found in the Book of Mormon. And

65 Robert L. Millet, in responding to Kendall White’s Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy, has offered a somewhat different account of what White has in mind by “social crisis.” See Millet, “Joseph Smith and Modern Mormonism,” 49–51. On this issue, I accept Millet’s analysis and merely strive to go beyond what he does.
the "cause" in both instances is "crisis." That is about as far as White's analogy can take him.

White fleshes out his analogy by drawing upon reductionist sociological speculation\(^66\) that assumes that ideas about divine and human things are in some ways merely products of or responses to what is ambiguously called "crisis." That portion of his argument is at least problematic. It is grounded in assumptions that, if accepted, make both faith and its contents merely products of culture and also pathological—an aberrant product of a culture undergoing crisis. These theories also reduce faith and its contents to a pathology that enlightenment (or therapy) should be able to cure or at least ameliorate. Armed with such background assumptions about what "causes" social movements, White argues that "social crisis" or "cultural crisis," however these are understood, somehow generates or yields "pessimism," especially among those given to believing in divine things. And "pessimism" is bad, since "optimism" is optimistic and hence good. Hence, insistence on the presence of sin in human affairs and a need for redemption from that sin through an atonement by Jesus Christ is profoundly "pessimistic" about human things and therefore wrong, according to White. Presumably an "optimistic" or "liberal" assessment of the human condition would not see the need for an atonement from sin.

Since Protestant liberalism, and White is fond of this "ism," was presumably also a response to or was produced by an encounter with the acids of modernity, he has not explained why that particular encounter yielded such an optimistic, decent, rational accommodation to modernity, while the encounter with modernity by others later yielded a pessimism in which God and redemption are stressed. Perhaps events—war, depression, whatever—caused the giddy mood of optimism to dissipate. Then comes the true crisis. But that would be a genuine crisis generated by the inability of modernity to produce on the illusions it had generated. To begin to talk this way eventually gets us back to McMurrin's grim pessimism in the face of what he considers the

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\(^{66}\) White begins by describing the Marxist criticism of religion and the debate it has engendered (pp. 1-3, 7, 9). He then adds bits and pieces from other authors who share the notion that religion understood as faith in God is an illusion or delusion.
failure of the shallow optimism associated with Protestant liberalism and liberalism generally. That is another story, which White neglects to tell.

Since White holds that Latter-day Saints have traditionally held a liberal, "optimistic" assessment of human nature, they must also not see a genuine need for an atonement from sin. Therefore, Mormon theology is "optimistic" and hence also "liberal." One hardly needs to state the argument to begin to see just how silly the whole thing is and how little it has to do with the actual faith of Latter-day Saints and with the contents of the scriptures, which provide the ground and content of that faith.

In addition, what initially linked White’s dabbling in Mormon intellectual history with sociological speculations—he teaches sociology at Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Virginia—was the ideology he appropriated as a young graduate student at the University of Utah in the 1960s. At that time he came to hold that belief systems, including especially those concerned with divine things, are necessarily causally linked to changes in a controlling material substructure, to use the Marxist formulation that he cites (pp. 1–3). White, unfortunately, seems not to have outgrown this indoctrination, for there is little indication of a significant improvement in either his thinking or his command of the sociological or psychological literature between 1967 and 1987. He seems to accept a version of what is popularly known as the “economic determinism” found more or less in certain key writings of Karl Marx and elaborated and modified by his disciples. Be that as it may, by 1967, as a young graduate student, White had been indoctrinated in a sociological and psychological literature that treats belief in divine things as an aberrant, pernicious by-product of an as yet imperfectly socialized or enlightened psyche or society.

White elaborated his position in both 1967 and 1985. He begins with Karl Marx (pp. 1–3) and then quotes or paraphrases the position of several other writers, all in an effort to establish some necessary causal link between beliefs and social conditions. White thus explicitly embraces a vague Marxist understanding of

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67 White cites the Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy (the Bottomore edition), Capital, and The Poverty of Philosophy by Karl Marx in both Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy (p. 8) and in his thesis (pp. 5–6, 85, 106).
religion. His premise is that the content of what is believed about
divine things, which he views as constituting the ideological
superstructure, is necessarily dependent in some way upon
underlying social conditions, which form the real substructure for
those beliefs. And changes in the substructure yield shifts in the
ideological superstructure. Though his language in 1987 is not
necessarily clearer than the language he employed in 1967, he
seems even more determined to assert a "causal" relationship
between social or cultural crisis (or what Marx called "material"
conditions) and belief systems (or what Marx described as the
"ideological" superstructure, which especially embraces
religion).68

