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Nephite Feminism Revisited: Thoughts on Carol Lynn Pearson's View of Women in the Book of Mormon

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Periodically, readers of the Book of Mormon have raised the issue of its depiction of women and specific messages that it has for women. Having come to regard Carol Lynn Pearson as a cultural treasure, we looked forward to reading her essay on this topic in the March 1996 Sunstone, "Could Feminism Have Saved the Nephites?" The question is certainly interesting, and her asking voice is important and eloquent. While affirming that "The Book of Mormon is indeed a book written for our day, and it contains many powerful lessons that can greatly benefit us" (p. 32), she expresses concerns about what she sees as the "near unrelenting militarism" of the Nephites, "the absence of women in the record and the stunning, negative female imagery" (p. 32). We sympathize with her concerns and can agree with some of her general propositions and observations. Compared to the Bible, particularly The Gospels, the Book of Mormon neglects the female perspective.\(^1\) However, her case turns out to be seriously flawed, and if we

\(^1\) Another treatment of this topic includes Maureen Ursenbach Beecher and Lavina Fielding Anderson, eds., *Sisters in Spirit: Mormon Women in Historical and Cultural Perspective* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987). One essay from that volume, by Melodie Moench Charles, "Precedents for Mormon Women from the Scriptures," noted that the attention given to women was not impressive and that Book of Mormon authors apparently saw women as less significant than men; nevertheless, "the most important teachings show that
take her charges at face value, they unjustly diminish our appreciation of the Book of Mormon. In this review, we point out problems in her essay, but do so hoping to address many of the concerns that she voices. We do not intend to diminish her many accomplishments elsewhere.

Our initial focus was on her neglect of important Book of Mormon texts and contexts that contradict or modify specific statements that she makes. Reviewers of drafts of this paper encouraged us to undertake a broader approach to the issue of women in the Book of Mormon, rather than just responding to her paper. Accordingly, we include observations relevant to her questions that go beyond the specific cases she mentions.

We affirm that the message of the Book of the Mormon for women is a positive one, more so than has been recognized by most readers. We shall consider several kinds of evidence that this is so:

- Doctrinal statements and the absence of proscriptive statements
- Type-scenes involving specific women
- Imagery concerning a Divine Mother
- Symbolism in narrative context
- The significance of the narrator perspective (male, Nephite, military)

We shall also discuss the influence of culture and biographical influences on contemporary reader expectations on the text. We must point out that Pearson’s paper seems never to analyze passages in context. Instead, she quotes isolated texts and makes subjective evaluations. This approach generates questions that illuminate contemporary concerns, but such a method cannot provide definitive answers. Even her most passionate assertions—that there is a correlation between an apparent sexism and the seeming militarism of the Nephites—comes with no textual or contextual analysis of the causes of the Book of Mormon conflicts or of the Nephite attitudes and policies regarding war. She observes the

salvation is available equally to all” (ibid., 52). Charles gives the Book of Mormon four pages. Also, Donna Lee Bowen and Camille S. Williams have written an informative essay, “Women in the Book of Mormon,” in Encyclopedia of Mormonism, 4:1577–80.
accounts of violence and reacts with horror, expressing her feeling that such passages “stain the pages of the book” (p. 34). But she never looks at the wars either in the ancient context or in terms of their contemporary relevance, thus neglecting to note that the negative depiction of war is intended to engender feelings of sorrow and repugnance among readers.

We shall also describe the results of a computer-based search and contextual readings that suggest that women have a stronger presence in the text than first appears. Pearson cites a statistical study of ratios of he/his versus she/her pronouns in the Book of Mormon as evidence of Nephite marginalization and neglect of women (p. 35). Here, we shall examine textual and contextual evidence that generalizations about women’s inclusion in the Book of Mormon based on these statistics have been misleading. We shall show that the language is far more gender-inclusive than is commonly recognized.

Overall, we attempt to select more comprehensively, to pay more attention to narrator perspective and cultural context, and to incorporate new discoveries about text and context. We value the text differently and also see a more satisfactory interpretation.

**Doctrinal Statements and the Absence of Proscriptive Statements**

Our women ... were strong, yea, even like unto the men. (1 Nephi 17:2)

Quoting a rare “statement that would appear inviting to women,” Pearson cites Alma 32:23: “And now, he imparteth his word by angels unto men, yea, not only unto men, but women also.” Then she asks, “Where are the stories to demonstrate this expansive doctrine? ... Was there something going on that did not make its way into the record?” (p. 34).

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3 It may be useful to note that the Book of Mormon was never intended as a woman’s history text. Although written in a patriarchal society by men, the lessons are for both sexes.
Before we look closer at the stories that do appear in the record, let's recall some of the expansive doctrines that expressly refer to women.

And he cometh into the world that he may save all men if they will hearken unto his voice; for behold, he suffereth the pains of all men, yea, the pains of every living creature, both men, women, and children, who belong to the family of Adam. (2 Nephi 9:21)

Behold, my sons, and my daughters, who are the sons and the daughters of my first-born, I would that ye should give ear unto my words.

For the Lord God hath said that: Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land; and inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments ye shall be cut off from my presence. (2 Nephi 4:3–4)

For... he inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile. (2 Nephi 26:33)

And now, because of the covenant which ye have made ye shall be called the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters; for behold, this day he hath spiritually begotten you; for ye say that your hearts are changed through faith on his name; therefore, ye are born of him and have become his sons and his daughters. (Mosiah 5:7)

And the Lord said unto me: Marvel not that all mankind, yea, men and women, all nations, kindreds, tongues and people, must be born again; yea, 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)
Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee. (Mosiah 13:20)

The spirit and the body shall be reunited again in its perfect form; both limb and joint shall be restored to its proper frame, even as we now are at this time; and we shall be brought to stand before God, knowing even as we know now, and have a bright recollection of all our guilt.

Now, this restoration shall come to all, both old and young, both bond and free, both male and female, both the wicked and the righteous. (Alma 11:43–44)

From these statements, and many others which use inclusive language, we see that the promises and obligations of the gospel are the same for both men and women. Pearson gives a nod to some of these positive statements, but misses the point that, unlike the Bible, the Book of Mormon never makes prescriptive statements with respect to women’s roles. In the course of delivering his message, Mormon describes his culture, but never circumscribes ours.

When Women Move to the Foreground

Given that the Book of Mormon doesn’t often mention individual women, what can we learn from those instances when it does? In researching this essay, we have realized that when women move from the background to the foreground in the Book of Mormon they typically do so for three reasons:

- to highlight profoundly archetypal situations
- to show the mutual dependence and independent agency of men and women
- to emphasize that the promises and obligations of the gospel apply equally to men and women

There is a consistency and deliberation in this on the part of the authors that suggests a positive intent and attitude. Pearson contrasts the Book of Mormon with the Bible, observing that the
Bible far more frequently describes strong female role models. Nevertheless, the stories we do have in the Book of Mormon have more significance that she realizes.

**Abish and the Lamanite Queen**

I say unto thee, woman, there has not been such great faith among all the people of the Nephites. (Alma 19:10)

Alma 18–19 contains the single most detailed account of individual female actions and words in the entire Book of Mormon. This is the story of Ammon’s preaching to the Lamanite king, the king’s conversion and lapse into apparent death, the testing and conversion of the queen, her fall into a deathlike state, the appearance of Abish, and her role in the resolution of the crisis. Given that the editor, Mormon, so often neglects the female perspective, why does he give space to Alma’s detailed story of these women’s actions and words unless he sees them as particularly significant? If Mormon has anything specific to say about women, he must be saying it here.

So the story of Abish and Lamoni’s queen in Alma 19 is potentially crucial. But, according to Pearson, the queen “is another spiritually dependent woman: she does not receive from God but from her husband’s servants the knowledge that Ammon is a prophet” (p. 35). In Pearson’s report, the queen exists only to teach us that, to a wife, “the husband must never stink.” She derives this lesson, not from her own close reading of the text, but from an anonymous teacher, a reading she holds up for deserved ridicule. Other passages in the Book of Mormon don’t hesitate to criticize errant husbands and fathers. For example, Jacob not only chastises Nephite husbands for infidelity (see Jacob 2:31–35), but explains that he has come to deliver his prophetic message because the Lord has heard the prayers of those Nephite women.

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4 In passing, we must observe that Pearson’s contrast of the Bible and Book of Mormon overlooks many examples of “negative imagery” in the Bible (Delilah, Jezebel, Salome, etc.) and several striking instances of “positive imagery” in the Book of Mormon.
For behold, I, the Lord, have seen the sorrow, and heard the mourning of the daughters of my people in the land of Jerusalem, yea, and in all the lands of my people, because of the wickedness and abominations of their husbands. (Jacob 2:31)

In Mosiah 25:12, the children of Noah’s runaway priests refuse to be associated with their fathers, taking upon themselves the name of Nephi. Obviously then, Book of Mormon writers do not place husbands on an unassailable pedestal. We should not assume blind approval even in the case of the stolen Lamanite daughters who at one point pleaded for the lives of their husbands (see the discussion on pages 37–39 of this review). Here we hope to provide a more enlightening reading of the text.

In Alma 18:23–24, the king, having believed Ammon’s preaching, falls to earth as if dead. He is mourned by his family and, after two days and nights, they are about to bury the king.

Now the queen having heard of the fame of Ammon, therefore she sent and desired that he should come in unto her. And it came to pass that Ammon did as he was commanded, and went in unto the queen, and desired to know what she would that he should do. And she said unto him: The servants of my husband have made it known unto me that thou art a prophet of a holy God, and that thou hast power to do many mighty works in his name. (Alma 19:2–4)

In Alma 19, the words that the queen heard came to her as a witness from the servants and a testimony from Ammon. The capacity to believe Ammon’s testimony as she did came from God. Ammon says of her, “Blessed art thou because of thy exceeding faith; I say unto thee, woman, there has not been such great faith among all the people of the Nephites” (Alma 19:10). This signals us to pay attention.

