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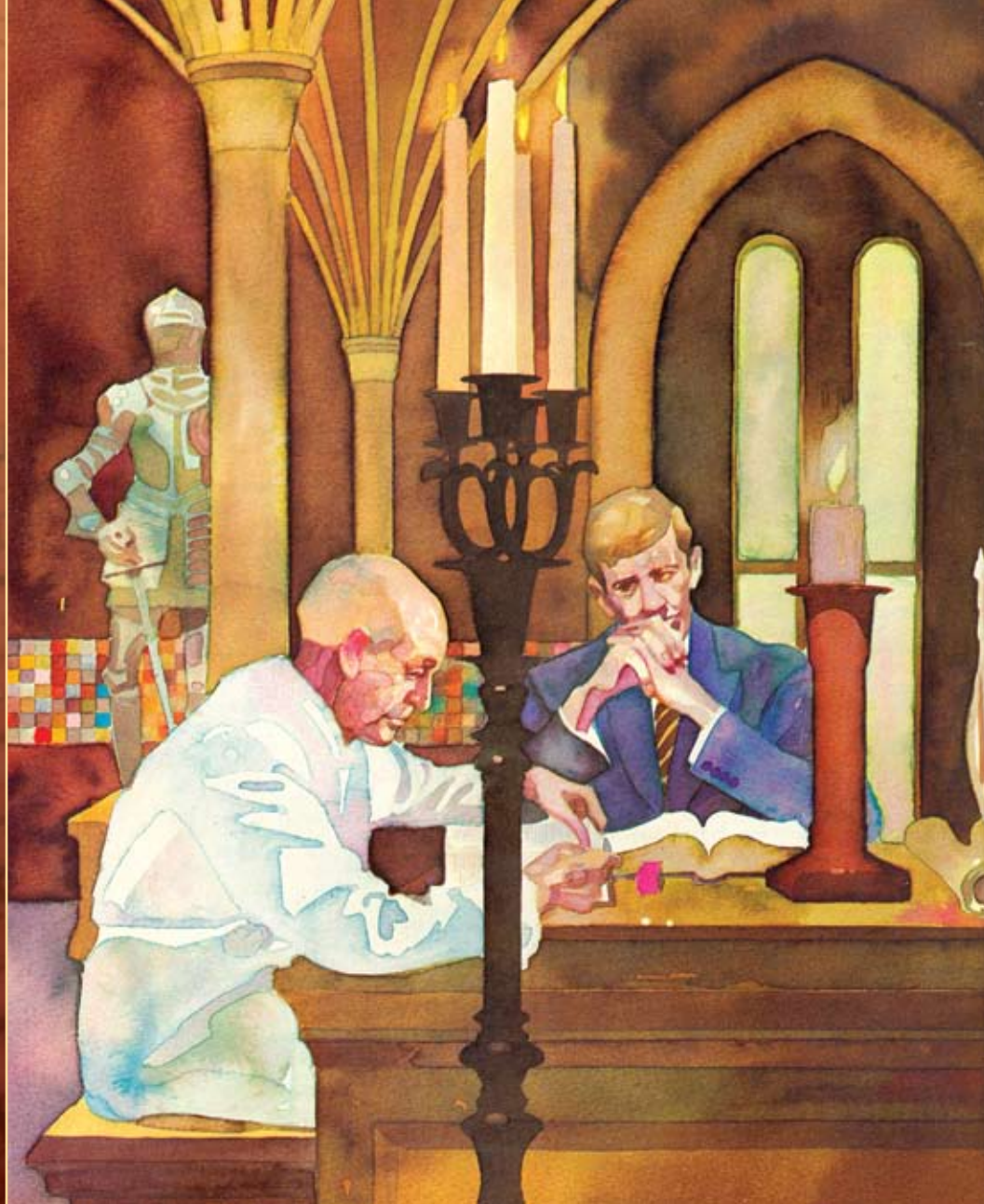
Title The Discovery of Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon:
Forty Years Later

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Abstract On August 16, 1967, Welch discovered the presence of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon. Serving in the LDS South German mission at the time, in the city of Regensburg, Welch attended a lecture on the New Testament. He there learned of chiasmus and how it provides evidence of Hebraic origins. After reviewing a book dealing with literary art in the Gospel of Matthew, he began his analysis of the Book of Mormon for evidence of chiasmus. His first identification of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon was in Mosiah 5, but examples of chiastic style have since been found throughout the book. Welch wrote his master's thesis on chiasmus and continued study on the subject. Though rational arguments cannot generate a testimony of the truthfulness of the book, the presence of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon gives credence to its origins.



THE DISCOVERY OF
C H I A S M U S
IN THE BOOK OF MORMON

40 Years Later

JOHN W. WELCH

*Editorial note:
The following comes at our invitation from a talk at
BYU Campus Education Week, August 20, 2007; also delivered
at the annual conference of the Book of Mormon Archaeological Forum
in Salt Lake City, October 20, 2007.*



Regensburg Cathedral
from across the
Danube.

Opposite: Illustration of
John W. Welch meet-
ing with Father Paul
Gaechter in August,
1968. Illustration by
Jerry Thompson. Used
with permission.

I T WAS FORTY YEARS AGO, on Wednesday, August 16, 1967, that the discovery of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon occurred. As I have looked back over the intervening four decades, I have enjoyed seeing how far this idea has come and how many people have contributed to its development. To document the events of 1967, I have gone back through my missionary letters, notes, and records, and I have reminisced with my missionary companions to relive that extraordinary experience. I still remember it vividly. I am grateful for each opportunity to share the story of that discovery.

To set the stage for the chiasmus story, I need to go back to my teenage years. I was blessed with good parents and devoted school and seminary teachers. For my sixteenth birthday, my parents gave me a small triple combination. Liking its leather smell and feel, I read the Book of Mormon cover to cover. Trusting my seminary teacher's assurance, I knelt down and prayed and was blessed with a testimony of its truthfulness. At the same time, I studied Latin and world history from teachers who required lots of grammar and research papers. I enjoyed the rows of books in the Pasadena Public Library. I remember reading a copy of Hugh Nibley's *Lehi in the Desert* that my mother had

carried on a backpacking trip in California's High Sierra Wilderness Area. I was never quite the same again.

I also had a Sunday School teacher who had recently graduated from BYU. He spoke with deep admiration of Hugh Nibley, and so when I came to BYU as a freshmen in 1964, I signed up for Nibley's Honors Book of Mormon class, which covered his *Approach to the Book of Mormon*, published in hardback that year. Much is owed in the chiasmus story to Hugh Nibley for teaching a whole generation of LDS scholars to read the Book of Mormon in an ancient context.