White fails to show how one might go about testing such a
theory in general or in its specific application to the study of
Mormonism. But such theories are not seen as hypotheses that
need testing, rather as insights that can be applied to get a desired
result. That is, they seem to function as background assumptions
upon which the actual explanation being advanced can be made to
rest. Be that as it may, there is little that could be called empirical
in White's book. The closest thing to empirical testing is some
proof-texting, often from secondary sources (like quoting from
McMurrin and others), but nothing approaching an exegesis of
the Book of Mormon. Nor has White attempted to explain why a
"crisis" should have touched only a few Mormon academics and
perhaps some Church leaders and not the Saints as a whole, who
he seems to assume have been relatively untouched by "Mormon
neo-orthodoxy." At least that appears to be the case, since he has
made no effort to discover whether his description of "traditional
Mormonism," which he sees as analogous to Protestant liberalism,
is or is not now consonant with the beliefs of the Saints generally
or even with its leaders, or whether the Saints actually see and have
always seen mankind as corruptible and hence in need of an
atonement through Jesus Christ.

68 If, as White claims, both Protestant neo-orthodoxy and Mormon
neo-orthodoxy are merely a response to crisis, that is, are caused by or are the
products of crisis, what can he hope to accomplish by preaching to the Saints?
On his theory, what the Saints believe is in large measure beyond their control.
And given his own background assumptions, what he believes may also be
beyond his own control.
White’s Modified Account of the Mormon Past

The one significant thematic shift made by White between his thesis in 1967 and Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy in 1987 was the adoption of Thomas G. Alexander’s opinion, first announced in 1980, but reprinted subsequently,\(^6^9\) that the Book of Mormon and pre-1835 Mormon teachings of Joseph Smith were “similar” or “close” and in at least once instance “drawn from” the flux of Protestantism found in his immediate environment.\(^7^0\) After 1835, according to Alexander, Joseph Smith abandoned the “pessimistic” assessment of human nature and related notions of God.\(^7^1\) And White also holds that Joseph Smith then replaced this early “pessimistic” understanding of human nature, in which an atonement for sin is thought to be necessary, with what Alexander labels an “optimistic” or “progressive” theology.

But now, according to Alexander, we are confronted with a Mormon neo-orthodoxy that is bent on turning away from the earlier “optimistic,” “progressive theology” by returning to the teachings concerning human nature found in the early revelations to Joseph Smith and in the Book of Mormon. Hence we have,


\(^7^0\) Thomas G. Alexander, “The Reconstruction of Mormon Doctrine: From Joseph Smith to Progressive Theology,” 24–33. For example, Alexander has it that “the system of interpretation [of their sacred texts] which Mormons adopted in 1830 was essentially drawn from contemporary Protestantism.” But it was later changed as more and different elements were added to the “theological” amalgam. Ibid., 33 n. 23. Hence, “theology” determines what one “finds” in a text and not the other way around. This assumption seems to justify Alexander’s notion that what was in the Book of Mormon concerning God, for example, was merely nineteenth-century sectarian Protestantism. And those teachings are, Alexander claims, discontinuous with and also inconsistent with what was later taught by Joseph Smith and believed by the Saints.

\(^7^1\) According to Alexander, “the doctrines of God and man revealed in these sources [that is, the Book of Mormon and so forth] were not greatly different from those of some of the religious denominations of the time. Marvin Hill has argued that the Mormon doctrine of man in New York contained elements of both Calvinism and Arminianism, though tending toward the latter.” Ibid., 25.
according to Alexander, an emerging “Mormon neo-orthodoxy.”

To get to this point in his argument, Alexander begins with the following:

Perhaps the main barrier to understanding the development of Mormon theology is an underlying assumption by most Church members that there is a cumulative unity of doctrine. Mormons seem to believe that particular doctrines develop consistently, that ideas build on each other in a hierarchical fashion.72

Alexander flatly denies that this is so. And he claims that, “while this type of exegesis or interpretation may produce systematic theology and while it may satisfy those trying to understand and internalize current doctrine, it is bad history since it leaves an unwarranted impression of continuity and consistency.”73 In other words, what is found in the Book of Mormon and the early revelations to Joseph Smith is, according to Alexander, both discontinuous with and also inconsistent with what “developed” in the Prophet’s thinking after 1835, especially during the Nauvoo period. And it is also inconsistent and discontinuous with what those whom Alexander sees as “progressive theologians” churned out between 1893 and 1925. Hence, a good rather than bad history will tell us how “certain doctrines have in fact developed.”74 A good historical account, such as the one he presumably provides, will necessarily stress discontinuity and inconsistency between the early teachings and what came later, when “these progressive theologians provided a framework for understanding man which went relatively unchallenged until the recent development of Mormon neo-orthodoxy.”75