When the king rises from his near-death state, he reaches out to her and declares that “I have seen my Redeemer; and he shall come forth, and be born of a woman, and he shall redeem all mankind who shall believe on his name” (Alma 19:13). At this, the king and the queen are both overpowered by the Spirit. This
leads into the story of Abish, which Pearson alludes to without analysis except to say that "Abish, who performs one of the few strong deeds by a woman in the book,\(^5\) had converted to the Lord because of a remarkable vision her father had had years before, not a vision of her own" (p. 35). Before we look at the "strong deed" that Abish performs, compare the language of the Book of Mormon with Pearson's version:

[Abish] having been converted unto the Lord for many years, on account of a remarkable vision of her father. (Alma 19:16)

Note that the text does not specify a vision "that her father had" or a "vision of her father's." It says "a vision of her father." It seems a better reading to credit Abish with having a vision of her father,\(^6\) which led to her conversion. This is one of those instances in which the reader's paradigm colors the interpretation of the text. It is understandable that Pearson overlooked this possibility, since many of us have come to a similar conclusion. But yet, once someone (in this case, John Hansen) provides a better reading,\(^7\) the possibility seems quite obvious. Clearly, we all need to read more carefully.

Now look closely at the "strong deed" in Alma 19:29-30:

And it came to pass that she [Abish] went and took the queen by the hand, that perhaps she might raise her from the ground; and as soon as she touched her hand she [the queen] arose and stood upon her feet, and cried with a loud voice, saying: O blessed Jesus, who has saved me from an awful hell! O blessed God, have mercy on this people!

And when she had said this, she clasped her hands, being filled with joy, speaking many words which were

\(^5\) While not often named, the women in the Book of Mormon participate in intensely dramatic situations from start to finish. Strength was obviously required for endurance and for survival. See, for example, 1 Nephi 5:1-8; 7:19; 17:1-2; 18:19; 2 Nephi 5:6-7; 2 Nephi 17:14; Mosiah 5:7; Mosiah 25:12; and so forth.

\(^6\) Which father? Earthly or heavenly? Either is plausible in light of current near-death literature.

\(^7\) Post to a Listserv on Thursday, 12 September 1996.
not understood; and when she had done this, she took the king, Lamoni, by the hand, and behold he arose and stood upon his feet.

Here we have women involved in prophecy, healing, speaking in tongues, and visions. Pearson had asked, “Where are the stories to demonstrate [God’s imparting his word to women also]?” Certainly, here is one. At this point in the story, the queen, like Abish, has had her own witness directly from the Lord, and she can in nowise be considered “spiritually dependent” on her husband with respect to her knowledge. In describing the queen this way, Pearson overlooks entirely the queen’s subsequent vision.

Most of us at some point in our lives have to decide to place a particle of belief in someone else’s words and testimony (see Alma 32 on faith). This is a common human experience, a by-product of infancy, childhood, and naïveté on any subject outside of our personal experience. If a wife were to receive a profound spiritual epiphany alone atop a plateau in Mesa Verde and her husband were to believe her, would Pearson then be justified in describing him as a spiritually dependent male? Or, on the other hand, if a husband dismissed his wife’s report and testimony, merely on the grounds that, as a male, he should possess an independent mind and spirit, would Pearson judge him favorably? If we are to be on equal grounds, in partnership, as Pearson advocates, we should act and judge according to equal standards. Despite Pearson’s reservations about the story of Abish and the queen, it is here that we can begin to address her concerns for finding Book of Mormon exemplars for women.

Significantly, the story of Abish and the Lamanite queen qualifies as a “type-scene,”8 a prophetic prefiguring not only of the resurrection of Christ, but also of the role of women in that event. As Robert Alter remarks, “The type-scene is not merely a way of formally recognizing a particular kind of narrative moment; it is also a means of attaching that moment to a larger

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pattern of historical and theological meaning." Compare the general features of this account in Alma with a conspicuous pattern in ancient Near Eastern religion:

One of the most striking features of the ancient Sacred Marriage cult was that the goddess had an important part to play in the resurrection of her husband. . . . We will recall how Anath made possible Baal-Hadad’s resurrection by attacking and destroying his enemy, Mot, the god of death. In Mesopotamian myth it was Inanna-Ishtar who descended into the realm of death to destroy Erishkigal’s power so that dead Dumuzi-Tammuz could be restored to life. Aristide’s Apology describes how Aphrodite descended into Hades in order to ransom Adonis from Persephone. Cybele likewise made possible the resurrection of Attis on the third day, while in Egypt it was Isis who made possible the restoration of her husband, Osiris. . . . But no matter what the details of these ubiquitous Near Eastern death-and-resurrection legends, the underlying theme is the same: the god is helpless without the ministrations of his consort. . . . The reunion of Jesus and Mary Magdalene at the tomb on Resurrection Morning therefore clearly fits within this well-known tradition.10

The same motif also appears in the Mesoamerican Popol Vuh in the story of One Hunahpu’s death and the maiden daughter of the underworld lords, through whose courageous actions life was renewed.11

The stories of Abish and the Lamanite kings and queens also resonate with these traditions. Given the growing recognition that Book of Mormon authors consciously selected stories that present archetypal patterns, it is likely that these stories attracted the atten-

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10 Eugene Seaich, “A Great Mystery: The Sacred Marriage and Bridal Chamber in Early Christianity and Judaism” (Salt Lake City, unpublished MS, 1979), 198–99.
tion of Mormon as significant type-scenes, and as such, they receive due attention and prominence in the text. That the queen’s spiritual experience duplicates that of her husband surely demonstrates the equality and partnership that Pearson longs for. The events in the story demonstrate both independent actions of the women involved and the mutual dependence of male and female.

Had Pearson given the story of Abish and the queen a close and understanding reading, some of the strongest criticisms in her essay would require modification, a toning down of the hyperbole that often appears in her rhetoric. She asks, “Was there something going on that did not make it into the record?” Our answer, with respect to the Book of Mormon and to Pearson’s essay, is “Yes.”

**Other Type- Scenes in the Book of Mormon**

The discovery that the story of Abish is typologically significant led in turn to the examination of other relatively detailed accounts of women in the Book of Mormon to ascertain whether type-scene or ritual issues play a role in their inclusion and formulation in the text. Speaking of type-scenes, Robert Alter writes:

> Since biblical narrative characteristically catches its protagonists only at the critical and revealing points in their lives, the biblical type-scene occurs not in the rituals of daily existence but at the crucial junctures in the lives of the heroes. . . . Some of the most commonly repeated biblical type-scenes I have been able to identify are the following: the annunciation . . . of the birth of the hero to his barren mother; the encounter with the future betrothed at a well; the epiphany in the field; the initiatory trial; danger in the desert and the discovery of a well or other source of sustenance; the testament of the dying hero.12

In comparing this passage to the Book of Mormon, we think of Nephi’s vision of the virgin; Nephi’s journey to find Ishmael, whose daughters marry Lehi’s sons, thereby fulfilling a commandment from God (see 1 Nephi 7:1; 16:7–8); Nephi’s vision;

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Nephi’s initiatory adventures in securing the plates of Laban; much danger in the desert; the discovery of the Liahona; Lehi’s blessings to his sons; and other closing testimonies by his successors. Clearly, the selectivity of the Book of Mormon narrative has a cultural background and a literary context. With an eye alert to the notion of type-scenes, when we look back at the other fairly detailed accounts of specific women (or groups of women) in the Book of Mormon, we notice that many have significant archetypal or ritual backgrounds. Pearson discusses none of these stories in any detail. These include the story of Sariah’s complaint and testimony, the vision associating the tree of life with the virgin in Nazareth in 1 Nephi 11:13–23, the story of Adam and Eve in 2 Nephi 2:18–27, the story of the kidnapping of the twenty-four daughters of the Lamanites (which Alan Goff has examined as a type-scene¹³), the story involving Isabel in Alma 39, and finally, the archetypal “Salome” story of the daughter of Jared in Ether 8 and 9.

The prominence of these and other type-scenes in the overall narrative suggests that we might gain insights into what was included in the Book of Mormon and the significance of those selections by reading them against larger contexts.

Alter also suggests that variations in type-scenes are significant. That is, if a similar story is included, we should pay close attention to differences. The most conspicuous difference between the stories of Lamoni and his queen and the subsequent narrative of the father of Lamoni in Alma 22 is that the second queen acts out of fear and anger rather than faith. That is, the first queen inquires before she takes action. The second queen acts with determination and initiative, but without making inquiries of the prophet. The narrator shows sympathy for her concerns. But even though the second queen’s actions and commands trigger Aaron’s successful response in raising Lamoni’s father, she does not obtain the same kind of direct witness as did the first queen.

Sariah’s Complaint and Testimony

Actually, the female presence in the Book of Mormon begins with the first line: “I, Nephi, having been born of goodly parents.” Sariah figures as an active participant in the journey across the desert, appears in Lehi’s vision as one partaking of the fruit of the tree of life, and participates in the journey to the New World. The story of Sariah’s complaint and testimony deserves a closer reading than it has received thus far:

And it came to pass that after we had come down into the wilderness unto our father, behold, he was filled with joy, and also my mother, Sariah, was exceedingly glad, for she truly had mourned because of us. For she had supposed that we had perished in the wilderness; and she also had complained against my father, telling him that he was a visionary man; saying: Behold thou hast led us forth from the land of our inheritance, and my sons are no more, and we perish in the wilderness. And after this manner of language had my mother complained against my father. (1 Nephi 5:1–3)

At first glance, we might want to dismiss this part of the story as a negative image, since it depicts Sariah as “complaining.” But in structuring the account, Nephi starts with the end, highlighting her gladness and joy in contrast to her mourning over her sons and sacrifices. This shows that his focus is not on the fact that she complained, but on the outcome of the experience. Nephi recognizes the validity of both her fears and her joy. Of all the stories he could tell about his mother, why does he give the most space to this one? Sensitized by readings on allusion and type-scenes by Alan Goff and Robert Alter, we should hear an echo of the account of the widow of Zarephath and Elijah in 1 Kings 17:9–24. Like Sariah, the widow had been asked by a servant of God to sacrifice all her material goods and subsequently seems to have lost her son. She too complains and the prophet recognizes the validity of her concerns. He offers no rebuke; instead, Elijah prays to the Lord on her behalf. Lehi’s response to Sariah is just as exemplary:
And it had come to pass that my father spake unto her, saying: I know that I am a visionary man; . . . I know that the Lord will deliver my sons out of the hands of Laban, and bring them down again unto us in the wilderness. And after this manner of language did my father, Lehi, comfort my mother, Sariah, concerning us, while we journeyed in the wilderness up to the land of Jerusalem, to obtain the record of the Jews. (1 Nephi 5:4–6)

In this passage Lehi *comforts* Sariah; he does not rebuke her or belittle or dismiss her concerns. The story continues in a way that strengthens the association between Sariah and the widow, and, by extension, between Lehi and Elijah as servants of God:

And when we had returned to the tent of my father, behold their joy was full, and my mother was comforted. And she spake, saying: Now I know of a surety that the Lord hath commanded my husband to flee into the wilderness; yea, and I also know of a surety that the Lord hath protected my sons, and delivered them out of the hands of Laban, and given them power whereby they could accomplish the thing which the Lord hath commanded them. And after this manner of language did she speak. (1 Nephi 5:7–8)

The allusion, the “likening,” in the narrative is confirmed on comparing Sariah’s response to the delivery of her sons to the restoration of the widow’s son. The widow says, “Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth” (1 Kings 17:24). The comparison makes Lehi an Elijah in the same way that biblical stories of Elisha parallel Elijah’s acts and demonstrate that Elisha was Elijah’s successor. So, of all the stories Nephi could choose to tell about his mother, he chooses one that “likens” her to an exemplary woman in the scriptures. It is of comfort that Sariah is “flawed” and yet righteous, as was Peter in the Bible.