Commissioner Neal A. Maxwell and Robert K. Thomas at BYU about 1968.

Appreciation also goes to Robert K. Thomas, director of the Honors Program, my second-semester Book of Mormon teacher, and one who taught an English class called "The Bible as Literature." Exuding excitement and encouragement, he saw endless possibilities for gospel scholarship and was influential in teaching us to read the Book of Mormon as literature.

My sophomore year, I went on the BYU Semester Abroad to Salzburg, Austria. While there, I attended classes at the Universität Salzburg, where I obtained a *Studienausweis* that gave me access to any university lectures in Austria or Germany. This

experience made me comfortable around German-speaking professors, and that familiarity would play a role in the unfolding of the chiasmus story. While in Salzburg, I was called to serve in the South German Mission. Arriving in August 1966, I served in the Bavarian cities of Nürnberg, Regensburg, and München.

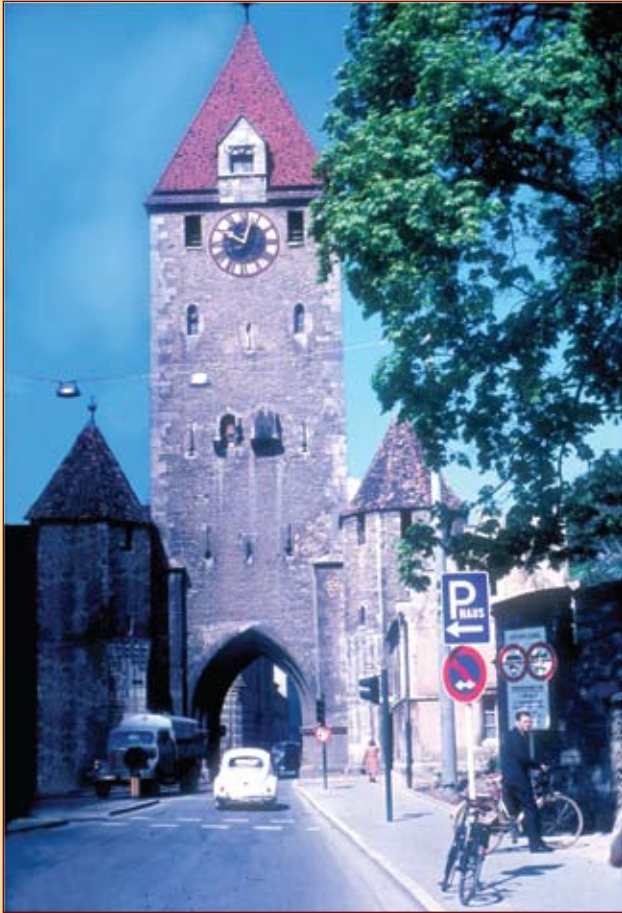
In May 1967, I was transferred to Regensburg, on the northernmost bend of the Danube River. This medieval city has foundations going back to the Roman times. The city, with its extremely narrow streets, was famous for its dominant, twelfth-century Catholic cathedral and as a seat of the



Map of Bavaria locating Regensburg on the northern bend of the Danube.

German Counter-Reformation. Regensburg seemed to me to be a city of priests, Catholic churches, and theological schools. It also was home to the Pustet Press, a large publisher in Catholic Germany of religious books and music.

As one can imagine, our reception was not always bright and sunny. We tried several things to overcome these barriers. One day, my junior companion, Barry Barrus, and I went to the archbishop's office and talked our way in to see him. He treated us respectfully, which encouraged us to look for other opportunities to make contact with other clergymen.



Shortly afterwards, I saw a poster on a bulletin board outside the church next to the cathedral, announcing some classes that would be taught in the Regensburg Priester Seminar—the Priests’ Seminary. One of the titles was “Die Offenbarung im Gegenwart” (“Revelation in the Present Day”). I wondered what Catholic theologians might say about continuing revelation. But another course, about the New Testament, looked more promising. It was held on Friday mornings, which was convenient because Friday was our “diversion day” (now called “preparation day”). On that day we had free



time in the morning hours. By attending this class, I thought we could learn some useful things and might have a chance to say a bit about how we as Latter-day Saints understand the New Testament.

The next Friday we attended that class in the cloistered Priester Seminar on Bismarck Platz. The class was small—about a dozen students, as I recall.

It was in that lecture that I first heard about chiasmus. The topic came up in the professor’s discussion of whether Matthew had been written before Mark or Mark had been written before Matthew. Some scholars



Top left: Medieval gate in the Regensburg city wall.

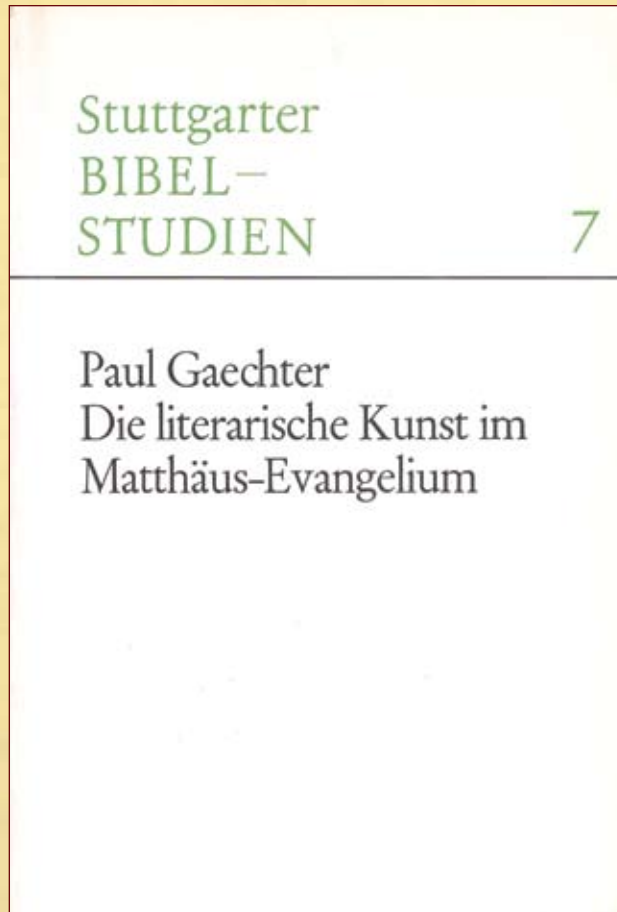
Top right: Elder Welch (left) and companion Elder Barry Barrus.

