



Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011

Volume 14 | Number 1

Article 23

2002

Vol. 14 Num. 1-2 FARMS Review of Books

FARMS Review

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Review, FARMS (2002) "Vol. 14 Num. 1-2 FARMS Review of Books," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011*: Vol. 14 : No. 1 , Article 23.

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A stack of approximately eight old, worn books with dark, textured covers. The spines of the books are visible, showing signs of age and wear. A magnifying glass is positioned over the middle of the stack, focusing on the words 'Review of Books'. The entire image has a reddish-brown tint.

F A R M S

R e v i e w

O f

B o o k s

VOLUME 14, NUMBERS 1-2 • 2002

FARMS REVIEW OF BOOKS

FARMS REVIEW OF BOOKS

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FARMS REVIEW OF BOOKS

Volume 14, Numbers 1–2 • 2002



Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies
Institute for the Study and Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts
Brigham Young University

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Printed in the United States of America
ISSN 1050-7930

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FARMS Review of Books is published semiannually.

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Editor's Introduction

HISTORICAL CONCRETENESS, OR SPECULATIVE ABSTRACTION?

The remarks below were originally presented on 17 November 2001 at a debate organized under the auspices of the Society of Evangelical Philosophers, who were gathered in Denver, Colorado, in conjunction with the joint annual national meeting of the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature (the AAR/SBL). On the evangelical side were Francis J. Beckwith (Trinity International University), Paul Copan (Ravi Zacharias International Ministries and Trinity International University), William Lane Craig (Talbot School of Theology, Biola University), Carl Mosser (University of St. Andrews), and Paul Owen (Montreat College). The Latter-day Saint participants were David L. Paulsen, Daniel C. Peterson, and Stephen D. Ricks (Brigham Young University), Blake T. Ostler (Salt Lake City), and Hollis T. Johnson (Indiana University). The moderator of the debate was Richard J. Mouw, president of Fuller Theological Seminary, of Pasadena, California. The debate had been timed to coincide with the release of a new volume entitled *The New Mormon Challenge: Responding to the Latest Defenses of a Fast-Growing Movement*.¹ However, the book had not actually appeared by the time of the meeting.

The major point of my remarks was to indicate that, in my opinion, the very choice of "theology" as a focus of debate grants to that

1. Francis J. Beckwith, Carl Mosser, and Paul Owen, eds., *The New Mormon Challenge: Responding to the Latest Defenses of a Fast-Growing Movement* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2002).

particular area of intellectual activity an importance that it does not and should not enjoy among Latter-day Saints, and that it did not enjoy among early Christians, and that doing so, moreover, both distorts the biblical message and unduly privileges the position of some of our more sophisticated critics.

I have made only slight modifications for publication here, and have sought to retain the deliberately informal character of that oral presentation.



Carl Mosser's chapter in *The New Mormon Challenge* remarks, not unfairly, that "no Latter-day Saints have yet distinguished themselves as world-class biblical scholars, philosophers, or theologians."² One is tempted to reply that, for a relatively small movement that did not reach the million-member mark until 1953—preoccupied for its first century with fleeing persecution, establishing settlements throughout the West, and digging irrigation canals—we are not doing too badly. Or that, compared to the original Christian movement at A.D. 171, we have an acceptable number of tenured professors.

But there is a more fundamental reason, and it needs to be stated here.

I love philosophy. But philosophy is not a primary mode of religious reflection for Latter-day Saints. Nor is systematic theology. Not even a secondary mode. Nor a tertiary one.

We tell stories. "Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste brought death into the world."³ Of Moses and the children of Israel and the migration of a small group of Hebrews to the New World. Of the incarnation and atoning sacrifice of the Son of God. Of the visit of Jesus Christ to a shattered but expectant people in the Americas. Of the appearance of the Father and the Son to Joseph Smith. Of the pioneers, the modern Camp of

2. Carl Mosser, "And the Saints Go Marching On: The New Mormon Challenge for World Missions, Apologetics, and Theology," in *The New Mormon Challenge*, 84.

3. John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, lines 1–3.

Israel under a Latter-day Moses, fleeing persecution and colonizing the Great Basin.

And at the first of each month, fasting—as well as many times in between—we tell one another of our own experiences with the grace of God and our faith in Jesus Christ.

Our chief intellectual accomplishments, as a religious culture, have come in the writing of history—journals, family and local histories, academic historiography.

The Bible, for us, is not a poorly organized systematic theology. It is a book of stories, a collection of testimonies.

There is a tangible quality to the witness of the Bible that is utterly different from the ontological speculations of the Hellenes and their imitators among the Christians. The authors of the New Testament did not offer syllogisms and metaphysics. They testified of “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life” (1 John 1:1).

The first few pages of the *Clementine Recognitions*, an early third-century Christian text, offer us a glimpse of a clash between Hellenized philosophical culture and a Christian witness that had not yet succumbed to its attractions. The first-person narrator, who identifies himself as Clement of Rome, tells of his youthful anxiety about the immortality of the human soul and his desperate search for proof of it. Clement joined the philosophical schools of his native city, but he was very disappointed and depressed to find no truly convincing arguments and to see that his teachers and fellow students were more interested in demonstrating their cleverness than in attaining to the truth. So desperate did he become that he even, for a time, considered taking up spiritualism.

But then rumors began to reach Rome of a great and powerful worker of miracles in the distant land of Palestine. And one day, while he was walking in the city, Clement encountered a Jewish Christian named Barnabas, who was proclaiming the coming of Christ to

the passersby. "When I heard these things," recalls Clement, "I began, with the rest of the multitude, to follow him, and to hear what he had to say. Truly I perceived that there was nothing of dialectic artifice in the man, but that he expounded with simplicity, and without any craft of speech, such things as he had heard from the Son of God, or had seen. For he did not confirm his assertions by the force of arguments, but produced, from the people who stood round about him, many witnesses of the sayings and marvels which he related."

Impressed, a number of those in the crowd began to give credence to what Barnabas and his fellow witnesses related. But then a group of philosophically minded onlookers challenged Barnabas. They "began to laugh at the man, and to flout him, and to throw out for him the grappling-hooks of syllogisms, like strong arms." They asked him, Why do tiny gnats have six legs and a pair of wings, while the much larger elephant has only four legs and no wings at all? But Barnabas declined to enter into their frivolous objections. "We have it in charge," he said, "to declare to you the words and the wondrous works of Him who hath sent us, and to confirm the truth of what we speak, not by artfully devised arguments, but by witnesses produced from amongst yourselves."⁴

I find that same spirit or sensibility in the modern Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Here is Hyrum Smith, one of the Eight Witnesses to the Book of Mormon, writing in December 1839 of his recent sufferings in Missouri, where he had come face to face with the prospect of martyrdom: "I had been abused and thrust into a dungeon . . . on account of my faith. . . . However, I thank God that I felt a determination to die, rather than deny the things which my eyes had seen, which my hands had handled, and which I had borne testimony to, wherever my lot had been cast; and I can assure my

4. The account occurs at *Clementine Recognitions* 1.1-9. Hugh Nibley summarizes it in *The World and the Prophets*, ed. John W. Welch, Gary P. Gillum, and Don E. Norton (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987), 34-38. I use the translation of Thomas Smith, as featured in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (1885; reprint, Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994), 8:77-79.

beloved brethren that I was enabled to bear as strong a testimony, when nothing but death presented itself, as ever I did in my life.”⁵ Four and a half years later, Hyrum Smith, with his brother Joseph, did go willingly to his death as a martyr, a witness. (The Greek word *martyros*, of course, means “witness.”)

And what do we find in the Bible? Mark Smith’s new book, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, surveys the traits of deities in both Ugaritic and Israelite texts and identifies important commonalities:

1. Strength
2. Body and gender
3. Holiness
4. Immortality.⁶

Latter-day Saints affirm all of these attributes. We are, however, uncomfortable with attributes that we do *not* see clearly taught in the Bible or delivered via modern revelation. Robert Wilken remarks that it was only with the second-century apologists, who “began to offer a reasoned and philosophical presentation of Christianity to pagan intellectuals,” that Christian thinkers began to claim that

they worshipped the same God honored by the Greeks and Romans, in other words, the deity adored by other reasonable men and women. Indeed, Christians adopted precisely the same language to describe God as did pagan intellectuals. The Christian apologist Theophilus of Antioch described God as “ineffable . . . inexpressible . . . uncontainable . . . incomprehensible . . . inconceivable . . . incomparable . . . unteachable . . . immutable . . . inexpressible . . . without beginning because he was uncreated, immutable because he is immortal.” . . . This view, that God was an immaterial, timeless, and impassible divine being, who is known through the mind alone, became a

5. Cited at Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 148.

6. Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel’s Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2001), 83–102.

keystone of Christian apologetics, for it served to establish a decisive link to the Greek spiritual and intellectual tradition.⁷

That link has no particular appeal for us.⁸

The great church fathers Clement and Origen fought against “persistent anthropomorphic tendencies in early Christianity.”⁹ We see no cause to join them.

We do not need God to be an *actus purus*, with all the negative baggage that carries for his role as an object of petitionary prayer. (“The God of the philosophers,” Alfred North Whitehead once observed, “is not available for religious purposes.”)¹⁰

We are not obliged to insist on the absolute transcendence of a God of whom Paul says that we all—including the apostle’s unregenerate, pagan, Athenian audience—are of his *genos* (Acts 17:28–29), his “family,” his “genus.” God, in the view of the Latter-day Saints, is not *ganz anders*.

We do not need to construct *ad hoc* explanations—periodic materializations, for example—for the theophanies recorded in such plainly anthropomorphic detail throughout the Bible. We can take the “image” and “likeness” of Genesis 1 at face value.

This delivers us from some knotty problems. For example: Marcel Sarot refers to the dilemma that faced St. Thomas Aquinas: “The denial of emotion in God seems to go against the witness of Scripture, whereas the affirmation of emotion in God seems to be incompatible with the divine incorporeality.”¹¹ Accordingly, observes Professor Sarot, Thomas opted for a denial of divine emotion.

7. Robert L. Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 151.

8. Nor, I hope and believe, for a small but growing number of Protestant theologians. A sparkling recent example of what I regard as a healthy trend is Clark H. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God’s Openness* (London: Paternoster, 2001).

9. Morris S. Seale, *Muslim Theology: A Study of Origins with Reference to the Church Fathers* (London: Luzac, 1964), 8–9.

10. Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (New York: Macmillan, 1927), 249.

11. Marcel Sarot, “God, Emotion, and Corporeality,” *The Thomist* 58/1 (1994): 77.

Sarot agrees, contending that the concept of bodiless emotion is meaningless. For this reason, he says, advocates of divine emotion must accept an embodied deity—or else, if they are unwilling to do so, they must forego divine emotion: “without corporeality, no emotion.”¹² Since, for Sarot, this disjunction constitutes a devastating *reductio ad absurdum*, the choice is obvious beyond dispute: Because God obviously has no body, he just as obviously cannot have emotions. Nicholas Wolterstorff and Alfred Freddoso have taken similar positions.¹³

Latter-day Saints accept the Bible’s witness to both God’s form and God’s emotions.

We accept, indeed devoutly affirm, the oneness, the inexpressibly rich unity, of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We could even, I suppose, employ the words *Trinity* and *trinitarianism*—as Elder James E. Talmage’s hugely influential 1899 work on *The Articles of Faith* in fact does—though we typically do not.¹⁴ The Bible *testifies* to this important truth; and so, even more explicitly, do the peculiarly Latter-day Saint scriptures. We do *not* (borrowing a description of polytheism that Paul Owen cites) “postulate different gods to account for different kinds of events.”¹⁵ We simply feel no need to endorse the doctrine of ontological unity worked out, most prominently, at Nicea.

Latter-day Saints know nothing of an ontological “substance” to “divide”; we resolutely decline to “confound” the “persons.” We affirm that the Father and the Son are distinct personages of flesh and bone. The preincarnate Jesus was revealed to ancient Israel as the Yahweh of

12. Ibid., 82. See his entire article, 61–92, for a very serious argument against unembodied passibility.

13. For a somewhat lengthier treatment of this issue, see now Daniel C. Peterson, “On the Motif of the Weeping God in Moses 7,” in *Revelation, Reason, and Faith: Essays in Honor of Truman G. Madsen*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2002), 285–317.

14. For example, the second chapter of *The Articles of Faith* is entitled “God and the Holy Trinity.” Elder Talmage’s work has been published in numerous editions.

15. Paul Owen, “Monotheism, Mormonism, and the New Testament Witness,” in *The New Mormon Challenge*, 278.

the Hebrew Bible. Many biblical scholars now recognize that El (or El Elyon, “the Highest”) and Yahweh were originally distinct.¹⁶ Even such mainstream reference works as the *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* and the *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary* (sponsored by the SBL) speak of the original distinction between Yahweh and El. It is striking that, in the New Testament, Jesus is “the Son of the Highest” (as, for example, at Luke 1:32).

The question is the nature of the needed oneness. Even in the famous *Shema* of Deuteronomy 6:4, the matter is unclear.¹⁷ Moreover, in view of “the post-biblical importance of monotheism, the relative rarity of its expression in the Bible is quite striking.”¹⁸ Was early Israel monotheistic in the sense under discussion here? Probably not.¹⁹ Exodus 15:11 (“Who is like unto thee, O Lord [Yahweh], among the gods?”) seems to entail the existence of other gods, as do Psalm 82 and many other passages.²⁰ On the other hand, did even the indisputably polytheistic Ugaritic pantheon exhibit a real oneness? Mark Smith argues convincingly that it did, through familial relationships and the concept of the divine council.²¹ And the Mesopotamian pantheon may have been conceived almost as an ontological monotheism.²²

Early biblical monotheism, if we choose to use the term, includes a divine council of gods.²³ It is only just prior to the exile that explicit monotheistic rhetoric in something like the modern sense appears in Israel.²⁴ (Later, as we all know, the seventy divine sons of El and Asherah become, in Jewish tradition, the angels of the seventy na-

16. See, for example, Smith, *Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 140–47.

17. See *ibid.*, 153.

18. *Ibid.*, 154.

19. See *ibid.*, 11, 91, 149.

20. On this, see Daniel C. Peterson, “‘Ye are Gods’: Psalm 82 and John 10 as Witnesses to the Divine Nature of Humankind,” in *The Disciple as Scholar: Essays on Scripture and the Ancient World in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks, Donald W. Parry, and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2000), 471–594.

21. Smith, *Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 8, 52–55, 66, 78–79.

22. See *ibid.*, 95.

23. See *ibid.*, 149–50, 151, 155.

24. See *ibid.*, 151, 154, 163.

tions.)²⁵ *Elohim*, of course, is plural in form. And, sometimes, it is clearly plural in meaning. But even when it refers to a single divine person, it implies plurality.

Elohim includes all gods; the fulness of deity is comprehended in him. Thus the word is equivalent to “deity” or “Godhead.” In this sense it is used in the priestly account of Creation: “Then *Elohim* said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness’” (Gen. 1:26). The passage presupposes the conception of the heavenly council . . . ruled over by God. . . . Despite this court imagery, the priestly view is clearly monotheistic, for *Elohim* embraces the divine plurality in unity, and elsewhere in the priestly account [though not here] the divine name is accompanied by verbs in the singular.²⁶

While oneness is demanded by the witness of the scriptures, the Nicene formulation is *not*. (Social trinitarianism seems a much more promising approach to many of us.) “To put it simply,” Professor Owen writes, “Christians believe that God is one, whereas the Latter-day Saints believe that God is more than one.”²⁷ But that distinction is far too simple. I can accept it no more easily than I can accept the implied dichotomy between “Christians” and “Latter-day Saints.”

We affirm that God is the creator. In reading *The New Mormon Challenge*, I have seen more clearly why *creatio ex nihilo* matters so much to our critics. I have still seen no reason to believe it.

He is, however, the sovereign of the universe.

From the very start, we have affirmed the deity of Jesus Christ. The title page of the Book of Mormon declares that its purpose is “the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God.” “Behold,” the Nephite king Benjamin told his people in the late second century before Christ, “the time cometh, and is not

25. See *ibid.*, 55, 135.

26. “God, names of,” in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George A. Buttrick et al. (New York: Abingdon, 1962), 2:413.

27. Owen, “Monotheism, Mormonism, and the New Testament Witness,” 272.

far distant, that with power, the Lord Omnipotent who reigneth, who was, and is from all eternity to all eternity, shall come down from heaven among the children of men, and shall dwell in a tabernacle of clay. . . . And . . . there shall be no other name given nor any other way nor means whereby salvation can come unto the children of men, only in and through the name of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent” (Mosiah 3:5, 17).

The history of philosophy and philosophical theology is strewn with apodictic reasoning, with “demonstrative” arguments—what the Arab scholastics called *burhaan*—that no longer move us, that hold only antiquarian interest. Knowing this, William James remarked that

as a matter of history [philosophy] fails to prove its pretension to be “objectively” convincing. . . . It does not banish differences; it founds schools and sects just as feeling does. The logical reason of man operates, in short, in this field of divinity exactly as it has always operated in love, or in patriotism, or in politics, or in any other of the wider affairs of life, in which our passions or our mystical intuitions fix our beliefs beforehand. It finds arguments for our conviction, for indeed it *has* to find them. It amplifies and defines our faith, and dignifies it and lends it words and plausibility. It hardly ever engenders it; it cannot now secure it.²⁸

Joseph Smith said that a man could learn more. “Could you gaze into heaven for five minutes,” he said, “you would know more than you would by reading all that was ever written on the subject.”²⁹

Jacques Maritain tells a story about St. Thomas Aquinas, greatest of all systematic theologians: “One day, December 6, 1273, while he was celebrating Mass in the chapel of Saint Nicholas, a great change came over him. From that moment he ceased writing and dictating.”

28. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 344–45.

29. Joseph Fielding Smith, ed., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1972), 324.

When his companion, Reginald of Piperno, complained that there remained much work to be done, Thomas replied, "I can do no more." Still the other man insisted. "Reginald," Thomas answered yet again, "I can do no more; such things have been revealed to me that all that I have written seems to me so much straw." He died a few months later.³⁰

This is the Thomas Aquinas from whom my youngest son takes his middle name.

Postscript: Minirec

"Newspeak was the official language of Oceania."³¹

Just hours before press time, the inimitable Robert Durocher, of southern California, called my attention to the fall 2002 newsletter of an operation in Mission Viejo, California, that calls itself "Concerned Christians & Former Mormons: A Ministry of Reconciliation." The contents of this newsletter seem to me relevant to issues raised by David Paulsen in his response to *The New Mormon Challenge*, which is published in the present issue of the *Review*, pp. 99–111: What kind of "respectful dialogue" can we realistically expect to have with our evangelical and fundamentalist fellow Christians? How is *The New Mormon Challenge* being used by them, and what, perhaps, was its real intent? The answers suggested by the newsletter in question are not encouraging.

On the front page of the newsletter, a large headline reads: "The New Mormon Challenge: Conference on Cults and New Religions—January 24–25, 2003." A relatively lengthy article follows, telling of a conference to be held on those dates at Biola University, in La Mirada, California, under the joint sponsorship of Biola, Concerned Christians & Former Mormons (CCFM), Standing Together, and another organization called Evangelical Ministries to New Religions (EMNR).

30. Jacques Maritain, *St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Joseph W. Evans and Peter O'Reilly (Cleveland: World Publishing, 1958), 54, 56.

31. George Orwell, "The Principles of Newspeak," was written in 1948 and is often included as an appendix to *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

The keynote speaker of the conference will be the professional anti-Mormon Sandra Tanner of the Utah Lighthouse Ministry in Salt Lake City. Three other main speakers are highlighted: Luke Wilson, of the Institute for Religious Research (formerly Gospel Truths Ministries) in Grand Rapids, Michigan, the publisher of various books and newsletters critical of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and, most recently, producer of a slick and slickly marketed video attacking the Book of Abraham, will also address the group. So, too, will Craig Blomberg, of Denver Seminary. Professor Blomberg is the coauthor (with Stephen Robinson) of *How Wide the Divide? A Mormon and an Evangelical in Conversation*³² and a contributor to *The New Mormon Challenge*.³³ (CCFM offers *The New Mormon Challenge* for a substantially discounted price of \$15.00, reduced from the normal retail price of \$21.99.) The fourth principal speaker, yet to be confirmed and publicly announced at the time the newsletter was published, is slated to speak on “Polygamy in Utah Today.”

CCFM plans to host a (free!) conference-luncheon for Protestant pastors on the first day of the meeting at the beautiful Atrium Hotel near the John Wayne Airport in Orange County. Pastor Craig Johnson, a participant in several recent meetings between Protestants and Latter-day Saints, leader of a Utah-based ministry titled “Standing Together,” will open the proceedings, whose “focus will be on how wide IS the divide!” “Pastors,” says the newsletter, “need to be better informed as well as to know where to find help in teaching their people the difference between Mormonism and Christianity. . . . [W]e want them to be aware of the threat of Mormonism to the Christian body and the tools that are available to them.” Since CCFM wants to issue personal invitations to as many as it can, the newsletter asks its readers to send in their pastors’ addresses.

32. Craig L. Blomberg and Stephen E. Robinson, *How Wide the Divide? A Mormon and an Evangelical in Conversation* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1997).

33. See the responses by Benjamin I. Huff and Kent P. Jackson to Professor Blomberg’s *New Mormon Challenge* essay on pp. 113–37 of the present issue of the *FARMS Review of Books*.

A prominent feature of the luncheon will be a panel discussion, devoted to “the unique approaches different ministries take in sharing Christ with the LDS people.” Another discussion, to be held later on the same day, will bring a panel of anti-Mormon ministries together to update those in the audience on the latest tools to “enable the Christian to be more effective” in persuading Latter-day Saints to abandon the Church of Jesus Christ. Donna Morley, for example, has evidently written a book entitled *A Christian Woman’s Guide to Understanding Mormonism*, which is designed to help housewives witness to Latter-day Saint missionaries knocking at their doors. Mrs. Morley will take part in the program. Jim and Judy Robertson, of Concerned Christians, in Mesa, Arizona, will also participate in the discussion.³⁴ Judy Robertson has recently published an anti-Mormon book for children, entitled *Understanding My Mormon Friend*.

It will be noted that, among all the activities of the two-day conference cosponsored by this “Ministry of Reconciliation,” not a single Latter-day Saint appears on the program. The clear posture is one of attack. It is also one of distortion. Additionally, on the second page of the newsletter, a brief article entitled “The Salt Lake Tribune” falsely states that “the independent morning newspaper has been bought by the church-owned Deseret News,” and observes, again falsely, that “the LDS Church now owns both daily newspapers.” The “Ministry of Reconciliation” loses no time in underlining the conclusion that its readers are to draw from the disinformation with which they’ve just been presented:

When people refer to Utah as being a different country, you can understand why when things like this take place. When the major religion controls the media as well as strong political influence it would seem to us that it is not so much another

34. Extraordinarily revealing glimpses into the workings and methods of the Robertsons’ organization can be found on the Web at www.shields-research.org/Critics/CCoM.htm as of October 2002. That they are still engaged in the same problematic kind of behavior is evident from a telephone call that I received this very morning, by sheer coincidence, from a trusted acquaintance who teaches in Mesa, Arizona.

country as it is a “theocracy.” The way this buyout was manipulated again shows the power of the LDS Church.

In the wake of the events of September 11, massive news coverage of the Taliban theocracy in Afghanistan—building tensions in the Near East—and the similar, factually distorted depictions of Utah as a foreign theocracy scarcely seem conducive to “respectful dialogue.” Nor does the article on page three of the newsletter, the headline of which implores Latter-day Saints, “Why Not Just Be Honest?”

In George Orwell’s famous dystopia *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the invented language called Newspeak enforces the Party line by making clear thought impossible. Seemingly straightforward concepts are turned on their heads and twisted into their direct opposites: “War is Peace, Freedom is Slavery, Ignorance is Strength.”³⁵ The war department is the Ministry of Peace, or Minipax. The government office responsible for rationing is the Ministry of Plenty, or Miniplenty. The propaganda bureau is the Ministry of Truth, generally known as Minitrue. The secret police are headquartered at the Ministry of Love, called Miniluv:³⁶

The Ministry of Love was the really frightening one. There were no windows in it at all. Winston had never been inside the Ministry of Love, nor within half a kilometer of it. It was a place impossible to enter except on official business, and then only by penetrating through a maze of barbed-wire entanglements, steel doors, and hidden machine-gun nests. Even the streets leading up to its outer barriers were roamed by gorilla-faced guards in black uniforms, armed with jointed truncheons. . . . One did not know what happened inside the Ministry of Love, but it was possible to guess: tortures, drugs, delicate instruments that registered your nervous reactions, gradual wearing-down by sleeplessness and solitude and persistent questioning.³⁷

35. George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1949), 5.

36. See *ibid.*, 6.

37. *Ibid.*, 6, 167–68.

One of the most famous features of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is the “two-minute hate,” a daily telescreen special in which various elements of “crimethink” are depicted by means of a series of horrific images and sounds, at which viewers are expected, even required, to hiss and curse. But there is also “hate week,” a regular week in which all Oceanian citizens attend rallies and parades designed to inflame their hostility toward enemies of the Party and to heighten their efforts in the perpetual warfare conducted against those enemies by the rulers of Oceania.

We don’t live in Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Direct frontal assault is not “reconciliation.”

Editor’s Picks

And now, following an ancient and venerable precedent established several years ago, I announce the book recommendations for this issue of the *Review*. These recommendations have been established by the scientific procedure of looking at the books in question, reading the relevant reviews, and speaking with my various coeditors. The decision regarding what to recommend and what not to recommend has been, and typically is, easy and unanimous. The apparently precise ratings, however, are much more subjective, and they might have been different, say, had Brigham Young University’s football team enjoyed a better season this year. As in previous issues, the ratings are expressed according to the following scale:

- **** Outstanding, a seminal work of the kind that appears only rarely.
- *** Enthusiastically recommended.
- ** Warmly recommended.
- * Recommended.

We commend to readers of this issue of the *Review* the following books:

- *** John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne, eds., *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon: The FARMS Updates of the 1990s*

- ** George Q. Cannon, *Life of Joseph Smith the Prophet*
- ** Richard R. Hopkins, *Biblical Mormonism: Responding to Evangelical Criticism of LDS Theology*
- ** Hugh W. Pinnock, *Finding Biblical Hebrew and Other Ancient Literary Forms in the Book of Mormon*
- * K. Douglas Bassett, comp., *Latter-day Commentary on the Book of Mormon: Insights from Prophets, Church Leaders, and Scholars*
- * Kenneth Lutes and Lyndell Lutes, *Words of Christ Restored for the Last Days*

I am grateful to the various people who have helped in the production of this issue of the *FARMS Review of Books*. My associate editors, Louis C. Midgley and George L. Mitton, have been helpful and enthusiastic at every stage of the project and are great fun to work with. Our production editor, Shirley S. Ricks, has been her usual competent and organized self, without whom the ship would have run aground long ago. Alison V. P. Coutts, the director of publications for FARMS and for its parent organization, Brigham Young University's Institute for the Study and Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts, is an ideal colleague in connection with the *Review* and elsewhere in our work. I also wish to thank Angela Clyde Barrionuevo for her typesetting expertise; Elizabeth W. Watkins for her insightful editorial suggestions; Paula Hicken for her competent supervision of the source checking and proofreading; and Julie Dozier, Tessa Hauglid, Ellen Henneman, Larry Morris, David Pendleton, Linda Sheffield, and Sandra Thorne for their assistance at all stages. We hope that the reviews and review essays herein found will spark discussion, provide insights, encourage good writing, and persuade those contemplating the perpetration of bad books and articles to take up other pursuits. Fishing is pleasant. So is golf.

BASSETT'S *LATTER-DAY COMMENTARY* ON THE *BOOK OF MORMON*

Ronald W. Asay

It is important that readers of K. Douglas Bassett's commentary on the Book of Mormon pay attention to his introduction. Here he explains that his book came about "more by accident than by design" (p. iii). Over a period of years, as he taught Book of Mormon classes in seminary and at Brigham Young University, he collected supplementary materials and distributed them to his classes. Ultimately his materials became so large and popular that he was encouraged to publish them, which he did as the *Latter-day Commentary on the Book of Mormon*. Most of his quotations are from General Authorities, but some are from other credible sources such as presidents of the United States, prominent Latter-day Saint authors and educators, and some scholars outside our community, such as C. S. Lewis. The compiler presents virtually no commentary of his own. However, he never intended to be original, only to provide inspiring and uncontroversial illumination to the text.

Because it evolved somewhat randomly, the book is distinctly different from the typical commentary, which is crafted over a relatively short period of time and in a directed, organized fashion. Strictly speaking, this is not in fact a commentary on the Book of Mormon

Review of K. Douglas Bassett, comp. *Latter-day Commentary on the Book of Mormon: Insights from Prophets, Church Leaders, and Scholars*. American Fork, Utah: Covenant Communications, 1999. ii + 539 pp. \$25.95.

at all but rather a collection of modern references and quotations attached to key words and ideas of the Book of Mormon. However, with few exceptions, these modern authors were not discussing the verses of scripture to which Bassett attaches these quotations. Thus they are not truly in context and are only indirectly a commentary. This unique approach has inherent strengths and weaknesses. One problem is that church leaders have not commented directly on a majority of the Book of Mormon. Granted, many authorities discuss the fulness of the gospel contained in this scripture, but gaps are created by the absence of direct commentary on many segments of the Book of Mormon itself.

For example, the book of Alma contains many notable stories and events. However, the following all pass without direct commentary: Alma's encounter with Nehor; his many missionary excursions to the apostate Nephite groups; the conversions and teachings of Amulek and Zeezrom, along with their miraculous healings and rescues; the missionary experiences of the sons of Mosiah and the conversion of the Lamanites; Ammon's discussion of the natural man; Alma's instructions to his sons Helaman, Shiblon, and Corianton; and Moroni's battles and dealings with his people and with Pahoran. It is almost possible to read this entire section of the commentary without realizing that it has anything to do with the book of Alma.

A few more of many possible examples may serve to illustrate these observations. In 2 Nephi 1:4, after Lehi's party arrives in the promised land, Lehi makes the remarkable statement: "I have seen a vision, in which I know that Jerusalem is destroyed; and had we remained in Jerusalem we should also have perished." Bassett presents no material about the historical fact of Jerusalem's destruction nor about Lehi's vision or leadership in this context.

Likewise, for this verse, "And I, Nephi, did build a temple; and I did construct it after the manner of the temple of Solomon save it were not built of so many precious things" (2 Nephi 5:16), Bassett makes not even the slightest comment about temples and temple building. Later, Abinadi emerges from two years of hiding to finish

his ministry among the people of Noah. This entire chapter (Mosiah 12), containing many quotations from the prophet as well as the rationalizations and questions from Noah's priests, is omitted from the commentary. Similarly, Abinadi's compelling sermon on the mission of Christ in Mosiah 16—which resulted in the conversion of Alma—goes without notice.

If this pattern of omissions and gaps is consistent throughout the book, then what does it contain? Bassett's apparent aim, one in which I think he succeeds very well, is to relate material from the Book of Mormon to the conditions of today and to the advice of current leaders. Necessarily, he takes a certain amount of poetic license to insert points and commentary that might not strictly follow from the text. For instance, going back to Alma, while little information is included about the historical material and in fact about most of the doctrines of that great book, Bassett selects topics from the book of Alma—such as adultery (pp. 330–32), the second death (pp. 341–43), military service (pp. 353–56), righteous mothers (pp. 359–64), sustaining church leaders (pp. 366–70), and the plan of happiness (p. 345)—and appends quotations from a variety of sources elaborating on these ideas. This is the pattern throughout the book, and some wonderful citations are included.

Take the following example: "I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them" (1 Nephi 3:7). In connection with this familiar scripture, Bassett quotes George Q. Cannon:

There are some people who seem to have the idea that rebellion and disobedience are evidences of independence and of manhood. Well, I am glad to know that, so far as I am concerned, I never took that view. I always felt that I was just as independent in being obedient, and I know I felt much better than I could possibly feel if I were disobedient. It is not necessary to be disobedient to show independence. . . .

I suppose each one of us is fond of having his own way. I know I am. I am willing to confess that I like to have my own way. But I do not like my own way well enough to want it in opposition to [the leaders of the Church]. (pp. 12–13)

What an interesting and appropriate idea—one that I certainly would never have stumbled onto if left to my own devices. Although not typical of the usual commentary on this particular verse, Cannon's words are very applicable and illustrate a strength of Bassett's approach.

Another example is his reference to 2 Nephi 4:5–6 (pp. 98–100). In this scripture, Lehi indicates that parents, in this case Laman and Lemuel, have a responsibility to bring up their children in the Lord's way. Bassett quotes David O. McKay, Gordon B. Hinckley, and Spencer W. Kimball extensively on this issue. The insightful and inspiring selections are from conference reports and the *Ensign*, available to most readers, but also from the Tokyo Area Conference Report, August 1975, and *Treasures of Life*, by President McKay. Several selections are also included from less well-known authors, in this case Merlin R. Lybbert and Anne G. Wirthlin, both authors of *Ensign* articles. From Lybbert comes this insight:

This teaching is to be done before a child reaches the age of accountability, and while innocent and sin-free. This is protected time for parents to teach the principles and ordinances of salvation to their children without interference from Satan. . . . During these formative, innocent years, a child may learn wrong behavior; but such is not the result of Satan's temptations, but comes from the wrong teachings and the bad example of others. (p. 100)

These are a few of many highly successful illustrations of Bassett's novel approach. In other instances I felt that the true message of a verse was sacrificed somewhat in order to draw a lesson that was slightly contrived. For example, when Lehi sent his sons back to Jerusalem, Sariah was unhappy with her husband. Her feelings were later recorded by her son Nephi: "For she had supposed that we had

perished in the wilderness; and she also had complained against my father, telling him that he was a visionary man; saying: Behold thou hast led us forth from the land of our inheritance, and my sons are no more, and we perish in the wilderness” (1 Nephi 5:2). Lehi responded without anger and was able to comfort his wife by reminding her that what he had done was the result of instructions received in a vision from God. Subsequently, both rejoiced in the return of their sons with the brass plates. The Book of Mormon reveals little about the relationship between these great parents, but Bassett spends several pages (pp. 19–23) and quotes counsel from seven different church leaders illustrating the tender relationship that should exist between husband and wife. Certainly this is pertinent to us in this day of spousal abuse and marital contention, and the quotations contain sage and timely advice. However, this is the only commentary given for the entire chapter. The compiler makes no mention of Lehi’s reading of the brass plates and their contents nor of his discovery of his own genealogy contained therein.

A similar example is found in 1 Nephi 18:16. En route to the promised land, Nephi was bound by his brothers. While he lay captive and miserable, hungry, bruised, and thirsty, he recalled: “Nevertheless, I did look unto my God, and I did praise him all the day long; and I did not murmur against the Lord because of mine afflictions.” We can derive many lessons from Nephi’s steadfastness and patience. Bassett takes this opportunity to quote several latter-day prophets about the need for sustaining our church leaders without murmuring. For example, he quotes from *Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*:

Apostasy often begins with criticism of current leaders. Apostasy usually begins with questions and doubt and criticism. . . . They allege love for the gospel and the Church but charge that leaders are a little “off the beam”! He generally wants all the blessings of the Church: membership, its priesthood, its temple privileges, and expects them from the leaders of the Church, though at the same time claiming that those same leaders have departed from the path. (p. 58)

Such counsel is clearly wise and appropriate to our day and time. But does it follow from this verse and context? Probably not, but again, this volume is not strictly a commentary on the Book of Mormon. Rather it is a commentary on living the gospel today, the topics being stimulated by situations in the lives of men and women living long ago and reflecting to some degree Bassett's interests and biases. The success of this approach depends on what readers are looking for in this commentary. If they are searching for the traditional contextual interpretation and some historical analysis, then they will be disappointed. If they are looking for modern-day scriptural commentary that dovetails with many of the daily life lessons of the Book of Mormon, then they will often be delighted.

It is not true, however, that Bassett includes no doctrinal or historical commentary, only that it is inconsistently present. For example, the "Isaiah chapters" of 2 Nephi 11–24 are handled very well. Bassett selects verses from these chapters that are of particular interest to Latter-day Saint readers and then references a wide variety of standard commentaries. These include primarily *Isaiah Plain and Simple*, by Hoyt W. Brewster Jr.; *Isaiah: Prophet, Seer, and Poet*, by Victor L. Ludlow; *Book of Mormon Compendium*, by Sidney B. Sperry; *Book of Mormon Student Manual*; *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, by Robert L. Millet and Joseph Fielding McConkie, along with several conference reports, *Ensign* articles, and selected quotations from other church leaders. Although by no means comprehensive, the twenty-two pages he devotes to these chapters contain excellent discussions of difficult material. In particular, he covers very nicely the prophecies regarding the stem of Jesse, the root of Jesse, and their respective roles in the last days (pp. 144–45).

One problem with the format of the book is that many sections of the Book of Mormon lack direct commentary and list only references. Often these are the longer, more comprehensive citations, and as such are perhaps the very ones that would be most useful. Thus readers are required to go to another source if they wish to find the quotation. Compounding this problem, many of these are from valuable but rarer sources, such as *The Book of Mormon: First Nephi, The*

Doctrinal Foundation: Papers from the Second Annual Book of Mormon Symposium; Behold the Lamb of God, by J. Reuben Clark Jr.; *Crusader for Righteousness*, by Melvin J. Ballard; and CES symposia, BYU devotionals, and other addresses. For readers with access to *GospelLink* or other similar electronic collations, this is not a serious problem, but for the substantial number of readers without such access, the obscurity of these sources and many like them constitutes a difficult obstacle to their use. Even for those who have these resources, the advantage of having this commentary at hand is that the quotations it does contain are immediately available. Its utility is certainly lessened if one must go to other sources to find information that may or may not prove to be worth the search.

The lack of any index makes this book very difficult to use as a reference. I found it nearly impossible to find quotations I wished to read again or to search for a particular topic or author. In our computer era, such an omission seems to be an oversight that could easily have been corrected.

The majority of the material is aimed at helping the reader change behaviorally. Many pages of insightful counsel regarding the need for forgiveness, love, giving of material things, not judging, serving others, and being a good spouse are presented. Bassett treats some passages eruditely and establishes points of doctrine using references not commonly cited. Other verses that have little doctrinal importance but lend themselves to moral or ethical lessons are referred to exhaustively.

Given its incomplete coverage, perhaps the proper use of this book would be to read it along with the Book of Mormon, not so much to help explain a difficult passage as to add relevance. In this mission the compiler succeeds. In fact, this is a remarkable compilation of bits and pieces of the spoken word that would otherwise escape the notice of most of us. Remarkably, Bassett found enough material over the years to provide commentary on a very large portion of the Book of Mormon. Although some deficiencies characterize his approach, the volume is nonetheless a valuable addition to the study of how this scripture can apply to and modify our lives.

EVALUATING THE CASE FOR A LIMITED GREAT LAKES SETTING

John E. Clark

Before delving into details of particular geographies, I need to acknowledge my awareness of the enormous potential to give offense in an essay of this type; this is not my intention. I merely compare substantive claims in these books against the facts of the Book of Mormon, physical geography, archaeology, and anthropology—as far as I understand them. I avoid making judgments on testimony and rule all such statements in these books as out of bounds. I realize that working on the riddle of Book of Mormon geography can be an engaging pastime, and such activity is laudable. Once one publishes a proposed geography, however, he or she moves from the realm of recreation into scholarship and must be held responsible for this action. All such scholarship should be evaluated against a high standard—

Review of Duane R. Aston. *Return to Cumorah: Piecing Together the Puzzle Where the Nephites Lived*. Sacramento, Calif.: American River Publications, 1998. ix + 197 pp., with 16 maps, 23 illustrations, bibliography, and subject index. \$19.95, hardback.

Review of Paul Hedengren. *The Land of Lehi: Further Evidence for the Book of Mormon*, 2nd ed., version 2.3. Provo, Utah: Tepran, 1999. 160 pp., with 33 maps, 25 illustrations, and subject index. \$14.95, spiral bound.

Review of Phyllis Carol Olive. *The Lost Lands of the Book of Mormon*. Springville, Utah: Bonneville Books, 2000. xiii + 333 pp., with 40 maps, 9 illustrations, and bibliography. \$16.95, paperback.

preferably a higher standard than detractors of the Church of Jesus Christ would use in debunking such claims. I attempt to treat all such geographies with scholarly seriousness and hold their authors to appropriate standards. Have they set forth the facts? Have they cited all the relevant sources? Do their inferences flow logically from accepted facts? Is the argument convincing and interesting? Are the illustrations appropriate? Is the work a contribution? Is the book well written?

In this review, my fourth discussion of Book of Mormon geographies, I evaluate current theories proposing a Limited Great Lakes (LGL) setting.¹ In this essay, I review the three featured books and revisit Delbert Curtis's *Christ in North America*, a book I have previously considered in detail.² I have also previously reviewed the first edition of Hedengren's *The Land of Lehi*,³ but his second edition is significantly improved and deserves additional consideration here. I first consider briefly the general content of each book; in the second half of this essay, I consider remaining problems and challenges of LGL geographies as individual topics.

