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**Abstract** Review of *Letters to a Mormon Elder: Eye-Opening Information for Mormons and the Christians Who Talk with Them* (1993), by James R. White.

**James R. White. *Letters to a Mormon Elder: Eye-Opening Information for Mormons and the Christians Who Talk with Them.* Minneapolis, Minn. Bethany House, 1993. 304 pp., with scripture index. \$8.00 donation.**

Reviewed by Russell C. McGregor  
with Kerry A. Shirts

### Letters to an Anti-Mormon

James White's book *Letters to a Mormon Elder* is clearly regarded (at least by Mr. White and his ministry) as a major "witnessing" tool for confronting Latter-day Saints. "Reading this book may prove to be one of the most important events in your life" goes the blurb on his Internet site. Thus it is appropriate to see what responses it has garnered. Until now, L. Ara Norwood's review in the FARMS *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* has been the only substantive response given to this work. In that review, Norwood says, "It would have been much more interesting and balanced had the letters been written between Mr. White and an actual member of the Latter-day Saint Church with the proper background, but then that would change the entire outcome of the book."<sup>1</sup> Taking this as a challenge, I decided to write a series of responses to Mr. White's letters.

In some respects, my responses will suffer the same problems as the letters in the book. This is *still* not a real dialogue, since White's second and subsequent letters do not reply to my letters, but to imaginary (and rather weak) letters. The best way I can find to get around this is simply to respond to each letter *without* regard to what White will say next. In this way, he still has the initiative, but to do anything else would be dishonest. With the entire series in front of me, it would be trivially easy to word my letters in such a way that White's "replies" can be made to look both

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<sup>1</sup> L. Ara Norwood, review of *Letters to a Mormon Elder*, by James R. White, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 5 (1993): 317-54.

related and inadequate, but that would be self-serving and even manipulative.

The one exception to this policy is the letter written by the mission president. Since White's letter 18, "The Mission President Speaks," tends to portray the fictitious mission president as bombastic and cowardly, it seemed only fitting to undo this misconception. I have known many mission presidents, and none of them have been anything like that. Thus the letter I have written for him makes his actions realistic and plausible; it also makes White look bad. This is not intended to be an actual reflection on White's character, as the incidents described are fictitious, but it is necessary, because mission presidents do not usually prevent missionaries from talking to people just because those people have anti-Mormon ideas.

The letters in White's book, as well as attacking the church, develop a story line in which the missionary becomes increasingly befuddled and eventually seems to cave in. However, in his conclusion, White admits that, "You have no guarantee that if you say 'all the right things,' and present 'all the right information,' that the person with whom you are speaking is going to respond positively" (p. 297). In other words, the book is really making what is tantamount to a misleading advertisement. Furthermore, it is unreal. A real missionary wouldn't correspond with someone in his own area; he might correspond only after being transferred out of the area, but would lose interest once he realized that the correspondent was not an investigator but an anti-Mormon—which would be glaringly obvious after the third letter. But responses to just the first three, while realistic, would not be sufficient, so I have gone along with the premise that the missionary will answer all seventeen of them. However, I feel no obligation to follow any other part of White's script.

The most unreal aspect of the story is the clandestine meeting to which White invites the missionary at the end of letter 9, and then alludes to in letter 10 and after. A real missionary would not "ditch" his companion to meet someone in a park. This rendezvous has some rather nasty (and I hope unintended) undertones that I have not canvassed, preferring only to refer to its flagrant opposition to mission rules. But it is the key to White's picture of the missionary giving in; up to that point the missionary, although

losing the argument, is going down fighting; afterward, he is suddenly accepting everything White says. And because White does not give us the minutes of that meeting, he leaves his hopeful evangelical audience out on a limb. White must have had some really powerful arguments in that meeting—but he is too modest to reveal them to his audience. Oh, well.

It is worth noting that in selecting a missionary as his target, White leaves nothing to chance. LDS missionaries are reasonably young—just the right age group, in fact, for the kind of “cult recruitment” that White proposes. They are called into the field to perform a very specific role. They take with them very limited reading materials; they have a grueling schedule to follow and a fairly rigorous personal study program. They couldn’t divert themselves to the kind of research needed to answer White’s claims even if they wanted to, and they wouldn’t have the necessary resources even if they did manage to make the time. It is not surprising that some people would see them as easy targets; what is surprising is that so very few, if any, are ever successfully recruited.

Apart from answering all of White’s letters, I have not followed his story line at all. I could have turned it around and had him making a commitment to baptism, but that would be just as silly as White’s own script. I have decided to make Elder Hahn a good missionary who follows the rules, does the work, keeps his leaders informed, and answers White’s letters according to his own timetable and priorities, and not White’s. I have also provided him with a brother, an aunt, and an uncle who have access to the sorts of material that are necessary to answer some of White’s material. The role of “Uncle Larry” was filled by Kerry A. Shirts, a Latter-day Saint who is active in apologetics, both on the Internet and in print.

### Letter 1: What Is a Testimony?

Dear Mr. White,

Thank you for your letter.

You seem to be under the impression that my testimony consists only of subjective feelings. Please let me clarify this point. When I bear my testimony to you, I am not speaking only of my *feelings*, but I am telling you something that I *know* with certainty.

You wrote, "We both know people who are honest, kind, and moral, but who teach falsehood about Jesus Christ and His gospel. For example, we both have encountered Jehovah's Witnesses as they go door-to-door preaching *their* version of the truth" (p. 16). I'm not sure that I would agree that the Jehovah's Witnesses are teaching "falsehood"; certainly I would agree that they are mistaken in some points, but that is not the same thing. But yes, I certainly do agree that they are sincere and fully genuine in their belief, as I am sure you are. I don't actually regard you (or them) as being "in error"; on the contrary, I believe that your understanding of the gospel includes a great deal of truth. As I understand it, your beliefs are based on the Bible. Ours are also based on the Bible, as well as additional truth that has been revealed from heaven. You have correctly pointed out that truth is absolute and not relative. But only God knows things as they really are. We mortals can only see "through a glass, darkly" (1 Corinthians 13:12); our perception of truth is always incomplete, and hence imperfect. This means that many times when we presume to correct one another's "errors" we are committing errors just as great ourselves. Our Savior said it best: "And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?" (Matthew 7:3). Therefore I am always hesitant to say that you or anyone else is wrong; all I will say is that there is still more truth for you to find.

You tell me that you also have a testimony, "and [your] testimony is in direct conflict with [mine]" (p. 17). I ask you this: have you personally prayed and asked God to know whether the Book of Mormon is his word? For that is the foundation of my testimony; I asked, he answered, and no matter what else happens,

I can never deny this. It is as real and as sure to me as if he had appeared and told me to my face.

I would also like to know what you mean when you say “the Spirit has testified” to you (p. 17). This is not because I doubt your sincerity, but because I wish to know whether we are talking about the same thing. Do you actually mean that you have personally received revelation from your Father in Heaven, by the power of the Holy Ghost?

Or do you mean what many, or most, evangelical Protestants have meant by similar statements—namely, that you have formed a conclusion from your reading of the Bible and you give that conclusion the status of a revelation?

I agree quite enthusiastically with your point about not trusting our own hearts. I have on many occasions rationalized wrong things to myself; I have very strongly desired things that were not right for me to have. On one occasion I even prayed for confirmation of one of these things; it was something that I badly wanted. (I didn’t get an answer on that occasion, although I wanted the thing every bit as badly afterwards. It didn’t turn out the way I wanted it to, either.) But when I received the witness from the Holy Ghost that the Book of Mormon is true, it was something entirely different than wanting or rationalizing, or anything else.

There is an analogy that we sometimes use: if you met someone who had never tasted salt, could you describe its taste to him or her? In just the same way, I can’t describe my experience of receiving a testimony. I can only talk about it in terms of feelings because that is the nearest thing that people can relate to. But it is certainly much, much more than that.

You said that, “There is something which is unchanging, unlike our feelings. There is something that tells us the truth at all times, again, unlike our feelings. That something is the Word of God” (p. 17). I follow what you are saying about the Word of God being pure, respected, and unchanging (see pp. 17–18). Since God has gone to the trouble of revealing truth to a long line of prophets, it certainly behooves us to make good use of his recorded word. But to start from the assumption that the Word of God exactly equals the Bible is to guarantee that we are going to

discover that the Word of God exactly equals the Bible. Circular arguments do tend to work that way.

But we may not be too far from a common starting point here. Certainly I accept that both the Bible and the Book of Mormon are true, and I do not expect truth to contradict truth. But it is not sensible to read one volume in isolation, make up our minds about it, and then expect another volume to agree with our newly formed interpretations. That would be circular reasoning and would actually make our interpretations, rather than the texts themselves, our yardstick. Rather, in the case of the Book of Mormon, it is necessary to read it together with the Bible, and ask ourselves: "can these two scriptures be reasonably understood to be harmonious with each other?" If not, then we need to investigate why. But we cannot approach them with a set of assumptions about which came first; for I believe the Bible *because* I have a testimony of the Book of Mormon; it is the Book of Mormon that testifies to me of the Bible. If I ceased to believe in the Book of Mormon, I would then have to be converted to the Bible all over again.

So I ask you this: does the Bible have priority over God, or does God have priority over the Bible? That is the question that we need to settle before we can move ahead. If you accept, at least conceptually, that the God who revealed the scriptures to prophets anciently *could have* spoken to other prophets as well and *could* choose to speak to prophets today, then we could get somewhere. But if you start from the position that the Bible is all there is and all there ever could be, then we are not going to come to a meeting of the minds, however much common ground we might otherwise find.

You gave the example of the Berean Saints, who studied the scriptures daily to learn whether the things the apostles had taught them were true (see p. 18). I have had the privilege of meeting people during my mission who do just that. I have also met those who, like the Pharisees in Jesus' day, searched in the scriptures to find something to use against him. The distinction is not in the act of searching the scriptures, but in *what is being sought*. For, as I am sure you realize, it is quite possible to read the Old Testament on its own and form a very consistent picture of what God wants us to do and then read the New Testament and find real



discrepancies. This has always been a fairly easy exercise for well-read Jews who want to find fault with the Christian gospel, and there are some Christians who apply the same approach to criticizing the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Also, we cannot conclude that the Berean Saints did *not* pray about the apostles' message; nothing is incompatible at all about scripture study and prayer. In fact, I even venture to suggest that it might have been very difficult for them to have found the message of salvation through Christ to be compatible with the Old Testament scriptures *without* prayerfully pondering the apostles' message.

Incidentally, the Jehovah's Witnesses, whom you mentioned earlier, consider themselves to be carrying on the Berean tradition. They are in dead earnest about this. They arrive at their beliefs in exactly the same way that you arrive at yours—by reading the Bible. They cling to it as their one and only source of truth. And although there are many similarities between their doctrine and yours, you and they regard each other as being in error. What more eloquent commentary could there be on the need for further revelation?

I take your point about the Holy Ghost not being in conflict with the scriptures (see pp. 18–19), but I'm sure you realize that this must have posed a challenge to first-century Christians. For example, God established the covenant of circumcision with Abraham (see Genesis 17:10) for an "*everlasting covenant*" (Genesis 17:7, emphasis added). Yet in Acts 15, we find that covenant being revoked. I'm sure you can readily see that your "zero contradiction" rule might have been a difficult point for the earliest Saints.

Now I certainly believe that this contradiction, and others like it, can be resolved, but I would ask you this: are you willing to accept that the same kinds of resolutions can be applied to contradictions that you perceive between, say, the Book of Mormon and the Bible? If so, then we can go forward. If not, then you would seem to be operating a double standard.

Your discussion of James 1:5 is interesting. I cannot really respond in kind, because I do not know Greek, but I have this thought: the fact that *wisdom* and *knowledge* are different words is not in itself decisive. The English words are also different, but

come from roots that are synonyms. You point out that “If we are *wise*, we will accept that truth [from the Bible], and will not pray to God and ask Him to repeat what He has already said” (p. 19). But I can’t find in the Bible where God has “already said” anything at all about the Book of Mormon, unless you accept such passages as Isaiah 29 and Ezekiel 37:15–20 as prophecies of its coming forth, as I do; so praying and asking him about it *wouldn’t* be asking him to repeat himself. And I can think of few subjects upon which wisdom is more earnestly needed than the choices we should make regarding our eternal salvation. How can God grant wisdom better than to let his children know which is the wisest choice? Or would you argue that God wouldn’t—or *couldn’t*—tell us something if it isn’t already in the Bible?

And your argument can be just as easily turned around. As I mentioned, I have a testimony of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon. That testimony is more than just a feeling; the Holy Ghost has revealed to me *personally* that it is true. If praying to know if the Book of Mormon is true is to “ask Him to repeat what He has already said,” then wouldn’t it be equally faithless for me to investigate a question that God has already settled? And in my case, the question was not settled *indirectly* via the Bible, but directly and personally.

Therefore, it seems to me that if you are going to ask me to put my faith on the line by testing it according to the Bible, you should be equally willing to put yours on the line by making the Book of Mormon a matter of prayer.

But in any event, other passages support the use of prayer. In Matthew 7:7–8, the Savior said, “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.”

Now you could argue that this passage does not talk about prayer alone; the admonition to “seek” may well be directing us to the scriptures. But if, as you rightly point out, prayer without seeking will not find the answers (for faith without works is dead), seeking without prayer equally will not. For if human *hearts* are untrustworthy, then human *minds* are devious and can find support in the scriptures for whatever preconceived conclusions they see fit.

Just one more thought on the subject of prayer: we read that when Nebuchadnezzar had a dream, which he could not remember, he asked his wise men to explain it to him. When they could not, he ordered them put to death. Daniel asked for a stay of execution and went back home and with his companions “desired mercies of the God of heaven concerning this secret,” which was subsequently “revealed unto Daniel in a night vision” (Daniel 2:18, 19). In simple language, *they prayed*. They prayed and got an answer. The Lord revealed knowledge—and very specific knowledge, at that—to Daniel in answer to his prayer. I believe that is a good pattern to follow. I earnestly recommend it.

Now to other matters. I am a full-time missionary. I have been called of God, through his prophet, to labor in the Lord’s vineyard; my time is not my own. Also, you live within my mission area, and so it is not normally acceptable for us to correspond. I have consulted my mission president, and he has given me permission to correspond with you, providing that our correspondence does not take up time when I should be working nor displace my personal scripture study program. In other words, my correspondence time will only take place on my weekly preparation day. Therefore, I hope that you will understand that I may not always be able to reply as quickly as you would like. He also made the proviso that it must not turn into a “Bible bash.”

Now I hope that you will give some thought to the points I have raised herein. Please let me know whether you can accept that God does have priority over the Bible, and that he can also answer prayers and reveal truth to you now. I testify to you that he can and will, if you ask in faith.

May the Lord bless you in your search for truth.

Elder Hahn

## Letter 2: As Far as It Is Translated Correctly

Dear Mr. White,

I was really surprised to read your statement that, “The vast majority of LDS, in my experience, harbor some doubts concerning the accuracy of the Bible, some going so far as to reject the Bible, for all intents and purposes, as a book that can be trusted” (p. 21). That, if I may say so, is quite different from my experience. My companion and I study the Bible daily. We teach from it with confidence. In common with the overwhelming majority of Latter-day Saint youth from active families, I attended four years of seminary classes; two years of the four were devoted to the Bible. This is the standard seminary curriculum. The two years we spent on the Old and New Testaments did not focus on textual problems or errors in translation but on the actual teachings of those collections of scripture.

You should not be too surprised at the sometimes odd statements made by some of the early Brethren; Elder Orson Pratt, in particular, was one whose opinions were often a little on the margins. His writing, “The Bible Alone an Insufficient Guide,” from which you quoted, has never been accepted by the church as authoritative. I remember reading that he edited a periodical called *The Seer*, in which he advanced some rather unorthodox ideas. It seems that he was “hauled over the coals” for some of the things he said in that paper, and he ended up repudiating it.

And I don’t exactly see that “there are a lot of different attitudes toward the Bible among Latter-day Saints” (p. 22). I see that you have shown two. One was Elder Pratt’s criticism of the Bible’s accuracy; the other, in opposition to Elder Pratt’s view, was President Young’s more conservative view that supported its reliability. In fact you quoted President Young thus: “The Bible is good enough as it is, to point out the way we should walk, and to teach us how to come to the Lord of whom we can receive for ourselves” (p. 22, from *Journal of Discourses*, 3:116).

In other words, you only showed two views, and the first was pretty well quashed by the prophet and seer of the Lord. Does “a lot” really just mean two—one of which was rejected?

But in any event, what I wish to propose is this: I will tell you what I believe; I will take the responsibility for representing the LDS position. Please, by all means, tell me what *you* believe and lay out the Baptist position, but please don't tell me what my beliefs are. I won't be so presumptuous as to make myself a spokesman for your church, and I would ask that you please return the favor. Does that sound fair?

I agree that when Jesus quotes the Old Testament, he does so with approval. I also agree that he regarded a direct first-person quotation such as "I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob" as being the words of the Lord. It does not follow, however, that he automatically regarded the *entire* Old Testament as "the very words of God Himself" (p. 22), which it clearly is not.

I should tell you that, being a missionary in the field, I have to travel light. Although I do have a reasonable collection of books at home, all I have with me are my scriptures, the missionary discussions, and a couple of other church books. By scriptures I mean, of course, the Bible (King James Version), the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price. So I'm not really equipped to carry on a full-scale debate by mail, since I do not have much of a library in my one suitcase and a briefcase. Thus I'm going to have to impose on you with another request: can you accept that when you cite a passage from the Bible, I'm going to refer it back to my King James Version? That's not because I doubt your skill, but because even if I did speak Greek (which I don't) I wouldn't be able to check up on your translations any other way.

So here I am, KJV in hand, looking up your scriptural citations. The first one you quote is 2 Timothy 3:16 (although you reference the verses as 16-17). Since I think verse 15 is important as well, I hope you won't mind if I quote it too:

And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. (2 Timothy 3:15-16 KJV)

From Acts 16:1, we know that Timothy was an adult convert, the son of a Jewish mother and a Greek father. Given this background, what scriptures had he known “from a child”? Answer: the scriptures we now know as the Old Testament. Is Paul telling him to accept the Old Testament as God’s final and complete word? Where would that leave the Gospels—or Paul’s own letters? Continue now to verse 16, and learn that *all* scripture comes by inspiration and is therefore good stuff. Timothy’s exposure to the Hebrew scriptures prepared him to receive more truth when it came along; many of his contemporaries took quite the opposite approach, as I’m sure you know. I fully agree with this passage, applying it to *all* scripture—including the Book of Mormon.

I also note that while my Bible says “given by inspiration of God,” you translate the passage as “God-breathed” (p. 23). I remember in English class we were once reading T. S. Eliot, and one of the footnotes mentioned that the Greek word *pneuma* means both “wind” and “spirit”; so I suppose “breath” fits in well enough too. But do you see that this is itself a perfect example of the problem of translation? Not that I am saying that your translation is wrong, or even that it is different in its strict dictionary meaning to that given by the King James translators; I am saying that it highlights the problem in the very nature of translation. The two variants, while they may denote the same thing, carry entirely different connotations—they draw different “mental pictures.” To me, “given by inspiration” suggests that the prophet is given to know a truth he didn’t know before and then has the task of expressing that truth in his own words. (This is consistent with my personal experience of inspiration.) The phrase *God-breathed* conveys the sense of “from God’s mouth to the prophet’s ear” and so on down his arm to the prophet’s pen. The prophet is a secretary taking dictation.

Please understand me: not being qualified in Greek, I’m not going to say that you’re wrong and the seventeenth-century committee was right; my point is simply that—how can I know? And if one day I find out that the text supports *both* readings just as well, where does that leave me? I can only point out that, having rendered your translation in the most “inerrantist-friendly” way possible, you have then argued it all the way to the hilt. You say, “God used men to write His Word, but He did so in such a way as

to insure that what was written was word-for-word what He had intended from eternity past" (p. 23). Do you mean to say that the verse we are discussing says *that*? Do you really get all that from "all scripture is given by inspiration"?

And are you—a scholar in Hebrew, Greek, French, and German—really unaware of the woeful inadequacies of human language? Every word in every language is an approximate and imperfect carrier of its meaning. Simple little words like *and* and *the* really convey no meaning at all—they just help text to flow. The really meaningful words—like *power*, *light*, *truth*, and *love*, not to mention *scripture* and *inspiration*—each carry a whole range of meanings, and they convey them differently to each hearer or reader. Thus even if, as you say, "God . . . insure[d] that what was written was word-for-word what He had intended" (p. 23), the next fellow to come along and read it would not understand it *exactly* as God intended it—because God's pure thought had been encapsulated in an imperfect human language.

But perhaps the biggest logical problem with *sola scriptura*, the idea that the Bible contains the totality of God's revelation, is that it is itself unscriptural. You said, "The God of the Bible is big enough to use men to write His message, yet at the same time see to it that the resultant revelation is not mixed with error or untruth" (p. 23). And where in the Bible does it actually *say* that? I can see how you can contemplate a phrase like *God-breathed* and then develop such an idea, but can you in your turn see that it is a very significant idea to rest on that one little phrase?

Not only is your letter-perfect model not apparent from what the scripture says, but there are also some passages that seem to say quite unselfconsciously the opposite. In Jeremiah 1:1–2, we read, "The words of Jeremiah the son of Hilkiyah, of the priests that were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin: To whom the word of the Lord came in the days of Josiah." Did you notice that? The book of Jeremiah is "The words of Jeremiah . . . to whom the word of the Lord came." It's not at all "the words of the Lord written by Jeremiah's pen" (in fact it was written by Baruch's) but Jeremiah, in his own words, expressing the word of the Lord. This prophet, at least, was no mere secretary.

You also cited 2 Peter 1:20–21, which reads thus in my Bible:

Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

Notice once again that we have the same problem of translation here; indeed, it is even more glaring this time, since your rendering, “no Scriptural prophecy ever came about by the prophet’s own personal interpretation” (p. 23), means something quite different than “no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.” The latter quite clearly tells us not to attempt a private interpretation of the scriptures. Indeed, I have always taken this passage to mean that, since the scriptures were given by the power of the Holy Ghost, they can only be understood by that same power.

In giving me what you call your “own translation” of these verses (p. 23), can you see that “personal translation” is a synonym of “private interpretation”? For *every* translation is an interpretation. And when you say, “I have often had LDS people say, when confronted with a passage that contradicted their own beliefs, ‘Well, that must be mistranslated’” (p. 27), I must protest that that has not been my experience. But even if they did, your approach of providing your own translation when it suits you to do so is no less a vote of no confidence in the standard translations than the statement you have cited.

But to come back to the passages at hand: the fatal objection, of course, to your argument that these passages are talking about the Bible is that when these passages were written, there was literally no such thing as “the Bible.” You can consider the possibility that the writers had particular scriptures in mind, or you can apply them to *all* scripture—but it still remains an open question: just what constitutes “all scripture”?

You have then anticipated my reaction thus:

We might agree to this point. You might be willing to say, “Yes, as the Bible was *originally* written it was the perfect and complete Word of God.” But, then you’d be quick to add, “Things have changed—the Bible has been changed, things have been lost. We can



no longer say that the Bible is fully and completely the Word of God.” (p. 24)

Your first attributed statement is right on the mark, except for the word *complete*. But the second statement would not reflect my first thoughts: I would say that I see no indication that God *ever* thought to stop speaking to his children; hence, in that sense, at no time has the scriptural canon ever really been closed—it was never *complete* because it was never *finished*. There is always more for God to say, so we should always be prepared to accept whatever he has to reveal to us.

Your second statement does have some interesting thoughts. First, I would say that I do not see the Bible as ever having been the *total* Word of God. I would say that it has always *contained* the Word of God and does so today. Neither would I say that the contents of my quadruple combination—the Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price—constitute the *total* Word of God. These, too, only *contain* the Word of God. That, in a nutshell, is our idea of canon: an open-ended collection of scriptures containing the Word of God, and to which God is always at liberty to add.

But you are right: the Bible *has* been changed; things have indeed been lost. Consider what Paul has to say in 1 Corinthians 5:9: “I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators.” What’s wrong with this? Well, if Paul is referring to an epistle he previously wrote, then *First* Corinthians is really *Second* Corinthians, and the *real* 1 Corinthians is simply lost. Paul wrote it and quoted it again in our 1 Corinthians, so he presumably thought it was important; if so, where did the original epistle go?

Another example: when Paul was taking his leave of the Saints at Ephesus, he quoted a scripture to them, as follows:

I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to *remember* the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive. (Acts 20:35, emphasis added)

Now I have emphasized *remember* for this reason: the Saints at Ephesus were all Paul’s converts; they hadn’t heard Jesus speak in person—and neither had Paul (except in visions). So when he

reminds them of a familiar saying of Jesus that they all knew, it is clear that they did not hear it in person; it must have been in their scriptures. So where is it? Not in any scripture we currently have—except for Acts 20:35, of course. Conclusion: the Ephesian Saints had scriptures that have not come down to us.

There are many other such passages, but I don't want to belabor the point. The simple matter is that there once existed scriptures that perfectly orthodox Christians thought were very important. We no longer have them. Thus it is undeniable that things have been lost.

Your technique of interpreting scripture seems to undergo a bit of a wrench when you come to the Book of Mormon. In commenting on 1 Nephi 14:10, you say that, "It is clear that . . . 'all churches other than the LDS Church' must be actively 'keeping back' many 'plain and precious truths' of the Bible" (p. 25). However that comes to be clear to you, it is not at all clear to me. It seems to me that the act of "keeping back" need only happen *once*—there is nothing in that passage that makes it an active ongoing process. I'm wondering if you are not trying to deliver the most ridiculous reading possible—something that is equally easy to do with the Bible.

But indeed, I recall that at the great ecumenical councils, many books previously highly regarded were condemned as heretical and consigned to the flames. Among these were the *Gospel of Thomas* and the *Gospel of the Twelve Apostles*. Shortly before my mission, I read a book called *The Pastor of Hermas*, which says some interesting things about the salvation of the dead and seems to have been very highly esteemed in the first two centuries; that has certainly been "kept back" from inclusion in the canon. Jude, who also wrote a lost letter (see Jude 1:3), quotes from the book of Enoch (v. 14)—another "kept-back" book. It would seem that the Book of Mormon has scored a bull's-eye on this one.

Now I agree that when some of us talk about translation problems we also, by a kind of shorthand, include transmission problems under that category. But I'm not certain that you are one hundred percent right when you claim that there is only a one-step translation between the long-lost *Urtexte* and our English New Testament. To start with, not every qualified person I have

spoken to is certain that Greek was the original language of every book of the New Testament, as you claim in no less than four places in your letter. I have heard of a very old Jewish-Christian sect in Palestine that uses a Gospel of Matthew in Hebrew—and they think *that* is the original. Certainly none of the New Testament authors were native Greek speakers, and some scholars bluntly claim that lost Aramaic originals lie behind most of our New Testament books. Even if they are wrong, when a person writes a letter in a language other than his or her native tongue, he is already translating; he develops the thought in his first language, translates it into his second language in his head, and then writes it down. Thus, whichever way you look at it, from the original Aramaic thought, whether written or not, to the Greek manuscripts, our modern translations are the result of at *least* a two-step translation.

However, I was not trying to argue that any process such as you describe (p. 27) had taken place:

“Hebrew⇒Greek⇒Latin⇒French⇒German⇒Spanish⇒English.”

I apologize if I gave that impression. I was attempting to point out that each new translation that has been made has a tendency to both rely upon and rebel against previous translations. Received versions carry an awful lot of authority, and they have a way of intimidating later translators—who somewhat resent being intimidated. I can’t quite make up my mind whether the benefits of this process outweigh the disadvantages, but the point is that nobody *ever* seems to be completely satisfied with any translation, because they all seem to want to do it *again*. And that really wouldn’t be necessary if everyone agreed that the translator(s) had got it one hundred percent right, would it?

I’m not sure that the only important mistakes in translation would be “purposeful and malicious” ones (p. 27); my academic friends tell me that it is hard enough to render a good translation between closely related contemporary languages. Translating a dead ancient language into an unrelated modern one must be a nightmare.

But I wonder why you added that little tag about Joseph Smith’s “obviously attempting to insert a prophecy about himself in something that was written a full 3,000 years earlier” (p. 27). It may be obvious to you, but not to me. If we accept, for the sake of

argument, the possibility that Joseph Smith *may* have been a true prophet, then we allow the possibility that God could reveal to him prophecies that really *were* recorded anciently, but that were lost at an early date and never found their way into the manuscripts we now have. If it is “obvious” to you that Joseph was simply pretending to be a prophet, then of course he was only making things up; such is the way of circular arguments.

I am also a little concerned with the following statement that you made:

If you ask me, Elder Hahn, James Talmage *knew* that the Bible was translated accurately in the English versions, and he also knew that the charges of gross corruption of the biblical text, made so often by Latter-day Saints, have no basis in fact. That is why he was so reticent in his statements that I cited above. (p. 28)

If you ask *me*, Mr. White, Elder James E. Talmage of the Quorum of the Twelve was teaching perfectly accurate Latter-day Saint doctrine when he made the statements about the Bible that you quoted. If you ask me further, I might be able to tell you that I have *never* heard Latter-day Saints in high or low positions make “charges of gross corruption” against “the biblical text”; not often, not even occasionally, but *never*. Quite the contrary, most church members I know believe that Paul wrote all fifteen epistles attributed to him. I have also known some quite senior Latter-day Saints who were reluctant to rule out John as the author of the so-called Johannine Comma in 1 John 5:7–8, despite the consensus of both liberal and conservative scholars that that passage is an interpolation. Are you sure you aren’t exaggerating just a little? Or maybe just setting up a straw man?

In any event, as I said before, perhaps you will be so kind as to let *me* speak for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, as well as for my personal beliefs, and you can speak for *your* beliefs. That way, neither of us will need to feel misrepresented.

In regard to your talk-show anecdote, I notice with some curiosity that you seem to be using the words *Christian* and *Mormon* as though they were mutually exclusive categories. This is not the case. We regard ourselves as Christians *because* we are Latter-day Saints; the former is the superset, the latter the subset. In just the

same way, the fact that you are a white American man also means that you are a human being; it wouldn't make much sense to divide *those* into mutually exclusive categories, would it?

But aside from that, I am interested in how you arrive at the conclusion that it "is not a very meaningful fact" that "none of the 5,000 Greek manuscripts (as an example) of the New Testament read *exactly* like another" (p. 28). If you are going to make an argument for the flawless transmission of the text from past ages, then the fact that all the manuscripts differ from each other should seem to be quite an important fact. Be that as it may, the *number* of the variants, while important because it defines the scale of the task, is not as important as the *significance* of the individual changes—a question which your impressive array of statistics does not address.

But in any event, we are not nearly as far apart on the issue of the accuracy of the Bible as you seem to think. Elder Talmage pretty well speaks for me, as for most Latter-day Saints; his book *The Articles of Faith*, from which you quote, is one of the few books on the approved reading list for missionaries. Still, I am curious about your claim relative to what you call the "tenacity" of the different readings, that is, that "every reading that has entered into the manuscripts of the New Testament has remained there. While some might think that this is bad, it is not, for what it also means is that since no readings 'drop out' of the text, the original reading is still there as well!" (p. 29). Actually that isn't bad at all; if I understand you correctly, variant readings simply accrete to later copies of manuscripts. This would mean that the latest manuscripts would have the largest number of words, and the earliest manuscripts would have the smallest number, and so finding the original readings would be as easy as simply performing word counts on each manuscript copy. Have I misunderstood something here, or is it really that simple? Or are you in fact saying that all the different readings that there ever were are still around on *different* manuscripts, and so the original has got to be around *somewhere*? If the latter is what you are saying, then your statement above would appear to be little more than an expression of faith that the original readings are being preserved somehow. That is not, if I may say so, a very strong argument to make. Even if the original reading is still around

somewhere, the problem of recovering the original reading from among all of the available variants would still remain; and what is the chance of any translator getting that right *all* of the time?

I have already pointed out the clear fact that whole books of scripture have been lost, and so I do not see a need to reiterate that.

Mr. White, I really do hope that this isn't going to turn into a "Bible bash," as I said in my first letter. I have no objection at all to discussing these matters with you, but I'm not interested in a recital of all the "evils" of Mormonism.

I hope you understand our true position with regard to the Bible. We use it widely, for both proselyting and internal teaching purposes. We are aware that it was not translated by inspiration, and we know of some problems in the transmission of the manuscripts. In short, we are not inerrantists. I hasten to add that we are not inerrantists with regard to our other scriptures, either. From my reading, doctrines of the all-sufficiency and inerrancy of scripture arose only *after* the ancient Saints realized that revelation had ceased. These doctrines enabled them to treasure up and guard the past revelations that were stored in the Bible, much as people in a desert might treasure up and guard a well—*after* the stream has stopped flowing.

I look forward to hearing from you again. Once more, I urge you to read the Book of Mormon, to ponder its message, and to pray and seek the Lord's guidance. I testify to you that he will indeed answer your prayers in a real and tangible manner.

Your friend,

Elder Hahn

### Letter 3: Is That All There Is? Not Hardly!

Dear Mr. White,

I must begin by apologizing for giving you the wrong impression about my intentions. In pointing out some contradictions in the Bible, I was not trying to denigrate that volume of scripture; my purpose was twofold. First, to point out that the Bible, while true, is not inerrant; and second, to establish a single standard. For if we are going to forgive the Bible for containing difficult or contradictory passages, couldn't we be equally forgiving if similar problems arise when considering the Book of Mormon?

Again, I must reiterate that I am perfectly willing to consider the Bible's teachings about scripture per se—and in fact I believe them. But you have not demonstrated that the Bible is talking about itself in those passages. You said, "At times I think that this list, or one very similar to it, is part of the 'missionary training packet' that is passed out to every new missionary before being sent out into the field" (p. 31).

You need not fear. There is no missionary training packet of contradictory scriptures given in our formal training. What exists is a certain amount of field experience that has arisen among missionaries and is shared around; inerrantists challenge all of us, at some time or another. In such circumstances, we have found that these passages can give pause to our challengers and allow them to consider our position a little more carefully.

It may be so that atheists and others use similar passages to attack the Bible, and I certainly do not wish to give them aid and comfort. I am emphatically *not* trying to attack the validity of the Bible. Unlike those others, I believe that these anomalies can be explained. I also believe that similar explanations apply to so-called contradictions between the Bible and the Book of Mormon. But if you say that I "join hands" with people who would attack the Christian faith in this manner, I can only respond by pointing out that it is your insistence on an inerrant Bible that makes it such an easy target in the first place. We believe that the Bible is true, while accepting that it is possible for it to contain errors; for this reason, such attacks do not really faze us. We can still point to the

magnificence of the edifice without getting embarrassed about any little blemishes it may have.

I notice that the next paragraph of your letter includes this statement: "Your list of contradictions in the Bible is actually very well suited for my purposes" (p. 32). I suppose that really isn't so surprising; it wasn't my list, but yours. You would not likely provide a list that did *not* suit your purposes, would you?

I would like to thank you for your explanation of Paul's first vision (see pp. 33–37). I had honestly thought that one or the other of these passages in Acts must be mistaken; it was not an important part of my faith, and it did not shake my belief in Paul's testimony at all, but thank you just the same. Believe me when I tell you that for every "inerrantist" with whom these anomalies are useful, we encounter at least one "infidel" for whom they are problematic. So you have helped to make my job easier, and I thank you.

However, I am not sure if you haven't underscored another point of mine—and undermined a rather important one of yours. I pointed out that "We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly" (Article of Faith 8). Your response was in your last letter, which carried the subtitle, "But *It Is Translated Correctly!*" Only now you have emphasized yet again the problems involved in translating the Bible from ancient languages. My understanding of those passages came from my King James Bible; you pointed out the NIV and stepped through the Greek wording of those passages. While I don't claim to follow all of what you are saying (what on earth is "partitive genitive case I"?), I understand that your argument is that Acts 9:7 is saying that Paul's companions heard a sound, while in Acts 22:9 they didn't understand what was said. If your translation is correct, then there is no contradiction in this one detail—but which translation is correct? And this is just one verse.

This is the problem: if doctrinal accuracy really matters, and I daresay it does, then whom are we to trust? You say to trust the Bible, but 99.99 percent (at least) of the world's population can only read the Bible in translation. For the overwhelming majority, "trust the Bible" actually means "trust the translators." Whether you realize it or not, the clear consequence of your argument is that we must trust in the opinions of a small group of scholars



trained in dead languages—scholars whose skill we cannot check, over whom we can exercise no control—and who rarely seem to agree among themselves. What is the solution?

Well, fortunately there is a solution. It lies in continuing revelation. The stream is flowing anew from its source; we enjoy the ancient scriptures, and having ongoing revelation only enhances our ability to understand them.

I would like to express my wholehearted agreement with, and approval of, the following statement from your letter:

Finally, it must be stated that part and parcel of dealing with almost any ancient or even modern writing is the basic idea that the author gets the benefit of the doubt. . . . Some critics of the Bible seem to forget the old axiom “innocent until proven guilty.” (pp. 36–37)

And may I just add that *all* critics of the Book of Mormon forget that same axiom. I hope that you are prepared to apply this principle evenhandedly.

I agree that Matthew didn't *deliberately* misattribute Zechariah's words (from Zechariah 11:12–13) to Jeremiah (in Matthew 27:9–10; see pp. 38–39); I have no doubt it was an honest and unintentional mistake on his part. Still, *any* mistake, however trivial, means that the Bible is not *completely* inerrant, doesn't it?

I am quite certain that I didn't raise the issue of the time of the crucifixion in my letter (see pp. 39–40). Perhaps it came from your list of standard criticisms. I am quite aware of the usual solution to that one, namely, that John was using Roman time while the synoptists used Jewish time. In fact, I learned that in seminary when I was sixteen.

I don't have a problem with Peter and Andrew meeting Jesus (see pp. 40–41), so again I presume that the argument comes from your list of standard criticisms. Nor did I raise the “staff” issue (Mark 6:8; Luke 9:3; Matthew 10:10; see pp. 41–42). However, I wonder if your “harmonizing” on the last one does not owe more to your commitment to inerrancy than to what the text says. Certainly when Jesus told them not to obtain or provide shoes for their journey, we need not assume that he meant for them to go barefoot; he seems to be saying “go as you are.” So,

are they standing around with their staves in their hands while he is meeting with them? It seems not very likely. No, as I read Luke's and Matthew's accounts, the staff is explicitly prohibited, while in Mark's account it is explicitly permitted. That is a contradiction. Again, not an important one, but a contradiction nonetheless.

Now, as I frequently find myself telling people I meet: we don't have to worry about these things as long as we are willing to see the Gospel writers as simply reporting, as reliable witnesses, their *own* recollections of what they saw and heard. (Except for Luke; he's writing a "research paper.") If you ask any police officer what happens when four different people witness the same traffic accident, he or she can tell you that the several accounts sound like four different accidents. And so we are quite happy with the New Testament as we presently have it—true, but not inerrant. The Gospel writers were witnesses who honestly reported their experiences as they remembered them, and that's good enough for us. It is only when you want to postulate infallible divine guidance to assure the inerrancy of the witnesses' memories that you run into difficulty.

In the matter of the lost books of the Bible, you make a strange argument (see pp. 43–44). You say, referring to the epistle from Laodicea, that perhaps Laodicea is another name for Ephesians (or maybe another name for the missing *First* Ephesians—see Ephesians 3:3). But you also said, "I see no reason to call this a 'lost book' if God never intended it to be in the Bible in the first place. Surely, if God wishes a book to be in His Word, He can manage to get it there" (p. 14).

The anatomy of this argument seems to be as follows:

If a book is not in the Bible, then that is because God didn't want it there. The reason we know God didn't want it there is because it's not in the Bible. And thus we see that, after all, there is really no such thing as a lost book; if a book isn't in the Bible, that's because it wasn't supposed to be there. We might wonder why it was written in the first place, but we know that it wasn't important, because the Bible is complete without it. How can the Bible be complete without all of the books of scripture once prized by the Saints? Never mind—it just is. And so by assuming the completeness of the Bible, we are able to prove, against all the

evidence, that the Bible is complete. As I mentioned in my first letter, circular arguments do tend to work that way.

You know, it has occurred to me just now that if “the Bible” as a single monolithic unit were such an important part of God’s plan, why were the Saints in past ages able to get along quite well without it? Because, as I’m sure you know, until the fourth century there was no such thing as “the Bible” at all; there were collections of highly prized sacred writings, but each book was thought to stand alone—as they still do, really. Why, after thousands of years, did the need for a Bible as such suddenly emerge? Is it perhaps your view that God changed his mind about what constitutes scripture?

Or did *people* suddenly realize that they needed to be able to “control” the scriptures in order to protect them—because revelation had ceased?

I am glad that you have such reverence for God’s revealed word. I just hope it does not eclipse your reverence for the Revealer.

Well, you indicated that you would like to move along to discuss your view of God. You call him “the God of the Bible” (p. 44). I would call him the God of the whole universe. But in either case, I am happy to move on.

Your friend,

Elder Hahn

### Letter 4: The God of the Universe

Dear Mr. White,

It has taken me some time to read all the way through your letter. I would like to begin with some general observations before I get into the specifics of it.

First, I recall mentioning in an earlier letter that I felt it would be better for me to set out the LDS position and describe our doctrine and my beliefs, and allow you to tell me what your beliefs are. Here, I find that you devoted almost the first half of your letter—over 3,800 words—to expounding the LDS doctrine of God, as you see it. You could have saved yourself a considerable amount of trouble if you had allowed me to tell you what we believe, instead of your telling me. The remainder of your letter contains a good deal of “anticipating” what you think my answers will be. If you had confined yourself to explaining what *you* believe, and only that, your letter would have been considerably shorter—perhaps only one-third its present length—and thus much less taxing for a full-time missionary to read.

Second, it is clear that you have read and studied LDS materials rather extensively. I am starting to wonder something, but I don't know any really tactful way to ask, so I will come out and ask it. Mr. White, if I gathered that much information showing what's wrong with the Baptist Church, you might very well think I was anti-Baptist. I expect you would be right, too. So I'm beginning to wonder if there isn't an anti-Mormon agenda of some kind going on here. Can you assure me that you are truly approaching the church with an open mind? Do you really want to know what I can teach you? If not, then I need to be about the Lord's errand.

Now, I have been called and set apart as a missionary of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; that makes me, in a small way, an official spokesperson for the church. Any person who is not called to speak for the church is merely self-appointed and has no business making pronouncements on what the church believes or teaches. So I am going to tell you what we believe, and *that* will be the LDS position for the purposes of our discussion.

The first point that I wish to make is that, as you admitted (see p. 47), the King Follett sermon, *Journal of Discourses*, *Mormon Doctrine*, and *The Seer* are not canonical scripture to us. While they may be useful indications of what their authors thought, they are in no way binding upon the Saints, because the church has never accepted those works as scripture. In the case of *The Seer*, I remember mentioning it to you in my first letter. Elder Orson Pratt, who was its editor, was called to account for some of the things it said, and he repudiated them. The *Journal of Discourses* was taken from extemporaneous conference talks given in halls that had sometimes-doubtful acoustics and no electronic sound systems—and without the aid of electronic recording devices. There is lots of good stuff in it, but it is not all that reliable. Even if it were, it would still mostly represent the opinions of the speakers.

*Mormon Doctrine* also has its difficulties. I notice that you pointed out that it was written by “Mormon Apostle Bruce R. McConkie” (p. 49). Strictly speaking, that’s not true. Elder McConkie wrote it *before* he was called as an apostle. The leaders of the church instructed him to make changes to some statements that were simply “beyond the pale”—a little bit like Elder Pratt’s experience—but it has *no* official status.

As you correctly quoted Elder McConkie, we regard ourselves as *monotheists*, and not as *polytheists* (see p. 49). By that we mean that we believe in one God. God the Father, his son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost are three separate and distinct divine beings. You can call them “Gods” if you want. But they are united in purpose, in thought, and in power; in all things they act as one. Therefore it is entirely correct to call them “one God.”

It is entirely incorrect, and more than a little uncharitable, to accuse Elder McConkie of playing “word games” when he points this out (p. 49). If you have ever spoken to Muslims on this subject, you would discover that they think that *all* Christians are playing “word games” when we claim to be monotheists, while believing that Jesus can be fully divine, but a different person from his Father. And those who are astute enough to distinguish the rather small (from their point of view) differences between mainstream creedal trinitarianism and LDS precreedal trinitarianism will generally remark that ours just seems less murky.

When Elder McConkie elsewhere says, "But in addition there is an infinite number of holy personages, drawn from worlds without number, who have passed on to exaltation and are thus gods" (p. 49, from *Mormon Doctrine*, 576–77), that is *not* a polytheistic statement. For my dictionary defines *polytheism* as "the worship of more than one god." Leaving aside our "trinitarian" differences for a moment, you must see that the mere acknowledgment that other gods exist *entirely out of our reckoning* is a far cry from any known form of polytheism. No worship of any of these beings is contemplated even for a moment. Neither can we be said to even "believe in" them in any meaningful way; we simply indicate that they are "somewhere out there," like quarks or pulsars, but they make no difference to us at all. Our religion would be *exactly the same* without them—because it is, in fact, without them. They do not figure in our worship or in our religious life at all. They are a mere academic detail.