Left: Cloister inside the Regensburg Priester Seminar.

had advocated the theory that Matthew was written originally in Aramaic and then translated into Greek, making it older than Mark; others argued that Mark was the primary Gospel. The lecturer acknowledged that most people believe in the Markan primacy theory, but at the same time he mentioned a new book by Paul Gaechter, called *Die literarische Kunst im Matthäus-Evangelium* (*The Literary Art in the Gospel of Matthew*), because it gave innovative literary evidence that Matthew had been heavily influenced by Hebrew thought patterns. I was intrigued.

As we left the lecture, we stopped at the Pustet bookstore to see if they had Gaechter's book, and sure enough they did. Elder Barrus, who was very cooperative but a bit baffled through all this, remembers buying the book but having no idea what it was all about.

I read this book and could not put it down. On page 6, Gaechter introduced the idea of parallelism and argued that it was especially important to the Hebrews because in their culture oral transmission was important and parallelism helps people memorize. On pages 7–9, he argued that Jesus had spoken in what Gaechter called the “the higher form of



Above: Cover of the book about the literary art in the Gospel of Matthew.

Below: Gaechter's example of chiasmus in Matthew 13.

wörtlich an, schiebt mit v. 16-17 einen weiteren Ausspruch Jesu ein und fährt in v. 18 mit der Einleitung zur Deutung der Parabel vom Sämann weiter. Der Wortchiasmus erstreckt sich auch noch auf diese Einleitung (Mt-K 435). Die Stichwörter folgen so aufeinander:

(v. 13)	Parabeln
	sehen — hören
(14)	Prophetie
	hören — sehen
(15)	Herz
	Ohren — hören
	Augen — sehen
	Ohren — hören
	Herz
(16)	sehen — hören
(17)	Propheten
	sehen — hören
(18)	Parabel

Hier dürfte angebracht sein zu fragen, wie Matthäus zu künstlichen Gebilden dieser Art kam. Er formte sie sicher nicht zu seinem Privatvergnügen. Er selbst mußte dabei wohl von einem literarisch-ästhetischen Empfinden geleitet werden, aber gewußt haben, daß

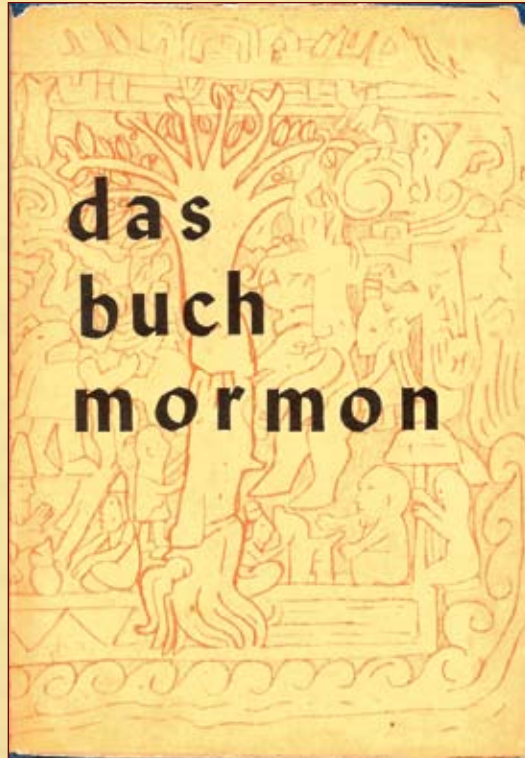
Jewish instruction,” and that Matthew had written what Gaechter called “closed forms” or defined units, many of which were symmetrically constructed with an a-b-a arrangement. This symmetry, he wrote, “progresses to chiasmus,” an a-b-c . d . c-b-a pattern. Reading these pages had just introduced me to chiasmic schemas.

In his summation, Gaechter made some strong statements: “The recognition of closed form leads to important conclusions. For one thing, the originator of closed forms was not a Greek but a Hebrew, for the arrangement of a literary (non-poetical, narrative) piece in this form can only be understood as coming from a Semitic sphere.” Thus, he wrote, “behind our gospel of Matthew lies a Semitic original source.”¹ From Gaechter's many examples, there seemed to be no doubt that Matthew in fact used chiasmus and that it was more Hebraic than Greek in nature.

More than that, understanding this pattern in Matthew brought that Gospel to life for me. For example, Gaechter proposed that the book of Matthew was structured in seven parts, which parts had (a) no speech, (b) speech to the people, (c) speech to the disciples, and (d) its center

on chapter 13, a chapter of parables. The Gospel then (c') has a section in which Jesus speaks again to the disciples, (b') to the people, and then (a') a final section containing no speech.² Among many examples of chiasmus at the word level, Gaechter offered an analysis of Matthew 13:13–18.³ With this tool in mind, I found Matthew more interesting and more understandable than ever before.

So far, however, the idea of finding chiasmus in the Book of Mormon had not entered the picture. That discovery occurred on August 16, a few days after I had finished Gaechter's book and my rereading of Matthew. Early that Wednesday morning, I was awakened by what seemed to me to be a voice, whose words were these: "If it is evidence of Hebrew style in the Bible, it must be evidence of Hebrew style in the Book of Mormon." With faith that this might be so, I got out of bed. (As I have often mused, that was the real miracle that morning.) It was still dark. I went over to the desk on the other side of our one-room apartment. Picking up the copy of the German Book of Mormon that I had been using that summer, I wondered: If it is here, where? I felt clearly prompted to begin reading where my companion and I had left off the night before, which happened to be in King Benjamin's speech. I read Mosiah 4. When I turned the page onto Mosiah 5, the classic chiastic passage



Above: Cover of the copy of the Book of Mormon in which chiasmus was discovered.

Below: The page on which chiasmus was first found in Mosiah 5:10–12.

9. Und [] wer das tut, wird zur rechten Hand Gottes befunden werden, denn er wird den Namen kennen, mit dem er genannt ist; denn er wird nach Christi Namen⁶ genannt werden.

C 10. Dann [] muß ein jeder, der den Namen Christi nicht auf sich nimmt, mit einem andern Namen genannt werden; daher wird er seinen Platz zur linken Hand Gottes finden.

D 11. Und ich möchte, daß ihr auch bedähtet, daß dies der Name ist, den ich euch, wie ich sagte, geben wollte und der niemals ausgelöscht werden soll⁷, es sei denn durch Übertretung; hütet euch daher vor Übertretung, damit der Name nicht aus eurem Herzen ausgelöscht werde.

Rx 12. Ich sage euch: Ihr dürft nicht vergessen, den Namen⁸ immer in eurem Herzen geschrieben zu behalten, damit ihr nicht zur linken Hand⁹ Gottes befunden werdet, sondern die Stimme hört und kennt, die euch ruft, und auch den Namen, womit er euch Rufen wird.

in Mosiah 5:10–12 jumped off the page.