None of the geographical correlations is convincing, nor can a convincing geography be salvaged by amalgamating the separate strengths of each. Although each proposed geography advocates a limited territory that incorporates the Great Lakes region, they are mutually incompatible in basic assumptions and details. In my judgment, Aston's presentation is the most professional of the three and Olive's the least. I consider them in reverse order of their scholarly merit. Of the three, I focus principally on Aston's arguments in attempting to address his claims for a New York geography and his objections to a Middle American geography.

1. Earlier discussions include John E. Clark, "A Key for Evaluating Nephite Geographies," review of *Deciphering the Geography of the Book of Mormon*, by F. Richard Hauck, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 1 (1989): 20–70; John E. Clark, "The Final Battle for Cumorah," review of *Christ in North America*, by Delbert W. Curtis, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/2 (1994): 79–113; and John E. Clark, "Two Points of Book of Mormon Geography: A Review," review of *The Land of Lehi*, by Paul Hedengren, *FARMS Review of Books* 8/2 (1996): 1–24.

2. Clark, "The Final Battle for Cumorah," 79–113.

3. Clark, "Two Points of Book of Mormon Geography," 1–24.

Limited Great Lakes Geographies

Olive's Lost Lands of the Book of Mormon

The sixteen chapters of Olive's book cover four broad topics. In four introductory chapters, she dismisses the case for limited Meso-american geographies, establishes the prophetic identification of the United States of America as the land of promise mentioned in the Book of Mormon (Canada and Mexico are explicitly excluded), makes a case for a limited territory for Book of Mormon lands, and reconstructs the physical geography of the western New York region for Book of Mormon times. The next two chapters address issues of Jaredite occupation, with the next eight chapters covering issues of Nephite geography: specifically, the locations and features of the lands of Nephi, Zarahemla, Bountiful, the eastern borders, the narrow neck, the land northward, the region of many waters, and the hill Cumorah.⁴ In the final two chapters, Olive considers the question of archaeological evidence and provides a final summary.

Olive places Book of Mormon lands in western New York. She assumes that the modern-day Hill Cumorah outside of Palmyra is the hill mentioned in the text. None of the numerous maps in her text carries a scale; she makes no attempt to correlate postulated Book of Mormon features to modern state boundaries or towns, so the precise locations of minor features are hard to determine. Moreover, the numerous maps are light, fuzzy, cramped, and difficult to read. The bulk of Olive's proposed geography occupies western New York between Lake Erie and the Genesee River, an area about 90 by 110 miles. This limited geography applies only to the narrative center of Book of Mormon lands, but even so, it appears much too small and off scale by a whole order of magnitude. There is hardly any room in a territory this size for groups to have become lost for many days when traveling, for example, from Zarahemla to Nephi.

4. I distinguish the ancient hill Cumorah from the modern-day Hill Cumorah by capitalization, except when citing the various authors—I have followed their capitalization in quotations.

The hill Cumorah is located in the northeast corner of Olive's land southward, with the Finger Lakes region being the "land of many waters." Lake Erie is the west sea, and its southwestern extremity (Ohio shore near Kirtland) is the land of "first inheritance." Lake Ontario is the Ripliancum of the Jaredite report and the North Sea of the Nephite report. These identifications take care of the obvious bodies of water that any reviewer can see on modern maps. From here, Olive gets creative and interesting. To her credit, she has studied topographic maps of the region and has worked through basic geologic reports.

The Book of Mormon narrative obviously requires more than just northern and western seas. Olive finds these other seas for the southern and eastern margins, as well as the Jaredite mention of a "sea that divides the land," in the former presence of Pleistocene (postglacial period) lakes, now only evident in geologic reports and marked by the presence of lowland marshes on the current landscape. Early Lake Tonawanda was a narrow, east-west-tending lake that extended from modern-day Niagara Falls to about Rochester. This lake paralleled the southern shore of Lake Ontario. The narrow strip of higher ground trapped between these two lakes was about twenty to twenty-five miles wide and about seventy miles long. This isolated strip is her candidate for the land northward and the probable location of most Jaredite settlements. By recourse to reconstructions of ancient lakes that no longer exist, Olive is able to nearly surround Book of Mormon lands by water, create a narrow neck of land within this currently landlocked region, and to make sense of all the water passages in the text.

Unlike any previous geography I have encountered, Olive implicates a universal flood at the time of Noah to make her point. In doing so she makes untenable assumptions about water depths and drying rates. She opines that the Jaredites fled the Old World soon after the flood, meaning that much of the water would still have been ponded on the land surface in places such as upstate New York. But she continues to identify these bodies of water until the end of the

Nephite era, even after crucifixion cataclysms altered the land surface. No one seriously doubts the evidence of ancient lakeshores and lake sediments in New York any more than they question the former presence of Lake Bonneville in the Salt Lake Valley. The ancient lake benches are obvious. But Olive cannot have it both ways. These same reports must give sufficient indication that the lakes in question were ancient and disappeared over ten thousand years ago. If one wants to accept the word of geologists, it has to be a full commitment that includes their dating of the phenomena in question. One is not free to extract only the scientific statements favorable to one's view unless one has the training to raise valid scientific objections to contradictory material. Melting continental ice sheets and Noah's flood are mutually incompatible.

The question at stake here is the appropriateness of uniformitarian principles: how much can we rely on modern knowledge of geologic processes to interpret those of the past? In terms of dating ancient lake beds, it would be a rather simple matter to find the date of the oldest archaeological sites in these regions and to have them provide terminus dates for the disappearance of the various lakes. This has not been done. In her zeal to reconstitute a plausible hydrology for Book of Mormon lands, Olive simply ignores all evidence for temporal placement that does not suit her purpose. The other books listed above make the same mistake, but in archaeological rather than geological time.

The city of Zarahemla in Olive's microgeography would have been in the area around present-day East Aurora, New York; this is less than twenty miles east of the shore of Lake Erie to the west and from Buffalo to the northwest. This location does not leave sufficient room for settlements and wilderness west of Zarahemla. Buffalo Creek–Buffalo River is the mighty Sidon. The precise location of the ancient city of Nephi is not given, but based on extrapolation from her maps to a modern atlas, it appears to have been in the region of West Clarksville or Cuba, New York, located approximately fifty miles to the

southeast of East Aurora. This placement is too close to accommodate the Book of Mormon narrative for travels between Zarahemla and Nephi and for many significant cities located between them.

Archaeology plays a minor part in Olive's proposal. Both the area of Cumorah and Zarahemla are said to be archaeological hotspots. Referring to the region of Zarahemla she claims the following:

Modern day East Aurora sits in this central location today. . . . More relics have been found in this region than almost any other in western New York which is strong evidence that the capital city of Zarahemla was indeed located in this very spot.

Archaeological evidence indicates the ancient city took in an area of about 3 to 4 [square] miles and was heavily populated. Interestingly, large skeletons have been unearthed in this area as well as numerous artifacts of husbandry and war. (Olive, p. 144)

Similar claims are made for the Cumorah region:

The bones and artifacts found in western New York are consistent with those described in the text of the Book of Mormon.

The historian, O. Turner, describes a fortified hill within three miles of the Hill Cumorah which was barricaded on an eminence made for a large and powerful enemy. The entrenchments were ten feet deep and twelve feet wide. Skeletons found within the enclosure indicate a race of men one third larger than the present race. (Olive, p. 236)

These statements are typical of the significant claims made for an archaeological confirmation of Olive's Book of Mormon lands. Specific claims, and references supporting them, are avoided, and everything is generic but said to be obvious. What are the weapons of war, for example, and where can one read about them? The few references

to archaeological findings that one can actually trace through her footnotes are to dated claims made in the nineteenth century, most of which she has taken from previous Latter-day Saint correlations, namely E. Cecil McGavin and Willard Bean's *The Geography of the Book of Mormon*⁵ and B. H. Roberts's *New Witness for God*.⁶ Both books are rich resources for early settlers' accounts of archaeological evidences destroyed during colonization of upstate New York. But in the final analysis, these reports are merely very old gossip and folklore that require confirmation. What is the best current archaeological evidence, and where can one access it? I have yet to see a study that has seriously evaluated these early documents. Reports of bones of extra-large humans are the sort of exaggeration we expect from early amateur accounts.

What is distressing in such treatments of archaeological evidence is that none of the good artifacts reported to have been commonly found during the early days of colonization has since come to light. If iron, brass, and copper artifacts were found by the basketloads in early times, some should have survived to modern times, either in the ground or in private collections of artifacts. The lack of such evidence puts these accounts of archaeological finds in doubt. I will return to this archaeological problem after summarizing the other books because it is a problem they all share. In passing, it is interesting that no one has ever claimed to have found fortifications on the Hill Cumorah itself. The fact is that fortifications have been reported all around the area. This shows that such evidence was not destroyed in the colonial era. If evidence of ancient warfare and fortifications could be expected anywhere, Cumorah is the place—but it is archaeologically clean.

The conclusion I reach after reading Olive's text is that Book of Mormon lands remain lost, despite her valiant effort.

5. E. Cecil McGavin and Willard Bean, *The Geography of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1948).

6. B. H. Roberts, *A New Witness for God* (Salt Lake City: Cannon and Sons, 1895).

Hedengren's *The Land of Lehi*

Hedengren's second edition of *The Land of Lehi* differs substantially in tone, substance, and scale from Olive's book. Where Olive's book is florid in rhetorical excesses and logical lapses, Hedengren's is a no-nonsense and nothing-but-the-facts account. Hedengren avoids commingling testimony with facts and confusing sentiments for evidence. He states his proposals as models capable of scientific testing. Unfortunately, he provides minimal references to outside sources and fails to provide a master bibliography, so he does not promote research in the normal scholarly way. As indicated by the format of his work, Hedengren's proposals are designed to be works in progress that can be updated in his computer version. His second edition is version 2.3. It is twice the length of the first edition, and it shows substantial improvement in the quality and clarity of accompanying computer maps and illustrations. Unfortunately, he has removed the short chapter setting out his theoretical orientation that was found in the first edition, and he has removed the color photographs of probable locations of Nephite places that once graced his cover. He has, however, added at least five new chapters and greatly expanded others.

The fourteen chapters of this book are usefully divided into four sections. The first five chapters deal with Book of Mormon geography in the Old World—the trek from Jerusalem to Bountiful and the eventual departure to the promised land. This is a topic rarely dealt with in proposed Book of Mormon geographies. Chapters 6–11 address Lehiite (Nephite and Lamanite) regions in the New World. The next two chapters briefly cover issues of Mulekite and Jaredite geographies. The final chapter, “Additional Harmonies,” is composed of forty-four sections dealing with everything from minerals and their placement to panpipes. For many of these sections, Hedengren provides no explicit link to Book of Mormon issues. For example, he never clarifies what panpipes have to do with the Book of Mormon. The reader is supposed to know why such things as pearls, body armor, fortifications, grapes, grains, minerals, and so forth are impor-

tant for determining the probable location of Lehigh lands. It almost appears that in his quest for fostering an air of objectivity in presenting evidence, Hedengren has neglected to mention why some things are correspondences and why they might be of interest.

Hedengren makes a very useful distinction between Book of Mormon lands and the "narrative center" of those lands. The lands and features described by writers of the Book of Mormon were a small subset of the total territories occupied by Book of Mormon peoples. Hedengren proposes that the Lehighites crossed the Arabian peninsula and embarked from the coast of Oman, circled Africa, crossed the Atlantic Ocean, and landed somewhere in the Chesapeake Bay area of the Atlantic seaboard. From there they migrated inland and northward to the Great Lakes region. The lands described in the text include present-day Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, and New York. This scale may be a bit big, but it is certainly in the range of travel distances required by the Book of Mormon.

The critical postulate for inferring Lehigh lands is that the Hill Cumorah near Palmyra is the hill mentioned in the text as the site of the final Jaredite and Nephite battles. The New York Hill Cumorah is on the northern edge of Hedengren's proposed Lehigh lands. The land of Nephite is located in southeastern Pennsylvania, with the city of Zarahemla located near present-day West Pittston, in central Pennsylvania. He proposes the Susquehanna River as the ancient river Sidon, and he locates Bountiful upriver (northward) from Zarahemla near the town of Sayre, Pennsylvania. In this proposed geography, the Atlantic Ocean is available to serve as the East Sea, Lake Erie becomes one west sea, and Lake Ontario becomes the North Sea. The Delaware peninsula is flanked by bays. Delaware Bay is also an east sea, and Chesapeake Bay is a west sea, thus creating a portion of Lehigh lands nearly surrounded by seas. Delaware Bay is also the place where the "sea divides the land." These designations are not quite as creative as Olive's identifications, but they do require duplicate features that share ambiguous titles in the Book of Mormon. It is an extremely

messy correlation and requires special assumptions of duplicated names for geographic features, a requirement that should be viewed with suspicion.

Hedengren's proposed location for Book of Mormon lands presents the problem of coming up with a narrow neck of land somewhere between Zarahemla and Cumorah in this landlocked territory of upstate New York. He interprets the land between two of the Finger Lakes (Lakes Seneca and Cayuga) as this narrow neck. If he is right, this feature would lose all the strategic importance it appears to have held for the Nephites. In its favor, his geography appears to be of a credible scale; he preserves the relative directions mentioned in the Book of Mormon between features, he has managed to find large bodies of water in enough places to pass the "seas" test of the text, and the relative terrain is higher in the south than in the north, as required by descriptions in the Book of Mormon. He has also picked a significant river for the Sidon.

In my review of Hedengren's first edition, I considered only two points of logic and did not delve into the geographical, archaeological, or anthropological details of his proposal. I attempted to show that Hedengren's argument that the New York Hill Cumorah was the hill mentioned in the Book of Mormon failed to make the case. His argument for Cumorah remains essentially unchanged in this second edition, and my assessment remains the same: it does not work. There is no compelling logical case to be made for identifying the hill in Palmyra as the hill Ramah in the Book of Mormon, so the best that LGL advocates can do is rely on traditional Mormon views on this matter. Such an assumption provides sufficient grounds for building a geography without pretending to establish it on a more rigorous logical basis.

The other issue I addressed was the notion of puzzling together the picture of the Book of Mormon lands in such a way that textual understanding could be aided by knowledge of a real-world setting. Hedengren has since removed much of this argument from his second edition, but it remains the key metaphor and objective of Aston's

book. I agree with the sentiment of reconstructing a clear picture, but true understanding depends on getting the real-world correlation exactly right, something that no geography has managed to do. None of the proposed LGL geographies successfully passes the tests of physical geography or archaeology. In a footnote to my review of Hedengren's first edition I proposed that the simplest physical test for locating Book of Mormon lands would be to locate a volcano near a seashore.⁷ Hedengren addresses this issue in his section 5, "The Geology of the Destruction Recorded in 3 Nephi," of chapter 14. This is his longest treatment of any topic, but it has almost no geology in it. Without specifying the source of counterarguments that he is addressing, thus maintaining his practice of not citing any previous assessments of Book of Mormon geographical matters, he spins hypothetical reasons why the descriptions in 3 Nephi could not depict a volcanic eruption. There is no indication that he has consulted professional geologists on these topics, read about vulcanology, or read travelers' descriptions of volcanic eruptions in Central America. In short, his appreciation of physical expectations of such eruptions appears deficient, a circumstance that would render his opinion on these issues problematic. His argument is unconvincing. Aston makes a similar exculpatory argument in his book. He claims that volcanoes are not required to explain the conditions in the accounts, but he demonstrates little knowledge of their effects.

As before, a major deficiency with Hedengren's second edition (and also with Olive's book) is the failure to build on the extensive literature on Book of Mormon geography. Hedengren reveals no sign of having read the work of others on Book of Mormon geography, and he has consulted only a few outside sources on geography and archaeology. His treatment of subjects is selective, with avoidance of difficult issues the norm, coupled with the promotion of a few minor matters that seem to favor his particular correlation. Hedengren appears more concerned with minor issues than the main message. Issues of method and inference are not addressed.

7. Clark, "Two Points of Book of Mormon Geography," 22–23.

When I first addressed Book of Mormon geography in a review,⁸ I made the point that the first step in fashioning a geography is a thorough analysis and understanding of the Book of Mormon text on its own merits, unencumbered by any real-world correlations. All geographies claim to receive validation of proposed lands by showing how closely Book of Mormon features correspond to the real world. In short, they require some sort of goodness-of-fit analysis based on comparisons between a map of Book of Mormon lands drawn from references in the text (what I call an internal map) and a map of the real world. None of the books considered here begins by creating an internal map to compare to the real world. Olive and Aston mention such maps created by others in their appended materials, but Heden-gren does not even do this. Rather, he has worked interactively, or dialectically, between the text and the region proposed for Book of Mormon lands, thereby creating only one map. This is a recipe for disaster because it lures the model builder into distorting the meaning of the text to fit the proposed real-world setting. Thus the narrow neck ends up being something as strange as a narrow strip of land between two finger lakes; others have to resurrect ancient lakes to bound the desired territory of Nephite lands.

Aston's Return to Cumorah

Of all LGL proposals I have seen, Aston's *Return to Cumorah* makes the strongest case for a credible geography. For those seriously interested in an LGL geography, this is the book I recommend. It is succinct and deals with a variety of evidence. His analysis is interesting because he once held the view that Book of Mormon lands were located in Mexico and Central America but has since become persuaded that a much stronger case can be made for western New York and Pennsylvania and Ontario, Canada. In particular, he rejects the so-called "two-Cumorah theory." I do not accept Aston's arguments, but I consider them the best of the current proposals that are trying to reclaim New York as ancient Nephite and Lamanite territory.

8. Clark, "A Key for Evaluating Nephite Geographies," 20–70.

The force of Aston's argument is to change the default assumptions of current theorizing about Book of Mormon lands. As do other authors, he presumes that the current interest in Central American cultures is an unjustified distraction that goes back to the 1840s, when the spectacular ruins of stone cities there were first brought to the attention of the English-speaking world. Back when members of the Church of Jesus Christ naively thought Book of Mormon lands encompassed all the Americas, speculation about Mesoamerican cultures as being Nephite or Lamanite made sense. Now, with the consensual realization that the lands of the Book of Mormon were quite small, fitting a Middle American picture together with a New York hill becomes untenable. Within the past fifty years there has been a major shift of opinion among the church membership about the probable location of Book of Mormon lands, to such an extent that those advocating Great Lakes geographies find themselves arguing the minority position. Therefore, those so engaged need to provide especially strong arguments to overcome current default assumptions that favor competing models for a Mesoamerican setting. Aston sets up his argument to address the major traditional objections to a New York geography. He presumes that if he can remove these objections, we should favor an upstate New York correlation because it would conform to long-standing church traditions and the stunning symbolism of having the gospel restored in this same place where it was lost. I consider his specific arguments below.

In fourteen succinct chapters, Aston considers and amply illustrates major features of Nephite geography as described in the Book of Mormon and identifies them with places in upstate New York, Pennsylvania, and Ontario. He also considers the archaeological remains and customs of native peoples of this area and the concordances of these data with the sacred account. The region that Aston identifies as Book of Mormon lands is most similar to, but slightly larger than, the geography proposed by Delbert Curtis in *Christ in North America*. The narrow neck of land between Lake Ontario and Lake Erie is the narrow neck of land of the Nephites. Ontario is the principal land northward, but a strip of land along the south coast of Lake

Ontario is also a limited land northward—similar to Curtis’s and Olive’s proposals. Western New York and Pennsylvania constitute the land southward. The Genesee River is the river Sidon, and Zarahemla is in the region of Geneseo, New York, east of the Genesee River and southwest of Cumorah. It is on the wrong side of the river, but presumably this problem can be overcome.

As with all LGL proposals, Aston is forced to improvise in identifying the named seas of Book of Mormon lands. The northern portion of Lake Erie is the west sea, and the western portion of Lake Ontario is the sea west, while the eastern part of this same lake is the sea east. Lake Cayuga of the Finger Lakes is the east sea. The sea south is the southern portion of Lake Erie. For the greater land northward, Lake Huron serves as the sea west with its northernmost extremity (Georgian Bay) serving as the sea north. A critical point in this confusing cascade of “seas” is one’s point of reference, whether it be in the land northward or southward. Perspective and point of reference are important issues, but it looks very much like special pleading to have different names for the same bodies of water and the same names for different bodies of water. This undercuts the utility of naming things and referring to them in normal speech.

It is a frequent practice in Book of Mormon geographies, when confronted with an uncooperative claim from the text about the locations of things vis-à-vis one’s proposed geography, to postulate the existence of two different places with the same name. Given Aston’s goal of resolving the problem of two Cumorahs, it is ironic that he must have two lands northward and duplicate seas to pull it off. To me, duplication of place names is a sure sign of trouble with a geography and of overly complex assumptions about how to read the text. Aston’s correlation is implausible. The reason both Curtis and Aston need two lands northward is the awkward fact that the proposed hill Cumorah is east of the Niagara neck, their proposed narrow neck of land. In simplistic internal geographies that read the Book of Mormon as implying a narrow neck of land connecting the lands northward and southward, the existence of the hill Cumorah south or

southeast of the narrow neck places it in the land southward. Unfortunately for these correlations, the Book of Mormon clearly places this hill in the land northward. The hill Cumorah is a later name for the Jaredite hill Ramah, and the Jaredites inhabited only the land northward. We are thus required to place Cumorah in the land northward. Failure to do so is sufficient to dismiss all correlations that identify the Niagara neck as the narrow neck of land mentioned in the Book of Mormon. Having a land northward for the Jaredites and later Nephites that is different from that for the early Nephites is overly complicated and unconvincing.

Correlations of Book of Mormon features and cities with modern geographies are illustrated by maps in the front and back folds of Aston's book (conveniently located and easy to use) as well as fourteen other maps and charts interspersed throughout the text to clarify detailed arguments. Aston places the city of Zarahemla about twenty-five to thirty miles south of Rochester, and he puts the city of Nephi in the very southwestern corner of New York state near Jamestown. As with Olive's geography, his land southward is a compressed micro-geography that leaves little room for the travel distances mentioned in the Book of Mormon.

Within its genre, however, *Return to Cumorah* provides the most thorough coverage so far of the archaeology of New York. As discussed by Aston, much of this has been destroyed since initial settlement by European colonists in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. But much can be reconstructed from early historical accounts. Aston's reconstructed maps of aboriginal settlement patterns for this area are impressive and demonstrate convincingly that this was a fertile land for agriculture that once supported significant populations. As discussed below, Aston uses the archaeological record to show the plausibility of some of his claims, but he fails to pursue these data to their logical conclusions.

In the following discussion of individual arguments, I provide more detailed assessments of pending issues for LGL geographies. I disagree with much of what is offered as evidence in support of

LGL geographies, the interpretation of supposed “facts,” and the logic of many of the arguments. As do Olive and Curtis, Aston relies on rhetoric and innuendo to establish some of his case. Contrary to his claims, the geographic details of western New York do not correlate as well with the Book of Mormon account as do those proposed for Mesoamerica. Aston’s lands are too small and could not, and did not, support the tens of thousands of people described in the Book of Mormon account at A.D. 400. He has to pull and stretch the facts of the Book of Mormon and local New York geography to make them mesh. Moreover, New York does not come close to fulfilling the temporal and cultural requirements of the Book of Mormon. I read Aston’s argument in manuscript form before publication, and I communicated these views to him. He countered that all geographies have problems with archaeological and anthropological details, a point with which I agree. But he dismissed my concerns, I can only suppose, as irresolvable problems. The more appropriate response would have been to consider the possibility that all the geographies are wrong. In the following sections, I work my way through the arguments of Aston’s book, with inclusion of arguments from the other LGL books when appropriate. I accord Aston’s book greater attention here because it is the best of the lot. I have no particular desire to single out this book for hard critique; rather, my purpose is to respond to arguments advanced in the cause of an LGL geography and put them on record. This might serve some readers who want a second opinion as well as model builders who want to avoid the problems identified in the current models for an LGL geography of Book of Mormon lands.

An Assessment of LGL Arguments

Book of Mormon Geography Is Knowable

Of the books under consideration, Aston’s book comes the closest to being a scholarly production. I address the principal arguments in his book in the order of their original presentation. Thus this review can be read alongside his text. “It is the premise of this book that Book of Mormon lands really can be identified, and experi-

enced, if we are but willing to recognize that the Book of Mormon itself contains sufficiently many clues on features of geography that can clear up our understanding” (Aston, pp. 4–5). Aston notes that a pervasive attitude prevails among church members that Book of Mormon lands cannot be known. I agree with him that the details of the text are sufficient to provide a plausible hope of actually identifying these ancient lands. This has not yet been convincingly done. Aston argues that in attempting to make this identification, priority ought to be given to details of physical geography rather than of archaeology, although the latter should be considered later. This also becomes a decision rule for evaluating proposals. “Thus to the degree that correlation exists between features of geography and the Book of Mormon accounts, confidence can be established” (Aston, p. 3). This can all be accomplished if we have at least one known point in real space on which to tie Book of Mormon geography. All the LGL proposals presume the Hill Cumorah in New York to be that known point.

One Cumorah or Two?

We can first recognize that the Hill Cumorah, mentioned in Mormon, Chapter 6, is a point of Book of Mormon geography that should be known with certainty, since the Prophet Joseph Smith and the Saints in the early days of the Church accepted its location as indisputable. Therefore this should be the starting point from which to start to begin building an understanding of Book of Mormon geography. (Aston, p. 5)

Such claims are the crux of the debate between those who would place Nephite lands in Middle America and those who would place them in New York. I have dealt with this argument in some detail in my review of Curtis’s book; I call it the “trap of obvious facts.”⁹ Given the way many church members treat gossip as information, it is unlikely that this matter can ever be resolved short of the prophet making a clear declaration from the pulpit. The best internal analysis of

9. Clark, “The Final Battle for Cumorah,” 110.

the Book of Mormon text on this matter is presented by Hedengren, but he fails to prove his case. To my knowledge, no one has made a thorough analysis of early statements by church leaders on this matter.

Labeling the Middle America argument as the “two-Cumorah” theory is really an unfortunate use of language. The issue revolves around the probable location of the Cumorah mentioned by Mormon as the depository of the Nephite records and the place of the final battle. No geographer, of any stripe, believes that there are two hills of this description. There is only one Cumorah/Ramah, and it was clearly an integral part of Jaredite and Nephite geography in the land northward, north of the narrow neck of land, and near the East Sea. Likewise, no one questions that the hill near Palmyra was the location from which Joseph Smith obtained the abridged record deposited by Moroni. Moreover, no one really questions that early Saints and even close associates of the Prophet Joseph Smith called the Palmyra hill “Cumorah.” Their beliefs and convictions on the matter, however, do not count as “indisputable” evidence, as Aston believes. That this “fact” has been disputed for over a century raises questions about its indisputability. The issue is whether the Palmyra hill is the same one known by Mormon and Ether. Middle America advocates claim that it is not; LGL advocates claim that it is.

First, the final arbiter of information on Book of Mormon geography ought to be the sacred canon itself, not just hearsay. If Mormon’s Cumorah was in New York, all the facts in the book ought to bear this out. Nothing is wrong with taking this location as a working hypothesis; it is quite another matter, however, to make it a declaration of faith and an issue of scholarly warfare. If the Palmyra hill represents another hill in a distant land given the same name by Moroni after Mormon’s death, then trying to make it conform to the requirements of the Book of Mormon Cumorah should create substantial dissonance with the recorded facts of Nephite geography.

Second, the engraved plates could not contain a description of their own deposition. Why? The book would have been sealed before it was deposited in its final hiding place. The best we could have is

Moroni's thoughts on where he intended to bury the plates, but we do not even have this. Just as one cannot read a sealed book, one cannot write in a sealed book. Moroni's last writings clarified that he did not know the Lord's will with regard to the plates or the reasons for his prolonged survival after his comrades were slain (see Hedengren, pp. 39–46). Why would the final deposition of the plates be any different?

Third, the only evidence in support of a New York Ramah/Cumorah is Mormon folklore. I think it is clear that Joseph Smith Jr. himself did not know the location of Book of Mormon lands. The authors I examine here treat the various accounts attributed to Joseph Smith in different ways. They accept some and reject others. Olive provides a good analysis of Frederick G. Williams's statement about the location of the Lehites' landing attributed to the Prophet, and she dismisses it (pp. 1–16). She also makes a case that the statement written in the *Times and Seasons* about the lands of the Book of Mormon being in Guatemala could *not* have been approved by Joseph Smith, even though he was the editor of this paper, because he was in hiding and incommunicado at the time. Aston makes this same point. So good reasons are found to cast doubt on troublesome statements, and favorable ones are accepted and promoted with little criticism. In short, there appear to be two sets of rules for evaluating evidence; this is self-serving and unacceptable.

I would like to see more evenhandedness in dealing with statements from Latter-day Saints. As a matter of analytical rigor, I think all speculative statements by Latter-day Saints should be dismissed before beginning any serious analysis. Oliver Cowdery's account of the hill full of records, as later related by Brigham Young, is an example. This is supposed to clinch the case for a New York Ramah/Cumorah. I have dealt with this account in my review of Curtis's book.¹⁰ Sufficient ambiguity exists in the different accounts of this supposed event to cause one to wonder whether it was a pedestrian stroll to

10. Ibid., 93–98.

nearby Cumorah or whether the participants were caught up in vision and shown the room full of ancient records and other artifacts. If the latter, this hill could be anywhere. It bears pointing out here that approval of early Mormon traditions of any particular locations by later apostles and General Authorities does not settle an issue. The bottom line is that any statements not fully consonant with or contradicting what is in the Book of Mormon must be treated as speculation. On the other hand, opinions that merely restate the text add nothing to it. The dangerous area is where opinion is thought to clarify ambiguities in the text, of which there are many. The minimal fact that various statements are attributed to Joseph Smith that place cities in different lands suggests that he continued to be interested throughout his life in the location of Book of Mormon lands and, consequently, that it remained an open question for him. If he knew where they were, why did he continue guessing? Should we not be similarly open-minded today? Do we go with the Prophet's early statements or his later statements?

One of the marvels of the Book of Mormon translation is that Joseph Smith gave us a record that surpassed his own understanding. The thrust of all Hugh Nibley's analyses of this text and of others is that the book is full of truths that could not have been known either to any secular scholars of Joseph Smith's time or even to him. One of the best testimonies of the truth of the work is that Joseph Smith did not seem to know the details of the book. The logical obverse of this has been the standard fare of anti-Mormonism from the beginning: If all the details in the Book of Mormon geography were readily at hand in New York and Pennsylvania, this could be seen as evidence that Joseph Smith made the whole thing up. This conclusion does not necessarily follow, of course, but such a correlation would certainly be sufficient grounds for strong suspicion.

Names are important things. It would be interesting to know what Cumorah meant in the language of the Nephites. If it meant something like "record depository," then it could have served as a functional label as well as a place name. I have heard such an etymol-

ogy attributed to the name, but I have not looked for its source or validated this reading. One of the questions here is whether we are seeing the reuse of an honored name. This is a particularly ironic issue for upstate New York and for Latter-day Saints. We do not think of the Old World Palmyra when we use the name in conjunction with Joseph Smith. Nor is the Old World implicated in the names of neighboring New York towns: Syracuse, Geneva, Greece, Hamburg, Holland, Castile, Rome, and Utica. Likewise, we consider it natural for the early Saints in Utah Territory to use honored names for their towns and natural features: Bountiful, Jordan, Nephi, Lehi, Manti, and Moroni. In both situations, the reuse of traditional names was part of colonial expansion into Indian lands and its appropriation by immigrants. Naming was an important part of domesticating the frontier. The New York Cumorah could represent the reuse of a worthy name in a similar manner.

If we are dealing with an original hill and a later hill named in honor of the first, then any archaeological expectations, as inferred from the text, would apply only to the original hill. The most thorough analysis of the physical expectations for the hill Ramah/Cumorah has been provided by David A. Palmer.¹¹ As noted above, the hill should be located in the land northward, north of the narrow neck of land, and near the east sea. It should also have been large enough to have accommodated two wars of extermination involving tens of thousands of casualties. The area round about would have to have been highly productive agriculturally to sustain the warring Nephites during their few years of preparation.

Finally, we have a plausible expectation of finding evidence of war, whether fortifications, habitations, weapons, or skeletons of victims. This evidence should reasonably date to two different time periods about one thousand years apart. The Palmyra Cumorah does not meet any of these expectations. It is awkwardly located; it is much too small; the area lacked the necessary agricultural potential,

11. David A. Palmer, *In Search of Cumorah: New Evidences for the Book of Mormon from Ancient Mexico* (Bountiful, Utah: Horizon, 1981).

at least in Book of Mormon times when New York natives still were not using corn; and it lacks the expected archaeological record. Even if defensive trenches, weapons, and bodies were buried, they would still be archaeologically detectable or obvious. Given these deficiencies, is it any wonder that scholars have searched elsewhere for the original hill? The limited archaeological evidence proffered by LGL advocates is all old hearsay about items said to have been found in the Palmyra region. It has not been confirmed, but even were we to give it the benefit of the doubt, the evidence favors other hills, not Palmyra's Cumorah.

The Land of Promise

The books by Curtis, Olive, and Aston interpret the prophecies recorded in 1 Nephi about the "land of promise" as past history. This involves a double ambiguity of taking a general description of a future event and coupling it with posterior guesses as to the events foretold. The most extensive treatments are those by Curtis and Olive. Their readings of the promised-land scriptures are exclusionary. Curtis and Aston read the foretold events of the discovery and population of the promised land by fair gentiles as excluding Mexico and Central America. Olive reads these same scriptures as excluding Canada as well, a position more logically consistent with the proposed narrow interpretation than that of either Aston or Curtis. All these readings are strained, however. The main consequence, and perhaps main purpose, of reading them in this limiting way is to undercut the plausibility of Mesoamerican geographic correlations and make way for an LGL theory as the only surviving alternative. If Mexico is not part of the land of promise, it necessarily follows that Nephite lands could not have been located there, and vice versa. Olive's extensive discussion follows that of Curtis. She makes two points. First, she reads the scriptures of the promised land in order to locate the general lands of the Book of Mormon. Once these are identified within the boundaries of the United States, she then specifies that the lim-

ited lands, or narrative center, of Book of Mormon lands based on the geographic clues were located in western New York.

I have always read these scriptures as New World–inclusive rather than exclusive. The only places clearly excluded are those Lehi and company left behind. I have addressed the issue of conflating prophecy with history in my review of Curtis’s book.¹² As with Cumorah controversies, arguments over the extent of the promised land are irresolvable, short of modern prophetic utterance, because the various positions are decided in advance by prejudices. The main points in favor of a limited identification for the land of promise are that it was to be a land of liberty not subject to a king, a land populated by fair-skinned gentiles, and a land in which the descendants of the Lamanites would be scattered. But parts of the same prophecy are interpreted as referring to Columbus, a gentile moved upon by the Spirit to discover the promised land. Columbus does not fit easily into a limited interpretation for the land of promise, since he never touched the shores of the future United States. Another difficulty with the limited interpretation is the confusion of a “land” for the political territory of a nation-state. Why not, for example, interpret the scripture as referring to the early United States when it had only thirteen colonies rather than to its political territory over a century later? This limited territory would better correspond with the proposed narrative center of Book of Mormon lands described in these books.

It is indeed important to establish that the Book of Mormon narrative occurred in the New World. I have seen an interesting proposal that places the events in Malaysia rather than accepting this inference. Hedengren’s brief analysis on this point works better than either Olive’s or Curtis’s painful exegesis. He quotes the visit of the angel Moroni to Joseph Smith saying that the Book of Mormon gives “an account of the former inhabitants of this continent, and the source from which they sprang” (Joseph Smith—History 1:34). Because this message was delivered to Joseph Smith in New York,

12. Clark, “The Final Battle for Cumorah,” 82–93.

“this” must refer at least to the North American continent. “Continent” appears to be a much more plausible reading of “land” than is “nation-state.” If so, interpretations of the land of promise probably should not be read as excluding Mexico, Canada, or Central America—or even South America.

The reading of a limited promised land as the contiguous United States involves an irony for any LGL geography. Olive cites the evidence for the New Jerusalem to be built in Jackson County, Missouri, and the scriptural evidence for the location of Adam-ondi-Ahman (p. 21). All of her evidence points to Missouri, but then she argues that the narrated events took place in western New York. Her Cumorah is as distant from Missouri as Mexico is. Why privilege one over the other? As Curtis does, she argues that the Indians in Mexico and Central America were too civilized and organized to be descendants of the Lamanites. This is not a sound argument. In addition to accidental bigotry, it presumes perfect knowledge of the meaning of scripture. Aston summarizes the main points of his argument as follows:

The Lord showed Nephi that “many multitudes of Gentiles” would come “upon the land of promise.” These Gentiles would “prosper and obtain the land for their inheritance.” These Gentiles would be “fair and beautiful.” They had “gone forth out of captivity,” having the power of the Lord with them (1 Nephi 13:14–16). What other people could this refer to, other than those Gentiles, pilgrims, who had come to occupy eastern United States and Canada in colonial times? (Aston, p. 6)

I suspect that this question was not really meant to be answered, but the clear answer is that the scripture refers to all the other people from the Old World who came to the New World, which included Mexico, Central America, and South America. At the end of his argument, Aston throws in the Statue of Liberty and its inscription as confirming and inspirational evidence, as if its existence establishes

the case of the United States as the only land of liberty and prosperity in the New World. I do not accept his arguments, but extensive confrontation on the matter is pointless since no concrete details concerning specific lands are involved. It is sufficient here to suggest that interpretations of the land of promise as only the United States are unwarranted. What we need for finding Book of Mormon lands is clear information about features and the direction and distance between them. Each of the authors provides a list of features that he or she thinks makes the case. I focus on those advanced by Aston.

Sailing and Landing

The first, immediate consequence of choosing the Palmyra hill as Ramah/Cumorah is that all Book of Mormon peoples must have landed somewhere near there. This identification requires the Lehites to have sailed their craft around the Cape of Good Hope and across the Atlantic Ocean, which counters expectations based on some old hearsay in the Mormon tradition. I agree with the LGL authors that such hearsay evidence of Lehi's landing should not count as real evidence, for reasons already mentioned. The Book of Mormon does not specify the oceans crossed; rather, they have been inferred from internal reconstructions of the geography. Hedengren and Curtis provide evidence of winds and currents that show the physical feasibility of Atlantic crossings for the Jaredites, Nephites, and Mulekites. Other advocates have done the same for Middle American geographies and Pacific Ocean crossings. For the Lehites, the travels of Nephi and his band indicate a landing on the shores of the west sea, with subsequent travels northward and eastward to escape the Lamanites. The sense of the text is that the Lehites suffered a long journey across an immense sea and landed quickly and gratefully on its shore. For me, the Pacific Ocean and a Middle American landing appear the best explanation.

I have little problem with the proposition that some of the Great Lakes are extensive enough to have been called "seas" anciently, in the same sense conveyed by the Sea of Galilee. What I cannot square with

the text is the notion that these terms would exclude the ocean crossed by the Nephites to get to the land of promise. It is hard to imagine being impressed by a lake after spending six months to a year on the ocean. The LGL proposals have all the groups approaching the promised land from the east rather than the west. Hedengren proposes an ocean shore landing for the Lehites in the Chesapeake Bay, but it is southeast of his projected Book of Mormon lands. This does not work. Locating the Jaredites and Mulekites presents other problems, as they settled lands north of the Nephites. Hedengren speculates that they also landed on the Atlantic coast and worked their way inland following rivers until they reached western New York. In contrast, Olive and Aston argue that the Nephite landing was on the eastern shore of Lake Erie. Curtis has the Nephites and Mulekites landing on the southern shore of Lake Ontario. His proposal has the minor advantage of not forcing his people to sail upstream over Niagara Falls, as implied in Aston's and Olive's proposals. These proposed arrival points are a logical necessity, given their commitment to a Palmyra Cumorah and to the Great Lakes as Book of Mormon "seas." But such landings present logistical difficulties. How did the ocean craft sail upstream and over shallows, rapids, and falls to reach lakes hundreds of miles inland? Such a route would have been extremely difficult, and it certainly could not have been the first landing by any stretch of the imagination. There must be a vast literature on the travails of actual peoples who attempted this route. Those who argue this position ought to examine this literature. For the Nephites, and others, it would have required a month or more of additional travel and probably change in water craft and periodic portage to work their way inland from the Atlantic coast, none of which is warranted by the text.

In truth, all LGL geographies have difficulties with the water passages of the text. They have potential seas in all directions but no easy way for their travelers to get to them from the Atlantic Ocean. If some of the seas mentioned in the Book of Mormon really are oceans rather than lakes, then its narrative center is necessarily somewhere in Middle

America, a narrow land flanked by bona fide oceans. Those who wish to believe that Mediterranean peoples landed in the Great Lakes near Kirtland, Ohio, need to show the feasibility of such a trip. So far they have not established a credible case.