When we consider that every known polytheistic system includes the names of the multiple gods, their relationships with one another, and their various powers, interests, or "departments"—and then find that *all* these features are *completely absent* from Latter-day Saint belief—it becomes apparent that calling our belief "polytheism" is not very meaningful and could be seen as a simple insult.

So your statement, "we see the first major difference between Mormonism and Christianity—monotheism versus polytheism" (p. 49), contains *two* false dichotomies. Once again, I notice that you are using *Christian* and *Mormon* as mutually exclusive terms. They are not, and you seem to be loading the dice when you use them in this way.

Now we could argue this at considerable length, but there is no need to. As the apostle Paul taught, "But to us there is but one God" (1 Corinthians 8:6). Paul's statement goes for us, too. I will come back to that passage later.

As far as God's having a previous mortal life is concerned—nothing anywhere in scripture requires us to embrace this notion. As a missionary, I should properly leave it at that, but I cannot resist pointing out that the Snow couplet, which you quoted, has some illustrious ancient predecessors. The very orthodox Athanasius had a couplet very similar to it; his ran, "God

became man that man might become God.” Of course his first line is talking about the incarnation of Christ, but the second line is one that Latter-day Saints may well be much happier with than are other modern Christians.

You have cited Doctrine and Covenants 130:22 and argued that it supports the idea that God was once a man (see p. 51). In fact, it merely says that God the Father has a tangible, physical body; it makes no claims as to how he obtained it.

You make the following statement about Joseph’s beliefs and the first vision:

Joseph Smith’s *beliefs evolved* so during the period between the writing of the Book of Mormon and his final beliefs in 1844. When Smith wrote the Book of Mormon, he was still monotheistic in *his beliefs*, and had not yet *developed* the concept of multiple gods (yes, I know about the First Vision, but, as we shall see, Smith did not claim to have seen God the Father until well after the writing of the Book of Mormon). (p. 47, emphasis changed)

This argument is important because it clearly displays your assumptions. Joseph Smith *didn’t* write the Book of Mormon; he translated it. Whether or not his beliefs “evolved,” the fact is that the *doctrines* of the church were *revealed* to him incrementally. I will return to this in a moment. And your point about the first vision tells me precisely where you are heading, so I hope you don’t mind if I forestall you here.

The argument that “Smith did not claim to have seen God the Father until well after the writing of the Book of Mormon” is part of what my Aunt Jenny calls “the great retreat.” She says that for years, anti-Mormons argued that Joseph “invented” the first vision only in 1838. Then when a number of *much earlier* accounts of the first vision came to light, the critics had egg on their faces, and so they retreated to a position that the accounts didn’t exactly resemble each other and tried to make “contradictions” out of these points of difference. In fact the differences are not contradictions at all; they merely consist in details that are in one version and not in others—details that are entirely consistent with those that *are* in the others. The argument about what the earlier

versions *didn't* say is an argument from silence, and as such it is weak and desperate. I just thought I'd let you know that, to save you the trouble of trying to make an unsupportable argument.

I also pointed out that the Lord revealed doctrines to Joseph incrementally. This seems to be his pattern, thus:

But the word of the Lord was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken. Wherefore hear the word of the Lord, ye scornful men. (Isaiah 28:13-14)

Thus it seems that in the days of Isaiah, the Lord revealed his word line upon line and precept upon precept, and this was a problem for "scornful men." Human nature doesn't change much, does it? I'm sure that an idea such as the "evolution" of beliefs would have been very useful to the scornful men of Isaiah's day.

You seem to have understood the doctrine of eternal progression reasonably well, so I don't see a need to discuss that, except to say that we don't actually see ourselves as becoming God the Father; we see that we may ultimately become *like* him, but we do not expect to *replace* him.

You have made too much fuss over what you see as an "inconsistency" in LDS belief:

Is God progressing in knowledge or not? Wilford Woodruff said he was, Bruce McConkie said he wasn't, and Joseph Fielding Smith said the same thing. Some Mormons today say he is, more say he isn't. It is not consistent, I believe, to accept Smith's teachings and say that God is *not* progressing, but many LDS today, realizing the problems attendant with the concept of a changing God, prefer to hold to a different belief. (p. 54)

I will discuss the actual issue below. The point *you* are missing, however, is that it is perfectly possible for Joseph Smith to say something without that something automatically becoming doctrine for the church. The church's enemies frequently accuse us



of misrepresenting or not understanding our own beliefs because we do not ascribe infallibility to every statement ever made by a prophet or apostle. In their minds, if a prophet said it, then it must be scripture—that is, *canonical* scripture. But that is their own misunderstanding. For us, a prophet is someone who has his own mind and opinion, but who also sometimes receives revelation. We see no need to assume that every time he opens his mouth on any particular subject, he is speaking revealed truth. That is a challenging view, but at the same time a very liberating one. I recommend it to evangelical Protestants. That way your ministers can stop trying to find eternal, spiritual truths in the mundane little details in the Bible—such as Paul asking Timothy to send him his cloak and books (see 2 Timothy 4:13).

But I believe that you are using this as an opportunity to make another surreptitious dig at the church. We believe what we believe because we think it is true, and *not* because it lets us out of some problems which you imagine are attendant with some concept or other. Actually the “problems attendant with the concept” of an *unchanging* God are themselves considerable, as I shall show below.

The question of whether or not God the Father increases in knowledge is actually related to the question of whether his foreknowledge is absolute or not. Most of us believe that God knows beforehand every detail of what will happen, including exactly what each one of us will do and when. On the other hand, some believe that God’s foreknowledge actually consists of knowing all the possibilities and their probabilities, and being able to plan for all contingencies—as well as knowing that he has the power to accomplish all of his purposes, should it become necessary for him to intervene. We all agree that God’s foreknowledge is not deterministic—if he knows what you are going to do tomorrow, then that is because he knows you very well and knows what circumstances you will be in tomorrow. His foreknowledge does not actually decide your actions for you.

Thus if God absolutely *knows* all things before they happen, then he does not progress in knowledge. But if his foreknowledge is hyperintelligent prediction rather than absolute and certain knowledge, then he does progress in knowledge, since an event that he merely *expects* beforehand becomes a *fact* when it hap-

pens. The reason for the possibility of divergent opinions on this subject is the lack of revealed doctrine about it.

I have waxed somewhat long on this point because it is going to become relevant again later on when I address your discussion about God's changing his mind.

Something else that perhaps you may not realize is that in the church, nobody's testimony or personal revelation is binding on anyone else. It doesn't matter who is bearing a testimony; if the Holy Ghost doesn't confirm it to those listening, then they are not obliged to accept it. This is important, and I will have occasion to refer to it again.

Finally, about halfway through your letter you come to the point about what you see as LDS belief, namely:

So the Mormon view of God, as seen above, includes (1) polytheism, the belief in more than one God; (2) the concept that God was once a man who lived on another planet, and who progressed to the status of God; (3) the eternal law of progression, whereby, it is said, men can become gods. (p. 54)

Of these, the last point is reasonably correct (although you have inexplicably rephrased it "the eternal law of progression" instead of "the law of eternal progression"); the second is *not* doctrine, since it is not found in any of our scriptures; and the first is not true in any meaningful way at all. Unless, that is, you regard our ideas about the Trinity as polytheistic. So perhaps it is appropriate to look at that issue.

The doctrine of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints regarding the Godhead consists of all the relevant statements found in the four standard works. Thus the passages you cite are part of our doctrine, although we don't necessarily give them the same priority as you do.

To start with, I notice that you give the following reason for choosing the Isaiah passages to support your argument: they constitute "the clearest, most unambiguous statements of absolute *monotheism*. . . . I choose them as being representative of a teaching that is to be found throughout the Bible" (p. 56). This seems to be contradictory. If they are the "clearest, most unambiguous" passages you could choose, then they are obviously *not*

“representative,” since other candidates are more ambiguous. Indeed, it is fairly clear that these passages, far from being “representative,” are actually the *strongest* supports you could find. Which is not a fault; most people who are making an argument will generally advance the strongest evidences they can muster to support it. But calling them “representative,” as though they say the same thing as every other passage on the same subject, is a little conceited.

I propose to restore some balance by looking at what some other passages have to say, and then coming back to the passages you favor. The first passage of interest is Genesis 1:26, where God says, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness,” and then proceeds to do so. So the question arises: who is “us” in this passage? And why “our” image and likeness? There is clearly a plurality here, but of what? If you argue that the plural pronouns in that verse refer to God and angels as a group, that would seem to be inconsistent with verse 27: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.”

God created man in whose image? God’s own image. Angels don’t rate a mention there. So the plural numbers in verse 26 can refer only to God. Now I have had people suggest that God is merely referring to himself in the plural, as earthly kings have been wont to do, but even if God was inclined to such affectations, it is noteworthy that he seems not to use it elsewhere. In his conversations with the prophets, he invariably refers to himself in the singular. (Incidentally, it is quite clear that *image* and *likeness* refer to what God *looks like*, because exactly the same words are used in Genesis 5:3, describing Seth in the image and likeness of his father, Adam.)

But if we move along to Genesis 3:22, we discover that, as a result of eating the forbidden fruit, “the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of *us*, to know good and evil” (emphasis added). “One of us” is *not* the way the royal plural is used. It can only refer to a *group* of beings. What kind of beings? Well, what kind of beings would God consider himself “one of”? The question answers itself: divine beings, that is, gods.

In Deuteronomy 32:8–9 we have an interesting situation:

When the most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel. For the Lord's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance.

Now, although our Bible says "children of Israel" at the end of verse 8, the experts say that this should read "sons of God." The situation, then, is that someone called the most High God divides the nations up among his sons; Israel is the inheritance that falls to the Lord, that is, Jehovah, who is one of those sons. This is hardly "pure monotheism." In fact, the very title "most High God" is a comparison, and it really doesn't mean anything unless there are also *less* High Gods.

By the same token, the titles "God of gods, and Lord of lords" applied to the Lord by Moses in Deuteronomy 10:17 are not very purely monotheistic. He seems to be describing Jehovah as supreme, not only over men, but over gods as well. What gods? I once had someone tell me they were idols. But that doesn't make much sense either, since that would make the Lord "God of idols." Do we really want to call him that? How about "Idol of idols," or "most High Idol"? No, they don't really have the same ring to them, do they?

Turning to the New Testament, when we read about the baptism of Jesus in Matthew 3:16-17, Mark 1:10-11, and Luke 3:22, what do we find? We have Jesus stepping up out of the water, the voice of the Father speaking from heaven, and the Holy Ghost descending "like a dove" and lighting upon him. It is abundantly clear that, in whatever way the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are "one," it doesn't preclude them from each being in a separate location.

A similar thing happens at the transfiguration (Matthew 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:34-35). The voice of the Father comes out of a bright cloud, but Jesus does not dissolve into that cloud; the cloud itself is, very significantly, always and only called a cloud and is *never* identified with the Father. In other words, the Father might be inside the cloud, or on the other side of the cloud, but he wasn't the cloud; his voice came from that direction *and no other*—so he was in one place, and *not* everywhere at once.

Now we come to some passages you have already discussed. You mentioned John 10:34, quoting Psalm 82:6, and claim that Jesus is quoting the scripture as a way of accusing the Pharisees of being bad judges. There are several problems with this interpretation. Let's look at the context of what Jesus himself is saying in John 10:29-36:

My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.

I and my Father are one.

Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him.

Jesus answered them, Many good works have I shewed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me?

The Jews answered him, saying, For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God.

Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods?

If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken;

Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?

The meaning of this is plain. Jesus tells the Jews that he and his father are one. He does *not* say, "I am my Father," but says instead that he and his Father enjoy a special unity. The Jews take exception to this, understanding quite correctly that he is making himself God. Jesus then quotes Psalm 82:6 to them and makes this argument from it:

*If* he (i.e., God) called those to whom his word came "gods" (and *not* "judges"); and,

*If* you believe the scripture;

*Then* you can't accuse me of blasphemy for saying that I am the Son of God.

That is the argument Jesus makes, and it *only* works if Psalm 82 really refers to people as gods and not merely as judges. So when you conclude that "The interpretation you provided to me

in my home, Elder Hahn, is certainly incorrect, is it not?" (p. 63), I have to answer no, it is not incorrect. On the other hand, your interpretation seems to rely upon a fairly violent forcing of the text to fit your monotheistic presuppositions. Unfortunately, that won't work. You are trying to fit a square text into a round doctrine.

But you are certainly not the first to do that. When my brother was working on his master's degree, I got to help proofread some of his thesis on the development of Rabbinical Judaism. He pointed out that it was quite important for the Jews to maintain some distance between themselves and Christianity—especially when Christian rulers were very intolerant. So they reinvented themselves, to a certain extent. Their monotheism became much more definite, but the Old Testament didn't carry them all the way; therefore, they came up with new interpretations of some passages, including Psalm 82. Nowhere else in scripture does the word *gods* refer to princes or judges.

Another passage that got the new spin was Deuteronomy 6:4, which you quoted to me. But the statement "The Lord our God is one Lord" simply refers to the unique covenant relationship between Jehovah and Israel. A parallel statement would be for me to say, "Elder Hahn, your correspondent, is one Elder Hahn," which would be perfectly correct. There are about 60,000 other missionaries out there, and over 10,000,000 Latter-day Saints, but I would expect that I'm the only Elder Hahn with whom you are corresponding. In like manner, whatever other divine beings might live in eternal worlds, Jehovah was the only God with whom Israel had such a relationship.

And that brings us around to the Isaiah passages which form the backbone of your argument for "absolute monotheism." My brother's sources (and he quoted a lot of them, mostly non-LDS) showed that *biblical* Judaism was henotheistic or monarchistic; rather than believing that God was utterly unique and alone, they pictured him as the ruler of a myriad of other similar beings. The meetings of the sons of God in Job 1:6 and Job 2:1 are "representative," to use your word, of this picture. So when we look at what Isaiah reports, how is it different?

You quoted Isaiah 43:10 as follows (p. 57):

Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me.

There are three rather glaring things about this passage. First that the Lord is talking about Gods being “formed.” Idols, which are false gods, are “formed,” or made by hand. The Lord is clearly saying that *no* God is ever “formed,” either before him or after him, and yet, idols get formed all the time. Clearly idols, being formed, are not Gods.

Second, and following from this, we can understand that when the Lord speaks of Gods, he does *not* mean idols; for these are *not* Gods. If we find other instances in which the Lord speaks of Gods but does not clearly signal that they are false gods, or idols, then he is probably talking about something else.

Third, we have to get a handle on what is meant by “before me” and “after me.” One point on which you and I agree is that the Lord has always existed and always will. Thus *nothing* happened before him, because he always was, and nothing will happen after him, because there is no after with regard to him. Thus if there were to be other Gods, this passage tells us that they would neither be his predecessors nor his successors; they would have to be his “contemporaries.”

This, therefore most assuredly does *not* cancel out eternal progression, since, come the day that you enter into your exaltation, the Lord will *still be there*—he will not come to an end so that you can come “after” him. On this, more later.

On page 57 you also quoted Isaiah 44:6–8 thus:

Thus saith the Lord the King of Israel, and his redeemer the Lord of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God. And who, as I, shall call, and shall declare it, and set it in order for me, since I appointed the ancient people? and the things that are coming, and shall come, let them show unto them. Fear ye not, neither be afraid: have not I told thee from that time, and have declared it? ye are even my witnesses. Is there a God beside me? yea, there is no God; I know not any.

The key word in all this is *beside*, but this is used to translate a Hebrew word that could just as well be rendered “apart from” or “away from” or even “not associated with” or “in preference to.” So while the passage in English looks pretty uncompromisingly monotheistic, it would be hard to make the same argument from “don’t have any God in preference to me.” This looks a whole lot more “monarchistic,” as my brother would put it. Baal, Molech, and Astoreth are not gods because they are *apart* from the Lord and their worshipers preferred them *ahead* of Yahweh.

But again, the real thrust of this passage is to emphasize, not the Lord’s unique aloneness, but his unique covenant relationship with Israel. And in fact there is an element here that makes “strict monotheism” impossible to maintain, since the Lord refers to himself in verse 6 as “the first, and . . . the last.” This cross-references nicely to no less than *four* places in Revelation (see Revelation 1:8, 11; 21:6; 22:13) that make it abundantly clear that Jesus is the “first and the last” in these passages. These passages, taken together, are strong support for the LDS view that Jesus is Jehovah, the God of the Old Testament, in which case he can’t possibly be excluding the Father in what he is saying. This, after all, is a personal title that he is using. But even if you take the sectarian view that Jehovah is the Father, you would have to agree that he can’t be excluding Jesus.

And when Isaiah quotes God as saying, “Is there a God beside me? yea, there is no God; I know not any,” does that mean that Jesus does not know his Father? Or that the Father does not know Jesus? I rather think that they do know each other.

I know that you argued this point yourself, trying to say that the Father and the Son are not separate beings. This, if I may say so, is another example of forcing a verse to conform to your presuppositions; for if John 17 means anything at all, it means that Jesus is *not* his Father—and that his followers can or should have the *same* kind of unity that Jesus and his Father enjoy. Thus whatever Jesus meant when he said that he and his Father are “one” is something that can also apply to all Christians. So I ask you: if you got all the Christians in the world in one place and excluded everybody else, how would the total number of “beings” present compare with the total number of Christians? I daresay they would



be equal. All Christians are separate beings, but united, they are one—thus it is with the Father and the Son.

From the New Testament we learn that Jesus is fully divine. I'm sure I don't need to quote passages to prove that. And he always either addresses his Father in the second person (in prayer) or refers to him in the third person (in conversations with others). He makes no confusion in person or number in his discourses. But in the Old Testament, Jehovah is calling himself "I"—first person, singular—and insisting that he is in some way unique. Shall we conclude a contradiction? Do we insist that Jesus isn't really God in order to preserve the "strict monotheism" that you see in this passage? Or do we accept that Jesus and the Father are truly both divine beings and that Jehovah (whichever one he be) is saying something that does *not* exclude the other members of the Godhead? I vote for the latter. Apart from anything else, it seems more—Christian, for want of a better word.

You also gave the following quotations (p. 58), which I here reproduce in full:

I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me: That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the Lord, and there is none else. (Isaiah 45:5-6)

For thus saith the Lord that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited: I am the Lord; and there is none else. (Isaiah 45:18)

And there is no God else beside me; a just God and a Saviour; there is none beside me. Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else. (Isaiah 45:21-22)

Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying,

My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.  
(Isaiah 46:9–10)

I especially like the quotation from Isaiah 45:21, wherein the Lord calls himself a “Saviour.” And when in Isaiah 43:11 he insists that he is the *only* Savior, then according to your reasoning, that means that the Savior, “Christ the Lord,” announced to the shepherds in the field near Bethlehem can be only one person.

But that is aside from the subject at hand: is Jehovah alone in the heavens or not? *It is possible to read these Isaiah passages in isolation, and draw that conclusion, but the only trinitarian doctrine that could survive this interpretation is modalism—and you made it clear that you don’t believe that.*

If we read these chapters in their entirety, it is clear that the Lord is contrasting himself to idols—the false gods that men foolishly worship. I like your phrase, “the trial of the false gods.” The Lord is *not* rejecting true Gods, if such there be, that nobody on earth worships because they are out of our reckoning. Isaiah 46, for instance, starts off by talking about Bel and Nebo—burdens to their worshipers. Isaiah 44 describes men cutting down trees and making a barbecue with part of the wood and an idol with the other part. But *nowhere* in all of this does Jehovah say, “I have no divine Father” or “I have no divine son,” which lets both of us off the hook; what he says is something like “there is no God to be preferred to me.” Bel and Nebo are not Gods, they are just earthbound, useless man-made objects that never enter into the Lord’s presence.

Do you understand that we perfectly well accept the statements in the Bible about the “gods of the nations” (Psalm 96:5)? Such “gods” have *nothing whatsoever* to do with *any* LDS teaching. The countless divine beings to which Elder McConkie gives a wave of his hand are *not* the “gods of the nations” and have nothing whatever to do with this earth and its heavens.

Now I could go on (and on and on), but I won’t. The important things that we discover are:

LDS doctrine is *not* polytheistic. It is not as strictly monotheistic as Islam or modern Judaism either—but then, neither is “mainstream” Christianity.

The Bible passages most commonly used to argue “pure monotheism” are as hard on mainstream creedal trinitarianism as

they are on LDS precreedal trinitarianism. You will certainly throw your baby out with our bathwater if you insist on your quite uncompromising—and somewhat blinkered—reading of the Bible passages.

Moving along: as I pointed out, the belief that God was once a man is not doctrine, because it is not found in any binding or authoritative source. Having said that, I must add that most or all of us do believe it, but we don't claim to know how that state of affairs came to be, or if he has a Heavenly Father of his own, or the particulars of how God came to be God. But let me make it clear that we do *not* think of God as just “the guy who got the top job.” He is far more than that. LDS writings about God, from the earliest period down to today, uniformly regard him in the most reverent and worshipful terms. Thus, contrary to your rather cavalier treatment of the subject, Isaiah 29:16 does *not* describe our view of God at all; hence, the passage does not refute our view.

Your claim that God “is the Creator of . . . everything in the universe, including time itself” (p. 60) is one that I do not find support for, either in the passages you have cited or in any other scriptures. I cannot imagine where you got it from, unless it was from the Greek philosophy that you say has no influence on Christian thought. God is eternal because he has always existed in time, and always will do so, *not* because he exists in a state that is somehow outside of the time process. In fact, each and every time we talk about God's doing something (such as creating the earth), we describe his bringing about a state of affairs that did not exist before his intervention and which did exist afterwards. God's actions happen in time. Therefore he is operating within time. He is “eternal” because he continues forever; there is no future time when he will not exist, and there was no past time when he was not around.

The statement you quote from Jeremiah 23:24 that God “fill[s] heaven and earth” (p. 61) does not grab me as meaning that he personally occupies all of the space therein. It seems rather to say that he “fills” those places just as I fill this page, or as you might fill a suitcase when you pack it—by placing other things in them. And the other Jeremiah passage (you referenced 10:10 on p. 61, but it's actually 10:11) is yet again referring to idols (as verses 9 and 10 make plain)—false gods that created nothing and

that will “perish from the *earth*, and from *under* these heavens” (emphasis added). True Gods aren’t on the earth, and no other celestial beings are mentioned or even considered in this passage.

You argue that “Man likes to attempt to make God in *man’s* image” (p. 59). This may be true, but it is also unnecessary, since God got there first, making man in *his* own image. In fact it is significant that whenever God appears to man, he is in human form. This is consistent, from the time that the Lord, in company with two unnamed others, appeared before Abraham (see Genesis 18), to the time that Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy others saw the God of Israel (see Exodus 24:9–11), to the appearance of the risen Lord before John on Patmos (see Revelation 1:13–16). And let us not forget the appearance of the Father and the Son to Joseph Smith in the spring of 1820. You say, “The God of the Bible will not allow himself to be put into human categories” (p. 60), but one of two things is happening here: either he is going to the trouble of *appearing* human (as the Gnostics said of Christ)—in which case he *wants* us to think of him that way—or else he appears that way because he really *is* that way—that is, human form is his “native” form.

You argue further that “the God of Mormonism did not, in reality, create *all things*” (p. 61), to which I respond, “all *what* things?” I venture to say that he did in fact create “all things” that were within the knowledge of the authors of the Bible and, indeed, that are within the knowledge of modern science, including astronomy. For the idea of God as merely the God of this little planet is a silly anti-Mormon caricature that comes right out of the first-grade textbook of the Ed Decker School of Nonsense Polemics. Please don’t trot it out again. The *real* “God of Mormonism” says this about his creations: “worlds without number have I created; and . . . by the Son I created them” (Moses 1:33).

True, he did not create the elements. But then, the Bible never says that he did. Genesis 1:1–2 makes it clear that at the commencement of the creation, the earth was chaos without form. It explicitly does *not* say that God created the chaos before he started organizing it. That doesn’t mean that God couldn’t have done so, but it does mean that you *absolutely cannot* argue a creation *ex nihilo* from the Bible; it is not there. It comes from

that Greek philosophy that you insist does not influence Christian thought, and it comes from *no other source*.

You seem to feel that you have proved your case about what God is really like. You also seem to think you have refuted, with the use of the Bible, "the Mormon concept of God." You haven't, simply because you haven't really understood it. If you were to get your LDS theology from authoritative LDS sources, instead of from speculative works such as *The Seer*, or anti-Mormon sources such as *The God Makers*, then you would be in a position to critique the real thing and not just the caricature. But then, I suspect the real thing might not prove such an easy target. Not being made of straw, it might prove rather harder to demolish.

Mr. White, if you really want to have a dialogue, then I sincerely suggest that you put away your anti-Mormon books. Do not let this sort of propaganda blind you to the truth that is found within the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. We know that it is possible for willful men to find all manner of criticisms against the Lord's church and kingdom. They did it in Jesus' lifetime, so of course they will do it again now. Can you understand that this does not faze us at all?

Your discussion of the passages of scripture that you anticipate in response is interesting, if a little presumptuous. Nevertheless, it is good to know that you are aware of them. You quoted 1 Corinthians 8:4-6 thus:

As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one. For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,) But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him. (p. 64)

You argue that since Paul is talking about whether it really matters if Christians eat meat that has been offered to idols or not, the "gods" and "lords" he refers to are simply idols. I agree that the *context* of this passage is a discussion of the issue of eating

meat offered to idols. But that in no way abrogates Paul's right to make an *obiter dicta* comment about another topic.

Verse 6 makes it clear that Paul sees that the Father and the Son have different roles, and further, that the Father *is* the "one God" on his own, while the Son is "one Lord" in a manner somehow separate from the Father. He is clearly *not* saying that the one God consists of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; for Paul, the one God is the Father, and Jesus is *someone else*.

This doesn't mean that you can't hold a different view, but if you do, then you will either have to deal with Paul's view on this matter, or else admit that the Bible is not your only source of enlightenment on the subject of the Godhead.

But the verse you have focused on is verse 5, where Paul says, "For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many)," and you argue that these "gods many and lords many" are exclusively and only idols. I'm afraid that this verse doesn't take you all the way there.

To start with, Paul says that those "that are called gods" are "in heaven or in earth." As we discussed previously, idols exist only on earth. So when Paul distinguishes between *two groups* of beings "that are called gods," the one group in heaven and the other on earth, he is making a clear distinction between those that are *rightly* called gods—those that dwell in heaven—and those that are *wrongly* so called, that are only on the earth. Thus Paul can add "(as there be gods many, and lords many,) But to *us* there is but one God, the Father . . . and one Lord Jesus Christ" (emphasis added). Paul clearly has no problem with the existence of divine beings other than the Father and the Son, but he is clear they are not anything to *us*.

Your introduction of other translations of this passage is yet another vote of no confidence in the Bible we use. But those translations dramatically illustrate the translation problem I mentioned in my first two letters. Consider the NIV rendering you quoted: "For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many 'gods' and many 'lords')." What the KJV renders "that are called," the NIV gives as "so-called." They both look synonymous to me, but "so-called" carries an implication of falseness that the KJV does not show. Can you guarantee that Paul's own words conveyed this

implication? The giveaway in this translation is the quotation marks around *gods* and *lords* in the parenthetical portion. Do you expect me to believe that any accepted Greek manuscript uses quotation marks to imply falseness? Do they use them at all? Or indeed any form of punctuation? The quotation marks are clear indications not of the actual meaning of the text but of the translators' own preferences.

Your discussion of the stoning of Stephen is, to be fair, a good and intelligent attempt to view this event from a mainstream perspective. However, I don't think you make your case. While some people might imagine that Jesus is actually standing upon his Father's hand, I think it is clear that Stephen is talking about the right-hand *side*. You argue that this refers to "the position of power and authority," and that may indeed be what is intended, but Stephen clearly *said* that he saw Jesus "on the right hand of God"—that is, whatever "position of power and authority" Jesus occupied, it was a definite spatial position with relation to another person. How, I might ask, is it possible to stand to the right of someone or something that is everywhere? That which has no boundaries also has no right or left side. Whatever Stephen saw, Jesus was standing on the right of the picture.

In support of your interpretation, you argue that "God is spirit, and a spirit does not have flesh and bones." But you seem to have forgotten some of your own rules about reading scriptures. Stephen was neither praising God nor declaring deep truths, both of which situations may call for a certain "poetic license"; he was describing, in plain and simple language, what he saw. Eyewitness testimony takes precedence over syllogisms.

I shall save my discussion of John 4:24 for another letter.

I must say, I did enjoy your minidiscourse on the subject of idolatry, even if it was a little bit pointed (i.e., in my direction). You said, "One can make a god out of almost anything: As someone put it—some people get up in the morning and shave their god in the mirror, others get into their god and drive it to work, while others sit in front of their god for hours each night and simply watch it. Idolatry is alive and well today" (p. 64). That is true. And, may I humbly point out, placing the Word ahead of the Speaker—putting the Bible before the One who revealed the truths contained therein—is also a form of idolatry.

Now, this letter is already too long, but I did promise to mention some of the problems attendant upon the idea of an absolutely unchanging God. So let us consider these briefly.

The first question I would ask you to consider is this: if a rational being chooses to do something, knowing the consequences of that action, is it not logical to conclude that that being *intends* to bring those consequences about? This question is important, because you seem to believe that God created each one of us in a conscious, deliberate, and rational act of creation. But you also believe that God's foreknowledge is absolute and unchanging—he always knew what he knows now about the future. He therefore knew, at the moment he created Hitler, of the death and misery that Hitler would bring into the world. As an absolutely free being, God could have chosen *not* to create Hitler. And he presumably made the same choice with Stalin, Pol Pot, and other ghastly murderers. In each case his choice was rational, absolutely free, and undertaken in full and perfect foreknowledge of the consequences, but he did create them. Since he could have chosen not to, and thus prevented World War II, the Holocaust, the Gulags, and the Killing Fields, is it not logical to conclude that he caused those catastrophes to happen?

Take it one step further; we believe that Satan was once one of the premortal sons of God, but that he rebelled and was cast out. You evidently believe that God knowingly and perspicaciously created Satan—again, with full foreknowledge of the consequences. God *could have chosen not* to create Satan—but he did create him; as a result of *that* choice, there is evil in the world. Your theology leads to the inescapable conclusion that God is personally and immediately responsible, if not for individual evil acts, then for the existence of evil. It is here because God chose that it should be here.

So, is evil good? Obviously not. Is God good? I think that you would agree with me that, in a moral sense, God is good. He always and only chooses good over evil. But your theology has a free, rational, powerful, and morally good being knowingly bringing evil into existence. He could prevent evil simply by choosing to create men and women who would always exercise their free will to do good and never evil, but he chooses otherwise.



This is, of course, a bit of an old chestnut, but it doesn't go away; we keep meeting skeptics who throw it up at us. Of course we go back to agency, and of course they say, "why couldn't God just create people who would freely choose to only do good?" They expect this question to stump us. In fact, it doesn't. The "problem" of evil is *not* a problem for LDS theology; it is only a problem for those theologies that are influenced by platonic ideas.

But indeed, it is actually questionable whether God, if he was exactly as you view him, could do anything at all. You insist that God is self-existent, outside of time, and not limited *in any way* by his creation. Above, I argued that since God's acts in the world happen in time, he must be also within the time process. This is because his actions happen at a specific time; Israel gets trapped by the Egyptian army, and right then God parts the Red Sea. He did not part it the previous month or the following week or in 1973 during the Yom Kippur war; his timing was perfect. But even if he had parted it at any of those other times, the fact remains that that is an act that takes place entirely in time. If God was outside time, as you claim, how would that be possible?

And even if he was within time, could he still do anything? Action always requires a decision. You said to me that God never changes his mind. That means that he cannot make a decision, since a decision is a change of mind. If God can't decide to do anything, how can he then do it?

And not only how, but why? If God is not limited in any way by his creation, then he is not dependent on it for anything. He is not God *because* we worship him; we worship him *because* he is God. He is wholly "other"—you said so—and so he doesn't need us for anything, right?

So why did he create us? He must have had a reason to create us, because he is rational and not capricious. But what reason could that be? He doesn't depend on us for anything, remember? Not even his emotional states, right? If God went to the trouble of creating us—however little trouble that might be for an omnipotent being—then he must have wanted to do so. And creating us satisfied that want. He is, therefore, happier with us around. We make him happier. Or, to put it another way, we influence his ability to be happy—we move him, if you like.

But we just *couldn't* move a God who was an abstract bundle of platonic absolutes, could we?

Well, this letter is far longer than it should have been. But I want you to understand that there are strong, rational criticisms for *every* belief under heaven. You cannot arrive at absolute truth by human means—reading, studying, and discussion—only. There is a way to know for certain what God really wants of you. All you have to do is humble yourself in prayer before him. Read the Book of Mormon, ponder it in your heart, and ask him in sincere prayer if it is true. I testify that he will answer your prayer.

As always, your friend,

Elder Hahn

### Letter 5: What Think Ye of Christ?

Dear Mr. White,

Thank you for writing a letter of manageable length. Since you seem determined to continue to try to teach me LDS doctrine, despite my continued requests that you leave that to me, perhaps you would be so kind as to confine yourself to official, canonical sources—namely, the four standard works.

You do not seem to notice when I correct your misconceptions about our teachings. For example, in this letter you say, “as you know, in Mormon belief, the Father and the Son are separate and distinct individuals, and separate and distinct gods” (p. 68). As I know and have tried to explain to you, it is indeed our doctrine that the Father and the Son are separate and distinct individuals. But “separate and distinct gods”? With a small *g*? That doesn’t sound very much like our belief. As I said in my last letter, God the Father, his Son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost are three separate and distinct divine beings. You can call them “Gods” if you want. But they are united in purpose, in thought, and in power; in all things they act as one. Therefore it is entirely correct to call them “one God.” And that is pretty much how we generally think of them.

The fact that some passages in the Bible use the construct “Jehovah Elohim,” thus giving the Father’s name to the Son as well (see p. 70), does not even begin to be a problem for me. I don’t know about you, but I also use my father’s name. I suspect that you probably do, too. One of the things a son almost always inherits is his father’s name.

I must say that I have read the talk by Elder McConkie that you give little excerpts from. Once again, I do not know if you are making this argument on your own, or if it comes from others. If the latter, I would once again earnestly invite you to put away your anti-Mormon books and get the truth from the source.

If the argument is your own work, then I must be blunt with you: I have read the entire talk, and you are not using it responsibly. In his talk Elder McConkie was addressing a particular development that was happening at Brigham Young University at the time. My brother was studying there then, and some students had

decided that their relationship with Jesus was so “special” that they could ignore the other members of the Godhead. They felt that, instead of praying to the Father in the name of the Son, they could pray to Jesus in his own name. This was contrary to our doctrine (see Colossians 3:17) and a departure from correct teaching—a heresy, if you will—and it fell to Elder McConkie to correct it. He was absolutely *not* saying that Latter-day Saints do not or should not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. He was saying that there is no such relationship that excludes the other members of the Godhead. If you are trying to make his words mean something else, then the most charitable thing I can say about your attempt here is that it is *very* tendentious and tends to cast doubt on your sincerity.

While on this subject, I can’t help pointing out that apostles are often called upon to do just what Elder McConkie did—that is, correct false teachings. That’s why Paul and James look like they were disagreeing with each other, when they really weren’t—Paul was correcting some “Judaizers,” while James needed to set some “Antinomians” straight. Be honest for just a moment; couldn’t your church use some living apostles once in a while?

With regard to your Isaiah passages: please refer to my previous letter. Although I was not thinking of the specific issues you raise now, I think you will find that I have dealt with them anyway.

You say that it is “*utterly impossible, on the basis of the Bible, to distinguish between Jehovah and Elohim*” (p. 71). I suggest that it is a good deal more possible than you realize. For one thing, it is clear that, although the terms Jehovah and Elohim are often used together in the Old Testament, they are not always used interchangeably. For example, while there are many instances where expressions such as “sons of God” or “sons of the most High” appear in the Old Testament, I have never seen even one reference to “sons of the Lord” or “sons of Jehovah.”

For another thing, I notice that you rely almost exclusively on the Old Testament. This is interesting, because as a Christian I would expect you to regard the New Testament as somewhat more definitive as far as your faith is concerned. When we look at the New Testament, what do we find?

The first thing we notice is that it quotes the Old Testament all over the place. (If Jerald and Sandra Tanner were Jewish anti-

Christians instead of Protestant anti-Mormons, they would have a field day “proving” that the New Testament simply “plagiarizes” the Old.) And the quotations from the Old Testament are translated into Greek.

How does *Jehovah* appear in the Greek New Testament? As *Kyrios*. This gets translated as “Lord” in English.

How does *Elohim* appear in the Greek New Testament? As *Theos*—especially *Ho Theos*. This, of course, gets translated as “God” in English.

Of course the same words appear in many places in the New Testament that are not merely quotations from the Old. And you will find that *Lord* usually refers to Jesus—especially after his resurrection—while *God* usually refers to the Father.

As I mentioned in my last letter: in a number of places in your favorite Old Testament book, Isaiah, the Lord announces that he is the one and only Savior (see Isaiah 43:3, 11; 45:15). And when the angel appeared to the shepherds in the field outside Bethlehem, he said to them, “For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11).

Now we may never really know what the angel’s words were in the original Aramaic, but it seems reasonable that it would be something like, “a Savior, who is the anointed Jehovah.”

But don’t just take Luke’s word for it. In John 1:1–2 we read, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God.” My brother explained that the first and third “God” in this passage comes from Greek *Ho Theos*—the God—while the second occurrence was simply *Theos*. So this could be rendered, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with The God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with The God.”

Now we know that Jesus is the Word—I’m sure I don’t even have to mention verse 14, because you’re probably way ahead of me here. So Jesus is “God,” and in the beginning he was *with* “The God.” So who is “The God?”

While we ponder this, have a look at verse 3: “All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.” That’s pretty definite, isn’t it? The Word (a) was God, (b) was with The God in the beginning, and (c) made everything. He’s starting to sound very much like the Old Testament Jehovah,

with what you could call a "Christian spin." (It has just occurred to me, at this point in our discussion, that John would probably make a better Mormon than he would a Baptist.)

It seems pretty clear that, according to John, in the beginning Jesus was God *in some sense* and was with another being who can be identified as "The God." You have pointed out that Elohim basically means "The God," so this looks like a good match; the other being, "The God," is Elohim. And what does Jesus do, in the beginning, while he is with Elohim? He creates "all things." You've made a pretty strong case from the Old Testament that Jehovah created all things, so we've got another good match.

On another occasion, Jesus was speaking with the Pharisees and told them that Abraham had rejoiced to see his day. They responded that he was too young to have seen Abraham. He answered, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58). This cross-references back to Exodus 3:14, wherein Jehovah tells Moses that his name is "I Am."

Now there are three possible ways to understand this statement. Jesus could be saying, "I'm a lot older than I look; I'm actually older than Abraham," to which the Jews would likely respond, "he's cracked, this guy." Or he could have meant, "Jehovah lived before Abraham," to which they would probably say, "your point being?" Or, he could be saying "I am Jehovah, who lived before Abraham," at which point they would respond as they did two chapters later, when he called himself the Son of God—they would pick up stones. And in fact this is precisely what they did do (see John 8:59), clearly showing how they understood this statement; Jesus was claiming for himself the *personal* name of Jehovah—and this despite the fact that he always distinguished himself from his Father.

Yes, Jesus is Jehovah. And in making his covenant with Israel, through Moses, he did indeed command them to worship him—that was basic to the covenant. But when he was on the earth as a mortal, Jesus mediated a *new* covenant and deflected all worship to his Father—despite the fact that it was his due. And so we do as he taught, praying to the Father in his name, instead of to Jesus.

Near the end of your discourse on Jehovah as the Father, you make the following accusation: "You have a god before Jehovah,

Elder Hahn! Your Mormon beliefs are causing you to break the very first commandment of God himself!" (p. 72).

And there's that small *g* again! I don't often get to see logic this bad, so I feel privileged to have seen this one. Can't you see the fallacy in this argument? You have gone to a whole lot of trouble to show that Jehovah is the Father. If you are right about that, and we are wrong, then we have indeed been worshipping Jehovah all along, and just didn't know it. On the other hand, if we are right and you are wrong, then Jehovah himself has commanded us to worship the Father in his name. *In neither case* are we breaking the first commandment.

There is absolutely no doubt at all in my mind that if we were in fact directing our worship to the Son, on the basis of his being Jehovah, you would argue (and with slightly better logic) that we were breaking the first commandment on the basis of *your* conclusion that Jehovah is the Father. Thus, whichever member of the Godhead we gave priority to in worship, you would still make the same accusation.

I have often wondered how it is that people can think it so sinful of us to understand verses of scripture differently from them. Thank you for showing me how it works.

Mr. White, if believing that it is a sin to be a Mormon helps you sleep better at night, then don't let me stop you. Just don't try to convince me with such feeble arguments.

Now, you brought up the endowment ceremony. You are right that it is sacred, and we will not be discussing it. That is not to say that we cannot discuss the doctrines it contains, since those doctrines are fully and clearly attested in the scriptures—including, but not limited to, the Bible.

And so, referring back to John 1:3, we see again that "all things were made by him [Jesus]; and without him was not any thing made that was made."

This fits in nicely with 1 Corinthians 8:6 which says: "But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him." Jesus clearly has a very significant part to play in the creation; in fact, it seems that he did it himself. Now if it happens that he had others assisting him in that work—in the nature of one or more subordinates who worked under his direction—then does

that diminish his right to claim the work as his? Not at all. If an architect can say “I built this building” when it was really built by a couple hundred sweaty-looking guys in hard hats operating big machines, or if a conductor can say, “Now I will play *Finlandia*” and then wave his baton at seventy-five other people who actually produce the sound, then surely the Lord can say, “I created everything” even if others were also involved.

Now, I have read the passages you referred me to, namely Isaiah 6:9; Acts 28:25–26; Exodus 4:11; and 1 Corinthians 12:10–11 (see p. 73), and I find *nothing* therein that identifies the Father as Jehovah. Nor do I find anything that identifies the Holy Ghost as Jehovah. I realize that Acts 28 quotes Isaiah 6, and says that it was the Holy Ghost who spoke those words to Isaiah, which words he attributes to the Lord (not in capitals, incidentally) but why shouldn’t he? If the Holy Ghost tells a prophet something, then that something is the word of the Lord. The Holy Ghost is preeminently a messenger, and as such speaks on behalf of the Father and the Son. Throughout the ancient world, the concept of the royal messenger who speaks in the name and with the authority of the king is widespread and firmly established. The Holy Ghost can be readily understood in that context. It does not enhance our understanding of scripture either to impose our cultural models on the ancients or to ignore their cultural models—which is precisely what you do when you try to superimpose your post-Nicene understanding of the Trinity on passages that were written by men who had no such notions.

Thank you for at last getting to a discussion of your own beliefs—in dealing with the Trinity—instead of merely denigrating mine. Once we get down to the clear biblical teachings about the Godhead, we can help individuals such as yourself understand why Bible believers such as myself do not believe in such unscriptural and man-made notions as the Trinity.

By the way, do you find that last sentence condescending and a little hackle-raising? I’m not surprised; I lifted it straight out of your letter (see p. 75).

I counted over 4,300 words in your letter; of these, only the last portion—the portion on the Trinity, a mere 842 words—actually conveyed your own beliefs in any positive way. The remainder, the bulk of your letter, was nothing more than an attack upon



my beliefs. I wonder—why is this so? As missionaries, we encounter people of many creeds and denominations. We find no need to undermine their beliefs before presenting the message of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to them. Our message is entirely positive and not at all negative. If we were to devote eighty percent of our teaching to attacking what others believe, as you have done, our missionary discussions would have to be increased in length by a factor of five.

Now to the question at hand. I thank you for your explanation of the Trinity, since it is the clearest and most concise explanation I have seen. For all that, it is still a little fuzzy around the edges, but it is still a lot clearer than anyone else has ever been able to explain it to me.

Once again, as I have said before, we are not polytheists. Perhaps, though, we are coming down to the nub of where we differ, since you clearly believe that the Trinity is one being, containing three persons, while we believe that the Godhead contains three beings, each of whom is a person.

I don't want to get involved in a beat-up on the Jehovah's Witnesses, although I would point out that they arrive at their conclusions in exactly the same way you do—by reading the Bible as the one and only source of doctrinal authority. But since you brought up the subject of subordinationism, I would point out that there is a whole lot of biblical support for such a doctrine. I have already mentioned 1 Corinthians 8:6 twice. Let us look at another passage that says something quite similar: "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5). Now, it is entirely apparent, yet again, that Paul sees Jesus as someone separate from God. But more than that, he sees Jesus as the mediator between God and men. Now a mediator between two parties is—indeed, must be—a third party. Ideally, such a mediator should be completely independent, but in any event, he must be someone who is not partial to one side over the other—he can't be closer to one side than he is to the other. If he was, the trust that makes him effective would be lost.