Finally, the “complaint” story concludes with another significant passage:
And it came to pass that they [Lehi and Sariah] did rejoice exceedingly, and did offer sacrifice and burnt offerings unto the Lord; and they gave thanks unto the God of Israel. (1 Nephi 5:9)

The man and the woman pass through an ordeal and worship together afterwards. Recall that Pearson uses the Bible only to make negative comparisons with the Book of Mormon. We are suggesting that she read more carefully. Many of the negative images that she complains of in the Book of Mormon also appear in the Bible. More significantly, a broader reading puts the negatives in context with the corresponding positives.

Eve and the Experience of Joy

Pearson remarks that, because of the Book of Mormon’s infrequent explicit addresses to women, there is “room for us to quip: Men are that they might have joy, and women are that they might provide it.” This parodies 2 Nephi 2:25:

Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy.

Feminist criticism of the social impact of the Bible tends to focus on three points: the scapegoating of Eve in the traditional anti-female reading of the garden story, Exodus 22:18 on not suffering a witch to live, which was exploited to justify the medieval witch burnings, and passages such as 1 Timothy 2:11–15 on women keeping silent and submissive, using the garden story as justification. From the outset, Mormonism rejected all these readings.

The Mormon reading of the garden story that first emerges in 2 Nephi 2 makes the fall a blessing, and, consequently, Eve a figure of honor. The Adam and Eve account in 2 Nephi 2:18–27

14 This would not be relevant to a discussion of the Book of Mormon, except that Pearson remarks that “Probably 85 percent of ‘witches’ burned in the Inquisition were female” (p. 38).  
15 That is not to say that one cannot find traces of these notions within Mormonism, but that when one finds them, they are in tension with our sacred texts and have obvious ties to the larger culture.
contains no trace of the usual scapegoating of Eve that is so prevalent elsewhere in the normative Christian tradition.\textsuperscript{16} Joseph Campbell informs us that one of the functions of a mythology is sociological, “supporting and validating a certain social order.”\textsuperscript{17} Hence, the New Testament passages that have been cited to justify a particular social order refer back to the pointed interpretations of the Garden story. Generations of post New Testament fathers did so too. If Book of Mormon authors truly marginalized women to the extent that Pearson believes, it is strange that they passed up this key opportunity to justify themselves.

Incidentally, the Joseph Smith Translation of Exodus 22:18 anticipated modern scholarship in correcting that verse as a mistranslation, referring not to witches, but to murderers. And Mormon scripture and tradition contains much that contradicts the questionable opinion of 2 Timothy 2:11 and similar passages, such as the callings given to Emma Smith in Doctrine and Covenants 25. While criticism of Mormon history and culture with respect to feminist issues may be justified on these points and others, credit should be given where it is due, particularly with respect to the depiction of Eve. We celebrate with her when she says, “Were it not for our transgression we never should have had seed, and never should have known good and evil, and the joy of our redemption, and the eternal life which God giveth unto all the obedient” (Moses 5:11).

**Negative Imagery in Narrative Context**

Pearson also makes several strongly worded remarks with respect to “negative female imagery” in the Book of Mormon. Here she uses an approach to the text that is both inappropriate and unfair—inappropriate because she removes the images from

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\textsuperscript{17} Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth* (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 31. Campbell’s reading of the woman as initiator in the fall is interesting in comparison with 2 Nephi: Moyers: “Why are women the ones held responsible for the downfall? Campbell: They represent life. Man doesn’t enter life except by woman, and so it is woman who brings us into this world of pairs of opposites and suffering.” Ibid., 48.
an apolitical symbolic context in order to politicize them, and unfair because for men to take the same approach to negative male imagery in the scriptures, or even her essay ("testosterone poisoning"), would defeat the purposes of the text. First consider the importance of context. Pearson’s citation of some prophetic imagery from Isaiah illustrates the hazards of overly selective, context-free reading.

And my people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O my people, they who lead thee cause thee to err and destroy the way of thy paths.

(2 Nephi 13:12)

Far from being a doctrinal pronouncement on the fitness of women to provide leadership, this passage occurs in the middle of a prophetic narrative. The situation begins with crisis in Jerusalem and a breakdown of social obligations:

And the people shall be oppressed, . . . every one by his neighbor; the child shall behave himself proudly against the ancient, and the base against the honorable. When a man shall take hold of his brother . . . and shall say: Thou hast clothing, be thou our ruler, and let not this ruin come under thy hand—In that day shall he swear, saying: I will not be a healer; for in my house there is neither bread nor clothing; make me not a ruler of the people. (2 Nephi 13:5-7)

This denial of familial obligations breaks down the social order, in many cases leaving children without both parents, or parents so involved in economic survival that they do not or cannot provide leadership. But the prophecy does not end with the bleak picture of decadence, defeat, scattering, and servitude, but continues with the gathering of Israel:

They shall return to their lands of promise. And the house of Israel shall possess them, and the land of the Lord shall be for servants and handmaids; and they

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18 We have just seen that the leadership of Abish and the Lamanite queen contributes to significant conversions among the Lamanites.
shall take them captives unto whom they were captives;
and they shall rule over their oppressors. (2 Nephi
24:2)

The image that Pearson takes as “uncomplimentary” in an
isolated reading is directly paired with a promise that the former
handmaids shall rule over their oppressors. So the trajectory of a
prophetic narrative is important. Also, the literary form is signifi-
cant. Regarding other aspects of Isaiah’s negative female imagery,
Bowen and Williams’s interpretation is that this imagery shows
that: “Decadent Israel is described as devoid of honorable men,
in that they valued women as decorative sex objects (2 Ne.
13:16–26; Isa. 3:16–26).”19 The point is that the negative images
in this context do not apply to women only, but to decadent Israel,
men and women together.

Positive and Negative Imagery

The Book of Mormon makes a striking use of dualistic im-
agery, pairing opposing symbols to make the maximum con-
trast:20 a rebellious Laman versus an obedient Nephi, a tree of life
versus a great and spacious building, King Noah versus King
Benjamin, wicked Nephite husbands versus faithful Lamanite fa-
thers, Alma versus Korihor, and Mormon versus Amalickiah. If
there are negative female images, we should also look for the cor-
responding positives. We should also consider the use to which the
negative images are put.

While Pearson strongly protests the Book of Mormon use of
the “great and abominable church, the mother of abominations,
. . . the whore of all the earth” (p. 36; see also pp. 39–40), Pear-
son does not observe that the abominable church consists of
“both male and female” (2 Nephi 10:16) who fight against Zion,
which, as she herself remarks, is also characterized as feminine.
Nor does she observe that the “whore of all the earth” is just as
much a biblical image as a Book of Mormon one (see Revelation
17, Proverbs, Hosea, etc.). Given that the scriptures typically por-

20 See Mack C. Stirling, “The Way of Life and the Way of Death in the
tray Jerusalem and Zion as feminine, even though consisting of male and female, and destined as the intended bride of Christ, we are dismayed at her statement that "there is no mistaking the gender of ultimate good and the gender of ultimate evil" (p. 36). Does the Book of Mormon account as a whole give anyone the impression that males comprise the gender of ultimate good? (Whatever happened to Satan?) Pearson says that "to contrast the Heavenly Father with the mother of abominations is very much a statement on gender" (p. 37). We disagree. Like "Babylon" or the "Great and Spacious Building," which is its symbolic equivalent, the "mother of abominations" is a symbol of a mixed-gender group. Such a "statement on gender" is easily contradicted by selecting from other Book of Mormon symbols, such as the feminine wisdom, mother earth, the mother of the Son of God, or God's describing his love for Israel in terms of maternal imagery. Indeed, while the poetic opposition between Father in Heaven and Babylon is appropriate, another set of opposing symbols should be considered in assessing Pearson's claim: mother earth, wisdom, and the tree of life. We must then understand the narrative symbolic context to which the great whore belongs.

**Mother Earth, Wisdom, and the Tree of Life**

Despite her well-known interest in the Divine Mother and her mention of the Canaanite goddess and the *Popol Vuh* of the Maya, which contains references to such a figure, Pearson makes no reference to the three Book of Mormon occurrences of "mother earth" (2 Nephi 9:7; Mosiah 2:26; Mormon 6:15). What is the religious context behind the use of that language in the Book of Mormon? Northop Frye explains:

No principle is without many exceptions in mythology, but one very frequent mythical formulation of this attitude to nature is an earth-mother, from whom everything is born and to whom everything returns at death. Such an earth-mother is the most easily understood image of *natura naturans*, and she acquires its moral ambivalence. As the womb of all forms of life, she has a cherishing and nourishing aspect; as the tomb of all forms of life, she has a menacing and sinister
aspect; as the manifestation of an unending cycle of life and death, she has an inscrutable and elusive aspect. Hence, she is often a *dive triformis*, a goddess of a threefold form of some kind, usually birth, death, and renewal in time; or heaven, earth, and hell in space.²¹

The references to "mother earth" in the Book of Mormon are subtle but neatly spread across the entire history, arguing for a long-standing tradition. Also, it is clear that these references, in connection with other archetypal feminine imagery, contain the essentials of the mythic formulation. The presence of these essential elements of the picture in the text invites our further exploration of the Old and New World contexts. Some have expressed concern that the three passages cited refer to mother earth in the context of death. While this is strictly correct in the ancient mythological formulation, it might be beneficial to see some of the other manifestations of the image. Accordingly, other passages in the Book of Mormon suggest the life-giving aspects of mother earth:

O Lord, wilt thou hearken unto me, and cause that it may be done according to my words, and send forth rain upon the face of the earth, that she may bring forth her fruit, and her grain in the season of grain. . . . And it came to pass that in the seventy and sixth year the Lord did turn away his anger from the people, and caused that rain should fall upon the earth, insomuch that it did bring forth her fruit in the season of her fruit. And it came to pass that it did bring forth her grain in the season of her grain. (Helaman 11:13, 17)

While Pearson does mention the reference to feminine wisdom—"For they will not seek wisdom, neither do they desire that she should rule over them" (p. 36, quoting Mosiah 8:20)—she does not follow up on the implications of the passage. At a minimum, we should quote from Raphael Patai's *The Hebrew Goddess*:

In the late Biblical period a theological tendency made its appearance which prepared the ground for the emergence of the Talmudic Shekhina. The trend referred to is that of interposing personified mediating entities between God and man.... The most frequently appearing of these intermediaries ... is ... Wisdom.\textsuperscript{22}

Patai refers to the discussions of Wisdom as a holy feminine personification in Job 28:12–28 and in Proverbs 3, 8, and 9. Later developments in the Old World are interesting (see Patai), but this much, at least, would have been part of the Nephite tradition. Again, the Book of Mormon reference is strictly correct.