The Narrow Neck of Land

Aside from Cumorah, the next most important feature in Book of Mormon geographies is the narrow neck of land which divided the land southward from the land northward. Both Aston and Curtis identify the narrow neck with the Niagara neck between Lakes Ontario and Erie. Aston provides evidence that Niagara is an Indian place-name that means "narrow or small neck" (pp. 21–22), but he is cautious enough not to take this correspondence as definitive evidence. Olive has to fabricate a narrow neck of land south of Niagara by resurrecting ancient lakes; her proposal is baseless on geological grounds. For his part, Hedengren argues for a stretch of land between two of the Finger Lakes. For Aston, the proximity of this feature to the Palmyra Cumorah settles the matter:

It is remarkable that a narrow neck of land exists not far from a known point of Book of Mormon geography, the Hill Cumorah. Knowledge of this correlation becomes evidence that the narrow neck of land at Niagara is that neck of land mentioned in the Book of Mormon. So compelling is this knowledge, that it becomes strong evidence that the setting for the Book of Mormon took place in nearby lands. This would seem to go a long way toward dispelling theories that there might exist another Hill Cumorah. (Aston, p. 22)

Aston describes how he struggled with his own misconceptions that the hill Cumorah was north of the narrow neck, and how he finally resolved this difficulty. In the process, he claims to resolve other difficult passages involving water. The key is two different meanings for the "land northward," a solution also arrived at by Curtis. Given

the importance of correctly identifying the narrow neck, Aston's account merits detailed attention.

The dilemma that I faced was this: if these north countries were above the narrow neck of land as is typically believed, then why do Book of Mormon accounts not give even the slightest hint that Mormon and his armies crossed the narrow neck of land, coming over to the known location of Hill Cumorah for their last battles (see Mormon 6:2)? The record is silent on such a possibility.

This matter disturbed me for years until I was eventually able to shed some new light on the matter. The solution to this puzzle lies in a different understanding of what is meant by use of the term "the land northward."

Simply, it means that almost all significant Book of Mormon events, first involving the Jaredites and then the Nephites, took place in lands located below the narrow neck of land, in lands northward to Zarahemla. The land of Desolation lay on the southern seashores of an ancient lake, present-day Lake Ontario. (Aston, pp. 23, 25)

The other land northward is southern Ontario, a land nearly surrounded by water. Aston sees this as a remarkable correspondence to the description in Helaman 3:8, which claims that the Nephites began to cover the whole earth "from the sea south to the sea north, from the sea west to the sea east." This postulated piece of ground does indeed accord well with Mormon's description—if we are willing to grant duplicate names for seas and if we suppose that Mormon was describing a land not frequented by either Jaredites or Nephites.

Both Curtis and Aston use southern Ontario as their escape hatch for the troublesome scriptures of the cardinal seas, but they have no use for this region otherwise, and they do not place a single city or feature in it or even illustrate it on their principal maps. This second land northward serves no apparent role in Book of Mormon history as they relate it. Recall that this is a land in which all the trees had

been cut down, and the later inhabitants built cement cities—not a likely possibility for Ontario. Aston points out that his interpretation of this land is better than one I suggested in which I considered the language concerning filling the whole earth with peoples, from sea to sea to sea to sea, as effusive and possibly metaphorical.¹³ He might be right, but the issue will only be resolved, and can only be evaluated, by taking into account all other correspondences to requirements of the Book of Mormon narrative. Aston further proposes that the Niagara River that bisects the narrow neck is a good candidate for the place where the “sea divides the land.”

I have already pointed out some problems and consequences of this particular case of duplicate naming. The first is that the larger of the lands northward lay inert, for all intents and purposes. Second, the active land northward, the strip of land hugging the southern shore of Lake Ontario (the Ontario Plain), is much too short and far too wide to have served as the northern lands described in the Book of Mormon. We are exhorted to believe that the Jaredites spent over a millennium in this pancaked land northward and never strayed thirty miles south into the land southward.

Consider Aston's claims quoted above. The first is a case of circular reasoning. The identification of Niagara only becomes plausible by its association with a known point of geography: Cumorah. But Cumorah cannot be taken as a known point, so its conjectured validity cannot be used to support additional claims. A better way to proceed would be to read the text and then look for a hill and a narrow neck that have the physical relationship suggested by the text. As Aston notes, his earlier expectations countered those he finally came to believe after he struggled mightily with the issue. His discussion of Mormon's movements is another case of fallacious reasoning. The Book of Mormon accounts of the final Nephite wars do provide sufficient evidence that Mormon was in the land northward, and no mention is made of later crossing the narrow neck to get to Cumorah because it was located farther north in the land northward—close

13. Clark, “A Key for Evaluating Nephite Geographies,” 65.

by—rather than to the south. If we start our analysis with a question rather than a conclusion, things become clearer. The geographical distortions necessitated by the belief that the Palmyra hill is Mormon's Cumorah are obvious, and they constitute good evidence that Aston's correlation and identifications simply do not fit. In making this claim, I am giving Aston's dilemma the benefit of the doubt. But he wades into dangerous waters with his claim that failure to mention things in the text is positive evidence that something did not occur. Hedengren uses a similar argument in making his case that Moroni did not wander far from Cumorah/Ramah—because he did not record that he did (p. 43). It is not legitimate to second-guess what the absence of evidence in the text means and then to use one's guess as evidence.

The major challenge for LGL correlations is to find a plausible narrow neck that gives a land northward that is as extensive as its land southward and that has as much evidence for prehistoric population. Unlike the land southward, our historic expectations for the land northward are for evidence of an earlier civilization, up to two thousand years older than the bulk of the Nephite occupation superimposed upon it.

The River Sidon

Of the four geographies considered here, only Aston's proposes a credible candidate for the river Sidon. He suggests that it is the modern Genesee River; this river is about 110 miles long and runs northward from northern Pennsylvania to Rochester and into Lake Ontario. The Book of Mormon account places the headwaters of the Sidon south of the city and land of Zarahemla. And it specifies a river that could be forded in its upper reaches but which had sufficient current to carry dead bodies out to sea. The most thorough textual analysis of the river Sidon is by John and Janet Hilton.¹⁴ Curtis pro-

14. John L. Hilton and Janet F. Hilton, "A Correlation of the Sidon River and the Lands of Manti and Zarahemla with the Southern End of the Rio Grijalva (San Miguel)," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1/1 (1992): 142–62.

poses the short Niagara River as his candidate for Sidon. As mentioned, Aston interprets the Niagara River as the place where the “sea divides the land.” Olive proposes Buffalo Creek–Buffalo River as the Sidon. This river is much too short and small to be considered a viable candidate. For his part, Hedengren argues for the mighty Susquehanna River. It appears to be of the right order of magnitude in length and volume, but it flows southward rather than northward, as required by Book of Mormon description. This flaw is so serious as to invalidate his entire scheme. Further, he does not address this issue. Were he to find a good candidate for the Sidon, his geography would be the best of the current crop of LGL geographies. As it stands, Aston’s Sidon is the best of the lot, but his identification is still unsatisfactory, and his argument for making his case is even less acceptable. Consider some of it:

Proximity of the Genesee River to the known Hill Cumorah in the north would seem to suggest that this river was indeed the River Sidon of the Book of Mormon. If so, then the Hill Cumorah was near events associated with the land of Zarahemla. Again, in Alma 2:15 it is noted that the River Sidon ran by the land of Zarahemla.

Referring to the internal maps of Appendix A, please notice that other geographers typically place Hill Cumorah outside of the core of Book of Mormon events, in a land that seems too far northward, too far from the core of Book of Mormon events which occurred at Zarahemla.

It would seem that only the proposed New York geography can make it clear that Hill Cumorah was indeed located not far from the heart of Book of Mormon events. Perhaps for this reason Hill Cumorah was chosen as the site for the last battles of both the Jaredites and the Nephites. (Aston, p. 41)

So much is wrong with this argument that it is hard to know where to begin. If anything, Aston’s claim leads to the opposite conclusion: that his correlation cannot possibly be correct. First, he makes

an assertion and not an argument. What is claimed as a conclusion is really a rewording of his initial premise—that his chosen river must be the Sidon because it is proximate to the known point of the hill Cumorah. This is a repetition of his argument for identifying the narrow neck of land, and it does not work for all the same reasons. More embarrassing is the distortion of the Book of Mormon text necessary to suggest such an argument. The river Sidon is unambiguously located in the land southward, but curiously, its entry point into the sea is never mentioned. Sidon and Cumorah are clearly in different lands and are never mentioned in any passages as being proximate. That Aston would try to make a case for his Sidon in this manner is curious. One can take it as a simple decision rule that any proposed geography that places Cumorah near the river Sidon must be incorrect.

Aston presumes to know the location of Mormon's Cumorah. From this he identifies the river Sidon, in defiance of all geographical relationships in the Book of Mormon. He then uses these two conjectures as a platform to recommend a different reading of the text and for dismissing all other geographies that correctly place Cumorah outside the river Sidon drainage. He further suggests that this provides a key for understanding Jaredite and Nephite military strategies. Cumorah was not proximate to the Nephite settlements in the land of Zarahemla; it was not near the core of the action of early Nephite history. Rather, Cumorah represented a point of distant refuge to which the Nephites fled to gain separation from their enemies in an effort to buy time to prepare for their end game.

Aston's argument is upside down—he uses the physical geography as a basis for creatively rereading the Book of Mormon. This unacceptable practice leads to erroneous conclusions. In no known travel account of warriors or missionaries south (or east) of the narrow neck of land is there any mention of the land of Cumorah or of the hill Cumorah. And we have a rather complete account of the identities of all these lands from all the wars; no empty space is unaccounted for south of the narrow neck of land. Cumorah did not en-

ter Nephite history until the final two centuries (A.D. 200–421), after they were forced into the land northward and had to concede all the land southward to the Lamanites.

Careful attention to Mormon's account of being given charge of the records and of his moving them to safe caves puts the hill Cumorah north of the narrow neck of land, where all internal geographies place it. The same accounts mention the river Sidon only in its headwaters and in its course through the land of Zarahemla. There is no account of anyone traveling along the Sidon north of Zarahemla to the sea, perhaps suggesting that such travel was difficult or impossible. No such impediments characterize the candidates for Sidon considered here.¹⁵

Desolation and the Defensive Line

Aston's analysis of the fortified line between the lands of Bountiful and Desolation follows his method of argumentation noted above, with the consequence being "some surprisingly different interpretations of Book of Mormon accounts" (Aston, p. 56), the principal one being his placement of Desolation below the narrow neck. Given his treatment of Cumorah, the narrow neck, and Sidon, this should come as no surprise. The scriptures describe the "line" as a "fortified" line. Aston suggests that this fortified line may have corresponded to a natural feature of the landscape. This interpretation is possible, of course, but nothing in the text supports such speculation. Aston eventually identifies the Niagara escarpment (the strand line of ancient Lake Iroquois) as this line. He presumes he has it correctly identified, of course, with one consequence being that most other geographers are misreading the text and placing Desolation north of the narrow neck. From Niagara Falls this two-hundred-foot-high escarpment runs eastward, paralleling the southern shore of Lake Ontario

15. In putting this last speculation in print, I have violated my own rule of thumb: to avoid making positive inferences from the absence of evidence. So I do not consider this argument serious—only interesting. The known problems with Aston's Sidon are sufficient to negate his hypothesis several times over without recourse to such postulated features.

until it peters out about fifty miles away, halfway to Rochester. The low-lying lands between the escarpment and the modern lakeshore are about seven to eight miles wide. This strip of land is Desolation, the principal lands of the Jaredites and the later Mulekites. Curtis and other LGL geographers make similar claims that this escarpment divided a land northward from Bountiful, just to the south, with Zarahemla just to the south of Bountiful. This is clearly an error of scale. The area in question is slightly smaller than the land in Utah Valley east of Utah Lake and west of the Wasatch Front. There simply is not enough real estate in a land this size to accommodate the Book of Mormon accounts of tens of thousands of people. I doubt that the number of current inhabitants of this New York strip, even with modern cultigens and technology, anywhere approaches the number of people said to have lived in these lands in ancient times. It would have to have been one continuous city to even approach the correct order of magnitude.

Consider some of Aston's arguments on these matters.

Given that the Hill Cumorah of western New York played an important role in Jaredite accounts, and assuming that the Jaredites had occupied lands northward above the narrow neck of land at Niagara, they would be required to eventually travel to Hill Cumorah for their destruction. Then why does the Book of Ether not indicate that Jaredites had ever crossed the narrow neck of land in their final wars?

This disparity suggested to me that the land of Desolation lay below the narrow neck of land, and not above as many believe. (Aston, p. 51)

This argument is almost identical to the arguments reviewed for the river Sidon and the narrow neck. It is worth stressing that the "disparities" that Aston confronts *arise only because he presumes to know the location of Ramah/Cumorah*. If he had worked through the Book of Mormon text first, without trying to squeeze the account into a New York setting, he would have continued to favor a placement for

Jaredite lands and Desolation north of the narrow neck of land. It would necessarily follow that Cumorah would be located north of the neck also. Aston's presumption concerning the location of Cumorah forces him to read the scriptures creatively. Thus he wonders why the battle narratives do not mention travels through the narrow neck. The answer that he accepts is that they did not travel through it. From this guess, however, he reaches the erroneous conclusion entailed in his initial premise of knowing the location of Ramah/Cumorah. He presumes that Desolation was necessarily south or east of the narrow neck. The more likely conclusion is that Cumorah was in the land northward, as the majority of readers of the Book of Mormon believe. He is correct that the two lands are contiguous. Desolation takes its name from the ravages of war that culminated at Ramah.

If we approach the riddle of Book of Mormon geography with requisite humility, as a difficult problem, and if we take as our working proposition that we do not really know *a priori* the location of any of the features mentioned, then we will consistently place Desolation and Cumorah north of the narrow neck and defensive line, and Bountiful, Zarahemla, and the land southward south of this same line. The proof of this claim is the numerous internal geographies that have been constructed. As an aside, the argument quoted above suggests that there was not much Jaredite population on the other side of the narrow neck. This undercuts Aston's earlier argument for a second land northward bracketed by cardinal seas. He concludes, "the Book of Mormon seemed to indicate that Jaredite events mainly took place below the narrow neck of land" (Aston, p. 51). This is simply untrue; the text indicates the reverse. Aston's method consistently leads astray.

The Narrow Pass and Fortifications

Aston associates the narrow pass mentioned in the Book of Mormon with the defensive line of fortifications. The bulk of his analysis is to present evidence of ancient fortifications along this strand line. Most of the references are to old reports because most of

these fortifications were destroyed in colonial times. Although he suggests that the evidence is possibly confirmatory, Aston is careful not to put too much weight on it. Of the few sites that have been dated by scientific techniques, many postdate Nephite times by one thousand years. It is highly probable that most of the sites are much too late to have been Book of Mormon fortifications. Aston's caution in this matter is commendable, as is his attempt to look at the primary archaeological sources. In doing such research, interested geographers should realize that reports written before 1950 are chronologically weak. A major pending question concerning the reported high density of ancient remains in this area is their date. For this information, one must search the most recent reports. This remains to be done.

Lessons from Limhi's Lost Messengers

I have claimed that many of the geographies considered here are too small to accommodate some of the travels described for the land southward. Aston analyzes these trips and argues that they sustain his vision for a microgeography of Nephite lands. Of particular interest is the journey of Limhi's scouts/envoys in their search for Zarahemla. "The significance of this expedition is that it clearly demonstrates that Jaredite lands were not all that far from the land of Zarahemla" (Aston, p. 73). The key to this analysis is the "overshot distance" between the distance these scouts thought they had to travel and the distance they actually traveled. All analyses of this expedition rely on conjecture to estimate this extra distance, so none is particularly convincing in and of itself. Here I outline Aston's arguments on these matters. He makes the following points:

1. If Coriantumr was the final survivor of the last battle at Ramah, "this suggests that his discovery by Mulekites probably occurred in the near vicinity of the Hill Cumorah" (Aston, p. 74). This is simply speculation. We do not know where the Mulekites found him.
2. The hill Ramah is mentioned in Ether in conjunction with Omer's travels. "This certainly suggests that the Hill Ramah/Cumorah

must have played some kind of central role in Jaredite geography, from the very beginning of the Jaredites in America" (Aston, p. 74). This inference seems unfounded and unnecessary. All we can infer is that it was a known point of geography during later Jaredite times and that it was in Jaredite lands.

3. "Because of the wickedness of the Jaredites, Jaredite lands became occupied by the Mulekites (see Ether 13:21). Now, since Jaredite lands included the Hill Cumorah, then lands of the peoples of Zarahemla (Mulekites) also included the Hill Cumorah" (Aston, p. 74). This is a particularly beguiling claim based on inattention to the Book of Mormon account. The scripture makes no such claims. The Mulekites' first landing was in Jaredite lands, but they settled in the land of Zarahemla to the south. There is no evidentiary basis to confound Mulekite lands with Jaredite lands and on that basis to infer the presence of Cumorah in Mulekite lands (that is, Zarahemla). The "other people" referred to in Ether 13:21 who would inherit Jaredite lands were most likely the Nephites rather than the Mulekites.

4. "The account of the Limhi expedition states that they found 'bones' and 'ruins of buildings,' those that once belonged to the Jaredites. Thus the expedition missed its target at Zarahemla, overshoot its mark and discovered lands previously occupied by the Jaredites. An important issue is that the over-shot distance was not all that much, in contrast to much greater distances typically proposed by other Book of Mormon geographers" (Aston, p. 75). The first statement here is correct, but Aston's claims for the overshoot distance do not logically follow and are mere speculation aided and abetted by his view of the possibilities of his geography. As he has it set up, it would not be possible to overshoot Zarahemla by much without hitting the shore of Lake Ontario. Had this occurred, the Limhites would surely have realized they were lost. Even so, Aston, and others such as Curtis, must propose a zigzag trip for the Limhites and other travelers between the lands of Nephi and Zarahemla to even come close to the number of days consumed by this journey—up to forty days for the truly disoriented.

5. "If travel had been through wilderness areas, heavily forested, with steep hilly terrain, people could have easily gotten disoriented and lost. Actual path distances could have easily been double the scale amounts" (Aston, p. 75). This is certainly possible, but it does not accord well with our notions of peoples attuned to their environmental circumstances. This statement is another assumption posing as analysis. To make such arguments work, we must assume some diminished capacity on the part of the peoples involved. The simple point is that the closer Nephi was to Zarahemla, the more difficult it would have been to remain ignorant of the actual route between them. Aston argues for an extremely short distance and thus needs natives of limited capacity. In his brief analysis of four other journeys between Zarahemla and Nephi, Aston makes the point that Limhi's people must have had a good idea of the general direction and distance. I agree. Armed with such knowledge, and assuming that Limhi sent some men with woodsman capability to protect and guide the emissaries on the trip, it is remarkable that they would become lost or were in situations in which they could not ask directions along the way. Aston's argument is that, knowing the approximate distance, the Limhites would not overshoot their mark too much. If true, then Ramah/Cumorah and Desolation must have been close to Zarahemla. John Sorenson uses similar logic but accords the Limhites more diligence in travel once they suspected they might be lost. He presumes that they would not have traveled much more than twice the distance they originally expected. Thus, he argues for a longer distance which would have carried the unknowing Limhites into the land northward, as required by all other clues of Jaredite geography.¹⁶

6. "Coriantumr and his people were destroyed at Hill Ramah/Cumorah, hence the vicinity of hill Ramah/Cumorah was the most likely place where Ether would have left the twenty-four gold plates of Jaredite history, so that the Limhi expedition would eventually find them (Ether 15:33)" (Aston, p. 78). This inference does not nec-

16. John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1985), 14.

essarily follow from the facts, but with a relaxed notion of what “vicinity” might mean, it is a plausible expectation. I would like to see more critical thinking on this matter. Why did other people not find these plates before the Limhites did, especially if the bulk of Mulekite/Nephite population was so close by?

7. “Now, from all the above considerations, it does not seem reasonable that the Limhi expedition would have missed their mark, the land of Zarahemla, by a huge distance factor as is typically thought. In Journey No. 3 above, it took sixteen strong men forty days of wandering to travel from the land of Zarahemla, to the land of Nephi. According to Map A, this might have involved a ‘crow flight’ distance of something like 110 miles. Thus when the Limhi expedition overshot the land of Zarahemla, and ended up near or at Hill Cumorah, this might have meant an overshoot of about twenty-five miles. This distance is quite reasonable and seems consistent with the idea that the land of Zarahemla was not located very far from Hill Cumorah, and it was located *below* the narrow neck of land” (Aston, p. 80, emphasis in original).

The bulk of this fallacious argument is what Aston considers “reasonable” to believe. Why is it reasonable? In his Journey No. 3, for example, he has vigorous men progressing at a speed of 2.75 miles per day. This seems unreasonable. Even the Saints traveling to Winter Quarters made better time than this. The only way to accommodate this slow speed would be to have considerable lateral movement for every foot of forward progress. With such exaggerated zigging and zagging, however, it would be even more of a wonder that the Limhites did not chance upon some Nephite settlements before coming to the land of Desolation. The minimal overshoot distance of twenty-five miles is not at all credible either. This would be a slow or normal day of walking, depending on conditions. In Aston’s scheme, the land would have been relatively flat. If we presume that the Limhites followed trails, even game trails, they would have made good time. The most objectionable part of this whole analysis is the final line that pretends to be a conclusion but is really an assumption of what is

“reasonable” to believe. Aston guesses at the overshoot distance and then uses his guess as a fact to claim that Cumorah was close to Zarahemla, from which he derives the further fact that it was south of the narrow neck. This is merely speculation. The bottom line is that the Limhi expedition does not offer proponents of any of the geographies any facts on distance. The one interesting point is the capacity to get lost and lose the trail. I suspect that this potentiality provides an important clue on relative distance, but it is not precise information. A later description of travel from Zarahemla to Desolation and the land of many waters states: “And they did travel to an exceedingly great distance, insomuch that they came to large bodies of water and many rivers” (Helaman 3:4). This description counters Aston’s claims for these lands.

8. In his final footnote to this chapter, Aston compounds his difficulties: “It is ironical that an analysis of the Limhi expedition was a factor in helping geographers see that Book of Mormon events took place within a ‘local geography.’ Had that local geography been recognized as being centered around Hill Cumorah in western New York, there never would have arisen a need for a second Hill Cumorah” (Aston, p. 82). Aston’s arguments about alternative Cumorahs portray it as a matter of logical necessity—that scholars went looking for another hill once they realized that Book of Mormon lands were small, having already been convinced that ancient civilizations of Central America were involved. The two premises could not be reconciled, so something had to give. In some instances this may be true. The question, which Aston does not adequately address, is why the New York hill has not been seen to conform to the requirements of the text by most scholars. Why do most scholars give up on New York in favor of Middle America? A second, more important question to ask is why the early Saints and Joseph Smith did not realize that Book of Mormon lands were so small and were restricted to New York. Why is this only now being “recognized” by investigators such as Curtis, Aston, Hedengren, and Olive? Implied in Aston’s claim is the presumption that Joseph Smith did not know the loca-

tion of Book of Mormon lands, a point with which I agree, but one I doubt he realized he was making.

I will outline my last claim in more detail because it has possible implications for eliminating rhetorical excesses in future debates about Book of Mormon geography. Take the following: (1) Each of the proposed LGL geographies considered here is presented by its author as a novel and important proposal. (2) The need for LGL views arose because all parties of the geography debate now accept as an indisputable fact that Book of Mormon lands were localized, at least in their narrative center. (3) Each of these proposals differs from some traditional Mormon views on geography, including views ascribed to Joseph Smith by his closest associates. (4) The traditional views of Book of Mormon geography cannot be correct because the scale is wrong. If all of these are true, it follows that early Saints, including Joseph Smith, did not know the true extent of Book of Mormon lands or their precise parameters. It further follows that one would be ill-advised to take traditional correlations of Book of Mormon places as fact, including those of the Prophet and his early followers. This last claim does not necessarily follow from the preceding facts because it is possible to know a few points of geography with certainty, such as Cumorah, without understanding their implications for a complete geography. But this subtlety of logic creates difficulties for the books considered here. Although it falls short of logical necessity, it certainly is poor scholarly form to claim that a witness does not know the complete facts but indeed knows one essential fact.

If one questions the credibility of one's own witnesses, he or she ought to proceed with caution concerning the reliability of their actual testimony offered in evidence. In more concrete terms, it is poor form to imply that Joseph Smith did not know the extent or location of Book of Mormon events and, in the same analysis, to base one's geography on his purported beliefs about the location of the hill Cumorah. This compromised position is only exacerbated with claims of capturing the high moral ground by rescuing the hill Cumorah from its so-called detractors. *By the very scholarly exercise*

*of publishing a local geography, each LGL advocate makes an implicit claim that Joseph Smith did not understand Book of Mormon geography. Yet each starts his or her analysis by taking the location of the New York hill as the place of the one and only true Cumorah of the Book of Mormon as identified by Joseph Smith. Each LGL advocate, then, is logically compromised by having to disbelieve some early statements (e.g., the extent of Book of Mormon lands) while accepting others (e.g., the location of Cumorah). This leads to the important, unresolved question: Why believe Smith's claims for the location of the hill Cumorah if his views are found unacceptable on other points of geography? And if one chooses to believe that Joseph Smith held the view attributed to him, and, further, to take this as evidence, how can the accuracy of one's belief be substantiated? The only recourse is to work with details in the Book of Mormon and to compare internal reconstructions and expectations to real-world settings. It is worth stressing that the *only way* in which claims for Cumorah can be evaluated seriously through nonprophetic means is if we begin our analyses with the presumption that its location is unknown and must be demonstrated. Middle American geographers take this position; LGL geographers do not. These latter scholars begin with a preconceived notion that diffracts all subsequent observations and bends them toward their bias. As a result, all the proposed LGL geographies have irreparable flaws caused by assuming what they should have been demonstrating: the location of Cumorah/Ramah.*

Archaeological Correspondences and Challenges

Sooner or later, every proposal for a real-world setting for the Book of Mormon narrative must confront archaeological issues. Aston takes on the archaeological challenge toward the end of his book—thus the placement of my commentary here. All the LGL books treat the archaeological record of the greater Great Lakes area ambivalently. Each author finds evidence to support his or her views and, even more importantly, reasons for discrediting large chunks of the

same record. By my scorecard, all these books fail the archaeological test. One problem lies in faulty reconstructions from the Book of Mormon; others concern logical weaknesses. But the greatest problem is the archaeological record of the proposed area itself. It simply does not fit the requirements of the Book of Mormon.

One's arguments for archaeology cannot supersede the sources exploited, so a brief note on these is appropriate. I do not count previous Mormon geographical treatments of archaeological matters as legitimate sources. Of the four authors showcased here, Hedengren considers the widest range of archaeological sources, some of them rather specialized and obscure. The breadth of his coverage is difficult to gauge, however, because he does not provide footnotes or a bibliography, so his references have to be tracked down within his text. I hope he makes future versions of his geography more user-friendly by providing unimpeded access to the sources cited. Currently, few general works for the archaeology of Pennsylvania or New York exist, so serious students are forced to consult local histories, articles, and technical reports for details. These are particularly difficult to read and interpret. Curtis considers summarily only one very old but excellent source for New York.¹⁷ For their parts, Aston and Olive both consider about five to eight reputable sources for archaeological matters, and Aston includes the main synthetic reference for New York archaeology by William A. Ritchie,¹⁸ a source passed over by the others. Overall, the paucity of published sources and archaeological projects in western New York and Pennsylvania suggests a lack of interest in this region by the archaeological community at large. Perhaps one reason for the shabby treatment and lack of interest is that the archaeology of this region, for the time periods in question, is relatively dull compared to that of adjacent regions to the south and west. This, in itself, is rather telling. This circumstance involves considerable

17. E. G. Squier, *Antiquities of the State of New York* (Buffalo, N.Y.: Derby, 1851).

18. William A. Ritchie, *The Archaeology of New York State* (Garden City, N.Y.: Natural History, 1965).

irony because western New York was one of the first regions to receive archaeological attention in the early 1800s, the time of the Smiths' residence there.

The essential, supporting archaeological case for a New York setting for Book of Mormon lands was encapsulated above in a quotation from Olive. Early settlers' accounts of upstate New York describe numerous trenched and walled fortifications, weapons, and mass graves of disorderly bones—the latter presumably casualties of war. Some of the skeletons are said to have been exceptionally large, and the artifacts, fortifications, and mounds are said to have occurred in high frequencies. Case closed! Both Olive and Curtis quote extensively from McGavin and Bean's 1948 study—still the best secondary source for the early accounts.¹⁹ Olive argues that additional support comes from evidence for domesticity (parched corn, storage pits, and spun cloth), the arts (ceramic pots and figurines, clay pipes, and pearls), and small, inscribed stone tablets (pp. 294–300). In his treatment of correspondences, Hedengren draws attention to corn, pearls, fortifications, cloth, metal artifacts, architecture, armor, stone tablets, writing, stone boxes, wooden buildings, stone walls, conch shells, and panpipes. This is a long miscellany of items that lacks a coordinating, linking argument to Book of Mormon matters. Aston discusses cattle, horses, “seeds of every kind,” cement, wooden cities, and fortifications. The mere presence or absence of these items is thought to be sufficient for the authors' presentations. But they do not add up to much. Throughout, there is an astounding disregard for temporal placement of these items and features. For Book of Mormon lands, the question is not simply “Where?” but “When?” and “What?” Aston makes a significant advance in his attempt to show a system of settlement. The number of sites, their placement in his hypothetical Nephite territories, and the nature of the sites (towns vs. forts) are said to correspond to the spatial and demographic requirements of the Book of Mormon.

To their credit, all authors represented here realize that the archaeological case for their LGL correlations is not good, and each

19. McGavin and Bean, *Geography of the Book of Mormon*.

appropriately spends some time explaining away the failure to meet expectations. Each author is aware of such deficiencies because his or her geography was written as a challenge to Middle American geographies, which appear to be doing well when it comes to archaeological evidence. Whether this is actually true or not is beside the point; Great Lakes archaeology looks two inches tall beside the colossus of Central America. As if in harmonious chorus, the LGL authors claim that much of the evidence has either been destroyed or would not have survived normal processes of decay to the present day. Olive makes a particular point concerning the lack of evidence for temples patterned after the Temple of Solomon (pp. 301–2). These were built of wood and would not be expected to withstand normal decay. Alternatively, most of them would have been burned when the Lamanites destroyed Nephite lands. A nice explanation, but it does nothing to allay my anxiety concerning Lamanite temples; perhaps Olive presumes that they did not have any. “Temples built of timber decay, and we should not be confused by the lack of these monuments found in the area” (Olive, p. 302).

Curtis argues that much of the evidence for early fortifications, battlefields, weapons, and war dead was destroyed when the lands in question were brought under cultivation. The plow destroys the sword in this case. He also advances several novel arguments that support his position. The most interesting is his claim that the disparity between New York and Central American archaeology decides the case in favor of New York because the Central American ruins are too complex to fit the bill for Book of Mormon lands.²⁰ Accepting his argument requires commitment to several supporting hypotheses. Curtis argues that the Nephites had all things in common during the era of peace and communalism after Christ’s appearance (ca. A.D. 33–200); there were no rich and poor distinctions, and, therefore, they did not build architectural monuments such as are found in Mesoamerica. After A.D. 200, groups were small and contentious and

20. Delbert W. Curtis, *Christ in North America* (Tigard, Ore.: Resource Communications, 1993), 167.

did not have the resources or motivation to erect such buildings. Nor did they worry about putting up buildings in the terrible time of the last war. Rather, the constructions we should expect to find are fortifications, something that western New York has in abundance. For their part, the Lamanites were too lazy to have worried about putting up big buildings, so we should not expect to find evidence of them in ancient Lamanite territories. (This latter claim for Lamanite underachievement hardly squares with references to Lamanite palaces.) In short, according to Curtis, there was very little evidence to begin with, and it has long since been destroyed.

For almost 300 years the “Gentiles” have systematically pillaged, leveled, plowed, and cultivated the land of north-eastern United States of America. Almost all of the mounds, the wasted cities, and the trenches filled with bones, and the mounds of bones with a very thin cover of earth have been obliterated. Yet there is still enough evidence to show that a people with a high degree of civilization lived and died there.²¹

What we should be looking for are the remains of fortified cities and of a people at war, not great pagan temples and burial mounds built by a people united and at peace.²²

Finally, Aston provides more specific arguments concerning the archaeological problem presented by New York. Given the importance of this issue, he deserves to be quoted at length:

The Archaeology of New York State, a classic 1965 work by William Ritchie, is an important archaeological work on New York. Yet his findings on the archaeological picture of western New York seem to be devoid of the kind of picture that one might think the Book of Mormon had painted, and seems to ignore the findings of the many historians who had recorded the discoveries of ancient earthworks, fortifications,

21. Ibid., 171–72.

22. Ibid., 174.

and archaeological evidences discovered in western New York by its earliest observers.

The archaeological record of the New York area seems quite misleading when one looks at sites that have been radiocarbon dated. Ritchie's sample collections show a huge gap in time, wherein there is practically no data. Surprisingly, almost nothing is dated within the time period 500 B.C. to A.D. 400, the period of the Nephites.

Noticing this can lead one to think that western New York never had a Nephite population. It would be easy to fail to understand why this is misleading, and to not comprehend the significance in this. Only after much research on the matter did this gap in archaeological knowledge become clear.

It seems obvious that the great bulk of the archaeological sites, covering the time period of the Nephites, were destroyed by the spade and the plow of the early colonists. Also, those few sites that remain are unacceptable for study because they were pilfered and badly damaged. The sites had been ravaged by people who destroyed most of what they found and often made errors in describing and interpreting their findings.

Many of the artifacts discovered were either pilfered, destroyed or lost. Then too, in some cases forgeries were involved, and unless the artifacts were discovered undisturbed in their original locations by competent professionals, the findings were considered difficult to interpret.

Advancing "civilization" has produced devastating effects on the archaeological record of western New York. Towns were built over former sites, farmers plowed over earthworks, digging up skulls and artifacts by the bushel basketful, and treasure hunters pilfered and destroyed most of the archaeological sites.

McGavin and Bean, in their 1948 book on *The Geography of the Book of Mormon*, report that many ancient grave sites were within the Book of Mormon lands proposed in

this book. It turns out that almost all of those wonderful ruins were destroyed, or rendered useless. (Aston, pp. 86–87)

While Aston laments this situation, it appears from my perspective to have provided LGL advocates with the best of both worlds: the lack of evidence becomes their best evidence. This becomes an excuse for avoiding serious archaeological research. The early reports, those I consider old hearsay, give glowing accounts of wonderful finds—and of the destruction of the sites from which they came. Aston, Curtis, and Olive accept these reports but consider Ritchie's tedious and detailed catalogue of facts to be "misleading." Aston claims to have come to his conclusion "after much research on the matter," but his research is nowhere apparent. He does not produce one reference. He appears to be saying that he thought about the disparity apparent in matching Ritchie's account of ancient New York with Book of Mormon requirements and found an escape route in McGavin and Bean's claims.

Numerous problems are inherent in Aston's argument, but I will address only the most serious. Why did the destruction of sites affect only those of the Nephite era? Urban sprawl is no respecter of archaeological sites and cannot edit the archaeological record in this manner. Ritchie provides a complete archaeological sequence for New York, with nothing missing. He relies on acceptable techniques of dating materials through radiocarbon and through changes in artifact styles. The so-called gap suggested by Aston does not exist. Ritchie's account is thought to be problematic and misleading only because the Nephite-equivalent period in New York is one of relatively low population, and *Aston believes these to be Book of Mormon lands*. In short, the fault is not inherent in the archaeological report but in the assumptions dictating the reading of it. As shown below, subsequent research in New York is substantiating the historic patterns described by Ritchie. When a detailed archaeological record fails to validate one's hypothesis, this should provoke reexamination of the hypothesis rather than rejection of the record of archaeological findings.

The issue of site destruction is at the center of all LGL claims. I address it from the perspective of an archaeologist with three decades

of field experience. Archaeologists are rather hasty with claims of “destruction.” But we do not use this term with the same meaning that it is being given in LGL arguments. For archaeologists, the ideal site is “pristine,” meaning that it remains “undisturbed” by various natural agents (tree falls, rodents, hurricanes, earthworms, forest fires, etc.) or cultural forces (such as farming, looting, mining, and urban sprawl) until we get a chance to take it apart carefully, layer by layer. If archaeological sites were eggs, we would prefer them boiled rather than scrambled. For most archaeologists, scrambled sites lose most of their interpretive value, as Aston points out. When a site is plowed, looted by clandestine diggers or “avocational” archaeologists, or cut through by sewer lines or road right-of-ways, the pristine “order” of artifacts and features such as floors, fire hearths, and post molds is destroyed and scrambled. What is lost in pristine context, however, is partly compensated for by the increased visibility of the site. This is the critical point. LGL advocates use the term *destroyed* to mean “wiped off the face of the earth, obliterated, expunged, or erased.” Archaeologists use *destroyed* to mean “altered, transformed, messed up, or scrambled.” Even after enormous damage, these sites still exist, and their artifacts still exist, albeit in smaller pieces; however, the spatial relationships which once obtained among the various artifacts and features are obliterated.

The thrust of Aston’s argument is that destruction has removed all traces of the sites in question, and this is the reason, according to his speculation, that they are not represented in Ritchie’s master work. But the opposite is true; sites that are destroyed have *increased visibility*, are easier to find, and are generally overrepresented in synthetic works. LGL arguments are 180 degrees off the mark. Sites dating to the Nephite era are represented in Ritchie’s work, perhaps in frequencies greater than they deserve. There simply are not that many of them.

Many times, the only way buried sites can be found is when they are partially destroyed during normal urban or rural activities, such as a sewer line encountering burials in downtown Salt Lake City. Archaeologists are drawn to land disturbance like moths to a light

because they have a chance to view what is beneath the surface without digging blindly. Opinions among archaeologists on the benefits of destruction, such as those voiced by Squier in the opening lines of his early study on fortifications in western New York, are not uncommon:

The Indian tribes found in possession of the country now embraced within the limits of New England and the Middle States have left few monuments to attest their former presence. The fragile structures which they erected for protection and defence have long ago crumbled to the earth; and the sites of their ancient towns and villages are indicated only by the ashes of their long-extinguished fires, and by the few rude relics which the plough of the invader exposes to his curious gaze. Their cemeteries, marked in very rare instances by enduring monuments, are now undistinguishable, except where the hand of modern improvement encroaches upon the sanctity of the grave.²³

True, many features of these sites, such as posthole patterns and earth embankments, can eventually become too scrambled to detect—but evidence of the site will not vanish. The issue here is of visibility vis-à-vis site disturbance. Those who have collected arrowheads know that the best places to look are plowed fields, erosion channels, and other sites where surface vegetation is removed and where subsurface deposits are exposed or churned to the surface. The same principle applies to site visibility. Weekend collectors and pot-hunters tend to search for artifacts and then preserve and display them in collections. Such artifacts are removed from sites but not from sight—quite the opposite. In his study of New York, Ritchie makes frequent use of observations from private collections. Aston knows this but perhaps has not appreciated its implications for his argument.

The other excuse for dodging the archaeological implications of the dismal New York record is to claim that the evidence would not

23. Squier, *Antiquities of the State of New York*, 7.

be preserved. This is a more appropriate claim than blaming everything on plows and spades. One should not expect silk, linen, roast beef, perfume, honey, feathers, or lemonade—or their like—to survive long in the archaeological record under New York conditions. In turn, stone, bone, gold, copper, and shell survive under most conditions. The issue that Book of Mormon geographers must address is the following: Given the cultural features and events described in the Book of Mormon, what kinds of archaeological evidence would be preserved? Which of these things were made of stone, shell, wood, gold, or cement? And, where should we find them on the Book of Mormon landscape, and for what time periods? Curtis argues that many geographers are searching for all the wrong things in all the wrong places. I agree with his general sentiment, but not with his specific claim concerning cities and large buildings. The current geographies are quite reasonable in most of their expectations. Avocational Book of Mormon scholarship appears to have outgrown the era of looking for wheels, roads, and white Indians. Much grief could further be avoided were greater attention accorded the material expectations of past events before plunging into archaeological reports. For example, Olive argues away temples by claiming they were made of wood. Granting her improbable expectation, her argument still does not work completely because the archaeological record of New York is full of evidence for wooden structures, as she should have realized when looking at the pictures in Ritchie's book. Of course, most of the evidence consists only of floor plans as marked by postholes of ancient buildings rather than the superstructure. Hedengren, by contrast, uses such evidence to demonstrate the former presence of wooden buildings in his chosen area, and thus to establish the validity of the Book of Mormon account (p. 149).

A useful argument that no one has employed is the possibility that sites simply have not been found. If we were to take the observation about archaeological visibility to heart, and if we still desired a good reason for explaining away the discrepancy between the sacred account of Nephite lands and current understandings of New York

archaeology, then a more reasonable claim would be that most sites have not been discovered because they have not had the good fortune of being partially destroyed. No archaeological record is completely known, so there are always sites, or features at known sites, yet to be discovered. An important concern in dealing with an archaeological record is its representativeness. Do sites of the various periods have an equal chance of coming to the attention of the archaeological community or being reported in print? No. Archaeological reporting is clearly biased in direct relation to archaeological visibility. Large sites are easier to find than small ones, and most mound sites are easier to identify than nonmound sites. Sites with pottery and chipped stone are easier to find than those without such diagnostic artifacts. Sites with exotic artifacts and burials are reported more rapidly and frequently than those without. Sites in areas of frequent human activity are easier to find than those in remote places; thus sites located in valleys, along river flood plains, on lakeshores, or on tilled land are easier to find because of increased human disturbance. Knowing these things, one can compensate for underrepresentation of some sites in assessing the ebb and flow of regional histories. Most places within the continental United States, however, have now had sufficient archaeological activity that the basic outlines of prehistory are known. Future efforts will be directed to filling in details and making minor adjustments. In short, what we see in the New York archaeological record is probably a representative sample of what there was.