I do not believe that I ever would have found this through my own intellectual efforts. Indeed, I probably would not have found it at all except for the typesetting in that particular edition of the German Book of Mormon, for the two central words in Mosiah 5:11 were stacked right on top of each other. In good typesetting, one should never stack words at the end of a line, because a stack can trip the eye as it goes from the end of one line to the beginning of the next. But as I read down the left column on this page, the two words *Übertretung* and *Übertretung* jumped right out (that German translation of the two English words *transgression* and *transgress* had used the same word). I immediately looked in the line below and saw the word *ausgerottet* (meaning blotted out) and in the line above, again, *ausgerottet* (blotted out). And above that, *linken Hand* (left hand) of God, and down below, *linken Hand*, again. The chiastic pattern in this passage appeared instantly, as follows:

"And now it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall not take upon him the *name* of Christ must be *called* by some other name; therefore, he findeth himself on the *left hand of God*. And *I would that ye should remember* also, that this is the name that I said I should give unto you that never should be *blotted out*, except it be through

transgression; therefore,” and this word marks a turning point, “take heed that ye do not *transgress*, that the name be not *blotted out* of your hearts. I say unto you, *I would that ye should remember* to retain the name written always in your hearts, that ye are not found on the *left hand of God*, but that ye hear and know the voice by which ye shall be *called*, and also, the *name* by which he shall call you.”

Finding this chiasm towards the end of King Benjamin’s speech, I turned back to the earlier pages of King Benjamin’s speech to see if the speech contained any other chiasms. Within a few minutes, I found Mosiah 3:18–19, in the exact center of King Benjamin’s speech.⁴ I remember waking my companion up and excitedly telling him, “It’s here! There’s chiasmus in the Book of Mormon!” It was an exciting moment. I have felt gratitude ever since that my faith and testimony were strengthened by the immediate finding of these passages in the Book of Mormon. Coincidentally, August 17, the day after the discovery of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon, was the one-year anniversary of my two years as a missionary, a fitting center point at the very middle of my mission time in Germany.

Exactly what happened during the rest of that Wednesday and Thursday is still a little unclear to me. After an unremarkable breakfast, we began showing it to anyone we could. We went out tracting that morning and even tried using chiasmus as a door approach to a cleaning lady who was out mopping the sidewalk in front of her home. She looked at us like she thought we were crazy, but we were undeterred.

Without delay, I began outlining all of King Benjamin’s speech. In the margins of the pages of Mosiah 2 and 3, I marked the distinctive A-B-Cs of chiasmus. Interestingly, I found that Benjamin’s speech breaks into seven discreet units or “closed

And now it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall not take upon him the *name of Christ*

must be *called* by some other name;

therefore, he findeth himself on the *left hand of God*.

And I would that ye should *remember* also, that this is the name that I said I should give unto you

that never should be *blotted out*,

except it be through *transgression*;

therefore, take heed that ye do not *transgress*,

that the name be not *blotted out* of your hearts.

I say unto you, I would that ye should *remember* to retain the name written always in your hearts,

that ye are not found on the *left hand of God*,

but that ye hear and know the voice by which ye shall be *called*, and also,

the *name* by which he shall call you.

except they *humble* themselves

and become as little *children*, and believe that

salvation was, and is, and is to come, in and through the *atonement blood of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent*.

For the *natural man*

is an enemy to *God*,

and *has been* from the fall of Adam,

and *will be*, forever and ever,

unless he yields to the enticings of the *Holy Spirit*,

and putteth off the *natural man*

and becometh a saint through the *atonement of Christ the Lord*,

and becometh as a *child*,

submissive, meek, *humble*, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things

Chiasmus in Mosiah 5:10–12 and 3:18–19, the first two examples found.

forms,” just as Gaechter had argued that the Gospel of Matthew had been composed in seven parts. (Some biblical scholars, such as Duane L. Christensen, have argued that such a pattern should be called the “candelabra form,”⁵ because it has seven branches, as did the seven-branched candlestick in the temple at Jerusalem.)



Domplatz, Regensburg.

At the same time, I also began contacting people about chiasmus. On a note pad, I jotted down a few names and phone numbers. At the top of the list is the name of Huber; I believe this was the man who gave the lecture at the Priester Seminar. I also wrote down the names of Andreas Klause, a history professor; a New Testament scholar named Mussner, who I noted would be out of town until August 29; and Rudolf Mayer, an Old Testament scholar whom I never met because he would not be back until November.

As I recall, we went right away to see the man whose lecture we had heard. We found our way to his office and knocked on the door. He invited us in. I suppose he might have remembered us from the class we had attended, but otherwise he did not know who we were. (In those days, we did not wear missionary badges.) I remember the high ceilings, wood-paneled walls, bookshelves to the top of the

walls, papers and books scattered everywhere, and a large desk in the middle of the room. He invited us to sit down. I told him that we were interested in chiasmus. I asked for a few references to other books I might read on the subject, and he gave me some titles to look up. I asked about the Hebraic quality and his opinion of Gaechter's arguments. He said he did not doubt the Hebraic nature of the form.

I then asked him, "How strong an evidence is chiasmus of Hebraic origins?"

He said, "Very strong."

Seeing he had swung the door wide open, I asked, "Well, if someone were to find a text, let's say in Spain, and it happened to manifest this form, would you conclude that there must have been some Hebraic influence in the history of that text?"

He thought about that for a moment and said, "*Ohne weiteres*" (Absolutely, without any further question).

I then carefully slid forward my copy of the Book of Mormon so he did not see the cover and asked, "Well, would you look at this text? Is this what people mean by chiasmus?" He then read through the two passages in Mosiah 5 and Mosiah 3. He read through them again, and said, "*Ach. Das is sehr gut!*" (That's very good!) "*Was ist das denn?*" (So, what is this?) Whereupon he closed the book, looked at the title, and said, "*Ach, Sie sind die Mormonen, hinaus!*" (Oh, you are the Mormons, get out!)

On Friday, August 18, on the train to Landshut for a three-day exchange with another pair of missionaries there, I wrote my weekly letter home, addressing it to my grandmother in Logan, Utah.⁶ Since my family was traveling from California and they were going to be with her by the time that letter would have arrived in California, I sent this letter to Logan. My grandmother was a literate woman, a schoolteacher who liked writing poetry. As I told her and my family what I had found, my enthusiasm could hardly be contained.

This unusually long, three-page letter began: "Greetings from Germany. What a wonderful summer we've been having—gorgeous weather, inspirational work, and rich blessings!"

After a little chit-chat, I dove right in: "Right now about all I can think about is a discovery I made on Wednesday morning. It's a great idea and I'm really excited about it—we've shown it to professors and theologians and no one can refute it!"