An important article by Daniel Peterson, “Nephi and His Asherah: A Note on 1 Nephi 11:8–23,”\textsuperscript{23} contains several brilliant insights into the significance of Mary’s presence in the vision of the tree of life, and meaningful parallels between the Book of Mormon and characteristic themes and images of Wisdom literature. Peterson begins by considering the context for this notable recurring image in the Book of Mormon. During his vision of the tree of life, Nephi asks for an “interpretation” of the tree (see 1 Nephi 11:8–11). By way of providing the interpretation, the angel shows Nephi a vision of the Virgin Mary.

And he said unto me: Behold, the virgin whom thou seest is the mother of the Son of God, after the manner of the flesh. And it came to pass that I beheld that she was carried away in the Spirit; and after she had been carried away in the Spirit for the space of a time the angel spake unto me, saying: Look! And I looked and beheld the virgin again, bearing a child in her arms. And the angel said unto me: Behold the Lamb of God, yea, even the Son of the Eternal Father!

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Peterson explores in fascinating detail the puzzle of why, in the vision, the angel expects Nephi to be able to associate the vision of Mary and the birth of the Son of God with the tree of life. He presents recent discoveries—which may relate to Nephi’s cultural background in Israel—regarding Asherah, a mother goddess venerated in ancient Israel and worshiped as the consort of Jehovah. Peterson demonstrates that Asherah was frequently associated with the tree of life. In the same article, Peterson explores the association of feminine wisdom with the tree of life. For example, in Proverbs 3:18, we are told that “She [Wisdom] is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her.” In Proverbs 1–9 and “elsewhere in ancient Hebrew and Jewish literature, Wisdom appears as the wife of God, which can hardly fail to remind us of ancient Asherah.”

Peterson observes many direct connections between the Book of Mormon and the ancient genre of Wisdom literature, including the nature of the opposition to wisdom:

Thus in Proverbs, readers are told of two contradictory “ways”—that of the foolish and that of obedience to wisdom—and Lady Wisdom is contrasted repeatedly with her antagonist, “the strange woman” or “whorish woman,” who is certainly “forbidden” to the righteous. (Likewise opposed to the truth of God is Nephi’s striking image, given to him in the same vision as the tree of life, of “the mother of abominations,” “the whore of all the earth,” which fights against the saints.) Lady Wisdom and the “whorish woman” are, in fact, competitors.

The context of the reference to feminine wisdom has another clue worth exploring. It occurs as King Limhi learns from Ammon that Mosiah can translate the Jaredite plates: “Doubtless a great mystery is contained within these plates” (Mosiah 8:19). The term mystery should not be understood as something generally unknown, but refers specifically to the temple mysteries. The only other reference to “a great mystery” in all the scriptures comes in Paul’s discussion of the love husbands should have for

\[24\] Ibid., 211.

\[25\] Ibid., 215.
their wives when the two are joined into one flesh (Ephesians 5:28–32). That is, the “great mystery” has to do with marriage. Such a context for the specific notion of “a great mystery” implies a hunger for greater knowledge of the temple ordinances and mysteries, including a greater knowledge of wisdom.

The implication is that the Nephites did know something about the Divine Mother and therefore had some positive notions in this respect. Further speculation on our part would be of no value, but, as Peterson’s article demonstrates, careful reading and background research can be far more enlightening than noncontextual approaches.

**Bridegroom and Bride: Narratives and Symbols**

We should also examine both the narrative and the symbolic complex to which the “mother of abominations” symbol belongs. Far from being a statement about gender, it derives from the internal logic of a symbolic narrative. And as we shall see, that symbolic narrative grows out of a specific cultural context.

We have next to set this apocalyptic structure in its context. In the first place, there is the problem that the nations outside Israel—Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, Phoenicia—are as a rule more wealthy, prosperous, and successful than Israel. They possess the power and domination that the Israelites themselves desperately longed to possess, and would certainly have regarded as a signal mark of divine favor if they had possessed it. The only recourse is to show this heathen success in a context of demonic parody, as a short-lived triumph that has all the marks of the real thing except permanence. It follows that there must be two forms of demonic imagery: the parody-demonic, attached to temporarily successful heathen nations; and the manifest, or you-just-wait demonic, the ruins and wasteland haunted by hyenas and screech owls that all this glory will inevitably become . . . .

As an example of this structure, let us look at a group of female figures in the Bible. We may divide them into two groups: the maternal and the marital,
mother figures and bride figures. Apocalyptic mother figures include the Virgin Mary and the mysterious woman crowned with stars who appears at the beginning of Revelation 12, and who is presented also as the mother of the Messiah. Bridal figures include the central female character of the Song of Songs and the symbolic Jerusalem of Revelation 21 who descends to earth prepared “like a bride adorned for her husband” and is finally identified with the Christian Church. . . . Eve in particular is the intermediate female maternal figure, “our general mother,” in Milton’s phrase, going through the cycle of sin and redemption. . . .

The demonic counterpart of the Bride who is Jerusalem and the spouse of Christ is the Great Whore of Revelation 17 who is Babylon and Rome, and is the mistress of Antichrist. . . . But, of course, Israel itself is symbolically the chosen bride of God, and is also frequently unfaithful to him. . . . Thus, the forgiven harlot, who is taken back eventually into favor despite her sins, is an intermediate bridal figure between the demonic Whore and the apocalyptic Bride, and represents the redemption of man from sin.26

Thus the image of the great whore has a specific context as one symbol among many, some positive, some negative, some transitional, in a complex narrative of covenant, fall, forgiveness, judgment, and redemption for Israel collectively. Remember that in this scenario, the female symbols, positive and negative, represent all of us, male and female. Removing that particular image from the scripture would tear across a tightly woven narrative fabric. Several of the biblical images and events that Pearson cites with approval depend on this interwoven set of symbols. For example, the story of the woman caught in adultery in the Gospel of John is a significant occurrence of this theme. If we see the images in the appropriate context, we can remove any unintended mes-

sages. The Book of Mormon itself says that we cannot understand the text without knowing the culture from which it comes (see 2 Nephi 25:5). Are the images sufficiently archaic as to be irrelevant in the modern world? Not at all. Would even Pearson ever attempt to tell the story of Corazon Aquino without making reference to Imelda Marcos? Of the harlot image, Pearson asks whether “we appreciate what this really means” (p. 36), but does so without reference to either the narrative context or the symbolic complex that reveals the meaning.

Isabel and the Daughter of Jared

We should mention Hugh Nibley’s suggestion that the Isabel of Alma 39:3–4, rather than being a simple prostitute, was a priestess. Nibley observes that “Isabel [is] the name of the Patroness of Harlots in the religion of the Phoenicians,”27 that she had many followers, and that, to go to her, Corianton had to “forsake the ministry, and ... go over into the land of Siron among the borders of the Lamanites” (Alma 39:3). Corianton’s participation there is described as “an abomination” (Alma 39:5), precisely the same term that the Old World prophets used to denounce the Canaanite practices, which often included ritual prostitution and human sacrifice. It is reasonable to assume that some forms of goddess worship were being practiced. Daniel Peterson’s suggestion that the name Isabel corresponds to the name of Jezebel in 1 Kings may also be significant here, because of the ties between Jezebel and some of these same practices.28 We have examined some positive suggestions of the goddess in Nephite culture. But for whatever reason, Alma took a dim view of the particular form of expression popular in Siron at the time.

Nibley also pointed out the consciously archetypal behavior of the daughter of Jared in Ether 8:7–17. Nibley has shown that the story begins as a deliberate imitation by the participants of an ancient type-scene.

There is one tale of intrigue in the book of Ether that presents very ancient and widespread (though but recently discovered) parallels. That is the story of Jared’s daughter, . . . an ambitious girl who had read, or at least asked her father if he had read “in the records which our fathers brought across the great deep,” a very instructive account of those devices by which the men of old got “kingdoms and great glory.”

Hath he not read the record which our fathers brought across the great deep? Behold, is there not an account concerning them of old, that they by their secret plans did obtain kingdoms and great glory?

And now, therefore, let my father send for Akish, the son of Kimnor; and behold, I am fair, and I will dance before him, and I will please him, that he will desire me to wife; wherefore if he shall desire of thee that ye shall give unto him me to wife, then shall ye say: I will give her if ye will bring unto me the head of my father, the king. (Ether 8:9-10)

Historically, the whole point of this story is that it is highly unoriginal. It is supposed to be. The damsel asks her father if he has read “the record” and refers him to a particular account therein describing how “they of old . . . did obtain kingdoms.” In accordance with this she then outlines a course of action which makes it clear just what the “account” was about. It dealt with a pattern of action (for “kingdoms” is plural) in which a princess dances before a romantic stranger, wins his heart, and induces him to behead the ruling king, marry her, and mount the throne. . . .

The thing to note especially is that there actually seems to have been a succession rite of great antiquity that followed this pattern. It is the story behind the rites at Olympia and the Ara Sacra and the wanton and shocking dances of the ritual hierodules throughout the ancient world. . . .
PEARSON, FEMINISM AMONG THE NEPHITES (CHRISTENSENS) 35

Certainly the book of Ether is on the soundest possible ground in attributing the behavior of the daughter of Jared to the inspiration of ritual texts—secret directories on the art of deposing an aging king. 29

The point here is that the negative images, like the positive ones, merit inclusion in the record because they represent archetypes.