Now if God is supreme, then Jesus must in some respect or other be somewhat less than supreme; for the underlying sense of the word *mediator* is "in between." If I were to draw a diagram—of the type that you seem fond of—it might show God the

Father “up there,” us “down here,” and Jesus in the middle. That would probably be an oversimplification, though.

There are some other important passages that address this point. One of these is John 5:19, wherein Jesus says, “The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise.” In saying that he follows the Father’s lead, Jesus is clearly proclaiming his subordinate status. But I also mention this passage because the *only* coherent explanation of it that I have ever heard is that God the Father once had a mortal life. I would be interested to hear how you explain it; for Jesus explicitly says that he can do *nothing* except what he has *seen* his Father do.

Matthew 28:18: “And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is *given* unto me in heaven and in earth” (emphasis added). “All power” sounds pretty powerful, so you may wonder why I bring this up in the first place; well, power that is *given* comes from somebody else—somebody who has it to give in the first place, somebody who therefore is *more* powerful.

John 14:28 says in part: “My Father is greater than I.” This needs no commentary.

John 20:21: “Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.” What could be clearer than this? The Father sent Jesus, and Jesus obeyed; now Jesus is sending the apostles in like manner. And the apostles went, too, because they were subordinate to Jesus; just as Jesus went where and when the Father sent him, because he was subordinate to his Father.

First Corinthians 11:3: “But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; . . . and the head of Christ is God.” Skipping the “controversial” bit of that verse, only because it does not relate to the subject at hand, this becomes another passage that needs no commentary. Christ is subordinate to the Father.

Now once again, I had thought to talk a little about some other issues in this letter, but I think I’ve made my point; using the Bible, you have put forward a good case for your interpretation. I believe that I have shown that the Bible also supports our interpretation, which is different from yours, to say the least. You would clearly have me abandon my interpretation in favor of

yours, but on what basis? Both are equally supportable from the Bible, depending only upon one's presuppositions; so what is the solution?

Fortunately, there is a solution, and we've found it. It is that God has chosen to speak to his children again. He has raised up prophets in our time and revealed his mind and will to them. He has even chosen to appear to some of them in person.

In Doctrine and Covenants 110:3-4 we read:

His eyes were as a flame of fire; the hair of his head was white like the pure snow; his countenance shone above the brightness of the sun; and his voice was as the sound of the rushing of great waters, even the voice of Jehovah, saying: . . . I am he who liveth, I am he who was slain; I am your advocate with the Father.

For us, that settles the matter.

Now I don't expect it to settle the matter for you, at least not yet. It does for me, because I have a testimony of the restored gospel; I know that the Doctrine and Covenants is the word of God, just as the Bible is. And you can gain the same testimony. But you will not find it in any books, nor in all the books in the world, for it is not there. You can only gain it in personal communication with your Father in Heaven.

Therefore I once again urge you to open your mind and your heart. Put away your collection of anti-Mormon books. They are of no value. Read the Book of Mormon and ponder what you read. Then ask the Father in faith, nothing doubting. I testify that you will receive a sure witness and testimony that it is true. And you will find, as I have, that this testimony will be able to withstand all human calculations that are brought against it.

May you have a desire to seek the Lord's will.

Elder Hahn

### Letter 6: The Prophet of the Lord

Dear Mr. White,

You said to me that “Any kind of rebuttal of what I had written to you would require more than two sheets of paper, but I could tell your letter contained no more than that” (p. 79).

This is getting confusing. I sent you an eight-page letter, and you seem to have received only two. You also quoted me as saying, “Your interpretation of these passages of the Bible lacks the proper authorization, the proper authority. God has restored the priesthood authority upon the earth, and since God has always operated through this means, and you do not have this authority, you lack the proper means of interpretation, and, therefore, the proper understanding of the Bible” (pp. 79–80). I’m sorry, but I honestly don’t remember saying that your interpretations were wrong because you didn’t have the priesthood. I have clearly mis-spoken if I said that.

So that there may be no misunderstanding, let me just say that priesthood authority is *not* required to understand the scriptures correctly. That is not our doctrine. What is required is the gift of the Holy Ghost, which is conferred by the laying on of hands by those who hold the priesthood. Without that gift, which is the power by which the scriptures were given in the first place (see 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20–21), we are left entirely to our own devices and are guaranteed to get things wrong.

I would just like to mention that my mother has been the Gospel Doctrine teacher in our ward for a lot of years, and her understanding of the scriptures is widely respected. She doesn’t hold the priesthood, and it has never occurred to any Latter-day Saint that she shouldn’t be teaching the scriptures. We did have a Baptist family visit our ward who thought it was strange that a woman should be teaching, though.

I hope you will excuse me for the delay in replying to you. As I believe I made clear in my second letter, I have only a very few books with me. It was therefore necessary for me to write home to get some information relevant to the contents of your letter.

I have read your letter very carefully. I am sorry to say that I find it very disappointing, in more ways than one. I have asked

you repeatedly to put away your anti-Mormon books and read the Book of Mormon with an open mind. In this letter you have relied on those anti-Mormon books more than ever.

You say that my testimony of the gospel “stands in the way of [my] acceptance of the true gospel of Jesus Christ. Anything that stands between a person and the gospel must be dealt with—it must be exposed by the light of truth. If this means ‘tearing down’ falsehoods, then so be it” (pp. 82–83).

This, if I may point out, is *not* the *modus operandi* of the ancient apostles. Consider the case of Paul, who took the gospel to the gentiles. In Ephesus, the famous cult center of the goddess Diana (or Artemis), there was a confrontation with the devotees of that goddess. Do I need to remind you that they, and not Paul or his companions, started the confrontation? Must I labor the point that *all* of the “tearing down [of] falsehoods” was done by the supporters of Diana? Is it lost on you that Paul *never once* attacked the worship of Diana in any way—not in his parting speech in Acts 20 and not in his long letter to the Ephesians? Would you call me smug if I pointed out that we follow the example of Paul as completely as you are following the example of Paul’s enemies?

You claim that you don’t enjoy repeating slander against the good name of Joseph Smith, or trying to tear down my testimony of his divine calling. I’m sorry, but try as I may, I can’t find those claims convincing. You describe the little bits of detail found by professional anti-Mormon Wesley P. Walters as “rich rewards.” With the air of a magician about to produce a rabbit, or a salesman about to offer me a free set of steak knives, you say “there is more . . . much more” (p. 99). This, if I may say so, sounds like you are rather enjoying yourself.

But let us get into the meat of the thing, and discover what substance, if any, there is to your arguments that Joseph Smith is to be rejected as a true prophet.

With regard to latter-day revelation, you say, “*even if* such a thing as latter-day revelation existed, it would not in any way *supersede*, or contradict, what the Bible says *in the passages we have examined*” (p. 80, emphasis added). The first thing that leaps out from this statement is the “even if” at the start. You really aren’t prepared to consider seriously the possibility that the Lord might

still want to speak to prophets, are you? Your mind is pretty firmly made up on this point, isn't it?

The second thing is that not only must latter-day revelation not contradict what has been revealed before, for you it cannot even *supersede* it. But that is *precisely* what new revelation does do. Does Acts 15 supersede Leviticus, or not? If not, why don't you live the law of Moses? If so, why can't latter-day revelation do the same?

It becomes clear after all that there is, for you, one source of truth, and only one. It is the Bible. You pray to your Father in Heaven, and I'm sure you are sincere, but you don't really expect any answers to come from anywhere but the pages of your Bible. That is your real god. That is the one you truly worship. That is the one whose uniqueness you so fiercely defend.

And not only must any new revelation not supersede or contradict the Bible, it must fully agree with "*the passages we have examined.*" Not only is the Bible the only guide to all truth, but you choose which texts to use as yardsticks. Shall we say that you have set up a game in which we have to play on your field, with your equipment, according to your rules—and with yourself as the umpire? Or shall we say there is no god but the Bible, and James White is its prophet?

You also said, "What Jesus revealed about God does not *contradict* what God had revealed before!" (p. 80). I would be interested to hear you try to persuade a rabbi of that. Actually I agree that Jesus did not teach anything that contradicted what had been previously revealed. But it is only by taking the Old and New Testaments *together* that this becomes clear. If a scholar takes the Old Testament on its own and draws his conclusions from that, together with the writings of others who have taken the same approach, and *then* approaches the New Testament with his conclusions already set, what is going to happen? Well, how many Jews joined your church last year?

In this connection, you say, "By taking the LDS position as an *a priori* assumption, and then *forcing* the Bible into the mold created by Mormon teaching, you are doing great injustice to the teachings of the Bible" (p. 81). How is this different from taking your preexisting interpretation of the Bible as an *a priori* assumption? Couldn't a Jew accuse you of doing exactly the same thing

with the New Testament—forcing the Old Testament into its “mold”? And aren’t you doing with the LDS scriptures what you would disapprove of a Jew doing with the New Testament, when you demand that it exactly conform to what went before?

You further say:

You allege that my interpretation is “incomplete” because I lack something you have—in this case, further revelation from God. And I reply, if you have further revelation from God, it will be in perfect harmony with what God has already revealed! As is plain to see, that which you call revelation from God is *not* in harmony with the Christian Scriptures, the Bible. (p. 81)

I’m sure I don’t need to reiterate the problem I have when you assume that “the Christian Scriptures” exactly equal the Bible. This is called “begging the question.”

Your examples of “contradictions” I believe we already discussed in connection with your letter on the nature of God. You claim that the statement “The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s” (D&C 130:22) contradicts a raft of scriptures. Hosea 11:9 says nothing at all about God having a body; neither does 2 Chronicles 6:18 or Jeremiah 23:24. Many people casually assume that John 4:24 does imply that God has no body, for it says, “God is a Spirit; and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.” But if saying that God is a spirit means that he can’t have a body, then what are we to make of Romans 8:9, wherein Paul tells the Saints, “But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you”? Are Christians supposed to lose their bodies? Is that perhaps what Jesus meant when he said that we were to worship God “in spirit and in truth”? You seemed corporeal enough to me when I met you last. Or is it possible that Paul meant that Christians can be “in the spirit” and still keep their bodies? If so, why can’t God do that too? Or do you believe that such things are possible for us, but beyond him?

The teaching that God has a body is authentically early Christian. St. Augustine turned his nose up at it, and eventually rewrote it. I have already discussed the LDS doctrine of the plurality of Gods, which is also comfortably at home with ancient Christianity,

but not with modern creedal Christianity. I shall simply say here that the contradiction exists only in your mind.

Therefore your statement that I “take ‘latter-day revelation’ to be superior to all else, and, if there is a contradiction, you simply dismiss the teachings of the Bible in favor of LDS doctrine” (p. 80) is simply untrue. You present it as though it were a case of a completely uniform biblical message being rejected in favor of latter-day revelation. In reality, latter-day revelation helps us decide which of several possible interpretations of many Bible passages to accept.

You go on to say that the “Mormon claim of latter-day revelation can be approached from many different angles” (p. 81). You then mention some of those angles. Conspicuous by its absence is the suggestion that one might try taking that claim seriously and examine it on the basis that it might, after all, actually be true. I humbly venture to suggest that you cannot honestly say that you have evaluated a truth claim until you have seriously considered the possibility that it might actually be true. The fact that you have not even thought that approach to be worthy of mention among your list of “angles” is most revealing.

The best possible “angle” from which to approach the Latter-day Saint doctrine of continuing revelation, together with the new scripture that it entails, is simply to ask: what if it is true? I find your entire letter to be a (very) long list of excuses to reject modern revelation without actually considering it. And from what you have said, I take it that there will probably be more.

You introduce your *ad hominem* against Joseph Smith with these words:

If your belief in Joseph Smith stands in your way of finding a real relationship with Jesus Christ, I will do whatever is necessary to remove that stumbling block, *simply because I care about you*. I do not enjoy the task—but tough love often demands that we do that which we do not like. (p. 83)

Now we know that in the Middle Ages, the dominant church of the day used to take those who disagreed with its interpretations and burn them for a crime they were pleased to call “heresy.” And they genuinely believed that they were saving souls from



hellfire, too. I'm certain a grand inquisitor would wholeheartedly agree with your dictum that "tough love often demands that we do that which we do not like."

At the same time, Jews were being forced to live in ghettos and wear yellow stars of David. At one point the Jews were forced to maintain, at their own expense, a house in each ghetto for those of their number who wanted to investigate the major Christian religion of the region. No doubt the medieval anti-Semites would approve of the slogan that "tough love often demands that we do that which we do not like."

Coming down to what your "tough love" demands that you do, it seems to be little more than breaking your own rules. While proclaiming the purity of your motives, you slip in the phrase "deceptions of Mormon leaders such as Joseph Smith" almost under my nose (p. 83, punctuation altered). But I spotted it anyway, as I also spotted your claim that the efforts of others who slandered him were "noble." Very well, so in what do these "deceptions" consist?

It appears that Joseph Smith is a deceiver for telling the story of the first vision. Before I come to that issue, I will take a moment to discuss your cavalier treatment of the martyrdom of Joseph Smith.

Your claim that "martyrs do not die with a pistol in their hands fighting back" (p. 86) comes entirely from your own cultural assumptions. The distinguishing feature of a true martyr is not passivity or pacifism, but his personal eyewitness testimony which gets him into trouble, and which he never denies. Joseph Smith claimed to see the Father and the Son. Yes, I know you think you can explain it away, but the fact remains that he did claim it, and for that reason alone his enemies hounded him, schemed and plotted against him, and finally achieved his death.

Do you genuinely believe that Joseph Smith was murdered for suppressing a scandal-mongering newspaper? Others have done the same, before and since, with perfect safety. If you ask any ten Americans which was our greatest president, I'd be surprised if fewer than eight of them named Abraham Lincoln. But he suppressed newspapers too, and he locked up hundreds of Americans for years without due process of law, and that to cope with a danger *far less* than what Joseph Smith and the Latter-day Saints

faced. For Lincoln was interested only in saving the Union as a political entity; Joseph saw that his people were in real danger of extermination. The mobs of bigots and fanatics that howled for Joseph's blood were only appeased for a short time; in less than two years the Saints were driven from Nauvoo at gunpoint, thanks largely to the good offices of "Christian" ministers.

But back to Joseph Smith. You claim, "I believe that I have already laid a sufficient foundation for the 'testing' of Joseph Smith as a prophet with regard to Deuteronomy 13:1-5" (p. 87). That is the biblical passage that warns Israel to reject prophets if they say, "Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them" (v. 2)—something that Joseph Smith never said. Joseph testified of the Father and the Son. Your *interpretations* of Joseph's teachings differ from your *interpretations* of the Bible passages of your choice, and by dint of such strained and artificial methods you are able to take Joseph's clear call to "come unto Christ" as an invitation to follow after "other gods." Is there anything that Joseph could say that would meet with your approval?

You also add, "You and I have already discussed how . . . following the advice of such LDS leaders as Bruce R. McConkie results in a direct violation of the very first commandment of God!" (p. 88). Yes we have, and I have shown that your view on this is wrongheaded, if not ridiculous. You are altogether too smug about your interpretations, Mr. White. You may regard them as having the same stature as holy writ, but forgive me if I'm not quite so persuaded. To follow Joseph is to follow the master, Jesus Christ, whose servant he was, and not any "strange god."

Your discussion of the first vision introduced rather a lot of material that I was not in a position to verify. As I mentioned, I wrote to a member of my family who has a good deal of knowledge in this area. My Aunt Jenny has written back to me, and I feel that I can do no better than to quote you the relevant portions of her letter.

### Excerpts from Aunt Jenny's Letter

Let's look into these claims that your friend makes about the first vision, and then come back to some of the scriptural issues he raises.

Your friend starts from Joseph Smith's own account and summarizes it in a paragraph containing seven points (see p. 90). The first point, "this 'revival' began some time in the second year after the Smiths' move to Manchester," is one we will return to. I will note that your friend is rather free with his quotation marks, as the word *revival* does not appear in Joseph Smith's own account. The second point, "it took place 'in the place where we lived' and spread to 'the whole district of country,'" is taken from Joseph's own words, but the key word, *spread*, is not Joseph's. I label that as the key word because it defines a very specific chain of events: according to that word, the religious excitement that Joseph describes must *start* in his neighborhood and *afterward* spread to surrounding regions. But this is not Joseph Smith's story: he says, as I'm sure you know, that the excitement "was in the place where we lived," and "indeed the whole district of country seemed affected by it," which is a different kind of picture. Joseph describes a widespread excitement which included his own neighborhood; he emphatically does not say it started there.

Now you may think I am being a little pedantic in my reading here, but I'm a lawyer, and it's my job to analyze implications closely. Your friend seems to rely on Joseph Smith's story, but he makes subtle adjustments to it. As I will show you, he is trying to make it easier to attack.

Much later in the letter, your friend introduces the Reverend Lane's account of the 1824 revivals. When your friend says that "Lane's description matches Joseph Smith's recounting of the revivals to a tee" (p. 101), he is massively overstating the case. The only point on which Lane's account matches Joseph's is that in both cases the excitement "commenced with the Methodists." To be sure, Lane's account matches your friend's "summary" of Joseph's account—which only proves that your friend has deliberately reworked Joseph's account to make it match Lane's. Joseph does not say that the excitement started in Palmyra and spread outwards from there, but simply that it happened "in the

place where we lived” and “the whole district of country seemed affected by it.”

Your friend also mentions that Joseph’s account was written “in 1838, a full eighteen years *after* the supposed events he narrates concerning the First Vision” (p. 89). This presumably is an important gap in your friend’s mind. Perhaps he feels the eighteen-year gap somehow discredits the first vision in and of itself. I should point out that your friend, who appears to be a conservative Protestant of some kind, would probably not think that the much longer gap between the birth of Christ and the writing of the Gospels would discredit those documents. Does he understand the importance of consistency?

He later says, speaking of Joseph’s account: “He tells us that he went into the ‘sacred grove’ (as modern Latter-day Saints call it) on a beautiful spring day in 1820. Did he just make a little mistake in remembering when his sister Lucy was born in his previous listing?” (p. 92). Actually, the mention of his sister Lucy being a member of the family has to do with the family’s removal to Manchester. It is a useful evidentiary clue, but its real significance seems to have escaped your friend. I will explain its importance below.

Your friend describes the Lord’s message to Joseph thus:

Smith asked the two Personages which church he should join. He was told he should join none of them: “They are all wrong—Methodists, Presbyterians, Baptists—the whole lot are in error.” Their creeds, which present the basic elements of the Christian faith, were said to be “an abomination” in the sight of God. And what of church members, the “professors” of these faiths? “They are all corrupt.” It is not that this was new for Joseph—he included this kind of rhetoric in the Book of Mormon as well when he said that one either is a part of the church of the Lamb or the church of the devil (1 Nephi 14:10). (p. 93)

I have been practicing law for over twenty years now, and I have seldom seen such skillful manipulation as this. Note again, the liberal use of quotation marks around phrases that are *not* direct quotations. Are you sure that he wrote this for you in

particular? It would seem to be better suited to people who were actually unfamiliar with the document he is abusing. He says that “creeds . . . present the basic elements of the Christian faith,” as if Christianity were creedal by definition. (It isn’t.) He cleverly equates the word *professors* with *church members* when it really refers to church *leaders*. Then in the most breathtaking display of effrontery, he says, “It is not that this was new for Joseph—he included this kind of rhetoric in the Book of Mormon as well,” a sentence that relies upon at least three hostile assumptions. Your friend assumes that the Book of Mormon, published in 1830, predates this experience, which Joseph declared happened in 1820; he assumes that Joseph wrote the Book of Mormon instead of translating it; and he assumes that Joseph was making up the entire first vision experience “as well.” All of which demonstrates that your friend is arguing from the assumptions he is trying to prove.

Your friend’s statement that “Joseph *did* tell many different stories, most of which, Elder, contradict the others on important points” (p. 94) is quite disingenuous. As a lawyer, I make this statement without fear of legal repercussions. Take the transcript of Joseph’s 1832 handwritten account of the first vision. This remarkably compact account actually agrees with the longer 1838 account in *every single detail* that it mentions about the vision. To be sure, there are a lot of details that it does not mention, including the appearance of God the Father. But in the much longer account the Father says only eight words—the bulk of the interview is clearly taken by the Son. The short account discreetly avoids mentioning the Father’s presence and sticks to the message the Lord brought to Joseph, which was that his sins were forgiven and that he was not to join any church, since they were all apostate.

Now a contradiction must be the juxtaposition of two *explicit* and incompatible statements of fact, and the 1832 version does apparently contradict the 1838 account on one point, although it is a very trivial one. Your friend has quoted the earlier account as saying that the vision took place “in the 16th year of [Joseph’s] age” (pp. 94–95). We shall be charitable to your friend on this point, since others without ill will have made the same mistake, and he may be quoting them. The mistake I refer to is the “16th.” For qualified handwriting experts have stated that the actual figure

should be the "15th," but the second digit has been smudged or overwritten.

Likewise, the mention of angels in the 1835 accounts is not a contradiction, but a generalization. The term *angel* in the first half of the nineteenth century was a generic term referring to all heavenly beings, especially when they were visiting the earth with a message. This is precisely what the Father and the Son did on that spring day in 1820, and that made them angels *par excellence*. We can reasonably infer that every Christmas, Joseph Smith, along with the rest of the Christian world, sang an old Catholic hymn that says, in part, "Come and behold him, born the King of angels." What sort of being would the King of angels be? In Joseph's time, what sort of person was the king of England? The king of England was English, and by the same token the King of angels was an angel—if not *the* angel, "the angel of his presence" in fact. There is no contradiction, and your friend is playing a shell game when he tries to manufacture one.

Your friend's rather smug (and if I may say so, unfriendly) challenge that you "produce any shred of evidence that Smith claimed to have seen God the Father prior to the year 1834, a full fourteen years after the event supposedly took place" (p. 96) is one that he thinks he makes with perfect safety. You are a full-time missionary and are not in a position to go digging up obscure historical references. It is your calling to preach the gospel. Do not neglect it for any reason.

Nevertheless, Joseph Smith makes a very clear claim on 16 February 1832 to have seen God the Father. True, this is not referring to the first vision, but it does rather upset your friend's theory of evolution. For the date of Doctrine and Covenants 76:19–24 is not in dispute, and on that date the Father and the Son appeared to Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon together. Two witnesses are better than one, and Sidney is yet another witness who had differences with Joseph (and later on with Brigham Young); Rigdon is yet another witness who left the church and died out of it. Yet he maintained his testimony to the end of his life.

But while your friend is waiting for that "shred of evidence that Smith claimed to have seen God the Father" in the first vision "prior to the year 1834," he might accept a challenge to produce

a shred of evidence that anyone claimed that Jesus was born of a virgin prior to A.D. 64. If he cannot, are you then entitled to reject the virgin birth as unhistorical? If you are not, will he apply the same standard to the first vision? I believe that careful examination will show that your friend has two quite different standards of evidence that he applies to belief systems—an almost impossibly strict one for yours and a lenient one for his. This stance is called hypocrisy.

I do not think your friend has much experience reading the scriptures; certainly he doesn't seem to understand the rule that if two texts are produced by the same author, and there exists a plausible reading of both of them that is noncontradictory, then that is the reading that should be adopted. Certainly his treatment of Doctrine and Covenants 84:22 with reference to the first vision ignores this rule.

Your friend thinks that Doctrine and Covenants 84:22 contradicts the first vision because Joseph didn't hold the Melchizedek Priesthood at that time and therefore could not have seen the face of God and lived. The problem, of course, is that nowhere in that verse, or indeed in all of that section, or anywhere else for that matter, does it state that the person who is seeing God's face must hold the priesthood *himself*. That is the assumption that your friend relies on, and it is utterly baseless. The passage in question simply says that the priesthood is the power that makes it possible for a person to see the face of God and live. And that priesthood power was certainly present during the first vision; for God the Father is the source of all power, while the Son of God uniquely possesses that priesthood—it is his and anciently was named for him; to men here on the earth it is merely delegated.

Others, including General Authorities of the church, have offered an alternative explanation. They have suggested that the person who is seeing God's face must indeed hold the priesthood himself, *if and only if the theophany occurs at a time when the priesthood is on the earth*. Since the priesthood was *not* on the earth in 1820, Joseph could see the Father at that time even without it.

Thus the three choices your friend offers you for understanding this passage comprise a false dilemma. Note the loaded phrases with which he tries to build up his case—"the priesthood,

a teaching that . . . had begun to evolve in his mind” and “He asserts that it is impossible for a man who does not have the priesthood to see the face of God . . . and live to tell about it.” *Who* asserts that? Actually your friend does; note how breezily he tries to palm off his own opinion as Joseph’s assertion. “Mormon leaders have come up with some ingenious ways around this obvious contradiction” (pp. 96–97)—obvious, that is, to your friend; to those who know how to read the scriptures and who understand the doctrine of the priesthood, there is no contradiction at all. And, “I would like to suggest to you that the reason Smith could say what he did in D&C 84:21–22 without even noticing that he was creating a contradiction is simply that at this point in time (1832) he had never claimed to have seen God the Father!” (p. 97). How modest of him to merely “suggest” this, all the time dropping his subliminal little hints that Joseph was “*creating* a contradiction,” that is, he was making it all up! And how about “Smith’s beliefs obviously evolved over time” (p. 97), a mantra that he likes to keep repeating. This is a well-known technique of manipulation; he thinks that if he repeats it often enough, you will start to accept it without ever having actually examined it. But he shows real temerity when he takes it upon himself to tell you what “you must accept”; playing fast and loose with facts and logic, to borrow your friend’s phrase, “does not qualify one as a prophet, either” (p. 97).

Your friend mentions E. D. Howe’s classic of anti-Mormon letters (I call it the *Mein Kampf* of the anti-Mormon movement) and makes the predictable argument from Howe’s silence about the first vision (see p. 97). Howe, incidentally, was arguing the thesis that the Book of Mormon was originally written as a money-making novel and was only later worked over into a religious book; thus talking about the first vision would not have helped him. A number of years ago, Professor Hugh W. Nibley of BYU wrote an essay entitled “Censoring the Joseph Smith Story” (later included in his *Tinkling Cymbals and Sounding Brass*). In it he clearly showed that anti-Mormon writers have universally suppressed or distorted the first vision story; even years after it was officially published and included in the scriptures of the church, the church’s critics have fought shy of it or seriously misused it. Your friend himself has carefully manipulated Joseph Smith’s



account, even while claiming to rely upon it; he has been somewhat more subtle than most of his predecessors, though.

But Nibley also found some very clear indications that the first vision story was known from a much earlier date. In 1829, a journalist named Abner Cole wrote a series of satirical articles in a Palmyra newspaper. His "Book of Pukei" was intended as a satire on the Book of Mormon, but he satirized everything he could—including Moroni and the first vision. Oh yes, it was talked about, all right. Mocked and distorted though it was, it was still recognizable.

You told me that your friend is using some anti-Mormon books. This is certainly true, to some extent. His use of some passages from the *Journal of Discourses* to claim that certain early church leaders didn't know anything about the first vision is regurgitated nonsense that he would have obtained from a Salt Lake City outfit headed by Jerald and Sandra Tanner. But there are many indications in your friend's letter that he is arguing the anti-Mormon case in his own right and not simply believing what others tell him.

Be that as it may, those passages from the *Journal of Discourses* do not prove that the early Brethren didn't know about the first vision in the mid-nineteenth century. Your friend is clearly ignorant of the competent answers that have been made to this silly claim. His conclusion that the Brethren were confused by the "evolving" story of the first vision (for *thirty-one years* after it stopped "evolving" and was published in its final form) is simply ludicrous, and it serves as an excellent illustration of how much influence wishful thinking has over his reasoning processes. For the very Brethren he quotes were intimately involved in having Joseph's history published in England and America; of course they knew it. His argument about whether "the First Vision story as you tell it today was being told over and over again back in 1869" is again manipulative. That story doesn't get told "over and over again" in the church even today; while on the other hand, if someone were to give an unprepared talk without notes and without notice in sacrament meeting next Sunday and talk about the first vision, the chances of that person making no errors at all would be slim. But the talks your friend cites—the ones in the *Journal of Discourses*—were exactly that: unprepared, without

notes, and without notice. In twenty-six volumes of such talks, one can undoubtedly find mistakes on every subject imaginable. Those mistakes prove *nothing*, because they are not even consistent with each other.

The Brigham Young quotation doesn't say what your friend (and his mentors, the Tanners) want it to say. It simply says that neither God, *nor* his angels, visited the earth with ostentatious display, but quietly, to a few chosen servants. The crucial sentence says, "But He did send his angel to this same obscure person, Joseph Smith, Jr., who afterwards became a Prophet, Seer, and Revelator, and informed him that he should not join any of the religious sects of the day, for they were all wrong" (*Discourses of Brigham Young*, 108). Now the subject of that sentence is the first "He," that is, God. The verb clause starting "and informed" relates to the subject, and not any other noun; thus, it is God, and *not* the angel, who "informed him," namely Joseph, not to join any churches. Brigham's statement is right on track.

George A. Smith's statement is interesting and actually supports what I said about the word *angel* above. For he is clearly talking about the first vision, and just as clearly is familiar with the 1838 account—the only one which gives the James 1:5 quotation in full. But he also uses the words *angel* and *angels* in the same manner that Joseph does in his 1835 account. Note that these words are the *only* hint that this statement is in any way "confused," but the speaker's obvious familiarity with the 1838 account, together with the fact that *angel* is a normal nineteenth-century word denoting all heavenly beings, including God, makes your friend's conclusion quite unwarranted.

Wilford Woodruff is also familiar with that account. He cites seven specific details from the 1838 account, in the correct order—again, including a reference to James 1:5. But he does make a fairly important mistake in that he mixes this experience up with two of Moroni's visits—the first, in 1823, and the last, in 1827. However, mixing details of three experiences together in one paragraph is of *no evidentiary value* in determining what he actually believed about *one* of those experiences. When your friend offers his conclusion thus: "The confusion of the early leaders after Smith's death is natural—Smith had *not* told one story all along, but had told many *different* stories between 1830 and his

death in 1844," he is spinning cobwebs from moonshine. Those talks, as I pointed out, were given entirely extemporaneously. Of course there will be mistakes in them. Arguing that those mistakes are due to a process of "evolution" that had reached its final form over thirty years before is a tremendous leap in logic. Woodruff conflates the first vision with two other experiences; there is no sign of his being "confused" by any earlier account of the first vision itself. Therefore, his mistake does not support an evolutionary model.

Your friend's letter is over 12,000 words long. I am therefore amazed to see him say, "I have not yet commenced to begin!" (p. 99) after more than 9,300 words. What does he think he was doing for the first three-quarters of the letter? Making small talk? If so, he was wasting both your time and his—and I must remind you that your time is considerably more valuable, because it is the Lord's time.

You will probably not get another opportunity to serve the Lord full time until you retire. That is over forty years away. The remaining months of your mission are too precious for you to let yourself get sidetracked.

Your friend makes a fairly determined effort to prove that the first vision "couldn't" have taken place. His proof, if such it may be called, is as follows:

Joseph Smith claimed there was a revival in 1819/1820.

Wesley P. Walters proved this revival took place in 1824.

Therefore Joseph was lying or mistaken about the timing of the first vision.

Therefore it never happened.

The first point is not true. Joseph did not mention the word "revival" in his account; he talked about a period of religious "excitement." He uses the terms "region of country," "district of country," and "the place where we lived" interchangeably, and *not* to imply some kind of outward spread, as your friend has so tentatively paraphrased him.

Nor does he say that the excitement happened in 1820. He says that it happened, or reached his area, "some time in the second year after our removal to Manchester." *In* the second year means more than one year but less than two years later. I realize your friend has already given you a rundown of Joseph's chro-

nology, but I'll give you another one, without any hostile commentary.

Joseph reports that his father moved from Vermont to Palmyra when Joseph was about ten. That would be in 1816, the year the Smith family was "warned out" of Norwich, Vermont. Four years later the family moves onto the Manchester farm. In the second year after, the religious excitement begins.

Now, your friend has suggested that Joseph Sr. moved to Palmyra in advance of the rest of the family, which is not inherently unreasonable; expecting the family to cool their heels in Vermont for another two years is quite idiotic. The fact is that the Smiths purchased the Manchester farm in July 1820. Some months prior to moving there—an entire growing season *at least*—they had built a log cabin on an adjacent property, and they continued for a time to live there. They probably thought it was on the farm itself—the boundaries were not marked—but in fact it was off the farm by a mere fifty feet. Incidentally, the boundary of the farm was also the boundary between Palmyra and Manchester.

Nevertheless, there is a problem in this chronology as it stands. Taking the 1816 move from Vermont as the starting point, four years later they move onto the farm—that is, in 1820. If the religious excitement begins in the second year after, that is, in 1821–22, that is too late to have influenced Joseph before his first vision in 1820. Your friend's rather devious sleight-of-hand tries to force Joseph's chronology up to 1824, but I'm sure you see the fallacies in his reasoning as he picks and chooses the facts that suit his theory, and rejects equally well-attested facts because they don't suit it. When people let their opinions control the facts, they can prove anything. But even after discarding his mangling of the time line, there remains yet a problem in Joseph's chronology.

Let's leave the chronological problem for a moment. It can in fact be quite easily solved once we get the rest of the facts into place, so we will come back to it.

Your friend is clearly familiar with some of the answers to his theory, and he tries to deal with them by telling you to dismiss them without a hearing. This is known as "poisoning the well," and it is what convinces me that he is arguing this line all on his own. Note where he says, "Backman asserts that the revivals might

have taken place *prior* to 1819, and that Smith's 'confusion' over what church he should join may have started much earlier in his life. Aside from the fact that this results in an obviously *strained* reading of Smith's history, it again only deals with one issue, not all together" (p. 104).

There are two obvious problems with this statement. The second problem is that your friend's borrowed theory is a house of cards—it is not necessary to "deal with" every piece of the whole rickety structure; dismiss one and the whole thing collapses. The first problem is the statement that "this results in an obviously *strained* reading of Smith's history." This is a knowing and calculated misrepresentation of fact, or in other words, a deliberate lie. I would point out that there is no more "strained" way to read Joseph's history than to flatly contradict all of the most important facts it contains, including the first vision. Further, your friend quoted from Joseph's 1832 account, but suppressed the following statement found therein: "From the age of twelve years to fifteen I pondered many things in my heart concerning the situation of the world," which announces that Joseph had been thinking about things since at least 1818. Now by a curious coincidence there were revivals in the Palmyra area in the 1817–18 period. Although Joseph does not say anything about revivals in the earlier account, if we take the two together, it is easy to see the sequence of events: Joseph is impressed by revivals in 1817–18 and then disturbed by some subsequent interdenominational ill will. He broods over these things for some time, reading the Bible, going to meetings, and listening to preachers. Then in 1820 he reads James 1:5 and goes out to pray.

This is not "straining" Joseph's history, but taking all of his accounts and doing the only responsible thing we can do with them—presume them to be true, give them the benefit of the doubt, and work from there to see how they fit together. That is what real scholars do.

We still haven't solved the chronology problem, but as Richard L. Bushman points out in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/2 (1994): 129, "the chronologies of the two [accounts] would coincide if one word in Joseph's 1839 account were changed. If the text read 'sometime in the second year after our removal to Palmyra,' rather than 'after our removal to Manches-

ter,' the stories would blend." Bushman argues that Joseph has made a simple error in conflating the move to Palmyra with the move to Manchester. This is not difficult to believe; I have some very clear memories of family circumstances from my early teens which other family members think happened at other times and places.

Your friend made a rather sarcastic comment about Joseph's inclusion of Lucy in the list of family members who moved to Manchester in 1820, when she was not born until 1821. He thinks it proves the family actually moved in 1822, but of course it doesn't. The purchase of the Manchester farm in July 1820 is a given quantity, a fixed point which shows your friend's contrived chronology to be false. It also means that little Lucy hadn't been born before the farm was taken over, so Joseph was in fact making a mistake. Actually these little errors are quite important in their own way, for they show quite clearly that Joseph didn't go over his story to check it for "holes," as a clever deceiver would have to do. He simply relied upon his memory and told it as he recalled it, and so made just the sorts of little mistakes in detail that all *authentic* reminiscences contain. That's the real significance of that mistake. It proves beyond doubt that Joseph was sincerely remembering and *not* crafting a "cunningly devised fable."

Your friend offers some additional argumentation to support his conclusion as follows:

The Smiths were "warned out" from Norwich, Vermont, in March 1816.

The weather records of the time, matched to Lucy Mack Smith's recollection, prove that the family left Vermont in 1818, not 1816.

The Palmyra road-tax records show Joseph Smith Sr. from 1817, but Alvin doesn't appear until 1820, despite the fact that he turned twenty-one in 1819.

The Smiths stay on the Palmyra road-tax records until 1822; therefore, they must not have been on their Manchester farm before that time.

Your friend argues that since the Smiths were "warned out" from Norwich, Vermont, "therefore the Smiths most probably moved to Norwich in 1816 and lived there two years, until 1818." So runs his claim. But this is a mere assumption; why would they

“probably” stay? It is apparent that Joseph Sr. did go to Palmyra in 1816; it is not completely unreasonable for him to go a few weeks ahead of the rest of the family while he finds work and accommodation, but two *years*? Does your friend really imagine the rest of the family would be content to wait around for two years, without the primary breadwinner, in a town that had officially notified them that they would get no help if they got into difficulties? That is a huge stretch of our credulity, and all to try to fit Joseph’s chronology to an 1824 revival.

Your friend also claims that Walters ran down the “weather records” of the time and matched them to Lucy Mack Smith’s account. Yet Lucy’s account confirms the dating of Joseph’s first vision, a point on which your friend is silent. Why is Lucy’s account useful about a peripheral item like the weather, but not worthy of mention when it tells of the first vision? Especially when the first vision is the subject of the investigation?

And indeed, if your friend disbelieves Joseph on *everything else*, why is he so devout about accepting the length of Joseph’s chronology? Note well: he accepts *only* the length of it, while trying to violently force all of the dates it contains into much later events.

Your friend makes much of the fact that the road-tax records don’t show Alvin Smith until 1820. He argues,

It is evident that Joseph Smith, Sr., moved to Palmyra *before* the rest of his family, who joined him there at a later date. We know this from the fact that Alvin would have been listed in the 1819 road-tax records, had he been present in Palmyra (he turned 21 on February 11, 1819). Obviously, Lucy and the children did not arrive in time for Alvin’s name to be found on the 1819 lists.  
(p. 102)

Your friend thinks that something is “obvious” or “evident” when other equally likely explanations are readily at hand. Is your friend prepared to vouch for the efficiency of nineteenth-century civil servants to the extent that Alvin couldn’t possibly have been overlooked in 1819? It is a known fact that the Smith men often hired out as laborers; is your friend absolutely certain that Alvin wasn’t away “on the job” when the tax assessors came around?

Your friend also points out that “It is important to note that Smith is listed as living in Palmyra until 1822—despite LDS scholars’ contention that he moved from there *four years earlier* in 1818” (p. 102). This may explain why your friend relies on Walters’s 1967 article, instead of his *Inventing Mormonism* (with Michael Marquardt) from 1994. For that book makes it clear that the Smiths “articled for” their Manchester farm in 1820. Thus there was evidently some official confusion about where the Smiths actually lived. Your friend has actually undercut his own case with this item, since it casts doubt upon the sources he relies on to establish the later arrival of the family in Palmyra.

In fact, it is known that the Smiths lived only a few feet away from the farm for several months before they bought it; they built a log cabin, moved in, and started working the farm before the papers were signed, so that they would be able to bring in a harvest. The fact that the land was taxed at the unimproved rate for two years most emphatically does not mean that the family did not live there or work the property. It is entirely absurd to imagine a poor family buying a farm and then letting it lie idle—while paying tax on it—for two years, but that is the absurdity your friend wants you to swallow. It is far more reasonable to suppose that the local tax authority continued to tax the land at the lesser rate even after the family started working it. Many local authorities still tax partly improved property at the same rate as unimproved property. They probably did not tax it at the higher rate until after the frame home was completed.

Now it happens that all of your friend’s “evidences” come via the same conduit—Wesley P. Walters. Your friend introduces him as a Presbyterian minister, which he was, but had he been as zealous and diligent in his pastoral work as he was in his anti-Mormon activity, he would have been one of the finest ministers any Protestant church ever produced. For his real claim to fame was as an anti-Mormon researcher and author. I do not say this to discredit him—even anti-Mormons occasionally get things right, and in fact some of Walters’s finds, though rather minor, are quite valuable. I point it out because your friend has been a little shy about mentioning it. Why do you suppose that is so? Is it because your friend doesn’t want you to realize that Walters’s mind was



made up before he ever laid eyes on the documents he relies upon?

Your friend makes this comment about Walters's finds and the conclusions he offers from them:

Joseph Smith fabricated the story years later, and, to make "room" for the First Vision without getting rid of Moroni and the golden plates, he "changes history" and pushes events back by four years. But, history has caught up with Joseph Smith. (p. 103)

If the last sentence were not just a pompous cliché, it could be quite offensive. History does not need to catch up with Joseph, for on 27 June 1844, a large number of your friend's coreligionists "caught up" with him and murdered him for the crime of being a prophet. In almost twenty years of reading various anti-Mormon publications, I have never once read anything by an evangelical Protestant that has shown the least bit of shame about that atrocity. If one of them did, we would have to say that there is one anti-Mormon who has some Christian conscience left. I have not come across even one, and the sheer hypocrisy displayed by those who profess to be Christians, and who can justify such criminal actions, is mind-boggling.

But what your friend fails to grasp is that if Joseph were really just making it all up, he would have no need to falsify the material facts of his history at all. The first vision doesn't have to have happened in the sacred grove; if Joseph is just inventing it, he can make it happen anywhere, and any time far enough back. Nor does he have to tie it in with revivals; any trigger—or no trigger at all—would fit in with well-known biblical examples, such as the visions of Moses, Samuel, and Paul. In his tendentious zeal to convict Joseph of lying, your friend has failed entirely to provide a valid motive.

Your friend also makes much of the fact that Oliver Cowdery and William Smith both mention the Reverend Lane as a person whom Joseph knew prior to the first vision. Your friend needs to be aware that both Oliver Cowdery and William Smith are secondary sources, not primary ones. Oliver didn't meet Joseph until 1828, and William Smith was even younger than Joseph. But the fact is that your friend is again picking and choosing his evidence;

both Cowdery and Smith confirm the essential facts of Joseph's story, a fact about which your friend is silent. But he swoops on this detail because he thinks that it helps his cause. As he points out, Lane moved to Palmyra in 1824, but that was not Joseph's only opportunity to meet him. For, as Larry C. Porter reports in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 7/2* (1995): 128: "in July 1819, Rev. Lane was just fifteen miles away from the Smith home for a period of eight days attending the annual Genesee Conference at old Vienna (later Phelps, New York)." This conference took place from 1 July to 8 July. It was a major event, at which many of the attending ministers preached sermons for the benefit of the lay people who inevitably showed up. Joseph could certainly have met Lane there, or heard him preach.

Now I could easily pile argument upon rebuttal to show just how shoddy your friend's argumentation is, but I'm sure that you've got the message by now. Your friend is trying to prove that the first vision did not happen because it is possible to reach a different set of conclusions about external events than those which Joseph describes. In other words, he wants you to reject Joseph's unambiguous direct testimony on the strength of highly ambiguous circumstantial evidence. He has entirely failed to show why Joseph should lie about those events—if he's inventing the whole story, then the first vision doesn't depend on anything that happened in the real world; in fact, the first vision only depends on those external events if they *really did* influence Joseph, and if he *really did* have the vision as he said he did. If he didn't actually have it, then he can invent any inner turmoil he likes, without linking it to anything else. That would be the safe thing to do and is the obvious course of action for anyone making up a story like the first vision. The fact that Joseph didn't take that course is very strong evidence of his sincerity. And, I'm sorry to say, the shifty way your friend handles the evidence is equally strong evidence of his *insincerity*.

Before I finish, I want to mention the problems your friend has in reading scripture. First of all, as I mentioned, he fails to give Joseph the benefit of the doubt. His approach to reading LDS scripture is to look for anything that could possibly be seen as an inconsistency and then milk it for all it is worth; in other words, he is an entirely hostile interpreter. Second, with regard to the Bible

passages he cites, he shows a tendency to read documents as they were never intended to be read. He seems at times like what we call a "strict constructionist"—that is, he argues that the meaning of a passage is equal to the sums of the dictionary meanings of all the words it contains. At other times, he seems to want to excuse a passage from such treatment, if the clear thrust of it is contrary to his preconceptions. And he does it just about the wrong way around, since a straightforward narrative probably says just what it means, while ecstatic declarations of praise tend toward exaggeration. So when Stephen in extremis reports what he sees, it is only fair to take him literally—he's hardly likely to try to compose a beautiful poem in those circumstances; while when other prophets, in chapters chock-full of poetry, make expressions of wonder and awe about God's majesty and greatness, we really shouldn't read them as dry theological treatises.