Alexander focuses his attention on what Joseph Smith taught about “God and man” before and after 1835, arguing that “placing development of these doctrines into historical context will also illuminate the appearance of so-called neo-orthodoxy (a

72 Ibid., 24.
73 Ibid., emphasis added.
74 Ibid.
75 Ibid., 30.
term borrowed from twentieth century Protestantism), which emphasizes particular ideas about the sovereignty of God and the depravity of man." 76 At this point in his argument Alexander relies upon Kendall White's views. 77

In the final section of his essay entitled "Reconstruction of Mormon Doctrine," which is devoted to the consideration of "Some Consequences for Our Time," Alexander states the following opinion concerning his and Kendall White's speculation about a Mormon neo-orthodoxy:

During the period following World War I, a movement developed in Protestantism which challenged the prevailing modernism and proposed the reestablishment of a more sophisticated form of a theology which returned to the basic teachings of Luther and Calvin emphasizing the sovereignty of God and the depravity of man. Since World War II, a similar movement has taken place in Mormonism which is as notable for its differences from the Protestant movement as for its similarities. 78

He then concludes his essay as follows:

As O. Kendall White has pointed out, Mormon neo-orthodoxy has not gone as far as the Protestant movement in defining a sovereign God and a depraved man entirely dependent upon grace for salvation. As should be apparent, statements by Joseph Smith, the progressive theologians [James E. Talmage, John A. Widstoe, B. H. Roberts], and the First Presidency have specifically rejected doctrines such as the absolute sovereignty of God and irresistible grace. In the absence of an authoritative statement by the First Presidency, however, it is still possible to return to the early 1830s and find a basically sensual and devilish man. Because of the reconstruction of the Mormon doctrine of God, however, what we get today

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76 Ibid., 24.
77 Ibid. Alexander's supporting citation is to a portion of Kendall White's 1967 thesis that was published in Dialogue under the title "The Transformation of Mormon Theology," 24 n. 2 (citation found at 32).
78 Ibid., 32, n. 55 (citation found at 33), citing Kendall White again.
is a rather unsteady neo-orthodoxy lacking the vigor and certitude of its Protestant counterpart, since the progressives amputated two of its legs and seriously weakened the third.\textsuperscript{79}

Certainly one can be excused for wondering what Alexander's views are on the question of whether Joseph Smith (and those who followed him) turned away from the earlier belief in the absolute necessity of an atonement for sin by Jesus Christ. He seems to claim that even the understanding of "the atonement and salvation," which he concludes was originally "similar" or "close" to the teachings "that might have been found in many contemporary Protestant denominations," underwent over time a "transformation" or "reconstruction" in the "doctrinal development" of the Nauvoo period.\textsuperscript{80} How? Well, he is not clear on this matter. Joseph Smith's King Follett funeral sermon is, for Alexander, the culmination of a radical transformation in what he calls "Joseph Smith's theology."\textsuperscript{81} But on the crucial issue of the atonement his views remain unclear, especially given his earlier insistence that it is bad history to see consistency in what he calls the "Reconstruction of Mormon Doctrine."

We must ask: did Joseph Smith's teachings in Nauvoo constitute an abandonment of the atonement? If not, then what we have in the King Follett sermon must be seen as somehow consistent with what is found in the Book of Mormon and the early revelations, that is, as a line-by-line addition to the earlier revelations. It is clear where Kendall White stands on this issue, but it is not clear where Alexander stands.

In 1987, and unlike his earlier understanding, White argued that there really is a Mormon neo-orthodoxy that "is primarily a post-World-War II phenomenon," which

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 32.
\textsuperscript{81} Alexander, "Reconstruction of Mormon Doctrine," 28; Alexander, "‘A New and Everlasting Covenant,’ " 58–59.
has been reinforced by historian Thomas G. Alexander in his seminal analysis of "The Reconstruction of Mormon Doctrine" published in 1980. However, Alexander convincingly argued that during the initial period of the formulation of Mormon doctrine, 1830 to 1835, Mormon beliefs differed little from those of American Protestants. Tempered by the perfectionism of the Methodists, the Mormon doctrine of human nature tended toward depravity, while its absolutist and trinitarian concept of God reinforced a notion of the saving grace provided by the death and atonement of Jesus Christ. . . . As prevalent themes in the Book of Mormon, these were apparently beliefs of the earliest Mormons. (pp. xviii–xix)

White adds the following remark: "From 1835 until his martyrdom in 1844, Joseph Smith increasingly emphasized the finite nature of God, a more optimistic view of humanity and a doctrine of salvation by merit" (p. xix, citing Thomas G. Alexander for support for his opinion).