Right now about all I can think about is a discovery I made on wed. morning. It's a great idea and I'm really excited about it — we've shown it to professors and theologians and noone can refute it! I can't explain it all but follow closely: A few weeks ago I found a book called "The Literary Art in the Gospel of Matthew" and for some reason couldn't put it down — it was simply great — The author argued brilliantly a new theory proving the original hebraic tradition of Matthew, a difficult problem, for we have only Greek manuscripts of the Gospel. That Matt. was translated from Hebrew and that it is genuine can not be denied, so he says.

The above letter was written two days after the discovery of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon.

I ended at the bottom of this page by saying, "If it's good for Matthew, it's good for Benjamin. Other climaxes are *dead giveaways*," referring to Mosiah 5:11.

As I wrote this letter, I was riding on the train, and the handwriting gets a bit worse toward the end, where I concluded, "Oh well, you get the idea. It's a new idea (or is something like that already in print??). I couldn't

I then told about reading Gaechter's book and even displayed in detail the chiastic structure in Matthew chapters 16–17, after which I blurted out, "See the symmetry! It's subtle. It's an acid test for a Hebraic narrative!"

"Well, you can guess what comes next." Indeed, "that's just what I've done." I've found chiasmus in the Book of Mormon "not once, but 5 (perhaps 7!), and not without a big push from the Lord," a simple reference to Wednesday morning's experience.

I then dove right in, announcing that "Benjamin was a scholar and Mosiah 2–5 is loaded with this very form" and proceeding to spell out the structure of Mosiah 2:9–27 as I had already by then outlined it:

- For example: Mosiah 2:9–27
- A. Purpose of assembly v. 9
- B. What is man? vv. 10–11
 - "no more than mortal"
- C. Laws of Benjamin's kingdom vv. 12–13
 - D. Service vv. 14–17
 - "one another"
 - E. Climax—thank your Heavenly King
 - D. Service v. 21
 - "one with another"
 - C. Laws of God's Kingdom v. 22
 - B. What is man? vv. 23–26
 - "no more than dust" v. 26
 - A. Purpose of the assembly v. 27

imagine where. Tell me what you think of the possibilities—it's a *very* convincing demonstration. I've got pages of details and comparisons work[ed] out. Enough. Hope all the travel[er]s make it safe and successfully! All have my love and thanks. Gram, keep everyone on the right trail! With love, Jack."

I then added a postscript to my father, "Dad—is there anything written on the subject? Is the form as old as Isaiah (Lehi) or Jeremiah? Could we show that it was highly influenced by Egyptian style as Mosiah 1:4 suggests?" I had no idea what else might have been written about the use of chiasmus in Lehi's day; I just knew that the pattern was there in the Book of Mormon.

The next day, Saturday, August 19, I worked in Landshut with Elder Wimmer. My day planner shows that we met with a Protestant minister. No doubt, chiasmus was one of the topics of discussion.

On Monday, August 21, Elder Wimmer took me to speak with a graduate student who was studying at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome and was visiting in Landshut during a summer break. We talked for about an hour. He already knew something about chiasmus and was impressed that I knew of Paul Gaechter's work. We looked at several passages in the Book of Mormon, and I taught him the missionary lesson about the origins of the Book of Mormon. He readily accepted a copy of the Book of Mormon and was very friendly. He went back to Rome a few days later, and we had no further contact with him, but this conversation was my first

successful academic encounter involving chiasmus in the Bible and the Book of Mormon. It would not be my last.

Back in Regensburg, I wrote home again on the next Friday, August 25. During that week, I had gone back to the beginning of the Book of Mormon, thinking that, since chiasmus was present in King Benjamin's speech, he must have learned it from somewhere and, therefore, maybe it could also be found in the writings of Nephi and other early Nephites. Indeed, this letter home reported, "My form study of the Book of Mormon is progressing pleasingly," and I gave as an example the beginnings of a chiastic outline for 1 Nephi:

- A. Away from Jerusalem
- B. Ishmael Ch. 7
- C. Tree of Life Ch. 8
 - Lehi about the old world
 - Nephi and the Lord's Spirit Ch. 11
 - Nephi about the new world
- C. Meaning of Lehi's dream Ch. 15
- B. Ishmael Ch. 16
- A. Away from old world

I concluded by saying: "Lots of details fit really well, but not like in Mosiah, meaning in King Benjamin's speech. We showed the argument to all the priests and theologians we could get a hold of in Landshut and had nothing but success!" The next week, I outlined the book of 1 Nephi more completely.

On Tuesday, August 29, we made an appointment to see Dr. Mussner at 10:00 A.M. in his office at the Theologische-Philosophische Hochschule. This meeting, however, was not so successful. My companion, Elder Barrus, wrote in his journal: "Today we talked with a Doctor Mussner, Catholic theologian, concerning the literary art in the Book of Mormon and in Matthew. He was very nice until he found out who we were," not unlike our meeting with Huber twelve days earlier.

Meanwhile, my father had wisely written back to me, cautioning me about trying to prove the Book of Mormon to people. I responded on September 11: "About the chiasmus relationship—it's no accident or coincidence. The chance of finding it in Thomas Aquinas is at least 0—he's far too Aristotelian. . . . Now look at the book of Mosiah again—you notice this style intricately interwoven on all

levels of understanding and rhetorical possibility. Mosiah 5:11 shows it [1] on the verse level, which is the climax [2] of v. 6–15 which the seventh part of Benjamin's speech (each part of which is a chiasmus with [3] all the parts together making another); now look at chapters 1–6 which are the first part in the chiasmus [4] in the whole book of Mosiah. That's four intricate levels, all fitting precisely, hardly accidentally. I know what you mean about proving it to other people, but I feel that the Lord has made it clear enough that man can choose and judge for himself."

About this time, I wrote to Robert K. Thomas to tell him what I had found and to ask if anybody else had ever come across anything like this. On October 9, he answered. I would have received his letter about a week later, in which he said, "The literary form you mention is interesting and convincing. I first heard of it [in the New Testament] from Curtis Wright who taught Greek at BYU for a while and who was very excited about its potential meaning for Book of Mormon scholarship." He gave me Curtis Wright's address, and I wrote to him right away.

On October 10, I got a letter back from University of North Carolina Press, where I had tried to obtain a copy of Nils Lund's *Chiasmus in the New Testament*, which they had published in 1942. This title had come up in several conversations. The UNC Press said the book was out of print, but they told me that I might be able to get a copy from Barnes & Noble, who had bought the remainders. I sent off my order.