I have tried to make a simple case for removing the escape routes of LGL advocates so that a useful dialogue on substantive issues of history and archaeology can ensue. Rather than approach the archaeological record with excuses, we should begin to pay attention to what it tells us. I am not an expert on New York archaeology, nor am I likely to be, but I took a few hours to peruse some of the literature to see what LGL advocates have available for making their case. The general course of prehistory outlined for New York fits comfortably and logically with the histories of adjacent regions, and it makes good anthropological sense. The inferences made from the archaeo-

logical observations appear reasonably supported in the known facts. In making a match between Book of Mormon claims and a particular archaeological record, we must heed three basic parameters: space, time, and content. LGL authors have focused disproportionately on the spatial requirements of Book of Mormon lands, with some attention to cultural content, but with almost complete disregard for the book's temporal claims. Only by ignoring time have they been able to fit Book of Mormon lands into the Great Lakes mold. When we pay attention to time and to cultural context, it becomes clear that the events described in the Book of Mormon do not seem to have occurred in the Great Lakes area.

The Book of Mormon makes hundreds of clear cultural and chronological claims. Here it will suffice to touch on just a few principal ones. The dates inserted at the bottom of each page of the Nephite account in the Book of Mormon provide the needed chronological frame. As to cultural practices, the Book of Mormon describes for all its peoples, even the Lamanites, a sedentary lifestyle based on cereal agriculture, with cities and substantial buildings. Thus we should be looking for city dwellers, permanent populations, kings, farmers, and grains. These should start in the third millennium before Christ and persist at least until the fourth century after his death. There should be some climax and nadir moments in developments, and these should occur in specific places on the landscape. New York lacked cities and cereal agriculture until after A.D. 1000 and is thus not the place. We are not missing evidence of Great Lakes peoples, their settlement patterns, or subsistence practices for the time periods under consideration. These are reasonably well known for each period from a variety of evidence; they simply do not fit the specifications.

The largest Nephite cities and towns of the Book of Mormon narrative were located in valley settings, necessarily in areas with good agricultural land. Some areas were occupied for centuries of periodic building. Some had temples and other religious structures, walls, gates, and dwellings. In archaeological terms, these sites should be spatially extensive and thick, with significant stratigraphy. These

are the types of archaeological sites with the highest potential for visibility and the greatest probability of being located and consistently reported. We would not expect evidence of their size or date to be annihilated, even with several centuries of plowing. Rather, such activity would make them easier to find—more visible. They should have been part of the early settlers' descriptions. New York and Pennsylvania lack sites that fit this description. Finding a two-to-four-thousand-year-old city in New York would be so novel that it would be reported quickly in all scientific outlets. It has never happened. The most likely locations for such cities are already archaeologically well known because they are also the prime locations for modern occupation.

What does Great Lakes archaeology have to offer in terms of our expectations? As Hedengren and others note, the archaeology of the midcontinental and northeastern United States covers a long time period. The Book of Mormon time period corresponds to the archaeological phases of the Late Archaic (Jaredite), Adena (Jaredite and Nephite), and Hopewell (Nephite) periods. There is sufficient evidence of peoples in all the lands proposed as candidates for Book of Mormon lands, but we must question if they lived in the manner described in the text and if the content is right. It is essential to make a clear distinction here between archaeological evidence for occupation and evidence of a people's cultural attainments. All the LGL books considered here blur this distinction and take evidence of human occupation in the New York area as evidence of past civilizations. *Civilization* is a technical term with a special meaning in archaeology, usually meaning societies complex enough to have lived in cities and to have had kings—a basic requirement for the Book of Mormon. The term is an appropriate interpretation of the text but not for northeastern archaeology. For this area, the Adena and Hopewell cultures are particularly attractive candidates for Book of Mormon peoples because they represented the most sophisticated cultures on their time horizon in the United States. They were the first cultures in this area to build burial mounds and mound enclosures, they engaged in long-distance trade, and they fabricated artistic items which they buried with select individuals. Hedengren and Olive both report

that some were buried with thousands of pearls. Adena and Hopewell peoples lived in Pennsylvania and western New York, but this region represented the impoverished fringe or cultural backwater of their culture. This last observation raises an interesting question: If these were indeed Book of Mormon peoples, as some claim, why did their cultural center not correspond with the proposed LGL narrative center of the Book of Mormon? The Book of Mormon indicates that one archaeological expectation should be that its narrative center needs to correspond to the cultural center of Nephite occupation (but not necessarily the cultural center of the Lamanites, which could have been greater than that of the Nephites given their longer flirtation with, and deeper commitment to, ostentatious pagan practices).

Aston points out in the passage quoted above that Ritchie's account of New York does not provide the needed archaeological support for his LGL model. Two immediate possibilities may account for this. First, Ritchie's account may be deficient for a number of reasons—the option Aston chooses. Second, New York might not be the place where the Book of Mormon narrative occurred—the option I believe that follows from the evidence. What is the basic cultural scheme for this region? I take the following succinct summary statements of cultural periods and their typical cultural practices from a masterwork on Pennsylvania archaeology:²⁴

- Archaic period (7000–1000 B.C.): “Bands of hunters and gatherers, following patterns of restricted seasonal wandering.”
- Transitional period (1800–800 B.C.): “Far ranging bands of hunters and gatherers, occupying temporary hamlets; heavy dependence on riverine resources.”
- Early Woodland (1000–300 B.C.): “Bands of family units living in scattered households; persistence of hunting and gathering, with a possible shift in some areas to semi-sedentary settlement due to a more stable economic base.”

24. Barry C. Kent, Ira F. Smith III, and Catherine McCann, eds., *Foundations of Pennsylvania Prehistory* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1971).

- Middle Woodland (500 B.C.–A.D. 1000): “Incipient tribal village life in western Pa., supported by horticulture, hunting and gathering; bands in eastern Pa. living in scattered hamlets, practicing hunting and gathering.”

- Late Woodland (A.D. 1000–1550): “Seasonally sedentary tribes; villages and hamlets (some stockaded villages); horticulture, hunting and gathering.”²⁵

For the Genesee Valley, the location of Aston’s land of Zarahemla, Neal L. Trubowitz gives detailed information from an intense survey carried out in conjunction with the construction of a recent highway.²⁶ Hedengren is aware of this report, but Aston seems not to be. For the wide strip of land involved, there is one hundred percent coverage, so the information for relative changes in occupation is unusually good, as such things go in archaeology. Trubowitz’s information is more recent than Ritchie’s summary.

Hunting and gathering as a way of life continued into the Early Woodland Period, with land use still centered on the valley slope above the Genesee-Canaseraga junction as in the previous period. Very few data have been found on flood plain or lake plain sites during this time period. There are a number of camps recorded for the upland, though the site density there is still the lowest. The population probably remained stable. . . . The basic stability in lifestyle continued despite the adoption of new technology (including ceramic pots and smoking pipes) and ideology (as seen in the elaboration of mortuary ceremonialism of the Middlesex and Meadowood phases in line with influences reaching the Genesee Valley from the Adena Tradition heartland in Ohio).

This pattern continued and intensified during the following Middle Woodland Period. Subsistence of the Point

25. Ibid., 4.

26. Neal L. Trubowitz, *Highway Archeology and Settlement Study in the Genesee Valley*, Occasional Publications in Northeastern Anthropology, no. 8 (George’s Mills, N.H.: Occasional Publications in Northeast Anthropology, 1983).

Peninsula Tradition was still based on hunting and gathering, and mortuary ceremonialism reached its fullest expression in exotic grave goods left in burial mounds of the Squawkie Hill phase, patterned after those found in Ohio (Hopewell Tradition). Verified mound sites are all on the valley slope overlooking the flood plain, as is often the case for contemporary mounds found in the Illinois and Ohio Valleys. Although only one site was found on the lake plain in the highway sample, others did exist in the lower Genesee River basin. . . . Point Peninsula site density was greatest on the flood plain as opposed to the valley slope. This could show a shift in subsistence focus, but small sample size may be a controlling factor here. However, the number of known sites and total site density drops from the Early Woodland Meadowood and Middlesex phases to the Point Peninsula Tradition and Squawkie Hill phase. This implies that a population decline took place during the Middle Woodland Period.²⁷

These findings support Ritchie's earlier reports for New York but are in direct contradiction with Aston's hopes for the land of Zarahemla. The population of the Genesee Valley was always small and dispersed in small bands. The food quest involved hunting and gathering of wild plants, fruits, nuts, and berries. During the key time period (ca. A.D. 100–400), the Genesee Valley suffered a decline in an already sparse population. No large sites are found here for any time period. Corn agriculture did not become a significant factor here or elsewhere in the midcontinent or the United States southeast until after A.D. 1000. With the commitment to corn agriculture, population increased, village sizes increased, and so did tensions. All the known fortified sites and villages in New York date to the latest time periods, the Late Woodland. All the LGL authors make a fuss about fortifications in this region. Clearly there were many, and reports of them go back to the beginning of colonization, with the best report being

27. Ibid., 144–45.

Squier's 1851 study, complete with maps. It bears emphasizing that these fortified knolls and spurs were all quite small and would have accommodated only about one to four hundred people each. They really do not fit our expectations for the Book of Mormon populations, even if they were of the right period. Fortifications are found associated with mass graves and large storage pits, some of which still had evidence of stored maize. These are all known features of late occupation. Yes, they are in the "right" area for LGL models, *but they do not date to the right time period*. Therefore, they are not, and cannot be, confirmatory evidence or even correspondences. Hedengren demonstrates how some of these fortifications correspond to descriptions in the Book of Mormon and then concludes that "we find in the region proposed as the site of Lehite habitation a tradition of constructing fortifications precisely like those described in the Book of Mormon" (p. 112). True—but the tradition started in A.D. 1100.

Aston's arguments are similar:

It is well known that prehistoric western New York was covered with sites of fortification, evidence that some previous inhabitants engaged in battles using these forts. It is generally believed that these forts were erected by the Iroquois Indians, who are supposed to have occupied the area only as far back as the 11th or 12th centuries A.D.

But some of the more recent anthropologists hold that the "Iroquoians go back to Archaic times . . . before 2500 B.C." Latter-day Saints might find this interesting to contemplate, as the Book of Mormon relates a continuous possession of the land, from the Jaredites to the Mulekites and Nephites, spanning back into this same time period. . . .

Because Nephite fortifications described in the Book of Mormon correspond so well with those once occupied by Indians of the New York area, it can be inferred that these Indians quite likely were Lamanite descendants who retained the Nephite practice of fort-building, over many generations. (Aston, pp. 130–31)

This is another pair of fallacious arguments offered in support of a New York correlation. Of particular interest is Aston's awareness of the basic archaeological facts outlined above, coupled with his choice to ignore them. The suggestion that Iroquoian peoples and their fortifications might go back to 2500 B.C. is particularly misleading. One certainly cannot retrodict cultural accomplishments to one's progenitors. All the New York fortifications date to late times, and, yes, the people who built them probably descended from peoples who formerly inhabited the area centuries before, but this does the ancestors little good. The shift from Nephites to Lamanites in the second quotation serves no clear purpose since the evidence of fortifications postdates both the Nephites and Lamanites by nearly eight hundred years.

Aston provides one additional argument about his archaeological difficulties to round out this section.

It appears that when both the Jaredites and the Nephites came to lands set aside for them by the Lord, they found an empty Promised Land, not occupied by other nations. After the demise of the Nephites, these lands remained hidden from the world until the coming of the Colonists. The scant archaeological record seems in keeping with the ways of the Lord that our testimony of the Book of Mormon remain a matter of faith, and not based upon external proofs found from archaeology. (Aston, p. 89)

I encounter such arguments frequently among the Saints. It should be clear that this is a theological argument rather than an evidentiary one. It also constitutes a possible reason why the desired evidence fails to make an appearance. I find the claim troublesome on a number of grounds that do not merit discussion here. I am particularly uncomfortable with secular arguments that introduce theological factors to make their case. As a matter of fact, the archaeological record for New York is not "scant," nor can it be used to argue for a previously unoccupied land or for a land forgotten after the period

of Book of Mormon population. It is a long record of small bands of hunters and gatherers (berry eaters) who lived there for millennia. The record is clear, and we have no recourse but to accept it as it stands.

In summary, the archaeology of New York is persuasive evidence that Book of Mormon peoples did not live there. This conclusion follows from a few basic points and assumptions. First, I presume that the archaeology of New York State, as currently published (2002), is a fair representation and adequate sample of what is there, and particularly that the evidence for some periods has not been systematically destroyed. Second, I presume that the evidence published for the various regions and time periods is accurate—that is, that the majority of archaeologists working in this region are competent and academically honest in terms of their archaeology. Third, I assume that additional research and discoveries will not significantly alter current understandings of the times or places of prehistoric occupation nor of the cultural practices involved; rather, it will lead to minor changes in some of the details of prehistory. Fourth, said archaeological record lacks evidence for cities, sedentism, corn agriculture, fortifications, and dense populations during Archaic, Early Woodland, and Middle Woodland times. Therefore, New York is not Book of Mormon country, and we should be looking elsewhere for “the lost lands of the Book of Mormon.”

Demographic Concerns

I have already noted that LGL correlations were too small to have accommodated the populations enumerated in the Book of Mormon. Aston is aware of this problem, and he has an argument for it that deserves some consideration. To begin with, he suggests that the notion that the “Nephites were a very numerous people, building large cities of impressive stone structures” is a misperception (Aston, p. 83). He believes the Book of Mormon indicates otherwise: “The Nephites were a people who lived in a vast wilderness area, built cities made of

wood, and struggled against vast hostile Lamanite populations that inhabited the wilderness areas" (ibid.).

The first difficulty is to come to grips with the demographic inequality between Nephites and Lamanites. To read the text, the Lamanites appear to have enjoyed exceptionally high fertility rates and the Nephites the reverse. Aston argues that the Lamanites were migratory, were "blood-thirsty," dwelt in tents, and wandered in the wilderness. He fails to mention, however, how these characteristics led to population disparities. Before moving forward with Aston's argument, it is worth stressing that all descriptions of the Lamanites and Nephites have to be adjusted for time period. Time and cultural content should be as much of a concern with the text as with the archaeological record. Otherwise, no match will ever be possible. Book of Mormon peoples did not remain the same for a thousand years. Thus, Enos's description of some Lamanite bands cannot be projected to the time of Alma, or vice versa. The Book of Mormon clearly describes the Lamanites as living in cities with kings and slaves and as having an agricultural economy. Aston assumes that Nephites were more sedentary than the Lamanites, and this is part of his explanation for why there were more Lamanites. This is exactly backward from anthropological understandings of reproductive rates and incentives. Sedentary peoples have higher fertility rates precisely because they are not forced to wander. Nomadic peoples typically wander in small groups.

Aston's argument for mobility works more for his notions of mobilizing troops rather than for birth rates. He suggests that for their wars the Lamanites drew upon all their populations.

If there was to be a battle, every blood-thirsty Lamanite wanted to be included in the action. In this way, huge Lamanite armies were quickly assembled, moving quickly on foot over the entire geographic region of Book of Mormon lands. The less mobile Nephites, city dwellers and protectors of their

cities, thus had smaller populations than the numerous roving Lamanite hordes. (Aston, p. 84)

Here again is another weak argument; the Nephites' living in cities and desiring to protect them would not seem to lead to their population being smaller. Aston does better in his second possibility for the disparities in population. He suggests that the Lamanites became more numerous because "the descendants of Laman and Lemuel, starting from the very beginning, began to intermarry with other peoples who may have occupied neighboring lands. These people could have been the ancestors of those whom we know today as the Indians" (Aston, p. 85). I think this is indeed the only sound explanation, and it is a fundamental idea in most Book of Mormon geographies. People already resided in the land of promise before any of the Old World groups came over, and substantial intermarriage occurred. Aston does manage to muddy the waters somewhat with his last claim about Indians. In a previous argument he talked of empty lands. In this one, he allows for the possibility of other peoples. Moreover, he has the Lamanites intermarrying with these people, but he also has the ancestors of the Indians retaining their separate identities until the present day. Why, from a Nephite narrative center perspective, would these people not all have been considered or have become Lamanites?

In his final argument, Aston asserts that Nephite lands would not have been densely populated, so New York would work well archaeologically. This is another example of interplay between a real-world setting and the text, with interpretive adjustments made to each. The gist of his argument is that one cannot extrapolate from the number of Lamanites slain in battle to calculations of Nephite numbers because fifty Nephites could stand against thousands of Lamanites (taken from Mosiah 11:19), perhaps because of superior weapons and armor. Here again, a specific circumstance is promoted to a racial characteristic for the rest of time. This claim is simply wrong, as all other battle narratives in the book attest. The other problem is continuing chronological blindness. Whenever we are presented with information

about the Nephites or Lamanites, our questions must include “When?” and “Where?”

Nephite Lands

I have reviewed some of the basic features of Aston’s proposed Nephite lands. He presumes to know the location of Cumorah, and from there he identifies everything interesting and close by as a Book of Mormon feature. All his arguments begin with proximity to Cumorah and end with claims of clarifying the Book of Mormon narrative, while conveniently and simultaneously disproving Middle America correlations. He finds further clues substantiating his views in the location of former Indian settlements. He plots these on a wonderfully elegant map that shows the locations of waters and wilderness vis-à-vis sites, and he differentiates the types of sites according to fortifications, unfortified sites, and earthworks or mounds. His map reveals a relatively dense occupation in the Genesee Valley, his candidate for the land of Zarahemla. Many settlements are also found in his proposed location for the land of Nephi, near Lake Chautauqua, New York (near the shore of Lake Erie). I will not address the details of his argument here because he ignores the dates of the sites he places on this map. They do not date to Book of Mormon times, and they therefore cannot count as evidence for his model. His map is superb (Aston, p. 97, map 9.1) but irrelevant because it has the appearance of evidence without being so. Were Aston to take the same map and concept, do the hard work of wading through archaeological reports that provide information on time period and site characteristics, and then plot these sites by time period and site type, he would have a useful and clear picture of occupation for Book of Mormon time periods. This would be the first time this had been done. As it stands, all Aston’s timeless map proves is that the best land for agriculture in western New York had more and larger sites than did the adjacent forested high ground. This is expected. Unfortunately for his proposal, New York peoples of the time period of interest did not practice agriculture or erect these sites.

Nephite Cities

Aston makes specific proposals for the approximate placement of important Nephite cities and lands. He starts from his known point of Cumorah and works from there to locate the waters of Mormon, the land of Helam, cities in the southwest, the eastern cities, Moroni, Mulek, Nephiah, and the hill Onidah. Placement of these cities and features depends on the locations of the major features described above. I have already given my reasons for rejecting Aston's spatial claims for Cumorah, the narrow neck, and Sidon. I therefore need not deal with his specific proposals. Rather, I will mention just a few points of additional interest: First, his placement of cities that, according to the Book of Mormon record, were sunk under water at the time of the crucifixion is problematic because the geology and hydrology of western New York do not seem suitable for such catastrophic events. Aston claims that Jerusalem was located on the shores of Lake Erie (p. 111). He suggests that the unusual feature known as Presque Isle Bay may have been formed when this city sunk. He does not speculate on any possible natural causes for its sinking or present any geologic evidence that might provide a simpler explanation for the bay. He locates the city of Moroni on the southern tip of Cayuga Lake, his east sea, but he fails to mention that this city was sunk under the sea. The possibility of such an event must surely be taken into account in trying to determine this city's location. Aston does not correlate any of these cities with archaeological sites. This is a serious deficiency, especially after all his attention to settlement patterns. His treatment of sites is generic and noncommittal. His allocation of Book of Mormon place-names across western New York appears driven solely by his reconstruction of the geography. However, this may be more an analytical necessity than preference, due to the annoying absence of any spectacular sites in this region for the late Nephite period. He really does not have much to work with on the archaeological side.

Aston notes the similarity between the names hill Onidah and Oneida. "This is a uniquely New York name found in the Book of

Mormon (Alma 32:4; 47:5). The name may have been carried down through the centuries by Lamanites, to later generations of Indian peoples" (Aston, p. 120). "The Oneida Indian name, according to historians, originated from the name 'Oneota,' the name of the large stone found on the 'highest eminence,' (hill Onidah?), in the territory of their ancestral lands" (ibid., emphasis in original). Folk etymologies of this sort are always fun, but single instances should not be taken seriously because they occur among all languages. These are the sorts of arguments that Joseph Smith's detractors use to debunk the Book of Mormon in their attempts to prove he fabricated it from the tools and knowledge readily at hand.²⁸

Detractors focus on fortifications, word similarities, and descriptions of northeast Indians and customs which conform to those described for the naked, painted, and bloodthirsty Lamanites. Aston, Hedengren, Olive, and Curtis do much the same thing and even supply the pictures of northeast Indians. There is a curious symmetry between LGL accounts and anti-Mormon attacks on the Book of Mormon. None of the LGL authors appears to be familiar with standard arguments against the Book of Mormon; otherwise, I suspect they would have been more cautious in repeating each one. Their failure to check this literature is hardly a surprise, however, because most do not even cite previous studies of Book of Mormon geography by fellow church members; Aston's consideration of geographies is the exception. The principal difference between the two approaches is that the LGL authors take the supposed correspondences between the sacred narrative and the archaeology, anthropology, and linguistics of New York to be proof positive of the Book of Mormon's authenticity. The insufficiency of their arguments is most readily apparent in that detractors marshal all the same evidence and correspondences as proof against a divine origin for the book—and as an accusation

28. For example, see David Pursuitte, *Joseph Smith and the Origins of the Book of Mormon* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1985); and Dan Vogel, *Indian Origins and the Book of Mormon: Religious Solutions from Columbus to Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1986).

against Joseph Smith Jr. The same evidence cannot logically lead to such divergent conclusions. Something is seriously wrong with either the evidence or the modes of argumentation. If everything in the Book of Mormon occurs in New York, then detractors have a possible case. As arguments, however, both genres of LGL proposals are equally unsuccessful and unconvincing. Most of the correspondences are forced, accidental, or erroneous and cannot count as evidence, pro or con. Before leaving this point, it is worth stressing that LGL geographers have to deal seriously with the older anti-Smith literature that makes many of the same arguments they propose in his favor. They should forget about targeting Mesoamerican geographers for a moment and focus on their true opponents.

Summary Evaluation

I have not attempted here to address every argument in the four LGL books; rather, I have focused on key arguments and claims. Although there are some interesting ideas and opinions, overall, I find all the books to be deficient. I have identified the prominent weaknesses so others may avoid such pitfalls in the future. A major problem of all the studies is a faulty and compromised method of working dialectically between the Book of Mormon text and a real-world setting. This technique is a recipe for misreadings of the text and of the archaeology because one has to “bring them together” and to “close the gap” in order to forge desired correspondences. This license for illogic is most readily apparent in Aston’s book but is clearly evident in the others as well. The overriding feature appears to be the assumption that the Palmyra hill is the one and only hill Cumorah of the Book of Mormon. Other fallacies and failures follow this unnecessary first leap of faith. All the authors use geography and archaeology to “understand” textual details. This is backward. One must work out an internal geography first and then start looking for its ancient setting. None of the current authors took this first and most important step. An equally serious consequence of this procedure is that none works with a complete geography. Rather, each

treats a handful of geographic details and ignores the rest. The most glaring example of this is Hedengren's river Sidon, which flows in the wrong direction. By what possible reasoning would one even seriously consider this to be the Book of Mormon feature, let alone expend years of effort fabricating an entire geography around it? Curtis's and Aston's treatments of the land northward exhibit this same deficiency.

Most of the interpretations of spatial relationships and real-world correlations in these books are forced, and the proposed geographies are overly complex. As noted, Olive has to postulate large lakes that have not licked a shore for over ten thousand years. Not far behind are the proposals by Curtis, Hedengren, and Aston for duplicating named lands and seas to preserve the tenuous coherence of their Book of Mormon narratives vis-à-vis their proposed Nephite lands.

All authors ineptly handle archaeological and anthropological details of the text and of the real-world setting. Their arguments are not plausible and sometimes not even logical. Poor argumentation is the most avoidable of scholarly sins. Also, the authors use double standards when it comes to interpretation, most clearly evident in the treatment of Mormon folklore and traditional understandings of Book of Mormon geographical matters. Why insist that the Prophet believed in the Palmyra hill as Cumorah on the one hand, while on the other disbelieving that he made a statement about a ruin in eastern Guatemala (Quirigua) as being in the ancient land of Zarahemla? The authors employ too much selective belief and disbelief when it comes to handling both statements by General Authorities and scientific information. Whatever one's rules of inference, these need to be stated and applied equitably to all materials. One cannot believe geologists' reconstructions of ancient lakes and then choose to disbelieve the dates given for them. One cannot take early settlers' accounts of the wonderful archaeological finds in New York as positive evidence and then turn around and discard the statements of the most knowledgeable archaeologist to have ever worked in the state. Such a

procedure reveals that a researcher already has a conclusion in mind and is only harvesting sound bites from authorities to back his own claims—to lend them an appearance of credibility rather than seeking for the reality. None of these books passes the test of competent scholarship, nor would they pass normal scholarly review.

To summarize my assessment: None of the geographies deals convincingly with the spatial details of features and cities in the Book of Mormon. The proposed geographies distort the text and are unconvincing. Consequently, I reject each proposal purely on its handling of the internal details of the Book of Mormon. I also reject each proposal on methodological grounds. They all put the cart before the horse; they use real-world settings to adjust the meaning and reading of the text itself. The proposed geographic correlations to bodies of water, hills and valleys, and other natural features are not plausible. Thus I can discover no good reason to accept any of these correlations as they stand. As discussed, the archaeology of the New York–Pennsylvania region fails to correlate in terms of the spatial distribution of sites, of the temporal distribution of sites, and of the cultural content of sites. Likewise, the anthropology of these proposals comes up short. For many of the arguments in these books to be plausible, one has to presume unacceptable levels of ignorance or incompetence on the part of past peoples to make the events described in the book work in the proposed setting in the manner imagined. If we accord the ancients full rationality in our models, many of the claims appear dubious. To conclude, none of these geographies works at any level, so I reject them all. If these are the best arguments that can be advanced for an LGL geography, then it is clear that the Great Lakes are not Book of Mormon lands.

Unfortunately, Pursuitte's observation about Book of Mormon apologetics appears particularly apt for the current crop of LGL proposals: "Published works purporting to prove *The Book of Mormon* true often demonstrate the two weaknesses of very liberal interpretation of archaeological findings and misrepresentation or apparent ignorance of relevant facts."²⁹

29. Pursuitte, *Joseph Smith and the Origins of the Book of Mormon*, 239.

This is a damning truth from the pen of one who wishes us ill. Geography aficionados can do much better than this if they follow the rules of competent scholarship and resist the temptation to force Book of Mormon lands into places where they do not belong. To bring matters home to the pocketbook and a practical question affecting us all: If one wanted to tour Book of Mormon lands, where should he or she go? Clearly, not to New York, Pennsylvania, Ontario, or Delaware. Go south, young man!

ONE-STOP SCRIPTURES

John A. Tvedtnes

The price of this book exceeds what one might expect to pay for a volume of this size. Much of the cost undoubtedly went into the beautiful imitation leather binding with incised gold lettering and a ribbon to mark one's place. But the book is still overpriced.

The purpose of this book is to present to readers what the authors consider to be a restoration of Christ's words spoken anciently to his Jewish and Nephite disciples. The New Testament portion of the text includes all those sections (with necessary background verses included) of Christ's teachings from the four Gospels, with the changes to the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible found in the Joseph Smith Translation (JST). The text from the Book of Mormon version is borrowed from portions of 3 Nephi in which Christ speaks to the Nephites. The latter is merely a condensed version of 3 Nephi and, as such, adds nothing to what we already have.

While the authors divide the various books of the Bible and Book of Mormon into chapters, they do not indicate verses, which would be helpful for those who would like to identify the KJV reading. Even though presenting the material in paragraphs, the Luteses could have

Review of Kenneth Lutes and Lyndell Lutes. *Words of Christ Restored for the Last Days*. Midway, Utah: Lutes International, 1999. 251 pp., with index. \$21.85.

inserted versification (although the KJV and published JST sometimes differ).

I shall comment only briefly on the portions of the Book of Mormon reproduced by the Luteses, noting that they have failed to include portions of the Nephite record outside of 3 Nephi where Christ is directly quoted. One such passage is found in Moroni 2, in which Moroni fulfilled his father's promise by recording the words of Christ to which only passing reference is made in 3 Nephi 18:37. Other omissions include the words of Christ addressed to Jacob, beginning in 2 Nephi 10:7, and Christ's instructions to the twelve Nephite disciples in Mormon 9:22–25. The authors also omit "the words of Jesus Christ" revealed to Mormon and recorded in 3 Nephi 30:1–2 and Moroni 8:8 as well as Mormon's quotation of Christ's words in Moroni 7:33–34. The words of Jesus to Moroni (Ether 4:6–19) and his citation from Jesus' instructions to "our fathers" (Moroni 10:23) are likewise not included. Also missing is the conversation between Jesus and the brother of Jared in Ether 3.

The authors do not really make it clear whether they are trying to include all of Christ's words from the New Testament or only the ones that have been changed in the JST, although I suspect it is the latter. Otherwise, it would have been appropriate to include the words of Christ in Acts 20:35, 1 Corinthians 11:24–25, and 2 Corinthians 12:9. Still, they should have included the JST modifications to Jesus' words in Acts 22:10, 18. Had I done a book like this, I, at least, would have included Doctrine and Covenants 45:16–75, which the Lord told Joseph Smith was something he had said to his disciples in Jerusalem.

Unfortunately, the authors are not precise. When it comes to the JST, they presume that all changes made by Joseph Smith to the KJV are "translation errors [that] have been corrected" (p. 10). This does not account for the fact that Joseph Smith sometimes revised his own changes, either giving a third reading, or reverting to the KJV reading. They would have benefited from being acquainted with the manuscripts and Joseph's marked Bible.

More important is the fact that the authors allowed errors to creep into the text. Indeed, I found an error on the very first page. In the account of Christ's baptism in Matthew 3:14, the authors show deletion of the word *forbad* in the KJV and addition of the word *refused* in the JST. But they leave out two other words that are found in both versions. The KJV reads as follows: "But John forbad *him, saying*," while the JST reads: "But John refused *him, saying*" (emphasis added). The authors leave out the words *him, saying*, which are found in both versions. They quote only part of the verse, a verse that does not, in fact, have any words from Jesus.

In "A Word of Explanation," the authors acknowledge that their text "shows selected deletions," but they seem to have established no clear criteria for such selections. Thus, for example, they show the JST substitution of *God* for *devil*, with a strikeover through the words *tempted of the devil* and the JST wording *with God* in bold letters (p. 11). The KJV words *the devil* are also crossed out in the fourth paragraph, but not in the third, where the JST substitution *the Spirit* is included in bold. This lack of consistency throws doubt on their research.

Generally speaking, I do not find books useful that merely recapitulate the scriptures, in part or in their entirety, and provide the reader with no further information. I have my own copy of the Joseph Smith Translation published years ago by the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (now Community of Christ), and also Paul A. Wellington's edition of *Joseph Smith's "New Translation" of the Bible*, which compares the published JST with the KJV in parallel columns. I also have Todd Andersen's *The Gospels Made Whole: One Complete Story of Jesus Christ*, in which he interweaves the KJV and other latter-day scriptures with the JST Gospels in their entirety, rather than just the selections used by the Luteses. So I would not find their book a useful addition to my library. But, although the buyer must be warned of errors and omissions in the text, I suppose a market exists for it among people who do not have these other books.

ANCIENT LITERARY FORMS IN THE BOOK OF MORMON

Richard Dilworth Rust

Hugh W. Pinnock, a recently deceased member of the First Quorum of the Seventy of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, spent many years doing what the title of his book indicates: finding biblical Hebrew and other ancient literary forms in the Book of Mormon. The result is a three-part compendium of forms and examples: forms of repetition, forms of parallelism, and other forms.

Although Elder Pinnock refers to there being “at least 240 different defined Hebrew writing forms . . . identifiable in the Old Testament” (p. 50), in his treatment of Hebraic forms in the Book of Mormon he limits himself to twenty-six—seven forms of repetition, thirteen of parallelism, and six miscellaneous forms: anthropopatheia (God and man with similar attributes), numerical parallelism, exergasia (working through for heightened understanding), ellipsis (a leaving out), eleutheria (bold speech), and eironeia (irony: an opposite expression). Forms of repetition include anaphora (repetition of the same word or phrase at the beginning of successive clauses or sentences), epibole (irregular repetition), epistrophe (similar sentence or clause endings), and amoebaeon (like paragraph endings). A striking example of anaphora is Jacob’s repeated “Wo unto” found in 2 Nephi 9:31–38.

Review of Hugh W. Pinnock. *Finding Biblical Hebrew and Other Ancient Literary Forms in the Book of Mormon*. Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1999. xvi + 183 pages, with index. \$19.95.

Forms of parallelism make up the main part of the book. These include word pairs, synonymous parallelism, synthetic parallelism (two things placed together to add strength), phrases repeated in order, phrases opposing each other, and chiasmus (inverse repetition). A simple but effective example of antithetical chiasmus is:

A I give not
 B because I have not,
 B but if I had
 A I would give. (Mosiah 4:24) (p. 94)

Typically, Pinnock provides examples from the Old Testament and the Book of Mormon—as with word pairs such as these:

A before the fierce anger of the Lord
 B come upon you,
 A before the day of the Lord's anger
 B come upon you. (Zephaniah 2:2)

A I will visit them
 B in my anger,
 B yea, in my fierce anger
 A will I visit them. (Mosiah 12:1) (pp. 52, 179)

A major point of the book is set forth in the preface: “Joseph Smith could not have been aware when he translated the Book of Mormon that it was full of chiasms and Hebraisms” (p. x). These various ancient forms argue that the Book of Mormon “is an ancient Hebrew book that was translated, but not written, by Joseph Smith in the nineteenth century” (p. x). Later, the argument becomes deductive, as with this reference to the form of inverse repetition: “Because the Book of Mormon is a Hebrew-influenced text like the Bible, it naturally contains this form in abundance” (p. 93). While the preponderance of Hebraic forms in the Book of Mormon gives credence to Pinnock’s assertions, I find especially touching his anecdote about a Jewish friend to whom he showed chiasmus in the Book of Mormon.

She told her rabbi, who responded, "Then, my dear, you have found one of God's books because chiasmus is the language of God" (p. ix).

Writing in a friendly, accessible style, Pinnock relies heavily on Donald W. Parry's *Book of Mormon Text Reformatted according to Parallelistic Patterns* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1992) and E. W. Bullinger's *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1968 [first published in 1898]). He relies as well upon ideas from Robert Alter, Wilfred G. E. Watson, John W. Welch, and others. Pinnock says in his first citation of Parry: "I am deeply indebted to Donald Parry" (p. 47 n. 1). Indeed, he is quite derivative of Parry, following a similar order of forms and using many of the same examples.

Although not entirely original, *Finding Biblical Hebrew and Other Ancient Literary Forms in the Book of Mormon* is refreshingly clear. Pinnock is obviously a teacher: he is very concerned with communicating clearly. His examples also have graphics as visual aids—for example, line drawings of up staircases and down staircases in connection with anabasis (from the Greek meaning "to go or walk up") and catabasis (from the Greek meaning "going down"). (These forms are repeated, with terms and examples, in the "Glossary and Pronunciation Guide" at the end of the book. There, typically, the author has paired examples from the Old Testament and the Book of Mormon.)

The book has its limitations, though. The scriptural examples are all taken out of context, so the emphasis is on the forms themselves much more than on the effectiveness and purposes of these forms as part of a larger whole. In that regard, I prefer Parry's *Book of Mormon Text Reformatted according to Parallelistic Patterns*. Simply looking at one example after another is sort of like reading sequentially a book of quotations. Too, despite Pinnock's pronunciation guide, I find myself losing interest in trying to remember the names of the rhetorical terms. (For me, it is simpler to think of "staircase parallelism" than "anabasis.") Still, the book provides a handy and clear guide to some major literary forms found in the Book of Mormon.

I like also what the book does not provide but what it points to. In his epilogue, Pinnock says, "We have merely scratched the surface

of a discipline that can fascinate, inspire, and alter your thinking about the sophisticated writing abilities of the prophets who lived from 4000 B.C. to A.D. 400" (p. 157). Indeed. If it does nothing else, Pinnock's book could stimulate further study of the literary aspects of the Book of Mormon.

Despite all the books and articles on the Bible as literature, Robert Alter finds that "the telling [in the Hebrew Bible] has a shapeliness whose subtleties we are only beginning to understand, and it was undertaken by writers with the most brilliant gifts for intimating character, defining scenes, fashioning dialogue, elaborating motifs, [and] balancing near and distant episodes."¹ David A. Dorsey avers that "there is still no comprehensive study of literary structure in the Hebrew Bible and few adequate analyses of the structures of individual Old Testament books. The field of research is still in its infancy."² If this is true of study of the Bible, then what about the Book of Mormon? Writing about scriptural studies generally, but surely thinking as well about the Book of Mormon, Parry says: "Much work remains to be done in the field of scriptural poetics, including the study of parallelistic and repetitious forms."³ Appropriately, then, Pinnock predicts that "the study of this art form and writing system will increase in popularity as the years unfold. . . . It is possible that all we now know about how the ancients wrote and the forms they used is just a microscopic percentage of what there is yet to learn" (p. 157).

As far as I am aware, the only full-length treatments of the literary aspects of the Book of Mormon are my book, *Feasting on the Word: The Literary Testimony of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1997), and Mark D. Thomas's *Digging in Cumorah: Reclaiming Book of Mormon Narratives* (Salt Lake City:

1. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode, eds., *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 15.

2. David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis–Malachi* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1999), 20.

3. Donald W. Parry, *The Book of Mormon Text Reformatted according to Parallelistic Patterns* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1992), preface.

Signature Books, 1999). As both Thomas and I realize, a great deal more can be done with this scripture that in some ways appears simple yet is extremely complex.

Pinnock points to a fruitful area in which there is much yet to learn: He recognizes that “many of the Hebrew writing forms discussed in this book were designed by ancient religious leaders and early scholars to help students memorize oral or written texts” (p. 1). Again he says: “The climactic form aided the prophets in clearly communicating the word of God to eager listeners who had at best only limited access to the scriptural scrolls” (p. 83). This is affirmed by Dorsey, who writes, “Texts were normally intended to be read aloud, whether one was reading alone or to an audience. Accordingly, an ancient writer was compelled to use structural signals that would be perceptible to the listening audience. Signals were geared for the ear, not the eye, since visual markers would be of little value to a listening audience.”⁴ This is also true of the world out of which the Book of Mormon comes. It may strike a visually oriented person as incredible that, for instance, the twelve Nephite disciples could hear the Savior’s sermon at the temple and then the next day repeat that sermon to the people, “nothing varying from the words which Jesus had spoken” (3 Nephi 19:8).

While the typical reader of the Book of Mormon is worlds away from this oral-aural mode of transmission and learning, new discoveries of the book could, I believe, come from immersion in this type of environment. One could apply to the Book of Mormon the point Victor M. Wilson makes in *Divine Symmetries*: “Memory is everything in an orally grounded culture, . . . [a]nd memory is cultivated through repetition.” Epic and other forms of ancient literature were created with “balanced sections built around a center, both in the construction of its parts and in the arrangement of the whole.”⁵ Discovery of these arrangements is not easy, though. I can imagine

4. Dorsey, *Literary Structure of the Old Testament*, 16.

5. Victor M. Wilson, *Divine Symmetries: The Art of Biblical Rhetoric* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1997), 16, 18.

they would best be found by listening repeatedly to the Book of Mormon without the intrusion of artificial markers such as punctuation—perhaps even of chapter designations (initially provided by John H. Gilbert and later by Orson Pratt).

Pinnock's four pages on irony point to another fruitful area that is open to much more exploration and analysis.

What Pinnock says of poetry is true as well of narrative structures: It "relied on repetitions . . . and parallelistic, symmetrical structures to achieve beauty, emphasis, and clarity of understanding" (p. 49). Despite his repeated attempts to deny the historicity of the Book of Mormon, Thomas shows the rich possibilities of finding in the Book of Mormon type-scenes and formulaic phrases typical of the Bible. As I do in my chapter on narratives in *Feasting on the Word*, Thomas finds striking triple repetitions of events in the Book of Mormon. Both of us show we learned from Robert Alter about parallel narrative scenes. This area of interest, though, is far from being exhausted.

Pinnock calls attention to rhetorical figures and by doing so reminds us that as with the Bible, the Book of Mormon is replete with figurative language. More attention needs to be paid, for instance, to metaphors and personification like the following: "The good shepherd doth call after you; and if you will hearken unto his voice he will bring you into his fold, and ye are his sheep" (Alma 5:60). Mercy "encircles them in the arms of safety" (Alma 34:16).