Using the Wrong Lens, Fashioning the Wrong Picture

Ironically, in 1980, as we have seen, Alexander borrowed from White the notion that the supposedly "optimistic" or "progressive" theology, which White imagines is "traditional Mormonism," is under attack from those who want to set in place a "Mormon neo-orthodoxy." This new movement, to which White objects, involves, among other things, the attempt to stress the teachings found in the Book of Mormon at the expense of "the reconstruction of Mormon doctrine" presumably brought about by those who helped the Church move "from Joseph Smith to progressive theology." 82 What we have in all of this is an idea first articulated by McMurrin, and then picked up by White and then later by Alexander from White (though not directly from McMurrin), 83 and then, with embellishments, returned from

83 McMurrin holds that "there is a lot of nonsense in the King Follett discourse . . . , but I don’t think that Mormon theology is in any sense dependent
Alexander to White. But nothing in this melange about the “development” of theologies in the Mormon past makes much sense if the Book of Mormon remains the keystone of our faith and is taken seriously.

Unlike McMurrin and White, Alexander really believes that there was a Lehi colony and so forth. But he also seems to

on the King Follett discourse.” And then he adds that he feels that the “way of discussing the idea of the potential divinity in man and the ultimate mystery of the reality of God,” as that is found in the King Follett sermon, “is not only destructive to sane religion, it is intellectually debasing. There are others who know far more than I about the history of Mormon theology and such things as the place in it of the King Follett sermon. Thomas Alexander, for instance, of the BYU history faculty is an extremely competent person in this field.” Quoted from “An Interview with Sterling McMurrin,” 39.

Alexander’s affirmation concerning the Book of Mormon is as follows: “In fact, I believe the Book of Mormon is an ancient text and that the doctrines explicated in the book are doctrines believed by the Nephites and other ancient peoples whose record the book contains.” Then he adds that “instead of assuming that the Book of Mormon reflects Joseph Smith’s early thought,” he assumes that “Joseph Smith’s early thought reflected the things he had learned from the Book of Mormon.” Then he notes, by way of clarification, that he merely finds it interesting “that those teachings [in the Book of Mormon] were similar to those of some nineteenth-century Arminian-based Protestant groups such as the Methodists and Disciples. . . . However, that does not mean that the Book of Mormon doctrines were drawn from contemporary Protestantism, only that they were similar.” See Alexander’s “Afterwords,” BYU Studies 29/4 (Fall 1989): 143–44—which was a passionate response to Millet’s essay cited earlier. Alexander leaves unexplained why God would reveal to ancient Nephites (and then through their records to Joseph Smith) teachings that he would later contradict after 1835 as a radical “Reconstruction of Mormon Doctrine” took place. If the teaching on the Godhead in the Book of Mormon is essentially trinitarian, as Alexander maintains, then one may wonder whether God somehow changed his mind after 1830 about that matter or whether Joseph Smith just did not get it right in the first place. And if the ancient Nephites were taught something similar to trinitarian theology, why was that necessary? Was it because they were primitives and could simply not understand the much less complex and convoluted teaching that God revealed to Joseph Smith after 1835? And why would it be necessary to teach primitive Nephites and then later Joseph Smith before 1835 some version of trinitarian doctrine prior to setting forth after 1835 what is a much less convoluted teaching on the Godhead? Alexander obviously does not like such questions being raised because he sees them as questioning his convictions. I am not calling into question even obliquely his “belief in such basic matters as the historical validity of the Book of Mormon or
believe that the truth about God and man is to be found in a later theological "development" of an "optimistic" or "progressive" theology. McMurrin and White label this "development" the authentic Mormon view; they also label it a "liberal" theology manifesting what McMurrin describes as "the authentic spirit of Mormon religion," and White thereafter refers to it as "traditional Mormonism" (passim), "traditional Mormon thought" (pp. xi, 86, 87, 100), and "traditional Mormon theology" (p. 177).

In all of this it does not seem to have occurred to White that, from the perspective of those who accept Joseph Smith's prophetic claims, it is a mistake to appropriate the secular or religious fads and fashions found in the exterior world and especially to reach an accommodation with anti-religious ideologies found in secular modernity. White seems enthralled by the secularizing trends of modernity and therefore insists that the Church should yield or reach an accommodation even on the most basic issues. But why must the Saints yield to the latest fashions? Well, not to yield is understood as being moved by "crises" to hold dangerous, "pessimistic" positions. Why are they dangerous? Presumably because they are defined by McMurrin as "pessimistic" assessments of human nature. Such a bias introduces an element of fantasy into White's book. He has used the label "Mormon neo-orthodoxy" to describe those who have not had the kind of response he desires "to the experience of 'modernity'—the secularization of society and culture" (p. xi).