A Different Jesus?

Pearson says, "I find it difficult to understand how the same Jesus who gave us these wonderful female images in the New Testament would not speak to women or significantly of women when with the Nephites" (p. 37). Yet women are expressly said to be participants in Jesus' ministry in 3 Nephi 17:25 and, second, we now possess not even a hundredth part of his teachings to those people (see 3 Nephi 19:32; 26:6–10). The Book of Mormon assumes that we have those biblical stories (see 2 Nephi 29). Of that which we possess in the Book of Mormon, nothing obstructs our view of the women of the Bible, or of Christ's remarkable gender-inclusive New Testament ministry. There is nothing to suggest that his unrecorded teaching would not carry on that tendency, nothing in the text that prevents us from learning about the significant contributions of women in Mormon history, nothing that hinders us from learning from contemporary female voices, such as Pearson's own. The Book of Mormon nowhere claims to replace other books. It supplements and complements other sources.

The Lord twice uses maternal imagery in the Book of Mormon to describe his own love for his people. Pearson mentions 3 Nephi 10:4–6 but overlooks 1 Nephi 21:15, a quotation from Isaiah. With reference to the 3 Nephi passage, she claims that "any inclusion of women or positive statements about women end there" (p. 36). 30 Again, she speaks too quickly: the positive statements do not end there.

30 She says: "Only two instances in the entire 522 pages provide evidence that women are being specifically addressed along with men" (p. 34). She cites 2 Nephi 4:3 and Mormon 6:19. In addition, we noticed Mosiah 5:7 and Alma 19:10, as well as a few others. She also claims that Jesus never used
In discussing the Book of Mormon ministry of Jesus, Pearson takes great offense at the passage “Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch not that which is unclean; go ye out from the midst of her” (p. 37, quoting 3 Nephi 20:41). By convention, cities are feminine, whether seen as righteous or wicked. But here, too, she neglects the context, both the general context of the quotation in 3 Nephi and the complex of prophetic symbols used to relate the story.\(^3\) The passage that Pearson takes as a signal that a different Jesus is speaking occurs within the discourse on Isaiah, using what now should be a familiar set of symbols: Christ as the Bridegroom, redeeming Jerusalem as his Bride. Those willing to read the entire discourse can find the directly inviting voice that Pearson longs for and overlooks:

For thy maker, thy husband, the Lord of Hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel—the God of the whole earth shall he be called. For the Lord hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God. For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer. (3 Nephi 22:5–8, and compare Isaiah 54)

Pearson claims that in 3 Nephi Jesus neither includes nor invites females in his speeches nor does he use positive feminine imagery or honor femaleness. Here, the entire chapter uses positive female imagery as part of a direct and inclusive invitation.

**Did Feminism Save the Lamanites?**

This question is worth asking. As striking as the relatively infrequent mention of specific women in Mormon’s accounts is the circumstance that many of the women he does mention are La-

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\(^3\) By convention, all cities are female in the Book of Mormon, as are all ships.
manites. This includes the Lamanite queens, the faithful servant Abish, and the mothers of the stripling warriors. Pearson had contrasted the patriarchal Nephites with the “descendants of the Nephites—and those other people who lived later on the American continent—[who] have in their literature many positive and powerful references to women and the concept of the feminine” (pp. 37–38). It may be that Mormon himself was impressed by the results of this contrast between his own culture and that of the Lamanites.

The cultural contrasts between the Nephites and Lamanites within the text are as arresting as the contrast outside of the text and deserve closer examination.

The Stolen Lamanite Daughters

Mosiah 20:1–7 introduces us to the story of twenty-four Lamanite maidens who are abducted by the runaway priests of King Noah. One thing that the complex and richly allusive narrative omits is how we are to judge the maidens themselves. And what are we to make of the Lamanite king who himself goes to war in a failed attempt to recover the women (see Mosiah 20:15)? Perhaps this is the Lamanite king who some years later captures these same priests, not only spares them, but grants them political power (see Mosiah 23:39), and exploits their learning for economic gain (Mosiah 24:1–7). The text paints a relentlessly dark picture of these priests as corrupt, cowardly, exploitive, coercive, intolerant, and abusive. Not only the priests themselves but, despite their rise in fortune among the Lamanites (see Mosiah 23:31–35, 39; 24:1–8), the descendants of this union eventually come to a bad end (see Alma 25:4–12).

So, why do these Lamanite daughters at one point plea that their “husbands” might be spared? (see Mosiah 24:33). This is not quite the same as the situation in King Noah’s flight from the Lamanites, when those left behind “caused that their fair daughters should stand forth and plead with the Lamanites that they would not slay them” (Mosiah 19:13). Amulon himself pleads and then sends forth the wives (see Mosiah 23:33). We don’t know enough about what real hard choices these women had to face. Had they gone to dance on a ritual occasion specifically to
find husbands? Was escape at any point really an option? After being taking back into Lamanite society, what would have been their economic and social status had they managed to escape or separate themselves from their husbands? Is Amulon the type to leave anything to chance when the Lamanite army finally found him? Where were their children at this moment? Thinking about the type-scene issues for the story and the economic and social possibilities confronting these women can be sobering and enlightening, if not comforting.

Goff analyzes the trio of stories from Judges 19–21, the last one of which resembles in some ways the scene depicted in Mosiah 20; the similarities are “type-scenes” (p. 70). In looking at these common stories from antiquity we find that the stealing of the daughters of the Lamanites fits in with ease, and the behavior of the Lamanite fathers and daughters after the stealing makes good sense in light of the economic value virgin daughters had for their fathers. Having lost their unmarried or virginal status, the daughters lost much of their bargaining value. The only alternative for the daughters was to plead with their Lamanite families for their Nephite husbands (when they were later discovered), even if the priests of Noah were scoundrels.

Goff writes:

When we compare the people as the text invites us to do, we contrast the care the men of Limhi showed for their wives and children with the abandonment by the priests of Noah. All these events define the lack of moral character of the priests. The fact that the Lamanite king was willing to permit the stealing of the

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32 John W. Welch, ed. Reexploring the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 139–41.
Lamanite daughters by welcoming Amulon into his kingdom speaks badly of this king, just as the Israelites’ encouragement of the Benjaminites to kidnap their own daughters speaks badly of all Israel. . . . The text is clearly unsympathetic to the people of Amulon. The connection between the two stories of abduction is a hint from the author that their actions were reminiscent of a time, reported in Judges, when the Israelites didn’t follow God’s law but did that which was right in their own eyes.34

The narrative shows the patriarchal focus on the actions and accountability of the men involved. But then, as now, to the extent that women have been denied choice and agency, they cannot be judged for the hard choices they make.

“Our Mothers Knew It”

We should also look more closely at one of the most quoted stories in the Book of Mormon, that of the 2,000 stripling warriors.

They had been taught by their mothers, that if they did not doubt, God would deliver them. And they rehearsed unto me the words of their mothers, saying: We do not doubt our mothers knew it. (Alma 56:47–48)

We like this story for its drama, the remarkable deliverance of the young men, and the vision of young men who would obey “every word of command with exactness” (see Alma 57:21). It is, as Pearson says, “the only story about women that most . . . have heard used in a Church talk” (p. 35). However, that is all she says about this story, and all too often that is all any of us say. But how is it that these mothers were able to deliver this promise to their sons? The covenant that the young men make explicitly includes a willingness to die (see Alma 53:17). The story demonstrates the validity of the promise of the mothers, but earthly deliverance is not necessarily inevitable in the Book of Mormon. While the righteous are often delivered, the innocent can suffer, and the

34 Goff “Stealing of the Daughters of the Lamanites,” 73.
price in life is often high. The story of the slaughter of a thousand and five of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies (see Alma 24:19–25), all unarmed to keep a covenant with God and engaged in the act of prayer, is one impressive example. That personal experience seemingly would have taught these same Lamanite mothers that righteous behavior does not guarantee earthly deliverance. Many of them must have been on the field during the slaughter. But the young men did not doubt that their mothers knew what they were promising. So does it not seem evident that these Lamanite mothers had secured a special revelation on behalf of their sons? Pearson supposes that “Not one woman in the Book of Mormon appears to have her own connection to the heavens” (p. 35). Here are a great many who do.

**Power and Powerlessness: Queen and Pawn**

Robert Alter teaches us to read the scriptures with an eye to how different narratives reflect one another. Two of the women in the Book of Mormon reflect on one another in an ironic commentary on power and the powerless. First look at the Lamanite queen in the story of Amalickiah’s rise to power:

> And it came to pass on the morrow he [Amalickiah] entered the city Nephi with his armies, and took possession of the city.

> And now it came to pass that the queen, when she had heard that the king was slain—for Amalickiah had sent an embassy to the queen [falsely] informing her that the king had been slain by his servants, that he had pursued them with his army, but it was in vain, and they had made their escape—

> Therefore, when the queen had received this message she sent unto Amalickiah, desiring him that he would spare the people of the city; and she also desired him that he should come in unto her; and she also desired him that he should bring witnesses with him to testify concerning the death of the king.

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35 Brian Christensen made this suggestion after reading a draft of this review.
And it came to pass that Amalickiah took the same servant that slew the king, and all them who were with him, and went in unto the queen, unto the place where she sat; and they all testified unto her that the king was slain by his own servants; and they said also: They have fled; does not this testify against them? And thus they satisfied the queen concerning the death of the king.

And it came to pass that Amalickiah sought the favor of the queen, and took her unto him to wife; and thus by his fraud, and by the assistance of his cunning servants, he obtained the kingdom. (Alma 47:31–35)

This is a thoroughly disturbing story, the more so because the queen is sympathetically portrayed. She quite clearly feels an obligation to her people and a distrust of Amalickiah. Whether she is taken in completely is not clear. Perhaps she accepts him as a suitor out of respect or fear or because she wants to avoid destructive conflicts. The sadness of the story lies in her powerlessness despite her high office. Despite her concerns on behalf of her people, war comes. Yet, later on in the book of Alma, we read another story that seems directed to those who might appear to be the most powerless. This occurs after a conflict over ownership of land and the subsequent possibility of a dangerous political alliance taking place:

And behold, they would have carried this plan into effect, (which would have been a cause to have been lamented) but behold, Morianton being a man of much passion, therefore he was angry with one of his maid servants, and he fell upon her and beat her much.