In the meantime, having had a lot of ups and downs the week ending on October 21, my weekly



Elder Welch at his typewriter.

letter home mentioned, on the good side, the following experience: “I worked in Ingolstadt last week and had quite a great time; on Thursday night we were invited to address a Lutheran Youth group on the subject of Mormonism. The same group had run the Jehovah’s Witnesses out before, but they seemed to like us a bit better. Before the evening was over, we had sold half the group Book of Mormons (including [to] the minister) and they invited us back to discuss the topic further. Afterwards we talked awhile with the minister about some of Nibley’s approach and my chiasmus idea, and he was both overwhelmed and impressed. We felt great.” I also exclaimed, “Hooray! We finally found and ordered *Chiasmus in the New Testament*, so if you get a cancelled check from Barnes and Noble bookstore, you’ll know what it was for.”

When the Lund book arrived, I was thrilled to find that, despite its title, *Chiasmus in the New Testament*, this book began with Lund’s chiastic analysis of many passages from the Old Testament, such as the example from Leviticus 24, which is one of the very best examples of chiasmus in Hebrew literature. This was crucial in pushing the presence of chiasmus back into Lehi’s time, making it a style that would have likely been known by Lehi and influential in Nephite writing. It was at this point that I also began to understand how much careful work about chiasmus had been done by scholars and how widely dispersed the pattern of chiasmus is in the Bible, going well beyond what I had learned from Gaechter.

At this same time, I got a letter from Curtis Wright, who had written on October 23. He kindly and informatively wrote: “I have never been really interested in chiastic structures *per se*, though some of my other interests have made me very much aware of their existence.” Wright (who would go on to become a professor in the BYU library) recommended that a perusal of Lund’s book “would be beneficial to you I am sure.” He concluded by saying, “Lund feels that the chiastic models of the New Testament are Semitic, not Greek, in origin, and is supported in this opinion by many other scholars. Beyond that I have not followed the literature on chiasmus, and . . . I have never seriously looked for chiasmus in the Book of Mormon, although I must admit that the idea intrigues me.” Most of all, this letter gave me even more reason to believe that I was on the right track, that I had already read the

right books, and was finding things that no one else had ever noticed before.

In the next few weeks, I kept finding things, especially as I read on into the book of Alma. My scrawling notes show that I had detected chiastic patterns in Alma 5:39–41; 34:10–14; 40:22–24; and 41:13–15. One realization concerned the highly creative structure in Alma 41:13–15. I read this passage first in German and was a bit disappointed that it looked promising but was not quite perfect. Upon checking the passage in English, however, it became clear that the German translator had unwittingly muddled Alma’s carefully constructed chiasm. This made me appreciate all the more the accuracy of Joseph Smith’s translation.

I particularly remember being on the train when I noticed the chiastic structure of Alma 36—the entire chapter! It was an overwhelmingly exciting moment to watch the length and the detail of that text unfold, which turns out to be one of the very best instances of chiasmus anywhere in world literature. Gazing out of the train window and watching the Bavarian countryside roll by, I was transported by the skill and care of Alma as a writer. Amazed at the power of the chiastic form to focus the reader’s attention on the central turning point of Alma’s life, I thought how fortunate we are to have the Book of Mormon. I wondered where this train would take me.

The last eight months of my mission were spent in the mission office in Munich, mostly doing public relations work. Little was done with the chiasmus project at this time. But I did communicate with Father Paul Gaechter, a Jesuit, who lived in a monastery in Innsbruck, Austria. I was deeply gratified when he invited me to visit him. After the end of my mission, my younger brother and sister came to Germany to travel with me around Europe on my way home. On August 14, 1968, we went to Innsbruck, to the monastery a few kilometers southeast of the old town, if my memory serves me correctly.

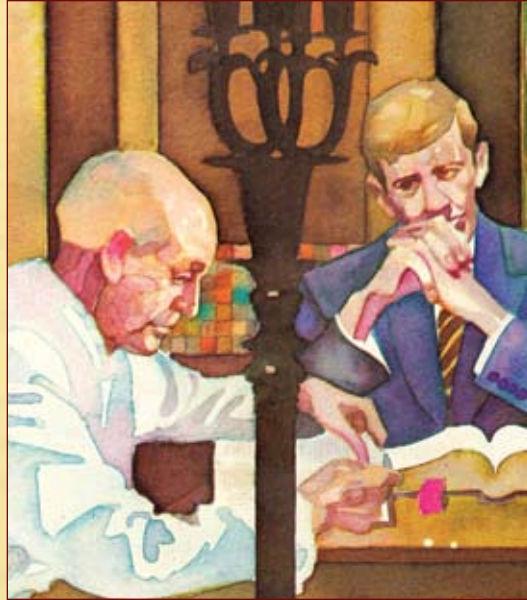
The elderly Gaechter (born in 1893, so he was 74 or 75 at the time) came out promptly to meet us. He ushered us into a small room near the front door. The wooden walls were mostly bare, except for the common Austrian crucifix. We sat on benches with a small table between us. Father Gaechter began by saying that he only had a few minutes in his daily schedule, and that he would need to return fairly soon to his duties in the monastery.

We soon became quite engrossed in our conversation, however, with him telling me about his work on the Gospel of Matthew and me telling him about the excitement of my discovery of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon. Father Gaechter was sincerely complimentary. As I showed him several remarkable literary patterns, his former disregard of the Book of Mormon quickly dissolved. He accepted a copy and said he would look at it, although—as my brother Jim wrote in his journal that night—“ONLY if it was for literary style.” Jim’s diary rightly recorded: “We had quite a discussion with him about a lot of things. He was a very kind and learned man.”

As we got up to leave, I thanked him for his time. He in turn detained me and addressed me in a very serious, approving tone. Sensing my intense interest in the subjects we had discussed, he looked right at me, took my right hand in both of his, and said, “You must continue your work on this subject. You are a very lucky young man. You have found a life’s work (*eine Lebensarbeit*).” I felt deeply impressed by his sincere encouragement. Although we had no further contact, and he died not long afterwards, Father Gaechter’s words have stayed with me ever since.

I returned home at the end of August, and in about two weeks drove with my brother Jim from Los Angeles to Provo to begin the school year at BYU. We arrived in Provo about 8:00 PM and got the key to our room in Helaman Halls. Foremost on my mind was wanting to talk to Nibley about what I had found. I left Jim in the dorm and made a beeline to Hugh Nibley’s home on 700 North, only a few blocks from the BYU campus.