A number of the paired Bible–Book of Mormon examples in Pinnock's book call attention to the intertextuality between these two works of scripture. Intertextuality within the Book of Mormon is also worthy of further study. Subsequent Nephite prophets, we know, had access to teachings of the earlier Nephite prophets. Alma's sermons are indebted to Abinadi's teachings, as are Amulek's to Alma's. Steeped in their knowledge of Isaiah, Nephi and Jacob incorporated some of his expressions into their own teachings. A striking instance of intertextuality is the observation by Nephi the son of Helaman (or perhaps by Mormon) that the church was broken up (around A.D. 30)

“in all the land save it were among a few of the Lamanites who were converted unto the true faith; and they would not depart from it, for they were firm, and steadfast, and immovable, willing with all diligence to keep the commandments of the Lord” (3 Nephi 6:14). Thus nearly six centuries later, it is acknowledged that Lehi’s desire for his two oldest sons is fulfilled: that Laman might be righteous and that Lemuel might be “like unto this valley, firm and steadfast, and immovable in keeping the commandments of the Lord” (1 Nephi 2:10).

A great help to discovering more of the literary aspects of the Book of Mormon would be to understand the book both through prophecy and through being “taught after the manner of the things of the Jews” (2 Nephi 25:5; see 25:4). More generally, it would help to become widely familiar with treatments of the Bible as literature. Pinnock in his selected bibliography lists six books on this subject. However, a subject search of the library at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill finds 142 books on the Bible as literature—most of which, presumably, contain insights that could be applied to the Book of Mormon.

For a God-fearing person, an intellectual interest in the Book of Mormon as literature is not sufficient. Elder Henry B. Eyring is properly aware of the limitations of an exclusively literary approach: “So much of the Old Testament can be taught as dramatic stories, fascinating customs, and beautiful literary forms. But I will sense a greater happiness, a deeper appreciation when I study or teach of times when prophets spoke of Jehovah and when the people received the words and turned toward Him.”⁶ Yet properly recognized, the literary aspects of the Book of Mormon are a means of conveying its spiritual purposes. Elder Neal A. Maxwell refers to Mosiah 8:21 (“Yea, they are as a wild flock which fleeth”) and speaks of “verses of scripture which teach while reflecting linguistic loveliness.” Again, he refers to Mosiah 5:13 to show that “important insights about discipleship are embodied and conveyed in beautiful but succinct ways . . . in this inspired

6. Henry B. Eyring, “Studying and Teaching the Old Testament,” *Ensign* (January 2002): 34.

but haunting interrogatory which deals with the essence of failed discipleship.”⁷ Pinnock refers to this linkage of aesthetics and meaning: “The beauty and surprising presence of this Hebrew writing form [chiasmus] in the Book of Mormon appeared to be an almost untapped reservoir of testimony-strengthening material” (p. viii). Indeed, the literary beauty of the Book of Mormon is an essential vehicle for presenting its God-directed purposes—as I acknowledge with the subtitle of my book on the Book of Mormon as literature: *The Literary Testimony of the Book of Mormon*.

It needs to be emphasized, though, that being trained “after the manner of the things of the Jews” is not sufficient. I expect that Laman and Lemuel had this kind of training, yet they were like the people listening to Nephi the son of Helaman: It was “not possible that they could disbelieve” (3 Nephi 7:18), so they became angry. Or one could simply disregard the divine element in scriptures—as do so many scholars.

Finally, Pinnock’s book could contribute to a study of the Old Testament in Gospel Doctrine classes of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. *Finding Biblical Hebrew and Other Ancient Literary Forms in the Book of Mormon* has nearly as many examples of literary forms from the Old Testament as it does from the Book of Mormon, and recognizing these Hebraic forms can enhance study of the Bible just as it can of the Book of Mormon.

7. Neal A. Maxwell, *The Promise of Discipleship* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2001), 4.

PRESSING FORWARD: A REAL FEAST

Stephen J. Duffin

General Comments

In 1984 FARMS issued the first of its "Reports on Research in Progress." Since then, brief articles have appeared regularly as FARMS Updates. In 1992 the articles of the first decade were collected and published in one volume entitled *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*. This second volume, *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon*, continues in the same vein with Updates from 1992 through 1999 accompanied by similar research articles that were published during this same period in the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*.

Pressing Forward contains sixty-nine Updates in 298 pages; on average, each item is just over 4 pages long, including notes. These Updates, then, are not lengthy in-depth articles but rather bite-sized, easy-to-read reports of current research on the Book of Mormon. However, it should not be thought that their brevity is indicative of a lack of either scholarship or skillful research on the part of the authors. Many Updates arise out of cooperative research, and they are not released until they are carefully scrutinized by referees, thus ensuring that top-quality research is published. Contributors include many

Review of John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne, eds. *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon: The FARMS Updates of the 1990s*. Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1999. xiii + 329 pp., with passage and subject indexes. \$14.95.

whose names will be familiar to readers of Book of Mormon research: John Gee, William J. Hamblin, Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, John L. Sorenson, John A. Tvedtnes, and John W. Welch, to name just a few. With authors such as these, we are guaranteed quality research. It is indeed gratifying for members of the church to have access to this level of research carried out in defense of the Book of Mormon and to know that scholars of this caliber are able to answer objections and criticisms.

Pressing Forward contains an index of passages and a subject index arranged alphabetically. Most of the articles in the book are sequenced in correlation with the Book of Mormon passages to which they refer, beginning with an article entitled “Four Suggestions on the Origin of the Name Nephi” to “The ‘Decapitation’ of Shiz” as found in the book of Ether. (The final eight articles are historical studies with references to the Doctrine and Covenants or Joseph Smith’s history.) This sequencing of *Pressing Forward* is especially useful when the book is read in parallel with the Book of Mormon.

Although the book contains subject and scripture indexes, an additional index categorizing the Updates into the different areas of research might have been a useful supplement for those with specific research interests. For example, items that deal with literary comment could be indexed together for easy reference. This, however, is a minor criticism since the book is easy to navigate. The topics of each article appear in the recto headers and the book of scripture on which the article is based in the verso headers. Each Update, as one would expect, contains several useful notes for the reader who is interested in pursuing any particular topic.

Discussion of the Articles

I will not comment on every article in *Pressing Forward*. I will, however, look at a representative selection of the different topics discussed and the approaches used by the authors. One common and worthwhile approach that many of the Updates take is to show that names of people and places as well as other terminologies found in

the Book of Mormon are consistent with those of the ancient world. In the first article, Gee vindicates the name of Nephi by giving four suggestions of its origin, confidently concluding that Nephi is an attested Egyptian name.

In the second article, Jeffrey R. Chadwick gives the name Sariah similar treatment to that previously given the name Alma.¹ Since the name Sariah does not appear in the Bible as a female personal name, the skeptic might suggest that Joseph Smith invented it. Chadwick's article assures us that Sariah is a female Hebrew name, justified by a single reference to a "Sariah daughter of Hoshea" in an Aramaic papyrus.

The phrase *a visionary man*, as found in 1 Nephi, is not present in the King James Version of the Bible. However, by drawing on its Hebraic roots, Tvedtnes successfully demonstrates that it is nonetheless authentic. Tvedtnes, this time in company with Stephen D. Ricks, also gives suggestions for the Hebrew origin of three place-names found in the Book of Mormon: Zarahemla, Jershon, and Cumorah.

Another approach compares Nephite practices with established ancient practices. Angela M. Crowell and Tvedtnes do this when they compare the practice of blessing God *after* eating and being "filled," as found in Alma 8:22. Parallels are found in various ancient texts, including rabbinical writings and a poem from the Dead Sea Scrolls. In a separate article, Tvedtnes—relying on stones from the archaeological site of Gezer, clay tablets from El-Amarna in Egypt, and the Dead Sea Scrolls—determines that the Book of Mormon practice of using the terms *city* and *land* interchangeably was also a custom in the Old World.

Similarly, Welch also compares Sherem's accusations against Jacob as recorded in Jacob 7:7 with ancient Israelite law. On three accounts Sherem accuses Jacob of offenses which, if the individual is found guilty, are punishable by death. Welch traces each of these

1. See Hugh Nibley, review of *Bar-Kochba*, by Yigael Yadin, *BYU Studies* 14/1 (1973): 121, and Paul Y. Hoskisson, "Alma as a Hebrew Name," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 7/1 (1998): 72–73.

accusations to preexilic Israelite law. These types of articles show that small details, which are probably missed by the casual reader of the Book of Mormon, add evidence to its claim of authenticity.

Comparing the forms and styles of writing in the Book of Mormon with Old World literature has, in the past, been another fruitful area of research. My particular favorite in *Pressing Forward* is Royal Skousen's discussion of Hebraic conditionals. Skousen has found that the original English-language text of the Book of Mormon contained expressions that are uncharacteristic of English. One of these is the Hebrew-like conditional clause. In English, the conditional is commonly expressed as: "if x then y." In Hebrew the same idea is expressed as "if x and y," and although that form is peculiar in English, it makes perfect sense in Hebrew. Skousen counts thirteen examples of this type of Hebraic conditional in the first edition of the Book of Mormon that were removed by Joseph Smith in his grammatical editing for the second edition, published in 1837. This, Skousen points out, lends support to the idea that Joseph Smith's translation was a literal one and that the language from which the book was translated was Hebrew or Hebrew-like.

As one might expect, some Updates defend the practice of writing on metal plates. William J. Adams Jr. informs us of Dr. Gabriel Barkay's find at an excavation site in Jerusalem. The dig, which was begun in 1979, unearthed a tomb dated to about 600 B.C. Among the finds were two rolled-up strips of silver, unknown elsewhere in the archaeology of this period. These silver plates contain quotations from the book of Numbers, confirming that religious texts *were* engraved on precious metal plates in Lehi's Jerusalem and thus showing that Lehi's search for the plates of Laban and his own writings on precious metal plates are real possibilities.

Five articles discuss swords in the Book of Mormon. Adams compares the sword of Laban to a sword found at a site three miles south of Jericho, and Tvedtnes compares it to a description of a sword in one of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Tvedtnes discusses the rod and sword as the word of God, Brett L. Holbrook talks of the sword of Laban as a

symbol of divine authority, and Matthew Roper deals with eyewitness descriptions of Mesoamerican swords.

The book also devotes considerable space to King Benjamin and his address, reflecting the growing interest in this topic. Two Updates based on the research of Welch, Terry L. Szink, and others introduce us to the ancient precedent for the use of towers in royal councils and ceremonies, while the longest article in *Pressing Forward* deals with ways in which King Benjamin's speech paves the way for the democratization of the government and politics in the land of Zarahemla.

Much of the work of FARMS involves defending the Book of Mormon, particularly in replying to critics of that foundational book of scripture. As expected, Updates also respond to criticisms of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In response to the criticism that Joseph Smith, or one of his contemporaries, was the sole author of the Book of Mormon, Philip A. Allred focuses on how the single word *state* suggests that Alma the Younger can be singled out as a distinct author within the book. Sorenson deals nicely with the minor criticism that there is no evidence of a tent-making or tent-using tradition in Mesoamerica.

Some of the articles, however, are not strictly apologetic in nature. Welch's discussion of the connections between the visions of Lehi and Nephi and his explanation of why the Nephite economy was so volatile are of great interest to the student of the Book of Mormon and show just how complex and integrally sound the book is. Ken Haubrock gives an excellent appreciation of the life and personality of Sam, the brother of Nephi. Not only does he offer insights that most readers would overlook, but he also shows how, with just a careful reading of the Book of Mormon, our understanding and appreciation of the people of the Book of Mormon can be greatly enhanced.

As one may anticipate, these Updates vary in strength of argument. Some appear to be well supported with evidence, while others are a little more speculative. One that strikes me as leaning toward speculation is the article dealing with the shining stones of the Jaredites.

The claim here is that radioluminescent lights made from a porous silica matrix in which a phosphor is dispersed have recently been developed and that their qualities are consistent with those required of the Jaredite stones. In fairness to the researchers, they do not claim that their research is conclusive, and they admit that we can only speculate about the process that led to the Jaredite lights. Furthermore, it seems to me that one needs only to show that occurrences such as the Jaredite lights were *possible* in order to silence the critics. A stronger conclusion that shows us something that *actually* did occur or *probably* occurred is a bonus, but it is enough in most instances to settle for a weaker conclusion.

Pressing Forward ends with eight historical studies ranging from a progress report on fragments of the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon to a discussion of Joseph Smith's access to library facilities in Harmony. The final article, appropriately, issues a warning of the dangers of jumping to conclusions. Using the lessons learned from the Grolier Codex, a document that was originally declared a fake by scholars but is now acknowledged as authentic, Sorenson and Welch highlight five mistakes made by those who judged the Grolier Codex a hoax and suggest that these mistakes are also commonly made by critics of the Book of Mormon.

Conclusions

This book will be of interest and value to most members of the church, especially to those wishing to keep up-to-date with the latest research on the Book of Mormon. I would also recommend this volume to any critics of the church since it may save them considerable time and effort in dealing with issues that have already been researched. For a long-time subscriber to FARMS, the research covered in this volume will, of course, not be new. However, this volume is still a useful addition to any library as the Updates and articles are conveniently gathered together in one place with adequate subject and scripture indexing.

These Updates do not set out to prove the authenticity of the Book of Mormon, for a testimony of its truthfulness is a personal matter and must come from the Spirit. However, after reading *Pressing Forward*, one cannot help but marvel at the consistency of the Book of Mormon, both internally and in comparison with evidences of previous cultures. This volume, then, achieves what it sets out to do, which is to help all students of the scriptures to “press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ” (2 Nephi 31:20).

A GENERAL RESPONSE TO *THE NEW MORMON CHALLENGE*

David L. Paulsen

Carl Mosser asked me to provide a general Latter-day Saint response to *The New Mormon Challenge* and, in particular, to respond to the authors' conclusion that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is not a Christian church. With our limited time, I cannot do justice to even one of these invitations. Rather than slighting the second, which is personally very important to me, I have chosen to defer it to another venue.

General Reaction

My general response will consist of summarizing the authors' own stated aims for their work and then assessing how well, from my Latter-day Saint perspective, they have achieved them. These aims include the following:

This paper in its original form was presented as part of a panel discussion of *The New Mormon Challenge* conducted before the Evangelical Philosophical Society section of the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion (AAR) in Denver, Colorado, 17 November 2001. Richard J. Mouw, president of California's Fuller Theological Seminary, moderated the discussion. Latter-day Saint respondents included David L. Paulsen, Daniel C. Peterson, Stephen D. Ricks, Blake T. Ostler, and Hollis R. Johnson. Representing the evangelical viewpoint were William Lane Craig, Francis J. Beckwith, Carl Mosser, Paul

Review of Francis J. Beckwith, Carl Mosser, and Paul Owen, eds. *The New Mormon Challenge: Responding to the Latest Defenses of a Fast-Growing Movement*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2002. 535 pp., with glossary and indexes. \$21.99.

1. To retard the growth and progress of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints by disproving or otherwise discrediting its beliefs.¹ (Given this aim, I would classify *The New Mormon Challenge* as an anti-Mormon book.)

2. To this end, based on sound scholarship, to provide a rigorous critique of Latter-day Saint beliefs.²

3. As a basis for this critique, to first state Latter-day Saint beliefs accurately and fairly.³

4. To this end, to distinguish between “official” or “canonized” beliefs, traditional beliefs, popular or commonly held beliefs, and, finally, permissible beliefs.⁴

5. To present this critique in a “respectful, charitable and courteous” manner.⁵

6. To engage Latter-day Saints in genuine and “fruitful theological dialogue.”⁶

With the exception of the first, these goals are refreshing. It is rare, indeed, that an anti-Mormon book has such laudable aspirations. I thank the authors. How well does *The New Mormon Challenge* achieve these aims? Leaving aside the first aim and grading the book by comparing it with other anti-Mormon books, I would score it near the top of the class, significantly better than most anti-Mormon books. Again, my thanks.

However, if I were to grade the book against more absolute standards, I would mark out improvements that still need to be made.

Owen, and Paul Copan. All citations to *The New Mormon Challenge* in my panel presentation are to a prepublication version of the manuscript (hereafter, PPM). Corresponding citations in this written presentation are to the published version (NMC), which was not yet available at the time of the Denver event. Marc-Charles Ingerson and David Vanderbeek have provided valuable assistance in preparing this manuscript for publication.

1. PPM, 77–79; see NMC, 68–69.

2. PPM, 21–22; see NMC, 22–23.

3. PPM, 21; see NMC, 22.

4. PPM, 21–22; see NMC, 22.

5. PPM, 20; see NMC, 11, 21.

6. PPM, 98; see NMC, 12–13, 86.

And I am hopeful that these will be made in the authors' intended sequels. Perhaps some candid comments will conduce to that end.

Aim 1: To retard the growth and progress of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints by disproving or otherwise discrediting its beliefs.

I will not say much by way of critique of this aim. *Res ipsa loquitur*—the thing speaks for itself. Further, this aim seems strikingly at odds with the book's additional goal of engaging Latter-day Saints in genuine and fruitful dialogue. How do a declaration and pursuit of all-out war on another's faith generate goodwill and genuine dialogue? Nonetheless, I personally hope that this warfare doesn't diminish dialogue between our two Christian communities, which, I hope, continues and flourishes.

Aim 2: To this end, based on sound scholarship, to provide a rigorous critique of Latter-day Saint beliefs.

I am a philosopher, so I will leave it to my colleagues to evaluate the soundness of the book's scholarship. But, by and large, I am impressed with the quality of the critiques collected in this book. Contributors have posed challenges to Latter-day Saint positions that will likely keep LDS apologists engaged for some time. I do, however, want to raise a metalevel question relating to Aim 2. In context, what does "sound scholarship" require? Consider two major points argued for in the book: (1) the Bible teaches that the world was created out of nothing, and (2) the Bible teaches that God is a single metaphysical substance consisting of three persons. Each of these claims, I understand, flies directly in the face of a scholarly consensus to the contrary. Of course, this fact in no way entails that these claims are false or, by itself, impugns the scholarly nature of the arguments marshaled in their support. But, given a contrary scholarly consensus, does "sound scholarship" require that defenders of a minority position (1) acknowledge the contrary consensus, (2) at least summarize the grounds on which such consensus is based, and (3) only then make a case for their minority report? Failing to do this, defenders of a minority

position may mislead their readers to conclude that the scholarly consensus supports their view when in fact it does not. Again, what does a critique of LDS beliefs based on “sound scholarship” require?

Aim 3: As a basis for this critique, to first state Latter-day Saint beliefs accurately and fairly.

To fulfill this aim, it seems to me that evangelicals must state our beliefs to our satisfaction. And here we arrive at what I consider to be a major failing in *The New Mormon Challenge*. While I find in this book some misstatements of Latter-day Saint beliefs, the primary sin of the editors of *The New Mormon Challenge* is not so much one of commission as it is of omission. The editors, as they themselves acknowledge, fail to set out our basic beliefs.⁷ Especially troubling here is their failure to set out our views of Christology, soteriology, and the doctrine of the Trinity, while nonetheless attempting to convince their readers that our faith cannot be considered Christian in “any very useful or theologically significant sense.”⁸ Strange that these nonpresented beliefs should have no theological bearing on whether our faith is Christian. And stranger still that our rejection of two extrabiblical beliefs—creation out of nothing and the classical doctrine of the Trinity—should be theologically decisive for excluding Latter-day Saints from the Christian circle.⁹

Compounding this failing to set out our beliefs is the authors’ proposed remedy. They recommend that their readers fill this information gap by reading another book by evangelicals about Latter-day

7. Speaking of the beginning chapters of their book, the editors acknowledge, “Neither, however, gives an introductory overview of LDS history and belief. For that we heartily recommend another book which will serve as an excellent companion to this one: Richard and Joan Ostling’s *Mormon America: The Power and the Promise*. PPM, 19; see NMC, 20. See Louis Midgley’s review of the Ostling book, “Faulty Topography,” in this volume, pp. 139–92, and Raymond Takashi Swenson’s review, “Faith without Caricature?” *FARMS Review of Books* 13/2 (2001): 65–77.

8. PPM, 76; see NMC, 66.

9. The editors describe these beliefs as “absolutely fundamental and nonnegotiable. We do not feel that the status of Mormonism in relation to Christianity can ever change unless there is a willingness within the structures of the LDS Church to reconsider those issues.” PPM, 476; see NMC, 400.

Saints that, on its flyleaf, promises to provide everything anyone ever wanted to know about the Mormons: *Mormon America: The Power and the Promise*, by Richard and Joan Ostling.¹⁰ They even call this book “an excellent companion” to their own.¹¹

I have two bones to pick here. First, why *Mormon America*? It is laden with errors of all kinds, both major and minor.¹² It is also often biased in its depiction of Latter-day Saint history and contemporary Mormon culture.¹³ If the editors choose to incorporate by reference its portrayal of LDS beliefs and practice into *The New Mormon Challenge*, they do so at the price of defeating their goal to state LDS beliefs fairly and accurately, perhaps even at the price of dissuading informed Latter-day Saints from taking their book seriously.

My second bone is more fundamental. If the editors of *The New Mormon Challenge* really want their readers to understand what

10. Richard N. Ostling and Joan K. Ostling, *Mormon America: The Power and the Promise* (San Francisco: Harper, 1999).

11. PPM, 19; see NMC, 20.

12. See Ostling and Ostling, *Mormon America*. The errors are too numerous to treat in a footnote. Examples of the minor errors include the Ostlings' implication that Latter-day Saints cannot obtain a temple recommend if they drink caffeinated soda (ibid., 176) and that we hold testimony meetings every Sunday, rather than only the first Sunday of each month (ibid., 181). More serious flaws include their claims that the church does “little to accommodate the philosophical cast of mind” and intellectuals in general (ibid., 374) and that “Mormon teaching violates the basis of ecumenical fellowship. The LDS scriptures simply do not allow Mormons to view the others as legitimate churches” (ibid., 323); “support for the Mormon doctrines of a corporeal . . . God . . . cannot be found . . . in the early church fathers” (ibid., 313). For a very different take on the latter issue, see Carl W. Griffin and David L. Paulsen, “Augustine and the Corporeality of God,” *Harvard Theological Review* 95/1 (2002): 97–118; Paulsen “Early Christian Belief in a Corporeal Deity: Origen and Augustine as Reluctant Witnesses,” *Harvard Theological Review* 83/2 (1990): 105–16; “Reply to Kim Paffenroth’s Comment,” *Harvard Theological Review* 86/2 (1993): 235–39. They also assert that Joseph Smith revised his account of the first vision to adapt it to his later teachings (Ostling and Ostling, *Mormon America*, 305–6); see Ari D. Bruening and David L. Paulsen, “The Development of the Mormon Understanding of God: Early Mormon Modalism and Other Myths,” *FARMS Review of Books* 13/2 (2001): 109–69.

13. As an example, the Ostlings refer to the church as “an authoritarian and secretive church” (*Mormon America*, 374) that “operates more like a small cult than a major denomination” (ibid., 354). It is interesting to note that the Ostlings, previous to *their* claiming that the church operates like a small cult, acknowledged that the term “cult” is

Latter-day Saints believe, why not let us tell our own story? Why not refer readers to books about LDS doctrine written by Latter-day Saints for Latter-day Saints? Let me make a positive suggestion here: Why not encourage them to read *Jesus the Christ* or *The Articles of Faith*, both by the late Apostle James E. Talmage?¹⁴ In *Jesus the Christ* Elder Talmage explains our understanding of the divine nature, life, and redemptive mission of Jesus Christ. In *The Articles of Faith* he clearly explains our thirteen Articles of Faith. (Let me add here that our first article of faith proclaims: “We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost.” In explaining this article, Talmage consistently uses the term *trinity* to describe God and sets out, as our own self-understanding of God, what is clearly a social trinitarian view of the Godhead.¹⁵ By way of contrast, the Ostlings, as outsiders, inform their readers that Latter-day Saints are henotheists.)

Jesus the Christ and *The Articles of Faith* were published nearly a century ago, were both commissioned by the First Presidency of the church, and for decades were published under the imprimatur of the Corporation of the First Presidency. After nearly a hundred years, they remain among the few books that church missionaries are authorized to take with them on their missions. While not inerrant, these books provide a much more accurate description of our beliefs than does any book describing our beliefs written by someone outside our faith, let alone the highly unreliable *Mormon America*. The editors should consider recommending *Jesus the Christ* and *The Articles of Faith* to their readers.¹⁶

the “slippery and all-purpose slur aimed at marginal faiths” (ibid., xx). Whatever the Ostlings personally think of Latter-day Saints, does their book provide, as the editors claim, a fair and objective “overview of LDS history and belief” (PPM, 19; see NMC, 20)? Not even close.

14. James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983), and James E. Talmage, *A Study of the Articles of Faith: Being a Consideration of the Principal Doctrines of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1958).

15. Talmage, *The Articles of Faith*, 29, 39–42, 47–48.

16. The editors disregarded this suggestion and continued to recommend *Mormon America* in their published version.

Aim 4: To this end, to distinguish between “official” or “canonized” beliefs, traditional beliefs, popular or commonly held beliefs, and, finally, permissible beliefs.

Since the authors provide almost no exposition of Latter-day Saint beliefs, I did not attempt to assess the authors’ performance with respect to this aim. While the Ostling book sometimes provides differing formulations of LDS beliefs, it largely fails to make the aimed-for distinctions.

Aim 5: To present this critique in a “respectful, charitable and courteous” manner.

I deeply appreciate the editors’ intent to fulfill this aim. And I believe they are sincere. In light of this, I must confess I was mystified to discover that in *The New Mormon Challenge*, my beliefs and my church are referred to by terms such as: “parasite,”¹⁷ “pagan,”¹⁸ “cult,”¹⁹ “pitiable,” “worse than scientific poppycock,” “a fairy tale.”²⁰ Somehow, these epithets fail to strike me as courteous, respectful, or charitable. Given their stated aim, I ask the editors to help me understand why these disparaging descriptions of my faith are in their book. Let me illustrate the object of my concern here by reading a longer passage in the manuscript:

Almost all converts to Mormonism come from a nominally Christian background. . . . Mormon missionaries don’t

17. “I am skeptical that evangelicalism is growing in the right kind of way to stave off *parasite* groups like Mormonism.” PPM, 77; see NMC, 67, for revised version.

18. “The historic LDS view of God virtually matches this *pagan* idea of deity whereas the God of the Old Testament is radically different.” PPM, 220; see NMC, 187, for revision.

19. “Latter-day Saints, unlike the members of most other New Religious Movements or ‘cults,’ have begun to enter the academy and produce genuine works of scholarship.” “Paul Carden observes that ‘few Christians in the field of missions seem to recognize the multi-faceted threat of the *cults* around the globe. . . .’ With respect to Mormonism specifically,” “Mormonism stands out from other New Religious Movements and *cults* in its attitude toward higher education and scholarship.” PPM, 68, 77, 81, emphasis added in all quotations; see NMC, 60, 67, 71. See Mosser’s discussion of Mormonism being a cult. PPM, 495–96 n. cxv; see NMC, 410–11 n. 1.

20. “The idea that there has been an eternal progression of humanoid deities consorting with one another is *worse than scientific poppycock*—it is a *fairy tale* of Olympian proportions.” The next paragraph refers to the Latter-day Saint God as “a *pitiable* deity, indeed!” PPM, 171, emphasis added; see NMC, 147.

evangelize, they proselytize. Mormonism is a parasite religion that gets its life from preexisting forms of Christianity. . . . If allowed to progress unchecked, Mormonism's growth will have a significant adverse effect on evangelical growth. In the animal world large parasites eventually cripple the health of their hosts. Sometimes they even cause their death. If evangelicals shrug off predictions of tremendous growth for a parasite religion like Mormonism, they do so at risk to the health of evangelicalism. . . . It is clear to me that the current evangelical response to Mormonism does not significantly retard the spread and growth of the LDS faith. We must somehow bring about . . . "a change in the process."²¹

What follows this passage, it seems to me, is a vigorous call to arms to all sectors of the evangelical community to do whatever it takes to retard the spread and growth of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Academics, clergy, and laymen are all urged to enlist. *The New Mormon Challenge* then is presented as an arsenal of weapons to be used, both defensively and offensively, in the campaign to impede the growth and progress of the Church of Jesus Christ. Does this response show Latter-day Saints and their beliefs "respect?" Perhaps, but if so, this seems to me like the kind of respect one shows for a feared and threatening enemy. This is certainly not the kind of respect I have for my evangelical friends. I respect them as valued allies standing together with me in the cause of Christ against his real enemies.

Aim 6: To engage Latter-day Saints in genuine and "fruitful theological dialogue."

21. PPM, 77–79; see NMC, 67–69, for the white-washed version: "Almost all converts to Mormonism come from a nominally Christian background. . . . Mormon missionaries don't evangelize, they proselytize. Mormonism is [a] religion that gets its life mostly from preexisting forms of Christianity. . . . If evangelicals shrug off predictions of tremendous growth for a religion like Mormonism, they do so at risk to the health of evangelicalism. . . . It is clear to me that the current evangelical response to Mormonism . . . does not significantly retard the spread and growth of the LDS faith. . . . We must somehow bring about . . . 'a change in the process.'"

Hallelujah! I hope *The New Mormon Challenge* helps to bring about this end. But I have already noted some serious tensions in the several aims of the book. For instance, on the one hand, the book is a call to arms to evangelicals and other Christians to join in impeding the growth and progress of my faith, proffering its essays as weapons with which the warfare can be waged. At the same time, the volume is proffered as an olive leaf beckoning “fruitful” Latter-day Saint–evangelical dialogue. Something does not quite add up here. My puzzlement connects with another important sense of “respect.” It seems to me that truly genuine and fruitful interfaith dialogue necessarily requires some notion of reciprocity in the sense that all of the participants are open at least to the possibility of learning something from the other. I believe that Latter-day Saints generally are open to that possibility. Indeed, as a prologue to their book, the authors quote the following statement from Joseph Smith: “One of the grand fundamental principles of ‘Mormonism’ is to receive truth, let it come from whence it may” (PPM, 7). Latter-day Saint Christians take this statement of the Prophet seriously. We do seek truth, whatever its source. In particular, I believe there is much that we LDS Christians can learn from evangelical Christians. For instance, evangelical thinkers have been reflecting carefully and deeply for generations on many questions of Christian theology, especially soteriology. They surely have much to teach Latter-day Saints here. Personally, I believe I have already learned and will continue to learn much from them about grace. One particular sentence from Craig Blomberg’s contribution to *How Wide the Divide?* for example, moved me profoundly: “Salvation is absolutely free, but it will cost us our very lives.”²²

On the other hand, I do not get the impression from reading *The New Mormon Challenge* that the editors and contributors are even open to the *possibility* of learning anything from us, especially pertaining to Christian doctrine or theology. I ask them to tell me

22. Craig L. Blomberg and Stephen E. Robinson, *How Wide the Divide? A Mormon and an Evangelical in Conversation* (Downer’s Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1997), 169.

honestly if my impression is correct. If so, I hope they will help me understand how they expect *The New Mormon Challenge* to generate fruitful dialogue. What is their definition of “fruitful?” Exactly what kind of “fruit” are they hoping to harvest?

Addendum

In this addendum, I have outlined some of the significant changes made to the prepublication manuscript prior to the book’s going to press. Most of these changes were attempts to address panelists’ concerns about Aims 1 and 5. The editors were distressed by my characterization of their book as anti-Mormon. My principal reason for doing so was their call for collective Christian action (Aim 1) to retard the growth and progress of the church, as explicitly set out in Mosser’s essay “And the Saints Go Marching On.” Mosser tried to make it clear in the published version of his essay that he was not calling for collective action to impede the church’s growth *simpliciter* but only to prevent the church’s growth when it is at the expense of Christian churches. This qualification, for me, hardly changes the anti-Mormon nature of Aim 1.

With respect to Aim 5, Mosser made some significant revisions to the disparaging rhetoric contained in his own essay but largely left the rest of the derogatory language unchanged. I quote at length a recent e-mail post from Mosser detailing these changes.²³

As I recall, most of your concerns were related to comments in my chapter. So, at the end of the email I have excerpted from the lists of corrections/changes the sections pertaining to my chapter.

A number of changes made before AAR proleptically dealt with concerns the panel raised. The changes made after AAR were mostly corrections of new errors that had entered the text, mistakes that we had previously missed, and for-

23. Carl Mosser to David Paulsen, 9 August 2002, e-mail entitled “Re: Fwd: changes to pre-publication ms. of TNMC.”

matting issues. But there were also a handful of changes and small additions made in light of the panel's comments. . . . There were a couple of issues I would have liked to have addressed in light of our discussion (e.g., what constitutes "anti-Mormonism"), perhaps in the form of a short appendix or an additional section to my chapter, but that just wasn't possible.

Changes that Mosser submitted to the publisher before AAR include replacing the word "cults" with the term "New Religious Movements,"²⁴ altering the phrase "gets its life from" to "gets its life mostly from" in connection with the term "parasite" as a reference to the church.²⁵ His deletions include removing the term "cults" as an inclusive reference for the church,²⁶ the words "parasite"²⁷ and "parasitical"²⁸ with reference to the church, and the sentence, "In the animal world large parasites eventually cripple the health of their hosts."²⁹ Mosser adds that in one instance, "I used the word [parasite] because I wanted the evangelical missiological community to clearly get the point I was making and did not intend to imply anything pejorative. In rereading the essay I see that Mormons would take this in a very different way." In light of this consideration, and probably others, Mosser elected to delete all occurrences of the term "parasite."

After the AAR a few additional changes were submitted to the publisher. One modification was inserting the qualification "defined theologically" after the word "cult" in the sentence containing "however, *cult* is the only word . . ."³⁰

Mosser omitted the sentences: "If allowed to progress unchecked, Mormonism's growth will have a significant adverse effect on evangelical growth. In the animal world large parasites eventually cripple the health of their hosts. Sometimes they even cause their death."³¹

24. PPM, 496 n. cxvii; see NMC, 411 n. 2.

25. PPM, 78; see NMC, 68.

26. PPM, 81; see NMC, 71.

27. PPM, 77, 78; see NMC, 67, 68.

28. PPM, 96; see NMC, 83.

29. PPM, 78.

30. PPM, 496 n. cxvi; see NMC, 411 n. 1.

31. PPM, 78; see NMC, 68.

With respect to the problematic first full paragraph (PPM, 79; NMC 69), Mosser explained,

The LDS respondents at AAR took particular offense at this paragraph and labeled the book “anti-Mormon” because of it. Therefore, there are a few changes I would like to make to it. Since a few lines are deleted on the previous page, the length of these additions should balance out pretty well. First, change the first sentence to: “It is clear to me that the current evangelical response to Mormonism (and to New Religious Movements generally) does not significantly retard the spread and growth of the lds [*sic*] faith (and other NRMs) at the expense of orthodox Christianity.” The last phrase will be slightly repetitive with the phrase “at our expense” used later in the paragraph, but that is by intention. I want this point to be emphasized. Second, after the sentence ending “. . . on which its current growth rests,” insert the following sentences: “I am convinced that a major factor contributing to Mormon growth is the widespread biblical and theological illiteracy among the laity of Protestant and Catholic churches. People in our churches need to be grounded better in basic biblical doctrine. We should also investigate other factors that contribute to lds growth and redress those that are due to failings within the Christian community.” Third, replace “counter-cult” with “apologetics.” Fourth, in the last sentence insert “(and other NRMs)” after “Mormonism.” The entire revised paragraph should read:

“It is clear to me that the current evangelical response to Mormonism (and to New Religious Movements generally) does not significantly retard the spread and growth of the lds faith (and other NRMs) at the expense of orthodox Christianity. We must somehow bring about what Stark calls ‘a change in the process’ if we want to prevent Mormonism from becoming one of the largest worldwide faiths at our expense. Something will have to shift the basis on which its

current growth rests. I am convinced that a major factor contributing to Mormon growth is the widespread biblical and theological illiteracy among the laity of Protestant and Catholic churches. People in our churches need to be grounded better in basic biblical doctrine. We should also investigate other factors that contribute to lds growth and redress those that are due to failings within the Christian community. This cannot be accomplished by leaving the task solely up to the numerous small and financially strapped apologetics ministries. Nor are the vast majority of those engaged in such ministry equipped to do all that needs to be done, even if finances and personnel were not so limited. A proper response to Mormonism (and other NRMs) will require the entire evangelical community.”

Though the above changes are laudable, my original analysis (like much of the language and focus of the book) remains fundamentally unchanged. In my judgment, the book remains anti-Mormon for two reasons: (1) their call, albeit now qualified, for collective action to retard the growth and progress of the church; and (2) their failure (refusal?) to state Latter-day Saint beliefs in LDS terms or to refer their readers to LDS explanations of our beliefs—e.g., the recommended *Jesus the Christ* and *The Articles of Faith*. As a result, their readers are left with the Ostlings’ biased (sometimes scurrilous) slants on Latter-day Saint doctrine and history or, even worse, with characterizations of that doctrine like Craig’s “infinite progression of humanoid deities consorting with one another from eternity.”³²

32. NMC, 147.

OF COURSE MORMONISM IS CHRISTIAN

Benjamin I. Huff

To be a Christian, in the most important sense, is to repent and come to Christ. One might also say that one becomes a true disciple of Christ by being reborn, being converted, or, as Blomberg says, “by sincerely trusting in the Jesus of the New Testament as personal Lord (God and Master) and Savior and by demonstrating the sincerity of that commitment by some perceivable measure of lifelong, biblical belief and behavior” (p. 329).¹ I take these expressions as essentially equivalent when properly understood.² For an institution, to be

1. Blomberg picks out this sense as the one evangelicals normally have in mind when they ask whether a person is Christian (p. 328). It is also the one Christ picks out as defining membership in his church in Doctrine and Covenants 10:67.

2. I also take them to be equivalent to Daniel C. Peterson and Stephen D. Ricks’s “commitment to Jesus Christ,” in *Offenders for a Word* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1998), 27. Blomberg suggests that Peterson and Ricks do not account for the possibility of insincere commitment. He misunderstands, though. When they say, “If anyone claims to see in Jesus of Nazareth a personage of unique and preeminent authority, that individual should be considered Christian” (ibid., 185), they are not changing their definition. Commitment involves reform in behavior as well as verbal profession of Christ. Their point is that it is rarely appropriate for us mortals to accuse someone of insincerity in that very important claim. Peterson and Ricks’s criterion may differ from Blomberg’s by not requiring the belief that Jesus Christ is God (though the Latter-day Saint scriptures clearly teach that he is). On this point I sympathize with Peterson and Ricks. I do not hold these characterizations of what it takes to be a Christian as equivalent to Blomberg’s “saved.”

Review of Craig L. Blomberg, “Is Mormonism Christian?” In *The New Mormon Challenge*, 315–32.

Christian in the most important sense is presumably to bring persons to become Christians. In this sense, then, is Mormonism Christian? Does the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints bring its adherents to repent and come to Christ? Or, in other words, does Latter-day Saint belief and practice involve accepting the Jesus of the New Testament as one's Lord and Savior and showing one's commitment to him by some perceivable measure of lifelong, biblical behavior? Of course it does. Of course Mormonism is Christian.

Each week, by sharing bread in similitude of the last supper, Latter-day Saints individually reaffirm their commitment to take upon themselves the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and keep his commandments.³ They read, ponder, and endeavor to live Christ's teachings together as congregations, as families, and as individuals. They serve each other, for example, by visiting sick members or providing for their needs, by helping new arrivals within a congregation with the heavy work of moving in, and by finding wholesome ways to fellowship. They serve in their communities by preparing meals for the homeless, by laboring honestly in the workplace, by serving on school boards, and by lobbying against the peddling of pornography and other unsavory practices. They cultivate the virtues of patience, forgiveness, humility, and compassion. They sing hymns with titles like "I Believe in Christ" and "Jesus, Savior, Pilot Me."⁴ Every active and committed Latter-day Saint accepts Christ as his or her Lord and

I believe salvation presupposes some degree of what evangelicals call *sanctification*, and I believe I agree with most Latter-day Saints on this point, although Stephen Robinson might disagree. Leaving it to God to say who is or will be saved, I do not attach any comment on salvation as such to my use of the word *Christian*.

3. The prayer offered weekly over the bread, in front of the congregation, reads, "O God, the Eternal Father, we ask thee in the name of thy Son, Jesus Christ, to bless and sanctify this bread to the souls of all those who partake of it; that they may eat in remembrance of the body of thy Son, and witness unto thee, O God, the Eternal Father, that they are willing to take upon them the name of thy Son, and always remember him, and keep his commandments which he hath given them, that they may always have his Spirit to be with them." This prayer appears in the Book of Mormon (Moroni 4:3) and in Doctrine and Covenants 20:77.

4. *Hymns of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, nos. 134 and 104.