### **Back to Elder Hahn's Letter**

Aunt Jenny says some other things, but I have copied just the portions that relate to your letter. As you can see, she has some fairly strong opinions of some things. But, if you look past her sometimes strong language, you will realize that what she says is perfectly sound. If you reject the central episode of Joseph Smith's testimony, but still insist on some of the trivial details in it, then that is far more "strained" than accepting that episode and looking for ways to work out the trivial details. I will paraphrase what you said to me in an earlier letter:

Part and parcel of dealing with almost any ancient or even modern writing is the basic idea that the author gets the benefit of the doubt. It is highly unlikely that a writer will contradict himself within short spans of time or space. Some critics of the church, and the prophet Joseph Smith, seem to forget the old axiom "innocent until proven guilty." The person who will not allow for the harmonization of the text (as my aunt did above) is in effect claiming omniscience of all the facts surrounding an event that took place over one and a half centuries ago. Most careful scholars do not make such claims. The above-presented explanation is perfectly reasonable, it coincides with the known facts, and it does not engage in unwarranted "special pleading" (compare with

pp. 36–37 of your letter 3). This comes directly from what you said to me about reading the Bible; this is your rule, but you seem to quite openly ignore or even reverse it when it comes to Joseph Smith. You are using a double standard. Is this really a Christian thing to do?

By the way, as I mentioned to you in an earlier letter, full-time missionaries have a fairly short list of approved reading material. The last time I looked, there was nothing by Jerald and Sandra Tanner on that list. When I return home I can read what I please, but for the balance of my mission, I intend to stick to the mission rules. So thank you for your kind offer, but I won't be collecting those books.

Now this letter is already far too long. I once again urge you to put away your anti-Mormon books. It does you no credit to keep relying on them. They contain no revealed truth; all they do, in Aunt Jenny's words, is "poison the well." I invite you to come to the well and drink of it unpolluted. It will lead to great joy and a multitude of blessings.

May you gain a desire to learn the Lord's will.

Elder Hahn

### Letter 7: Tests and Trials

Dear Mr. White,

It appears that our letters crossed in the mail, as your latest letter arrived the same day I posted my last reply to you.

You will forgive me if I continue to give priority to my calling. Your comment that our discussion “is directly relevant to the propriety of” my “missionary activities” is a little puzzling (p. 107). Perhaps I am unusually dull-witted, but I cannot think of any argument that would make serving the Lord improper.

Once again, I have had to write home for additional information, in this case the information related to the so-called Bainbridge trial of 1826.

You argue that I am somehow obligated to prove that Joseph Smith was a true prophet and that you have no obligation to disprove that claim. Your second point is quite correct—you don’t have to disprove anything at all. You can simply reject Joseph Smith and walk away. The only reason I can see why you would need to continue your *ad hominem* attack against him is to justify your rejection to yourself.

You seem to feel that I have simply accepted without question what others have told me about the Prophet Joseph Smith. You describe me as someone who just blindly accepts whatever my church leaders say. That is not the case. In reality I believe Joseph to be a prophet because the God of Heaven has revealed that fact to me personally. And all the clever sophistries in the world cannot overthrow my testimony because it came by the power of the Holy Ghost.

You say, regarding Joseph Smith’s prophetic calling, that “I do believe that he made *many* prophetic errors during his lifetime—I fully believe that he expected Christ to return before the year 1890 or 1891” (p. 108).

I wonder if you have thought this matter all the way through. That idea comes from Doctrine and Covenants 130:14–17, which reads:

I was once praying very earnestly to know the time of the coming of the Son of Man, when I heard a voice repeat the following:

Joseph, my son, if thou livest until thou art eighty-five years old, thou shalt see the face of the Son of Man; therefore let this suffice, and trouble me no more on this matter.

I was left thus, without being able to decide whether this coming referred to the beginning of the millennium or to some previous appearing, or whether I should die and thus see his face.

I believe the coming of the Son of Man will not be any sooner than that time.

Please notice what Joseph actually tells us here: he was praying to know the time of the Second Coming—and what Christian wouldn't want to know that?—and in response he was told that if he lived to age eighty-five he would see the Savior's face. Verses 16 and 17 make it clear that Joseph didn't know quite what to make of this communication, and the most he was prepared to commit himself to, speaking in his role as a prophet, was that "I believe the coming of the Son of Man will not be any sooner than that time."

Notice also how Joseph passes up every opportunity to grandstand or to make a show of superior knowledge here. Note also that the Lord's answer to Joseph is entirely consistent with what the Savior himself taught, as recorded in Matthew 24:36, which reads, "But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only." Taken in that context, the Lord's answer to Joseph appears as both a put-off, and something of a rebuke—albeit a mild one, since the Lord does not want anyone to be afraid to approach him.

But you may be right about Joseph's expectations; I have seen a number of statements that suggest that he was rather excited about this revelation and felt that this really was the Lord's timetable. Now if Joseph the man holds an opinion which he is unwilling to put forward in his role as the prophet of the Lord, that is a clear indication that he took that role seriously. On the other hand, if as a result of this revelation he developed a personal conviction based upon a particular interpretation of it, that can mean

only one thing—namely, that Joseph really *did* believe that the communication came from the Lord. Therefore if, as you say, you “fully believe that he expected Christ to return before the year 1890 or 1891,” then you must also believe that Joseph believed he was receiving revelation. Whether he was right or not, he was certainly sincere about it, which pretty much rules him out as a deliberate deceiver, since deceit is insincere by definition.

Now to the “false prophecies” that you think are so important. The first one you cite is from Doctrine and Covenants 84:1–5 and states that the temple to be built in Jackson County, Missouri, will be built “in this generation.” In regard to this, you conclude,

Smith said it was the word of the Lord; he defined the exact event that would take place—the temple would be built at a specific location that is known to this day; he defined the time parameters in which it would take place—*prior* to the death of *that* generation. It is a classic prophecy that can be tested—and it fails. (p. 113)

This may come as a shock to you, but I have certainly heard this one a number of times before. And the first thing I must do is refer you back to Matthew 24, which I mentioned above. In that chapter, Jesus prophesies a number of events. Some of them have already taken place, such as the destruction of Jerusalem, the scattering of Israel, and the persecutions against the early Christians. Others of these have not yet occurred, such as the astronomical signs described in verse 29—the sun being darkened, the moon being turned to blood, etc., and the sign of the Son of Man being seen in heaven, as per verse 30. But what is disturbing about this is that Jesus himself said, “Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled” (Matthew 24:34).

Now it is entirely possible to argue as follows: “Jesus said it was the word of the Lord; he defined the exact event that would take place—he would return in power and great glory; he defined the time parameters in which it would take place—prior to the death of that generation. It is a classic prophecy that can be tested—and it fails.”

So that you do not misunderstand me, let me say that that is *not* my argument. It is merely the logical result of applying your

argument to a prophecy made by Jesus himself. And it certainly seems that a great many of the early Saints anticipated that the Savior would return in their lifetimes. Shall we hold it against them for believing that?

Another difficulty arises with your interpretation when we realize that it is entirely possible, within the normal uses of the English language, to view the critical verses of section 84, namely verses 3 to 5, as a commandment rather than a prediction. Let us review these verses again:

Which city shall be built, beginning at the temple lot, which is appointed by the finger of the Lord, in the western boundaries of the State of Missouri, and dedicated by the hand of Joseph Smith, Jun., and others with whom the Lord was well pleased.

Verily this is the word of the Lord, that the city New Jerusalem shall be built by the gathering of the saints, beginning at this place, even the place of the temple, which temple shall be reared in this generation.

For verily this generation shall not all pass away until an house shall be built unto the Lord, and a cloud shall rest upon it, which cloud shall be even the glory of the Lord, which shall fill the house.

Verse 5 is certainly a prophecy, and many of the Saints thought it was fulfilled when the Kirtland Temple was dedicated in March 1836. But what of the other verses? Note that the word *shall* is often used in the sense of giving a command—the Ten Commandments say “thou shalt not” do things that people have continued to do to this day; are they then failed prophecies? Or merely disobeyed commands? Certainly the passage that you quoted from Doctrine and Covenants 124 refers to the verses above as a command and released the Saints from the responsibility of obeying it.

The fact that some church leaders felt that the command, although revoked, would ultimately need to be obeyed is entirely consistent with scriptural use; the command that the children of Israel take possession of the land of Canaan was only postponed for a time.



But I would sum up on this one point simply by saying that whatever the Lord meant by “this generation” in A.D. 33 is probably still valid in 1832.

Your use of Doctrine and Covenants 114 as a failed prophecy is rather weak, largely because it isn’t a prophecy at all—it is a command. David W. Patten was commanded to “settle up all his business as soon as he possibly” could, with a view to preparing for a mission. Although, as you rightly point out, he died strong in the gospel, it has been argued that he nevertheless didn’t settle up his business as soon as he could; had he done so, he wouldn’t have been “on the scene” to be killed at Crooked River.

But there is indeed a prophecy contained in that section, namely, the prophecy that a twelve-man mission would depart the following spring, the spring of 1839. And it happens that on 26 April 1839 the Quorum of the Twelve did in fact depart on a mission to England. Had Patten been alive at the time, he would have been part of that mission. Thus your rhetorical question “Why would God describe the specifics of a mission that would never take place?” is moot, since the mission *did* in fact take place. Therefore it was entirely appropriate for Patten to prepare for it. The mission went ahead, with another in Elder Patten’s place.

It is entirely clear that neither of these cases, nor both of them together, is sufficient to bring down a verdict that Joseph Smith was a false prophet.

There is another test, also a biblical one, which I notice that critics of the church never use. It is found in Acts 5:38–39, and reads: “And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.” This counsel and this work have *not* “come to nought”—at least, not yet. If you, and all the critics, leave us alone and stop contending against us, and our work not be of God, then that will soon become apparent, but if you continue to contend and the Lord is with us, then you will only bear witness to your own impotence.

Before moving on to your “other matters,” I would comment on your treatment of the prophecy of Jonah. You must know perfectly well that we understand the failure of Jonah’s prophecy in

very similar terms to your explanation here. The weakness is in your labored argument by which you try to distinguish the two cases. Joseph's "prophecies" were mostly commands—the prophetic elements were in fact fulfilled. Even if you insist that the command to build the city of Zion in Missouri is a prophecy, it can only be called a false one if Jesus was a false prophet as well. As I seem to keep reminding you, you need to discard your double standard and adopt a single, consistent one.

But most importantly, you have tried to limit the Lord's right to make a *conditional* command or prediction. May I ask—who are you to command the Lord?

The rest of your letter I find to be nothing more than a personal attack on the Prophet Joseph Smith. That's all it is, and nothing more. I would like to leave it there, but I don't want you to think that these accusations cannot be answered.

As I mentioned earlier, I have written back to my aunt, the lawyer, to get her view on the Bainbridge "trial." Here again are some excerpts of her letter.

### **Excerpts from Aunt Jenny's Letter**

Dear Elder Hahn,

You really are a glutton for punishment, aren't you? Don't you know an anti-Mormon when he starts slandering the Lord's prophets?

Anyway, since you are determined to persevere with this fellow, I will give you the lowdown on the Bainbridge "trial."

First of all, I would point out that your friend is yet again judiciously selecting his material to create the impression that the various stories about the so-called trial are consistent. They are not—in fact they contradict each other all over the place—and his picking and choosing of bits of accounts is not very scrupulous.

The old and dubious accounts he relies on have only one piece of hard evidence supporting them, namely a bill for the services of the justice who heard the case and the constable who brought Joseph in. While on the face of it that bill appears to support the account your friend has chosen, it in fact does not, for two important reasons.

The first is that the bill itself is tainted. As your friend so gloatingly remarks, it was found by professional anti-Mormon Wesley P. Walters. However, Walters's handling of it has broken the "chain of evidence," since he removed it from the venue he claims to have found it in. I don't just mean that he took it out of the box—he would have to do that—but he actually took it out of the custody of its lawful custodians, *without* their permission, *without* their signing it out or recording any description of it. He took it, along with an unspecified number of other papers, to Yale University. They were not returned to their lawful custodians for almost three months—and then only under legal duress. The only reason the county authorities found out about these documents was that Walters had them published—and you can bet your name tag that he would not publish any document that would not help his case. Therefore, there is no way to know whether all the documents Walters took were in fact returned; it may well be, for all we know, that other documents were found that exonerated Joseph Smith, but that Walters chose not to return. And there's also no way of knowing whether the documents themselves were tampered with in some way. The fact is that if anyone tried to produce in court a document that had been so badly handled and rely on it as evidence, that document would be thrown out.

The second reason the bill does not support the so-called court record your friend produces is that the court record is clearly not what it purports to be, for several reasons. First, misdemeanor trials were not recorded at that time, only felony trials. Thus whatever the court record is, it is not an official court transcript, because there would not have been one.

Second, the court record gives the testimony of several witnesses, but none of them signed it, as they would have to have done had an official transcript been taken.

Third, as your friend himself points out (albeit reluctantly), "Later study caused Wesley Walters to view this incident not as a full-blown trial, but as what we might call a 'pretrial hearing'" (p. 124). But his precious court record ends with the words, "And therefore the Court find[s] the Defendant guilty." Pretrial hearings cannot deliver guilty verdicts. They can only determine if the defendant has a case to answer and therefore needs to be bound over for trial. If, as seems clear, the 1826 hearing was a pretrial

examination, then the court record is a bogus document and has no evidentiary value.

Your friend once again draws some entirely unwarranted conclusions from Justice Neely's bill. He casually assumes, for example, that "Smith was examined with reference to 'glass looking' in March of 1826" (pp. 123-24). But was he? The phrase "the glass looker" appears below Joseph's name on the bill. All of the other defendant's names are listed with the charge *beside* them. Joseph's name does indeed have a charge listed beside it—the charge is "misdemeanor." The phrase "the glass looker" appearing below his name was an identifying reference, nothing more. It wasn't the charge, and indeed could not have been; there was no such crime as glass looking in the State of New York in the 1820s. Thus your friend's sanctimonious claim that "Smith was actively involved in abominable practices and ran afoul of the law in the process" (p. 124) is entirely unfounded.

And what was the outcome of the hearing? Your friend relies upon the so-called court record, as well as the equally suspect account of Judge King Noble, in claiming that Joseph was bound over for trial. Noble, although a judge, did not hear the case, and is *not* a primary source. Without anything more substantial to go on than his own and Walters's wishful thinking, your friend confidently declares that the hearing "would have resulted in a later full trial had Joseph Smith not taken what Joel K. Noble called 'leg bail' (i.e., he fled the area)" (p. 124). In reality, the evidence points toward Joseph's having been acquitted.

The court record your friend relies on so heavily actually does include some valid details, although badly garbled. I mentioned Justice Neely's costs of \$2.68. There is also an amount of \$.19 listed as "warrants." Another document that Walters ran down was a bill presented by Constable De Zeng for that amount. Now it happens that \$.19 was the prescribed amount for a pretrial mittimus (warrant of commitment to prison for lack of bail), as set down in *A Conductor Generalis* of 1819. In other words, it was the amount the constable would charge for bringing an accused person in. If Justice Neely had found that there was a case for Joseph to answer, he would have ordered him bound over for trial at the next court of General Sessions, and De Zeng would have charged an additional \$.25, which was the prescribed amount for a posttrial

warrant of commitment. But that charge was not levied; therefore, Joseph was not remanded to the custody of the constable, and so he was, in all probability, acquitted. That is precisely what Oliver Cowdery reported in *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* 2 (October 1835): 202.

So your friend's confident and sneering pronouncements about this matter are unfounded. A hearing took place, charge unknown, and Joseph was acquitted. The only valid conclusion to be drawn from these facts is that he was not guilty of any crime—he did *not* run “afoul of the law.”

### **Back to Elder Hahn's Letter**

Once again, my aunt has expressed herself quite forthrightly, and I hope this does not offend you. Moving on from the trial issue, which has been quite satisfactorily settled as far as I am concerned, I would like to comment on some other points you raise.

In a number of places you seem to argue from your conclusions. This can be seen where you say such things as, “In the Book of Mormon we find more evidence of his belief in the same magical practices found in the testimony given at his trial” (p. 125). Why do you assume that the Book of Mormon reflects Joseph's own beliefs? It could only do that if Joseph wrote it, but he always insisted that he translated it—it may reflect his vocabulary, but the beliefs are those of the authors.

Your entire argument that Joseph couldn't have been a true prophet if he was involved in what you choose to call the occult seems to me to manifest a kind of spiritual snobbery. You seem to say that God wouldn't stoop to consorting with someone whom *you* think unworthy of such contact. But as I'm sure you realize, we are all unworthy. So were the ancient prophets—but God spoke to them anyway.

Now I realize that you may accuse me of “joining hands with atheists” again, but I will risk it anyway. After all, I am only asking for a little less hypocrisy in dealing with the modern prophets. What I would like to do is ask you to consider whether Moses, by your standards, was good enough to be a prophet.

When he went before Pharaoh, he took with him his brother Aaron. Pharaoh demanded a sign, and Aaron cast down his rod. It

was a remarkable item, that rod. When Aaron cast it down, it turned into a serpent; when Aaron picked it up again, it changed back. I'll come back to Aaron's rod in a moment, but you remember that when Pharaoh's magicians cast down their rods, they also turned into serpents—and Aaron's serpent devoured them. This is important, because it is clear that this first miracle was a demonstration of the same kind of power that magicians of the day were able to use. Moses and Aaron were clearly "dabbling in the occult" because they were performing the "magical practices" of the culture that was around them.

But, as you once said to me, there is more—much, much more. You see, it turns out that the confrontation between the prophets and the sorcerers was a reenactment of an ancient Egyptian myth wherein Pharaoh proved his kingly power in exactly the same way. Moses and Aaron, therefore, were not only using Egyptian magic, but they were actually carrying out an Egyptian religious practice by so doing. Doesn't that make you look down on them with disdain? They can't really be *our* kind of people, can they? They just aren't sanitized enough.

And if dabbling in the occult is not enough to put you off Moses, there are other ample reasons to consider him an unsavory character. For he was a murderer. He saw an Egyptian overseer beating a slave; in so doing, the overseer was merely carrying out his lawful duty. But did Moses take that into consideration? According to the Bible, he did not. He first looked around guiltily to make sure nobody was watching and then murdered the Egyptian and buried him in the sand. When his crime became known, he fled the country and was actually on the run from Egyptian law when he claimed that God spoke to him. Do you really believe that claim?

If I got really warmed up, I could tell you all about how his pattern of getting his way by murder was repeated; how he broke several other commandments even after God supposedly gave them to him; how he had "revelations of convenience" to prop up his political power; how his marital practices were somewhat, uh, irregular; and how God didn't consider him good enough to even set foot in the promised land. But I hope you realize that I am not truly making this argument. I am simply pointing out that

it can be made—all it takes is a Bible and a chip on one's shoulder.

But back to Aaron's rod. As I said, it was a nifty gadget. It could change into a snake; it was the instrument Aaron used to turn the Nile to blood and to bring various other plagues. After everything else, it actually budded. And what did they do with this "magical talisman"? They put it in the ark of the covenant.

I point this out because you make such a to-do about Oliver Cowdery having a spiritual gift which at one time was referred to as "the rod" and at another time as "the gift of Aaron." I don't doubt that this could be linked with a physical object, such as an actual rod. Your assumption that it was a dowsing rod is exactly that—your assumption—and as such is not binding on me. It is also not consistent with what the scripture says, for in Doctrine and Covenants 8:6 we find that this gift "has told you many things." Dowsing rods don't give revelations—they merely react to water.

I realize that we could easily make a fairly large discussion about the changes to the Doctrine and Covenants, but this is quite long enough for one letter. I will simply point out a couple of passages of scripture. First, Isaiah 28:13–14: "But the word of the Lord was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken. Wherefore hear the word of the Lord, ye scornful men." And second, Jeremiah 36:32: "Then took Jeremiah another roll, and gave it to Baruch the scribe, the son of Neriah; who wrote therein from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the book which Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire: and there were added besides unto them *many like words*" (emphasis added). I'm sure I don't have to draw you a picture here.

Last of all, you get all indignant about Joseph carrying a "Jupiter Talisman" in his pocket. You mention the affidavit of one Charles Bidamon, son of Emma Smith and Lewis Bidamon. What you don't mention is that Charles was born years after Joseph died, and his affidavit, given in 1938 was to support the *sale* of the piece. In other words, Bidamon told the purchaser that the coin was Joseph's because that would make it more interesting—the statement was "sales talk." To be sure, he claimed that it was one of Joseph's prized possessions, but that just makes me

more suspicious; why did Bidamon, born twenty years after Joseph died, have the coin and not one of Joseph's own sons? Charles Woods, Joseph's lawyer, made a detailed list of all of Joseph's personal effects that were found on him at the time of the martyrdom; the talisman was not among them. *Not one contemporary source* links Joseph with the talisman; it only gets linked to him ninety-odd years after his death by a man who never met him, who was trying to sell something.

But even if it had been Joseph's, why is that important? You offer not one iota of evidence that he actually used it for anything, or that it would have been anything other than a sentimental keepsake for him, but the mere possibility that he had this round piece in his pocket is enough for you to assume that he was doing all manner of satanic practices with it. You know, symbols only mean what the people who use them think that they mean, and not what some book says that they mean; otherwise, none of us would be able to put up a tree at Christmas time. I notice that on one side of the talisman the figure seems to have what look like Hebrew letters in boxes, and on the other some odd geometrical figures in the center, while around the rim are some Greek and other letters. I distinctly make out the word *Deus*, which is Latin for God. Some might see this as heap big sinister juju, but others with more open minds might wonder whether it might be seen as a perfectly innocent, even devotional, mnemonic—like the soldier's pack of cards.

Be that as it may, I wonder if the real reason you bring up all of this stuff is that you think it gets you off the hook. By proving that Joseph couldn't possibly be a true prophet, because he was just not the kind of modern, rational, twentieth-century intelligence that you could look up to, you have possibly persuaded yourself that you don't have to take his truth claims seriously. I'm sorry, but it's not that easy. The Lord has a habit of calling the very people that the smart and well-educated set don't admire. This is partly why, as Jesus pointed out, "a prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house" (Matthew 13:57). The hometown folks can dismiss the prophet because they know all his little foibles, and in that sense, modern means of mass communication can make us all the Prophet Joseph Smith's hometown folks, because some people so diligently put his foibles before us.



All of these excuses to avoid facing the truth claims of the church, the Prophet, and the Book of Mormon are ultimately rather flimsy. I know without any doubt that if you gained your own testimony of the truthfulness of this work, you would laugh at the arguments that you find so compelling now. I challenge you to engage the Book of Mormon on its own terms—read it, ponder its message, and pray to the Father in the name of Christ to know if it is true. You will find, as I have, that revealed truth is far more powerful than unaided human reason.

Once again, it is my heartfelt prayer that you gain a desire to seek the Lord's will.

Your friend,

Elder Hahn

## Letter 8: The Book of Mormon and the Book of Abraham

Dear Mr. White,

This must be the longest letter yet. Once again, I've had to write home to get some extra information. This time, though, I've given Aunt Jenny a rest—she's more into early LDS history anyway—and asked my Uncle Larry to chip in. He's really into the ancient world and knows a lot about the Book of Abraham.

Anyway, having read your letter, I find you are still tossing up anti-Mormon arguments. And you still refuse to pray about the Book of Mormon. Well, that is, of course, your choice; however, the arguments you use to justify that refusal are, if you don't mind my saying so, rather thin.

To begin with, your likening it to praying about the *Satanic Bible* by Anton LaVey is just plain silly (see p. 132). What are the truth claims of that volume? I haven't read it, but I would expect that it claims to have been inspired by Satan, who is the father of lies. So if it is true, then it is an evil book full of lies. But if it was merely written by uninspired, wicked men, then it is false. In neither case can it be of interest to those who desire to follow God and Christ, as we do.

The Book of Mormon is an entirely different matter. It testifies of Christ in a direct way. It also testifies of the Bible. It claims to have been given to the world by miraculous means. All of this merits serious consideration—which you refuse to give. Instead, you insist on making the Book of Mormon subject to the Bible. And not only to the Bible, but to your interpretation of the Bible; God, it would seem, is not allowed to reveal anything that is not in harmony with the results of your exegesis. Your method, and your personal skill in using that method, carry as much weight as the sacred text itself—if not more. Since you will not permit God to reveal anything that disagrees with your own conclusions, it would seem that you have rather more faith in your own mental powers than you do in him. Thus when you announce, “I will not question God's truth by praying about it” (p. 132), you are assuming that your own conclusions *are* God's truth—they are infallible and couldn't *possibly* be wrong.

You say that the Book of Mormon is “opposed to biblical teaching” (p. 132). Yet when we come down to cases, it invariably turns out that your interpretation of the Book of Mormon is opposed to your interpretation of biblical teaching. And that is surely the rub, since people who read the Bible and the Book of Mormon *together*, understanding each in the light of the other, find only harmony and consistency in them.

You also argue against praying about the Book of Mormon on the grounds that Moroni’s promise “is a ‘no win’ proposition” (p. 133), since it puts the failure of the promise back onto the person who is praying. That rather depends on your point of view; only you and the Lord know how sincere you are being in your prayer, and if you were to tell me that you prayed sincerely and didn’t get an answer, I would have to accept that. Actually it is only “a ‘no win’ proposition” in that you can’t use your failure to get an answer as evidence with which to convince me of anything. It works exactly both ways—my testimony is not binding on you, and your lack of one is not binding on me. Each of us is equally free to rely on the Lord alone, without the other getting in the middle of that relationship. Moroni’s promise simply means that the Lord takes upon himself the responsibility of revealing the truth to his children, leaving them free to decide whether to accept that truth—or even seek it in the first place. My role as a missionary is to point it out and invite you to seek it. I have to trust the Lord to do the rest.

I find that Jesus made some promises in person that are equally difficult to test. Consider Matthew 17:20. How could anyone test that? “Didn’t the mountain move? Then you must not have had enough faith—it’s obviously your own fault.” Is this another example of a double standard—it’s okay when the Bible says it, but not when the Book of Mormon does?

You also claim that “any group (and many of them have done so in the past and continue to do so today) can construct such a ‘test’ about the truthfulness of *their* teachings” (p. 133). I find that an interesting claim. I have never come in contact with such a group. Would you like to name one? If there is even one such group that (a) spends only an hour at a time teaching people in their own homes, (b) is able to go away and leave people to read and pray *alone* to find whether what they teach is true, and

(c) as a result, experiences growth significant enough to be seen as a threat by the “mainstream” churches, then I would be very, very interested to know about it.

You go on to offer your “five reasons” why nobody “should pray about the Book of Mormon” (p. 134–53). They are, if you don’t mind my saying so, astoundingly weak. The first reason, “The Book of Mormon is historically inaccurate” (p. 134), seems to equate to, “Archaeologists know better than God.” Are you aware that *secular* archaeologists are unanimous that Israel did *not* conquer Canaan, as described in the Bible? Do you realize that not *one* scrap of archaeological evidence has turned up to support the life and deeds of Abraham or the resurrection of the Savior? What archaeologist (apart from Indiana Jones, that is) can tell you where the ark of the covenant is?

The statement you quote from Carlson, that there is in effect no such thing as Book of Mormon archaeology (see p. 137), is true enough—but largely because the geographical problem has not been solved. In your eagerness to “prove” the Book of Mormon wrong, you have actually supplied the answers to many of your own objections when you point out that we don’t really know where the events it describes took place. Until the archaeologists know for certain where to dig, how can you *reasonably* expect them to find anything?

And even if they do find anything, how are we to recognize it? It is entirely possible that archaeologists have already dug up some Nephite artifacts, but there isn’t anything that makes them clearly identifiable as such. You make quite a deal about Nephite “coinage,” pointing out that “no such coins have ever been found.” How do you know? Can you describe a senine well enough that anyone who found one would recognize it? The words *coin*, *coins*, and *coinage*, as well as *mint*, *minted*, and *minting* are entirely absent from the Book of Mormon text, and these units of money are clearly also units of weight. Insisting that Nephite monetary units represent minted coins is a straw man argument.

You try to link the Book of Mormon with *View of the Hebrews*, but that isn’t even a straw man—it’s just a straw to grasp. *View* is as different from the Book of Mormon as they both are from *King Lear* or *Batman*. Sure, *View* quotes many verses from

Isaiah—but that can only indicate “borrowing” if the number of verses they both quote, in common, is statistically significant, but it is not. Isaiah, you see, has a total of 1,292 verses. The Book of Mormon cites 459 Isaiah verses, or 35.53 percent of the total. *View of the Hebrews* cites 116 Isaiah verses, or 8.98 percent of the total.

Given that such a lot of Isaiah verses are quoted in both books, if there was absolutely no relationship between them, random chance alone would allow for some of the same verses to be quoted in both. In fact, random chance could account for 35.53 percent of 8.98 percent, which is 3.19 percent of 1,292 verses, or a total of 41 verses being cited in both books. In fact the two books have just 23 Isaiah verses in common, which is well inside the limits that random chance allows. Thus the Isaiah quotations found in the Book of Mormon provide no support whatsoever for the hypothesis that *View of the Hebrews* was a “source” of any kind.

I’m not just making those numbers up. My brother has a copy of *View*, and a few months before my mission, I read it. I also obtained counts of the verses and figured out the odds.

Contrary to your claim, B. H. Roberts absolutely did *not* lose faith in the Book of Mormon—his study was merely an attempt to anticipate possible future criticisms. And no, that’s not something that LDS “apologists” simply invented to try to cover up. Elder Roberts wrote a cover letter that accompanied his study. In that he tells his *real* conclusion, namely, that “our faith is not only unshaken but unshakable in the Book of Mormon” (B. H. Roberts’s letter of 15 March 1922, in Roberts, *Studies of the Book of Mormon*, 58). That’s the *real* verdict of the man whom you describe as “one of the greatest minds in LDS history.” I agree with him.

The question of animals and crops is a hoary old chestnut. In reality it is the rule, and not the exception, that migrants rename animals, naming species they find after others from “back home.” My second companion was from Scotland. I once had a good argument with him about what an elk is. He says that an elk is a very big animal that looks like a moose. When I showed him a picture of an elk, he said to me, “Och, Elder, that’s no’ an elk; that’s a red deer.” And indeed, from his point of view, he was right; our elk is a red deer to people from Europe, while our moose is their elk.

Likewise with crops. What is “corn”? It gets mentioned in the Bible a number of times, and it is certainly *not* what we call corn. My Scottish companion called our corn “maize” and insisted that oats are the “real” corn. He also mentioned in passing that the English, whom he called “Sassenachs,” use the word *corn* to describe grain. And so it is not merely possible, but actually likely, that the Nephites did the same as our migrant forbears did—renaming plants and animals to suit the uses they put them to.

Your second reason, the “false doctrine” one, goes right back to what I said at the start of the letter: what you call “false doctrine” I call truth; what you call “biblical truth” I call your interpretation. It’s all a matter of opinion. I could say more on this point, but it can wait for another time.

Your discussion of Abinadi’s teaching on the Godhead has several problems. First, you fail to understand that Abinadi, prophesying in Old Testament times, is perfectly correct when he describes Jesus as “God himself”; as I pointed out in an earlier letter, Jesus is Jehovah, the God of Old Testament times, the one whom Israelites regularly called “God.” But you are ignoring a good part of Abinadi’s teaching and distorting the rest, when you insist that he is teaching modalism. What does Abinadi mean when he says that Jesus is “the father, because he was conceived by the power of God”? If he meant that Jesus was the father *himself, in person*, why didn’t he just say so? Or why didn’t he say that Jesus was “the father, because he was conceived by his own power”? Clearly the God by whose power Jesus was conceived is *somebody else*. But since Jesus was the personal representative and messenger of the Father, it is natural that *ancient* people would identify him with the Father. This is perfect evidence of the Book of Mormon as an ancient book, since modern people never think in those terms; contrary to your conclusion, then, it is clearly *not* the production of Joseph Smith.

But note again where Abinadi says, “And *they are* one God” (Mosiah 15:4). Abinadi is emphasizing the perfect unity shared by the members of the Godhead; the plural pronoun makes it clear that he is not teaching any idea like modalism. A modalistic teaching would have to say, “And *he is* one God, manifesting himself in different ways.” No such teaching ever appears in the Book of Mormon.

But I notice that, once again, you are arguing from the conclusions of your own argument. You say, "It is evident that, at the time of the writing of the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith did not believe in a plurality of gods at all. He was still, technically at least, a 'monotheist'" (p. 143). You are trying to use the Book of Mormon as evidence of what Joseph Smith thought—and then argue that since it reflects Joseph Smith's own ideas, he must have written it. An argument doesn't get much more circular than that.

Your third reason, that "the Book of Mormon was given by a false prophet" (p. 144), is one that I addressed in my previous letter. You have entirely failed to prove that Joseph was a false prophet.

By including "anachronisms" among your "grave textual problems" (p. 144) you seem to be trying to give your first argument—the "historically inaccurate" one—a second turn at bat. But the "cross" and "Bible" issues seem, if I may say so, a little contrived. If you believe in prophecy, then you presumably accept that prophets *could* know that, in the future, brutal men would introduce crucifixion, on the one hand, while on the other hand uninspired men would declare the canon of scripture closed. Given that prophets could know such things, the choice of words becomes a simple matter of translation. So, can you think of more appropriate words?

You then discuss the Liahona in these words:

In 1 Nephi 18:12 we read of a "compass" being used by Nephi on the trip across the ocean to the "promised land." The compass was not invented till some time later. You might say that this was simply a "miracle," but why do we not find examples of compasses among the descendants of these people? (p. 145)

Clearly, you think the Liahona was an ordinary magnetic compass, when in fact it was nothing of the sort. It was given to Lehi while they were still in the desert, and a number of passages describe it. Indeed, I am at a loss as to why you did not refer to its first appearance, described in 1 Nephi 16:10. I cannot imagine why you did not refer to this much fuller description—unless you chose to ignore it because it is so clear about the real nature of the

“compass” Lehi was given? Have you tried to suppress this passage because it doesn’t support your opinion?

Here is Nephi’s description:

And it came to pass that as my father arose in the morning, and went forth to the tent door, to his great astonishment he beheld upon the ground a round ball of curious workmanship; and it was of fine brass. And within the ball were two spindles; and the one pointed the way whither we should go into the wilderness.

So it was not magnetic, because it pointed first south-southeast (see 1 Nephi 16:13) and then east (see 1 Nephi 17:1). It only worked according to the faith of its users (see 1 Nephi 16:28), and it had writing on it (see 1 Nephi 16:27) that changed from time to time (see 1 Nephi 16:29). At the end of the twentieth century, at the very height of our technological prowess, human ingenuity can only now start to duplicate what the Liahona did. Everything about it was miraculous—I “might say” indeed! And I might further say that of course the Nephites couldn’t make others like it; neither can we. So your question, “Why do we not find examples of compasses among the descendants of these people?” is rather silly. Why on earth would you expect to? Its miraculous properties couldn’t be replicated, and it was useless as a model for magnetic compasses, since it wasn’t one.

I’m afraid that introducing “Alpha and Omega” as well as “adieu” reaches new lows in banality (p. 145). In our mission, we reckon the “adieu” argument to be the silliest of all anti-Mormon arguments against the Book of Mormon; the “Jerusalem nativity” argument (from Alma 7:10) is only the second silliest, and yet I noticed you drew the line at that. You must be slipping to let “adieu” get under the wire. Of course a translator can use whatever word best suits the meaning he is trying to express *to the modern audience*, and both “adieu” and “Alpha and Omega” work rather well in that regard. Of course Jacob’s brethren didn’t speak French. Neither did they speak English—the language the rest of his book is now in. Why is one French word a problem, while 239,000 English words are not?

You also engage in the famous circular argument of so-called plagiarism. You ask, “Do you *really* think that Peter was actually



quoting the Book of Mormon when he gave his speech in Acts 3:22–26 (in comparison with Deuteronomy 18:15, 18–19 and 3 Nephi 20:23–26)?" (pp. 145–46). Of course I don't—Peter didn't have the Book of Mormon to quote from. But in 3 Nephi it is the Lord speaking; Peter could very well have been quoting what the Lord taught him and the other apostles. In fact, while the Lord could have taught it to them at any time he was with them, it is most likely a postresurrection teaching, belonging to the Forty-Day ministry.

Just so you know, plagiarism happens when somebody takes someone else's work and claims it as his or her own. Joseph didn't claim the Book of Mormon as his own work, so it's not plagiarism. In this particular case, Joseph is taking the Lord's words and attributing them to the Lord. What deceit!

I'm not going to get into a discussion of the nuts and bolts of the translation of the Book of Mormon (see pp. 146–49). I wasn't there at the time, so anything I say would only be guesswork—just as your opinions are. The important thing is that it was translated by the gift and power of God and that anyone who reads it, ponders its message, and earnestly prays to know of its truthfulness will receive an answer from above.

I have come across the terribly trivial issue of changes in the various editions of the Book of Mormon before today (see pp. 149–53). The fact that the first edition reads "mother of God" instead of "mother of the Son of God" (1 Nephi 11:18) simply shows that that passage was written by someone who had never been exposed to—or rebelled against—medieval Christianity, that is, its author was *not* Protestant. But nobody ever said Nephi was. The change, and others like it, simply clarifies which member of the Godhead is being spoken about. It is only a question of "confusion as to just who Jesus is" to someone who is trying to find fault. Actually one of the strong evidences of the authenticity of the Book of Mormon is the fact that each prophet has a slightly different interpretation of the role of the Messiah. But, as I already mentioned, for the most part, Jesus is God, and it is entirely correct to see him as such. None of the changes alter the actual meaning of the text; Joseph was right about that. Of course.

Ammon's mistake about King Benjamin is a completely authentic detail, the sort that we would expect to find in the circumstances. As you yourself quoted, "And king Benjamin lived three years and he died" (Mosiah 6:5). That is, he lived for three years *after* he placed his son Mosiah on the throne. Now if you read down the same column just a few inches, you will find that Ammon's expedition set out for Lehi-Nephi about three years after Mosiah ascended the throne—see Mosiah 7:1–3. So it is certainly possible that King Benjamin was still alive when Ammon's group left. If so, Ammon might well have believed that Benjamin was still alive when he met King Limhi. This is just the sort of mistake that a *genuine* historical account could make. Thus the first edition was most probably the correct translation, while the later editions are more historically accurate. But I really wonder if you didn't realize that already. Maybe you were just relying on the Tanners again, or maybe, as my Aunt Jenny suggested, you were playing games with the evidence on your own account.

I think I know what she would make of your handling of the "white and delightful" issue (see pp. 152–53). In this regard, the 1981 edition reflects the changes made by the Prophet Joseph Smith himself in the second edition, when he also changed *white* to *pure* (see, for example, 2 Nephi 30:6; compare this usage to Daniel 12:10). That change was lost in subsequent editions and restored in 1981. Your statement that "the fact that it was put into this form (a physical quality being replaced with a moral or a spiritual one) *after* the 'revelation' giving the priesthood to the blacks (June 8, 1978) seems to be more than just a 'coincidence'" (p. 153) is simply your own opinion. As such, it tells me nothing about the Book of Mormon. But it does tell me something about you. It tells me that you are willing to find fault wherever you can. It tells me that you are judgmental and accusatory.

In reality, the 1981 edition was a major effort to correct the standard Book of Mormon text in line with the Prophet Joseph Smith's own work. The change from *white* to *pure* was Joseph's own.

You go on to say that if you were to pray about the truth of the Book of Mormon, your prayer would have to say,

God, I know that this book is historically inaccurate,  
and I know that this book contains teachings that are

contrary to those doctrines taught in your Word, and I know that Joseph Smith fails the test of a true prophet, and I know that there are many problems with the text showing it to be a modern composition and not an ancient record, and I know that the text of this book has undergone a good deal of editing and changing, but, despite all of that, is it true?" (p. 153)

But that is, I'm sorry to say, a contrived and grossly exaggerated attempt to make seeking the Lord seem somehow ridiculous and certainly does not constitute an open mind.

In reality, you do not know that the Book of Mormon is historically inaccurate at all; you merely think that it is. Nor do you know that its doctrines are contrary to the Bible, any more than you know that the Bible is the *only* document containing God's word. Nor do you know that Joseph Smith was a false prophet or that the Book of Mormon is a modern composition.

Your argument that Joseph was a false prophet rests, in part, on your argument that "in the Book of Mormon we find more evidence of his belief in the same magical practices found in the testimony given at his trial" (p. 125). But that also rests on the assumption that Joseph *wrote* the Book of Mormon—in other words, that he was a false prophet. How do you know that he was a false prophet? Because the Book of Mormon shows his magical beliefs. How do you know they are his beliefs? Because he was a false prophet. And so your circular argument proves its own premises, as circular arguments always do.

Actually, a humble servant of God could phrase the question something like this: "Father in Heaven, my imperfect human wisdom leads me to reject the Book of Mormon. But I know only what man can know. Thou knowest all things, including those things that are hidden from me. Is it true?"

I entirely fail to see how asking such a question would be to "deny the Christian faith" or "abuse the privilege of prayer." Actually the pious indignation with which you refuse to "abuse the privilege" is strongly reminiscent of King Ahaz, in Isaiah 7:10–13. Prayer, according to you, is so "important" to you that you won't use it to actually ask God anything, for to you that would be to "test God" and "question the revelation of his truth." Of course that's not what it would be at all, and, indeed, it

could only be so if you elevate your own conclusions to the status of divine revelation.

And, as I said in my first letter, your argument can be just as easily turned around. As I mentioned, I have a testimony of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon. That testimony is more than just a feeling; the Holy Ghost has revealed to me *personally* that it is true. If praying to know if the Book of Mormon is true is to “ask Him to repeat what He has already said” (p. 19), then wouldn’t it be equally faithless for me to investigate a question that God has already settled? And in my case, the question was not settled *indirectly* via the Bible, but directly and personally.

Therefore, it seems to me that if you are going to ask me to put my faith on the line by testing it according to the Bible, you should be equally willing to put yours on the line by making the Book of Mormon a matter of prayer. But you quite consciously demand that I put my *revealed* faith on the line, even while you insist that your *speculative* faith is to be regarded as unquestionable. Your double standards are nowhere more glaring than on this point.

As I mentioned earlier, my brother says that medieval Judaism “reinvented” itself in reaction to Christian claims. I wonder if you are not reinventing mainstream Christianity in reaction to the claims of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. When you define prayer as “an act of worship that is to be undertaken in solemn adoration” (p. 153) to the *exclusion* of actually asking God any questions, you seem to be making quite a nonbiblical definition of prayer. It almost seems as if you want to remove prayer as a means of seeking truth, something that you would not need to do if you thought it would lead to the conclusions you want to establish.

Now I would like to discuss the Ezekiel and Isaiah prophecies with you, but this letter is already too long, and I haven’t given you Uncle Larry’s analysis of your Book of Abraham material. I will simply affirm my belief that Isaiah 29 is a prophecy of the restoration of the gospel, even in detail. Verses 20 and 21 seem especially apt in consideration of your various arguments.

Now we come to your arguments about the Book of Abraham. I must say that I find it extremely hard to believe that you would find two missionaries who have never heard of the Book of

Abraham. But I would like you now to read my uncle's letter, a copy of which is attached. I warn you that it is rather long. In our family, we regard Uncle Larry as just a little bit eccentric. In some ways, he seems to live more in the ancient world than in the modern one. And he seems to have pulled out all the stops in his response to your letter—he's even got footnotes.

As you can see, the arguments you have presented against the Book of Abraham are not especially convincing, in light of current Egyptological knowledge. I am especially impressed by the fact that the Book of Abraham gives the authentic Egyptian story of the original settlement of the land, shorn of its religious-mythological trappings. You have not addressed this fact, but that is not surprising, since that story was unknown to the Western world in the 1830s. In fact, since the Book of Abraham contains the first version of that story any Americans ever heard, how could Joseph Smith have known about it, except by revelation?

I am glad to see, at the close of your letter, that you are "concerned and praying." I hope your prayers seek two-way communication, in that you are prepared to listen to the Lord and not do all the talking yourself.

May you humble yourself enough to seek his will.

Your friend,

Elder Hahn

## Letter 8a: Uncle Larry Holds Forth

Dear (nephew) Elder Hahn,

You know I always hate to be so formal, as it just isn't my style, but in respect (which I do have for you and your wonderful sacrifice of time to teach folks about the Good Lord) I'll call you Elder. Now then, son, about the letter you recently wrote to me and which I have sat on for a day or two and thought about with great interest. This fellow, James White, the chap you wrote me about, is bothering you about the papyri? What is he trying to pull here with you? Of course you don't know about the papyri; that isn't what you're trying to teach. The gospel ought to be presented in proper order, but this fellow comes along and wants to divide fractions before he can add regular whole numbers, so to speak. But just to inform you so you know in the future, I'll tell you what his problem is. In a word, everything.