And it came to pass that she fled, and came over to the camp of Moroni, and told Moroni all things concerning the matter, and also concerning their intentions to flee into the land northward. (Alma 50:30–31)36

Compared to the queen, the servant maid has fewer social obligations binding to her circumstance. The course she takes obvi-

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36 This story also implies that Moroni, a righteous man, was held in high regard by this woman. By extension, can we suggest higher patterns of behavior by righteous men toward women?
ously involves real risk and consequence. Yet she makes the effort and, as a result, not only escapes her oppressor, but also brings about his downfall and secures a benefit for those who helped her.

**Women in Book of Mormon Societies**

By the sacred support which we owe to our wives and our children. (Alma 44:5)

Pearson claims that women in Nephite culture are marginalized and viewed as property. The longer we have worked on this response, the less inclined we are to accept this charge. Pearson reads a blessing that the peace of God may “rest upon you, and upon your houses and lands, and upon your flocks and herds, and all that you possess, your women and your children” (p. 35, quoting Alma 7:27). The reference to women and children comes after the summary statement “all that you possess,” not before. And even so, there are instances when women speak of “my husband; . . . my sons” (1 Nephi 5:8; compare Mosiah 21:9; Alma 19:4–5). It is very clear that marriage in the Book of Mormon is divinely ordained and has implications of mutual obligation. At least Pearson’s reading can be questioned.

Mormon’s frank admission of his own and his people’s imperfections—which Pearson cites—actually invites her criticism of Nephite culture in general or of particular instances of behavior. We should be able to criticize in such a fashion while still appreciating the Book of Mormon, if our reading is careful and sensitive to the full implications of text and context. For example, in discussing the story of the journey through the desert from Jerusalem to Bountiful, Hugh Nibley wrote:

The women particularly had a hard time in the wilderness (1 Nephi 17:20), as they always do, since they do all the work, while the men hunt and talk. “The Arab talks in his tent, cares for the animals, or goes hunting, while the women do all the work.” The women have their own quarters, which no man may invade; and an older woman may talk up boldly to the sheikh when no one else dares to, just as Sariah took Lehi to task when she thought her sons were lost in the
desert (1 Nephi 5:2–3). All that saved Nephi’s life on one occasion was the intervention of “one of the daughters of Ishmael, yea, and also her mother, and one of the sons of Ishmael” (1 Nephi 7:19), for while “the Arab can only be persuaded by his own relations,” he can only yield to the entreaties of women without losing face, and indeed is expected to yield to them, even robbers sparing a victim who appeals to them in the name of his wife, the daughter of his uncle.37

In this example, Nibley heightens our appreciation of the Book of Mormon text without suggesting that every act and attitude expressed in the accounts is exemplary. He matter-of-factly shows us a layer of culture that is very distinct from the gospel doctrine and therefore subject to criticism rather than to emulation. This seems to be a model approach, one that adds perspective and draws us into the text, making it more real and vivid.

Because the Book of Mormon involves several cultures and peoples, long stretches of time, and different narrators, it is important not to overgeneralize particular conditions or perceptions at one period across the whole text. For example, the way Enos describes Lamanite society at an early period from an outsider’s perspective is quite different from the way the sons of Mosiah experience it when they give us our only extended look from the inside. And we should keep in mind the tendency of the writers to show contrasts; for example, the priests of Noah abandoning their families in contrast to Mormon’s covenantal language describing a “sacred support” owed to one’s wife and children, or Jacob’s contrasting Lamanite fidelity with Nephite infidelity. But one striking observation holds true for the whole book:

The behavior and treatment of women were seen as an index of social and spiritual health. Many references to women concern their suffering during war, captivity, and hardship. Nephi and his brothers measure the difficulty of their travels in terms of the

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suffering of their wives, though Nephi emphasizes that the women were made strong like the men, while his brothers describe their wives’ sufferings as being worse than death (1 Ne. 17:1, 20). Jacob sharply contrasts male infidelity with the tenderness of the women (Jacob 2–3); immorality is described as precipitating the collapse of both family and society. The inhumanity and depravity of dying civilizations are also described in terms of the suffering of women: Lamanites fed to women and children the flesh of their dead husbands and fathers (Moro. 9:8); Nephite women were sacrificed to idols (Morm. 4:15, 21); Nephites raped captured Lamanite women, tortured them to death, and then ate their flesh as a token of their bravery (Moro. 9:9–10).38

Healthy societies in the Book of Mormon stand in a stark contrast:

And now, because of the steadiness of the church they began to be exceedingly rich, having abundance of all things whatsoever they stood in need—an abundance of flocks and herds, and fatlings of every kind, and also abundance of grain, and of gold, and of silver, and of precious things, and abundance of silk and fine-twined linen, and all manner of good homely cloth.

And thus, in their prosperous circumstances, they did not send away any who were naked, or that were hungry, or that were athirst, or that were sick, or that had not been nourished; and they did not set their hearts upon riches; therefore they were liberal to all, both old and young, both bond and free, both male and female, whether out of the church or in the church, having no respect to persons as to those who stood in need. (Alma 1:29–30)

These insights lend persuasive evidence to the notion that Book of Mormon writers did value women far more than has been

claimed. If they did not measure up to our contemporary standards of historiographical inclusiveness and narrator balance, they were a different people in a different time. If they had legal and cultural restrictions on women, they quite deliberately excluded those restrictions from the record, so as not to bind us to their errors. What these writers do say about women deserves great respect.

Survey Methods and Inclusive Language

We should make a further comment on methods. Pearson says that she “read the [Book of Mormon] specifically to focus on what it says about women” (p. 34). She “circled in red every female reference” (p. 34). Our initial responses to her paper involved our own notes and reading. Later, we used the Infobases™ LDS Collectors Library CD-ROM to locate expressly female references. We performed a search using the following terms: women, woman, mother, mothers, daughter, daughters, sister, sisters, queen, queens, virgin, virgins, maid, maids, maiden, maidens, handmaids, womb, breast, breasts, harlot, harlots, concubine, concubines, wisdom, she, her, hers, Eve, Sariah, Abish, Isabel, Sarah, Mary, wife, wives, whore, prophetess, nurse, nursing, widow, widows, and female.

This produced 312 hits. When these passages were cut out for reference, we had about sixty pages of text to digest. Our computer-assisted search brings out a number of references that elicited no comment in Pearson’s paper. But notice that this still does not produce a complete survey of women’s presence in the Book of Mormon.

We searched again for terms that include females: parent, parents, children, and people. This produced 1,724 hits. Among these hits, the phrases children of men or children of Israel or children of Christ often appear in doctrinal and prophetic passages. Their use emphasizes the inclusiveness of these passages as applying equally to men and women.

The plural pronouns they, them, we, ye, and you often must be understood as inclusive of both genders. Other terms, such as Nephite, Lamanite, Jew, or gentile, are inclusive except in some
military contexts. Terms such as *the wicked* or *the righteous* are expressly gender inclusive.

Furthermore, at various times, masculine nouns such as *men* or *he* should often be understood as inclusive, equivalent to *mankind* or *whoever*. While such use of language runs contrary to current fashions for explicit gender inclusiveness, we should not expect to be able to understand an ancient writer by uncritically imposing contemporary standards of proper usage. For example, 2 Nephi 9:21 expressly explains that *men* is used inclusively:

> And he cometh into the world that he might save all men, . . . both men, women, and children, who belong to the family of Adam.

Also, see the express inclusiveness of *he*:

> Wherefore, he that fighteth against Zion, both Jew and Gentile, both bond and free, both male and female. (2 Nephi 10:16)

As we have seen, the inclusiveness of language has cases where men are included as part of feminine symbols as well, the most conspicuous example being Babylon, the whore of all the earth, consisting of those who fight against Zion. Pearson herself opens her essay with a definition of *feminism*, a word built on a gender-specific root, but she assures us that the term nevertheless advocates “the equality of women and men.” She rarely gives Book of Mormon authors the same latitude in assuming inclusiveness in their use of language.

This expressly inclusive use of language by Book of Mormon authors creates a problem for those studies that try to measure the gender balance and female presence or absence by counting male versus female pronouns. Our contemporary sensitivity to gender-inclusive language should not be applied without equal sensitivity to the cultural, biographical, and genre context of the narrative.

**Mormon’s Role in Shaping the Account**

Pearson observes that the Book of Mormon mentions individual women far less frequently than does the Bible. She correctly credits this phenomenon to Mormon’s Nephite culture and also
likely biographical influences, such as his military career, but she does not pursue these issues in the detail they deserve. She does recognize the importance of asking, “What indeed was Mormon’s role in shaping the account?” Several significant sources of information answer her question: biography, culture, and genre. Unfortunately, while she chooses “to believe that the anti-female bias . . . is not there from malice but from lack of awareness” (p. 32), her approach tends to alienate the reader from Book of Mormon writers. She mentions that Mormon was a general and makes a quip about a hypothetical General Patton editing Scarlett O’Hara from *Gone with the Wind*.

Specifically, the first chapter of Mormon’s account says that at the age of ten he was given charge of the sacred writings, at age eleven he was carried by his father to Zarahemla during a time of great war and wickedness, and by age sixteen he became the general of an army. From this, we infer that, from a very young age, he underwent a very exclusive and specialized training. He probably didn’t have much chance to learn about the feminine sphere. But as we have seen, what he does include about women has an evident deliberation and positive intent.