White's strategy is to focus on the writings of a few Latter-day Saint academics who take seriously the restored gospel. Some of those he has selected seem worthy of serious attention (for

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the authenticity of Joseph Smith's revelations from God." I am merely attempting to figure out how he sorts out some important and crucial issues, given his penchant for seeing the earlier teaching of Joseph Smith as both inconsistent and discontinuous with what was later taught.

85 McMurrin, The Theological Foundations of Mormon Religion, 111 (quoted by White, xviii).
example, David H. Yarn and Hugh Nibley), and others clearly are not. Aside from his attitude toward a few really quirky examples, such as former Mormon intellectual Paul Toscano, he charges people like Nibley with advancing a new heresy merely because they seem to him to reject his idiosyncratic notion of what constitutes “traditional Mormonism,” which pictures the restored gospel as essentially a variety of Protestant liberalism.

White thinks that “traditional Mormonism” is “liberal” and “optimistic” precisely because it is not concerned with the need for a redemption from sin by Jesus Christ. He is, of course, wrong on this issue; nothing more can be said. Nor does he bother to try to explain why it is “pessimistic” to sense the power of redemption from death and sin through the atonement of Jesus Christ. There is nothing to suggest that Latter-day Saints have ever seriously entertained the notion that the atonement of Jesus Christ is unnecessary, which is not to say that individuals with links to the Mormon culture have not neglected the atonement. The most that can be said is that at times the Saints have not stressed the atonement as vigorously as is warranted. Be that as it may, White describes “traditional Mormonism” as “optimistic” about man. And by “optimistic” he means that they have not thought the atonement was necessary. He also assumes, and again wrongly, that “Mormon neo-orthodoxy” holds a “pessimistic” view of man merely because it takes seriously both the necessity and the reality of a redemption from sin by Jesus Christ. What exactly is pessimistic about that? Perhaps for White it is not the redemption from sin that is “pessimistic” but the very thought that a redemption is necessary—a naughty, low opinion about man.

And White wrongly assumes that a belief in a “finite” God, rather than God understood as something like a “ground of Being,” entails a rejection of the idea of the sovereignty of God.

86 Others that White in 1987 claimed were involved in advancing in one way or another “Mormon neo-orthodoxy” include Elders Neal A. Maxwell, Bruce R. McConkie, Russell M. Nelson, and Dallin H. Oaks.

87 On this matter, see Millet, “Joseph Smith and Modern Mormonism,” 61–62.

88 I am not happy with this term. Millet uses the term “infinite” instead. Millet, “Joseph Smith and Modern Mormonism,” 54. But that term troubles me even more. Nevertheless, I believe that we agree on what we are trying to say, even though our terminology differs.
Hence all that talk by both White and Alexander (already quoted) about the sovereignty of God seems confused. Certainly God need not be an Absolute, like the ground of Being or whatever the fashionable description of God is in philosophical theology, to be sovereign, unless one has in mind a notion of “God” that is dependent upon categories and arguments borrowed from Greek philosophy. And Latter-day Saints have fortunately to this point refused to do that sort of thing. White’s rather simplistic opinion about matters such as the sovereignty of God seems part of his effort to punish the Church for not reaching an accommodation with certain fads that may be described as Secular Fundamentalism.

Talking the Saints into Something Strange

As we have seen, White is not the first to attempt to thrust upon the Saints a kind of Protestant liberal theology. But until or unless the Saints can be persuaded that such a thing is “the authentic spirit of Mormon religion” (p. xvi, where he is quoting McMurrin) or what White likes to label “traditional Mormonism,” such efforts seem futile. In order to accomplish this task, whatever elements in Mormon culture that can be linked with a secularized, naturalistic humanism or with vague and highly sentimentalized Protestant liberal nostrums are celebrated, and everything else ignored or ridiculed. The strategy behind this form of Kulturmormonismus has been to charge the Restoration with promoting irrationalism, biblicism, anti-intellectualism, authoritarianism, and political or moral conservatism, and thereby to denigrate as deviant whatever seems inconsistent with the secular, liberal heresy being promoted.89

Even most of those few on the fringes of Mormon community in the 1960s who then had a longing for a fashionably “liberal” Mormonism seem to have forsaken their agenda. Back then they

89 Or linked with those elements of modernity that form the creed for the Secular Fundamentalism upon which the liberal heresy rests. Some of the authors under consideration hold that the Book of Mormon is inconsistent with Joseph Smith’s King Follett address; they also assume that those who take seriously the teachings of the Book of Mormon must reject the teachings found in the King Follett address.
were a melancholy lot. McMurrin, for example, has complained about the movement away from naturalistic humanism and positivism among increasingly competent Latter-day Saint intellectuals who now take the Restoration seriously. And he sometimes complains about the lack of courage among those who fancied themselves “liberals.”