You know as well as I do that folks who want to stir up trouble always get things backwards; they do it on purpose in order to confuse. The Pharisees are among us still after all these centuries, I suppose. I noticed he claims that the anti-Mormon authors, the Tanners, in their book *Mormonism: Shadow or Reality* have done the most work on the papyri. This isn't near the truth, but the critics just have to have someone be their hero who does their thinking for them. Now, then, as to the idea that Mormon scholars and the church are trying to keep this information on the papyri away from the regular church attenders: No kidding? Since when? Look here. I'm going to bring out some sources that I know you are not aware of, so you'll have the references for him to go through (if he will). This is going to get extensive, but at least from the get-go you'll know he is woefully inadequate in his knowledge about all phases of the papyri and the facsimiles, as well as about the Egyptologists and their stance. That is essentially what you will need to know, as you can then dig into this later when you come home to your mom and dad and family.

Incidentally your dad and I went fishing the other night and he outfished me again. I told him it's because he was calmer than I was against this White fellow you're wrangling with, and hence perhaps had a more kindly, meek approach to him. But then, as

we all know from the time you were just a wee tot, I haven't taken any guff against the Prophet Joseph Smith, the church, or otherwise, and I'm too old to change that attitude. I suppose with my long hair and no-holds-barred attitude, I have a lot of Porter Rockwell in me to give the critics something to deal with. If they want to lie, I want to reveal it. Let's look into this now in some depth, shall we?

In the first place, Mr. White doesn't have much knowledge of the Egyptologists at all. Do you remember when I went to the university several years back to do some firsthand research, take classes, and have lunch with some of them? Well, John Wilson told me then that he had no intention of trying to cause a fuss or argument with the papyri. He was simply practicing his hand at translating, hoping to bring more light in on the subject. Why, he had nothing but respect for the Mormons and he even told me (and later printed it) that if it had been anyone else asking the Egyptologists to translate papyri for any other church they would have refused to do it. His was a helpful attitude, not this childish nonsense this White fellow presents.<sup>2</sup> In fact, Wilson was one of the most respected Egyptologists and certainly knew the inside of the field better than any mere outsider. Why, over the wonderful lunch salads we used to consume with passion there at the university, we would constantly talk about how Egyptologists were always trying to sort things out in ancient Egypt and how we constantly had to redo what had been done by the others before our time. This is something White just cannot grasp. Wilson always used to tell us how biased James Breasted was in his approach to ancient Egypt.<sup>3</sup> Now we've all read Breasted and we've all learned a thing or two from his powerful pen, but we all knew that he never had the last word on things Egyptian, as none of us do either. That is a point critics fail to understand. But the rest of us

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<sup>2</sup> See John A. Wilson, *Thousands of Years: An Archaeologist's Search for Ancient Egypt* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1972), 177: "In agreeing to study the papyri we had no interest in controversy. We simply were eager to try out our skills on new manuscripts. I should not have agreed to translate if the invitation had not come from the Mormons."

<sup>3</sup> See *ibid.*, 43 (speaking of James Breasted): "Similarly, in his history course, he went right down the middle of the story, brushing aside complexities and uncertainties in order to give us the sweep of mortal triumph and tragedy."

scholars and Egyptologists certainly are aware of our limited understanding of history and archaeology.

Wilson used to tell me, "Larry, the problem you LDS scholars have is you are so emotionally attached to the subject." Well, he sure had a good point, and I would suggest to him that so was he. He ended up printing something to that effect.<sup>4</sup> In fact, after several of their discussions, Egyptologists found that there were many mistakes in their research.<sup>5</sup> Now would Mr. White then extend his

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<sup>4</sup> See Wilson, *Thousands of Years*, 51: "Today there is still eagerness to learn, but this becomes dampened by the necessities of office holding, which discourage imaginative scholarship." "What is now going on in Oriental studies may be called specialization or fragmentation, according to one's emotional bias" (p. 112). "Specialization means both refining and narrowing. The fragmentation of Oriental studies has strengthened the control of restricted fields of study at the cost of the broader picture. Narrowing down the focus cuts off the wider periphery of vision, which includes outside contacts. It is all very well to insist that a picture has more meaning if you can play light upon it from different directions. But life is short, and our immediate interests demand all of our time and attention" (p. 113). "In their writings scholars may attack one another in more vigorous language than they would use in verbal debate. The language of academic disagreement is superficially polite" (p. 120). "When Breasted offered the Egyptian Government the Rockefeller proposal for a new museum and training institute, the defeat of this overture sharply illustrated archaeological antagonisms. An admirable idea crashed on the irrational reefs of international and personal politics" (p. 121). "Every writer of history must remember that his works will be dated and will have only a limited currency. I have tried to tell my students that what I tell them is always subject to change, that they will be privileged to revise written history by their own discoveries and interpretations" (pp. 135-36).

<sup>5</sup> See Wilson, *Thousands of Years*, 137: "Frankfort's 'multiplicity of approach' I accepted wholeheartedly—that is, the argument that the ancients did not select one explanation of a phenomenon but believed that a world of divine miracle was capable of different causations. For example, the different myths about the creation were all instances of the productive purposes of the gods and thus reassured man that the gods worked in different ways to achieve the same goals. . . . Although the ancient logic is not our logic, it had its own consistency and integrity. One has to leave the world of rational scientific causality and enter the world of expected miracles to understand this." "My lack of enthusiasm was a legacy from Breasted, who loved Egypt so much that he saw its culture as independently creative and not influenced from the outside" (p. 138). "Obviously my argument is extreme. No system can last a thousand years unless it has some vital sap in it. Other scholars have pointed out genuine triumphs in later ages. I may have presented a partial truth as though it were the whole truth. . . . Some of what we may have embraced in the 1920s has been cast



logic to proclaim in stentorian voice that this proves the Egyptologists are phony? He'd be laughed out of the arena of scholarship were he to do so, yet that is what critics have done with LDS scholars on this papyri issue. If they can find just one minor point on which an LDS scholar is wrong, they immediately throw out all the scholarship on the papyri.<sup>6</sup> Such extremes are what Wilson was clearly against.<sup>7</sup>

While critics love to pretend there is a unified front of Egyptologists against the Prophet Joseph Smith's explanations and LDS scholarship, we constantly talked about the problems and differences of the scholars. G. Ernest Wright was one of the foremost scholars who said there is no unified field in any scholarship

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away. . . . So similarly what we now see as the truth may appear to be absurd a generation from now" (p. 142). In dealing with the Egyptian translations for James Pritchard's *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (1950), Wilson acknowledges that "My renderings were generally reliable, careful rather than literary, and unmarked by any flashes of genius. Indeed Sir Alan Gardiner, in the *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* [hereafter *JEA*] (1953), once showed that I had translated the lines in one broken text backward!" (pp. 143-44). "I once wrote an article (*Journal of Near Eastern Studies* [hereafter *JNES*] 1955) claiming that Hierakonopolis must have been small and economically insignificant because it lay in an area that is poor in its modern agricultural production. That may have been reasonable as a theory, but actual observation has shown that I was wrong" (p. 184).

<sup>6</sup> An excellent recent example is Stephen E. Thompson, "Egyptology and the Book of Abraham," *Dialogue* 28/1 (1995): 143-60. See also Stan Larson, *Quest for the Gold Plates: Thomas Stuart Ferguson's Archaeological Search for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Freethinker Press, 1996), and John Gee's review of the Larson book in *FARMS Review of Books* 10/2 (1998): 158-83.

<sup>7</sup> See Wilson, *Thousands of Years*, 175-76: "Back in 1912 an Episcopal bishop had mounted an attack on Joseph Smith as a translator. He had solicited and published several offhand and hostile opinions from Egyptologists. The resulting controversy had left a lot of bitterness. Scholarship required a more responsible analysis than a lot of indignant snorts." "A valid counterargument for the faithful would be that we Egyptologists can claim no inspiration. We can only scrape the surface meaning. If Joseph Smith was a prophet, he was an instrument of divine authority, so that he might find the deepest meaning. Although our work deals with fact, we must respect faith. As the Protestant world survived the Higher Criticism of the Bible three generations ago, the Mormons will survive this criticism" (p. 177).

of any kind on any subject.<sup>8</sup> So when critics say that all is proven false in the Mormon papyri and that the church ought to quit faking things that are still being discovered or retranslated into more correct terms and forms, I would suggest to the critics that they at least bother to inform themselves of the real situation. This reassessment is constantly going on in all fields of scholarly endeavor, and none more so than in Egyptology itself. We are nowhere near a complete and thorough understanding of what was once thought the basics of ancient Egypt and Egyptological understanding. I'll leave all the goodies for you in the footnote.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See G. Ernest Wright, "Biblical Archaeology Today," in *New Directions in Biblical Archaeology*, ed. David N. Freedman and Jonas C. Greenfield (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1969), 149–65. He reviews Werner Keller's book *The Bible as History: A Confirmation of the Book of Books*, trans. William Neil (New York: Morrow, 1956), and finds it far too simplistic (see pp. 149–51). For instance, with Jericho, "there is nothing but negative archaeological evidence" (p. 151). "The most astonishing thing to be said about the field of biblical history is that in spite of the vast mass of new evidence which archaeology has provided, there is no starting point that can be agreed upon by the various groups of scholars, no method of extracting history from tradition that forms a consensus" (p. 155).

<sup>9</sup> The Egyptian field is *always* being reassessed. Compare Stephen E. Thompson, "The Anointing of Officials in Ancient Egypt," *JNES* 53/1 (1994): 20, wherein he is refuting another Egyptologist; Josef W. Wegner, "The Nature and Chronology of the Senwosret III-Amenemhat III Regnal Succession: Some Considerations Based on New Evidence from the Mortuary Temple of Senwosret III at Abydos," *JNES* 55/4 (1996): 249–79, where he notes that, because of new archaeological and text discoveries, the "standard chronology" of the Twelfth Dynasty has to be abandoned; Alberto R. W. Green, "The Identity of King So of Egypt—An Alternative Interpretation," *JNES* 52/2 (1993): 99–108, for various contradictory materials and evidence; Anthony Spalinger, "Notes on the Ancient Egyptian Calendars," *Orientalia* 64 (1995): 17–32, showing there is no consensus yet on the ancient calendar system of the ancient Egyptians; José M. Galán, "EA 164 and the God Amun," *JNES* 51/4 (1992): 287–91, demonstrating that, after all, there are Mesopotamian parallels to the ancient Egyptian gods; Katja Goebis, "Untersuchungen zu Funktion und Symbolgehalt des nms," *Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* (hereafter *ZÄS*) 122/2 (1995): 154–81, wherein she gives the latest information on this very important Egyptian crown, showing that new combinations of gods and their various concepts can form breakthroughs and supplements in our understanding, even involving the Sphinx, the king, and the sun-god; José M. Galán, "Bullfight Scenes in Ancient Egyptian Tombs," *JEA* 80 (1994): 81–96, wherein the scenes depict an allegorical concept of the Pharaohs and kings overcoming fights and contests against

Since Mr. White lacks the scholarly acumen to deal with the papyri and the Egyptological literature, is it any surprise to you that he won't show you this continuous reevaluation going on in the field? And note that this reassessment covers virtually the entire history, religion, politics, chronology, philosophy, and economics of the ancient Egyptians. We just simply are not done by any stretch of the imagination.

And I can't help but notice with amusement how Mr. White tells you there is no need to go into the actual papyri because we have everything we need to see if Joseph was a true prophet in the Pearl of Great Price, and then he launches off into the papyri. Such consistency on his part. If we don't need to go into it, then why does he? (see pp. 158–59). He is correct about one thing though—"Please do not engage in a frantic search for some kind—any kind—of 'explanation' for Smith's obvious blunders and errors" (p. 167). That isn't your job; it's mine. The thing I note is that this White fellow simply refuses to engage in any kind of research himself but is content to declare things on his own (without any documentation) and then give us one quotation from the 1969 view of the papyri. But, my boy, I must insist that this is 1999 and if White is going to get into it, he ought to do so from today's information, not yesteryear's. In other words, what he feels are blunders and goofs of Joseph Smith are simply nothing of the kind. I will now go detail for detail into what White has said, and, more significantly, what he has left out. This fellow hasn't got a clue, so heads up: we're going to have some fun.

Did you happen to notice that he says all we need to do is look in the Pearl of Great Price for our test, and then he launches into the *History of the Church*? What for, if all we need is the Pearl of Great Price? You might want to ask him that. If he answers that

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their rulership; Hassan El-Saady, "Two Heliopolitan Stelae of the New Kingdom," *ZÄS* 122/2 (1995): 101–4, wherein he assesses archaeological evidence that the dead person identifies himself with everything to do with the resurrection; Nadette Hoffmann, "Reading the Amduat," *ZÄS* 123/1 (1996): 26–40, noting that after all, there really are hidden meanings and double meanings in the hieroglyphics because of the multiplicity of meaning and forms in various combinations; and J. Gwyn Griffiths, "The Phrase *hr mw.f* in the Memphite Theology," *ZÄS* 123/2 (1996): 111–15, updating this discussion. (This lists just a few recent samples of updating and correcting old thoughts going on in Egyptological studies.)

he needs to prepare the background, then ask him why he said all we need to do is read only the Pearl of Great Price (see p. 158). In other words, stick it to him for inconsistency. But anyway, notice also in his quotation concerning what the *History of the Church* said about Joseph acquiring and translating the papyri that White said, "It is important to note that Smith claimed to translate these items, in the same way he had claimed to translate the Book of Mormon" (p. 158). Now is this nuts or what? Tell you what. You inform this White fellow that if he can show you anywhere in the *History of the Church* 2:235–36 where the Book of Mormon is even mentioned, you'll come home off your mission and your dear old uncle here, who is reviewing his writings and helping you understand his nincompooery, will quit Mormonism. Where in the dusty hills of Idaho did White come up with the idea that Joseph ever said he translated these items the same way as he translated the Book of Mormon? Talk about putting words in the mouth of the Prophet. This is a clear example of a straw man argument, my boy. Remember I told you earlier this year about a straw man argument I discussed with the Egyptologists on another subject, and you asked me what that was? Well, here it is in all its grandeur. This has nothing to do with the Book of Mormon. White is setting this up on his own so he can destroy it and make you look like he is getting the victory. Well, that just isn't the case. If this is White's best attempt at cleverness, we ought to come out of this shining like the sun at noonday.

Notice the clowning around White does next. He contends that if these writings were of Abraham's own hand they would be the greatest archaeological find the planet has ever known. And notice how he has ignored the analyses done by Hugh Nibley, Michael Rhodes, John Gee, and H. Donl Peterson. Let me explain something I found when reading the Hebrew Bible.

It is obvious from reading the Hebrew Bible that the phrase *by his own hand* is a Hebrew idiom *beyadh*, which means "by the authority of," as we can clearly see in the Stuttgartensian Hebrew text that Kohlenberger translates. He renders Exodus 9:35 as "just as the Lord said through Moses," while the Hebrew has *beyadh*, that is "by the hand of." Clearly it was the Lord's hand—the Lord's authority, which had led Moses against Pharaoh, that is, by

the Lord's authority. Though we don't get it that way in the English, the Hebrew definitely has "by the hand of."<sup>10</sup>

At 1 Samuel 28:15 we see another example—the English translation reads that God would not appear to Saul either by the prophets or by dreams. In the Hebrew we again find *beyadh*, "by the hand of," or in other words, by the prophet's authority from God.

In other words, Abraham may not even have touched the documents that bear his name, the very ones that fell into Joseph's hands in the 1830s, since Abraham could have had them commissioned and written for him. Yet for all this, the documents would still bear his signature, since they were authorized by him, "by his own hand," even though a scribe may have written it instead of Abraham. Isn't it interesting that our critics take this one instance with sheer concrete literalness, yet they guffaw when we take other scriptures literally, for example, that God is our real Heavenly Father, embodied as a man in yonder heavens?

When I was having lunch with a Greek scholar the other day, he mentioned he had just been studying the Septuagint, the Greek Old Testament, and told me that the Greek word *cheir* was a fascinating one because it had various levels of meaning. One of the meanings was the hand as an "instrument of action and power. Thus, to the hand is ascribed what strictly belongs to the person himself or to his power."<sup>11</sup> "By the hand" means by his intervention, or by the hands of someone. At Leviticus 10:11, Moses is to offer the sacrifice, but he actually has Aaron, Eleazar, and Ithamar eat the unleavened bread. The Greek *cheir* here means that though Moses offered the sacrifice, it was not Moses who ate the sacrifice, even though he is credited with it, having "by his own hand" ordered it done by others. At 1 Kings 12:15 in the Hebrew text, the hand of the Lord was going to be on the king if he did not listen to the Lord. Of course, it was not God's hand, but rather the expression meant God would have someone else punish the king, which is the meaning of "by his hand." For the Book of

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<sup>10</sup> John Gee notes that the point can also be made from the Egyptian phrase *ndr.t=f*, "by his hand" = "from."

<sup>11</sup> Spiros Zodhiates, ed., *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, Tenn.: AMG, 1993), 1473–74.

Abraham, we see this as an expression of speech more or less, not a literalism that Abraham himself personally wrote.

As the LDS Egyptologist John Gee has noted, there have been various Jewish immigrations into Egypt through history, and nothing compels us to assume that Abraham must have written his account in Egyptian. His book could have passed through the hands of Abraham's posterity through time and eventually been translated into other languages.<sup>12</sup> John Wilson, one of the Egyptologists to work on the Joseph Smith Papyri, also noted that copies of documents were made, but attribution of the writing was to go to the original authors.<sup>13</sup> I notice that this White fellow hasn't bothered to inform himself of the ancient ideas at all. You need not worry about his argument—it is not only convoluted, but incorrect, as the historical evidence shows.

White's contention that Abraham on the lion couch has in reality been identified as Osiris, and hence that Joseph Smith blew it, is laughable. White is not up on the current literature on this at all. Both John Wilson and Klaus Baer, Egyptologists who worked on the papyri, noted that one of the figures in the papyri, a little female, was considered Osiris, even though she could not be, literally speaking.<sup>14</sup>

The one source critics usually ignore in their research is the most interesting in this respect. Roy B. Ward has noted something especially phenomenal, considering how White argues. Ward notes that in Luke 16:19–31, where Lazarus is taken to the bosom of Abraham, "The story itself is probably, as Gressmann proposed, dependent on an Egyptian tale, whose closest descendent is the Demotic tale of Satme. The role of Osiris in the Egyptian tradition has been replaced in the Lukan story by Abraham."<sup>15</sup> Isn't it

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<sup>12</sup> See John Gee, "Abracadabra, Isaac and Jacob," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 7/1 (1995): 72–73.

<sup>13</sup> See Hugh Nibley, *Abraham in Egypt* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 4–7.

<sup>14</sup> See John A. Wilson, "The Joseph Smith Egyptian Papyri: Translations and Interpretations," *Dialogue* 3/2 (1968): 71; Klaus Baer, "The Breathing Permit of Hôr: A Translation of the Apparent Source of the Book of Mormon," *Dialogue* 3/3 (1968): 117 n. 24.

<sup>15</sup> Roy B. Ward, "Abraham Traditions in Early Christianity," in *Studies on the Testament of Abraham*, ed. George W. E. Nickelsburg Jr. (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1976), 177.

interesting that a New Testament sketch featuring Abraham may be based on the Egyptian Book of the Dead, and that Abraham takes the role of Osiris? White never told you that, did he? The idea that Abraham can and did take on the role of the pagan god Osiris seems to have historical roots; hence it isn't a problem with the Book of Abraham Facsimile 1 either. At a bare minimum, if it is damning to the Book of Abraham, it is also damning to the New Testament, something I seriously doubt White will ever agree to. Note his double standard here. He would damn the Book of Abraham for this but let it slide with the New Testament—a common trick and a common un scholarly double standard of the critics.

White's clowning around is ridiculous. Had he bothered to read only one Egyptologist he would see the embarrassing stance he has taken. In fact, there have been recent studies on just this interesting phenomenon of folks becoming an Osiris and what it means. This is, trust me, too good to miss.<sup>16</sup>

What was the aim of the Osirian mummification rites? Quite simple. "The ritual aims at bestowing the fate of Osiris on the dead man. The Osirian person incorporates both the pharaoh and the father and belongs to all those who carry the name of this god."<sup>17</sup> The way Englund puts it is "the dead identifies himself with gods and entities in order to show and prove the insight he has reached, the position he has attained, and the powers he disposes over."<sup>18</sup> The royal divine access was identified by Egyptologists with Osiris.<sup>19</sup> The Coffin Texts have as an example of divine access: "the deceased is identified with Osiris."<sup>20</sup> The

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<sup>16</sup> The latest, fullest discussion of what it means to be Osiris is found in Mark Smith, *The Mortuary Texts of Papyrus BM 10507*, Catalog of Demotic Papyri in the British Museum (London: British Museum, 1987), 3:75–79.

<sup>17</sup> Ragnhild B. Finnestad, "The Pharaoh and the 'Democratization' of Post-Mortem Life," in *The Religion of the Ancient Egyptians: Cognitive Structures and Popular Expressions*, ed. Gertie Englund (Uppsala, Sweden: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1989), 91.

<sup>18</sup> Gertie Englund, "Gods as a Frame of Reference: On Thinking and Concepts of Thought in Ancient Egypt," in *Religion of the Ancient Egyptians*, 21.

<sup>19</sup> See Jørgen P. Sorensen, "Divine Access: The So-Called Democratization of Egyptian Funerary Literature as a Socio-Cultural Process," in *Religion of the Ancient Egyptians*, 113.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

dead has access to the god, and is a god, because of his knowledge: "You shall not hinder the King when he crosses to him [that is, the father of the primeval gods] at the horizon, For the King knows him and knows his name."<sup>21</sup>

Later developments in the ancient Egyptian religious systems eventually allowed the private individual divine access. The public were then also "identified" with Osiris.<sup>22</sup> We read: "The spirit is (destined) for heaven, the corpse for the earth, What men receive when they are buried is a thousand of bread, a thousand of beer on the offering-table of Khentamenthes [Osiris]."<sup>23</sup>

So Joseph Smith was not incorrect in noting that there was a human figure on the lion couch since, in Egyptian religious terms, this person, by being involved in the very rituals of Egyptian religion, was Osiris. This is clearly confirmed again, by none other than Klaus Baer, who reported that it was after 2200 B.C. that private individuals began to claim the privileges of royalty. Baer noted such specific privileges as "The deceased person who has been 'justified' in the judgment of the dead and lives again in a blessed existence in the Netherworld is like Osiris and therefore [according] to the Egyptian way of thought is Osiris."<sup>24</sup> So whether Abraham or Osiris, it is correct. The Egyptians, as already noted, simply did not think in exclusionary terms as we moderns do. Because A is A, we think, it cannot be B. But to the Egyptian A can be A and also B, and we need to begin to understand this. Why, just in 1996 an Egyptologist wrote that Egyptian hieroglyphs themselves had hidden meanings, more than one function, and multiple forms of meanings; they were actually a cryptographic code and in fact a metalanguage, among other things.<sup>25</sup>

Joseph Smith does things the Egyptian way, it appears. The Book of the Dead indicates that the dead, on reciting certain spells

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<sup>21</sup> PT 301; §448–49, in Raymond O. Faulkner, *Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 90.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 117. Compare J. Gwyn Griffiths, "Motivation in Early Egyptian Syncretism," in *Studies in Egyptian Religion: Dedicated to Professor Jan Zandee*, ed. M. Heerma van Voss et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1982), 48, 52–54, where we read that the ultimate goal is the divinization of a human being.

<sup>23</sup> PT 305; §474, in Griffiths, "Motivation," 48.

<sup>24</sup> Baer, "The Breathing Permit of Hôr," 117 n. 24.

<sup>25</sup> See Nadette Hoffmann, "Reading the Amduat," *ZÄS* 123/1 (1996): 26–40.



and acquiring the attributes of the various gods—the ears of Wepwawet, the hair of Nun, the lips of Anubis, etc.—simply claims, “I am Osiris.”<sup>26</sup> As J. Gwyn Griffiths has noted on taking on the various characteristics of the gods, “in general the divine limbs which are specially suitable have been chosen and . . . the result is the permanent survival of the deceased; thou hast not perished. If these divine physical properties have thus been assumed, it may be confidently inferred that it is meant to imply the divinization of a mortal man.”<sup>27</sup> Spell 42 of the Book of the Dead ticks off the characteristic physical features of the gods the mortal acquires. In fact, in Spell 45 the dead says “May it be done to me in like manner, for I am Osiris.”<sup>28</sup> The dead says to the gods, “I know your name, I know your names, you gods, you lords of the realm of the dead, for I am one of you.”<sup>29</sup>

Something else White misses is that the figure on the lion couch is not a mummy, but is stirring. This is not a dead man at all. And in fact, we have a similar lion-couch scene at Abydos, where we are told that, in the chapel of Sokar-Osiris on the southern wall, we see the mystical conception of Horus. Anubis is not involved in embalming in this lion-couch scene at all.<sup>30</sup> While we admit the lion-couch idea is similar, White seems to want us to believe that if we have seen one of these, we have seen them all and understood them all. This is false. Hugh Nibley has also described and discussed the Opet Temple Lion Couch, wherein the Egyptologists have noted the man on the lion couch at Opet is not dead, but is praying, which rings a bell for our Facsimile 1. The hands of the two figures on the lion couches are in the same position.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Book of the Dead 32, in Raymond O. Faulkner, trans., and Carol Andrews, ed., *The Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 56; Book of the Dead 42, in *ibid.*, 62.

<sup>27</sup> Griffiths, “Motivation,” 54.

<sup>28</sup> Book of the Dead 45, in Faulkner (ed. Andrews), *Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead*, 64.

<sup>29</sup> Book of the Dead 81B, in *ibid.*, 79.

<sup>30</sup> See Omm Sety and Hanny El Zeini, *Abydos: Holy City of Ancient Egypt* (Los Angeles: LL, 1981), 149 (see also fig. 11–6 on p. 148).

<sup>31</sup> See Hugh Nibley, “The Unknown Abraham,” *Improvement Era* (May 1969): 90, citing Luise Klebs, *Reliefs und Malereien des Mittleren Reiches (VII–XVII. Dynastie)* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1922), 177. Compare Anthony

Besides, Egyptologists have already declared that Osiris on this lion couch is not a dead mummy but is in the process of rebirth and rejuvenation. White also says the bird should have a human head and that Smith incorrectly copied it as a bird's head. But I. E. S. Edwards has a picture of an artifact of the tomb of Tutankhamun with the soul bird carved in wood; however, the carving reveals that there are really two birds, a human-headed one and a bird-headed one.<sup>32</sup>

Nibley also discussed this idea of the human-headed bird according to the Egyptologists and noted some significant things that White, true to form, has ignored. Nibley indicated that this figure should wear a jackal's mask (presumably over a human head),<sup>33</sup> but we must also realize that "no claim of inspiration is made for the drawings. . . . There is nothing particularly holy about them."<sup>34</sup> But now the question becomes, Who made the error? Of course, White wants us to suppose that Smith in his ignorance made it, neglecting the fact that the woodcuts of the facsimiles were made by Reuben Hedlock. However, Nibley notes the existence of "at least three Ptolemaic lion-couch scenes closely paralleling this one [the Joseph Smith lion couch] in which the artist has deliberately drawn the embalming priest without a jackal-mask."<sup>35</sup> In fact, in one case the mask had been purposely

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Spalinger, "Some Remarks on the Epagomenal Days in Ancient Egypt," *JNES* 54/1 (1995): 43.

<sup>32</sup> See I. E. S. Edwards, *The Treasures of Tutankhamun* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1976), plate 23 left; Christiane Desroches-Noblecourt, *Life and Death of a Pharaoh: Tutankhamen* (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1978), 281; Katherine S. Gilbert and Joan K. Holt, *Treasures of Tutankhamun* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1976), 151, for illustrations. Gilbert and Holt say, "The human-headed bird and the falcon are two of the forms that the king might adopt" (p. 151). They also note that another high Egyptian official "included in his tomb at Elkab an inscription containing a promise to transform himself into 'a phoenix, a swallow, a falcon, or a heron'" (pp. 151-52). Howard Carter, *The Tomb of Tutankhamun* (New York: Copper Square, 1963), 84, notes the two birds on the right and left of the wooden coffin protecting the mummy; both are manifestations of divine protection for the king. Plate XXIV in the back picture section shows the mummy.

<sup>33</sup> See Hugh Nibley, "As Things Stand at the Moment," *BYU Studies* 9/1 (1968): 98.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

erased; hence his conclusion on this matter: "We do not at present know why the Egyptians preferred here to dispense with the mask, but it is at least conceivable that the artist of Facsimile 1 had his reasons too. It will not do to attribute to the Mormons everything that puzzles us."<sup>36</sup> So, based on the archaeological examples of lion couches that we have, White's argument is more counterproductive to his case than strong proof against Joseph Smith. And, of course, you don't see White mentioning John Gee's excellent research on this either.

In his master's thesis, "Notes on the Sons of Horus," Gee shows a priest officiating with an Anubis mask on. The illustration shows a side profile of the man with the outline of the mask over his head.<sup>37</sup> Gee also notes that Seeber says of the representation there that the rule allows for the possibility of no distinction between the deity and the masked priest who is in the deity's role and also wears the deity's mask.<sup>38</sup> Hatshepsut tells how her father "made love to her mother in the disguise of the god Amon, with 'attendant priests . . . masked to represent his fellow-deities.'"<sup>39</sup>

These are just two examples of the many we have, showing that persons did wear masks of the deities and took over the gods' roles and attributes and were considered to be the god in Egyptian rites and rituals. In fact, Lewis Spence says that a certain mummy was taken from a coffin and "placed upright against the wall of the *mastaba* by a priest wearing the mask of the jackal-headed god Anubis."<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, Gee also noted the importance of realizing how correct Joseph Smith was in saying the officiant at the lion couch was a priest. He is refuting Ed Ashment:

Ashment's booklet also adds yet another item of bibliography to the completely irrelevant debate over whether the head of Figure 3 in Facsimile 1 of the

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> See also Siegfried Morenz, *Gott und Mensch im alten Ägypten* (Zürich: Artemis, 1984), 181.

<sup>38</sup> See John Gee, "Notes on the Sons of Horus" (master's thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1991), 26 n. 159, citing Hans Kayser, *Das Pelizaeus-Museum in Hildesheim* (Hamburg: de Gruyter, 1966), 70.

<sup>39</sup> Nibley, *Abraham in Egypt*, 130.

<sup>40</sup> Lewis Spence, *Myths and Legends: Ancient Egypt* (Boston: Nickerson, n.d.), 30.

book of Abraham has been restored properly. The figure in Facsimile 1 has a bald human head; the critics argue that it should be a jackal's head. (Joseph Smith Papyrus I presently is missing the figure's head.) This particular question—one on which Ashment has lavished his best work ever—is of absolutely no significance. To see why, consider the following:

(1) Assume for the sake of argument that the head on Facsimile 1 Figure 3 is correct. What are the implications of the figure being a bald man? Shaving the head was a common feature of initiation into the priesthood from the Old Kingdom through the Roman period. Since "Complete shaving of the head was another mark of the male Isiac votary and priest," the bald figure would then be a priest. [Would Joseph Smith have known this?]

(2) Assume on the other hand that the head on Facsimile 1 Figure 3 is that of a jackal, as was first suggested by Theodule Devéria. We have representations of priests wearing masks, one example of an actual mask, literary accounts from non-Egyptians about Egyptian priests wearing masks, and even a hitherto-unrecognized Egyptian account of when a priest would wear a mask. In the midst of the embalmment ritual, a new section is introduced with the following passage: "Afterwards, Anubis, the *stolites* priest (*hry sstj*) wearing the head of this god, sits down and no lector-priest shall approach him to bind the *stolites* with any work." Thus this text settles any questions about whether masks were actually used. It furthermore identifies the individual wearing the mask as a priest.

Thus, however the restoration is made, the individual shown in Facsimile 1 Figure 3 is a priest, and the entire question of which head should be on the figure is moot so far as identifying the figure is concerned. The entire debate has been a waste of ink. It is ironic that the best work Ashment has ever produced, Egyptological or otherwise, has been spent on a point that makes no difference in the end. The question is not

“whether or not Joseph Smith’s reconstruction of the standing figure in his lion-couch vignette is accurate” but whether or not the figure is identified correctly as a priest. It is.<sup>41</sup>

James White says that nothing Joseph Smith said was correct. In light of this information, he appears quite uninformed.

The description of a scene from the tomb of Neferhôtep says “the bald-headed priest with the panther-skin is the Sem; the priest holding the mummy is dressed as Anubis.”<sup>42</sup> In fact, we know that a jackal mask was worn by the chief embalmer, who impersonated Anubis at the embalment and burial ceremonies. Hans Bonnet states that masks were used unequivocally to represent Anubis.<sup>43</sup> Kate Bosse-Griffiths shows actual Beset masks and contends that the dancers who wore these masks were impersonating the deity.<sup>44</sup>

For the last one hundred years in Egyptian archaeology, it has been understood that priests wore masks representing the deities they were trying to impersonate. Many of the chapters in the Egyptian Book of the Dead were drawn with priests wearing the Anubis masks.

In a scene from Kerasher’s mummy, the description by Faulkner reads: “The mummy is held upright by a priest wearing a jackal’s head while water is poured over it.” Note that the priest pouring the water is bald.<sup>45</sup> The description accompanying an-

<sup>41</sup> Gee, “Abracadabra, Isaac and Jacob,” 79–82.

<sup>42</sup> Adolf Erman, *Life in Ancient Egypt*, trans. H. M. Tirard (New York: Dover, 1971), caption of plate, “Funeral Procession and Ceremonies at the Tomb,” between pages 320 and 321. Nina M. Davies’s article, “Some Representations of Tombs from the Theban Necropolis,” *JEA* 24 (1938): 26, noted that in funeral processions “either a male mourner, or a priest personifying Anubis, supports it [the mummy].” Aylward M. Blackman, in his article “Some Notes on the Ancient Egyptian Practice of Washing the Dead,” *JEA* 5 (1918): 117, observed that the living Pharaoh was considered the embodiment of the sun-god while here on earth. And when the priests were performing their lustration rituals in the temple, they wore masks.

<sup>43</sup> See Hans Bonnet, *Reallexikon der Ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1971), 441.

<sup>44</sup> See Kate Bosse-Griffiths, “A Beset Amulet from the Amarna Period,” *JEA* 63 (1977): 103–5.

<sup>45</sup> Faulkner (ed. Andrews), *Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead*, 25.

other illustration used in *The Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead* says, “[Hunefer’s] mummy is held upright . . . by a priest wearing a jackal’s mask.”<sup>46</sup> And, finally, Bob Brier shows an actual existing Anubis mask, which he describes as being “worn by a priest at a mummification.”<sup>47</sup>

The points I make are two. The figure in the Joseph Smith Facsimile 1 is a priest, properly so, as Joseph Smith said, with or without his Anubis mask. Joseph Smith is not incorrect here, as James White claims.

White’s analysis of Facsimile 3 is a laugh. When he says “In reality this scene . . . shows the god Osiris enthroned” (p. 162), he stops at that concerning the enthroned figure. But there is a lot more to it than that, and here is where Joseph Smith also scores a bull’s-eye in his explanation. Notice that Joseph Smith says figure 1 is “Abraham . . . with a crown upon his head, representing the Priesthood, as emblematical of the grand Presidency in Heaven.” Now interestingly, in Facsimile 3 we have Osiris enthroned as Osiris Khenty-Amentiu. This name means, and I quote, “First (or President) of the Westerners.”<sup>48</sup> Osiris, as Lord of the Dead, is called Khenty-Amentiu. Khenty means “Before, earlier,” as the Egyptologist Alan Gardiner noted,<sup>49</sup> or preceding, that is, the president, as Hugh Nibley has noted.<sup>50</sup> Joseph Smith is right on the money here.

White’s complaint that the male figures were dressed as females is simply laughable these days. True enough, the Prophet did identify female figures with men, and notice how much fun White has with this. He says, “It is rather embarrassing to note that the femininity of figures 2 and 4 is rather obvious—how could

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 54 (illustrating Spell 23).

<sup>47</sup> Bob Brier, *Egyptian Mummies: Unraveling the Secrets of an Ancient Art* (New York: Morrow, 1994), 76.

<sup>48</sup> Sety and El Zeini, *Abydos*, 7.

<sup>49</sup> Alan H. Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar: Being an Introduction to the Study of Hieroglyphs*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 130, 133, 156, 529, 585, 613.

<sup>50</sup> See Hugh Nibley, “One Eternal Round,” 12 lectures on the Joseph Smith Hypocephalus, FARMS, 1990, audiotape 10. Rudolf Anthes, “Egyptian Theology in the Third Millennium B.C.,” *JNES* 18 (1959): 186, notes that Khent Amenti means “presiding”; the example he uses is the main star presiding in the night sky.

Smith have missed it?" (p. 162). Indeed! Were Mr. White to get his nose out of worthless anti-Mormon literature and bother reading an Egyptologist or two, he would certainly see that Smith didn't miss anything. His identification of Maat and Hathor as men is possible in the depiction because of the ritual context. First, let us take a necessary diversion back to Facsimile 1 to help us understand this odd idea of men as women in Facsimile 3. Remember how in Facsimile 1 Anubis was supposedly drawn incorrectly as a bald-headed man? Every critic out there in lala land has proclaimed in resounding voice that this is proof positive that Smith was a fraud. This figure ought to be Anubis, the jackal-headed god. Further analysis has shown that the priest wore the Anubis mask. The same thing here.

What White has dismally failed to understand, because he shows no awareness at all of Egyptological literature nor of ancient Egyptian ideas, is precisely this aspect that he raves against. The ancient Egyptians dressed in costume during their rituals, coronations, and funerals and took on the roles of the deities whose robes they wore, whether male or female. It is that simple. And there is rather an abundant amount of evidence to demonstrate this these days.

The first thing to note is Olaf E. Kaper's study wherein he shows that the astronomical ceiling at Deir El-Haggar depicts androgynous figures, specifically, one figure that "displays female hairstyle and breast, but the sexual organ is male." At Denderah as well as Philae, figures are represented with female breasts but without the distinctive female traits. The Denderah figure is bearded, yet other male figures are shown with pendulous breasts. "The breasts on the curled-up god are female."<sup>51</sup> The idea is that to the ancient Egyptians gender was constantly being mixed and switched around. Faulkner has noted that, in the ritual of the bringing of Sokar in the Bremner-Rhind Papyrus, there is an unusual concentration of praise for Hathor. It is quite revealing that it is she who guides the gods through the land, and it is she who has power over them.<sup>52</sup> Julia Sampson has demonstrated that

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<sup>51</sup> Olaf E. Kaper, "The Astronomical Ceiling of Deir El-Haggar in the Dakhleh Oasis," *JEA* 81 (1995): 180, and n. 15.

<sup>52</sup> See Raymond O. Faulkner, "The Bremner-Rhind Papyrus—II," *JEA* 23 (1937): 12, 13.

Nefertiti's authority was equal to if not greater than that of the king who sits on the throne. In fact, the queens, with kingly status, changed their names to masculine forms to signify being successors to the throne of the king.<sup>53</sup> The goddess prepares the king for his office.<sup>54</sup> In the Seti I Temple at Abydos "a number of Hathor-goddesses are suckling the young Ramesses, who is wearing different crowns," and in fact, the goddess, "by fixing the uraeus on the forehead of Haremhab, [establishes] his right to be king . . . although he was not of royal blood."<sup>55</sup> The queen anointed her husband during the coronation of his kingship,<sup>56</sup> thus showing that it was by her authority that he reigned. Elise J. Baumgartel notes that "during the Naqada I period the largest and most important tombs belong to women. . . . From this I infer a matriarchal society of which strong remnants survive into historical times."<sup>57</sup> One more connection, and we'll see the serious significance this has for Book of Abraham Facsimile 3. Kate Bosse-Griffiths shows that, early on, Beset masks were worn during ceremonies and rituals involving the living, not the dead, and in fact, an organized cult of Bes dancers "were acting the part of the god." That is, by wearing the Beset masks, one of which has been found, humans became the god through enactment and ritual; hence the necessity for wearing various masks of various gods.<sup>58</sup> This is what is happening in Facsimile 3.

A syncretization (that is, a fusing and mixing not only of genders, but gods and mortals) occurred with the many Egyptian goddesses—Hathor being Isis, Maat, and most any other goddess, depending on what circumstance she finds herself in. But to the ancient Egyptian, it was Hathor (or Isis) who rewarded the king with his throne.<sup>59</sup> Isis, as the spiritual authority, is recognized in Coffin Text Spell 148, where we read "I am Isis, more spiritual

<sup>53</sup> See Julia Sampson, "Nefertiti's Regality," *JEA* 63 (1977): 88, 95.

<sup>54</sup> See Kate Bosse-Griffiths, "The Great Enchantress in the Little Golden Shrine of Tut'ankhamūn," *JEA* 59 (1973): 101–2.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>56</sup> See *ibid.*, 107.

<sup>57</sup> Elise J. Baumgartel, "Some Remarks on the Origins of the Titles of the Archaic Egyptian Kings," *JEA* 61 (1975): 29–30.

<sup>58</sup> Bosse-Griffiths, "A Beset Amulet," 104.

<sup>59</sup> See Günther Roeder, "Der IsistempeI von Behbêt," *ZÄS* 46 (1909): 65.



and noble than [all] the gods."<sup>60</sup> She tells the king, "I give you the office of Atum on the throne of Shu."<sup>61</sup> Hathor's status, even office, is taken over by the "Great Enchantress," "*Wr.t-Hk3w* [Weret-Hekau]," and as the "Lady of Heaven" (*dame du ciel*) she was syncretized with Mut and Isis (the Mother) while she announced that she put the king's crown on him. "*Wr.t Hk3w*, a real divinity (and not an epithet), assimilates herself to the double uraeus."<sup>62</sup> Hari even notes that the king, as Hapy, the feeder or provider of his people, appears bearded but also pregnant. Hence his identification as the Lady Weret-Hekau.<sup>63</sup> It's interesting that Weret-Hekau holds in her hand the symbol of life—grain—and that she conducts the king to Hathor, who makes the *nyny* gesture. Nibley has noted that the same situation is depicted in Facsimile 3 where Hathor is holding the sign of life in her hand.<sup>64</sup>

The whole point of this long foray is that the mixing of the sexes is very plausible in Joseph Smith's Facsimile 3. Far from being a liability, it shows that Joseph Smith was correct in depicting this odd situation where men represent women and women represent men. The point is, it is ritualistic assimilation, role modeling, role playing, exactly as in the classical world of the Romans and Greeks, as far as that goes. Hence we find Nero wearing masks, not only of himself but of his female lovers, while performing a play. With various masks, players could play the roles of gods, goddesses, heroines, and heroes. Not only masks, but entire costumes were donned by the actors and players because, "in a funeral procession, this reincarnation of the great ancestors through the masks in the presence of their living descendants did honor to both the living and the dead."<sup>65</sup> We find this exact situation in Facsimile 3. It truly is an ancient Egyptian touch, by all means. Hugh Nibley has shown time and again that the Hathor

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<sup>60</sup> Robert H. O'Connell, "The Emergence of Horus: An Analysis of Coffin Text Spell 148," *JEA* 69 (1983): 73.

<sup>61</sup> Roeder, "Der Isistempel," 67.

<sup>62</sup> Robert Hari, "La Grande-en-Magie et la stèle du temple de Ptah à Karnak," *JEA* 62 (1976): 103.

<sup>63</sup> See *ibid.*, plate XIV A, following 104.

<sup>64</sup> See Nibley, *Abraham in Egypt*, 139.

<sup>65</sup> Niall W. Slater, "Nero's Masks," *Classical World* 90/1 (1996): 33, 36–37. See also C. W. Dearden, "The Poet and the Mask Again," *Phoenix* 29/1 (1975): 75–82.

mask was worn by men, and in fact, the king, by donning that mask, became Hathor. He has also shown how Isis is the throne as well as the kingship “which is embodied in the living King. . . . With the idea of the Great Lady actually ‘embodying’ the King, the incongruity of Figure 2 as ‘King Pharaoh’ begins to dissolve.”<sup>66</sup> It is not so much a question of how Joseph Smith missed this incongruity, as how James White missed all this, since it has all been published well before he wrote his book—in some cases, many years before. Again, we see that James White needn’t be taken seriously, since he is not serious about understanding this himself.