Savior and to a significant degree follows Christ's biblical teachings in belief and in behavior. That is what being a Latter-day Saint is all about.⁵

Why, then, does Blomberg not conclude that Mormonism is Christian? Simply put, he does not address the question in its most relevant and important sense. He does not address whether the Church of Jesus Christ normally brings persons to become Christians. In the section of his essay considering Mormonism as a system or institution of belief and practice, he discusses various meanings one might attach to the claim that Mormonism is Christian, but not this one. In the section asking whether individual Latter-day Saints may be Christians, he gives the definition of *Christian* I quote above and questions whether Mormonism leads persons to be Christians in this sense. He says he cannot answer this question affirmatively but does not explain why: the brief discussion that follows wanders off the point. I will first explain how Blomberg fails to address whether Mormonism is Christian in the most important sense. Then I will consider his discussion of other, more taxonomical senses of the question.

Just before the end of his essay Blomberg asks, "Can a person who has had no religious influence on his or her life except the teaching and practice of the LDS come to true, saving faith *within* the LDS Church, if he or she is exposed to the full range of official Mormon doctrine and sincerely believe[s] all of that teaching?" (p. 330). This is (almost) a careful way of saying, "Does Mormonism lead its adherents to become Christians?" which I take to be the most natural construal

5. There are also more mundane senses of the term *Christian*, such as those in my copy of *Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language, Unabridged* (Springfield, Mass.: Merriam, 1976). In reference to a person: "one who believes or professes or is assumed to believe in Jesus Christ and the truth as taught by him" and an array of similar alternate senses. In reference to an institution: "professing or belonging to Christianity," among others, where *Christianity* is "the religion stemming from the life, teachings, and death of Jesus Christ," which is certainly the focus of Latter-day Saint teaching and practice. Any moderately committed Latter-day Saint fits a whole battery of *Webster's* definitions of *Christian*, and so does the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Blomberg does not consider any of these, nor does he say why he does not.

of “Is Mormonism Christian?”⁶ Thus Blomberg seems to have raised the important question. Why does he not give a positive answer?

At first he seems to offer an explanation by stating, “There still remain major contradictions of fundamental doctrinal issues between historic Christianity and official LDS teaching that make it impossible to *consistently* believe all of the Bible and simultaneously believe all official Mormon doctrine” (pp. 330–31). This statement is problematic as an explanation for at least two reasons.⁷ For one thing, Blomberg seems implicitly to concede that the reading of the Bible he finds to conflict with official Latter-day Saint teaching is one that takes historic Christianity for granted—that is, one that makes extra-biblical assumptions that conflict with Latter-day Saint teaching and hence begs the question.⁸ More importantly, believing all of the Bible is hardly involved in his definition of what it is to be a Christian. I suspect a huge number of Christians don’t even know all of the Bible, let alone believe it. Nearly all Christians misunderstand parts of the Bible, even though they have read them in sincere faith, and Christ at the last day is unlikely to ask those who visit the widows and the fatherless in their affliction whether they also know and believe the writings of Habakkuk.

6. Actually, beginning the question with “Can” rather than “Does” makes a difference. Blomberg has already closed his discussion of whether Mormonism as an institution is Christian with a negative conclusion. Hence at this point he presupposes that it would be exceptional for a Latter-day Saint to become a Christian without the influence of some other Christian system of belief and practice. Still, his “Can” question is close to the important question, and as close as he gets, so in what follows I will overlook the difference.

7. As a third problem, one could dispute Blomberg’s five-point summary of Latter-day Saint doctrines he finds “objectionable,” delivered in a footnote to this passage (p. 489 n. 69). I would particularly dispute points three and five. Still, as Blomberg acknowledges, it is not clear whether these teachings conflict with the Bible, and so a dispute over what Latter-day Saints officially or commonly believe on these points should wait for another occasion.

8. In a similar vein, on the preceding three pages, Blomberg answers several questions about how being a Latter-day Saint relates to being Christian simply by appealing to what “most evangelicals” (p. 329) would say, without offering any objective basis.

To his credit, Blomberg himself seems unsatisfied with this explanation. He acknowledges that consistency in belief is not of paramount importance and that it is debatable whether or not official Latter-day Saint teaching is consistent with the Bible. He then spends several lines expressing his desire that every professing Christian be joined to the fold of true Christianity, including Latter-day Saints. One might expect that what would come next would be another attempt at explaining why he does not believe that Mormonism leads its adherents to become Christians. Yet instead of an explanation he simply offers what appears to be a restatement of the conclusion: "I cannot, as of this writing, therefore, affirm with integrity that either Mormonism as a whole or any individual, based solely on his or her affirmation of the totality of LDS doctrine, deserves the label 'Christian' in any standard or helpful sense of the word. But my fervent prayer is that, through whatever developments God may wish to use, I will not always have to come to that conclusion" (p. 331). With this he ends the section and the main body of the essay. In the remaining half page he simply addresses whether it is uncharitable to claim that Mormonism is not Christian.

Thus Blomberg does not explain why he does not consider Mormonism Christian in the sense that matters most. The only reason he offers is one that he himself recognizes is inadequate and that a clear-headed reader will recognize is beside the point. One might attempt to read his restatement as something of an explanation, but it is no more relevant than the explanation he himself sets aside. Since being a Christian involves behavior as well as belief, *no* affirmation of doctrine is enough for a person to deserve the label *Christian*, whether the doctrine be Latter-day Saint, evangelical, Catholic, or whatever. Blomberg's concluding restatement focuses on beliefs solely, as though there were any sort of belief that could suffice to make a Christian.

Thus he raises but does not address the pertinent question. Still, for any reader who takes the initiative to consider the question, Blomberg's essay includes all the ingredients for the correct answer. Two pages prior to stating what it takes to be a Christian in the sense of

being converted to Christ, he lists what he acknowledges to be good features of Latter-day Saint belief and practice:

a strong commitment to win people to Christ; a biblical emphasis on numerous fundamental moral values, including putting family relationships as a central priority in life; generous financial giving; a good blend of self-reliance and helping others who genuinely cannot care for themselves; all the strengths of classic Arminianism with its emphasis on human free will and responsibility; mechanisms for spiritual growth and accountability for every church member; . . . genuine community and warm interpersonal relationships; a desire to restore original Christianity and remove corrupting influences from it; social and political agendas often similar to evangelical counterparts; and so on. (p. 327)

These features are more than enough for Mormonism to lead its earnest adherents to become Christians, by Blomberg's stated criteria: "sincerely trusting in the Jesus of the New Testament as personal Lord (God and Master) and Savior and . . . demonstrating the sincerity of that commitment by some perceivable measure of lifelong, biblical belief and behavior" (p. 329). Indeed, the first two points of Blomberg's acknowledgment alone would suffice to make Mormonism Christian. Of course it is.

Since his essay includes more than adequate grounds for concluding that Mormonism is Christian in the sense of leading its adherents to Christ, and no wholehearted explanation for why it would not be, one may wonder whether Blomberg has quite thought the question through. That said, it is clear that he has many objections to Mormonism, and some of these may make him reluctant to acknowledge it as Christian even if they do not precisely bear on the question. After all, for someone who believes that following Christ is the key to righteousness and eternal happiness, the term *Christian* does not easily take a strictly taxonomical meaning. It inevitably implies some level of approval, and there is much about Mormonism of

which Blomberg does not approve. Yet if Blomberg wishes to use the word *Christian* in a “meaningful” way, as he claims (p. 331), he should be prepared to distinguish between calling someone or something Christian and giving it unqualified approval. As it is, I am unsure what meaning to attach to Blomberg’s unwillingness to call Mormonism Christian.⁹ Further, key aspects of his disapproval reflect misunderstandings of Mormonism, as I will explain.

Blomberg brings up a number of his objections in the course of considering three other senses for the claim that Mormonism is Christian, reflecting various ways of fitting Mormonism into the broader Christian picture. This taxonomy is important, though far less important than the question of whether someone is a disciple of Christ. Blomberg discusses the hypotheses that the Church of Jesus Christ (1) belongs to one of the three largest branches of the Christian tradition (Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant), (2) is the “restoration of the original Christianity of Jesus and the apostles,” and (3) is simply a new denomination (or a new branch) within the Christian tradition (pp. 317–18, 322). Blomberg finds each of these hypotheses untenable. He is right to quickly reject the first hypothesis, although his discussion of it is highly problematic. Only the second captures the Latter-day Saint self-understanding. Still, a charitable observer who is not a Latter-day Saint should carefully consider the third. Blomberg says a number of sensible things along the way to rejecting points 2 and 3, but his reasoning leaves substantial gaps. His discussion leaves ample room for the reader to conclude that Mormonism is Christian in a taxonomical sense.

Taxonomy: Is Mormonism Orthodox or Catholic or Protestant?

The section discussing the first hypothesis is confusing because Blomberg means to be employing a “definition” of *Christian*, but it is not clear what his definition is. On one reading, his definition is “a

9. As far as I can tell, in this essay Blomberg also refrains from denying that Mormonism is Christian.

member of an Orthodox, Catholic, or Protestant church” (p. 317). According to this definition, clearly Mormonism would not be Christian, but it is an untenable definition, like defining an *American* as “a person from the East Coast, West Coast, or Great Lakes regions of the U.S.” The fact that these definitions cover the numerical majority of Christians or Americans does not make them plausible. They simply do not capture the common English meanings of the terms. Blomberg also quotes the *World Book Encyclopedia*, which does capture the common English meaning of *Christianity*—“the religion based on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ” (p. 317)—and indicates that not all (rather, “most”) Christians are Orthodox, Catholic, or Protestant. A different locution might preserve Blomberg’s legitimate point, though. Since Orthodox, Catholics, and Protestants are Christians, he might reasonably ask, “If we were to say that Mormonism is Christian, would we mean that it is Protestant, Catholic, or Orthodox?” Or he might ask, “Is Mormonism Christian in the sense of being Protestant, Catholic, or Orthodox?”

Of course, Latter-day Saints have never represented themselves as Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant, and this fact might be enough to justify dismissing the first hypothesis. Seemingly to illustrate, though, Blomberg goes on to present an inflammatory view of Latter-day Saint teaching about these three major branches of the Christian tradition. Regrettably, some Saints take roughly this view, but it is not an official teaching, nor is it the teaching of Latter-day Saint scripture. Blomberg reads the Book of Mormon as teaching that “all of Christendom after the apostolic age prior to 1830” is a church founded by the devil (p. 317). This interpretation fits poorly with the context of the passages to which he refers. According to that discussion, “there are save two churches only; the one is the church of the Lamb of God, and the other is the church of the devil” (1 Nephi 14:10).¹⁰ Since there are just two, these churches clearly do not correspond to

10. It may be interesting to compare Book of Mormon references to this “abominable” church with biblical references to “the mother of harlots and abominations” (Revelation 17:5).

any ordinary denominational divisions. Thus it is implausible to take Book of Mormon references to the “church of the devil” as references to traditional Christianity. My own view is that the church of the Lamb of God includes the humble righteous of all nations and denominations.¹¹ For a church that teaches that many who die without knowing the fulness of the gospel will be saved at the last day, it would be rather odd to teach that every Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant believer for a millennium and a half belonged to the church of the devil. Blomberg’s other paraphrases are also disputable.¹² In the spirit of such Book of Mormon teachings as 2 Nephi 29:7–11 and Alma 29:8, the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* gives a more standard view: that non-Latter-day Saint forms of Christianity throughout history do “much good under the guidance of the Holy Spirit,” though they are “incomplete.”¹³

Since the reading of Blomberg’s “definition” I consider above is so plainly untenable and clashes with the *World Book* definition he quotes, I consider another reading. This reading better explains why Blomberg brings up the Book of Mormon reference to the “church of the devil.” Perhaps Blomberg draws from *World Book* the idea that Christianity is a religion of which most members are Orthodox, Catholic, or Protestant. Then his reasoning might go: But Mormons believe the religion of which most members are Protestant, Orthodox, or Catholic to be the church of the devil. Hence Mormons are not Christians. This reasoning uses a more sensible characterization of Christianity than the untenable one I criticize above, though it still does not reflect the primary *World Book* definition. Mormonism is based on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ and so manifestly satisfies

11. My view on this point is similar to Stephen Robinson’s. Blomberg acknowledges Robinson’s reading in a footnote but does not explain why he rejects it. In addition, his quotation of the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* on this point makes his inflammatory reading of 1 Nephi even more inexplicable.

12. For example, Joseph Smith—History 1:19 does not use Blomberg’s phrase “hypocritical pretense” to describe Christian worship in Joseph Smith’s youth. I suggest a different gloss: *they employ my words, but they misunderstand me.*

13. This point appears in the passage Blomberg himself quotes from Roger R. Keller, “Christians and Christianity,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1:270.

the *World Book* definition. Yet if Mormonism called his religion the church of the devil, Blomberg's reluctance to call Mormonism Christian would be at least psychologically understandable. Fortunately, on this point he just gets Mormonism wrong. This misunderstanding comes up again later in his essay, again seeming to block what might otherwise be the most obvious way for Blomberg to classify Mormonism as Christian.

Taxonomy: Is Mormonism a Restoration of Original Christianity?

The Latter-day Saints themselves claim that their church is a restoration of the original church Christ established in the time of the apostles. Blomberg offers historical arguments against this claim, and he questions the cogency of various LDS scholars' historical arguments for it. He raises points that a careful assessment of the history should address. Still, his arguments are less than compelling.

That Christ would need to restore his church in 1830 presupposes that the Christian tradition had gone astray. Blomberg objects to this presupposition: "the amount and suddenness of transformation [in the early Christian world] required to defend the Mormon view of apostasy simply cannot be elicited from the ancient sources available to us" (p. 318). He acknowledges that substantial change occurred in the first several centuries of Christian history but emphasizes that this change was too gradual to fit the Latter-day Saint view.

I see three main problems with Blomberg's contention. First, the Latter-day Saint view of apostasy does not require sudden change. It only requires that enough had changed by 1830 to make a restoration necessary. Second, certain early and crucial changes are consistent with the historical evidence. For example, if crucial authority was lost because the original apostles were not properly replaced as they died, that fact could make necessary a subsequent restoration, even if doctrinal error crept in very slowly thereafter. The nature and location of authority in the early church is thoroughly disputed, but the Latter-day Saint view that the apostles held crucial authority is consistent with the very incomplete historical evidence we now possess, and it

finds support in the New Testament. Third and most important, Blomberg's contention that a distinct entry into apostasy "cannot be elicited from the ancient sources" is simply not to the point. The fact is that the ancient sources we now have available leave in doubt a great many important questions about the early church. While historical evidence for a Latter-day Saint view is interesting and welcome, the legitimacy of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its claims, including its claim to be Christian, does not depend on the existence of some unambiguous historical demonstration of them, any more than Christ's authority depended on scriptural exegesis showing that he was uniquely the Messiah foretold by the prophets. Where evidence either for or against is incomplete and subject to dispute, a lack of strong historical evidence for Latter-day Saint claims is not evidence against those claims.

Blomberg goes on to criticize in broad strokes various historical observations Latter-day Saint scholars have offered in corroboration of the claim that their church is a restoration of the original church. He is surely right that some Latter-day Saint citations of ancient authors involve misunderstandings that could be corrected by more careful study. However, his arguments are not developed enough to support his sweeping conclusions. He presupposes an extremely narrow view of what members of the Church of Jesus Christ would have to show in order to legitimately claim that Mormonism is Christian in the sense of being a restoration of the original church. He writes as though they must "demonstrate" (p. 320) on the basis of ancient sources that teachings and practices parallel with Mormonism were not only present but formed a "coherent doctrinal system" defined by Jesus and the apostles (p. 320), free of any Hellenistic influence (p. 319), and joined with a "monarchical episcopacy" (p. 321), and then were lost suddenly (p. 318), declining in "straight-line" fashion from orthodoxy to heresy (p. 319).

In fact, the Latter-day Saint claim is consistent with many other scenarios. For example, surely the real story involves heterodoxy present, ebbing and flowing, from the earliest days of the church. Surely

the complex Hellenistic culture was not a uniformly bad influence. What is crucial to the LDS claim is that correct teachings and authority to lead the church were present together in the time of the original apostles, whereas by 1830 this authority was no longer present and the teachings had changed enough to warrant a restoration. Moreover, whether or not Mormonism is Christian does not depend on anyone's demonstrating even this much from ancient sources.

I will linger a bit on one of Blomberg's oversimplifications. The Book of Mormon teaches that many "plain and precious parts of the gospel" were lost from the Christian community over time after the deaths of the apostles (1 Nephi 13:26–35). Such loss of truth is a key part of the LDS view that a restoration was necessary. Blomberg claims this must mean either that the texts forming today's New Testament were substantially miscopied or that other texts containing key truths were lost or discarded. He then casts doubt on both these scenarios. Despite Blomberg's doubts, both may have occurred. Textual criticism is hardly an infallible way to detect changes; there is no doubt that countless interesting early Christian documents have been lost; and there is no telling how much oral discourse was never fully captured in writing. Moreover, I urge a third scenario for the loss of truth. The Book of Mormon teaching may refer just as easily to how the texts are read and understood as to how they are worded. Books carry meaning by virtue of their being understood by people as language, and if the readers cease to recognize the same meaning in the words, then the meaning is in a real sense lost from the book.

An important example of this instability of meaning is the case of *spirit*, as appearing in John 4:24, "God is a Spirit." In the time of Origen, the fact that God was described as a spirit suggested that he is corporeal, having location and a sort of texture, like air, breath, or wind.¹⁴ Yet today many cite this passage to argue that God is incorporeal. The meaning of the word has changed, whether in Greek or in English, and so people see in the same text a very different meaning.

14. Origen, *De Principiis*, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (1885; reprint, Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994), 4:242.

In some cases careful philology may recover the original meaning. In other cases it may not. Such words as *faith* and *truth* have evolved substantially through history. Phrases like *laying on of hands*, or Christ's claims that he and his Father are one, may have had a specific meaning that was not properly passed on. The significance of symbolic texts or teachings is especially vulnerable to loss via disruption of the tradition of readers.¹⁵

The New Testament itself attests to the importance not only of reading a correct book, but of having proper advice in its interpretation, as when Christ expounded the prophecies concerning himself (Luke 24:25–27) or when the eunuch appealed to Philip to explain Isaiah (Acts 8:26–35). Second Peter 3:16 warns that the unlearned may misunderstand Paul's letters, or indeed any scriptures, and the errors of the scribes and Pharisees who did not recognize Christ show that one can fail to understand despite much study. Indeed, precisely this problem of a text's being "plain" to a person with a certain preparation and not to others is the subject of a small discourse by the same author who records the vision of the book from which plain and precious things were taken away (2 Nephi 25:1–8).¹⁶ Thus a loss of truth from the Bible could occur at least as easily through a failure in the tradition of readers and interpreters as through a failure of a copyist or librarian.

Blomberg himself suggests that the most plain and precious truth of all is lacking from many nominally Christian denominations:

Sadly, in many liberal protestant congregations and in even larger numbers of Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches, it is possible to attend and be involved for years without ever

15. Consider praying or acting in Christ's name (John 14:13), eating his flesh (John 6:53), or sitting in his throne (Revelation 3:21).

16. This vision prominently features a book that "proceeded forth from the mouth of a Jew," but references to "plain and precious things" being taken away "from the gospel of the Lamb" appear roughly as often as, and apparently interchangeably with, references to such things being taken away from the book (see 1 Nephi 13:24–29). Indeed, the book seems to be a representation of the whole gospel message as traced from the apostles, not merely of gospel writings.

hearing the message that one must personally accept Jesus as Lord and Savior and allow him to transform every area of one's life. It often requires some experience outside such congregations to lead to an individual's salvation. (pp. 328–29)

He does not suggest that they have removed passages from their versions of the Bible. Rather, he suggests that they fail to discuss the message and fail to see it in the scriptures. I myself suspect that Blomberg's impression is inaccurate, that these churches frequently express the same idea but in ways Blomberg does not recognize. In any church, a person may attend for years without truly hearing what is being taught. Still, my view of how plain and precious truths were lost from the tradition has interesting affinities with some of Blomberg's own views.

As in his discussion of the claim that plain and precious truths were lost, Blomberg's remarks in other cases are not well enough developed to constitute a refutation of the Latter-day Saint claim that their church is a restoration of the original church. They are better read as a survey of his reasons for doubt. Of course, the Latter-day Saint case based on historical records is not exactly airtight. In the end Saints have always relied on the witness of the Holy Spirit—an eminently ancient source, but hardly a public commodity. Hence, Blomberg's choice not to endorse this Latter-day Saint claim is reasonable and shows no disrespect or lack of charity on his part. But where does that leave the question of whether Mormonism is Christian? Since Blomberg has not refuted the claim of the restoration, he has not refuted the claim that Mormonism is Christian in the sense of being a restoration. On the other hand, he (like others in his position) is not under a rational obligation to assent that Mormonism is Christian *in this sense*. So, declining assent here, he proceeds to consider another sense.

Taxonomy: Is Mormonism Simply a New Christian Denomination?

One would think that since Mormonism fits the *World Book* definition and standard dictionary definitions but is distinct from other

present denominations, this hypothesis would be the default. Blomberg's reasons for rejecting it are a bit confusing. First he enumerates numerous parallels between Latter-day Saint doctrines and practices and those taught by Alexander Campbell, who had strong ties with Sidney Rigdon. He also lists a set of potential nineteenth-century sources for differences from Campbell. His point is clearly to argue that Joseph Smith's ideas were not very new or unusual after all. Yet then he claims, "Mormonism appears to relate to historic Christianity much as Christianity came to relate to Judaism: it changes enough elements to be classified better as a completely new religion" (p. 324). One doubts he can have it both ways.

At first Blomberg's point in listing similarities with other movements of Joseph Smith's time seems to be to support the hypothesis that Mormonism might be a new nineteenth-century denomination within the restorationist tradition to which Campbell belongs. More often, though, his point seems to be to undermine the claim that the source in Joseph Smith's teachings was revelation.¹⁷ Evidently Blomberg's aims are not merely taxonomic.

The affinities of Joseph's views with other nineteenth-century views are interesting, but they hardly imply that there was no restoration. Many of the parallels Blomberg cites are not surprising, given that Smith and Campbell both read the Bible. Strong similarity with many Christian denominations is only to be expected of a restoration of Christianity and evidences a shared source in revelation rather than lack of revelation. Further, the Latter-day Saint view that God works by the Holy Spirit among all people fits well with the view that many teachings relatively distinctive to the restoration might have been brewing for some time before they came together in the restored church. Nephi reports that God often teaches his people incrementally, "line upon line" (2 Nephi 28:30), and Joseph Smith may

17. He says, "One might be forgiven for thinking" that these elements were revealed to Joseph Smith, but this hypothesis "overlooks all of these clearly documented influences on his early life and thought" (pp. 323–24). Blomberg for his part overlooks the stunningly fresh and systematic unity of the gospel message restored through Joseph Smith—hardly the hodgepodge Blomberg suggests it is.

have had inspired forerunners, as Christ had in John the Baptist. The parallels Blomberg cites with sources other than Campbell are again interesting but do little to undermine the claim that Mormonism is a restoration of the original church. Mormonism is quite distinctive on the whole, as Blomberg quickly admits.

Blomberg's allegation that Mormonism is so different from other Christian denominations that it should count as an entirely new religion is more interesting than his attempt to assimilate it to other nineteenth-century phenomena, but it relies on a dubious notion of what distinguishes one religion from another. It is true that in many ways Mormonism is to traditional Christianity as Christianity is to Judaism. Christianity involved different ideas, different ritual practices, and additional scriptures compared with Judaism, as does Mormonism compared with traditional Christianity. Yet Blomberg may be too quick to assume that this analogy implies that Latter-day Saint belief and practice constitute a different religion from traditional Christianity. There are difficulties with the idea that Christianity is a different religion from Judaism, however often we may talk as though it is. The distinction is nowhere near as tidy as the distinction between, say, Christianity and Buddhism.

Christ did not offer the Jews the comforting idea that he was starting a new religion irrelevant to their own. He claimed that if they did not accept his message, they were not truly following the authorities they already accepted: Moses "wrote of me" (John 5:45–47); "If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham" (John 8:39); "it is my Father that honoureth me; of whom ye say, that he is your God: Yet ye have not known him; but I know him" (John 8:54–55). While he called for deep changes to existing Jewish practice, he persistently referred to the Jews' own scriptures to support his teachings. As we see from the Sermon on the Mount ("I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill"; Matthew 5:17), Christ did not come to replace the Jews' religion, but to correct and fulfill it.

Thus if Christ is to be believed, following their own religion required the Jews to follow Christ. Paul specifically calls the Mosaic law

a “schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ” (Galatians 3:24). Designed to bring its followers to Christ and delivered by prophets who knew and wrote of him, Judaism as originally delivered was evidently a form of Christianity, although an incomplete form.

Of course, in everyday discourse it is convenient to speak of contemporary Christianity and contemporary Judaism as two different religions. They do have substantial differences in both belief and practice, and on most occasions it is not appropriate for Christians to press their view of the situation on Jews who do not recognize Christ as their Messiah. Still, from the Christian perspective, Judaism can only be regarded as independent from Christianity insofar as it is a human tradition, out of touch with its origin in revelation. Christ recognized this aspect of Judaism, calling it “the tradition of men” in contrast with “the commandment of God” (Mark 7:8). His comment on this tradition was the same as his comment on the Christianity of Joseph Smith’s day. In both cases he quoted Isaiah: “This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Matthew 15:8–9, paralleling Mark 7:6–7 and quoting Isaiah 29:13; compare Joseph Smith—History 1:19).

Thus Blomberg’s analogy holds rather closely, perhaps more closely than he realized. Mormonism relates to traditional Christianity much as Christ’s teaching related to traditional Judaism. In both pairs, the first member claims to restore the original from which the second has strayed. Of course, Christ also presented much more than had been present in the original Mosaic teaching. Indeed, Christ himself was the greatest revelation.¹⁸

Mormonism differs from the traditional branches of Christianity, but not in the way Buddhism differs from Islam and Zoroastrianism.

18. Blomberg also offers a more colorful analogy, this time comparing the Latter-day Saints with an imaginary group claiming to represent a restoration of Islam. While it makes an amusing caricature, this imaginary group fails to be analogous to the Saints in key respects (pp. 324–25).

Rather, it differs in being a rival view of the same original teaching and the same original teacher, Jesus of Nazareth. These differences are reflected aptly by distinguishing Latter-day Saints from Catholics, Orthodox, and Protestants, all as branches of Christianity. Blomberg understandably declines to call Mormonism a restoration of original Christianity. Latter-day Saints, on the other hand, have no interest in calling themselves a new, nineteenth-century denomination of Christianity. Yet both they and Blomberg should agree that the Church of Jesus Christ is either one or the other: if it is not a restoration, then it is a new, nineteenth-century denomination—and either way, it is Christian.

Mormonism has important differences from the traditional branches of Christianity—on the nature of God as our Father and creator; on the nature of his unity with his Son, Jesus Christ; on the nature of the authority required to lead his church and administer saving ordinances such as baptism; and on the nature and terms of salvation, including the kind of unity we may hope to attain with the Father, the Son, and each other. While such differences as our additional scriptures, our modern prophets, our temple ceremonies, and our belief in eternal marriage are more conspicuous, we also have a unique perspective on the nature of the conversion Blomberg emphasizes as the key to true Christian discipleship. Indeed, perhaps the choicest feature of the Book of Mormon is its moving account of the change of heart wrought by the Holy Spirit on those who humble themselves and wish to be freed from sin—the process of being (re)born of God (Mosiah 5:1–7; Alma 22:15; 36:5–26; 3 Nephi 9:16–21). Yet Catholics, Orthodox, Protestants, and Latter-day Saints all look to Jesus of Nazareth as the author of our salvation. We all believe that he was the Son of God, that he died and rose again the third day, that he prepared the way for us to receive eternal life through faith in him; and we all seek to show that faith by obedience to his teachings. We all accept Christ as our Lord and Savior and strive to show our commitment to him by walking in newness of life. We are all Christians.

AM I A CHRISTIAN?

Kent P. Jackson

In the summer of 1968 when I was a young man, I made the decision to commit myself to Jesus Christ. After struggling for several years to find myself and not living the kind of life I knew I should live, I finally surrendered my will to that of the Lord and put my future into his hands. I changed friends, discarded old behavior and beliefs, and set my life on a new course that has guided me to the present time. That new course has led me to much happiness—a happiness I had never felt before and was unaware that I was missing. It is a joy in God through Jesus Christ, “by whom [I] now received the atonement” (Romans 5:11).

Although at the time I knew very little about scriptural language and absolutely nothing about theological definitions, I believed then and still believe today that I was spiritually reborn. I experienced the sensation of having the heavy weight of my previous life lifted from my shoulders. I felt lighter, safer, and happier. I felt a “joy and peace in believing” that was brought into my life by “the God of hope” (Romans 15:13). Above all else, I felt more free. Indeed, the immediate and lasting sensation was one of liberation. I had been freed from the things that had bound me. I had been liberated from falsehood, confusion, and doubt. And thus having been “made free from sin,” I was both able and determined to become a servant of God and to do

Review of Craig L. Blomberg. “Is Mormonism Christian?” In *The New Mormon Challenge*, 315–32.

his will for the rest of my life (Romans 6:18, 22; see 1 Corinthians 7:22). Paul describes well the process by which my old self became dead and my regenerated self walks “in newness of life” (Romans 6:4). I felt changes take place in my life by which I was “quickened” and “forgiven” (Colossians 2:13), and my interests and desires became increasingly set “on things above, not on things on the earth” (Colossians 3:2).

I was spiritually reborn, according to these descriptions and definitions in the Bible. I experienced “a change of heart” (Alma 5:26) “through faith on his [Christ’s] name,” and I was “born of him” (Mosiah 5:7). So why, then, do I ask, “Am I a Christian?”

Latter-day Saint Christians

In his chapter in *The New Mormon Challenge*, “Is Mormonism Christian?” (pp. 315–32, 483–89), my friend Craig L. Blomberg concludes with regret that I cannot be a Christian because I exercise my faith within the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and sincerely believe all its teachings (p. 330).¹ Blomberg’s regret is real. In the most courteous and thoughtful chapter in *The New Mormon Challenge*, he analyzes the Latter-day Saint claim to Christianity from a variety of angles. He concludes that neither we as a church nor we as individuals can be Christians while holding to our uniquely Latter-day Saint beliefs.² I have observed elsewhere that one person’s

1. Craig L. Blomberg is a respected New Testament scholar and the author of several important works, including *Interpreting the Parables* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1990) and *The Historical Reliability of John’s Gospel* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2002). His commitment as a defender of the Jesus of the Gospels and of the historicity of the New Testament is evident in these and other books and in his published articles. He showed great courage to coauthor with Stephen E. Robinson *How Wide the Divide? A Mormon and an Evangelical in Conversation* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1997), for which he has paid a heavy price within his own faith community. I admire both his work as a scholar and him as a good person.

2. This conclusion is not unique to Blomberg. See also Carl Mosser, “And the Saints Go Marching On,” in *The New Mormon Challenge*, 66 and 412–13 n. 25. The common theme of this book is that Latter-day Saints believe X, but *Christians* believe Y.

definition of a Christian may well differ legitimately from another's.³ I agree, for example, that as a Latter-day Saint I am not part of the historic Orthodox-Catholic-Protestant tradition of Christianity that has descended from antiquity. But are there no other definitions of a Christian that include me? Blomberg rejects as too simplistic the definition proposed by Daniel C. Peterson and Stephen D. Ricks: "What made a person a Christian in the first century, and what makes a person a Christian today, is, simply, a commitment to Jesus Christ."⁴ He views this definition as insufficient because one can profess a commitment to Christ while falling short in other matters (citing Galatians 1:8–9 and Matthew 7:23). Blomberg's own definitions are more specific: What makes a person a Christian, he writes, is whether that person "is genuinely *regenerate*." The question to be asked, he argues, is "Is such a person *saved*?" (p. 328, emphasis in original). Indeed, "Christian means 'converted'" (p. 328). To be a Christian, "one must personally accept Jesus as Lord and Savior and allow him to transform every area of one's life" (pp. 328–29). "*Anyone* can become a Christian by sincerely trusting in the Jesus of the New Testament as personal Lord (God and Master) and Savior and by demonstrating the sincerity of that commitment by some perceivable measure of lifelong, biblical belief and behavior" (p. 329, emphasis in original).

I agree with Blomberg's straightforward and evenhanded definitions. They make good sense. And I believe that most other thoughtful evangelicals would use similar words to describe what it means to be a real Christian. Significantly, but not surprisingly, those definitions are also consistent with the teachings of the Book of Mormon (see, for example, Mosiah 4:1–5:15; Alma 5:2–62; 7:14–16).

But Blomberg's definitions create a serious problem: they make *me* a Christian too. They make me a Christian because my own life is

3. Kent P. Jackson, "Are Mormons Christians? Presbyterians, Mormons, and the Question of Religious Definitions," *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 4/1 (October 2000): 52–65.

4. Daniel C. Peterson and Stephen D. Ricks, *Offenders for a Word: How Anti-Mormons Play Word Games to Attack the Latter-day Saints* (Provo, Utah: Aspen Books, 1992), 27.

governed by the very processes that he cites as evidence for one's Christianity. I am a personal witness of the redemptive power of Jesus Christ. I have been regenerated, I have been saved,⁵ and I have been converted. I have personally accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior, and I have allowed him to transform every area of my life. I trust in Jesus as my personal Lord, God, Master, and Savior and have attempted to demonstrate the sincerity of my commitment since the time of my conversion by living according to Jesus' will. And there are many others like me. I am not the only Latter-day Saint who has "felt to sing the song of [Christ's] redeeming love" (Alma 5:26). Most of my Latter-day Saint friends and neighbors have been similarly changed by the same power. And there are millions more, in every corner of the earth, and each can testify as I have of the converting power of the atonement of Jesus. The problem for Blomberg's definitions is that they include faithful, believing Latter-day Saints. Although we may not describe the transforming process in the same words used by evangelicals, we know it nonetheless because we have witnessed it in our lives and have seen it in the lives of others.

I believe sincerely that many of my evangelical Christian friends, and countless others like them, have been reborn spiritually also.⁶ The fact that their "hearts are changed through faith on his name" (Mosiah 5:7) is clear in their honest efforts to show the example and teachings of Jesus in their lives. They reflect the character of their Savior, just as faithful Latter-day Saints do. Although I believe that the fulness of Christ's gospel is found in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, I do not doubt for a moment that the transforming power of Christ is at work in many good people whose beliefs are different from mine. Thus I do not hesitate to call a good person like Craig Blomberg a Christian.

5. Latter-day Saints typically reserve the language of being saved for the last judgment and do not make claim to salvation in this life. At the same time, however, such language is used with respect to being rescued in this life from sin and evil. See Dallin H. Oaks, "Have You Been Saved?" *Ensign*, May 1998, 55–57.

6. In the most complete sense, being born again includes receiving baptism and the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost, ordinances that represent and fully activate the spiritual processes (see especially Romans 6:3–4).

So why, then, am *I* not a Christian? In order to say I am not a Christian, the authors of *The New Mormon Challenge* and every pastor or publisher who seeks to find fault with Mormonism must do one of the following two things: they must insist that salvation does not really come through Jesus after all, or they must insist that my own religious experience is not real. If I have been transformed through Jesus and live a life centered in his gospel but am nonetheless not saved because I believe the teachings of Mormonism, then salvation is not in Jesus but in correct thinking. Is this salvation by catechism, rather than salvation in Christ?⁷ The other option to exclude me is equally unacceptable. They must discount my religious experience and assert that my relationship with Jesus is not real. But I won't let them do that. I can testify of the redeeming power of the atonement because I am a witness of it in my own life and in the lives of people I love. I cannot deny the life-changing power of Jesus Christ. Do those who seek to disprove Mormonism really want me to deny that witness? I ask the authors of *The New Mormon Challenge* and others like them: Do *you* really want me to deny that witness? If not, then please take it seriously.

An Invitation

I say the following to every honest believer in Jesus Christ: I believe that the Holy Spirit has placed within your soul a true witness of Jesus. Can you believe the same about me? For me and for other Latter-day Saints it is not a doctrinal problem to believe that *your* relationship with Jesus is real and that he is at work in your life. We accept that and are pleased to call you our Christian brother or sister.

7. Stephen Robinson suggested the idea in *How Wide the Divide?* (see pp. 164–65). It seems to me that if proper, orthodox doctrinal thinking is the key to salvation, rather than a life transformed by and centered in Jesus Christ, then this would also exclude from salvation many other Christians, including evangelicals, who—however Christ-centered, faithful, and repentant they may be—hold mistaken ideas or otherwise do not know the proper protocol or vocabulary for being saved. In this there seems to be a fatal defect in evangelical theology. And it is a defect that favors the educated elites—the clergy and the academics—over Christ-loving, Bible-believing farmers and factory workers. See Blomberg in *How Wide the Divide?* (p. 186, first four lines).

And we believe that you will go to heaven. But for you it is a serious problem if *my* relationship with Jesus is real and if he is at work in *my* life. That is why people like the authors of *The New Mormon Challenge* resist the idea as vigorously as they can. There is very much at stake for you, and they know it. Here is why. If you believe that my spiritual rebirth is real and that the Holy Spirit has placed a witness of Jesus Christ in my soul—and I testify that I have that witness—then you need to be aware of some other things as well. The same spiritual processes and experiences that have brought about my spiritual rebirth have also brought about my conversion to the truthfulness of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The same Holy Spirit that has instilled in my heart a sure testimony of Jesus has likewise instilled in my heart a sure testimony that Joseph Smith was his prophet. The same workings that have changed my soul and regenerated me from a fallen man to a disciple of Jesus Christ have also converted me to the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon and the other Latter-day Saint scriptures.

Am I a Christian? Of course I am. Like you, I believe in Jesus as described in the New Testament and in the fact that there is “no other name given nor any other way nor means whereby salvation can come unto the children of men, only in and through the name of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent” (Mosiah 3:17). As yours has, my life has been changed through his saving power. But I believe more than this because I also believe the tremendous things that God has done in modern times. I believe that in 1820 the Lord called a new prophet, Joseph Smith, through whom he restored to the earth the *fulness* of the Christian gospel. This fulness of Christianity includes Jesus’ restored church—a community of people who have come to Christ in the manner described in the New Testament and who endeavor to do his will. The fulness of Christianity also includes the restoration of both the authority and the inspiration of living apostles. Thus the Lord’s church in our day has the same relationship to Jesus that the ancient church had under the ministry of men like Peter, James, and John. And thus the channel of revelation found among ancient apostles

is open again among modern apostles. The restored fulness of Christianity also includes the restoration of the Book of Mormon, an ancient record that, like the Bible, contains the word of God. It is a second witness of Jesus Christ that teaches in plainness the truths of his gospel and bears a clear and consistent testimony of him. Other books of scripture have been revealed as well. Is this not good news? Should not all Christians everywhere receive these blessings with eagerness and joy?

Blomberg quotes the invitation of Gordon B. Hinckley, president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: "Bring all the good you have with you and let us see if we can't add to it" (p. 489 n. 68).⁸ Another modern apostle tells why we bring our message to you, and he invites you to join us in receiving it: "Through missionaries and members, the message of the restored gospel is going to all the world. To non-Christians, we witness of Christ and share the truths and ordinances of His restored gospel. To Christians we do the same. Even if a Christian has been 'saved' . . . , we teach that there remains more to be learned and more to be experienced. . . . We invite all to hear this message, and we invite all who receive the confirming witness of the Spirit to heed it."⁹

8. Gordon B. Hinckley, "Larry King Live" Christmas 1999 television special.

9. Oaks, "Have You Been Saved?" 57.

FAULTY TOPOGRAPHY

Louis Midgley

With playful seriousness and as part of an amusing response to some truly dreadful anti-Mormon literature, in 1963 Hugh Nibley set down "a few *general rules* observed by all successful writers in this fascinating and lucrative field."¹ Three decades later, Massimo Introvigne noted that "a new generation of anti-Mormon writers has emerged, and they no longer follow Nibley's classic instructions on 'how to write an anti-Mormon book.'"² Though "the humor" of Nibley's essay, according to Introvigne, "is still enjoyable, even though first published more than twenty [now thirty] years ago, a visit to the anti-Mormon sections of most Evangelical bookstores demonstrates that the anti-Mormonism with which Nibley crossed swords is today largely out of fashion."³

1. See Hugh Nibley, "How to Write an Anti-Mormon Book (A Handbook for Beginners)," in his *Sounding Brass* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1963), 63. For the most recent version of this essay, see *Tinkling Cymbals and Sounding Brass: The Art of Telling Tales about Joseph Smith and Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 474.

2. Massimo Introvigne, "The Devil Makers: Contemporary Evangelical Fundamentalist Anti-Mormonism," *Dialogue* 27/1 (1994): 155 n. 6.

3. *Ibid.*

Review of Carl Mosser, "And the Saints Go Marching On." In *The New Mormon Challenge*, 59–88.

Review of Richard N. Ostling and Joan K. Ostling. *Mormon America: The Power and the Promise*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999. xiii + 454 pp., with nonspecific endnotes, suggestions for further reading, and index. \$17.00, paperback; \$26.00, hardback.