Of Mormon’s accounts Pearson says that “scenes of bloodshed and almost unbelievable violence stain the pages of the book. . . . The book’s violence is unforgettable” (p. 34). Pearson reports that the Book of Mormon “violates” her spirit, using language loaded with the implication that Mormon is a perpetrator of crimes through his text, rather than a witness of them. We should recognize that neither biblical nor Book of Mormon authors approve of everything they depict. As a corrective to this sense of violation and in the spirit of gaining empathy for Mormon’s motives, we recommend a reading of a 1984 FARMS paper by Lisa Bolin Hawkins and Gordon Thomasson, “I Only Am Escaped Alone to Tell Thee: Survivor Witnesses in the Book of Mormon.” It compares the editors of the Book of Mormon with a profile of those who survived the horrors of the Nazi and Soviet death camps and felt compelled to survive and bear witness. It turns out that Mormon and Moroni fit precisely the profile of a survivor witness. They describe violence because they do not want us to forget. The summary of this paper is worth reading:
- The will to remember and record anchors the survivor in the moral purpose of bearing witness, thus maintaining his own integrity in conscious contradiction of the savagery around him [Mormon 3:11–16; Moroni 9:6–25].
- Witnessing of his experience is viewed as a duty, even a sacred task [Mormon 3:16; 8:14; 9:31].
- It is instinctively felt, an involuntary outburst, born out of the horror that no one will be left [Mormon 6:17–22; 8:1–3].
- The task is often carried out despite great risks; often in secret by depositing the record in a secret archive [Mormon 6:6; 8:14].
- Survivors do not witness to inflict guilt or to rationalize their own survival. Their mission transcends guilt and their irrepressible urge to witness arises before any thought of guilt surfaces and at their initial stage of adjustment to extremity [Mormon 9:30–31; Moroni 9:3–6].
- They speak simply to tell, to describe, out of a common care for life and the future, realizing that we all live in a realm of mutual sacrifice [Mormon 4:17–22; 8:37–40; Moroni 7:45–48].
- Survival in this sense is a collective act; the survivor has pledged to see that the story is told [Mormon 3:16].
- The survivors speak to the whole world, as a firsthand eyewitness, one whose words cannot be ignored [Mormon 3:16–22; 9:30].
- They perceive that "out of horror . . . the truth will emerge and be made secure," that "good and evil are only clear in retrospect," for wisdom only comes at a terrible price. Thus, their mission is to display the "objective conditions of evil" [Mormon 5:8–9; 9:31; Moroni 9, 10].

The Hawkins-Thomasson paper teaches us to examine the motives and humanity behind the accounts of violence in the Book of Mormon. Just so, few readers of the Book of Mormon can read the accounts of genocidal conflicts in Bosnia and Rwanda without recognizing the immediate relevance of the text. Mormon gives us these stories not because he thought we wanted

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them, but because he knew we needed them. Most of the wars since World War II have been tribal and ethnic conflicts exactly like those described in the Book of Mormon.

**War in the Book of Mormon**

Moroni said unto Zerahemnah: . . . we do not desire to be men of blood. (Alma 44:1)

Yea, [Amalickiah] was exceedingly wroth, and he did curse God, and also Moroni, swearing with an oath that he would drink his blood. (Alma 49:27)

Pearson approaches the text based on the theory that patriarchy and militarism go together. She defines patriarchy as the rule of the fathers. Nephite culture was clearly patriarchal but, as we have seen, they did have more understanding of the Divine Feminine than Pearson observed. Pearson never defines militarism. It simply means having to do with military matters. In the context of her interpretive key—that war is a masculine endeavor, a by-product of patriarchy—her use of the term has pejorative overtones that go beyond a strict dictionary definition. Military matters do take up about one third of the book. But this should be expected in a book edited by a military man. What is the Book of Mormon’s attitude toward violence and militarism? Is it a blueprint for the repression of women and an admonition to embark on a policy of political and sexual conquest? Quite the contrary, we think.

She sees “near unrelenting militarism” (p. 32) in the Nephite culture. We think that her characterization of Nephite society as “patriarchal = militaristic” is in its own way as misleading as the common characterization of the Nephites as the good guys and the Lamanites as bad guys. She makes no analysis of any of the Book of Mormon’s explanations for the various conflicts that it describes. Consequently, she does not show how feminism could have changed the outcome in any specific case. Since, as we have seen, the treatment of women is a “barometer” of the health of the varied Book of Mormon societies at different times, such case-specific criticism could be of use. Yet, we should not oversimplify and overgeneralize from one instance across the whole of Nephite
or Lamanite history. The Book of Mormon is morally and culturally complex. The reasons for war vary: tragic misunderstandings, fear, ambitious men, ingrain cultural hatreds, defense of home and family, vengeance, political rivalry, propaganda, personal rivalry, and socioeconomic competition for resources. The motivations of the combatants vary too: the Nephites typically fought defensively. Thus her view overlooks the Book of Mormon's own explanations of the causes of and cure for conflict.

Righteous responses to war vary:

- Active defense (see Alma 43:45–46)
- Enduring captivity and finding nonviolent resolution (see Mosiah 20:22)
- Migration to avoid conflict (see 2 Nephi 5:2–10; Alma 27:22–26)
- Pacifism to the point of death (see Alma 24:6–30)
- Economic support of combatants (see Alma 27:24)
- Lamanite preaching to and conversion of Gadianton insurgents (see Helaman 6:37)

Throughout the Book of Mormon, peace is secured and preserved only through righteousness and never through military means.

The confrontation of the Anti-Nephi-Lehis with the morality of war (see Alma 24 and Alma 53:10–21) is much more complex, powerful, and realistic than that found in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, which Pearson cites. Look at this passage, which shows some of the moral complexity of passivism:

> But it came to pass that when they saw the danger, and the many afflictions and tribulations which the Nephites bore for them, they were moved with compassion and were desirous to take up arms in the defence of their country. (Alma 53:13)

Compassion moves these pacifists to be willing to take up arms, and Helaman's compassion and respect for the oath they made compels him to persuade them to keep their oath despite the danger.

In passing, Pearson suggests contemporary parallels to the militarism of Saddam Hussein’s Iraq and Hitler’s “Fatherland.” One character in the Book of Mormon who closely parallels
Hussein and Hitler is Zerahemnah, who is certainly not portrayed as worthy of emulation.

For behold, his [Zerahemnah's] designs were to stir up the Lamanites to anger against the Nephites; this he did that he might usurp great power over them, and also that he might gain power over the Nephites by bringing them into bondage.

And now the design of the Nephites was to support their lands, and their houses, and their wives, and their children, that they might preserve them from the hands of their enemies; and also that they might preserve their rights and their privileges, yea, and also their liberty, that they might worship God according to their desires. (Alma 43:8–9)

If there is to be a better solution to this particular kind of threat, Moroni would like to hear of it.

And thus he was preparing to support their liberty, their lands, their wives, and their children, and their peace, and that they might live unto the Lord their God.

Now, they were sorry to take up arms against the Lamanites, because they did not delight in the shedding of blood; yea, and this was not all—they were sorry to be the means of sending so many of their brethren out of this world into an eternal world, unprepared to meet their God.

Nevertheless, they could not suffer to lay down their lives, that their wives and their children should be massacred by the barbarous cruelty of those who were once their brethren, yea, and had dissented from their church, and had left them and had gone to destroy them by joining the Lamanites. (Alma 48:10, 23–24)

On Being a Reader in a Strange Land: Violation of the Spirit, or Enlarging of the Soul?

Pearson remarks that
The valuable things I have gleaned from the Book of Mormon have been bought at the expense of putting my femaleness aside and ignoring what is said of it. And while I am more than my femaleness, my femaleness is a profound and highly valued part of me, and to have to put it away when I pick up the book violates my spirit. (p. 34)

By now, it should be plain that we believe that Pearson overlooks much that is positive and important and is much too harsh in her judgments. We do grant the general direction of her criticism—the Book of Mormon is not as gender balanced as she and many other women might prefer. But what really happens when she puts her femaleness aside and enters into the text on its own terms?

"Pure knowledge," says Doctrine and Covenants 121:42, "shall greatly enlarge the soul." The story of Enos in the Book of Mormon demonstrates that enlargement of the soul: Enos's concern and empathy grows to encircle not only his family and kin, but also his adversaries. The best writing enlarges the soul, but only if we let the pure knowledge enter and do its work. If, speaking as middle-class, middle-aged, white American Mormons, we feel violated when we encounter essential differences in our reading or conversation, in a book by a feminist; a poem by a black, Native American, Chinese, or Hispanic writer; a statement of faith by a Catholic or a Jew; a web page in which a Muslim woman explains her views of the veil; a Protestant on the experience of being born again; an agnostic describing a loss of faith; a Hindu explaining his opinions about cross-cultural marriage; or a document of life from a medieval or ancient Hebrew culture, is the fact of difference in the other necessarily to blame? Does not the openness or brittleness of reader ideology in the face of another perspective contribute something to the different reader experience of empathy and enlightenment, an enlarging of the soul, or a contrasting sense of personal violation?

Given that many of us have read the Book of Mormon to see what it says about women, what accounts for the difference in our appreciation? Such appreciation is not just a matter of gender difference. As we compose this response, Shauna often expresses her passion for the Book of Mormon. Where Shauna says, "It's
beautiful!” Pearson reports that “When I encounter the occasional statement that would appear inviting to women, I stare at it as at an anachronism” (p. 34). This reminds us of Thomas Kuhn’s observation that

In science . . . novelty emerges only with difficulty, manifested by resistance, against a background provided by expectation. . . . Anomaly appears only against the background provided by the paradigm. The more precise and far-reaching that paradigm is, the more sensitive an indicator it provides of anomaly and hence an occasion for paradigm change.40

Reading Pearson’s comment in this light, and comparing our responses to hers, we conclude that she overlooked some of the things we found simply because she did not expect to see them, and, perhaps, something in her resisted finding some of the things we saw. We have to consider the historical exemplars and ideologies that define her background expectations and focus her attention. And some of the things that she finds to be profoundly offensive. Other women accept without reservation as narrator perspective, just as easily as contemporary readers accept Dickens, Twain, or Austin for themselves, expecting to have a richer life because of their readings. To read negatively, Shauna says, emphasizing her active choice, would rob her of a positive experience. An observation by Betty Edwards is apt in this instance:

Most of us tend to see parts of a form hierarchically. The parts that are important (that is, provided a lot of information), or the parts that we decide are larger, or the parts that we think should be larger, we see as larger than they actually are. Conversely, parts that are unimportant, or that we decide are smaller, or

that we think should be smaller, we see as being smaller than they actually are.41

Women's voices can provide useful and necessary correctives to male perspectives, perceptions, and values. Many of the significant accounts of the roles that women played in Mormon history have been overlooked in the official histories and have been the subject of much interest by Latter-day Saint historians in recent decades. It is entirely good and proper to add to our understanding by broadening our reading and seeking neglected writers and stories. Pearson herself has provided valuable perspectives in her book Good-bye, I Love You, and elsewhere in her poems, plays, and essays. The same book reveals much to explain the frustration that emerges in her critique of the Book of Mormon.42 We understand that she came by those frustrations honestly and has the right to ask the questions that she has and we hope that she finds our response worthy of those concerns. Pearson calls for more feminine input into social decision-making. Here, we agree. So does President Hinckley—one of the recurrent messages of the last few general conference sessions has been the inclusion of women's voices in ward councils.