I knocked on the door about 9:00 PM and introduced myself as one of his former students back from a mission in Germany. He said he remembered me. I told him that I had found something that I wanted to show him, and he warmly invited



Detail of illustration of John W. Welch meeting with Father Paul Gaechter in August, 1968.

me in. We sat down at the dining room table, crowded next to an upright piano, and I began by asking him what he knew about chiasmus. He said, “Not much.” So I began showing him what I had found in the Book of Mormon. We went through several examples. With each one, his smile widened and his questions accelerated. He wanted to know about every book I had read, with whom I had spoken, and what passages I had studied. After several hours (I think we talked until about 1:00 AM), he walked with me out onto the porch. In his inimitable way, he sincerely congratulated me, saying, “Young man, I

think you have made the first significant discovery to come out of the BYU.”

In retrospect, I realize that Nibley was prone in such circumstances to hyperbole, but his validation was a crucial confidence builder in my young academic mind. I asked him if he would be willing to help me and he said, “Certainly.” When the time came a year later, he agreed to be on my master’s thesis committee. My thesis, completed in 1970, would compare the presence of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon, the Old Testament, Ugaritic epics, the New Testament, and various Greek and Latin authors. I was glad to be back at BYU, especially grateful for the support of Robert K. Thomas, Hugh Nibley, C. Terry Warner, and R. Douglas Phillips in my further education. I found myself being often invited to talk about chiasmus in religion classes, Book of Mormon symposia, Sunday School classes, and firesides.

I conclude these reflections on the initial events in the chiasmus story by mentioning the article “Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon” that appeared in *BYU Studies* in 1969.⁷ This article was written and submitted in the fall of 1968, only two months after my return from Germany. Seeing how quickly all this happened makes me even more grateful and eager to recognize the Lord’s hand in prompting and guiding the development of this discovery.

Over the course of the next 39 years, I and many others have continued to work on the main themes raised in that *BYU Studies* article. First, the article began by defining chiasmus. I have pursued this topic further in my 1970 master's thesis, in the introduction to the 1981 volume *Chiasmus in Antiquity*, and in 1989 in a FARMS preliminary report entitled "Criteria for Identifying and Evaluating the Presence of Chiasmus." That report was finalized and published in the FARMS *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* in 1995 and as an appendix to the 1999 *Chiasmus Bibliography*.⁸ The definitional topic is still of current interest; several scholars have written on this subject, most recently the eminent social anthropologist Mary Douglas in her book *Thinking in Circles: An Essay on Ring Composition*.⁹

Second, the 1969 article raised the issue of when and where chiasmus appears, and it gave examples of chiasmus in Greek, Latin, English, and Hebrew, along with nine examples from the Book of Mormon. Expanding this comparative study, I combined with Yehuda Radday, Robert F. Smith, Jonah Frankel, and others to publish the 1981 anthology entitled *Chiasmus in Antiquity*.¹⁰ A reprint of this volume, which continues to be cited in exegetical studies, is now available through the Maxwell Institute. Examples of chiasmus continue to be found. Donald Parry's new *Poetic Parallelisms in the Book of Mormon* elegantly displays over a hundred chiasmic patterns.¹¹ In the last seven years alone, scholarly works utilizing chiasmus have been published by such authors as Jacob Milgrom, Bernard Jackson, Gary Knoppers, and George Nickelsburg; in books from such presses as Oxford, Yale, Sheffield, the United Bible Societies, Doubleday, Eerdmans, Trinity, Fortress, and Eisenbrauns; or in articles in journals such as *Biblica*, the *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, and the *Journal of Semitic Studies*.



Hugh Nibley about 1968.

Third, a few things were said in the 1969 article about when scholars began to notice and accept the idea of chiasmus in the Bible. In that article, I mentioned that parallelism (but not chiasmus) was understood in the 1750s by Robert Lowth, and I noted that a book entitled *Sacred Literature* had been published in London in 1820 by John Jebb, arguing for the recognition of a new type of parallelism, which he called epanodos or introverted parallelism.¹² Relying on Lund, I concluded that Jebb's work was not widely accepted until the work of John Forbes (1854) and the 1860 edition of Horne's *Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures*.

As things have turned out, I should have been more nuanced in stating how little was known about chiasmus before 1829, as I explain in a lengthy article published in 2003 entitled "How Much Was Known about Chiasmus in 1829 When the Book of Mormon Was Translated?"¹³ For example, in 1969 I said that there was "no chance that Joseph Smith could have learned of this style through academic channels."¹⁴ While it remains true that Joseph Smith did not learn about such things through academic channels, a few things were published in Philadelphia about chiasmus in the 1825 edition of Horne's massive *Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Scriptures*. In fact, Joseph Smith owned a copy of part of this work, which belongs to the Community of Christ in Independence, Missouri. However, written on the right front endpaper are the words "Joseph Smith Jun. Kirtland O. Jan. 1834," indicating that he acquired the book in 1834,¹⁵ four and one-half years after he finished translating the Book of Mormon. Perhaps he knew about this book or its contents in 1829, but I doubt it. There is no evidence to that effect.

Finally, the 1969 article looked ahead to the array of things we learn from the presence of chi-

asmus in the Book of Mormon. That article pointed out how chiasmus helps us see the artistry, complexity, creativity, and profundity of the Book of Mormon, and how it helps us interpret the meaning of the text and appreciate the individual personalities of its authors. As evidence that the Book of Mormon is an extraordinary text, I said then, as I say now, that “even had [Joseph Smith] known of the form, he would still have had the overwhelming task of writing original, artistic chiasmic sentences,” as he dictated page after page without notes or opportunity to revise. Regarding clues that the Book of Mormon is a translation of an ancient record, I ended then with the assertion that it makes sense “to consider the book a product of the ancient world and to judge its literary qualities accordingly,” and considering the book a nineteenth-century translation of an ancient record still makes sense. Ultimately I concluded then and still affirm today: “The book reviewed this way is moving; it deserves to be read more carefully.”¹⁶ Many publications since

1969 have indeed read the Book of Mormon more closely than it had ever been read before. The question “What Does Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon Prove?” is discussed further in the volume edited by Noel Reynolds, *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited*, which appeared in 1997.¹⁷

In conclusion, I am grateful to bear my testimony of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon. I realize, as Elder Maxwell was always prone to say, “Though argument does not create conviction, the lack of it destroys belief. What seems to be proved may not [necessarily] be embraced; but what no one shows the ability to defend is quickly abandoned. Rational argument does not create belief, but it maintains a climate in which belief may flourish.”¹⁸ I think the Lord has blessed us with clear understandings of miraculous things in the Book of Mormon. Isaiah promised that this book would be “a marvelous work and a wonder,” or better said, “a miraculous work and a miracle.” I have no doubt that that’s precisely what the Book of Mormon is. ■