What is it that had replaced the older strains of anti-Mormonism by 1994? Twenty years after Nibley set down his insightful and amusing “general rules,” the picture changed when the fundamentalist/evangelical world was bombarded with an unseemly film, shown extensively by clergy, entitled *The God Makers*, which was then also sold under the same title in book form.⁴ Introvigne labeled this (and similar, related sectarian anti-Mormon rhetoric) “post-rational” to distinguish it from the sort of literature that Nibley was spoofing in the sixties, which had at least the outward appearance of rationality. The older, somewhat less irrational varieties of sectarian anti-Mormonism tended to attribute the existence and success of the church mainly to a combination of human greed and gullibility, though Satan was never entirely absent from the explanation. In this recent, post-rational version of anti-Mormon propaganda, according to Introvigne, fundamentalist preachers now insist that swarms of demons are responsible for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and have been in full control of its leaders and benighted dupes right from the start, though greed and gullibility also appear as elements in the mix.

The notion that everything preachers dislike is the direct work of Satan did not suddenly come on the scene *de novo* in the 1980s; it has turned up here and there in the past. Introvigne was able to demonstrate that the sensationalistic nonsense advanced by Ed Decker and Dave Hunt, and subsequently spelled out in even more lurid detail by writers like Bill Schnoebelen and James Spencer,⁵ was in part merely a recycling of much older nonsense. This kind of recycling had been described by Nibley in 1963 as the way in which anti-Mormon literature has been formulated from the beginning. Introvigne also argued that the “theological and historical roots” of this post-rational version of sectarian anti-Mormonism “can be traced to larger movements

4. Ed Decker and Dave Hunt, *The God Makers* (Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House, 1984). A decade later Ed Decker and Caryl Matrisciana distributed for a time an even more offensive *The God Makers II* (Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House, 1993).

5. See, for example, the bizarre book by William J. Schnoebelen and James R. Spencer, *Mormonism's Temple of Doom* (Idaho Falls: Triple J, 1987).

extending beyond narrow Mormon boundaries,” even though it also continues to borrow themes and arguments from both secular and sectarian anti-Mormon predecessors.⁶ Of course, anti-Mormonism is still at least partially a hackneyed, formulaic, paint-by-numbers affair, especially when one moves beyond the few agencies and individuals who devote their exclusive or primary attention to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and examines the larger sectarian countercult industry.

But there have recently been some shifts in the anti-Mormon landscape. In the last decade, a small group of evangelicals has sensed a growing awareness of the embarrassing weaknesses in the literature being marketed by the sectarian countercult version of anti-Mormonism. The countercult movement was given much of its current configuration and direction, especially in its approach to the Church of Jesus Christ, by the notorious “Dr.” Walter Martin, the veritable “father of Christian cult apologetics.”⁷ Critics of the Church of Jesus Christ have been put increasingly on the defensive, beginning in 1989, by the publication of sophisticated criticisms of both secular and sectarian anti-Mormon books and essays. For the first time, Latter-day Saint scholars have had a venue in which they could publish such detailed critiques. This response to anti-Mormon literature commenced with the *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* (now known as *FARMS Review of Books*) and was soon supplemented by the publication of two books exposing in considerable detail many of the basic

6. Introvigne, “The Devil Makers,” 154–55.

7. This language is quoted from an editorial note “About the Author” in Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, rev., updated, and expanded ed. (Minneapolis, Minn.: Bethany House, 1997), 7. Martin’s book was first published in 1965 with the subtitle *An Analysis of the Major Cult Systems in the Present Christian Era*. After 1977, the subtitle did not appear in any editions of the book. The general editor for this thirty-year anniversary edition of Martin’s notorious book was Hank Hanegraaff, who, upon Martin’s death on 26 June 1989 at age 60, either (depending on whom one believes) filched the Christian Research Institute, the lucrative business venture started by Martin, from his loyal associates and family or else was the hand-picked successor to Martin. What has resulted is a bitter internecine battle for control of the CRI, with considerable controversy over the unusual business practices of Hanegraaff. This is but one of many similar quarrels typical of the inner workings of the countercult movement.

weaknesses of sectarian anti-Mormonism.⁸ What was begun in the 1960s by Hugh Nibley in two entertaining books⁹ as a momentary diversion from his interest in the scriptures and the ancient world has now been taken up by a host of Latter-day Saint scholars. In addition, anti-Mormonism took some blows with the publication of Craig Blomberg and Stephen Robinson's *How Wide the Divide?*¹⁰ Countercultists tend to despise this book and have refused to acknowledge it precisely because it does not follow the stereotypical pattern of distortion and dissembling common among anti-Mormons. Its tone was also civil, and it allowed a Latter-day Saint to speak. For the first time it became apparent to some evangelicals that the countercult movement has been producing and marketing a detestable literature. The countercult movement was exposed to morally earnest, conservative Protestants as an intellectual and moral failure—a gross embarrassment to their faith.

If this seems extreme, then one ought to consider the recent statement by Richard J. Mouw, president of the Fuller Theological Seminary. According to Mouw, “as an evangelical I must confess that I am ashamed of our record in relating to the Mormon community.”¹¹ Of course, there are, according to Mouw, deep differences between evangelicals and Latter-day Saints over some crucial issues. “But none of those disagreements give me or any other evangelical the license to propagate distorted accounts of what Mormons believe. By *bearing false witness* against our LDS neighbors, we evangelicals have often sinned not just against Mormons but against the God who calls us to

8. See Stephen E. Robinson, *Are Mormons Christians?* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1991); and Daniel C. Peterson and Stephen D. Ricks, *Offenders for a Word: How Anti-Mormons Play Word Games to Attack the Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Aspen Books, 1992).

9. *The Myth Makers* and *Sounding Brass*. Both are now included in *Tinkling Cymbals and Sounding Brass*.

10. See Craig L. Blomberg and Stephen E. Robinson, *How Wide the Divide? A Mormon and an Evangelical in Conversation* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1997).

11. Richard J. Mouw, foreword to *The New Mormon Challenge: Responding to the Latest Defenses of a Fast-Growing Movement*, ed. Francis J. Beckwith, Carl Mosser, and Paul Owen (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2002), 11.

be truth-tellers.”¹² Mouw clearly wishes to distance himself from the abysmal literature produced and marketed by the anti-Mormon elements within the fundamentalist/evangelical countercult movement; he is appalled by what he describes as the “very poor quality” of the “exchanges between evangelicals and members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.”¹³ The two groups, he thinks, have either traded insults or talked past each other.¹⁴ Perhaps, but in my own experience, anti-Mormons do not primarily target the Latter-day Saints as their audience. They are not really seeking to evangelize or educate Latter-day Saints. Instead, they are busy selling a product to those anxious to learn more of the challenge posed by the dreaded cults. Their target audience is composed of Baptists or other conservative Christians who have an appetite for lurid tales about the Saints, or those who sectarians fear are vulnerable to the proselytizing efforts of Latter-day Saints.

The Latter-day Saint responses to anti-Mormon propaganda have been defensive. We have not imagined that we must persuade or can even educate those in the countercult industry. We have learned from sad experience that it is simply not possible to have a genuine conversation with those whose business is to attack our faith. The few efforts that Latter-day Saint scholars have made to befriend and educate countercultists have been dismal failures. After some initial friendly banter, nothing ever really changes. Latter-day Saint apologists have instead sought to provide resources that answer questions raised by those interested in hearing our message or those troubled by anti-Mormon charges or claims.

What Mouw seems to wish for is a reasonable exchange of opinions between evangelicals and Latter-day Saints. Specifically, he anticipates a civil, respectful, responsible conversation with what he describes as “a community of gifted Mormon intellectuals.”¹⁵ With this group

12. *Ibid.*, emphasis added.

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*, 12

he hopes for a “mutual exploration of some of the fundamental issues that bear on the human condition.”¹⁶ However, this conversation is not one between equals or for the purpose of mutual understanding. Building on some earlier experiences of countercultists actually negotiating what may have amounted to an ideological surrender by the Worldwide Church of God and by the leaders of the Seventh-Day Adventists,¹⁷ Mouw and his colleagues may hope that conversations with a few Latter-day Saint intellectuals will eventually turn Latter-day Saints (or the Church of Jesus Christ) into their brand of evangelicals. Mouw seems to anticipate—or at least hope—that such an “exploration” might make possible a “significant theological revision” of Latter-day Saint beliefs, perhaps as the result of what he believes are signs of “LDS theological fluidity,” which he links with the “strong emphasis on continuing revelation” among the Saints. He is thus “hopeful that Latter-day Saints will respond to the invitation to keep the conversation going.”¹⁸ So it seems that a few evangelicals believe that a conversation or dialogue has already begun that may eventually lead the Saints to move more in the direction of what evangelicals insist is orthodox, historic, trinitarian, biblical Christianity. If this is the case, they clearly do not understand the Church of Jesus Christ. They mistake signs of comity as an indication of our propensity to seek their approval and even as a willingness to adopt their ideology. What they offer is merely a less strident, somewhat better informed version of sectarian anti-Mormonism. Why?

Mouw’s remarks are found in the foreword to a book entitled *The New Mormon Challenge*. This collection of essays is not an effort by evangelicals to set out the history of their faction of conservative

16. Ibid., 11.

17. For a countercult perspective on the shifts that have taken place among Adventists and the movement founded by Herbert W. Armstrong, see Kurt Van Gorden, “The Worldwide Church of God: From Cult to Christianity,” in *Kingdom of the Cults*, 471–94; and for Walter Martin’s description of how he and Donald Grey Barnhouse in the 1970s brought about a capitulation on various issues by the leaders of the Seventh-day Adventists, see Martin, “The Puzzle of Seventh-day Adventism,” in *Kingdom of the Cults*, 517–608.

18. Mouw, foreword, 13.

Protestantism and its complex relationship with the Christian past, to explain to the Saints the various strands and currents in evangelical dogmatic theology, or to set out evangelical stances on issues important to their faith community or currently being debated within it. Nor are these individuals offering—or even able—to engage in an interfaith dialogue, a genuine conversation between equals. It is also clear that the few Latter-day Saint intellectuals with whom they have had some friendly conversations are not authorized to engage in such a dialogue. When they talk about a “respectful” conversation, do they have in mind one in which there is deference or esteem granted by each party to the views of the other party? For a genuinely respectful conversation to take place, there must be an informal and entirely voluntary recognition of the claims of the other one. To this point, there has been nothing approaching the kind of interfaith dialogues that have taken place between various versions of Christian faith. Instead, *The New Mormon Challenge* is merely the latest attack on Latter-day Saint beliefs. It differs from the older literature in that it is less acerbic and much better informed and more polite, courteous, and civil. It is still, however, anti-Mormon to the core.

Carl Mosser, the driving force behind this new endeavor, makes it clear that he believes that the existence of the Church of Jesus Christ threatens “the health of evangelicalism.”¹⁹ Since he has discovered that Latter-day Saints are both willing and able to provide sophisticated accounts of their beliefs and defend them against various criticisms, he has been concerned over this “new Mormon challenge.” He and his associates seek “to prevent Mormonism from becoming one of the largest worldwide faiths at our expense.”²⁰ For these and other reasons, he speaks of the need to “retard the spread and growth of the LDS faith.”²¹ The analysis and arguments that inform and flow from this new, somewhat more academic, evangelical apologetic

19. Carl Mosser, “And the Saints Go Marching On: The New Mormon Challenge for World Missions, Apologetics, and Theology,” in *The New Mormon Challenge*, 68.

20. *Ibid.*, 69.

21. *Ibid.*

effort being led by Mosser differ in several ways from the propaganda advanced by the spate of countercult preachers and agencies inspired by the late “Dr.” Walter Martin. In addition to not being nasty or vitriolic and manifesting an awareness of Latter-day Saint scholarship, this new, more sophisticated attack on the foundation of the faith of the Saints may have as its goal the radical transformation of the church and not simply the persuading of individual Saints to abandon the faith—a kind of negotiated surrender, first by intellectuals and then eventually by the Brethren. If they imagine that such might be possible, they are still losing the battle without knowing it.

In short, what Mosser and company seek is not a dialogue but an end to Latter-day Saint proselytizing. Mosser insists that he cannot “in good conscience consider Mormonism a legitimately Christian faith.” He likes what he considers to be signs that some of the Saints are now moving in the right theological direction, and he hopes that “the LDS Church as a whole follows” their lead.²² He and his associates imagine that they are having a conversation with people who are not genuine Christians. They claim to be evangelizing the Saints and perhaps the Church of Jesus Christ. But they are wrong; they are entirely in the proselytizing mode. They are not evangelizing those who have not accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior, since on this crucial issue Latter-day Saints are and have always been fully evangelical.

The Saints see themselves as the children or seed of Christ through a covenant in which they take upon themselves his name. But from the perspective provided by the dogmatic theology of Mosser and his associates—that is, from their reading of the Bible—“Mormonism’s heresies are legion.”²³ Well, there are in fact some deep differences in the way we read the Bible and what we believe about divine things. But if the issue is whether the Saints accept Jesus of Nazareth as Lord and Savior, and not whether we agree with a particular reading of the Bible (and thus with a particular theological formulation that evangelicals assume necessarily constitutes a genuine Christian), then

22. See *ibid.*, 87.

23. *Ibid.*, 85.

Mosser and his associates cannot in good conscience exclude Latter-day Saints from the ranks of Christians. And to grant that Latter-day Saints put their trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior would then make a mockery of the evangelicals' claim that they are evangelizing. One does not, according to their own ideology, evangelize those who already trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior. But, of course, Latter-day Saints make no distinction between evangelizing and proselytizing, so we find nothing problematic about baptizing Baptists.

Though they may not realize it, the editors of *The New Mormon Challenge* are following rather closely some of the rules that Nibley set out in his "Handbook for Beginners." They hold the reader's hand tightly, insisting on pointing out their own qualifications and accomplishments. With no trace of modesty, they claim that the book they have written and edited "is a rare book that is worth reading,"²⁴ that it "pioneers a new genre of literature on Mormonism" with its "outstanding scholarship and sound methodology" (dust cover). They assert that "if you are sharing the gospel with Mormons or investigating Mormonism for yourself, this book will help you accurately understand Mormonism and see the superiority of the historic Christian faith." They also maintain that "this book really ought to be read by anyone with an interest in the truth claims of Mormonism, regardless of religious background or reason for interest. We think we can safely say," they boast, "without presumption, that *The New Mormon Challenge* is a truly groundbreaking and epoch-making book."²⁵ Nibley's first playful bit of advice to the fledgling writer of an anti-Mormon book reads as follows: "*Don't be modest!* Your first concern," he informs the neophyte anti-Mormon, "should be to make it clear that *You are the man for the job*, that amidst a 'mass of lies and contradictions' you are uniquely fitted to pass judgment."²⁶

On the heels of this advice comes Nibley's second rule, followed closely by Beckwith, Mosser, and Owen: "*A benign criticism of your*

24. Beckwith, Mosser, and Owen, "Introduction: A Much Needed and Challenging Book," in *The New Mormon Challenge*, 19.

25. Ibid.

26. Nibley, "How to Write an Anti-Mormon Book," 474.

predecessors will go far towards confirming your own preeminence in the field. Refer gently but firmly," Nibley admonishes, "to the bias, prejudices, and inadequate research, however unconscious or understandable, of other books on the subject."²⁷ It should be noted that Mosser and Owen began their venture into anti-Mormonism with an essay in which they neatly positioned themselves to come to the rescue of the evangelicals overwhelmed by the "new Mormon challenge" by doing what previous writers have lacked the skill and knowledge to accomplish.²⁸

Mosser thus still lectures his fellow evangelicals that "as a community, with respect to Mormonism . . . , we have often succumbed to the sinful habits of caricaturing and demonizing the enemy, recycling arguments that have long been answered, refusing to admit genuine mistakes, and being generally uncharitable."²⁹ He thinks that God is calling evangelicals to change their evil ways and become more charitable, courteous, and respectful of those they still insist are not Christians. But how can one have benevolent goodwill toward those one must characterize as essentially unbelievers—even pagans—who have not come unto Christ, simply in order to get them to submit to a particular brand of theology? Is it the Christ who saves or some theological dogmas to which one must assent in order to be included by evangelicals in their club?

Nibley correctly saw—Satan, greed, and gullibility notwithstanding—that the "real villain of every anti-Mormon book is Mormonism."³⁰ And he also reminds his readers that "every anti-Mormon book is a sermon."³¹ Without realizing it, Mosser and his associates have followed Nibley's impish advice on this matter. One only has to look at the homilies that begin and end *The New Mormon Challenge*

27. Ibid., 474–75.

28. See Carl Mosser and Paul Owen, "Mormon Scholarship, Apologetics and Evangelical Neglect: Losing the Battle and Not Knowing It?" *Trinity Journal*, n.s., 19/2 (1998): 179–205.

29. Mosser, "The Saints Go Marching On," 87.

30. Nibley, "How to Write an Anti-Mormon Book," 554.

31. Ibid.

to encounter the passionate sermonizing element. Mosser insists that this new challenge—a dire threat posed by our proselytizing efforts—is such that it “cannot be accomplished by leaving the task solely up to the numerous small and financially strapped apologetics ministries. Nor,” he adds, “are the vast majority of those engaged in such ministry equipped to do all that needs to be done, even if finances and personnel were not so limited. A proper response to Mormonism . . . will require the entire evangelical community.”³² He seems to want to turn the entire fundamentalist/evangelical movement into one large countercult agency with the Church of Jesus Christ as the enemy in a battle for the souls of millions.

Mormon America and The New Mormon Challenge—“An Excellent Companion”

Mosser and his associates grant that they do not provide in *The New Mormon Challenge* “an introductory overview of LDS history, culture, and belief.”³³ But they are confident that such a thing is available from an evangelical perspective. They “heartily recommend” *Mormon America*, which they claim “will serve as an excellent companion” to their own collection of essays attacking Latter-day Saint beliefs.³⁴ The authors of both *Mormon America* and *The New Mormon Challenge* distance themselves from the disreputable anti-Mormon literature peddled by the essentially fundamentalist countercult movement,³⁵ but not from the enterprise itself. The Ostlings seem to speak for a new evangelical response to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-

32. Mosser, “The Saints Go Marching On,” 69.

33. Beckwith, Mosser, and Owen, “Introduction,” 20.

34. Ibid.

35. For a detailed examination of the fundamentalist/evangelical countercult movement, see Douglas Cowan, *Bearing False Witness? An Introduction to the Christian Countercult* (forthcoming in 2003). This is a much revised version of “Bearing False Witness: Propaganda, Reality-Maintenance, and Christian Anticult Apologetics” (Ph.D. diss., University of Calgary, 1999). Though neither his book nor this 672-page study focuses on anti-Mormonism, Cowan does provide insightful treatments of such anti-Mormon luminaries as Ed Decker, Walter Martin, Dave Hunt, Richard Abanes, Robert M. Bowman Jr., Ron Rhodes, John Ankerberg, and John Weldon.

day Saints—one that is both less repugnant and somewhat better informed.

Instead of imitating the petulance of sectarian countercultists or the waspish qualities common among secular anticultists, with whom jaded journalists frequently have ideological affinities, Richard and Joan Ostling, the husband-and-wife team responsible for *Mormon America*, are said to have produced a religiously sensitive, evenhanded, fair-minded, well-researched, scrupulous, clear-eyed, balanced, exhaustive, thoroughly documented, instructive introduction to the Church of Jesus Christ.³⁶

Is this language merely hype? In answering this question, I have chosen to overlook such typical anti-Mormon bromides as the obsession the Ostlings have—which must come with the craft—with the “fabled wealth” (p. xi) of the “Mormon economic empire” (p. 395). (Just think of all that tithing, and then add in those chapels and temples and their huge monetary value, and imagine the resulting financial and political power the church must wield!) And contemplate for a moment what the Ostlings imagine as a Mormon “penchant for secrecy” (p. xxvi), Mormon “authoritarianism” (p. 383), or the failure to have an administrative style modeled on “democratic America” (p. 374). According to the Ostlings, the “church is rigidly hierarchical, centralized, authoritarian, and almost uniquely secretive” (p. xvi). And yet the Ostlings think that “Mormonism began as, and still is, a uniquely American faith” (p. xviii) and that “Mormonism . . . provided nationalistic Americans with a very American gospel” (p. xix). However, despite—or because of—these supposedly profoundly American qualities, “no religion in American history has aroused so much fear and hatred, nor been the object of so much persecution

36. I have drawn this language from the twenty-two brief passages quoted by the publisher of *Mormon America* from various favorable reviews of this book. These blurbs could be found in October 2002 at www.harpercollins.com/catalog/book_xml.asp?isbn=0060663723. Since its publishers are in the business of selling this book rather than accurately representing its contents, there is, of course, no hint on this Web site that informed Latter-day Saints have faulted *Mormon America*. See, for example, Raymond T. Swenson, “Faith without Caricature?” *FARMS Review of Books* 13/2 (2001): 64–77.

and so much misinformation" (p. xvi). In light of all this, the reader should ask, why the catchy title? Does not the title *Mormon America* announce yet another potboiler, and not, as the authors of this book claim, an important achievement in understanding the faith of the Saints? The Ostlings ask their readers to accept implicitly the fiction that *Mormon America* sums up the topic, without taking into account the facts that the Church of Jesus Christ is spread around the world and that the majority of Latter-day Saints have virtually no special interest in things American. If, in assessing *Mormon America*, one can ignore these and many other similar predictable canards and quirky proclivities (which tell us more about the Ostlings and their conceits than about the Saints), have they, as curious outsiders, somehow managed to explain "the power and the promise" of the Church of Jesus Christ to those both outside and within the church? Does *Mormon America* really provide a competent "introductory overview of LDS history, culture, and belief," as the editors of *The New Mormon Challenge* claim? Or are we merely faced with a somewhat less recognizable form of anti-Mormon propaganda?

Despite deficiencies, some of which I will examine, *Mormon America* is superior to previous, comparable journalistic potboilers.³⁷ One reason is that the Ostlings are better informed than most journalists striving to market essentially lurid exposés. In addition, they have religious sensitivities, and these tend to set their book apart from run-of-the-mill, secular anti-Mormon journalism. The Ostlings, however, seem a bit coy about their religious commitments—describing

37. Examples of recent essentially secular journalistic attacks on the church include James Coates, *In Mormon Circles: Gentiles, Jack Mormons, and Latter-day Saints* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1990); Robert Lindsey, *A Gathering of Saints: A True Story of Money, Murder and Deceit* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988); Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith, *The Mormon Murders: A True Story of Greed, Forgery, Deceit, and Death* (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1988); Robert Gottlieb and Peter Wiley, *America's Saints: The Rise of Mormon Power* (New York: Putnam, 1984); John A. Farrell, "Utah: Inside the Church State," *Denver Post*, 21–28 November 1982 (also available as a special reprint from the *Denver Post*); John Heinerman and Anson Shupe, *The Mormon Corporate Empire* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985). One of these last two authors has questionable credentials, and the other is a sociologist who specializes in religion.

themselves as, “admittedly, conventional Protestants” (p. xi).³⁸ Their careers have been focused on religious journalism. In promoting their book, illustrating rather well one of Nibley’s general rules for fledgling anti-Mormon writers, they claim to be good at what they do and to be widely recognized for their accomplishments. Richard Ostling is the better known of the two, being a religion writer for the Associated Press who formerly wrote for *Time* magazine. In that venue, when the opportunity presented itself, he offered a crafty spin on Mormon things. Having their own religious ideology seems to have yielded a somewhat different thrust and tone in *Mormon America* than is common in the usual highly secularized treatments of the church written by journalists.

In addition, the Ostlings do not seem at home in the world of countercult individuals and agencies that make war on dreaded and dangerous “cultists.” They merely mention bits of the literature produced by the swarm of countercultist anti-Mormon agencies. Under the category “critics” in a section entitled “For Further Reading,” they list only two out of the vast horde of items sold by countercult anti-Mormons: what they wryly describe as a “self-published and frequently updated book by Salt Lake City’s best-known former Mormons [Jerald and Sandra Tanner]”³⁹ and a tawdry tome by James R. White,⁴⁰ which they indicate—perhaps with a dab of irony—is “a fairly articulate analysis of theological differences as seen from an Evangelical perspective” (p. 436). The Ostlings, unlike the older, essentially fundamentalist countercultists, seem to speak for a new style of anti-Mormonism—one that is kinder, gentler, and less abrasive.

38. For evidence that the Ostlings are known to others as evangelicals, see Swenson, “Faith without Caricature?” 66, where reference is made to comments about the religious ideology of the Ostlings by Richard J. Neuhaus in his “Is Mormonism Christian?” *First Things*, March 2000, 97–102.

39. Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1992).

40. James R. White, *Is the Mormon My Brother? Discerning the Differences between Mormonism and Christianity* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1997).

The Ostlings Enter the Book of Mormon Wars

True to the disposition of many journalists, the Ostlings focus on controversy. Thus *Mormon America* contains accounts, somewhat loosely linked, of the debate over the historical authenticity of the Book of Mormon and the question of how the essentials in the history of the Church of Jesus Christ ought to be set forth by Latter-day Saints. They make much of recent squabbles over these matters, and their account of them turns out to be a key ingredient in the tale they tell. As it turns out, whatever virtues *Mormon America* may have, it is at crucial points partisan, partial, and impaired. Despite showing some familiarity with certain portions of recent Latter-day Saint scholarship, their examination leaves much to be desired.

The Ostlings recognize that “the Book of Mormon was controversial from the outset” (p. 261). They also realize that, “from the beginning to this day, the reaction of Book of Mormon readers has been divided between those committed to it as ancient literature and those who consider it a product of the nineteenth century” (p. 261). They argue that these “older polemical traditions” also “split on two sides of a simple prophet/fraud dichotomy: either Joseph Smith was everything he claimed to be, a true prophet entrusted with a new scripture from authentic ancient golden plates, or he was a charismatic fraud” (p. 261). They exploit the fact that recently a few authors operating on the fringes of the Mormon academic community, while denying that Joseph Smith was a genuine prophet and the Book of Mormon an authentic ancient text, have striven to avoid directly charging him with being a conscious fraud. The Ostlings are correct in claiming that some of these writers recognize that a “simple prophet/fraud dichotomy” does not exhaust all possible explanations (p. 261). They then indicate that “some participants in [the] current discussion” over the historical authenticity of the Book of Mormon, while rejecting its authenticity, “would like to carve out a middle path” (p. 261) somewhere between its being read as an authentic ancient text and as a nineteenth-century sham. This effort by a few cultural Mormons,

dissidents, and former Latter-day Saints is then turned by the Ostlings into a main component of their campaign against the Book of Mormon.

What is described as a “middle path” identifies the efforts of a few critics who refuse to consider the possibility that the Book of Mormon is an authentic ancient history. They seek to avoid the use of harsh words like *hoax* when they offer their accounts of how and why we have the book. Who are those who seek this so-called middle path? The answer the Ostlings give is instructive—they indicate that these are “respectful and sympathetic non-Mormons who recognize the moral and spiritual values in the Book of Mormon as well as liberal Mormons who value their heritage” (p. 261). I am, of course, pleased when “respectful and sympathetic non-Mormons” choose to stress the value of the Book of Mormon for the faith of the Saints. Unlike sectarian anti-Mormons who continue the parade of invective against Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon, a few gentile scholars currently tend to adopt a somewhat more respectful stance toward both. They have tried to find language with which they can appropriately recognize the power that the existence of the Book of Mormon, as well as the message set forth in it, has for the Saints, without thereby also granting that it is what it claims to be. Unfortunately, these writers are sometimes allied ideologically with dissidents, former Saints, and cultural Mormons.

In this category the Ostlings include Martin E. Marty (a prominent, contemporary American religious historian), Rodney Stark (a sociologist), Harold Bloom (a literary critic), and Jan Shipps, among others, all of whom, according to the Ostlings, see “the moral and spiritual values in the Book of Mormon” (p. 261). Whether the Ostlings are right in their claim about these authors is beside the point, since they do not appeal to them in their own attack on the Book of Mormon. Instead, they turn to those they label “liberals”—that is, to cultural Mormons who flatly deny that the Book of Mormon is true despite whatever lingering sentimental attachments they may still have to their religious roots. Why? The Ostlings grant that, “from its beginning, the church has declared it essential that the Book of Mormon be accepted as it presents itself, as historical fact, not inspired

fiction" (p. 263). Accordingly, those in thrall to various and sometimes conflicting revisionist explanations of the Book of Mormon⁴¹ are outside the circle of faith, though some may, of course, choose not to remove themselves formally from the church. The Ostlings realize that this is the case—they grant that among those who want to carve out this so-called middle path are "many excommunicated Mormons who still identify themselves as Mormon, as well as some thoughtful Saints who are carefully circumspect in what they say and write but regard the Book of Mormon as most likely of nineteenth-century origin" (p. 261).

Those described by the Ostlings as "thoughtful Saints"—that is, those cagey about their disbeliefs—are depicted as fighting the good fight against those the Ostlings denigrate as "loyalist scholars," who accept and defend the truth of the Book of Mormon. Whatever else one might say about them, these "thoughtful Saints" would sometimes seem to lack what the Ostlings report that the former Mormon historian D. Michael Quinn calls "simple honesty among scholars" (p. 251), since "in what they say and write" they appear to cloak their infidelity. In their own polemic, though, the Ostlings turn these dissidents into heroes. The Ostlings do not hold sly unbelievers to Quinn's lofty standards. In this they are, however, following Quinn's lead, since honesty seems to be for him something the Brethren and his critics lack. All of this, of course, is familiar territory; the Ostlings add nothing to what is already known to those familiar with the recent debate over the Book of Mormon.⁴² They exploit for their own purposes what amounts to a tiny quarrel going on between Latter-day Saint scholars and some dissidents on the fringes of the church.

Regrettably, the Ostlings gossip about what are serious intellectual issues, calling attention to them merely for partisan polemical

41. The array of conflicting and contradictory explanations of the Book of Mormon is illustrated by the essays assembled by Dan Vogel and Brent Lee Metcalfe in *American Apocrypha: Essays on the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002).

42. The entire debate over the Book of Mormon, which began even before its publication, is examined and assessed by Terryl L. Givens in his *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion* (New York: Oxford University, 2002).

purposes. They fail to clarify or contribute to the conversation currently taking place. Consequently, when they confront Joseph Smith's prophetic claims, they confine themselves to describing the middle-path stance between reading the Book of Mormon as an authentic ancient text or dismissing it as a blatant hoax. There is, however, no indication in *Mormon America* that the Ostlings see anything either inspiring or inspired in what they label a historical hoax; they remain squarely in the old sectarian anti-Mormon camp. For their partisan, polemical purpose they exploit bits and pieces of the conversation that has been going on for twenty years over the Book of Mormon and are thereby able to make use of the fact that a few gentile observers, former Latter-day Saints, and cultural Mormons have suggested that something might be inspiring in the Book of Mormon even if it is not true—with the emphasis on the latter qualification.

Those who make this argument, with perhaps one or two exceptions, do not indicate what exactly they find either interesting or edifying in the Book of Mormon once they have rejected it as an authentic ancient history. On the contrary, they often boast that they find nothing of genuine value in the book. Robert Price, for example, in a most instructive instance, finds something at least a bit interesting in the Book of Mormon when it is read as frontier fiction. A member of the Jesus Seminar who is also heavily involved in the secular humanist movement, Price sees in the Book of Mormon something resembling what he finds in the Gospels of the New Testament when they are read through the lens provided by essentially secular humanist assumptions about divine things.⁴³ If Price had published this essay earlier, the Ostlings could have added his name to the list of “sympathetic non-Mormons” (p. 261), some of whom, with urbane tolerance and even compassion for virtually all communities rooted in the Bible, and with ever so gentle strokes, dismiss the truth claims of both the Bible and the Book of Mormon for somewhat similar rea-

43. See Robert M. Price, “Joseph Smith: Inspired Author of the Book of Mormon,” in *American Apocrypha*, 321–66.

sons. But, of course, his reading of the Bible challenges the Ostlings' evangelical religiosity at least as much as it does our faith. This is also true of Harold Bloom's way of reading both the Bible and Protestant sectarian history.⁴⁴

Massimo Introvigne has shown that "the Book of Mormon wars" are currently being "fought not around interpretation, but around the very nature of the Book of Mormon."⁴⁵ Is it what it claims to be? Or is it merely somehow a product of Joseph Smith's creative genius or religious imagination?"⁴⁶ This way of framing the question gets to the heart of the current squabbles. Introvigne also argues that "those claiming that it is neither of the two, but a fraud, exclude themselves from the debate and join the ranks of mere anti-Mormonism."⁴⁷ This is, of course, where the Ostlings are situated. Though they describe sympathetically the stance of those few who want to picture the Book of Mormon as a product of Joseph Smith's unaided inventive powers and not an outright, blasphemous fraud, they end up advancing "mere anti-Mormonism."

I am, however, gratified that the Ostlings describe me as one of the "current loyalist scholars" opposed to the so-called middle path. I am also not displeased that the Ostlings quote me as follows:

To reduce the Book of Mormon to mere myth weakens, if not destroys, the possibility of it witnessing to the truth about divine things. A fictional Book of Mormon fabricated by Joseph Smith, even when his inventiveness, genius, or "inspiration" is celebrated, does not witness to Jesus Christ but

44. See Harold Bloom's curious venture into what he calls "religious criticism," in *The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992).

45. Massimo Introvigne, "The Book of Mormon Wars: A Non-Mormon Perspective," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5/2 (1996): 1–25. A somewhat truncated version of this essay appeared in *Mormon Identities in Transition*, ed. Douglas J. Davies (London: Cassell, 1996), 25–34.

46. Introvigne, "The Book of Mormon Wars," 5 (in Davies, *Mormon Identities*, 26).

47. Ibid.

to human folly. A true Book of Mormon is a powerful witness; a fictional one is hardly worth reading and pondering. (pp. 263–64)⁴⁸

History and the Faith and Memory of the Saints

Just as the Ostlings do not entirely slight the conversation that has been taking place over how to read the Book of Mormon, neither do they completely ignore the related discussion of how to explain Joseph Smith. Indeed, they devote two chapters to these closely related issues (see chap. 15, “Faithful History,” pp. 238–58, and chap. 16, “The Gold Bible,” pp. 259–77). They are, however, not clear on the relationship of accounts of the Latter-day Saint past to the crucial question of how the Book of Mormon ought to be read, and hence they offer a confused commentary on the debate over how best to approach Joseph Smith’s prophetic truth claims. In this they go down a well-worn path—one familiar to the Saints from some recent cultural Mormon polemics and now also found, regrettably, in some sectarian anti-Mormon literature.

In addition to describing briefly the place of the Book of Mormon in the faith of the Saints and the debate over its truth that began even before its publication, the Ostlings also focus attention on the way the Saints devote themselves to understanding crucial, even fateful, aspects of their past. They complain that “the church has always tried to retain a proprietary hold over the telling of its own history” (p. 250). Surely, though, they cannot be suggesting that the Saints could possibly be indifferent to the way the story of the restoration is told, for they themselves state that in “a very real sense . . . the church’s history is its theology” (p. 245)—that is, they realize that some of what has taken place in the past both grounds the faith of the Saints

48. The Ostlings are quoting from my essay entitled “The Acids of Modernity and the Crisis in Mormon Historiography,” in *Faithful History: Essays on Writing Mormon History*, ed. George D. Smith (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), 214. They could have quoted many related passages. What they chose to quote represents only some of my argument on the issue they address.

and provides much of its content. The Latter-day Saint past has always been contested territory. The moment Joseph Smith began to tell of his encounters with heavenly messengers, those who were skeptical, hostile, full of disbelief, threatened by his claims, or disenchanted have been busy telling their own versions of what they think happened—reporting on events in negative terms and contesting virtually every detail and every prophetic claim.⁴⁹ The church has never controlled its history. Instead, the Saints have struggled to tell their story in a way that is consonant with, rather than destructive of, faith. What the Ostlings neglect to say is that, for all those whose faith is rooted in the Bible, an understanding of at least a segment of the past is crucial. Why? That Jesus, understood as the Messiah or Christ, was crucified is a historical statement, as is the claim that after three days he rose from the grave. The main difference between Latter-day Saints and others is that, for the Saints, the story did not end with the death of the apostles—it continues even now. For the Saints, this is one reason why history takes the place of theology, as that endeavor is undertaken by Christians generally.

The Ostlings acknowledge that, when contrasted with the Saints, sectarians are rather indifferent to their history, though, of course, “Protestants vary in their degree of historical amnesia” (p. 247). From my perspective, the Protestant historical amnesia is not limited to indifference to the quarrels of churchmen and to the divergent speculation of theologians through the ages; it is also manifested in an indifference to recent Protestant sectarian and denominational history, little or none of which forms part of the ground or content of their brand of Christian faith. For example, those currently associated with the Southern Baptist Convention certainly do not have as part of the ground of their faith a passionate awareness that the denomination to which they subscribe was founded by preachers who were eager to

49. Remarkable recent examples of such a sustained and strained attacks can be found in Richard Abanes, *One Nation under Gods: A History of the Mormon Church* (New York: Four Winds Fight Windows, 2002); and Charles L. Wood, *The Mormon Conspiracies: A Review of Present Day and Historical Conspiracies to Mormonize America and the World* (San Diego, Calif.: Black Forest Press, 2001).

defend slavery against their abolitionist brethren in the North. *Instead, they are indifferent to much or all of their own denominational history, with all its twists and turns and factional and sometimes brutally internecine quarreling, since their faith, as they insist, is drawn from and rests upon an interpretation of the Bible alone.* The history they turn to is thus far away and long ago and not, as it is with the Saints, also here and now, with the heavens still open and the story continuing. This is significant, since factions of contemporary conservative Protestantism tend to see themselves as guardians of something they imagine to be orthodox, historic, trinitarian, biblical Christianity. To the Saints, however, they appear as *formalists*, who still manifest a form of godliness⁵⁰ but who, by dogmatically closing the heavens, deny the power of God, arbitrarily limiting him by restricting what he can and cannot do. Instead they turn to a closed canon of scripture read through the lens of categories and explanations worked out in partly understood and long-forgotten theological controversies, ending at times in formal statements of faith.

And unless conservative Protestants are doing battle with Roman Catholics (which some of them have a penchant to do, especially if they subscribe to some strain of fundamentalism), they tend to ignore the details of what took place from the first century to the Reformation within and among various, often warring, factions of Christians. In general, they insist on an apostasy of large proportions and consequently a need for the church, or at any rate the essentials of faith, to be radically reformed by theologians, though not necessarily restored by God. But history is not a central concern in the disputes over theology found today among the various factions of conserva-

50. On 18 November 1830, the Reverend John Sherer wrote to the Reverend Absalom Peters of the American Home Missionary Society, his Presbyterian supervising agency, indicating that he had encountered Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon, as well as the tiny Colesville branch of the fledgling Church of Christ. Sherer's letter is quoted by H. Michael Marquardt and Wesley P. Walters, *Inventing Mormonism: Tradition and the Historical Record* (Salt Lake City: Smith Research Associates, 1994), 187. This tiny group of Saints, according to Sherer, "call themselves a church of Christ, and the only church of Christ. All professing christians who do not adhere to their system, they consider as formalists; 'having the form of Godliness, but denying the power.'"

tive Protestants—for example, the controversy between radical and more moderate Calvinists, not to mention Arminians, over the atonement and over what are thought to be the attributes of God. These kinds of sometimes fierce battles are mostly fought by proof-texting the Bible. With few exceptions, contemporary Protestants—those in the pews—tend to disregard the bulk of Christian history, dismissing most of what actually happened in the past as irrelevant to the content and truth of their own faith, which preachers tend to reduce to simple formulas. Except for a few specialists in the history of dogma, contemporary conservative Protestants seem to me to want to believe that everyone, everywhere, almost always has agreed on the fundamentals, whatever they are currently thought to be. And when they represent their own sometimes ferocious domestic theological quarrels to those of us on the sidelines, they downplay these controversies by representing them as merely slight differences of opinion over nonessentials.⁵¹

In fact, though, some of these quarrels seem to me to be of considerable importance. An instructive example of the kind of controversy I have in mind can be seen in a recent bitter exchange between Norman Geisler and James White, both of whom are, incidentally, strident anti-Mormons. After Geisler published a work on a moderate version of Calvinism,⁵² White countered with a passionate defense of what he considers to be Reformed, or Calvinist, principles.⁵³ The chief

51. For a description of the enormous variety of positions entertained by presumably orthodox Christians since the second century on such matters as scripture, divine revelation, tradition and its relationship to scripture, salvation, the church, God, the Trinity, life beyond the grave, what is essential and not essential to Christian discipleship, the estrangement and goodness of human beings, and divine providence, see Roger E. Olson, *The Mosaic of Christian Belief: Twenty Centuries of Unity and Diversity* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2002). Olson situates his own theological heresies, which are Arminian rather than Calvinist, squarely within the unity he finds somewhere behind all the diversity that constitutes the history of Christian theology.

52. See Norman Geisler, *Chosen but Free: A Balanced View of Divine Election* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Bethany House, 1999).