Politically Corrected Scriptures, or Contextually Corrected Readings?

Toward the end of her essay, Pearson suggests “correcting” the scriptures to remove offensive passages (she votes against all references to the whore) and adding more gender-inclusive language (making addresses more inclusive of brothers and sisters).

We have presented evidence that the language in the Book of Mormon is more gender-inclusive than she has observed. She ad-

42 In particular, “Where could I go to find healing for the wound to the woman in me? Only to God. But..., didn’t God prefer men too,” in her memoir, Good-bye, I Love You (New York: Random House, 1986), 80. This is her facing a moment such as when “many hearts died, pierced with deep wounds.” Such feelings as expressed here matter a great deal to many people. Pearson is not the only Latter-day Saint woman with such concerns.
mits to arguing with herself about the notion of changing scripture. But, in support of the notion, she cites a few valid examples where the words of hymns have been changed to avoid giving offense. However, her two examples in which the church has changed scriptural texts to avoid giving offense are not only problematic in their description but also instructive in their actual resolution. She remarks that “The great and abominable church used to be characterized as the Catholic Church, but the later editions of McConkie’s *Mormon Doctrine* show the change from that because we do not want to offend Catholics” (p. 39). Actually, as a superb article by Stephen Robinson shows, the association of the great and abominable church with the Catholic Church goes back to Luther, not to the Book of Mormon. The Catholic Church cannot be the great and abominable church in the Book of Mormon for two reasons. First, it did not exist when the specific actions attributed to the historical model took place. Second, the symbolic great and abominable church is not a specific institution, but is rather all those who fight against Zion (see I Nephi 11:36). McConkie’s interpretation was not preapproved by the First Presidency before publication, and was, in fact, criticized by President Marion G. Romney and by Elder Mark E. Peterson upon publication. What needed changing was not the Book of Mormon, but the faulty, culturally conditioned interpretation of the Book of Mormon.

In her second example, Pearson observes that “white and delightful” in the Book of Mormon has been changed to “pure and delightful,” “clearly because we do not want to offend people of color” (p. 39). In Hebrew, however, “white” and “pure” are interchangeable equivalents referring to moral behavior and in context have no connotation of race or skin color. (Compare Daniel 12:10 and Lamentations 4:7–8, where before a moral fall Nazarites can both be “whiter than milk” and “more ruddy in body than rubies” and 2 Nephi 30:6.) Hugh Nibley looks at the similar use of language in various Semitic texts and concludes that, in that cultural context, the formulaic expressions “white and delightful” and the contrary “dark and

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loathsome” have nothing to do with race, or skin color, and everything to do with character.44 Again, the change to 2 Nephi 30:6, which was originally made by Joseph Smith, was justified by the original sense of the language and was made to prevent misinterpretation, not to bow to popular taste.

A better example of a changed scripture would have been adding the phrase son of to the passage about the virgin being the mother of God (see 1 Nephi 11:18). Perhaps some of Joseph Smith’s revisions to the Bible could be examined. The difference in these examples involves notions of doctrinal consistency and clarity, rather than a more subjective concern with removing passages deemed offensive.

Even so, by learning to be better readers of the scriptures through understanding their background and cultural context, we can often overcome the kinds of negative experience that Pearson has endured. On the other hand, we agree with Pearson that the current LDS educational materials, including magazines, lesson materials, media, talks, and firesides, can often be criticized, and then revised and improved to our benefit. This would improve the contexts and conceptions that we bring to our reading of the Book of Mormon, the Bible, and our history.

Seeing Each Other Clearly

One thing that we have found particularly enlightening bears on some of Pearson’s comments about the differences between men and women and, further, on the whole tendency to frame certain issues in male versus female terms. She comments on research showing “a particular tendency in either the female brain or female socialization that encourages women and girls rather consistently to choose cooperation over competition. . . . Men seem programmed to be more aggressive than women” (p. 34). However, these same tendencies, and the polar male/female generalizations that come from them, can also be accounted for with Jungian Type Theory.45 Type Theory looks at personality as

45 We would suggest the wonderfully enlightening books on the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), such as Otto Kroeger and Janet Thuesen, Type
based on the interaction of preferences, akin to handedness, in four pairs of complementary processes:

- personal orientation towards Extraversion vs. Introversion
- gathering information via Sensing vs. Intuition
- deciding with Thinking vs. Feeling
- living with Judgment vs. Perceiving

Four sets of preferences combine to form sixteen different types. The only pair that shows a significant gender difference is for deciding based on Thinking or Feeling. Two-thirds of all males prefer to decide with thinking and two-thirds of all females decide with feeling. People with the thinking preference tend to prefer justice: people with the feeling preference tend to prefer mercy. This tendency may underlie why the Book of Mormon applies feminine gender to mercy and male gender to justice.

For behold, justice exerciseth all his demands, and also mercy claimeth all which is her own; and thus, none but the truly penitent are saved. (Alma 42:24)

This use of imagery is fine, deriving from general tendencies in populations. However, when dealing with individuals, the assumption of traits based on male or female gender, rather than on type preference, is wrong a third of the time, more than enough to be tragically misleading. Furthermore, Type Theory opens the question as to whether the “competitiveness” versus “cooperation” issue that Pearson raises should even be addressed as a gender issue. If a third of all men have the feeling preference, and a third of all women have the thinking preference, the ensuing difference in “competitiveness” versus “cooperation” is not really at base a gender issue. It has to do with an inborn preference that for individuals is independent of gender. Therefore, gender-based criticism may not only be reductive and divisive, but misleading. Type Theory not only moves the male/female dialogue from the old grooves, but by providing sixteen types, rather than just two, it

instantly increases the number and variety of strong role models available to individuals.

**New and Powerful Images of Women and Femaleness**

Pearson calls on us to “create new and powerful images of women and femaleness, . . . new volumes of history and indeed new scripture that will fill our minds and our hearts with positive female pictures, pictures of women serving as full and fully honored partners in our religious life” (p. 40). We have tried to answer this call in our response by reading closely, enlarging contexts, listening to critiques, and reading again. We have learned some things that have transformed familiar stories and have become alert to overlooked feminine presence in the text.

Obviously, much more could be said. Where can Latter-day Saint women look? With respect to the Book of Mormon in particular, the arts can fill in some voids.

The Book of Mormon paintings of Minerva Teichert have lately drawn attention. And one notable aspect of her work is its inclusion of female images. In Orson Scott Card’s five-volume science fiction retelling of the Book of Mormon, his Homecoming series, beginning with *The Memory of Earth*, he has actually done what Pearson has recommended, that is, created new and powerful images by imagining a large cast of female characters in Book of Mormon plots and telling their stories. Like Teichert, he has done so in a way that shows his love for the text, rather than impatience with it. We believe that love will always provide better criticism than anger because love sees with greater insight, empathy, and clarity. What if one does not agree with Card’s artistic vision? Fine, he is just one voice. What if Teichert’s paintings aren’t sufficient? Other voices work with history, scholarship, drama, novels, poetry, songs, personal essays, and art. Other approaches and critical tools are available, not the least of which is inspiration.

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We still have examples of great women from the Bible—Sarah’s taking her turn on the lion couch as an equal to Abraham and Isaac, Deborah and Huldah’s prophesying for Israel, Anna and Mary, and Mary and Martha. We still have our own lively history with Eliza’s lovely hymns, Emma’s sacrifices and conflicts, Lucy Mack Smith’s pride and sorrow, and many others. And we do have a lively present, with many voices active and anxiously engaged.

Mormon women have participated fully in a rich history and participate in a rich present. As for Pearson, her story has become a part of the community story. We should enlarge our appreciation of the richness of our history and our present, inclusive of the unhistoric women and of the women who have found their way into the spotlight of history.

Whether we have a small part of the stories and names of the women in the Book of Mormon, or nothing at all, they did have lives and they do matter to the whole story. We have found in our searches and reading that women are not as absent from the text and that the language is much more inclusive than Pearson and other readers claim. True, the women’s perspective is offered infrequently, but, as we shall see, given the cultures, genres, and specific narrators involved, this should be neither surprising nor disturbing. Despite the patriarchal perspective of the narrators, the presence of women begins with the first line—being born of goodly parents—and continues to Moroni’s sad reflections on the unimaginable suffering he witnesses. Women figure significantly in most of the major narratives of the book, in the journeys and adventures in Jerusalem; the desert and ocean crossings; the divisions in the colonies; Benjamin’s coronation ritual; the migrations, conflicts, and escapes that fill the book of Mosiah; the conversions, apostasies, and wars in Alma; the visitation of Christ; the Jaredite tragedy; and the final destructive wars. In our reading, even the many roles suggested by the explicit feminine terms cannot fully encompass the range of female experiences described in the text. We see women acting in a range of roles that is far broader than can be expressed through the expressly female nouns in the

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text, for example: advocate, pioneer, worshiper, convert, combatant, conspirator, ruler, servant, witness, victim, laborer, martyr, prophetess, planter, dancer, colonizer, explorer, priestess (Isabel), ruler (Lamanite queens), artists and artisans, clothiers, prisoner, mourner, spy, fashion designers and consumers for both good and ill (neat and comely versus costly and gaudy), craftsperson, teacher, exemplar, and fugitive.

All of this goes to suggest that women play a broader role in the Book of Mormon narratives than appears to the casual reader. More importantly, few readers have noticed the typological significance of the occasions when individual women figure prominently in the text.

Pearson complains that the majority of women in the Book of Mormon are the "nameless" and "faceless" (p. 35). That is just as true of the men in history, as in life. Most are simply husbands, fathers, and sons. Does that mean they don't matter? The description of Dorothea near the end of George Eliot's *Middlemarch* makes an important point.

Dorothea herself had no dreams of being praised above other women, feeling that there was always something better which she might have done, if she had only been better and known better. . . . Her full nature . . . spent itself in channels which had no great name on the earth. But the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive: for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and . . . [all those Dorotheas] who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs.49

Implicit in George Eliot's observation that the growing good of the world depends partially on unhistoric acts is the fact that we do need public role models to help us grow and develop. The growing good of Mormonism depends on both the historic and unrecognized acts. We have the faithful, hidden lives, but we also have worthy historic acts, many of which deserve to be better known and appreciated. As we tell our stories and live our lives, we

trust that our vision may be clear and that our actions and the consequences of those actions may truly contribute to the growing good.