White’s campaign for a presumably fashionably “liberal” Mormon theology—that is what his book is really about—does not rest on carefully worked-out arguments. Instead, he employs what amounts to a rather crude semi-Marxist sociology with some psychological jargon thrown in to explain why a “liberal” heresy has failed to take hold in the Mormon community. He goes about that indirectly by asserting that orthodox Mormon teachings and beliefs are being reemphasized by Latter-day Saint scholars. White’s struggle to reduce the teachings of the restored gospel to so-called “liberal” slogans also involves an attempt to revise the history of the Church for the purpose of making it appear that there once was a Mormon theology that was similar to liberal Protestantism. That is simply bunk.

When McMurrin talks about the “liberal” elements in “Mormon theology” or its “humanistic temper” or the “naturalistic and pragmatic propensities of the Mormon people” and then adds language identifying a “naturalistic quality of Mormon philosophy” so that he ends up claiming that “it is not entirely inaccurate to describe Mormonism as a kind of naturalistic, humanistic theism,” we are clearly being subjected to some wanton labeling—to slogans that form a kind of battle cry. Such rhetorical excess might make the thoughtful just a little cautious when he begins to describe what he labels “the authentic spirit of Mormon religion.” Whatever else one might say about his bold opinion, he is obviously not talking about the teachings found in the Book of Mormon or the revelations associated with Joseph Smith, but primarily about his own efforts to recast certain elements of the Mormon past into something close to Protestant

90 See, for example, McMurrin’s “Toward Intellectual Anarchy,” 209–13.
91 See, for example, “An Interview with Sterling McMurrin,” 18–43.
92 The Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion, quoted from the first unnumbered page of the “foreword.”
93 Ibid., 3.
liberalism, if not a form of naturalistic humanism. McMurrin has sensed that the Book of Mormon and the bulk of that which is associated with Joseph Smith would have to be jettisoned in order to persuade the Saints to adopt a genuinely "liberal" theology. Since McMurrin rejects the possibility of prophetic charisms, he has no reason to attempt to attend to or preserve in the life of the Saints the teachings in the founding revelations, including the Book of Mormon.

White seems not to have realized that McMurrin believes that there are potentially two competing ideologies with roots in Joseph Smith—the older one being somewhat closer to Protestant orthodoxy because it takes seriously the redemption from sin through Jesus Christ and hence rests on what McMurrin oddly labels a "pessimistic" view of man, and the newer one, for which he is the articulate spokesman, having much in common with the so-called "optimism" about man that he attributes to Protestant liberalism if not secular humanism. If White, in 1967, had understood McMurrin better, he would have been able to complete the analogy between an original pessimistic orthodoxy, followed by a progressive optimism or benign liberalism, only to be followed by a currently controlling pessimistic neo-orthodoxy.

Dismantling the Christ and Doing Without Divine Mercy

White understands Protestant liberal theology in the following way:

From the doctrines of an immanent God and the perfectibility of humanity, liberalism did not need a savior in the orthodox Christian sense. Indeed, people were not in a predicament from which they needed salvation. Furthermore, they possessed the power within themselves to change conditions—the power, if you will, to save themselves. Yet this does not imply that liberal theology left no place for Jesus. On the contrary, the importance of

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94 Ibid., 111.
95 See McMurrin's remarks about those who take revelation seriously in his "Toward Intellectual Anarchy," 210–11.
Jesus is found in his exemplary moral life. Through Jesus we learn the good life and the way back to God. It is not through an atonement that humankind is reconciled with God, nor through divine grace where some are elected to salvation, but rather through the moral and natural perfection of the individual personality. (p. 43)

To which White adds the following: “Liberalism helped to dismantle the Christ—Christianity’s ultimate object of worship. Christ became Jesus the teacher and exemplar” (p. 46). This description is, incidentally, not an entirely inaccurate account of exactly what has taken place among some Protestants in America, and it may help explain why the mainline churches have fallen on hard times when forced to compete with Protestant evangelicals who actually believe something. Sentiments about a nice teacher of ethics, or a wonderful, “gentle Galilean” are hardly what Christianity is all about. The enlightened liberals, according to White, “abandoned much of the biblical account of Jesus,” and accordingly, the liberals either rejected or radically reinterpreted Jesus’ significance for humanity. The transformation of Christian theology into secular morality—Christ on the cross into Jesus the moral teacher—confirmed the worst suspicions of neo-orthodox theologians (p. 47).

“The Kingdom of God,” for such liberals, was understood “as a just, peaceful, and harmonious society [that] had become a real possibility, requiring only the adequate development of reason, science, and technology. Instead of awaiting the direct intervention of Christ the Redeemer, liberalism depended on the example of Jesus the teacher” (p. xiii). For White, “this avowedly optimistic view was a casualty of World War I” (p. xiii).