Let’s get on to Facsimile 2 because we have a lot of ground to cover that White deliberately skips. He first blunders by saying that the hypocephalus is a common item of Egyptian funerary artifacts (see p. 164). Common? Out of all the Egyptian materials thus far discovered there have been slightly more than a mere 150 of these items found, yet there have been thousands and thousands of mummies. Common, my eye. White thinks that by making it common we all ought to understand it by now. Nothing is further from the truth, and you notice that White in the next few pages of his letter to you did not elaborate on it either.

White next says that, “Rather than explaining the ‘principles of astronomy’ as Smith alleged, this object comes directly from the pagan religions of Egypt” (p. 164). In fact, White then literally skips the rest of the entire hypocephalus to get to the figure identified as Min, the sexually active procreative god, and spends a few pages denouncing what to his view is simply lewdness, without understanding anything of the symbolism of this figure. Then White wraps up with saying, “he [Joseph Smith] grossly misidentified each of the items not only on this facsimile, but in the other two as well” (p. 167). This is simply ridiculous. How can White claim all is wrong when he skips 95 percent of the items? And then he himself mishandles the Egyptian god Min in many ways, most of which certainly and absolutely do have to do with astronomy. My, what chicanery we see from this White fellow. Let me just give you a brief indication of his silly stance on this, going

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<sup>66</sup> Nibley, *Abraham in Egypt*, 135.

through some of the figures, identifying them and their function, and demonstrating two things:

1. Many of them *do* have to do with astronomy.

2. Joseph Smith's interpretations are far more correct than incorrect on the figures in Facsimile 2, the hypocephalus.

Facsimile 2, figure 1, is the seated two-headed deity in the center of the circle. Joseph Smith said this figure has to do with the creation (and White thinks this has nothing to do with astronomy!). Who is this figure? I would say it is none other than Khnum, who was the "creator" god who arose from "Nun," the primeval watery abyss. And how do we know that this central figure in Facsimile 2 is Khnum? The one giveaway identifying feature of the figure is its flat, curly ram's horns, with which Khnum was always associated, he being the ram-god, creator par excellence. And, it was from Nun that Khnum as well as the rest of the Ogdoad ("Council of the Gods") arose. So we read the following sentence, "*Nwn pw it ntrw*," rendering it, following Gardiner, as "The father of the gods is Nun."<sup>67</sup> And we read further that "The Nile was a river of creative forces. . . . As the fount of Egypt's fertility, the (supposed) source of the Nile was linked to the ram-headed creator god Khnum, who was believed to have fashioned humankind from Nile mud on a potter's wheel."<sup>68</sup> We also now understand from Jan Assman that "The potter's wheel is the instrument of the creator-god who forms shapes from shapeless material."<sup>69</sup> We also know of Khnum that "his symbol was the flat-horned ram."<sup>70</sup> The central figure in the Joseph Smith hypocephalus has the flat horns of the ram and hence is Khnum. Most interestingly, in his four-headed aspect (most of the central figures in hypocephali have four heads) he "was the type of the great primeval creative force, and was called Sheft-ḥāt [Šf.t-

<sup>67</sup> Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, 105.

<sup>68</sup> David P. Silverman, *Ancient Egypt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 19.

<sup>69</sup> Jan Assmann, *Der König als Sonnenpriester* (Glückstadt: Augustin, 1970), 25. He also notes that the potter's wheel is a central symbol in Egyptian art.

<sup>70</sup> E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Gods of the Egyptians* (New York: Dover, 1969), 2:49. Compare I. E. S. Edwards, *The Pyramids of Egypt* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), 17, where the god Khnum creates "the royal child and his *ka* by moulding them on a potter's wheel."

ḥ3.t].”<sup>71</sup> (Nothing astronomical or cosmological about that, is there?) In fact, because he was associated with the Ram of Mendes he is “sometimes described as the Ram with ‘four faces (or, heads) on one neck.’”<sup>72</sup> This is the central figure, as in the Joseph Smith hypocephalus. So Joseph Smith was not so out of line in saying that this represented “the first creation.” Interestingly, Khnum created the “first egg,” fashioned the “first man” on the potter’s wheel, and was “god *par excellence* of the First Cataract,” where the “first city that ever existed” came to be. In other words, this is literally, following ancient Egyptian thought, “the first creation.”<sup>73</sup> Joseph Smith’s exact words. But even more interesting still, many of the various names of Khnum are simply electrifying in light of what Joseph Smith explained about this figure.

So, we know this is “the first creation,” and now these other names also indicate that this is so. To quote Joseph Smith, “First in government.”<sup>74</sup> Very interesting. Joseph Smith is three for three here: First in creation, first in government, and Khnum associated with the waters of Nun, which are depicted in the hieroglyph just to the side of his head. But there is more. Khnum was, early on, we are informed, “regarded as the god of the Nile and of the annual Nile-flood.”<sup>75</sup> He was “the creative power which made and which sustains all things. . . . [His] priests . . . identifi[ed] him with Nu, the great primeval god of the watery abyss, and from being the local river-god of the Nile in the First Cataract, he became the god Ḥāp-ur, or the Nile of heaven.”<sup>76</sup> All good things poured forth from this heavenly Nile; this “double cavern [Qerti—the Joseph Smith hypocephalus hieroglyph] was, in fact, the ‘couch of the Nile.’”<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Budge, *Gods of the Egyptians*, 2:51.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 50, 53. Alan H. Gardiner has noted how closely tied Khnum is with the ancient Egyptian “House of Life,” that is, the temple, as the drama of creation was performed there; “The House of Life,” in *JEA* 24 (1938): 178.

<sup>74</sup> Explanation to Facsimile 2, figure 1, in the Pearl of Great Price (Abraham).

<sup>75</sup> Budge, *Gods of the Egyptians*, 2:50.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

Is it not interesting that one of the main temples at Heliopolis was dedicated to the phoenix, the symbolic bird of immortality and resurrection,<sup>78</sup> and that Heliopolis is mentioned at least three times on the rim of the Joseph Smith hypocephalus, more than on any other hypocephalus? In addition, associated further with this famous bird—as well as with the famous city of the sun, Heliopolis, the Benben stone, and the Great Pyramid—is “the belief that time is composed of recurrent cycles which are divinely appointed.’ . . . There is further a governing moment [note this] amongst all these cycles and epochs—the ‘genesis event’ that the Egyptians called *Zep Tepi*, the ‘First Time.’”<sup>79</sup> *Zep tepi* means “the first day of a period of time” or the “beginning or commencement of anything.”<sup>80</sup> When we look in Faulkner’s *Egyptian Dictionary*, we find that *tepi*, as in *zep tepi*, means, depending on how the word is used, “in front of, in the direction of, before (of time)”; it can mean “previously,” as well as “of place, who are in front of, before,” and even “a good beginning.”<sup>81</sup> This certainly relates well to the Egyptian idea and explanation that Joseph Smith propounded as “first in measurement,” a notion also involving time.

This is an astonishingly good fit. Joseph Smith did not miss one element in figure 1. Even the apes tie in with the theme Joseph Smith claimed for figure 1.

Hans Bonnet notes some interesting things about these apes. The apes can represent Thoth, the god of writing.<sup>82</sup> Bonnet de-

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<sup>78</sup> See A. Wiedemann, “Die Phönix-Sage im alten Ägypten,” *ZÄS* 16 (1878): 92. See also Bonnet, *Reallexikon*, 594–96; Sabatino Moscati, *The Face of the Ancient Orient* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1962), 121, says, “At Heliopolis, the supreme gods are arranged in order of descent and relationship in the Ennead.” Compare David Fidler, *Jesus Christ, Sun of God: Ancient Cosmology and Early Christian Symbolism* (Wheaton, Ill.: Quest Books, 1993), 248–49. Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, 470, for hieroglyph of phoenix, G31 of sign-list. See also Robert Bauval and Adrian Gilbert, *The Orion Mystery: Unlocking the Secrets of the Pyramids* (New York: Crown, 1994), 197–200.

<sup>79</sup> Robert Bauval and Graham Hancock, *The Message of the Sphinx* (New York: Crown, 1996), 206.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> Raymond O. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian* (1962; reprint, Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1986), 296–97.

<sup>82</sup> See Bonnet, *Reallexikon*, 7.

scribes something else interesting in light of what Joseph Smith said about figure 1 in the hypocephalus. Horapollo explains that the apes, during the equinox, urinate hourly, as a sort of measure of time.<sup>83</sup> Joseph Smith shows that the central panel in which the apes reside is directly involved with celestial time, and the measure of time (Fac. 2, fig. 1). Bonnet also clarifies that the apes have a strong relationship with the heavenly bodies, specifically the sun, as they raise their front paws to the rising sun in worship.<sup>84</sup> So the sun, moon, and stars, the measurement of time, and a correspondence of the heavenly bodies and measurement of time all appear in Joseph Smith's explanations.

Alan Gardiner notes that Thoth is the god of writing and mathematics as well.<sup>85</sup> Smith's explanation includes the idea of "The measurement according to celestial time, which celestial time signifies one day to a cubit." Note the application of mathematics and the interaction with time. Spence says that Thoth "is called the 'great god' and 'lord of heaven,'"<sup>86</sup> and that, in his role as a lunar god, Thoth was considered "*the* measurer."<sup>87</sup> He is the "Great White" of Bonnet's description because the full moon is very large and very white in the sky. Thoth, or *Dḥwtj*, is the scribe of the gods.<sup>88</sup> There is nothing amiss in Joseph Smith's explanation of Facsimile 2, figure 1, despite James White's claim.

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83 See *ibid.*

84 See *ibid.*

85 See Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, 113.

86 Note that Bonnet, *Realexikon*, 7, says of him that he is the old baboon-god, the "Hez-ur, the 'Great White.'"

87 Spence, *Myths and Legends*, 107.

88 Karl-Theodor Zauzich, *Hieroglyphs without Mystery*, trans. Ann M. Roth (Austin, Tex.: University of Texas Press, 1994), 94. Thoth was the creator of hieroglyphs, according to some accounts; he is also shown in scenes of "Weighing of the Heart" making a written record of the judgment of the deceased, as in the temple of Ramesses II at Abydos, where we read, "For recitation by Thoth, Lord of Khmunu (Hermopolis), the Scribe." Hilary Wilson, *Understanding Hieroglyphs* (Lincolnwood, Ill.: Passport Books, 1995), 96-97; compare Margaret Bunson, *The Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt* (New York: Facts on File, 1991), 264. In Egypt, "It is Thoth (Hermes to the Greeks; Mercury to the Romans) who is the 'Master of the City of Eight.' Thoth . . . gives man access to the mysteries of the manifested world, which is symbolized by Eight." John A. West, *Serpent in the Sky: The High Wisdom of Ancient Egypt* (Wheaton, Ill.: Quest Books, 1993), 51. While in the Joseph Smith hypocephalus there are only

When we turn to figure 4, the hawk with outspread wings signifying the expanse of heaven, we also find that Joseph Smith is in line with the ancient Egyptian idea here, contrary to White's pet theory.

Alan Gardiner, in his analysis of the Hymns to Amon, noted the following in the 50th chapter: "Thy name is strong, thy might is heavy. . . . Divine hawk with outspread wings." According to Gardiner, this shows how the might of Amon is described in conventional ways, comparing Amon with a hawk, a bull, and a lion.<sup>89</sup> And where is this hawk? "Crossing the sky by ship."<sup>90</sup> "Concealing (*imn*) thyself (?) as Amon at the head of the gods . . . the dweller in heaven."<sup>91</sup> "His soul . . . is in heaven."<sup>92</sup> "He is Hor-akhti who is in heaven. . . . The main conception is that of a sky-god wedded to the earth."<sup>93</sup>

Rudolf Anthes has noted that Re melded with Harachti. As Re-Harachti, he was identified in the Pyramid Texts as the sun, that is, in the expanse.<sup>94</sup> Klaus Koch describes a comb from early Egypt

two baboons, in other hypocephali there are sometimes two, four, six, or eight. Eight baboons can also be seen on the Metternich Stela. Adolf Erman notes that the town of eight was named after the eight elementary beings of the world, whose chief god was Thoth, the god of wisdom. Erman, *Life in Ancient Egypt*, 23-24.

<sup>89</sup> Alan H. Gardiner, "Hymns to Amon from a Leiden Papyrus," *ZÄS* 42 (1905): 26. Compare the same idea of mounting to heaven on birds' wings in Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, 357. See also Eliade, *Shamanism*, 392, concerning the Greek ideas on this mode of transport: "As for Hermes' 'wings,' symbolic of magical flight, vague indications seem to show that certain Greek sorcerers professed to furnish the souls of the deceased with wings to enable them to fly to heaven." Compare the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, wherein Abraham is ordered to offer up sacrifices, all except for the turtledove and pigeon. The reasoning was, as Abraham said, "I will ascend on the wings of the birds. . . . And the angel took me with his right hand and set me on the right wing of the pigeon and he himself sat on the left wing of the turtledove, (both of) which were as if neither slaughtered nor divided. And he carried me up to the edge of the fiery flames." James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983), 1:695-96.

<sup>90</sup> Gardiner, "Hymns to Amon," 23.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 39, compare 41: "his soul is he who is in heaven."

<sup>94</sup> See Rudolf Anthes, "Harachti und Re in den Pyramidentexten," *ZÄS* 100/2 (1974): 77. Compare Adolf Erman, *Die Religion der Ägypter: Ihr Werden*

on which the king is depicted as a falcon soaring over his palace; up in heaven is another falcon on curved wings in a bark.<sup>95</sup> The king on the Narmer Palette is also depicted as a hawk.<sup>96</sup> The same falcon/hawk is called the "venerable falcon" at the Heb-sed festival at Edfu, venerable because he was Horus, the god, who flew to the heavens.<sup>97</sup>

Perhaps the most telling evidence in favor of Joseph Smith's interpretation comes from Rudolf Anthes in his long study of Egyptian religion in the third millennium B.C. Anthes notes directly that "on the ivory comb of King Horus, Serpent of the First Dynasty, however, the falcon Horus is represented twice: in the lower register he stands upon the symbol of the royal palace as the king, in the upper register he stands in a boat beneath which two wings representing the sky are spread. . . . the sky was thought to be represented by the wide-spread wings of the same falcon."<sup>98</sup> One thing is certain: "Horus . . . presides over the sky."<sup>99</sup> As Behdety, Horus was "confined to the hovering falcon,"<sup>100</sup> which is also a variant of the standing falcon, "identical with Horus as early as the Third Dynasty."<sup>101</sup> Interestingly, Junker "lists only Ptolemaic temple inscriptions as evidence of an equation of the wings of Horus with the sky," yet "the Egyptians regarded the sun as a falcon flying in heaven. The idea that his wings represented the sky was incidental and naturally accepted in spite of

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*und Vergehen in vier Jahrtausenden* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1934), who says the sun-god was also Harachti, Horus of the Horizon, and by this name became one of the major gods, and in fact the great falcon-headed god (p. 21). Later, this god was combined into Atum-Re-Harachte (p. 27).

<sup>95</sup> See Klaus Koch, *Geschichte der ägyptischen Religion* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1993), 60. He also notes the falcon on the back of Chephren's statue with his wings spread around the king, and points out that every king sat on the Horus throne taking on the properties of the god, usually as a falcon.

<sup>96</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> See Waltraud Guglielmi, *Die Göttin Mr.t: Entstehung und Verehrung einer Personifikation* (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 48.

<sup>98</sup> Anthes, "Egyptian Theology," 171.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

<sup>100</sup> Alan H. Gardiner, "Horus the Behdetite," *JEA* 30 (1944): 49, quoted in Anthes, "Egyptian Theology," 188.

<sup>101</sup> Anthes, "Egyptian Theology," 188.



any logical objections.”<sup>102</sup> And remember, White’s doctrine indicates that none of this has to do with astronomy.

What about figure 5, the Hathor cow, which Joseph Smith said is involved with the sun? A cow the sun? Yet here surely is a direct ancient Egyptian astronomical correlation.

Hathor is also called “Hathor, die Kuh von Gold”—Hathor, the cow of gold.<sup>103</sup> She is the Weret-Hekau, crowned with the sun disc.<sup>104</sup> We know there were four goddesses on the “First Occasion.” These goddesses were figured as cows.<sup>105</sup> Is it any surprise at all that at this juncture we find Joseph Smith also saying that the cow figure is a “governing power”?

Hathor was also the Eye of Re, which is the sun-god.<sup>106</sup> The Eye of Horus is defined as “bright” (*b3qt*), probably because it is the sun and has its properties.<sup>107</sup> In the Coffin Texts Hathor is actually said to be shining herself.<sup>108</sup> In the Egyptian Book of the Dead, chapter 17, Hathor is described as the Sacred Eye, which represents the “waters of the sky. . . . It is the image of the Eye of Re [the sun] on the morning of its daily birth. As for the Celestial

102 Ibid., 189.

103 Bonnet, *Reallexikon*, 279.

104 See Bosse-Griffiths, “The Great Enchantress,” 103.

105 See Gardiner, “Hymns to Amon,” 37, where we are told that Amon, in his form of great bull, is the bull, the “father of fathers,” the “mother of mothers” of those four cow goddesses. See also Klaus Koch, *Das Wesen altägyptischer Religion im Spiegel ägyptologischer Forschung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1989), 5–6, where Hathor is said to be the cow on the top corners of the Narmer Palette who grants the king his power to reign.

106 See Gardiner, “Hymns to Amon,” 41—“She is the Eye of Re: she is not repulsed.” Compare page 20 where the God Re is described as the “beneficent influence of the sun-god.” The city of Thebes itself is called the *wedjat-eye*. For Re’s right eye, which is in his disk, see 21. The Cow-goddess is the Eye of Re, which is the sun, exactly as Joseph Smith had said in Facsimile 2. Compare Erman, *Life in Ancient Egypt*, 267, where Re says “Call to me my Eye (i.e., the goddess Hathôr).”

107 See Hans Goedicke, “The Bright Eye of Horus: Pyr. Spell 204,” in *Gegengabe: Festschrift für Emma Brunner-Traut*, ed. Ingrid Gamer-Wallert and Wolfgang Helck (Tübingen: Attempto, 1992), 98.

108 See Raymond O. Faulkner, *Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts* (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1973–78), 1:56, 91.

Cow, she is the Sacred Eye of Re."<sup>109</sup> In fact, the property of the sun as dying in the west and resurrecting into a new life in the east gives the Hathor Cow the power to feed the dead and nurse them in preparation for their resurrection.<sup>110</sup> The sun travels along her belly throughout the day.<sup>111</sup> The cosmology is obvious. Additionally, the Coffin Texts speak of Hathor rising within the horizon, as the sun certainly does.<sup>112</sup>

Hans Bonnet shows that Hathor is the mother of Horus.<sup>113</sup> This shows that Hathor is associated with the Sun. "The sun ripens in the lap of Hathor." We also are told "Hathor is the sun because she was the sun's eye, hence the sun."<sup>114</sup> Manfred Lurker tells us that "according to an ancient myth Hathor was supposed to have raised the youthful sun up to heaven by means of her horns. In the end the goddess who bore the sun was herself equated with the sun, being regarded as the solar eye."<sup>115</sup> If James White thinks

<sup>109</sup> Raymond O. Faulkner, trans., *The Egyptian Book of the Dead: The Book of Going Forth by Day* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1994), under plate 9.

<sup>110</sup> See Wolfhart Westendorf, "Die geteilte Himmelsgöttin," in *Gegengabe: Festschrift für Emma Brunner-Traut*, 341, for a discussion of the sun's dying and rising again. See H. Wilson, *Understanding Hieroglyphs*, 82, where she discusses Hathor's role as guardian of the tree that shades the dead and offers them refreshment. As a funerary deity she was noted as "Chieftainess of the West." See E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Book of the Dead: The Papyrus of Ani* (New York: Dover, 1967), cxx: "she provides meat and drink for the deceased." In Faulkner, *Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 1:37, we see Hathor provides clothing; she also gives myrrh (1:42) and is the "mistress of the northern sky, who strengthen[s] the bonds of the wakeful" (1:256-57).

<sup>111</sup> See Westendorf, "Die geteilte Himmelsgöttin," 341: "The heaven goddess appeared in historic times under the name of Hathor." See also Erik Hornung, *Der ägyptische Mythos von der Himmelskuh* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1982), 55, for his idea that Hathor as bearer of the Sun Eye was not clearly identified until the New Kingdom.

<sup>112</sup> See Faulkner, *Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 2:127.

<sup>113</sup> See Bonnet, *Reallexikon*, 280.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> Manfred Lurker, *The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Egypt*, trans. Barbara Cumming (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982), 59. The eye of Horus, we know, was presented to his father Osiris, thereby helping him to attain new life. "The presentation of the eye of Horus was regarded in Egypt as the archetype of every offering ceremony," 67. We are further informed that the *wedjat*-eye was "a symbol of power of the god of light." With the ankh sign it means "to

the sun is not associated with astronomy, that is his prerogative, but I see no reason to follow after him. I find Joseph Smith's presentation makes much more sense in these ancient Egyptian documents than does White's.

Now what of figure 2, the top panel at the top of the circle? In the Joseph Smith version, the figure 2 at the top of the hypocephalus, also two-faced, holds the "Wepwawet" staff. Klaus Baer, in his translation of the Joseph Smith "Breathing Permit," noted that paragraph VI says "Amon is with you every day . . . in the Temple of Re so that you may live again. Wepwawet has opened the good way for you."<sup>116</sup> The footnote says that "His name means 'Opener of the Ways,' and his standard was carried, from the earliest times, at the head of royal processions."<sup>117</sup> In Faulkner's *Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts*, vol. 1, Spell 10, we read, "fair paths are opened up for you by Wepwawet." The variant reads "a road is opened up for you." Spell 24 reads "Wepwawet has opened up fair paths for you." In Spell 345 we read "Wepwawet will open for you the fair paths of the West." Another manuscript adds here the words "which belong to the vindication on this day against your foes, male or female, in the sky or on earth or in the realm of the dead."

So what do we find? The staff in the Joseph Smith hypocephalus is that of the "Opener of the Ways," which is precisely what a key does. "The key of power" in very deed.

Now then, what about the ship of the God, figure 3? Joseph Smith said it represents God, sitting on his throne, with a crown of light on his head, as well as the grand Key-words of the priesthood. Well, what of it? Here is what of it. This is just too darn good to miss.

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flourish." It was also a protection against the evil eye, 128. Compare Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, 111, §143: "thou hast placed it (the eye of Horus) in thy head, that thou mayst be eminent by means of it, that thou mayst be exalted by means of it, that thy estimation may be great by means of it." It is called "the sound eye," 197, §266.1. The eye of Horus is even equated on some occasions with the uraeus (i.e. the cobra), 421 bottom note. So it is also connected with that goddess as well.

<sup>116</sup> Baer, "The Breathing Permit of Hôr," 122.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 122 n. 61.

Notice that the figure in the boat holds the *was* scepter, the symbol of dominion.<sup>118</sup> The idea is very similar to the "Emblem of Min of Koptos" which, according to Wainwright, was the lightning bolt, the light weapon. Wainwright, who was one of the excavators of the Great Pyramid as well as of Mastaba 17 at Meidum, says,

In Greek mythology the thunderbolt is the "light"-weapon with which Zeus blasts his enemies, just as in Semitic mythology the angels of Allah destroy devils and evil djinns with the meteorite. Good evidence that the Greeks themselves identified the lightning with the meteorite is supplied by the expression "star-flung thunderbolt."<sup>119</sup>

In his *The Thousand Nights and a Night*, R. F. Burton uses the expression "cast at the *afir*t (me) with a shooting star of fire (*shihab min nar*)."<sup>120</sup> According to Wainwright, "*Shihab* is the ordinary word for 'shooting star,' but here its dangerous nature is emphasized by the addition of the words 'of fire.'"<sup>121</sup> The *was*-scepter means dominion.<sup>122</sup> According to Faulkner and Gardner, *hq3* means "to rule," and *hq3.t* means "scepter."<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> See Alan Gardiner, "The Baptism of Pharaoh," *JEA* 36 (1950): 12, in determining what the *was* scepter is. Compare Alan Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs: An Introduction* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 215, for several of the principal Egyptian deities—Seth, Horus, Isis, Osiris, Re-Harakhti, Amen-Re, and Khnum—carrying this scepter.

<sup>119</sup> G. A. Wainwright, "The Emblem of Min," *JEA* 17 (1931): 189.

<sup>120</sup> R. F. Burton, *The Thousand Nights and a Night* (Benares, 1885), I:224.

<sup>121</sup> Wainwright, "Emblem of Min," 189. Compare his article, "The Relationship of Amun to Zeus and His Connexion with Meteorites," *JEA* 16 (1930): 35–38. See also his article, "The Aniconic Form of Amon in the New Kingdom," *ASAE* 28 (1928): 175–89. Another article of Wainwright worth seeing is "Amun's Sacred Object at Thebes," *ASAE* 42 (1943): 183–85.

<sup>122</sup> See Zauzich, *Hieroglyphs without Mystery*, 115, and Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, 559: "w3s, dominion, lordship"; compare Amun in Bonnet, *Reallexikon*, 32; also Lurker, *Gods and Symbols*, 128, for a picture of *was*-scepters flanking *ankhs* (eternal life symbols) in the Temple of Hathor at Denderah.

<sup>123</sup> Faulkner, *Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, 178; and Gardner, *Egyptian Grammar*, 583.

In connection with the scarab in some hypocephali, a Pyramid Text of Unas reads: "This Unas flieth like a bird and alighteth like a beetle; he flieth like a bird and alighteth like a beetle upon the throne which is empty in the boat of Re." Interestingly, the British Museum Hypocephalus 36188 portrays this god with a scepter by the side of a scarab beetle. This is very similar to Joseph Smith's interpretation of the figure as God sitting on his throne with a sun disk "symbol of eternal light" above his head.

Accompanying an illustration of this boat of the god is a description of "Atum, Hathor and three other enthroned deities, all holding *was*-sceptres, pull[ing] on ropes attached to a boat on whose prow squats Horus as a child. Nakht stands in the boat poling, alongside a large falcon's head wearing a sun disc. In the following boat, steered by Thoth, the falcon-headed sun-god sits enthroned behind the scarab-headed Khepri and Isis."<sup>124</sup> The Faulkner translation says, "A path is made for me at the head of the Sacred Bark, and I am lifted up as the sun disc; . . . Let me pass, for I am a mighty one, Lord of the mighty ones; I am a noble of the Lord of Righteousness, whom Wadjet made."<sup>125</sup>

Note here that Wadjet is mentioned but is not pictured in the accompanying vignette. However, in the Joseph Smith diagram the *wedjat*-eye is shown twice. Now this is interesting because it is the symbol for the resurrection, for life, wholeness, and the nourishment of the gods. The restored eye is symbolic of life and the resurrection. Abraham in one papyrus is called "the pupil of the *wedjat*-eye, fourfold Qmr, creator of the mouth, who created creation, great verdant creation"<sup>126</sup> (cf. John 1:1: the word is what created). *Qmr* means something like

"creator, creation, mightier, or one who has power over." Here, "it is very noteworthy that the Patriarch Abraham is called 'the apple of the *wedjat*-eye.'" . . . The *wedjat*-eye was a symbol of perfection, prosperity, preservation, wholeness, completion, health, and resurrection. . . .

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<sup>124</sup> Faulkner (ed. Andrews), *Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead*, 126-27.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>126</sup> John Gee, "Abraham in Ancient Egyptian Texts," *Ensign* (July 1992): 61.

[It] is frequently mentioned in a closely related group of chapters from the Egyptian Book of the Dead (162–67) that treat the theme of preserving the dead until the time of the resurrection.<sup>127</sup>

The hypocephalus itself symbolized the eye of Re or Horus, i.e., the sun, and the scenes portrayed on it relate to the Egyptian concept of the resurrection of life after death. To the Egyptians the daily rising and setting of the sun were a vivid symbol of the resurrection. The hypocephalus itself represented all that the sun encircles, i.e., the whole world. The upper portion represented the world of men and the day sky, and the lower portion (the part with the cow) the nether world and the night sky.<sup>128</sup>

Bonnet gives the astronomical background to the “Horusage” being involved with the sun and the moon.<sup>129</sup>

What is so interesting is that the pieces of the eye represent aspects of an almost complete personality. In an ancient Egyptian myth, 1/64 of the *wedjat*-eye was missing after it was assembled. To have that missing part was to have the key to eternal life. Since this symbol is consistently identified by Joseph Smith with the “grand Key-words of the Holy Priesthood” perhaps the 1/64 could be what the Egyptians regarded as the secret or sacred name of God. The idea of knowing the names of gods (as well as enemies) was a crucial and very important aspect of the ancient Egyptian religion.<sup>130</sup> Those possessing the secret of the eye were believed to reach a new and higher level of consciousness. Further possession of the eye would determine the successor of Osiris in the battle between Horus and Set; its possessor would, therefore, have the right to rule and reign in heaven.

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127 Ibid.

128 Michael D. Rhodes, “The Joseph Smith Hypocephalus . . . Seventeen Years Later” (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1994), 1.

129 See Bonnet, *Realllexikon*, 314, 630.

130 See J. F. Borghouts, “The Ram as a Protector and Prophet,” *Revue d'égyptologie* 32 (1980): 36, concerning the idea that the ram, by knowing his enemy's name, could have power over him and vanquish him.

The *wedjat*-eye is explained by Plutarch to represent "divine providence" (literally "foreknowledge"),<sup>131</sup> "the divine wisdom by which God oversees and cares for all of his creations. It is not unreasonable to see in this 'the grand key words of the Holy Priesthood' ('The glory of God is intelligence,' D&C 93:36)."<sup>132</sup> Lurker says, "The resurrection of Osiris was attributed . . . partly to Horus who embraced his father and gave him the eye of Horus to eat."<sup>133</sup> The *wedjat*-eye, Lurker points out, also is "a symbol of the power of the god of light. . . . Some *wedjat*-eyes had an arm carrying the ankh or the papyrus staff, symbol for 'to flourish.' The *wedjat*-eye was also used as a protection against the evil eye."<sup>134</sup> Gardiner said that "presumably the missing 1/64 was supplied magically by [the God] Thoth."<sup>135</sup> That the *wedjat*-eye is shown twice with the "ship of the god" is entirely appropriate in the context of what the Egyptians felt it represented and with Joseph Smith's description of it. And, indeed, the sacramental aspects of the *wedjat*-eye do need to be examined.

With the cyclically regenerating world of the Egyptians involved directly in the cosmos, the idea is "about the capacity to merge with the divine power of life inherent in all being and which enables the pharaoh to transform himself into other cosmic forms of life after death. Expressed in the mythological language of the Pyramid Texts it is about the state of having 'eaten' the gods of the Egyptian world."<sup>136</sup> Eaten the gods? This is the sacrament theme. And most interesting for Joseph Smith's explanations of the facsimiles, the *wedjat*-eye is directly considered to be a sacramental motif.

The *wedjat*-eye as a sacramental motif; as everything good, sound, true, and beautiful; and as the god's secret, sacred, and powerful name offers all the greatness that a god has to its possessor: "sovereignty," full light, an assurance of a cyclic renewal of

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131 Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride* 51.

132 Rhodes, "Joseph Smith Hypocephalus," 9.

133 Lurker, *Gods and Symbols*, 93.

134 *Ibid.*, 128.

135 Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, 197.

136 Finnestad, "The Pharaoh," 90.

life.<sup>137</sup> The *wedjat*-eye is “filled,” whatever that means, but it is filled on the sixth day by Thoth, the scribe, who is described as not only filling the eye, but fixing it, putting its various parts back together since it was torn apart. The supplying of it with its missing parts, completing it, gathering and fixing it, giving it a restoration of wholeness, Möller notes, is paralleled with the dismemberment of Osiris and the supplement of the lost limb of Osiris, being resurrected again into wholeness, completeness, vitality.<sup>138</sup> What could be clearer as to the “grand Key-words of the Holy Priesthood” than this, a restoring to perfect wholeness, the resurrection?

The filling of the eye on the sixth day is done in Heliopolis, where we read an inscription saying that as “Osiris wakes from his slumber [of death]; he flies upward as the Phoenix and takes his place in heaven, and repeats his shape (moon) with Atum.”<sup>139</sup> Note the astronomical aspects of all this, contra James White’s mere assertion that there is none. This filling concept at Heliopolis is considered to hark back to some astronomical observation. Bonnet notes that Horus, in offering his eye to his father, helped his father, Osiris, gain a new life (resurrection) with the eye.<sup>140</sup> What especially catches our notice was Bonnet’s observation that the *wedjat*-eyes were given as the hands were stretched out to receive the offering.<sup>141</sup> And John Tvedtnes has demonstrated that the Hebrew word *consecrate* literally means “to fill the hand” of the ordained priests.<sup>142</sup> Most interesting, after citing numerous examples from Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and so forth, it has been noted that “the open hand is to be filled with sacrificial items,” as well, perhaps, as with a shining stone as noted in Revelation 2:17 and Doctrine and Covenants 130:11.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> See Goedicke, “The Bright Eye of Horus,” 98–99.

<sup>138</sup> See Georg Möller, “Die Zeichen für die Bruchteile des Hohlmaßes und das Uzatauge,” *ZÄS* 48 (1910 [1911]): 100–101.

<sup>139</sup> Hermann Junker, “Die sechs Teile des Horausages und der sechste Tag,” *ZÄS* 48 (1910 [1911]): 104.

<sup>140</sup> See Bonnet, *Reallexikon*, 314–15.

<sup>141</sup> See *ibid.*, 856.

<sup>142</sup> John A. Tvedtnes, as cited in Lynn M. Hilton, “The Hand as a Cup in Ancient Temple Worship,” in *Discovering Lehi: New Evidence of Lehi and Nephi in Arabia* (Springville, Utah: Cedar Fort, 1996), 179.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 179–80.



The sacrament motifs are also prominent in association with the Eye of Horus, as we have noted above. The Coffin Texts are replete with this motif. Spell 939 says, "My bread is the Eye, my beer is the Eye." Spell 863 says, "If N be hungry, Nekhbet will be hungry; if N be thirsty, Nekhbet will be thirsty," and it ends with mentioning the Eye of Horus as the cure. Spell 936 says one's thirst and hunger are satisfied with the consumption of the Eye of Horus. Spell 1013 says, "I live on bread of white emmer washed down with zizyphus-beer. . . . I testify concerning the Eye of Horus to him." The giving of the Eye of Horus is a very prominent theme and is portrayed not only in hypocephali, but also in a depiction by Lanzone of this event, in which a baboon presents a *wedjat*-eye to a god in his boat.<sup>144</sup> It is noteworthy that Abraham was given the sacrament in his famous meeting with Melchizedek. Robert J. Matthews has remarked on its significance: "When returning from the battle of the kings (see Genesis 14 KJV) Abraham met Melchizedek, who gave him bread and wine. The particular treatment given this episode in the New Translation almost suggests a prefigurement of the sacrament of the Lord's supper, for the bread and wine are blessed separately."<sup>145</sup> The sacrament is certainly in line with keeping our minds pointed toward the covenant that God has offered, and the depiction of it as the *wedjat*-eye is in line with this thought.

Kurt Sethe noted that as the bread and wine should represent the body and blood of Christ to us, likewise if the priest offers the god or goddess wine, incense, bread, fruits, or something else, it represents the Eye of Horus.<sup>146</sup> This seems to fit together well.

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<sup>144</sup> See Ridolfo V. Lanzone, *Dizionario di Mitologia Egizia* (Turin: Doyen, 1883), #1-2, plate XXXVIII.

<sup>145</sup> Robert J. Matthews, "A Plainer Translation": *Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible: A History and Commentary* (Provo, Utah: BYU Press, 1975), 382. See also Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 52-53. The sacrament is also strongly indicated in the Dead Sea Scrolls, specifically in "The Rule of the Congregation." See Florentino García Martínez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated: The Qumran Texts in English* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 127. Also, when Abraham meets Melchizedek in the plain, we are told specifically that "Melchizedek . . . brought out food and drink for Abram." "Genesis Apocryphon," in García Martínez, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 236.

<sup>146</sup> See Kurt Sethe, *Urgeschichte und älteste Religion der Ägypter* (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1930), 103.

In the Egyptian Book of the Dead we also find this prominent sacramental theme. We read, "may my name be called out, may it be found at the board of offerings; may there be given to me loaves in the Presence, . . . may there be given to me bread from the House of Cool Water and a table of offerings from Heliopolis."<sup>147</sup> We learn that this is important for the dead to have. "Let there be given to him bread and beer which have been issued in the presence of Osiris, and he will be forever like the Followers of Horus."<sup>148</sup> Another statement directly ties the sacramental motif to the sacred eye: "Your bread is the Sacred Eye, your beer is the Sacred Eye; what goes forth at the voice for you upon earth is the Sacred Eye."<sup>149</sup> We further read that the perfected souls are drawn near to the House of Osiris and that the officiating person is addressed thusly: "O you who give bread and beer to the perfected souls in the House of Osiris, may you give bread and beer at all seasons to the soul of Ani, who is vindicated with all the gods of the Thinite nome, and who is vindicated with you."<sup>150</sup> Klaus Baer, one of the Egyptologists to work on the Joseph Smith Papyri, noted that to be "vindicated" or, as the Joseph Smith Papyri put it, "justified," means to become an Osiris.<sup>151</sup> In Spell 68, the spell for going out into the day, we read, "You shall live on bread of white emmer and beer of red barley of Hapi in the pure place."<sup>152</sup> And again, "offering shall be made to me of food by my son of my body, you shall give invocation-offerings of bread and beer, incense and unguent, and all things good and pure whereon a god lives . . . and there shall be given to him bread and beer and a portion of meat from upon the altar of Osiris."<sup>153</sup> On another occasion the dead is asked, "What will you live on?" Wherein the dead responds, "I will live and have power through bread." "'Where will you eat it?' say the gods and spirits to me. 'I will have power and I will eat it under the branches of the tree of Hathor my mistress, who made offerings of bread, beer and

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147 Faulkner, *Egyptian Book of the Dead*, under plates 1-2.

148 *Ibid.*, under plate 4.

149 Faulkner (ed. Andrews), *Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead*, 33.

150 Faulkner, *Egyptian Book of the Dead*, under plate 6.

151 See Baer, "The Breathing Permit of Hôr," 117 n. 24.

152 Faulkner (ed. Andrews), *Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead*, 70.

153 *Ibid.*, 72-73.

corn in Heliopolis.”<sup>154</sup> Could the sacrament also be mentioned in conjunction with a creative power, or governing power, so to speak?

Now back to the idea of the god in the boat. Budge notes some interesting things with the gods in their ships. Isis prays and says to the god in the ship, “Thou hast conquered heaven by the greatness of thy majesty in thy name of ‘Prince of the festival of the fifteenth day.’ [Notice in the bottom flank of the ship in fig. 4 the fifteen dots.] Thou risest upon us like Rā every day; thou shinest on us like Atem. Gods and men live at the sight of thee.”<sup>155</sup> “The holy and divine emanation which cometh forth from thee vivifieth gods, men, quadrupeds, and reptiles, and they live thereby. . . . Hail, thou Lord, there existeth no god who is like unto thee.”<sup>156</sup> “Grant thou that I may have my being as a follower of thy Majesty. . . . The god thereof is the Lord of Maāt, the Lord of offerings, the Most Holy One. . . . Assuredly there shall be joy to him that performeth Maāt.”<sup>157</sup> “Homage to thee, O thou God, holy one, great in beneficent deeds, thou Prince of Eternity, who presideth over his place in the Sektet Boat, thou Mighty One of risings in the Ātet Boat!”<sup>158</sup> “Thou rollest up into the horizon, thou hast set light over the darkness, thou sendest forth air (or, light) from thy plumes, and thou floodest the Two Lands like the Disk at daybreak. Thy crown penetrateth the height of heaven, thou art the companion of the stars, and the guide of every god.”<sup>159</sup> Or, in short, God “clothed with power and authority; with a crown of eternal light upon his head” (explanation to Fac. 2, fig. 3). Joseph Smith knew whereof he spoke.

When we look at the Coffin Texts we also note that they identify this bark (fig. 3) as the bark of the god Re, many, many times over.<sup>160</sup> This concept is clearly a well-established one. Elizabeth Thomas notes the boats of Re, both morning and evening barks,

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>155</sup> E. A. Wallis Budge, *Osiris and the Egyptian Resurrection* (New York: Dover, 1973), 2:62.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 72–73.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 77–78.

<sup>160</sup> See, for example, Faulkner, *Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts*, especially spells 18, 61, 211, 360, 409.

and acknowledges that they were constantly used by the gods to traverse the sky, which was water, and used also in the underworld.<sup>161</sup>

This makes all kinds of sense from the Egyptian side. I. E. S. Edwards, the great authority on the pyramids, noted that, "according to the view most commonly accepted, Rē, accompanied by his retinue, traversed the sky each day in a boat." And, further to the point, "Every day the king would accompany the sun-god on his voyage across the skies. Sometimes he is described as a rower in the barque."<sup>162</sup>

Adolf Erman discusses this as well, especially the "Sacred bark of Amon-Re." Erman notes that to the outside world this bark was itself the image of the god. This situation makes perfect sense, since to the Egyptian travel was always on the Nile in the boat and "the god also would therefore, according to their views, require a Nile boat to go from place to place." The picture of the god's boat is from the time of Thothmes II, at Karnak.<sup>163</sup> The Egyptian Book of the Dead illustrates the ship of the god many times. Usually it is Re, the Sun-god who traverses the sky in his ship, which is usually depicted on a rather large hieroglyph of the sky.

I believe the hypocephalus is the strongest witness to the truth that Joseph Smith taught. Its symbolism is exact and precisely religious, and involves us all in the cosmic afterlife, in glorious resurrection. The big picture is never lost. It is the perfect example of the correlation of the microcosm (mankind) with the macrocosm (eternal life in everlasting realms of light).

These are some of the areas that White has obviously ignored. What he wants you to believe is that nothing can be said for the Book of Abraham. What I want to tell you is to keep preaching the gospel of Christ to folks who need it and don't get up in too much of a fret with this White fellow. He'll still be there after you have served the Lord . . . and so will I. We'll have some good study sessions together with your dad also. I'm sure proud of you for sticking to your guns and letting critics know their research

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<sup>161</sup> See Elizabeth Thomas, "Solar Barks Prow to Prow," *JEA* 42 (1956): 65-79.

<sup>162</sup> Edwards, *Pyramids of Egypt*, 8, 16.

<sup>163</sup> Erman, *Life in Ancient Egypt*, 275-76.

doesn't bother your testimony much. For what it's worth, their research doesn't bother my testimony either, let alone my own research, which refutes their lame contentions against the gospel.

Your affectionate uncle,

Larry

## Letter 9: True Colors Shine Through

Dear Mr. White,

I must say that I am surprised that you would expect me to give our correspondence greater weight than my holy calling. Naturally, I need to be about the Lord's errand—and at this moment, that errand includes training a new missionary. That is a serious responsibility and one that I cannot neglect just to carry on what is degenerating into a mere debate. I admit that it is more distracting than painful, but I really need to concentrate on the work I am doing.

You say that you have a friend “who was once a Mormon but left the LDS Church when he accepted Christ as his Lord and Savior” (p. 169). I fail to see what the two concepts—accepting Christ and leaving the church—have to do with each other. Most people I have met on my mission who have accepted Christ as their Lord and Savior have *joined* the church as a result. Church membership involves accepting Christ as Lord and Savior in a very real way, becoming his covenant disciples.

Now it happens that missionaries have just as much curiosity as everyone else. I admit that curiosity is what has kept me reading and replying to your letters. And curiosity leads us into speculation about questions that are not related to our work. We call these the “did-Adam-have-a-navel” questions. If some missionary were to ask a General Authority, such as Elder Peterson, one of those questions, then that General Authority would be quite correct to respond in the way that you describe (see pp. 169–70).

You say that “we have a phone message for Mormons” (p. 170). I find that statement odd and a little puzzling. Who is “we”? Why would you “have a phone message for Mormons”? Our mission office doesn't have a phone message for Baptists. Mind you, we aren't an anti-Baptist organization. Now while the remarks made by your anonymous caller don't tell me anything, the fact that you are part of a group that has “a phone message for Mormons” and that attracts the attention of church members who want to tell you what is wrong with your perception of the church, does indeed tell me something. It tells me that you are part of an anti-Mormon organization that publicizes a negative,

and probably faulty, view of the church and its teachings. If the misconceptions that you have written in your letters come from that organization, then that explains why your caller wanted to correct your misinformation.

I will be happy to meet with you in the park. Of course my companion will be coming along as well.

Your friend,

Elder Hahn

### Letter 10: The God of What?

Dear Mr. White,

As I mentioned to you during our first meeting, my name is Elder Hahn. That is what my friends call me. Even my family (including my slightly eccentric Uncle Larry) calls me that while I'm on my mission. I believe that it is a fairly reasonable request that I make: that you call me Elder. I'm sure that if you met a woman who preferred to be called "Ms." instead of "Mrs." or "Miss," you would respect that preference. I ask the same respect, no more and no less.