- at the Sexta Mesa Redonda de Palenque, June 1986, in Palenque, Chiapas, Mexico.
14. Vogt, *Tortillas for the Gods: A Symbolic Analysis of Zinacanteco Rituals* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976; repr. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), 38–42. Cf. Robert M. Laughlin, *The Great Tzotzil Dictionary of San Lorenzo Zinacantán* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1975), 19; chiasm with reversal of set A- and B-word and phrase pairs.
 15. In his review of Joseph Allen's claims along these lines, John E. Clark objects that it is "mirror imagery" or "bilateral symmetry," not chiasmus, thus missing the forest for the trees. See John E. Clark, "Searching for Book of Mormon Lands in Middle America," *FARMS Review* 16/2 (2004): 42–43.
 16. Allen J. Christenson, "Chiasmus in Mesoamerican Texts," in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: The FARMS Updates*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 234–35 (originally appeared in a January 1988 FARMS Update); seven-element chiasm, with two subordinate chiasms inside (citing Daniel G. Brinton, *The Annals of the Cakchiquels* [Philadelphia: Brinton's Library of Aboriginal American Literature, 1885], 75–77).
 17. In the initial section (Creation): Christenson, "Chiasmus in Mesoamerican Texts," 234–35 (citing Munro S. Edmonson, *The Book of Counsel: The Popol Vuh of the Quiché Maya of Guatemala*, MARI 35 [New Orleans: Tulane University, 1971], 9–13; cf. Allen J. Christenson, *Popol Vuh: The Sacred Book of the Quiché Maya People* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003; repr. Mesoweb, 2007), 37–40 (lines 32–35; 275–76 || 432–33; 538–41; 5107–10; 5147–48 || 5157–58; 5171–80) and 53–54, n. 25, citing Edmonson, *Book of Counsel*, 5, nn. 35, 80. See Christenson's book online at www.mesoweb.com/publications/Christenson/PopolVuh.pdf (accessed November 29, 2007).
 18. John W. Welch, "Chiasmus in Ugaritic," *Ugarit-Forschungen* 6 (1974): 421–36.
 19. John W. Welch, ed., *Chiasmus in Antiquity: Structures, Analyses, Exegesis* (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1981; repr. Provo, UT: Research Press, 1999); David Noel Freedman wrote the preface.
 20. Angelico Di Marco, *Il chiasmo nella Bibbia: Contributi di Stilistica Strutturale* (Turin: Marietti, 1980).
 21. Jacob Bazak, "Structural Geometric Patterns in Biblical Poetry," *Poetics Today* 6/3 (1985): 475–502.
 22. Victor A. Hurowitz, *Inu Anum širum: Literary Structures in the Non-Juridical Sections of Codex Hammurabi*, Samuel Noah Kramer Occasional Publications 15 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum, 1994), 58 n. 67, lauds Welch's contribution and then adds: "There seems to be no end to the use of long and short range chiasm in ancient literature and it may now be considered a well established and wide spread fact of literary style."
 23. John W. Welch and Daniel B. McKinlay, eds., *Chiasmus Bibliography* (Provo, UT: Research Press, 1999).
 24. John W. Welch, "Criteria for Identifying and Evaluating the Presence of Chiasmus," *JBMS* 4/2 (1995): 1–14; Welch and McKinlay, eds., *Chiasmus Bibliography*, 157–74.
 25. In reviewing a book on symmetrical patterns of repetition (direct and chiasmic) in Hebrew and Ugaritic, H. Van Dyke Parunak noted that the author "does not appreciate the wide repertoire of structural mechanisms that ancient writers constructed from the primitive elements of alternation and chiasm. As a result, his analyses often miss important nuances" (Parunak, review of *Studies in Biblical Narrative: Style, Structure, and the Ancient Near Eastern Literary Background*, by Yitzhak Avishur, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44/2 [2001]: 326). Yehuda T. Radday stated unequivocally that "chiasmic structure . . . is more than an artificial or artistic device. If it were nothing else, it would hardly warrant more than a passing illustration of a few exemplary passages. It is rather, and most remarkably so, a key to meaning. Not paying sufficient attention to it may result in failure to grasp the true theme" (Radday, "Chiasmus in Hebrew Biblical Narrative," in *Chiasmus in Antiquity*, 51).
- The Discovery of Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon: Forty Years Later**
John W. Welch
1. Paul Gaechter, *Die literarische Kunst im Matthäus-Evangelium*, Stuttgarter Bibel-Studien 7 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1965), 9.
 2. Gaechter, *Die literarische Kunst im Matthäus-Evangelium*, 13.
 3. Gaechter, *Die literarische Kunst im Matthäus-Evangelium*, 51.
 4. For a full discussion of the structure of this speech, see John W. Welch, "Parallelism and Chiasmus in Benjamin's Speech," in *King Benjamin's Speech: "That Ye May Learn Wisdom"*, ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 315–410. There are 2,467 words before this midpoint, and 2,476 words after it.
 5. His letter to me on August 11, 1985, refers to this pattern in connection with his article "Form and Structure in Deuteronomy 1–11," in *Das Deuteronomium: Entstehung, Gestalt und Botschaft*, ed. Norbert Lohfink, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 68 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1985): 135–44.
 6. All of my 1967 letters and notes are being deposited in the Chiasmus Collection in the Harold B. Lee Library at Brigham Young University.
 7. John W. Welch, "Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 10/1 (1969): 69–84.
 8. John W. Welch, "Criteria for Identifying and Evaluating the Presence of Chiasmus," *JBMS* 4/2 (1995): 1–14; John W. Welch and Daniel B. McKinlay, eds., *Chiasmus Bibliography* (Provo, UT: Research Press, 1999), 157–74.
 9. Mary Douglas, *Thinking in Circles: An Essay on Ring Composition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007). "Following Welch's general invitation to go further with the work he has begun," she proposes and discusses seven indicators (pp. 33–38). The recent issue of the *Journal of Biblical Literature* 126/4 (2007): 712, also contains a favorable reference to *Chiasmus in Antiquity*.
 10. John W. Welch, ed., *Chiasmus in Antiquity* (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1981).
 11. Donald W. Parry, *Poetic Parallels in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2007), see index on pp. 565–67 for full listing.
 12. Welch, "Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon," 72–73, nn. 2–5.
 13. John W. Welch, "How Much Was Known about Chiasmus in 1829 When the Book of Mormon Was Translated?" *FARMS Review* 15/1 (2003): 47–80.
 14. Welch, "Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon," 75.
 15. Welch, "How Much Was Known about Chiasmus in 1829," 78.
 16. Welch, "Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon," 84.
 17. John W. Welch, "What Does Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon Prove?" in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997), 199–224.
 18. Austin Farrer, "Grete Clerk," in *Light on C. S. Lewis*, comp. Jocelyn Gibb (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1965), 26; cited by Neal A. Maxwell in "Discipleship and Scholarship," *BYU Studies* 32/3 (1992): 5.