The next step in White’s argument is to attempt to show how what he labels “traditional Mormonism” closely matches his description of Protestant liberalism. He succeeds only by ignoring

the early revelations to Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon and most of what follows, and by stressing only a few items wrenched out of context—and above all by simply insisting that McMurrin's account is the final word on "traditional Mormonism."

According to White, the key to "traditional Mormonism," a so-called Mormon "liberal" ideology, is faith in "the fundamental goodness of human nature, and a doctrine of salvation based primarily on merit" (p. xxiv). He insists that Mormonism once proclaimed "a doctrine of salvation by merit" (p. xvi), or the "goodness of humanity, and salvation by merit" (p. xxii). He also refers to a liberal Mormon "optimistic evaluation of human nature, and its doctrine of salvation by works" (p. xii). "Because of this optimistic assessment of human nature, traditional Mormonism does not emphasize the grace of God" (p. 101), for "Mormonism espouses a doctrine of salvation by human works" (p. 80). But those White labels Mormon Neo-Orthodox theologians, under the impress of social crisis after World War II, now stress "the necessity of grace," and such a "preoccupation with 'grace' and denial of human possibilities for the amelioration of adverse conditions suggest an underlying authoritarianism. Humanity is incapable of saving itself in time or in eternity" (p. 55).

White is thus annoyed to find Latter-day Saints employing "such traditional Christian terms as 'carnal man,' 'sensual man,' 'devilish man,' 'original guilt,' 'evils of the flesh,' and 'seeds of corruption.' Such language points to a pessimistic view of humanity" (p. 96), or to a dreadful "pessimistic concept of human nature" (p. 99), or to a "pessimistic assessment of human nature, and a doctrine of salvation by grace" (p. xvi), and therefore also to an emphasis on "the atonement of Christ in contrast to the life of Jesus" (p. 106). He apparently does not notice that such language is either directly borrowed from the Book of Mormon and other Latter-day Saint scriptures or easily inferred from their language and teachings.

White assumes that his Mormon liberals proclaim "an optimistic concept of human potential and the notion of progress" (p. xiv) which rests on a belief in the "goodness of humankind" (p. 79), or an "optimistic concept of human
nature" (p. 86), or what he also calls a belief in the "basic goodness of human nature" (pp. 77, 100), or simply the "goodness of human nature" (p. 95), or that "human nature is good rather than evil" (p. 86), which presumably entails a "doctrine of salvation stressing merit rather than grace" (p. 86). White holds that "traditional Mormonism" long ago dispensed with the silly idea that humans are fallible, sinful, corruptible, or depraved in any degree, and hence in need of divine forgiveness made possible by the atonement of Jesus Christ. His understanding of Mormon beliefs at times matches the offensive and ridiculous caricature offered by fulminating Protestants bent on demonstrating that Mormons are not Christian.

On Never Revising or Testing an Account

In twenty years White seems to have found nothing that has impelled him to question, revise, or even elaborate his background theories, even though they have increasingly fallen on hard times among sociologists. One would never know from reading Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy that in twenty years, in addition to a surprising growth of interest in religion among sociologists in particular and academics in general, much has changed in the way in which a growing number of them approach religion. Some of this work is done by believers of one stripe or another, or at least by those sympathetic with belief, and it is therefore not now always grounded in the older hostility or suspicion that is typically found among those whose theories are drawn from elements found in the writings of Freud and Marx, both of whom began with the assumption that all of what they labeled "religion"—all "God-talk"—is necessarily either a delusion or an illusion of some kind.

Some and perhaps even much of the sociological study of religion, of course, is still done by those who see it as it is portrayed by White, that is, as an aberration much like juvenile delinquency or narcotic addiction that further therapy or enlightenment will perhaps cause to disappear. Or it is done by those who grade it higher if it accommodates as much as possible the most antireligious elements of secular modernity. White seems to approach the study of Mormon things with the assumption that religion comes in higher and lower forms, is either "pessimistic"
or “optimistic,” evil or perhaps benign, and so forth. He mounts a pulpit for the purposes of preaching his fashionable form of secular enlightenment, if not from all forms of religion, at least from the particularly unpleasant manifestation of superstition he finds among Latter-day Saints. In his preachments he distorts both the Mormon past and the present in an effort to make his opinions seem plausible. *Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy* is a bad book precisely because it promises much and delivers slogans, confusion, and secular dogmatism couched in fuzzy jargon.97

And when White’s background theory is applied to an actual instance of a sophisticated and widely read account of Mormon beliefs, it turns out to be simply false. For example, see his subdued assessment of Hugh Nibley’s social criticism, which is linked as much as any social criticism could be to an understanding of the scriptures—especially the Book of Mormon—and hence to the teachings of the prophets, both ancient and modern. White apparently does not sense that his theory fails to account for the complexities of Mormon beliefs, either in general or in cases like that of Nibley or virtually anyone else one could name.