You say that "From the very beginning of my correspondence with you I have mentioned how much I wish to speak to you about the God of the Bible" (p. 173). I confess that I am confused. I thought that that was what your fourth and fifth letters were about.

Also, I am a little puzzled by your use of the phrase, "the God of the Bible." Since you obviously don't mean that the Bible is all that he is the God of, I wonder why you keep using that expression. It seems almost like some kind of formula for you.

Now I don't have a problem with your affirming your own beliefs. That is perfectly acceptable, and I am not going to argue with that. I am only going to take issue where you seem to be trying to score points against the restored gospel.

I agree that God is unique. We—that is, the human race—have no knowledge of any other being who is like him. That other similar beings exist in eternal worlds really doesn't change anything—we have no real knowledge of them; they are not only above us, but they are also beyond us and have nothing to do with us. That makes our God uniquely important to us; as far as the whole human family is concerned, there truly is none like him.

But I notice again, as my Aunt Jenny pointed out, that you are using the wrong kind of scriptures to make the wrong kind of arguments. The Psalms are nothing if not poetry, and the one thing we all understand about poetic statements is that they are not to be taken literally. Did Tennyson mean that the Light Brigade charged into the actual mouth of hell? Did Wordsworth really think enough daffodils would make an army? Or should the



opening lines of *Richard III* be taken to mean that the right king can change the seasons?

Also, you seem to be willing to go well beyond what the scriptures themselves say. While I agree that the passage you quoted from Isaiah 40:12–18 is indeed impressive, you have gone far beyond it when you presume to answer the questions Isaiah poses. Indeed, it seems that the very point of those questions is that they are unanswerable by human wisdom. If the answer to all those questions is a flat “nobody,” then that is in fact a very easy answer. It puts me in mind of the questions God puts to Job in Job 38:4. God asks, “Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding.” Clearly the point is that Job doesn’t know—a simple “nowhere” is not the answer. The same goes for Isaiah’s questions.

And in fact you seem to realize this, because you say, “None of the questions asked by Isaiah can be answered—they are purely rhetorical” (p. 175). And so you proceed with utter confidence to answer them.

I suppose I should have expected you to cite John 4:24, even though we have already discussed it. Do I need to remind you of Romans 8:9, wherein Paul tells the Saints, “But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you”? Is it possible that Paul meant that Christians can be “in the spirit” and still keep their bodies? If so, why can’t God do that too? Surely you don’t believe that such things are possible for us but beyond him?

And it is clear that the Bible does not present a completely clear division between the physical and the spiritual, for Paul clearly taught that the resurrected body is “spiritual” (1 Corinthians 15:44–46)—even though it is clearly physical as well (see Luke 24:37–39). He also spoke of a spirit in man, which he compared with the Spirit of God (see 1 Corinthians 2:11).

It seems strange that you should use Luke 24:38 as you have done, since it is obvious that the apostles were simply scared of what they thought was a ghost. Pointing out that spooks don’t have bodies hardly seems to relate to the nature of God. Certainly, the spirit of a dead person would not have flesh and bones, because the physical body would be in the grave. But Jesus certainly *did* have flesh and bones. And further, it is in that state—that is, in

his resurrected body—that Paul said, “For in him [Jesus] dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Colossians 2:9). Jesus, then, is fully God, though embodied. So why is this impossible for the Father?

You overlook the fact that we believe that man is also spirit (see D&C 93:33–34; Numbers 16:22; Romans 8:16) and yet we are, quite obviously, physical; again, why can this not also be true of God? Weren’t we created in his image and likeness?

But the real weakness with your use of John 4:24 is that it has an important parallel. That verse states, “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.” The statement about God is used as an argument about how we must worship him. In exactly the same way, we find in 1 John 4:16, “And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.” This passage is structured in exactly the same way as your lone proof text; since God is love, we have to have love also. If John 4:24 means that God is *only* spirit, then 1 John 4:16 *must* by the same token mean that God is *only* love.

You seem also to make the argument that God sometimes appears in physical form even though he is actually incorporeal. I have to ask—why? Is he trying to deceive his children? Your claim that “Jehovah . . . entered into a physical manifestation in Genesis 18 when He visited with Abraham, . . . but it was not a permanent situation” is one I have not heard before (p. 176). Do you have any references to support this?

I have never at any time been told or taught that Jeremiah 23:23–24 is “the ‘doctrine of the devil’” (p. 177). Clearly one of us is mistaken about what the Church of Jesus Christ teaches, and I venture to say it is not me. I have no problem with the concept that God fills heaven and earth. He fills them with his emanating power and influence, as well as with his creations. Your argument “that He *himself* fills heaven and earth” (p. 177) is not by any means the only possible interpretation of that passage.

Your argument about man’s inability to understand God is one that we can both use. After all, your beliefs about the nature of God seem to rely, more than you care to admit, on creeds worked out by committees of philosophers. It is one thing for truth revealed from heaven to be beyond human comprehension;

it is quite another for the results of logical deduction and argument to be incoherent. But I enthusiastically second your wish that, “‘Let God be true, but every man a liar’ (Romans 3:4)” (p. 178). For the knowledge that I have received by personal revelation—that is, my testimony of the gospel—comes from God. Arguments about the interpretation of scripture come from men. That passage is reinforcement, if I needed it, that I need to esteem my testimony above *any* human argument, however compelling it may seem.

I have to confess that I have *never* been taught “that the Christian doctrine of God makes God an ‘ethereal nothingness’ or some kind of ‘fuzzy, nebulous force’ that no one can know” (p. 181). The Christian doctrine of God that I know is that God is in truth our Father, just as Jesus said. The uninspired creeds of men do indeed seem to make God into “an ‘ethereal nothingness’ or some kind of ‘fuzzy, nebulous force’ that no one can know,” but I find no such concepts in the scriptures.

You make an involved, intricate, and ultimately unscriptural argument from Isaiah 57:15 (see pp. 179–80). The statement that God “inhabiteth eternity” simply means that he lives forever. But what I really am interested in is the idea that God exists outside of time and that he created time.

First, there is no passage that I can find that actually says that God created time. I suspect that that is true for you as well, or you wouldn’t have to rely on Isaiah 41:4, which simply describes God “calling the generations from the beginning.” In fact, the idea of God creating time is not merely hard to understand; it is actually logically incoherent.

Consider for a moment, if you will, what we mean when we say that God creates something—anything at all. Since it doesn’t matter what, let us say “God created  $x$ ” since  $x$  is the most common algebraic symbol for a variable—you can replace it with any value later. Now the formula “God created  $x$ ” actually means that the following three states must exist *in temporal succession*:

At first, there is no  $x$ . Then God brings  $x$  into existence; after this point,  $x$  is part of the universe.

We can even express this in mathematical terms, using the symbol  $t$  to represent a point in time, thus:

At  $t-1$ , there is no  $x$ ;  
At  $t_0$ ,  $x$  comes into existence;  
At  $t+1$ ,  $x$  is part of the universe.

Where  $t_0$  is the moment when God actually creates something,  $t-1$  is the last moment before it, and  $t+1$  is the first moment after it. So let us plug in some values to our formula, and see if it makes sense. Let us start with a simple one: God created water. Thus we find that:

At  $t-1$ , there is no water;  
At  $t_0$ , water comes into existence;  
At  $t+1$ , water is part of the universe.

And so we could go on, with sand, bread, silicon chips, dessert (one of my favorites) or anything else you could think of. But what happens when we try to say "God created time"? We imagine that:

At  $t-1$ , there is no time;  
At  $t_0$ , time comes into existence;  
At  $t+1$ , time is in the universe.

Can you see why that fails? Without time, we can't have a " $t_0$ " or anything like it. The concepts of "before" and "after" need time to be progressing; you have to have time in order to have events in temporal succession. Therefore, the concept of time is *logically prior* to the possibility of creation.

If we think about it a little more, we discover something else: the idea of a "supratemporal" or "timeless" eternity is describing a state in which *no events can happen*, since an event of any kind must also be temporal. So, while "things" might conceptually exist in a nontemporal state, they can only *always* exist in it; they can neither come into existence, nor pass away, nor change in any way, since all kinds of changes are essentially *temporal*. Now the experts all agree that God's omnipotence means the power to do what is *logically possible*. God can't create a square circle, a married bachelor, or a rock too heavy for him to lift, because none of those things can logically exist. Likewise, he cannot cause an event that cannot happen—such as a temporal event (for example, an act of creation) in a nontemporal state. Therefore, he cannot create anything, including time, inside of a timeless eternity, as your diagram suggests.

You said that God is simultaneously aware of everything at every point on the timeline—"a continuous 'now'" (p. 180) is how you described it. Was it "a continuous 'now'" to God *before* he created time? For if time is created, there must have been a time *before* time existed. I don't mean before clocks and calendars but before time actually progressed—a logical impossibility. To the left of your finite time line is the part of eternity when time did not exist. Since time did not exist, it was not progressing. So how did God get to the point *when* he created time? The simple fact is that the idea is not merely too big or wonderful to comprehend—it is inherently contradictory, and hence untrue.

Now I have taken this flight into the realms of airy speculation because I wanted to show that there is a difference between "I don't understand it" and "it doesn't make sense." The statement that "God created time" is not merely hard to understand; it is actually incoherent, since time must exist before anything can be created.

Now we can certainly say that God's time is different from ours, and that our time is what God has appointed; in that sense we could certainly say that God created time. But as soon as we say that time only progressed *after* God decreed it, and did not progress *before*, then we are talking complete nonsense; *before* and *after* only have meaning where time is progressing.

You go on to say, "The God of the Bible is *perfect*. He lacks nothing, needs nothing, is dependent upon nothing or no one. Since all else that exists does so at His command, then how could He possibly need anything?" (p. 182). This, however, raises a problem: if God *needs nothing*, then why does he do anything? Rational beings, we would suppose, act for rational reasons. What rational reason could God possibly have for creating the earth, or us, or anything else?

As I pointed out in answer to your fourth letter: If God is not limited in any way by his creation, then he is not dependent upon it for anything. He is not God because we worship him; we worship him because he is God. He is wholly "other"—you said so—and so he doesn't need us for anything, right?

So why did he create us? He must have had a reason to create us, because he is rational and not capricious. But what reason could that be? He doesn't depend on us for anything, remember?

Not even his emotional states, right? If God went to the trouble of creating us—however little trouble that might be for an omnipotent being—then he must have wanted to do so. And creating us satisfied that want. He is, therefore, happier with us around. We make him happier. Or, to put it another way, we influence his ability to be happy—we move him, if you like.

You cited Revelation 4:11, which says, in part, “thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.” Does this mean that the creation gives God pleasure? If so, then he is dependent on this creation for that pleasure.

Others have suggested to me that the creation glorifies God—and indeed, you implied the same when you said, “God is working out His will in the world even if we are not sharp enough to figure out *exactly* how God will be glorified in each separate event that takes place” (p. 188). Does this mean that without the events that have happened and are now happening, God would be *less glorious*? You may not have thought of it in those terms, but if we say that  $x$  glorifies God, then we imply that no  $x$  means less glory for him. Any way you cut it, if God truly doesn’t need us for anything, then he has no valid reason to create us, and so the creation is only evidence that he is capricious and not rational.

That is, *unless* we ourselves existed before this mortal life and are eternal beings. *Unless* he stands in relation to us as a parent to his children, rather than as a tinkerer to his hobby. *Unless* we have needs that he can best meet by this physical creation. *Unless* he is actually anxious for our eternal well-being, as a loving parent would be. *Then*, and only then, does the creation, as the act of a being who has no needs *for himself*, actually make sense.

You seem to be hinting that you agree that God is personally responsible for evil in the world. I raised this point in my earlier letter on the subject (see letter 4). You may recall that I said (on page 137),

if a rational being chooses to do something, knowing the consequences of that action, is it not logical to conclude that that being *intends* to bring those consequences about? This question is important, because you seem to believe that God created each one of us in a conscious, deliberate, and rational act of creation. But you also believe that God’s foreknowledge is absolute

and unchanging—he always knew what he knows now about the future. He therefore knew, at the moment he created Hitler, of the death and misery that Hitler would bring into the world. As an absolutely free being, God could have chosen *not* to create Hitler. And he presumably made the same choice with Stalin, Pol Pot, and other ghastly murderers. In each case his choice was rational, absolutely free, and undertaken in full and perfect foreknowledge of the consequences, but he did create them. Since he could have chosen not to, and thus prevented World War II, the Holocaust, the Gulags, and the Killing Fields, is it not logical to conclude that he caused those catastrophes to happen?

Take it one step further; we believe that Satan was once one of the premortal sons of God, but that he rebelled and was cast out. You evidently believe that God knowingly and perspicaciously created Satan—again, with full foreknowledge of the consequences. God *could have* chosen *not* to create Satan—but he did create him; as a result of *that* choice, there is evil in the world. Your theology leads to the inescapable conclusion that God is personally and immediately responsible, if not for individual evil acts, then for the existence of evil. It is here because God chose that it should be here.

What this really means is, since all of God's creations exist as a result of his rational, conscious decisions, made in the fulness of his absolute foreknowledge, "your God," if I may call him that, is directly and personally responsible for all of the evil in the world. I am grateful that I worship a God who is a truly moral being.

But you seem actually to feel that God is himself responsible for individual evil actions, for you say,

But while there are many who are willing to confess this kind of general sovereignty of God, few are willing to go as far as the Scriptures go in describing the control of God over one particular area—the very actions of men themselves. When the truth of God begins to

impinge upon man's supposed freedom, men begin to rebel with intense hatred. (p. 191)

Now I don't know anyone who would "rebel with intense hatred" against the idea that God personally controls his or her actions. Quite the contrary, that is a very comforting idea, for it absolves us of all moral responsibility. You argue that "God uses an evil people (the Assyrians) to punish His people, and . . . does so in such a just and righteous way as to be able to hold the wicked Assyrians responsible for their behavior" (p. 192). And yet, you don't actually say how it is that he manages that; you merely assert that he does. I would say that God, knowing the hearts of men, governs the external circumstances so that his righteous purposes are worked out. But you seem to be saying that God actually caused the Assyrians to do what they did. If that is the case, how can they possibly be responsible? Don't you see that people can only be responsible if their choices are freely made? You want to have your cake and eat it too, but you can't. Either the Assyrians were responsible for their own actions, or they weren't; if they were, then God could only influence them indirectly; if they were not, then they cannot be held accountable, for their evil deeds were really God's doing.

So when you talk about how holy God is—and I agree that he is—you introduce an awful dilemma for yourself. For what can holiness possibly mean, when the being we call holy is responsible for all evil—not merely in the remote, abstract sense of having created free beings and allowed them to make wrong choices, but directly and immediately? As I said in letter 4 (on page 137):

So, is evil good? Obviously not. Is God good? I think that you would agree with me that, in a moral sense, God is good. He always and only chooses good over evil. But your theology has a free, rational, powerful, and morally good being knowingly bringing evil into existence. He could prevent evil simply by choosing to create men and women who would always exercise their free will to do good and never evil, but he chooses otherwise.



And, I would add, he could consistently use his influence to encourage his creations to choose good over evil, but, according to you, he chooses otherwise—but still holds them responsible anyway, for the choices he made for them. Is that holy? Is it even remotely just? Behold, I say unto you, nay.

Now, I don't have a problem with your beliefs about God's righteousness, mercy, and justice. I too believe that he possesses those qualities in full measure, so there is no need to debate those points.

I must say that, despite your occasional digs at the church, I have enjoyed this letter much more than your previous ones. A positive presentation of your own beliefs is a good thing, and I am glad to see you move in this direction. Please do not take it amiss that I have taken issue with some of your arguments. That is merely my own point of view, and you are free to believe as you wish. I just hope you remember that in God's wisdom—and not human efforts such as philosophical argument and scriptural exegesis—the fulness of the truth is to be found.

May you gain the desire to seek that knowledge.

Your friend,

Elder Hahn

## Letter 11: What Choices?

Dear Mr. White,

As I mentioned to you during our first meeting and in my previous letter, my name is Elder Hahn. That is what my friends call me. Even my family calls me that while I'm on my mission. I believe that it is a fairly reasonable request that I make for you to call me Elder.

Thank you for your mercifully brief letter. Thank you also for attempting to address my questions relating to the relationship between God and evil acts. But, if I may say so, you haven't fully clarified what you meant by your statement that God causes specific events to happen. You describe the crucifixion as a terrible crime and go on to say, "God used those sinful men (who certainly did not have pure motives for what they did) to accomplish His will" (p. 198). But the issue you don't address is—did they have a choice in the matter? Could they have chosen not to crucify the Lord? If they had so chosen, wouldn't that have defeated God's plan?

You go on further to say:

The men who acted did so voluntarily. God did not have to "force them" to do what was evil. Their intentions, from the start, were evil. But God's intentions in the same act were pure and holy. While God eternally predestined this action which involved human guilt and sin, he did so for the holiest and purest reasons. (p. 199)

While I agree that the reasons were holy and pure, the question remains: how responsible were those men for their actions? If God had "eternally predestined" that those men would crucify the Savior, what choice did they really have in the matter?

You might respond that they simply acted out of their own evil wills. But were their wills not what God created them to be? Is a being whose choices are "eternally predestined" by being created with a particularly evil nature truly responsible for those choices? How can people be held accountable for their actions if

they are “made” in such a way that they are not able to choose anything else?

And I don't think you have thought the question of consequences all the way through, either. Yes, the crucifixion was a very sinful act, and yes it did immeasurable good. But why did it do good? Because it was the means of redeeming fallen mankind. Redeemed from what? From sin and the consequences of sin. And where did that sin come from? From the choices of men and women upon the earth. So again we are back to the issue—why do we make wrong choices? If we are mere creations, why didn't God choose to create us truly good? Was it beyond his power to do so? Why create us sinful? Would it bring less glory to God to create all righteous people and save all of them than to create all sinful people and save only some of them?

Even though you have explained that you don't see God forcing people to make wrong choices, the consequence of your theology is still that God is responsible for all the evil in the world. To argue that he allows it to happen because it brings about things that add more glory to him in the long run has two problems: First, if God is all-powerful, doesn't he have enough power to accomplish his purposes by doing only good? And second, you are essentially arguing that the end justifies the means; God's holiness thus consists of his being a pragmatist who is right all of the time. I'm sorry, but that is not very holy, or even moral.

Anyway, we can move on from this topic now, I think. I can see where we agree and where we disagree. Actually if you would stop telling me what I believe, you would find that we don't disagree on nearly as many points as you think we do. For, although you are convinced that “we have already seen that the LDS concept of God is so far removed from the biblical one that the two cannot possibly have their origin in the same Being” (p. 200), the fact remains that, on the one hand, you have seriously misunderstood the LDS concept of God, and on the other hand, you have not convinced me that your theology is strictly biblical either.

In fact, I cannot help pointing out that you made that statement to preempt the use of latter-day revelation to clarify some of these questions, since you admitted “that ‘latter-day revelation’ addresses the issue of *why* things are the way they are” (p. 200). In other words, you are using your arguments about the nature of

God to avoid having to deal with what God has revealed in our day. Well, that's up to you.

I appreciate your attempts to explain your views about God's changing his mind. However, I don't believe that your explanation is truly adequate. Consider Deuteronomy 9:19-20, wherein Moses says:

For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure, wherewith the Lord was wroth against you to destroy you. But *the Lord hearkened unto me* at that time also.

And the Lord was very angry with Aaron *to have destroyed him*: and I prayed for Aaron also the same time. (emphasis added)

Your explanation seems to be that the Lord is just "talking down" to us, as parents do to children. Very well, but what has changed? If this passage means anything, then Moses certainly believed that he had prevailed upon the Lord to change his mind. Are you telling me that your own personal wisdom is greater than that of Moses, at the very end of his life? Or are you in fact saying that the scriptures are only the *second* to last court of appeal and that your own knowledge is the final one?

I'm sure it is flattering to human vanity that we should imagine ourselves so much smarter and more sophisticated than those simple shepherds that we can see the eternal verities better than they could, but I wonder if that's really a very edifying or even useful way to view the men that stood in God's presence. The fact is that you are clearly placing your judgment ahead of what the scriptures plainly say. Don't you think it would be better to place the scriptures ahead of your own opinions?

In any event, I am happy to move on.

May the Lord bless you with a desire to seek his will.

Your friend,

Elder Hahn

## Letter 12: So Now We Know

Dear Mr. White,

As I mentioned to you during our first meeting, and in my previous letters, my name is Elder Hahn. Please address me as Elder.

Now I think you have misunderstood something I said. I am more than happy to hear your beliefs about the Savior, Jesus Christ. But I didn't ask you to "compare and contrast [your] belief with the Mormon perspective" (p. 205); since I already understand the "Mormon perspective," I am quite capable of doing the comparing and contrasting. I can't imagine any missionary—or indeed any reasonably well-informed Latter-day Saint—asking you to do that. I have consistently requested that you let me teach LDS doctrine. I renew that request.

And I see that, yet again, you are falling into the same errors that have pervaded your previous letters. You are relying upon *The Seer*, a publication that was denounced by the First Presidency and repudiated by Orson Pratt, its editor. Why do you keep using it when I have already pointed this out to you?

And so I see that you are also trotting out the usual anti-Mormon chestnuts (see pp. 206, 209, 215). "Mormons worship a different Jesus" (concerned murmurs from the audience), "Mormons believe Jesus and Lucifer are brothers" (shock, horror), and "Mormons think God had SEX with Mary" (gasps of delighted disgust). So I am going to give these stock standard accusations only brief comments. Brief comments are all they deserve. But before I do comment on them, I am going to ask you that if you wish our correspondence to continue, then you will please raise the tone of your letters.

The "different Jesus" argument is a very weak one. I mentioned to you earlier about the great retreat my aunt describes in the anti-Mormon position. The different Jesus argument is part of that retreat, since for years the standard accusations—still heard today, by the way—were that we didn't believe in Jesus at all, or that we placed Joseph Smith ahead of him. Both of these accusations are false and untenable. The different Jesus argument, although equally false, can be argued from differing interpreta-

tions of scripture; so it made a convenient fall-back position. The only really different things we believe about Jesus have to do with his postresurrection activity. All the rest is just a matter of interpretation.

We believe in Jesus who created all things (see John 1:1–3; Moses 1:32–33); who was and is the divine son of God the Father (see Matthew 3:17; 16:16; Luke 1:32, 35; John 1:14, 18, among a great many others); and who was born of Mary in Bethlehem, taught the gospel, performed many miracles, was betrayed by Judas, was tried by the Jews and Pilate, and was crucified and rose the third day, as recorded in the scriptures. If all of this is not enough to identify clearly which Jesus we believe in, then nothing would be. In reality our Jesus is only different from your Jesus in matters of hair-splitting theological definitions of the kind that were introduced into the church by ancient philosophers with pagan backgrounds.

There is an illustration I sometimes use when confronted with this silly argument: suppose Jesus were to return to the earth tomorrow. Suppose further that he held a press conference to announce the beginning of his kingly reign. (Yes, I know that's rather hard to imagine, but please bear with me.) And so he announces that he has come to reign on earth for a thousand years and then opens the floor for questions. A bold reporter sticks up his hand and asks, "Er, Lord, are we your spirit brothers and sisters?"

Imagine, then, what the consequences of his answer will be. If he says "no," will the Mormons in the room say, "Well, in that case we'll just wait for our Jesus to show up"? I don't think so. And if he says "yes," will the conservative Protestants say, "Well, in that case we'll just wait for *our* Jesus to show up"? That hardly seems likely. There's only one Jesus. Sure, we can't both be right on every point about him, since we don't agree on every one, but he is still the same Jesus, regardless of which one of us has got all the right pieces of the puzzle.

The "Jesus and Lucifer are brothers" argument is equally weak. Oh, by the way, I know of no Latter-day Saints who are unaware of our teachings about the premortal existence, so your shocked and incredulous Mormons aren't anyone I've ever met. The fact remains that Jesus is the Son of God, according to a

whole raft of scriptures. And Satan is also one of the sons of God, according to Job 1:6 and 2:1. (It is interesting, isn't it, that in both passages it's the sons of God presenting themselves to the Lord; there are never any sons of Jehovah mentioned.)

But it's time for another illustration. I have a moderately large family, but I'm quite certain I don't have a sister named Sally. Now suppose when I return home I find that I have a new sister, named Sally, who was born or adopted into the family—and nobody told me. Would that make me a different person? All along I thought I was Elder Hahn—and now, because I've got this sister, does this mean I'm not the same person any more?

Can you see how inexpressibly silly that is? I am who I am, no matter to whom I am related. And, by the same token, Jesus is Jesus, and Lucifer is Lucifer. And of the two, Jesus is the fixed point. If it turns out that Lucifer is not truly a son of God, then we would have been wrong to believe the testimony of the scriptures, and you would have been right to reject that testimony—but it would have nothing to do with who Jesus really is.

And, just by the way, since we are guilty of believing the Bible on this point, while you are rejecting it, just what did you say is your ultimate source of doctrinal knowledge?

And now for the issue of the conception of Christ. First, I will just point out that your disgust and horror at all things sexual is *not biblical*; it is Augustinian. It was Augustine who taught Catholics and Protestants alike to be ashamed of the process which God decreed for the perpetuation of the human race. The Bible has no such hang-ups.

Second, I would point out that, whatever our differences of opinion may be on this subject, I regard it as one of the three or maybe four most sacred events in all of history. I therefore treat it with great reverence. And I question whether it is that sacred to you, since you seem happy to use it so cheaply just to score a point.

Having said that, after all of your many references from extra-canonical works—*not one* of which mentions sexual intercourse as the means by which Jesus was conceived—you insist that *we believe* that sexual intercourse was the means by which Jesus was conceived. Well, that is your conclusion. But what do the non-canonical references you quote actually say? The closest thing to

an official source is the excerpt from the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*—which was in fact citing James E. Talmage, whom you had already quoted. What are you trying to do here? Prove your case by repeated assertion? Anyway, this is how you quoted the encyclopedia, which quotes Talmage: “It is LDS doctrine that Jesus Christ is the child of Mary and God the Father, ‘not in violation of natural law but in accordance with a higher manifestation thereof.’” Knowing LDS doctrine, I of course knew that already. But I will now explain something to you that you clearly do not know.

In my Bible Dictionary, under the heading “Miracles,” we find the following statement:

Miracles should *not* be regarded as deviations from the ordinary course of nature so much as manifestations of divine or spiritual power. Some *lower* law was in each case superseded by the action of a *higher*. (emphasis added)

You see, it is the doctrine of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints that all miracles—note that, *all* miracles—are “not in violation of natural law but in accordance with a higher manifestation thereof.” That is, we don’t know how they happen, but the fact that Jesus changed water into wine was a higher manifestation of natural law, not a violation of it. The same with feeding the five thousand, walking on the water, calming the storm, healing many, even raising the dead—all were higher manifestations of natural laws that are presently beyond our comprehension. So when Talmage, McConkie, or anyone else says that the conception of Jesus happened “not in violation of natural law but in accordance with a higher manifestation thereof,” he is describing it in terms that we *always* use when speaking of miracles.

Now it seems obvious to me that a higher manifestation of natural law means something significantly *different* than a usual manifestation. The usual way that a child is conceived is by sexual intercourse. We wouldn’t need a “higher manifestation” of the laws of genetics if Jesus were conceived in the ordinary way, would we? Somehow—and none of us claims to know how—the Father introduced his genetic material into the body of Mary. And since both male and female DNA were present, this was *ipso facto*



an instance of sexual reproduction, as scientists define the term. So you don't need to indulge in any prurient little speculations beyond that. When you say that "they [i.e., various General Authorities and others] are teaching that Elohim, God the Father, had sexual intercourse with Mary, resulting in her pregnancy and the birth of Jesus Christ" (p. 215), you are presenting your own conclusions. That is what their words suggest to your mind. I'm sorry, but you are not an authority on the doctrines of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Your conclusions are not binding on me or anyone else. You can entertain them if they entertain you—I suppose some people might find them entertaining—but I don't accept them.

Another conclusion that I reject in this case is your claim that "In Mormonism all you can say is that she [i.e., Mary] was a virgin at the time of conception" (p. 215). Actually, in Mormonism, we say that Mary was a virgin at the time of the birth of Jesus. That is what we say, because that is what we believe. You can deny that fact until you are blue in the face, but it won't change anything.

I see no need to rehash the issue of "polytheism"—we have been over that ground already, except to say that you do not understand Latter-day Saint thought on the subject. Jesus is God. But Jesus is not his own Father. Therefore the Father is someone else—someone who is also God. That is our doctrine. If that is polytheism, then the New Testament is polytheistic.

You also claim, at the end of a rather long argument about Christ's creative activity, that "if Christ were the Creator of all things, then He would be the only true and eternal God. That is what the Bible teaches, but it is *not* what the LDS Church teaches" (p. 219).

The Bible teaches that Jesus is "the *only* true and eternal God?" Really? Then what about his Father—the one whose voice was heard from heaven on occasions when Jesus was present (see Matthew 3:16–17; 17:5; Mark 1:10–11; 9:7; Luke 3:22; 9:34–35) and who Jesus himself said was "greater than" him (John 14:28)? Doesn't he count?

The fact is, as I mentioned previously, that we certainly do accept that Jesus is the creator of all things—read again Moses 1:31–39 for the fullest exposition of this doctrine.

Which brings me to the last point I wish to make. I apologize if my tone has been somewhat brusque, but many people would legitimately feel that a letter like yours would deserve no reply at all. At one part of your letter you said:

I was caught utterly flat-footed one day outside of the west gate of the LDS temple in Salt Lake during the General Conference. A tall man, about fifty years of age, came striding across West Temple Drive. I could tell he was in a hurry, but in my best tracting style I offered him a gospel tract. (p. 215)

I am forced to wonder—just what did you think you were doing handing out tracts outside Temple Square during conference? Please understand—I have no problem with the idea that you or anyone else might want to try to proselyte us; proselyting is the prerogative of all believers of every stripe. If you believe that you are following Christ, then you cannot ignore the injunction of Mark 16:15, which says, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.”

The problem I do have is twofold: first, selective, targeted proselyting is predatory in nature. It actually disobeys that injunction, because instead of preaching the gospel to *every* creature, you are preaching only to those who hold specific beliefs of which you disapprove.

Our message is the same for all: Jew and gentile, Christian and Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, agnostic, atheist, and pagan. Except where legal or other constraints are placed on us by others, we simply invite all to come unto Christ. We do not carry an arsenal of pamphlets tearing down the specific beliefs of others, for that is not our mission. We are not “anti” anybody, just as Jesus and Paul and Alma weren’t “anti” anybody. We simply share the good news of the restored gospel.

The second problem is that, by waylaying the Saints on their way to conference, you are interfering with our right to worship the Lord without being molested. I know that you would resent anyone targeting Baptists in like manner. Let me share an experience with you.

In my last area, we met a really sweet widow. She was Baptist and as kind-hearted as anyone you could hope to meet. She was

very receptive to the gospel, too. Well, we gave her the first five discussions. She was reading the Book of Mormon, and each time we visited her she would tell us what she had read and how much she had enjoyed it. She was looking forward to being baptized, but then one day we came by and she looked really unhappy. "I'm sorry, Elders," she said. "You are such nice young boys, but I can't be baptized. My pastor said that if I join your church, I'll burn in hell, and none of my Baptist friends will ever speak to me again. I've really enjoyed our talks, and I'll keep reading the Book of Mormon."

Well, naturally we couldn't let it go at that. We asked her to arrange a meeting with her pastor in her home. The pastor showed up with *The God Makers* book and some other pamphlets from the "Ex-Mormons for Jesus" outfit. I said to him, "What do you know about those guys?" He said, "They are sincere Christians who reach out in love to their Mormon neighbors." I told him, "Those sincere Christians picket temple open houses. If someone were to picket your Baptist church, would you think they were sincere Christians?" The pastor turned red and started to splutter, but the lady said, "I wouldn't want anything to do with people like that!" The pastor tried to say that it was "different," but she asked him to go. She said, "I know what a real Christian is, and I'm getting baptized at the Second Ward chapel a week from Saturday!"

Well, he cursed us in the name of God and left. She was baptized, sure enough. Some of her Baptist friends did stop talking to her, but not all of them did, and she made new friends in the Second Ward.

The point of the story is that, just like that lady, I know a real Christian when I see one, and I will *never* see one distributing negative literature at an LDS place of worship; just like you will never see one distributing negative literature at a Baptist place of worship. That's just not something real Christians do.

You've read the Bible, and I presume not just the parts that support your interpretations. I'm sure you've read Acts 19. So tell me: can you visualize Paul and his companions outside a Temple of Diana, handing out pamphlets entitled, "Why Diana-Worshippers Will Burn in Hell"? Or is it much easier to visualize Demetrius the silversmith handing out anti-Christian pamphlets at

a Christian meeting place? I know which seems more realistic in my mind.

Well, it is now time for me to close. I have met a number of people who were more or less antagonistic to the church. You are the first actively proselyting anti-Mormon I have met. I'm sorry that you were not what you pretended to be.

I hope that you will seriously consider your actions. If you truly believe that you are in God's service, then you must believe that he does not need deceitful and manipulative misrepresentation on his behalf. I hope you will not let yourself be blinded any longer by the anti-Mormon propaganda that you are spreading.

May the Good Lord be merciful and forgive you for opposing his kingdom.

Your friend,

Elder Hahn

### Letter 12A: From the Mission President

Dear Mr. White,

First, let me introduce myself. My name is A. Thad Marvin, and I am the mission president for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in this mission. I am writing to you because I have become aware that you have been corresponding with a number of missionaries here. The four elders and one sister missionary have shown me the letters you have sent them. I notice that apart from the salutations and small talk those letters are essentially identical to each other. Despite their friendly tone, I have no hesitation in regarding them as anti-Mormon in their content.

Our missionaries are sent forth as lambs among wolves (see Luke 10:3). They have little experience of the world and its dangers, and they do not know the kinds of people they can meet. My role is to oversee them and to teach them how to avoid the perils that the adversary will cast around them.

All but one of the missionaries indicated that you asked to meet with them privately, without their companions present. You did this after they explained to you that the mission rules require them to stay with their companions at all times. If you knew what the mission rules were, why did you try to get the missionaries to break them? They all know that a *true* friend will respect their standards and not try to persuade them to do something they are not comfortable with. I'm sure that is what your church tells its Protestant youth. And by this, the missionaries now know that you are not truly their friend.

I notice from your letters that you use a familiar ploy in trying to persuade them to meet with you alone. "If you *really believe* that you are doing God's will, you will come and talk to me" (p. 171) ran the argument in one of your letters. That is familiar, because someone else used the same argument once: "If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread" (Matthew 4:3). Just like that tempter, you are trying to challenge the missionaries' testimonies, so that they will feel like they have to do what you say in order to prove something to you.

If you are in any doubt as to what conclusions I draw from this, please read John 8:44.

I am aware of the activities of certain kinds of organizations popularly called "cults"; by that term I do not mean every religion I disagree with, as some do. I refer to those that target young people and separate them from their families and their support structures. My missionaries are away from their homes and families; their support structure largely consists of their companions and their leaders, including myself. So when I see you trying to separate missionaries from their companions, I wonder what you might be trying to achieve. Do you think they will be more vulnerable alone? Do you think that if you persuade them to do something contrary to the mission rules they will be unable to report it to me? Do you hope to weaken the channels of communication that protect them from predatory individuals?

You project a very nice fleecy coat, Mr. White. But I can see the wolf hair underneath.

For these reasons, and for others, which I will not go into in this letter, I would ask you now to refrain from making further contact with the missionaries. I am also placing your name and address on a list of people whom the missionaries are not to contact. This list includes people who have physically threatened the missionaries or made overt advances toward them.

If you wish to have debates by mail with someone, I can refer you to people who are well qualified to deal with your claims and arguments. But, considering your level of education, I feel that you may look upon our young missionaries as soft targets. Perhaps you should pick on someone your own size in terms of educational attainments.

Elder Hahn, with whom you have exchanged the largest number of letters, has been transferred to another area of service. This is the normal practice after a missionary has served in an area for a number of months. He and I have discussed the matter and have agreed that, should you continue to write to him, your correspondence will not be forwarded to him. We will retain it at the mission home and give it to him at the time of his release, if he so desires.

In closing, I would like to ask you to not harass any of our missionaries any further. They are not here to provide idle amusement for you, but to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.

They are sent forth to “testify and warn the people”; their calling is not to be taught, but to teach. After they return home they are entirely at liberty to learn all they wish about whatever other churches they so desire, but during their missions they need to remain focused on their high and holy calling.

Yours faithfully,

A. Thad Marvin

### Letter 12B: Elder Hahn Returns

Dear James,

I am writing this to let you know that I have completed my mission and returned home. After being transferred from the area where we met, I served in three other areas. I want to tell you that having to deal with your arguments and objections was truly a growing experience for me. The additional prayer and study I had to do helped to strengthen my faith greatly and made me a far more effective missionary.

I have known some elders whose first meeting with an anti-Mormon shook them up some. That wasn't the case for me; your letters advance much the same arguments as other anti-Mormon literature does, but they do not carry the same kind of malice. It did shake me up a little when I found that you had written very similar letters to a number of other missionaries; that made it seem as though you were following some kind of formula. But what shook me up more than anything else was learning, from your twelfth letter, that you were an actively proselyting anti-Mormon.

I can't pretend that you did no harm at all. You distracted me when I was about the Lord's errand. I should have had the wisdom to say to you, as Nehemiah did to Sanballat and Geshem the Arabian: "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down; why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?" (Nehemiah 6:3). And when you gave me all the anti-Mormon stuff you dredged up, I should have responded, "There are no such things done as thou sayest, but thou feignest them out of thine own heart" (v. 8).

Just one more thing before I finish: my mission president showed me the letter you sent him, and a copy of the letter he sent you. It was a little bit funny, but a lot more sad.

I have to disagree with one thing my mission president wrote. He said that because of your level of education, you should really find a similarly educated Latter-day Saint to debate with. I think he put it something like "pick on somebody your own size." I disagree. I think that, at the middle of my mission, *I was your size*. I had half a computing degree and fifteen months of missionary experience; with a little help from my relatives, I could hold my



own against your several degrees and five languages. It isn't hard to tell which side the truth is really on, is it?

James, you led me to believe you were my friend. You weren't. I have many friends who are not members of the church; I have no friends who are actively opposed to the church, or who make a career out of attacking my beliefs. That's not what real friends do.

But I will pray for you anyway.

When I was released, my mission president gave me the letters you sent to me after I was transferred. It really shouldn't be necessary to tell you that they were handed to me unopened, having not been tampered with in any way. I have decided to answer the rest of them, in order to bring some closure to this matter.

Therefore, my reply to your thirteenth letter is enclosed. I will reply to the other four over the next four weeks. I don't know if you will read my replies, or even if you are interested in what I have to say. Reading over your letters again, they seem to be little more than pamphlets with a salutation at the top and a signature at the bottom. But I feel that they need to be answered—and *you* need to be answered, if only to leave you without excuse.

Yours truly,

Steve Hahn

### Letter 13: The Real Atonement and the True Priesthood

Dear James,

I must say that, once again, you have shown the most amazing ability to completely fail to see the obvious. You quote Job 38:1–7 and insist that the questions God is putting to Job are rhetorical. Then you come out with this sweeping statement: “So when God asked Job where he was when ‘the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy’ Job had no answer *because he wasn’t there!*” (p. 224).

That exclamation point seems like an attempt to carry the argument by force, since the glaringly obvious fact that you are missing is that if Job really wasn’t there, the question would be trivially easy to answer. Actually, the easy and naturalistic assumption to make is that we come into existence at the moment of conception, or birth, or sometime in between; if God’s questions to Job are actually hard questions, then the answers must not be accessible by making easy and naturalistic assumptions.

You have taken it upon yourself to warn me “about ‘importing’ human concepts into [my] understanding of God, such as understanding ‘person’ in human terms” (p. 225). Yet you have failed entirely to provide a satisfactory alternative meaning for that word. The same goes for *being*. Your analogy that “rocks have being, but they are not personal” (p. 225) is not at all useful. A rock is an inanimate object; if you split it in half, you have two rocks. What then, are there now two rock “beings”? Or do all rocks share one gigantic “metabeing”—the ultimate essence of all “rockness”? Or are you, in this case, simply using the word *being* as a way of saying that the thing exists? The rock “is,” therefore it is being a rock, therefore it is a rock being. Is that what you had in mind? If it is, then you have equivocated, since we clearly mean something else when we speak of a *living* being—such as a cat or a man, or God or God’s son. Your argument that “There is one being of God, eternal and infinite, yet there are three Persons who share that one being” (p. 225) is something you have asserted a number of times, but you have *merely* asserted; not one of the scriptural passages you have cited

in support of your notion has come anywhere near substantiating that.

But the subtitle of your letter is “The Atonement of the Lord Jesus,” so I would like to focus on that. And I find that, in your now well-established style, you have chosen first to attack and undermine our beliefs before coming around to your own. I think I know why you do that, too.

I must say that you have worked mighty hard to minimize the importance of grace in Latter-day Saint thought. You have picked and chosen your sources—mostly noncanonical—very carefully to attain this end. Therefore let me begin by redressing the imbalance. I refer to Doctrine and Covenants 45:3–5. These are the words of Christ:

Listen to him who is the advocate with the Father, who is pleading your cause before him—

Saying: Father, behold the sufferings and death of him who did no sin, in whom thou wast well pleased; behold, the blood of thy Son which was shed, the blood of him whom thou gavest that thyself might be glorified;

Wherefore, Father, spare these my brethren that believe on my name, that they may come unto me and have everlasting life.

Note that there is no mention at all of *our* merits or goodness; the blood of Christ is all that we have in our favor. The Savior’s only argument in our behalf is his sacrifice, and nothing else.

I don’t see the sense of your argument about the atonement. Blood that was forced from the Savior’s pores was certainly shed, and I fail to see why you presume it was not.

You have used Elder Packer’s talk, “The Mediator,” somewhat more responsibly than others have. But you assume too much. We do not “somehow continue to owe the debt of sin even after our ‘salvation’” (p. 227). That was the whole point of Elder Packer’s parable; the original debt was paid in full. We owe a new debt to him who freely gave his sinless life for us. Gratitude demands it even if nothing else does. And the glorious truth is that the Savior does not ask that we repay him by doing anything that benefits him; he asks us only to do those things that, as Elder

Packer goes on to point out, benefit us and those around us. Consider for a moment the fact that Jesus gave his very life for us; all he asks in return is that we live in such a way as to make that sacrifice meaningful in our lives. It would seem a dreadfully unthankful faith that answered “no” to that request. And indeed, Paul taught that the atonement was conditional, when he said that Jesus “became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that *obey him*” (Hebrews 5:9, emphasis added).

Your arguments about “blood atonement” are not very original. My brother has over 150 anti-Mormon books in his library that say the exact same things that you do. I should have expected that you would trot out this wizened old chestnut. Actually, I am being unfair. You did make one original contribution when you claimed that typing the quotations sickened you. Well, if typing the words of the latter-day prophets sickens you, let me prescribe a remedy: stop typing them.

I looked up “Blood Atonement” in my Topical Guide, and all it says is “see Jesus Christ, Atonement through.” Not being satisfied with this, I looked for some more references. See what I found:

He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity:  
he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the  
sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.  
(Revelation 13:10)

Now while this is worded as a general principle, it does seem to be specifically applied to a particular person, who is represented as the beast from the sea. So I look further still, and find this:

But whoso shall offend one of these little ones  
which believe in me, it were better for him that a mill-  
stone were hanged about his neck, and that he were  
drowned in the depth of the sea. (Matthew 18:6)

Wow, that’s gruesome. Did it sicken you to read it, James? Or is it all right for Jesus to say sickening things, but not his servants?

Actually the teachings of President Young can be quite simply understood in the light of the legal practice of capital punishment—a perfectly biblical notion. Brother Brigham was arguing two things: first, that capital offenders ought to voluntarily accept

their punishment, and second, that that punishment was ultimately beneficial for them. I would also suggest that he was putting a little hellfire into his sermons—and that to an audience who didn't believe in a literal burning hell.

It is clear, though, that the part you really object to is the idea that our own blood can save us from something that the Savior's blood cannot. Since you have been unable to find that in any canonical source—that is, in any document accepted by the Saints as binding—I'm sure I don't have to labor the point: such is not our doctrine. But you might consider that, to one who believes in a *loving* God, as Brigham did and the Latter-day Saints do, there often exists a need to understand divine sanctions that seem harsh—like capital punishment—as being compatible with God's love and not counterexamples thereof. Thus the idea that a capital offender who voluntarily offers himself for punishment is making a sincere attempt to repent and is thus placing himself in the way of God's grace actually emerges as quite an enlightened one, and not at all barbarous or "sickening." Except, of course, to those determined to find fault.

But it is also clear from the scriptures that there are some sins for which there is no forgiveness. Consider the following passage, which you yourself cited:

Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.