**A Brief Postscript**

The thoughtful consideration of Mormonism, which must begin with or at least assume some stance on the Book of Mormon, does not occur in *Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy*. Those who encouraged its publication must share some ignominy for having published such a book. The restored gospel is abused when it is reduced to a parade of facile slogans, and especially when it is cast in the terms White employs. Such language interdicts thought. If

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97 McMurrin boasts of rejecting “the divinity of Christ.” He grants he is guilty of “committing the basic Christian heresy and that the stock-in-trade reply . . . would be that” he thinks “that Jesus was nothing but a great teacher or something of the sort.” He denies that this does “justice to his views on Jesus,” and suggests that “there is a middle ground between being simply a great teacher and being God.” McMurrin is willing to grant that “Jesus had a transcendent, charismatic personality and a remarkable insight into moral and spiritual matters.” But he also affirms that he finds “neither wisdom nor love” in the idea that Jesus suffered, bled, and died for mankind. See “An Interview with Sterling McMurrin,” 31–32.
White had taken seriously the Book of Mormon and its teachings and the role of that text in the life of the Saints, he could not have advanced the account of Mormon things found in his book.

White could have at least endeavored to explain how Latter-day Saints, from the moment they started following Joseph Smith, could believe that the Book of Mormon is both true and that it contains truths for them, and yet not have genuinely found sustenance in the atonement of Jesus Christ. The Saints have quoted from the Book of Mormon in their sermons; read it as part of their devotion to God; consulted it for consolation, instruction, and moral guidance; found in it a message that allowed them to face the terrors of life—including death—with equanimity; and offered it to the gentile world as evidence that the heavens have been opened. Cultural Mormons may have jettisoned the Book of Mormon, but it has been and still is the keystone of the faith of genuine Latter-day Saints.

If there is currently a renewed interest in the Book of Mormon, and in that sense a Mormon neo-orthodoxy, and I believe that there is,98 then we must look at whatever came after

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that initial theophany, translation, and offering of the Book of Mormon to the world as the elaboration by God, through additional revelations, of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And those who take the Book of Mormon seriously begin with the assumption that what was added to the understanding of the Saints by further revelation was not essentially discontinuous or inconsistent with what was taught at the very beginning of the Restoration, but came line upon line, as part of the restoration of all things.  

Now, of course, Latter-day Saints, including the Brethren, have been given to speculations, some of which has not necessarily been consistent with what went before. The Saints, though, are not bound by such speculation. Hence, the way to achieve a sound understanding of Mormonism is to look for continuities and not just assume inconsistency between what is found in the Book of Mormon and what came later through divine special revelations and inspired teachings. After all, the Book of Mormon is the canon—the primary measuring rod. And, if an angel actually had something to do with it, it is then not a mere human invention or an instance of “theological” speculation by Joseph Smith.

If, as some have recently proposed, there is a radical discontinuity and even inconsistency between what Joseph Smith taught after 1835 and what is found in the Book of Mormon, then they must explain, if they are genuine believers, exactly why God would have misled Joseph Smith with the Book of Mormon only to have given him something fundamentally different later on. And they must explain exactly why God misled the ancient Nephites, if what they were taught through divine revelation through their prophets is not really true, that is, can be brushed aside by a subsequent development or later reconstruction in something called Mormon “theology.” And their explanation


99 But this movement has, as I have shown, nothing to do with what is sometimes described as Protestant neo-orthodoxy. See also Millet, “Joseph Smith and Modern Mormonism,” 66, on the issue of whether there is a Mormon neo-orthodoxy.
must be coherent and not simply a statement indicating that they believe in the historicity of the Book of Mormon and are outraged by those who wonder exactly how that can be, given what they have written.

And writers like Professor Brooke, who stand outside the circle of faith, should not be surprised to find resistance to their speculation from faithful Latter-day Saint scholars, especially when they draw upon books like *Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy.*

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100 It is discouraging to find Jan Shipps, who one would expect to know better, promoting Brooke's *The Refiner's Fire* with a testimonial for the book's dust cover, as well as advertisements for the book. Though she must certainly know better, she claims the *The Refiner's Fire* "is not just a revealing history of the background of the first Mormons and early Mormonism but a larger history of early American culture that will do almost as much for readers who are interested in the cultural context in which this new American religion developed as it will do for those who simply want to learn more about Mormon beginnings." See *The New Republic* (3 October 1994): 35. Such a statement raises a question about where she really stands on certain crucial issues.
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