And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come. (Matthew 12:31–32; see Mark 3:28, 29; Luke 12:10)

You tried to explain away this very passage by a quite extraordinary argument. You claimed that while the blood of Christ still *could* atone for the sin the Savior describes, in fact it *won't* because the person who commits it can no longer repent. Your actual words were:

The . . . unpardonable sin is not one that by its gross severity is beyond the reach of the atonement of Christ—it is unforgivable because of the position it places the sinner in, one from which he cannot, and will not, ever cry for forgiveness. (p. 239)

There are two vast problems with this argument. First, it is logically absurd to argue that Christ's atonement has power to save a class of sinners whom it actually and always fails to save. Your claim was that "there is no sin that is beyond the atoning blood of Christ, no sin so heinous, so evil, that the blood of Christ is insufficient to bring about forgiveness." But you have also admitted that the blood of Christ never *will* save those who commit the unpardonable sin. This is equivalent to a mother arguing with a school principal that her son deserves an A on a test because even though he *didn't* answer any of the questions correctly, he nevertheless *could* have—he just didn't want to. The proof of the child's knowledge was in the performance, and by the same token, the proof of the power of the atonement is actually in whom it can *really* save—not whom it could *theoretically* save.

Second, the above quotation flatly contradicts your belief that salvation is unconditional. I refer to your statements that say:

The death of Jesus Christ on the cross accomplished *atonement*. We agree on that. But what does atonement mean? How are we to understand this? Briefly, the Bible uses a number of terms to describe the effect of the death of Christ. Some of these terms include *forgiveness*, *righteousness* (or *justification*), *redemption*, *reconciliation*, and *propitiation*. It teaches that these things flow necessarily and surely from the work of Christ. What do I mean by this? I mean that the death of Christ actually accomplishes the forgiveness, justification, redemption, and reconciliation of those for whom it is made, *without any outside considerations*. The death of Christ is not "incomplete" without the addition of "other works" such as your own acts of obedience. The sacrifice of Christ is not dependent upon Steve Hahn or James White for its effectiveness. (p. 232)

And later in your letter, you said, "All those for whom Christ died are by that action saved, and cannot possibly fail of receiving eternal life" (pp. 239–40).

In simple terms, according to you, Christ died to save a specific group of people. Those people are thereby and therefore saved, and that is the end of the matter. Their salvation is not in any way dependent on anything that they might do or leave undone. If this belief is true, then all those who have been elected to be saved will be, whether or not they ever "cry for forgiveness" (p. 239). Thus it wouldn't matter if they committed the unpardonable sin and became incapable of repenting, because they don't need to repent—they'll be saved anyway.

But, if your argument about the "reformed view" is correct, those who are *not* of that elect group won't be saved no matter what sins they do or don't commit, or how much they try to repent. Thus your doctrine flatly contradicts the Savior's teaching, since on the one hand those whom he has decided to save will certainly be forgiven the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, while on the other hand those whom he has not decided to save won't ever be forgiven of any sin or blasphemy, however trivial. Clearly, the gospel of James White is *not* the gospel of Jesus Christ.

But to move along: not only do you simply misunderstand the Latter-day Saint doctrine of the atonement, and not only do you hold contradictory and inconsistent ideas of your own about the atonement, but you have also completely misunderstood the doctrine of the priesthood.

First, you make the completely erroneous claim that "we have seen already, of course, that Joseph did not claim to hold the priesthood until *after* the founding of the Church in 1830" (p. 243). In fact "we have seen" nothing of the sort. I have gone back over your letters and cannot even find where you have proved that claim. All I can find is the assertion that "As David Whitmer pointed out clearly in his book *An Address to All Believers in Christ*, Smith had developed the concept of the 'priesthood' *after* the founding of the Church in 1830" (p. 126).

Perhaps nobody ever told you, but assertion is not proof. And in fact Whitmer at that time, an embittered apostate with an ax to grind, did *not* claim that Joseph Smith "had developed the concept of the 'priesthood' after the founding of the Church in

1830.” He actually claimed that Joseph had introduced what Whitmer called “the error of high priests” (Whitmer, *Address*, 49); in his view the church was authorized to have only elders, priests, and teachers, because of his erroneous belief that “the Church of Christ of old had in it only” those offices (ibid., 60). But note this—he was quite convinced that *those* priesthood offices were legitimate.

Apart from Whitmer, the only evidence you ever cite was to show that the current version of Doctrine and Covenants 27 is not the same as the first published version in 1833. And yet that first version certainly did mention the priesthood, as did a number of other revelations.

But don’t just take Joseph’s word for it. The October 1834 edition of the *Messenger and Advocate* published a letter from Oliver Cowdery wherein he related some of his own experiences while assisting with the translation of the Book of Mormon—including being ordained to the priesthood by the resurrected John the Baptist. This letter is reprinted on pages 58 and 59 of the Pearl of Great Price. I invite you to study it at your leisure. Oliver Cowdery, although at one time excommunicated from the church, always maintained the reality of these experiences and ultimately returned to the church at the end of his life. And his testimony utterly destroys your borrowed “theory of evolution.”

You contradict yourself all over the place in this letter. For example, you correctly point out that the law of Moses is no longer in force, but you quite inconsistently demand that ordination to the Aaronic Priesthood must follow the Mosaic pattern, set down in Leviticus. Why should this be the case? The priests of the line of Aaron held the priesthood by right; we receive it by ordination, under the direction of the Melchizedek Priesthood, which, as Hebrews 7 plainly points out, is the higher of the two. And in any event, Hebrews 7:12 explicitly states that the Aaronic Priesthood has changed; why then, do you insist that it must be the same?

You also claim that “Jesus Christ is our *only* high priest, and anyone claiming to be a ‘high priest’ is usurping His position, Hebrews 7:26–28” (p. 245). (I do not see why you feel a need to put single quotation marks around every Latter-day Saint term, such as *high priest* and *priesthood*. That seems rather gratuitous and insulting to me.) In any event, I have read Hebrews 7:26–28



very carefully, and it absolutely does *not* say that “anyone claiming to be a ‘high priest’ is usurping His position.” That is eisegesis of your own.

The same goes for your idea that “the work of Christ on the cross” somehow disposes of the Aaronic Priesthood (p. 246). I believe that you are simply arguing from self-interest here; since your church does not have the priesthood, you can’t afford for it to be important, because for you it is *lost beyond recovery*.

In the middle of your misrepresentations of our teachings on the atonement you slipped in the following statement:

The concept that there could possibly be any more sacrifices by the ‘priesthood’ is so far removed from biblical teaching (note the entire argument of the book of Hebrews), and so foreign to the Christian mind, that it is difficult to fully grasp what I have just presented above.  
(p. 232)

This was in reference to a statement that the day will come when the sons of Levi will offer again an offering unto the Lord in righteousness. I don’t mind at all that you disagree with it—that is certainly your prerogative, but is it truly that difficult an idea to grasp? Or are you protesting too much? Surely your imagination is up to visualizing that.

Perhaps you do not realize that the statement you quoted (from *History of the Church*, 4:211) is followed only two sentences later by a statement explicitly clarifying that the law of Moses would *not* be restored.

Your arguments about the Melchizedek Priesthood are sinking. I expected you to trot out the old evangelical standby that “unchangeable” in Hebrews 7:24 *really* means “intransmissible.” And yet the whole argument of Hebrews 7 is a contrast between the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods; note that the Aaronic Priesthood was now changed (v. 12) but the Melchizedek Priesthood is unchangeable. That’s the clear contrast. Arguing, as you do, that the Aaronic Priesthood was ended and the Melchizedek Priesthood is intransmissible is not at all meaningful.

Furthermore, when you assert (without support) that “no one but Melchizedek and Christ has ever held” (p. 246) that priesthood, you fail entirely to notice that there were, in fact, others who

held the priesthood but who were not descendants of Aaron. Among these were Jethro (see Exodus 3:1) and King David (see 2 Samuel 6:14, 17–18). Since Jethro in particular was already a priest before the Lord spoke to Moses, what priesthood did he hold? Not Aaron's. Are you proposing another order of the priesthood that nobody knows about?

And what of the apostles? We know that they did not offer sacrifices. But they did have a vital authority in spiritual matters. We read:

Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John:

Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost:

(For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.)

Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost. (Acts 8:15–19)

Now there are a number of notable things about this passage. First, the Holy Ghost did not fall upon the new converts until *after* they had had the apostles' hands laid on them. Second, the apostles had to come in person to perform the ordinance—they couldn't do it long distance. This is clearly an important ordinance, and at that period in the church, only the apostles had the authority to perform it. Philip, though a mighty missionary who was on the spot and had authority to baptize, couldn't do it.

So the question is—what do we call this authority the apostles held? This authority to perform ordinances that could call down the powers of heaven? Please explain just why we should refuse to accept the obvious answer—that it was the priesthood, specifically the Melchizedek Priesthood.

Yours truly,

Steve Hahn

### Letter 14: Salvation . . .

Dear James,

Your letter on salvation has made for interesting reading. Were it not for the somewhat barbed and pointed remarks you keep making about the doctrines of the Church of Jesus Christ, I could probably let it go by with a simple acknowledgment that I had read it and that I appreciated knowing what you believe. But it is you who has made our correspondence into a contest of the rival doctrines, and so you cannot complain that I respond in kind.

First, the bulk of your letter is made up of seven passages of scripture and your commentary on those passages, which you claim show that God saves whomever he chooses, because he has thus chosen, without any action or response on their part. This is your theory of "absolute sovereignty"—that not only does God's grace make salvation possible, but it also makes it unconditional for some and unattainable for all others. I shall return to this later in my letter.

Your seven passages of scripture (actually you cited more, but the ones which made up the "perfect number") were Ephesians 1:3–12; 2 Thessalonians 2:13–14; Matthew 11:27; John 6:37–39, 44–45; 2 Timothy 1:8–9; Romans 8:29–30; Romans 9:10–24.

Against those seven passages, a total of thirty-seven verses, I have found quite a number of passages that say entirely the opposite. I could easily marshal seven times seven passages without even raising a sweat, but I will stick to just seven.

The first of these is Matthew 5–7, also known as the Sermon on the Mount. Have you ever wondered, if the essence of being a Christian is to believe the right theology, why the burden of Jesus' own teaching was always ethical and behavioral? Or why, if being saved was dependent only on God's irresistible will, Jesus kept insisting that his followers should *do* things, and that they would be saved thereby? Consider this from chapter 5:

But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;

That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. (Matthew 5:44–45)

Or this, from chapter 6:

But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth:

That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly. (Matthew 6:3–4)

Or this, from chapter 7:

Judge not, that ye be not judged.

For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. (Matthew 7:1–2)

And again, also from Matthew 7:

Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock:

And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.

And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand:

And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it. (Matthew 7:24–27)

With your quotations you provided approximately five words of explanation and commentary for every word of scripture. I don't need anything near that much. I will simply point out the obvious—that we will fall if we do not follow the Savior's teachings; we will be judged as we judge others; God will reward us for what we do; and we become the children of God by doing godly things. Jesus said all this, not me.

The second passage is from Matthew 18. The Savior had just related the parable of the unmerciful servant. We pick up where that servant's lord has just learned what the servant did:

And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.

So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses. (Matthew 18:34–35)

Again, this passage needs little commentary. Jesus taught that his Father would treat us as we treat others. That's a little different from the idea that God will simply claim us anyhow because he so chooses, isn't it?

The third passage is also from Matthew, in chapter 23:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! (Matthew 23:37)

Note here the plain and undeniable statements that are made: Jesus "would" have gathered Jerusalem "often," but Jerusalem wasn't cooperating and "would not," and so it didn't happen. Whatever kind of absolute sovereign God is, he certainly allows his subjects to make meaningful choices—choices that have consequences and choices that even he respects.

Now I could quite easily fill my quota of seven passages from Matthew alone, but I am not a single-author Bible reader. Contrary to your claim, I know of no Latter-day Saints who "have an almost 'anti-Paul' attitude" (p. 255)—but I do know of some Protestants who seem to take more notice of Paul than they do of the Master he served.

But Paul was not entirely given over to the doctrine which you have taught, as my fourth passage shows. For in 1 Corinthians 6 we find:

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither forni-

cators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind,

Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Corinthians 6:9–10)

Note that Paul doesn't say that fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, and so forth, will be "made righteous" whilst continuing in their sins. He says that unrighteousness of these kinds will disqualify people from inheriting the kingdom of God.

Further, in 1 Timothy 2 we find our fifth passage, which reads:

For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour;

Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. (1 Timothy 2:3–4)

Paul seems to believe—or so he told Timothy—that God wants "all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth." But we know that doesn't happen, does it? It seems that even Paul recognized limits on God's sovereignty. Perhaps those limits are self-imposed—God voluntarily refrains from imposing his will upon mortals—but clearly not everything works out the way he would like it to.

I have used Hebrews 5:9 already, so you know what it says. I do want to introduce just one more from Paul. In 2 Timothy 4 we find:

I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:

Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing. (2 Timothy 4:7–8)

Note that Paul's reward is a consequence of his having *fought*, *finished*, and *kept*. These are all verbs. Paul did certain things, and as a result, he stood to receive his crown. And, he adds, that applies to us too—if we "love his appearing." That's a condition, James.

Lastly—and there are many, many more that I could use—I come to the book of Revelation. And what do I find in chapter 20?

And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. (Revelation 20:13)

And so there we have it. We are judged according to our works. Clearly, salvation is not the “free-for-a-few-but-denied-the-rest” kind of gift that you would make it.

You go on to some more topics. At one point you make the following statement:

He [i.e., man] “suppresses” the truth about God, and instead worships created things rather than the Creator himself. He engages in idolatry—the worship of *anything* other than the true God, the Creator of all things. What does man worship? Anything—birds, reptiles, beasts, even man himself. Have you stopped to think that this would apply equally well to an “exalted man” such as the god of Joseph Smith? (p. 261)

Of course. One characteristic that sets Latter-day Saints apart from other Christians is our ability to look without fear on alternative points of view. I suppose that is the consequence of having a testimony that comes from the Holy Ghost.

But I ask you—have you considered that this would “apply equally well” to another kind of idol? I refer to an invisible idol—an idol not made with men’s hands, but with their tongues: a purely intellectual creation. Those idolaters who construct the immaterial god from pagan blueprints and then fondly imagine that they find him in the Bible, when in fact the God of the Bible is and always was anthropomorphic—those idolaters are guilty of ignoring the Savior’s warning: they try to cast the mote from the eye of another before removing the beam from their own.

Now I have used up my quota of seven passages to answer your seven. I am now going on to the subject of exaltation. You have indicated a number of times that you strongly disapprove of

that doctrine. I am surprised that you, a student of Greek, haven't heard of the original Christian doctrine called *theosis*, or *theopoiesis*. I do not intend to argue that teaching here, except to point out some well-known passages that support it. The first is found in Revelation 3; here the Savior is speaking through John:

To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. (Revelation 3:21)

This seems remarkably plain to me. Jesus overcame, and so he sits with his Father *as God*. And so, if we also overcome, will we. That is his promise.

And now to Paul. In the eighth chapter of Romans, we read:

The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:

And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. (Romans 8:17)

And again, in Galatians 4 we find:

Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ. (Galatians 4:7)

We'll take these two together, since they say the same thing. What does Christ's atonement make us? According to Paul, it makes us heirs. What do heirs do? They inherit. What does *any* son expect to inherit from his father? At least a share, if not all, that the father has. If that father is a king, the son stands to inherit his royal authority. And every son, rich or poor, inherits his father's name. So those whom Paul described as "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ" are by those very words being promised that they will inherit God's royal authority—that is, his godly power—and his name, which is God. So what will they be then?

Let us consider the words of the Savior in Matthew:

Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. (Matthew 5:48)



In your fourth letter you attempted to explain away the clear import of this passage thus:

Many LDS assume that this means that men can become gods, yet, is this what Jesus is saying? This text comes from the Sermon on the Mount. In this section Jesus is laying out the “kingdom standards” for the people of God. This section is *ethical* in nature, and the standard of perfection to which He calls us is ethical and moral. The Lord is not addressing the vast chasm that separates the creature, man, from the Creator, God, but is instead calling us to the moral perfection that is God’s. Such is hardly a solid basis for teaching that creatures can cease being creatures and become gods! (pp. 63–64)

I’m sorry, but while you are fully entitled to your own (private) interpretation of this passage, it just doesn’t wash with me. You are, as usual, arguing from your own assumptions; we are not “creatures” in fact, but are “the offspring of God” (Acts 17:29) and thus in line to inherit our Father’s estate.

The point is that “even as” means “just like.” Jesus is actually commanding us to be just like God.

The last passage I will mention is found in 2 Peter:

Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. (2 Peter 1:4)

What do you suppose it means to be “partakers of the divine nature”? Whose nature is divine? Isn’t God’s nature? Whoever partakes of that nature would have to become a lot like the One who possesses it in the first place, wouldn’t he?

Now we are nearing the end. I have read this letter, as I have read all of your letters, very carefully. And I think that I am beginning to see something that I didn’t see before. Your belief about salvation, if I understand it correctly, is that *God saves sinners*. He saves them unconditionally, without waiting for them to do anything, because he so chooses. Have I understood this correctly?

Furthermore, as you have told me, God *never* changes his mind. That means that if he saves someone, it is because he has *always* intended to save that person; nothing anyone does can ever alter God's intentions with regard to saving him or her. Have I got that right?

If I have, and if you are right, then *it does not matter*. For if your doctrine is correct, and *if* God has always intended to save me, then he will do so even if I never accept your doctrine, because nothing I do, or leave undone, can change his mind or nullify his grace. On the other hand, if he has always intended to *not* save me, then he will not, no matter how earnestly and sincerely I accept your teaching; I could pray the "sinner's prayer" every moment from now until my last breath, but it would be to no avail, for God is so magnificently unmoved by my entreaties—or anyone else's—that he will *never change his mind*.

Some people might find this a somewhat unlovely concept. The idea of a God so majestically aloof that the most heartfelt prayers of his children make utterly no impression on him at all is, if I may be excused for saying so, an idea not easy to love.

But, indeed, this is the *better* side of this doctrine. For, if we think it all the way through, we are bound to stumble across another one of your doctrines: that God, who *never* changes his mind and whose foreknowledge is absolute, created each of us in a conscious, rational act of creation.

Now, if we join the two concepts together, we are faced with this consequence: that *before* he created each one of us, he *knew* whether or not he was going to save us. The *inescapable* conclusion is that God knowingly created billions of human beings *unto damnation*—for he had no intention of saving them, and there was no possible way for them to be saved otherwise. Don't you see that, if your doctrines are believed, there is no logical escape from this conclusion?

So I ask you: what kind of being would knowingly and consciously create billions of rational beings simply in order to condemn them to eternal misery? Is that a loving God? A merciful God? Or perhaps not?

As I pointed out in response to your letters on the nature of God: since all his creations exist as a result of his rational, conscious decisions and are made in the fulness of his absolute

foreknowledge, “your God,” if I may call him that, is directly and personally responsible for all the evil in the world.

On the other hand, “my God,” as you are pleased to call him, is the Father of an innumerable progeny of spirit children. Each of those spirits possesses a fulness of agency—the same underlying freedom that God himself has. And he has taught us the way that we ought to act, so “my God” is *not* responsible for the independent acts of his children, any more than earthly parents are.

“Your God” has created billions of people *in order to* allow most of them to spend eternity in utter and inescapable misery. “My God” has designed a plan whereby all of his children can return and live with him, if only we repent.

Is this perhaps why you simply *had to* attack the foundation of our beliefs before you got onto the subject of salvation? Was it because you knew that your doctrine couldn’t possibly stand up to a *fair* comparison with ours? Is it *always* necessary to undermine a Latter-day Saint’s beliefs before offering your alternative—because your alternative isn’t *nearly* as good?

Yours truly,

Steve Hahn

### Letter 15: . . . And Grace

Dear James,

You seem to have a terrible problem with Elder McConkie's statement that "Grace is granted to men proportionately as they conform to the standards of personal righteousness that are part of the gospel plan" (quoted on p. 269). I notice, by the way, that you still refer to this quotation as being written by "a Mormon apostle," although of course he was nothing of the kind when he wrote the book. But I will let that pass.

This quotation seems to deeply sadden, shock, and disturb you, so I suppose I had better spend some time on it. Although I would just like to mention that you brought this up in what you described as a discussion of "the topic of justification as it is defined in the Bible" (p. 267).

Now the Bible is not a dictionary and actually defines very few of the words it uses. But the fact is that when the quotation above appears, you hadn't quoted a single line from the Bible. You had given me several paragraphs of your own unalloyed opinion; you had already quoted *Mormon Doctrine* two times and the Book of Mormon once. Then you come to the quotation above, and there is *still* not a Bible verse anywhere on the horizon.

This is an excellent sample of your methodology, James. You begin by announcing that you intend to tell me exactly and only what the Bible says; then, in order to ensure that I will see things your way, you soften me up by telling me what the Bible passages you quote are going to mean; your next step is to put in a considerable effort to undermine and discredit the teachings of the Church of Jesus Christ. Finally, when you imagine that you have removed our teachings from contention—and *only* then—you bring out your teachings. As I pointed out in my last letter, this approach is necessary for you, because if both teachings were to be presented fairly, yours would not stand a chance.

Anyway, back to Elder McConkie's statement. All your exclamations of sadness and disbelief seem to be an attempt to avoid confronting the fairly obvious fact that only by granting grace "to men proportionately as they" obey the commandments, can God be both just and merciful at the same time. For if, as you

have argued previously, God simply chooses to save some and damn the rest, then his "grace" is nothing more than favoritism and his "justice" a travesty, wherein we are condemned for being what he created us to be, without ever having a chance to be anything else. Whereas, by giving everyone the same chance and granting grace unto his children according to their diligence, he is being both just because he treats us all alike and merciful because none of us could possibly make it without his help.

You make the statement that "Grace plus works is dead, being meaningless" (p. 269). Don't you realize that that statement is entirely antisciptural? The structure is an obvious and presumably conscious borrowing from James 2:17, but the content is a direct and irreconcilable contradiction of that passage: "faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone."

You go on to argue that "personal righteousness . . . comes as a result of God's work" (p. 270). That sounds nice, but what does it mean? If a person is righteous solely as a result of God's (presumably irresistible) work in his or her life, then how can we really call that righteousness? Is a puppet righteous because the puppeteer makes it do good things? Or to put it another way: if one computer is made to run a program to solve the problems of world hunger, while another is made to run a program to work out a way to eradicate everyone who isn't blond and blue-eyed, do we really say that the first computer is "righteous" while the second is "evil"? Of course not; the computer is a mere machine; it has no moral sense and no choice. And if a person is only righteous because God chooses to work in that person, then I respectfully submit that that doesn't mean anything. Only if a person has a real choice between actual alternatives can anything that person does be counted as "righteous" or "unrighteous."

You obviously believe that Romans teaches your doctrine, since you rely on it almost exclusively. Whatever happened to the Sermon on the Mount? Nevertheless, the amount of commentary you have to provide is testimony that you are not willing just to "step back" and allow the Apostle Paul to present this doctrine" as you claimed (p. 270), since Paul clearly does not say what you want him to say without a considerable amount of editing from you.

Take, for example, Romans 4:3, which says, “For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.” You offered this as part of an argument that Abraham’s works didn’t count for anything. Yet, where do we find God irresistibly working in Abraham’s life? Nowhere. Instead, we find Abraham choosing to exercise his own faculties (“Abraham believed God”) and reaping the consequences (“and it was counted unto him for righteousness”). Note well, what Abraham did—the choice he exercised—was what counted as righteousness for him and not what God did to him or for him.

But the biggest problem with your letter is that you have simply not understood what we believe and teach about salvation. I can see that your presentation here might be quite convincing to someone whose knowledge of our teachings is slight or non-existent, but to one who knows what he believes, you have missed the mark at which you are aiming.

Your little graphic whereby you try to show that we exactly equate justification with good works and obedience betrays a clear and indeed fatal misunderstanding of Latter-day Saint doctrine. No authoritative LDS source denies the necessity of God’s grace to our salvation.

Perhaps the clearest illustration of your failure to understand our doctrine—and indeed, of your inability to read LDS scripture with anything resembling an open mind—is your mistreatment of 2 Nephi 25:23. You claim that it is an example of “theological errors in the Book of Mormon” (p. 268) and go on to protest that “we are not saved by grace *after all we can do*, but that we are saved by grace *in spite of all we have done!*” (pp. 268–69). I wonder if the difference in emphasis is not as much cultural as it is theological, but in any event, you have not understood the passage correctly. You assume that Nephi is telling us that God’s grace only comes into play after we have done all that is possible. But let us see instead what Nephi is really saying:

For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God; for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do.

As you can see, the statement would be complete in its essentials if the last five words were simply omitted. They are there for emphasis, to make it clear that no matter what we do or don't do, it is still by grace that we are saved.

If we really believed that each work, or ordinance, or whatever else we did added "brownie points" to our "score sheet" then your criticisms might have some merit. But that is not what we believe.

We know that our own efforts are always inadequate to save us. We know that we have to press forward, "relying wholly on the merits of him who is mighty to save" (2 Nephi 31:19). Our own merits are not part of the equation. But we believe that the Lord has given us commandments and requires us to obey them. The ordinances are the means by which he has decreed that we can show our acceptance of the gift he offers us.

Belief is always a decision, and it can only ever be made by the believer. It is, therefore, a work, even if it is a nonphysical work. It is only ever sweat-free to believe something that is trivially easy to believe—such as the fairly obvious fact that the sky is blue. For any belief that really matters, some real effort is required. If, as you seem to be saying, the right belief is essential to salvation—and you most definitely do seem to be saying that—then the decision to hold that belief is a work.

Please note that I am not trying to tell you what you believe. I am simply pointing out what I see as the logical consequences of what you believe. You insist in a salvation that requires no effort at all. The only way I can see that happening is if God simply picks people to save without any reference to what they do or don't do. And that is in fact what you describe: God, you say, saves sinners, no questions asked. Except the only way God will save a Mormon sinner is if that Mormon gives up his erroneous beliefs. Do you detect a slight inconsistency here? I'm certain that I do.

For all your belief in the overwhelming sovereignty of God, you seem incapable of considering that God might regard the sin of holding heretical beliefs as any less grave than you do. Your officious zeal to defend God—and why would he ever need defending?—reminds me of nothing so much as the medieval inquisitors who, utterly convinced of their own personal and institutional righteousness, could not see heretics as anything other than

dangerous fanatics who had to be forced to see reason. That approach didn't work for them. And it won't work for you, either.

You went to a lot of trouble to demonstrate "that Paul's doctrine of justification is not contradicted by James" (p. 280). And this despite the fact that James clearly located Abraham's righteousness in his faith-directed actions. I agree that the two apostles were not contradicting one another, simply because there is a lot more action in Paul than you seem to be willing to accept. You dwell a lot on Galatians 2. Paul's controversy with Peter in that chapter was about the works "of the law," that is, the law of Moses, and not any question of obedience to New Testament teaching. And, indeed, in the very first verse of chapter three, we find Paul asking, "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not *obey* the truth?" (Galatians 3:1, emphasis added). It has occurred to me a number of times that cheap-grace solafidianism—the doctrine that the grace of God in Christ requires no response from us beyond a verbally expressed belief—is a very bewitching teaching to those who want to be excused from obeying the truth.

I don't know if you belong to that category. But whether or not you realize it, you are clearly trying to offer me the "easy way out." For when you ask me, "Wouldn't you like to exchange that burden of continually striving after 'worthiness' for the worthiness of Jesus Christ?" you are clearly pitching your offer based on an appeal to my natural laziness. Here, you are telling me, is a far less strenuous program. Yes, I agree that it is. And if the universal experience of mortality teaches us anything, it is that in the last analysis, the easier program is the path of less growth. Thanks, but no thanks.

Yours truly,

Steve Hahn



## Letter 16: A Smorgasbord

Dear James,

In the first paragraph of your letter you say, “I appreciate . . . the fact that you are really examining the Scriptures and seeking to know what they really teach” (p. 283). That is true and is what I have always done, because the church teaches me to do so. I should also point out that I am not relying on my own limited human understanding of the scriptures, but on personal revelation. This mostly comes in answer to prayers, but it comes in various ways. Sometimes it comes as I read something else that is equally uplifting and edifying—like the *Ensign*. The Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price, all of which are also scripture, contain a powerful additional witness, not only to the *truth* of the Bible, but also to its *meaning*. Some of the most remarkable insights into the meaning of the scriptures have come to me in the house of the Lord, the temple. All of these things continue to enhance my knowledge and understanding of the scriptures.

Your own approach is not one that I can adopt. Indeed, the problems with your approach can best be illustrated by your serious misunderstanding of the writings of modern prophets. If you cannot understand your own contemporaries, whose native tongue is your own, how can you possibly understand the ancients, who spoke only Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek?

I will return to those misunderstandings later. Let’s consider, though, your misunderstandings of the New Testament. For example, Paul counseled the Philippians to “work out [their] own salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12). You responded by making two points: first, that Paul was saying to work *out* their salvation instead of to work *for* their salvation—meaning that they already had it. I must admit that I find this a remarkably slender argument; when I sit down at a computer to “work out” the solution to a problem, it is precisely and only because I do *not* have the solution that I need to work it out. But the obvious answer to your claim is the fact that the work has to be done “with fear and trembling”—something that would be entirely unnecessary if their salvation was absolutely assured, as you seem to be-

lieve. In fact their salvation must still—at least at the time of Paul’s writing—stand in jeopardy; otherwise, there would be no cause for them to fear and tremble. The suggestion that they should fear and tremble makes it clear that “working out” matters very much to their salvation.

Your second point was that Galatians 2:13 says, “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” You went on to ask me (rhetorically, of course), “Who is really doing the work, Steve?” (p. 283). Well, what does the verse say? It says that God is working *in them* so that *they* would “both . . . will and . . . do of his good pleasure.” But who is willing and doing? Those in whom God works. So the question arises: is the working of God within a person resistible or irresistible? The answer is obviously the former: a person always has a choice whether or not he or she is going to respond to that working and “yield to the enticings of the Holy Spirit,” as King Benjamin so eloquently puts it (Mosiah 3:19). If it were not so, Paul would have *no reason at all* to continue to exhort them to *do* things—such as working out their own salvation—because they would have no choice—God would simply compel them to do whatever he wanted. And so, God does the “working,” but we do the sweating.

Except for one statement you made, I am not going to concern myself with your discussion of Matthew 7:21–23, since you simply used it as a lead-in to your assault on Bruce R. McConkie. The exception is when you said that there would be a large group of religious people whom the Lord would reject and then added, “I believe that nearly every LDS person will be in that group” (p. 284). Apart from the fact that I find that statement personally insulting, I am further offended by the way you arrogate to yourself the prerogative of judging the hearts of men, which prerogative is Christ’s alone. I am most forcefully reminded of your letter in which you attempted to debunk the priesthood: you claimed that “Jesus Christ is our *only* high priest, and anyone claiming to be a ‘high priest’ is usurping His position, Hebrews 7:26–28” (p. 245). Well, it happens that Jesus Christ *is* our judge, and so by your logic, anyone presuming to judge others—especially with regard to their salvation—is “usurping His position.”

Your unprovoked attack on the late Elder Bruce R. McConkie contains errors that would, in my estimation, be difficult to make

unintentionally. You claimed that “A book had been circulating at BYU that spoke about having a ‘personal relationship’ with Jesus Christ. McConkie came to BYU to ‘correct’ this kind of thinking” (p. 284).

Actually the booklet in question was *not* simply talking about having a personal relationship with Christ. As a missionary, I advocated that to everyone whom I was able to teach; having a personal relationship with Christ is sound Latter-day Saint doctrine. That particular booklet was advocating a relationship that was inappropriate, in that it attempted to argue that worship and especially prayers should be addressed exclusively to the Son and not to the Father.

Consider this for a moment: there are many kinds of possible relationships between people, but not all of them are appropriate. Does warning against inappropriate relationships mean the same as warning against any and all relationships? Suppose, for example, that you were to give a talk in which you said that it was inappropriate for adults to have sexual relationships with children. Suppose further that a pedophile subsequently claimed that you had preached against parents loving their children. Would you not think that such a misrepresentation was a rather blatant one?

In the same way, your misrepresentation of Elder McConkie’s statements—and especially of the error which they addressed—was rather blatant. To claim that he was opposed to members of the church having a relationship with Christ is entirely misleading, because it is completely false. To show you what his true feelings about the Savior really were, I refer you to the following hymn, authored by Elder McConkie:

I believe in Christ; he is my King!  
 With all my heart to him I’ll sing;  
 I’ll raise my voice in praise and joy,  
 In grand amens my tongue employ.  
 . . .  
 I believe in Christ—my Lord, my God!  
 My feet he plants on gospel sod.  
 I’ll worship him with all my might;  
 He is the source of truth and light.  
 I believe in Christ; he ransoms me.  
 From Satan’s grasp he sets me free,

And I shall live with joy and love  
In his eternal courts above. (*Hymns*, 1985, no. 134)

I recommend the entire hymn to you. It will disabuse you of any notion of which you may have convinced yourself, that Elder McConkie was opposed to anyone having a personal relationship with the Savior.

Your love of uninformed speculation—especially hostile speculation—is given full rein in your treatment of the three degrees of glory. You assert, on no authority beyond your own opinion, that “The third word, *telestial*, is not even an English word, but was created by the imagination of Joseph Smith by combining the first two letters of terrestrial with the last seven letters of celestial” (p. 286).

In reality, as a Greek scholar you should know that the word *telestial* points to at least two good Greek words as possible roots. The word *telos* means “last,” so the *telestial* kingdom may simply be the last kingdom, that is, last in glory. Alternatively, the word *teleos*, the plural of which is *teleotes*, means a disciple, or an apprentice to a master. This relates well to the concept of this earth, in its present *telestial* state, as a place of learning and probation. The “scrabble method” of coining words invariably produces mere nonsense, and yet time after time Joseph Smith, with less than one twentieth of your education, manages to come up with words you haven’t heard of elsewhere, but which are valid. How does he do it? I think I know how, but since you reject his prophetic calling, you will need some better explanation than that which you have offered so far.

You treat 2 Corinthians 12:2–4 in an astonishingly cavalier manner. After quoting verse 2, you go on to casually announce that “in verse 4, Paul identifies this ‘third heaven’ as ‘Paradise’” (p. 287).

Does he? Let us quote the entire passage, and see.

I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven.

And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;)

How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. (2 Corinthians 12:2-4)

It seems to me, as I suspect it does to most Bible readers without a special case to plead, that Paul is talking about two *separate* experiences, being “caught up” to two *different* destinations. Your glib and apparently conscious attempt to conflate the two seems tendentious at best.

Your treatment of John 3:5 is equally cavalier. The fact is that Jesus is flatly stating that being “born of water” is a prerequisite for salvation. Cross-referencing to Ezekiel may be interesting, but it ultimately distracts us from the concrete reality of this teaching of Jesus. For the Ezekiel passage in question states emphatically that the water would be *sprinkled*, which cannot possibly be represented as any kind of birth. In a mortal birth, the baby is at first entirely inside the mother’s womb and then emerges totally, a process known in the scriptures as being “born of woman.” To be “born of water” would require a similar process; the candidate is at first entirely enclosed in water, and then emerges totally from it. That is baptism. Furthermore, I would ask you to consider what John tells us immediately after giving the words of Jesus to Nicodemus. In John 3:22 he says, “After these things came Jesus and his disciples into the land of Judea; and there he tarried with them, and baptized.”

The fact that baptism is not elsewhere called “born of water” is a red herring, since it is clearly being called that in this passage. And your final argument, that baptism couldn’t possibly be necessary for salvation because “this would leave God utterly dependent upon the actions of men” (p. 288), merely makes your own opinions the yardstick against which scripture is measured. The simple fact is that Jesus himself, in his famous commission to the apostles, said, “he that believeth *and is baptized* shall be saved” (Mark 16:16, emphasis added).

Speaking also of baptism, your incredibly stretched interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15:29 has the virtue of being original, so original, in fact, that it seems highly improbable that any first-century Christian—including Paul—ever thought of it. You argue—desperately, it seems—that “the baptism of a young child, for example, the day after an elderly saint of the Lord has passed

away could be viewed as the younger person coming to ‘fill’ the position of the person who has gone home to be with the Lord” (p. 289). I suppose it could be viewed that way—but what evidence have you that the ancient Saints ever held such a view? Is it your contention that all baptisms at that period were held the day after a death in the church? Or that those baptisms that were so timed were somehow classified differently than baptisms whose timing did not thus coincide? I respectfully suggest that we have here yet another example of an exegetical result that is informed more by your need to make an argument against a Latter-day Saint belief than by sound methodology.

But let us suppose that the early Saints did indeed think of the baptism of a new member as replacing those who had died. What, I ask you, can this possibly have to do with baptism for the dead? For if *huper* (or *hyper*) denotes substitution, then why can it *not* mean “on behalf of”—clearly a very meaningful form of substitution for another? Baptism for the dead allows a living Christian to be baptized *on behalf of*—that is, as a substitute for, or in the place of—a person who had no opportunity to be baptized in his or her own behalf.

I realize that my arguments are not going to convince you in this matter, any more than your arguments have convinced me. I will simply close my discussion of baptism for the dead by pointing out that no less an authority than Dummelow (in his *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 919) concurs with the Latter-day Saint view that Paul is referring, with approval, to an actual Christian practice, which he then uses as evidence of the resurrection.

And now to your discussion of Acts 3:21. I feel that I can do no better than to quote back your argument to you, and explain the problems with it. You first quoted the verse, and then said:

This raises the entire LDS belief that the church went into a state of apostasy after the death of the last apostles, only to be re-established by Joseph Smith in 1830. The phrase “the times of restitution of all things” in Acts 3:21 is interpreted to refer to this restitution of the Church. In fact, as I recall, Steve, this verse is used on that little “17 Points of the True Church” card that you gave me when we first met. An examination of the text chosen to represent this claim

will show just how weak this argument is. Acts chapter 3 is not in any way discussing the Church. This is seen in two ways. First, verse 21 says that the “restitution of all things” was “spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.” As Paul points out in Colossians 1:25–27, the mystery of the church was not made known to the past ages and generations (see also 1 Peter 1:10–12), hence this certainly is not talking about the church. Second, the prophets spoke of the restoration of Israel to its own land, and the restoration of the theocracy under David’s Son. This is what Peter is discussing in Acts 3. Besides all of this, I must ask when it was that Christ returned, as verse 19 says this would happen at the “restitution of all things.” (p. 290)

The errors in this paragraph are many. To begin with, you haven’t really defined what you mean by *apostasy* and *restitution*. I’m not even certain that you have a specific or concrete concept of *church*, so your arguments exist in a blanket of fog. Let us define these terms, and see where we are.

First, *church* always and only refers to a specific institution, and not to some amorphous and abstract “body of believers”; it is a definite, centralized organization, not some nebulous entity consisting of everyone who happens to think the same way at a given time.

*Apostasy* means many things. In this context, it refers to the departure of the early church from the gospel path, and the attendant loss of authority, gifts, and true doctrine.

*Restitution* means the restoration of those things which were lost through apostasy, that is, the authority to act in God’s name, the spiritual gifts that testify to the presence of the Holy Ghost, and the fulness of the doctrine of Christ. The last item can only come by direct revelation, for while many points of doctrine are spelled out in the scriptures, there are many other points that are merely alluded to. For the Bible, and especially the New Testament, was never intended by its authors to be a complete handbook for the building up and maintaining of the Church of Jesus Christ—and is therefore not suited to be used as such.

Now it happens that there are two possible readings of Acts 3:21. One is to read it as saying that all the prophets since the world began have prophesied of this restitution. The other is to read it as saying that the restitution will reestablish all things which were taught by the prophets. It is not especially important which view we take, since we know for a fact that the Bible does not contain every word ever spoken by every prophet.

You also claimed that “As Paul points out in Colossians 1:25–27, the mystery of the church was not made known to the past ages and generations” (p. 290)—except that he points out no such thing in those verses, since he isn’t discussing the church at all.

So what is it that Latter-day Saints speak of when we talk of the restoration or “restitution of all things”? We are not talking about the church *per se*, just as Peter wasn’t. We are talking about the fulness of the gospel, with its attendant divine authority and saving ordinances. With those things, the church is a powerful instrument of salvation. Without them, it would simply be another bunch of people singing hymns on Sunday morning.

As for the return of Christ, I wonder if you understand the meaning of *until*, as in “he shall send Jesus Christ . . . whom the heaven must receive *until* the times of restitution of all things.” It simply means “not before.” When my Mom used to tell me, “You can’t go to bed *until* you’ve dried the dishes,” she didn’t actually mean that my head would hit the pillow the moment the last dish was dried. What she did mean was that I had to dry the dishes *first*. Likewise, Acts 3:21 doesn’t actually mean that Jesus will appear as soon as the times of restitution start—or are completed—but simply that he won’t come *before* then.

I notice with some surprise that you have fallen back on the old chestnut of using Matthew 16:18 as a proof text for the survival—indeed, the invulnerability—of the church. It is ill suited for such a purpose. The “gates of hell” (as you said, *hades*, the place where the dead are detained) do not prevail against the church when it falls into apostasy. They prevail against the church when they are able to keep someone out of reach of its saving work. In simple terms, the gates of hell prevail against every church that is powerless to extend the offer of salvation to those



who die without hearing the gospel. But Jesus says that those gates will not prevail against *his* church. And they don't.

Ephesians 3:20–21 is not much more helpful to your cause. Paul's prayer, "unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end," is exactly that—a prayer. And if Jesus could pray in the Garden of Gethsemane that he might be spared, and yet he was not, then what is so special about a prayer of Paul, that the mere utterance of it guarantees its fulfillment? The church that survived, though apostate, has done its best to glorify God, as have its offspring. If that isn't good enough to answer Paul's prayer, then I can only point out that Paul cannot compel God to obedience. History does not contradict the word of God, although it may disappoint the wishes of Paul. Making that prayer into infallible scriptural prophecy is little short of Bible-worship.

Thank you again for keeping your letter brief. My final letter will follow soon.

Yours truly,

Steve Hahn

## Letter 17: Conclusions

Dear James,

I intended to reply to your seventeenth letter, but that was mostly small talk, and I am now focused on straight doctrinal issues. It is time, therefore, to sum up our correspondence.

As I said a number of times: if you had been willing to advocate your religious position *on its merits alone*, then we would have had a disagreement, but no quarrel. We do have a quarrel, only because you have insisted on first trying to undermine the position of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In fact, that effort has taken up the bulk of your writings to me. Your letters are enough to fill a book; take out all the anti-Mormon material, and they would barely fill a pamphlet.

Your first letter showed that you do not understand what Latter-day Saints mean by a testimony. You assumed that a testimony is just a feeling. True, we describe it in those terms. But those who have had the experience of receiving personal revelation know that it is much more than a mere feeling. Human language is not especially adequate to describe things that are not of this world, and so talking about feelings is as close as we can get. I truly hope that you some day have the experience of receiving personal revelation from the Holy Ghost. Not indirectly, from a book, but straight from the source. Then you will *know*. Until then, you just won't know what I'm talking about.

You have quite consistently attempted to disqualify the church's position, rather than engage it. Your treatment of the truth claims of the church has been to try to dodge them, with clever arguments as to why they should not be taken seriously. I would have expected that, if you were able to disprove them, you would have done so. I'm sure that you would have liked to have disproved them. Your failure to deal with them advertises your insecurity.

Throughout your letters, you play a rather tedious word game. You may call Latter-day Saints "Mormons" if you wish—we won't be offended. But it is dishonest to pretend that "Christians" make a separate category. Especially since you insist, in so many of your letters, that your interpretations are the only

Christian ones, despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of Christians—and even a great many Baptists—disagree with you on a number of points. Latter-day Saints are dedicated followers of Jesus. That ought to qualify us as Christians. For a great many unprejudiced people, it does. If that's not good enough for you, then that is a shame, but I see no reason why we should have to conform to your wishes.

You have relied on a number of logical fallacies in your letters. Circular arguments and straw man fallacies are present in considerable numbers.

You demonstrated time and again that you hold the Bible in higher esteem than you do the God who inspired its authors. You argue that the Bible is translated correctly—and then you introduce alternative translations when the King James Version doesn't suit you. Don't you think you might try to be more consistent?

Although you clearly believe yourself to be a Christian, you have consistently taken positions that would perplex and alarm the Christians of the first century. In particular, you have adopted a number of arguments against the church that would be equally hostile to the primitive church. Many of your arguments would be more appropriate in the mouth of a first-century anti-Christian than a twentieth-century Christian.

Although you have tried very hard to discredit Joseph Smith personally, and the church in general, you have simply failed. This lends support to the conclusion that the task is impossible.

Your letters have been an interesting introduction to the strange world of anti-Mormon rhetoric. But I don't think I will be delving any further into that world. I don't really find it attractive.

Yours truly,

Steve Hahn