53. James R. White, *The Potter's Freedom: A Defense of the Reformation and a Rebuttal of Norman Geisler's Chosen but Free* (Amityville, N.Y.: Calvary Press, 2000).

issue was the soundness of an “extreme” reading of Five-Point Calvinism, or what is often called TULIP (Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, and Perseverance of the saints). Geisler had argued that even Calvin was not a Calvinist in the way he is depicted by some Calvinists and that the contents of TULIP could be traced no further back into the Christian past than St. Augustine, who advanced something like the heresies of TULIP only late in his career—that is, after A.D. 417. This sent White into a round of proof-texting from the New Testament. He never addressed Geisler’s claim that nothing approaching “extreme” Calvinism could be found among Christian theologians earlier than the last part of Augustine’s career, when he wrote things that, if Geisler is at all correct, were novel, unbiblical, and simply wrong. White dismissed Geisler as an Arminian heretic, a charge Geisler flatly denied. According to Arminian views, the atonement is believed to have been universal and not limited—that is, the atonement is in force for all human beings and not just for a few lucky saved ones. At least some evangelicals entertain this view. Latter-day Saints who bother to read this kind of literature find it both amusing and instructive: it demonstrates some of the problems associated with yielding to the urge of conservative Protestants to do theology. We find it odd that both fundamentalists and evangelicals often assume that getting such matters reduced to neat formulae is a kind of necessary analog or even prerequisite to getting oneself saved—even, ironically, when one insists on an “extreme” understanding of predestination and election.

This helps to explain the tendency among conservative Protestants to substitute minimal, vague creedal statements—as well as assent to the supposed infallibility or inerrancy of the Bible, the meaning of which is notoriously difficult to pin down—for an understanding of the full range of theological controversy going on now and in the past. These tendencies manifest elements of the historical amnesia to which the Ostlings casually testify. Conservative Protestants can thus conveniently overlook the fact that the creeds and confessions are themselves but the outward sign and end result of fierce

battles that once raged beneath the surface of traditional, presumably orthodox faith, where it is assumed that nothing much has ever happened that makes a real difference.

This is not, however, to say that Protestants of different stripes do not have historical content in their faith, for they do. Even if they wanted to, they could not entirely banish crucial historical elements. As mentioned, the claim that Jesus is the Messiah (or Christ) is necessarily historical, unless one has adopted a radically liberal Protestant understanding of the Bible such as people associated with the Jesus Seminar might now advance. And the claim that Jesus of Nazareth was crucified and later rose from the dead and appeared to his disciples is a historical one. But conservative Protestants tend to focus on events and teachings recorded in the Bible understood through the lens provided by the creeds and other confusing theological speculations, the history of which is of little concern to the vast bulk of communicants.

The Ostlings, after granting that Protestants have varying degrees of historical amnesia and after noting correctly that Latter-day Saints take elements of their own history seriously, affirm that, in the place of history, the “creedal churches”—which presumably still include at least many if not most Protestants, as well as pious Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholics—“have official statements of faith, [while] the Mormon Church tends to have official versions of sacred history” (p. 245). The Ostlings thus assume, since their own religious world is dogmatically set in polished theological formulae, that the Saints must necessarily have something analogous that takes the place of official creeds and confessions. This may help explain why they and anti-Mormons generally target accounts of our past and seek to offer their own revisionist versions. They assume that identifying a flaw in some account of the Latter-day Saint past will do irreparable damage to the faith of the Saints. The Ostlings then wrongly surmise that this “official history” includes “everything that has happened to the church ever since” the restoration, setting the stage for claims that “sensitive historical issues are frequently downplayed, avoided or denied” (p. 247).

and for gossip about how the Brethren have recently been mean to some Mormon historians, restricted access to church archives, and so forth.

On the other hand, the Ostlings correctly sense that history is important for the Saints, who can be said to live by and in a story. And we tell stories about our own encounters with the divine that anchor our hopes and expectations for the future. At least part of what this means is that the faith of the Saints is not derived from or dependent on recondite theological or philosophical speculation, nor is it the result of some mode of biblical exegesis—learned or otherwise—fashioned by theologians in long-forgotten and little-understood controversies. Although we make use of such work and even do some of it ourselves, it is always an auxiliary to the faith. We are painfully aware of how our hopes, assumptions, and preunderstandings control or at least influence what we make of texts, so we are cautious about biblical studies or any apparent finding that might in some way bear on prophetic truth claims. We certainly do not see such scholarly endeavors as yielding proofs but perhaps as assisting in our understanding and in our dedication to God. We see the basic plot in the Bible as unfinished and therefore see ourselves living in a kind of charmed or enchanted world in which the divine is, from time to time, manifest in our own lives in ways not at all unlike those described in our scriptures, with God still active among his covenant people in essentially the same manner as that depicted in those texts. So, for the Saints, the heavens are not closed, the canon of scripture is not finished, the story has not ended, the great drama continues, and we are part of it. We strive to fuse our own stories with those we find in the Latter-day Saint past and in our scriptures. Both the Book of Mormon and the story of its recovery have invited and facilitated our entry into a world pulsing with divine power. They work together to invite those who receive them to leave the world of sectarian controversy over theology and live, instead, in a world much like the one described in our scriptures.

For the Saints, the scriptures are thus not mere artifacts from a dead past. And though they obviously describe many theophanies

and other divine special revelations, what really counts is not assent to their infallibility nor to their being the final, finished divine revelation. We are not into bibliolatry. The scriptures are not themselves revelations for us, unless or until the Holy Spirit brings them to life in our hearts and minds—and then in our deeds. In this way the scriptures provide us with a guide and a model for our own immediate link, here and now, to the presence and power of God in our lives. What this means is that, far more than with other Christians, our faith is both grounded in history and has historical events central to its content. And these form and direct our identity in the present and direct our aspirations for the future, both here below and beyond. I have tried to capture this ethos by referring to the *faith and memory* of the Saints. What counts for us is not merely an assent to theological formulae; an initial, momentary confession; or acceptance of an invitation to come to the altar and be saved. We seek instead a transforming, eventually sanctifying, individual and communal experience that involves a long and sometimes painful process of rebirth, faithfulness to our covenants, constant repentance, and a powerful linking of faith and deeds that often offends sectarian critics.

Thus the faith of the Saints tends to be contested in the arena of history and not that of theology, either dogmatic or systematic. Submission to pat theological formulae cannot justify or sanctify anyone any more than obedience to the ceremonial law requiring circumcision can determine who is or is not genuinely right with God. What seems to trouble some sectarians about the Saints is that we now live, like the former Saints, in a world of wonders—including seers and prophets among the covenant people of God—and not in the sectarian world dominated by theological speculation, controversy, carefully crafted creeds, and dogmatic hair-splitting. Evangelical critics of the Church of Jesus Christ need to realize that, instead of doing theology, especially in their way—that is, striving to sort out puzzles generated over years of uninspired and uninspiring theological disputation—we tell stories. These stories link us to the past, recalling God's mighty deeds, and shape the future as they form our identity as the covenant people of God.

A world like that of the Bible, in which the heavens are not closed, is a world pulsing with divine purpose and power and thereby permeated with gifts from God. To testify to these things, for us, is not to play the game of theological or philosophical disputation, however enticing and amusing that sort of thing may be. Neither is it to invoke language that the evangelicals tend to call witnessing—a language in which, in addition to confessing Jesus as Lord and Savior, one must also have the correct theological dogma setting out the doctrine of justification, and one must proclaim the dogma that God, understood as Being-Itself, created everything (including time and space) out of nothing. Our approach is, instead, a public witness of a reality in our lives that is vouchsafed to us by the Holy Spirit. Evangelicals may sometimes imagine—building perhaps on their own experience of a momentary emotional twinge as they answered an altar call or had some similar initial experience, when they were presumably regenerated once and for all—that our faith is set out in the routine ways they commonly employ, or found in something similar to their own witnessing rituals. It is not. Instead, it is grounded in our own experience with the guiding, healing, and sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit.

The Ostlings sense that something like this is true by noting Jan Shipp's comment that the early Latter-day Saints "were conscious of living through their own sacred history in a new age. They were also, in a sense, recapitulating the sacred history of scripture through their own experiences" (pp. 246–47).⁵⁴ This explains why the Ostlings focus their attack on the Book of Mormon as a way of debunking the faith of the Saints and countering the prophetic truth claims made by Joseph Smith, whose experience opened the heavens for those who have genuinely trusted the restored gospel. This also explains why we see the efforts of dissidents or former Latter-day Saints to fashion radically revisionist explanations of the founding or generative events, or anyone's efforts to explain away the Book of Mormon, as frontal attacks on our faith.

54. While the statement is accurate as far as it goes, it is a mistake to think that the Saints no longer see themselves this way.

The Ostlings clearly recognize that our faith rests on history. They sense that, unlike Protestants, the Saints “remember” the past, “and they remember in great detail. The remembrances bind them as a people” (p. 239). This is exactly right.⁵⁵ And it explains why the Ostlings mock our sometimes clumsy efforts to defend, keep alive, and deepen the memory of the crucial founding theophanies. It also explains why the Ostlings offer a rather pedestrian selection of complaints about the way we understand our own past, tell our story, and deal with revisionist accounts.

It appears important for the Ostlings to challenge the integrity of what we see as the hand of God in our immediate past. Unlike some of the less thoughtful sectarian critics, they sense that nothing much is to be gained by quarreling with us over competing interpretations of the Bible. They focus instead on squabbles over the Latter-day Saint past, borrowing from a few dissidents or former Latter-day Saints a tale of how “the church suppresses evidence that is contrary to the official interpretation” and of how it has “censured Mormon historians” (p. 251) who challenge what they call “official history.” To defend “‘traditional’ or ‘faithful history,’” according to the Ostlings, “means that sensitive historical issues frequently are downplayed, avoided, or denied” (p. 247). This is, of course, the ideological stance currently being advanced by those who are anxious to place the church in the worst possible light, who want to create public relations problems, and who engage in sensationalism or partisan propaganda as they avoid dealing with substantive issues.

Certainly, Latter-day Saint history cannot be shielded from critical attention (see p. 247). Thus, in order to point out efforts by the Saints to downplay “sensitive historical issues” in an attempt—as they see it—to shield our faith from the real truth about the past, the

55. I have advanced more detailed versions of this argument elsewhere. See, for example, the argument set out in my essay entitled “Modernity, History and Latter-day Saint Faith,” which appears in *Mormon Identities in Transition*, 20–24; and also see a more elaborate version of the argument in “‘To Remember and Keep’: On the Book of Mormon as an Ancient Book,” in *The Disciple as Scholar: Essays on Scripture and the Ancient World in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks, Donald W. Parry, and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2000), 95–110.

Ostlings quote Martin E. Marty, a distinguished Protestant historian of American religion. Marty was actually making a somewhat different point about the Saints, which the Ostlings seem to ignore. What he argued is that “faith attached to or mediated through historical events”—which is the kind of faith characteristic of mainstream Christianity, Judaism, and Islam,

has always had some dimensions of an “offense” or “scandal” to the insider just as it has been only that to the outsider who despises. Awareness of the pettinesses and peccadillos among leaders or injustices in the record of a people—one thinks of the Christian Crusades and Inquisition or the papal corruption in many ages—has to be some sort of threat to the clarity of faith’s vision, though it clearly has not meant the loss of faith . . . on the part of so many who are aware.⁵⁶

According to Marty, “whoever knows how Christian faith survives and can survive knowledge of all the evidences of fallibility and scandal that occurred through history will understand why the outsider historian finds trivial the question of whether the faith [of Latter-day Saints] is threatened by the revelation of human shortcomings.”⁵⁷ But, in order to appreciate Marty’s point, one must have scrutinized accounts of Christian history that move beyond the first century.⁵⁸

56. Martin E. Marty, “Two Integrities: An Address to the Crisis of Mormon Historiography,” in *Faithful History*, 174.

57. *Ibid.*, 175.

58. I have come away from reading Roger E. Olson’s *Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1999), with a deep melancholy. Olson provides a nice intellectual history covering the main outlines of postbiblical theological disputation, but the even more depressing accounts are essentially social and political. And there, even with the help of a faithful guide, one cannot avoid the ugly, depressing tales of human depravity that constitute the very substance of the story being told. It is in the face of these appalling details, Professor Marty argues, that those with pious dispositions find various ways to see a glimmer of light in the midst of all the intrigues and maneuvering, the pomp and politics, the blood and gore. For an effort to put this terrible tale in the best possible light, one might consult a social history of Christianity like that provided by Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, 2 vols. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984–85). Nothing in the Latter-day Saint past resembles the dreadful story told by Gonzalez.

Of course Marty sees that we are concerned about what he calls “public relations” issues. The problem is not that we have not and cannot continue to come to terms with such matters, or that our faith cannot survive an awareness of our rather obvious imperfections, but that these human imperfections and mistakes—if we are certain they are such—are constantly being used to damage the church by critics who, it must be noted, are often not interested in the full truth about our past. And yet the faith persists and prospers. The reason is that revelations of shortcomings among the Saints do not somehow nullify our experiences as individuals and as a community with the guidance and assurance of the Holy Spirit. The constant barrage of efforts to embarrass the church that appears in books, newspapers, magazines, and tabloids is, of course, a concern to the Saints. But the Saints have never known a time when this sort of thing was not taking place. And the stark contrast between the reality we experience and the lurid stuff in the latest offensive tabloid only deepens our appreciation for the gifts that come from God.

“Yet intellectually,” according to Marty, addressing directly the issue of the sins of the Saints, “these are not of much interest.”⁵⁹ The reason is that “most of the writing on Mormon history that poses a problem” concerns what he calls the “generative events”—the founding theophanies and the Book of Mormon.⁶⁰ According to Marty—and he is correct on this issue—the reason is that, “if the beginning of the promenade of Mormon history, the First Vision and the Book of Mormon, can survive the crisis, then the rest of the promenade follows and nothing that happens in it can really detract from the miracle of the whole.”⁶¹ If the founding theophanies and the Book of Mormon “do not survive, there can be only antiquarian, not fateful or faith-full, interest in the rest of the story.”⁶²

Gossip about a few dissidents and apostates (those the Ostlings call “Dissenters and Exiles,” pp. 351–71), the alleged mistreatment by

59. Marty, “Two Integrities,” 176.

60. *Ibid.*

61. *Ibid.*

62. *Ibid.*

some of the Brethren of a few historians, complaints that some materials in the church archives are not available to just anyone, or efforts of a few to focus attention on the evils of polygamy or the terrible event at Mountain Meadows should not be of major concern either to the Saints or to those familiar with the history of religious movements generally. And this is, I believe, the point made by Martin Marty. Those who focus on such issues—whether dissidents, former Latter-day Saints, or secular or sectarian anti-Mormons, including journalists—have a superficial understanding of the ground and content of our faith, at best. At worst, they prove themselves willing to employ any means for essentially polemical purposes.

Contrary to what some sectarians assume, we do not view ourselves or our leaders as infallible or inerrant. Instead, we recognize that our best efforts to find favor with God, our sincerest struggles to keep the commandments and to build Zion, even with assistance provided by God, are always flawed. We are always in need of divine mercy. So pointing out mistakes or trotting out tales of what appear to be imperfections does not accomplish what our enemies desire, though it may sometimes constitute a public relations problem for us. And what might we make of the fact that our critics sometimes have their own rather embarrassing foibles? These are often ignored. Dissidents, journalists, and revisionist historians are not particularly eager to reveal embarrassing tendencies about themselves and certainly do not welcome an inspection of their own shortcomings, which are sometimes relevant to the issues being contested. Anti-Mormons who are obsessed with our faults, and especially with those of the Brethren, have often not been willing to make public certain details about dissidents whose reputations they have found it useful to protect for their own partisan purposes.⁶³

63. For example, Sandra and Jerald Tanner, inveterate sectarian anti-Mormon publicists, knew about D. Michael Quinn's homosexual proclivities long before he finally made these public. Sandra Tanner told me, for example, that she found his notorious sex survey simply revolting. But the Tanners said nothing then or subsequently about this matter. Why? Is it that they find his revisionist history and his personal attacks on the Brethren useful? This appears to be the case, since they market his stuff. If so, we have an explana-

Some Unfortunate Ideological Labeling

In addition to the debate over the truth of the Book of Mormon, the Ostlings mention my closely related contribution to the recent controversy over how best to approach the Latter-day Saint past. However, instead of dealing with my arguments, they merely classify me as “very conservative,” while they lionize former Latter-day Saint historian D. Michael Quinn, whom they label a “liberal.” Quinn is made into a truly heroic figure, presumably because of his self-proclaimed insistence on “simple honesty among scholars” (p. 251), as mentioned above. The use of amorphous, highly politicized labels is, I suppose, to be expected from journalists whose world comes in the form dictated by the seating arrangements in the French parliament—that is, right, center, left (or conservative, moderate, liberal). This stuff is the very lifeblood of journalists but the deathbed of genuine understanding. The Ostlings, regrettably, employ such crude, ideological pigeonholing when they seek to describe the conversation going on among historians on how best to deal with the essentials of church history.

When journalists label something “traditional” and those who defend it “conservative,” they consign both to the dustbin. That is just the way this kind of labeling works. One hardly needs an argument when one can substitute pejorative labels for plausible, coherent analysis and a careful weighing of evidences. To cite one instance with which I am well acquainted, the Ostlings picture me as one of the “articulate adherents of the conservative position” on how best to approach the past of the Latter-day Saints (p. 416). But beyond this, the Ostlings neglect to explain exactly what my position is. Instead, they contrast me with Richard L. Bushman, whom they describe as holding a “moderate stance” (p. 416). They fail to indicate on which issues and in what ways I am supposed to differ with Bushman. Differences in style among writers would not seem to be sufficient grounds for the distinction the Ostlings want to make. I am fond of

tion for their failure to mention facts about him and his essays that might diminish his usefulness in their own campaign against the church.

Bushman's essays on the Latter-day Saint past;⁶⁴ I cannot identify one issue on which I am aware of a disagreement with him. Why, then, am I placed in a different category? Is it perhaps because the Ostlings do not really understand the literature they cite? Or if they understand this literature, why do they choose to employ clumsy ideological labeling? Is it because they are engaged in a partisan, polemical campaign? If not, then why not confront the arguments?

The Ostlings are, however, correct in distinguishing my position—and also that of Bushman—from that of Quinn, as well as in reporting that he claims not to be driven by an agenda or ideology and therefore to be an objective historian.⁶⁵ Both Bushman and I maintain that such claims are substantively empty, conceptually confused, and self-serving.⁶⁶ Disregarding the literature on the possibility and desirability of objectivity in doing history, Quinn contrasts what he describes as his desire to be “fair and objective” with what he labels “ultimate objectivity.”⁶⁷ Seemingly, he refers to those who want their readers to view them and their associates as “fair and objective”—that is, disinterested, detached, honest, balanced, or dispassionate—in the things they write about the past, while they picture those with whom they disagree, especially their critics, as biased, polemical, and essentially dishonest. But, in fact, no one either defends or criticizes what Quinn describes as “ultimate objectivity,” and Quinn himself ignores the literature that is focused precisely on such claims. He blasts away at a straw man, seemingly as a way of preserving his attachment to a thin version of the myth of objectivity rather than dealing with the actual criticisms of that ideology. This approach has

64. See, for example, Richard L. Bushman's *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984).

65. See Quinn's plea for “functional objectivity” in his “Editor's Introduction” to *The New Mormon History: Revisionist Essays on the Past*, ed. D. Michael Quinn (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), viii.

66. See Richard L. Bushman's essay entitled “Faithful History,” *Dialogue* 4/4 (1969): 15–17; reprinted in *Faithful History*, 6–7. Bushman's remarks can be compared with my views as set out in an essay entitled “The Myth of Objectivity: Some Lessons for Latter-day Saints,” *Sunstone*, August 1990, 54–56.

67. Quinn, “Editor's Introduction,” to *The New Mormon History*, viii.

become Quinn's stock-in-trade. Does he want his readers to believe that he is allowing evidence to speak its truth through him as a detached, objective, neutral observer, while his critics are pictured as pernicious partisans or polemicists driven by a corrupting ideology? Seemingly. He charges those with whom he disagrees with dishonesty. He ignores the need for comity among scholars involved in conversations over intellectual issues. In addition, some rather deeply held prejudices seem to dictate his understanding of what constitutes evidence, as well as to control his interpretations and explanations.⁶⁸

Is someone wholly "fair and objective," however those words are understood, while covertly advancing a private agenda?⁶⁹ The Ostlings ignore such questions. Instead, they identify Quinn as a "liberal" and also as "a 'new Mormon history' scholar who attempts to combine the goal of objective scholarship and candor with taking faith claims seriously" (p. 416). Leonard Arrington granted that "every historian's judgments were inescapably influenced by their interests, values, and private beliefs."⁷⁰ If this assessment is true, and I believe that it is, then we have grounds for wondering if individuals are being open and honest if they do not make public their lifestyle preferences until after they are excommunicated from the church, while telling what amounts to tall tales about why they were "officially" removed from the community of Saints.⁷¹

68. In his "The New Mormon Hysteria," *Sunstone*, March 1993, 5, Quinn claims that what he labels dishonest "Traditional Mormon History," whatever that is, "sanitizes the Mormon past of human *infallibility*" (emphasis added). What he may have been trying to say in this diatribe is that the history he loathes does not emphasize "human *fallibility*."

69. See, for example, Quinn, *Same-Sex Dynamics among Nineteenth-Century Americans: A Mormon Example* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996). Compare Klaus J. Hansen, "Quinn speak," *FARMS Review of Books* 10/1 (1998): 132–40; and George L. Mitton and Rhett S. James, "A Response to D. Michael Quinn's Homosexual Distortion of Latter-day Saint History," *FARMS Review of Books* 10/1 (1998): 141–263.

70. Leonard J. Arrington, *Adventures of a Church Historian* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 70.

71. For a sympathetic account of Quinn's troubles with the church, selectively drawn from his own papers, see Lavina Fielding Anderson, "DNA Mormon: D. Michael Quinn," in *Mormon Mavericks: Essays on Dissenters*, ed. John Sillito and Susan Staker (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), 329–63.

Quinn has become a major figure in anti-Mormon attacks on the church. He has fitted himself well for this role by, among other things, fashioning a reputation for quarreling with the Brethren over how the past of the Saints ought to be approached.⁷² This makes of him a stick with which others can beat the church. The Ostlings make considerable use of him in that role. But why would journalists cite and quote my writings? The reason seems to be that the Ostlings have a story to tell, and they need, in addition to heroes like Quinn, a few knaves to serve as foils. From their perspective, therefore, there has been a struggle between heroic “liberals” (like Quinn), who seek to be “objective and fair,” and malevolent “conservatives,” who can be portrayed as wanting to hide or ignore the truth about the Latter-day Saint past, presumably so that the Brethren can continue to mollify and manipulate the faithful. Or, put in an alternative vocabulary, the Ostlings want to describe a struggle between “new Mormon historians,” who are pictured as wholesome truth-lovers, and “traditionalists,” who insist on sanitized, distorted versions of the past. This is not an exaggeration: the Ostlings actually picture me as anxious to avoid telling the truth about the Latter-day Saint past (see pp. 250, 416, 418, 425, 426, 436). In addition, they report that Elder Boyd K. Packer, speaking to teachers in the Church Educational System assembled at Brigham Young University in 1981, commented on the way he believed they ought to present the Latter-day Saint past to their young students (see p. 249). The cautions offered by Elder Packer are briefly set forth by the Ostlings, who then claim in melodramatic language that his “stance has led to open warfare in history scholarship” (p. 250).

In aligning the practitioners of this “new history” on one side and “the proponents of ‘faithful history’” (p. 250) on the other, the Ostlings abuse an expression once employed by Richard Bushman,

72. For a wanton attack on Elders Boyd K. Packer and Ezra Taft Benson by Quinn, see his bizarre “On Being a Mormon Historian (and Its Aftermath),” in *Faithful History*, 69–111. In this same essay, Quinn blasts away at my first venture into Mormon intellectual history. I have examined his diatribes directed at me in my essay entitled “Comments on Critical Exchanges,” *FARMS Review of Books* 13/1 (2001): 93–103.

while ignoring his analysis.⁷³ Bushman was not calling for lying for the Lord or for a sanitized history that covers over or ignores anything, and neither am I. What he invited is a more thoughtful history—one more consonant with faith and thereby less dependent on the indoctrination that students undergo in secularized graduate schools. He sought a history more genuinely devout and less disinterested and detached. Bushman's own work as a Mormon historian has exemplified his prescriptions. We are not asking that the Brethren or the Saints be presented as faultless heroes; they ought to be known in their full humanity, which is clearly not without its occasional blemishes. We are, after all, struggling to obey God, and like everyone we are imperfect. I go a bit further than Bushman, though: I also want my historians portrayed without halos. This has led, of course, to some consternation among those who have no qualms about exposing the faults of the Brethren but prefer that their own remain hidden.

The Ostlings report that I am among those who are “not historians,” but who are, instead, “professors of political science at Brigham Young University” who have been critical of something vaguely called “new Mormon history” or “revisionist history.” There is some truth to this, but not much. Instead of criticizing “new Mormon history,” I have merely tried to trace the history of that slogan. I have also sought to figure out the function of this label in polemical literature like *Mormon America*, since there simply is no identifiable movement that carries this name. Be that as it may, along with some others I am said to occasionally

write essays for independent journals such as *Sunstone* as well as church-sanctioned publications, defending the idea that “objective” or neutral history scholarship is an illusion. If one's research into history proceeds from naturalistic

73. See Bushman's essay entitled “Faithful History,” in *Faithful History*, 1–17. A glance at this essay will indicate how journalists, following critics of the church, have mangled the meaning of Bushman's language by turning it into a silly slogan.

presuppositions, it will inevitably do violence to faith claims. Only history that proceeds within the language of faith can do justice to an understanding of the sacred. (p. 250)⁷⁴

Elsewhere the Ostlings describe *Sunstone* as “a stylish outlet for liberals and dissidents” (p. xx). For this and other reasons, I have not been eager to publish in that magazine. The Ostlings must have in mind essays by others, since all I have published in that venue is a brief essay dealing with the myth of objectivity that captivates the rhetoric and imagination of some Mormon historians, and two letters responding to radically revisionist essays.⁷⁵ What the Ostlings fail to mention is that the vast bulk of the response to the radically revisionist literature produced by dissidents and former Latter-day Saints has been published by FARMS. In addition, the Ostlings neglect to set forth my arguments or those of others who have dealt with attacks on the Book of Mormon or our many responses to various efforts to fashion some so-called middle-path explanation of Joseph Smith’s prophetic truth claims. Neither do they indicate that, after two decades, these arguments, as far as I can see, have not been answered, except with slogans and name-calling.⁷⁶

74. This description might also fit *Dialogue*, which has now lost much of its credibility. That fact explains why most Latter-day Saints view these publishing venues with a measure of suspicion.

75. See my review essay of Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), entitled “The Myth of Objectivity,” *Sunstone*, August 1990, 54–56; as well as a letter entitled “Revisionist Pride,” *Sunstone*, October 1991, 4–5; and a letter I wanted entitled “The Mormon Story,” but which the editors entitled “The Mormon (His)story,” *Sunstone*, February 1992, 9–10. This fiddling with my title convinced me that it is pointless to publish in that venue, since the editors were not taking seriously the things they included in their magazine.

76. An example of obfuscation, ironically passing as presumably “objective” scholarship, can be found in D. Michael Quinn’s *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, rev. and enlarged ed. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998). In numerous passages, Quinn turns his critics into “LDS polemicists” or “FARMS polemicists” by fabricating an idiosyncratic notion of what constitutes a polemic; then they are routinely accused of dishonesty, and their views are caricatured and rejected without being confronted. See William J. Hamblin, “That Old Black Magic,” *FARMS Review of Books* 12/2 (2000): 225–393, for some of the details.

The Ostlings, Countercultists, and Mainstream Evangelicalism

As I have indicated, the Ostlings do not seem to be comfortable with the zealots who constitute the bulk of the sectarian countercult industry. Instead, they seem to represent a somewhat more sophisticated and responsible brand of sectarian anti-Mormonism—one that is somewhat better informed and more courteous. (In fact, the evangelical movement, into which the Ostlings seem to fit, was started by Billy Graham and others in the 1940s in an effort to blunt and replace excesses found in the fundamentalist ideology that had come to dominate conservative American Protestantism between the two world wars.) The Ostlings seem to me either not to have firsthand knowledge of essentially fundamentalist countercultism or to have chosen not to follow in the footsteps of the anti-Mormon segment of the industry.⁷⁷ In effect, they seem to have borrowed much of their characterization of the agencies and individuals that produce or promote anti-Mormon propaganda from one of my commentaries on contemporary sectarian anti-Mormonism (see pp. 345–50).⁷⁸ I am not sure how this fact will play out among countercultists, who may not be aware that the Ostlings move in other and somewhat higher circles. They may conclude that an enemy of their enemy, despite the differences, is at least temporarily a friend. However, to fail to distinguish this new brand of anti-Mormonism from their own would be a manifestation of the propagandistic nature of these quarrels. For similar

77. Except for the Southern Baptist Convention, which, sadly, is now officially involved in its activities and rhetoric, the countercult industry is still marginal among many conservative Protestants. For details about the SBC involvement in countercultism, see Daniel C. Peterson, “Shall They Not Both Fall into the Ditch?” What Certain Baptists Think They Know about the Restored Gospel,” *FARMS Review of Books* 10/1 (1998): 12–96; and also Midgley, “A ‘Tangled Web’: The Walter Martin Miasma,” *FARMS Review of Books* 12/1 (2000): 380–83.

78. The Ostlings cite my essay entitled “Anti-Mormonism and the Newfangled Countercult Culture,” *FARMS Review of Books* 10/1 (1998): 271–340. In this essay I assess the range of anti-Mormonism found in the sectarian countercult movement. I do this by commenting on Keith Tolbert’s *The Directory of Cult Research Organizations: A Worldwide Listing of 752 Agencies and Individuals* (Trenton, Mich.: American Religious Center, 1996). It seems that the Ostlings know of Tolbert’s work through my assessment of its contents.

reasons, secular critics of the church form temporary alliances with sectarian countercultists when firing at the Saints, and countercultists may borrow from and be dependent on former Latter-day Saints who, in other situations, are their mortal enemies.

The Ostlings, it turns out, mention my analysis of the current crisis facing what was once known as the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, the controlling faction of which is now known as the Community of Christ (p. 426).⁷⁹ In this setting, their treatment of my publications is much like their treatment of those of the countercult industry—that is, my essays are not, as elsewhere in *Mormon America*, unfavorably contrasted with the ideology of various noisy dissidents, cultural Mormons, or former Latter-day Saint historians. Instead, my work on the countercultists and on the RLDS seems to have been mined by the Ostlings for useful information. Thus, when borrowing from some of my essays, the Ostlings do not hint that I am a kind of Neanderthal conservative. But when they portray the issues at stake in the current battle over the Book of Mormon, their way of dealing with my writing, and that of others as well, shifts into a familiar negative mode.

I am not the only Latter-day Saint scholar who has been puzzled by the way the Ostlings deal with their work. Others whose names show up here and there in *Mormon America* have indicated to me that their positions on various issues have been distorted in one way or another. None of these scholars reports being interviewed by the Ostlings, and none was offered an opportunity to comment on the book prior to its publication. The Ostlings could easily have improved the overall quality of their book if they had sought the assistance of those best fitted to comment on their work, rather than turning to those who are perhaps eager for a vindication for their own emotional estrangement from the mainstream Latter-day Saint intellectual community.

79. See Louis Midgley, "The Radical Reformation of the Reorganization of the Restoration: Recent Changes in the RLDS Understanding of the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2/2 (1993): 132–63.

Significantly, even moderate evangelicals like the Ostlings make use of former Latter-day Saint historian D. Michael Quinn. His essays are cited and quoted more often in *Mormon America* than those of any other author. In other contexts one can assume that the Ostlings would not be fond of his new ideology. The Ostlings indicate in an endnote that “three years after his excommunication, D. Michael Quinn let it be known publicly that he is homosexual, but that issue played no part in his years of difficulty with LDS officials” (p. 427). How do they know what did or did not play a role in his excommunication? Did “LDS officials” provide this information? Elsewhere they opine that “officially his 1993 excommunication stemmed from an article . . . claiming that Joseph Smith effectively gave women the priesthood” by including them in the endowment and sealing ceremonies “and a 1992 *Sunstone* essay on church repression” of what he considers the truth about the Latter-day Saint past (p. 357). Currently the church makes no statements, official or otherwise, on disciplinary matters. There are no official announcements upon which the Ostlings could possibly have relied. Instead, they parrot Quinn’s account and label it “official.” But they are, after all, investigative journalists, and there are ways of figuring out what might have led to Quinn’s excommunication. Even without an official announcement, it would not be entirely implausible to suspect that his excommunication and his homosexual leanings might be linked.

Lavina Anderson, in an *apologia* for Quinn, reports that in a letter dated 18 May 1993, Paul Hanks, his stake president, mentioned “‘very sensitive matters’ that were not related to Michael’s historical writings.”⁸⁰ And what might they be? According to Anderson, “the allusion to Michael’s sexual orientation, which Michael had not yet made public, was unmistakable.” Despite this acknowledgment, Anderson reports that Quinn remained skeptical “that nonhistorical questions prompted Hanks’s persistence” in trying to have a conversation with him in which these “very sensitive matters” could be

80. Anderson, “DNA Mormon: D. Michael Quinn,” 350.

resolved.⁸¹ Despite what appears to Anderson as an allusion to moral issues, Quinn seems to have wanted to believe that his problems with the Church of Jesus Christ resulted from concern about what he had published and not his “sexual orientation.” Why? I wonder if he avoided having a conversation with Paul Hanks so that he could continue to assert that what he had written about the Latter-day Saint past led to his excommunication. He clearly wants to be seen as an honest truth-teller who has been hounded for his virtues. Lavina Anderson, though, has now provided a more plausible explanation of Quinn’s excommunication than the one he has insisted on.

Lamentably, much like both secular critics and countercultists generally, the Ostlings use Quinn when it suits their own partisan polemical purposes, while ignoring or downplaying the genuinely tragic side of his story and its implications for the tales he tells.

Partisan Advocacy

Like the editors of *The New Mormon Challenge*, the Ostlings do not want to seem openly or stridently hostile toward the Saints. They are, instead, condescending in ways that are analogous to the way virtually every community of believers gets treated by journalists, including evangelicals and their allies. But at times the Ostlings drop the guise of balanced, objective reporters. An example of this lapse into partisan advocacy can be found, among other places, when they confront the issue of human deification (see pp. 307–14). They garble what the Saints teach and believe on this matter by initially reducing the early Christian doctrine of deification to an extension or reflection of a bland “Methodist and Arminian view of sanctification, a doctrine of man’s potential perfectibility through free choice with the help of God’s grace” (p. 307). But they then claim that this Arminian-style sanctification, which is presumably entirely unlike the Latter-day Saint teaching, “was thoroughly trinitarian and retained a dis-

81. Ibid., 351.

inction between the creature and the creator" (p. 307).⁸² "In Mormonism man has the potential for actual godhood" (p. 307). They also more than hint that we do not distinguish between ourselves and God, while they claim that patristic writers did not really mean deification as the fulfillment of the potential for actual godhood. For those who reject the most radical or extreme versions of Calvinism and consequently believe in genuine moral agency, if the Ostlings are correct, sanctification bears little resemblance to deification.

In this way the Ostlings strive to rebut some of the scholarly appeals by Latter-day Saint scholars to the patristic literature in which deification is a central teaching. They cite a few scholars outside the Latter-day Saint tradition who in some cases have been coached to distinguish what is found in the patristic literature from LDS teachings (see pp. 310–12). One of these insists on "an ontological gap" between man and God (p. 311), whatever that strange, nonbiblical language may mean. The Saints do not, of course, deny that profound differences exist between God and his children. But philosophical notions associated with the Greek word for Being (*on*)—ontology, ontological gaps, and so forth—do not account for these differences. Since we do not imagine that God, understood as Being-Itself, created everything, including time and space and human beings, out of nothing, we have no difficulty with the biblical concept that, whatever our current weaknesses and limitations, we are of the same genus as our Father in Heaven and his Son. We also believe that all of our Father's children have, through faith (understood as trust in Jesus as Redeemer from sin, and also as Lord and Savior), the possibility of becoming the seed of Christ. We thus hope to become one with the Messiah or Christ, just as he is one with his and our Father,

82. By "thoroughly trinitarian" the Ostlings may have in mind a form of the old Sabellian or modalist heresy—which is rather common among critics of the Church of Jesus Christ. This heresy effectively denies that there are three distinct members of the Godhead. This is done in an effort to protect their understanding of monotheism against what they wrongly conceive of as Mormon polytheism.

by making and keeping a covenant that makes possible our eventual full rebirth through his gifts, in his likeness, and with whatever of his attributes he can equip us with.

Following those who invoke categories foreign to the scriptures, the Ostlings also make much of what they call the “nature” or “essence” of God (p. 311), which they insist is both incorporeal and nontemporal. This is presumably done in an effort to drive a radical wedge between God and human beings such that no one ever really has “the potential for actual godhood.” They strive to turn their understanding of the ancient view of *theosis* into a version of Arminian notions of sanctification. What the Ostlings do not set out is exactly why and how the Latter-day Saint idea of deification is linked to sanctification—sometimes also called exaltation. If they had done this, they would have had to inform their readers that the Saints believe that sanctification is possible only as a gift from God. It is God’s work through the Holy Spirit. But this would have then removed their primary objection to what the Saints believe about deification. In the Book of Mormon we find the following: “And again, if ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and deny not his power, then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot” (Moroni 10:33). The Latter-day Saint scriptures offer no teaching of self-salvation, which is the belief that the Ostlings seek to attribute to Latter-day Saints.

The Ostlings struggle to show that the Saints have no support for their understanding of deification in the patristic materials. But this is not true. The Saints have not, of course, claimed that there is a perfect correspondence between what we believe and what the church fathers taught. The real question is whether conservative Christians of any stripe can find in the patristic literature support for their understanding of the destiny of human beings. Put another way, which evangelical is willing to grant any version, Latter-day Saint or otherwise, of human deification? How exactly do the Ostlings propose to square the patristic materials with their own faith? Do they believe in

deification “by grace”? If so, on this issue they are closer to the Saints than to evangelicals generally.

The Ostlings also make an effort to distinguish the belief in deification found in the writings of C. S. Lewis from what the Saints really believe. They are obviously troubled by the use that some of the Saints have made of language found in the writings of Lewis. They describe “Jack,” as he was known to his friends, as “the twentieth century’s best-loved and most influential apologist for traditional Christianity” (p. 307). But they also have to admit that Lewis believed in deification. They do so reluctantly. They seek ways of distinguishing what Lewis taught from what the Saints believe. This is not difficult; there are obviously some matters upon which Lewis held opinions that differ from those held by the Saints. I wonder if the Ostlings accept what Lewis taught about deification. If so, how do they respond to contemporary conservative Christians, including both fundamentalist and evangelicals, whose dogmas simply do not tolerate anything approaching deification, however it is understood? And pointing out that Lewis may have subscribed to some of the classical trinitarian ideas about God hardly explains away, but merely qualifies, his belief.

The Ostlings quote several passages from the writings of C. S. Lewis in which he set forth in his clear and forceful style his belief that it is our destiny—if we so desire, and of course through the grace of God—to become “gods and goddesses” (p. 308). I will add one little passage that they neglected to quote. In a letter consoling a woman for some suffering she had witnessed, Lewis wrote as follows: “It is so v[ery] difficult to believe that the travail of all creation which God Himself descended to share, at its most intense, may be necessary in the process of turning finite creatures (with free wills) into—well, Gods.”⁸³ When confronted with the claim that Lewis taught deification and finding it necessary to grant that he did, they still ask: “Did he?” (p. 308). Then, instead of granting the obvious, they dance

83. C. S. Lewis, letter to Mrs. Edward A. Allen, 1 November 1954, in *Letters of C. S. Lewis*, rev. and enlarged ed., rev. by Walter Hooper (New York: Harcourt Brace [Harvest], 1993), 440.

around this uncomfortable fact. They do this initially by pointing out that “the real C. S. Lewis was aware of the Book of Mormon and assumed that Joseph Smith wrote it” (p. 308). This is true, but it does not address what the “real C. S. Lewis” believed about deification, which is the issue they were presumably confronting. Then they point to theological differences between Lewis and the Saints. Something like this is also true, but I am unaware of Latter-day Saint scholars who do not acknowledge this fact. So I must ask their question again: “Did he” teach deification?

The Ostlings eventually grant that “Lewis did write a number of passages that do appear to express deification” (p. 309). “Appear”? Lewis is not murky on this issue—much of his popularity stems from his clarity. It is not the case that he merely *appears* to have taught deification—he did so, precisely and often. He did not thereby, according to the Ostlings, erase the distinction between God and all those with the potential to become Gods, but no Latter-day Saint scholar has said that he did. And the Saints do not deny or blur this distinction. Lewis, again according to the Ostlings, taught that “man has no luminosity of his own; he is only capable, through grace, of functioning as a clean mirror to reflect the brightness of God” (p. 309). What the Ostlings apparently do not realize is that something like this is also what the Saints believe and what is taught in our scriptures. It seems that the Ostlings have not understood that the Saints believe that only God can save us and that salvation from both death and sin, as well as sanctification (or exaltation), is always a gift from God and never an autonomous human accomplishment. The Saints do not believe in self-apotheosis. And the Ostlings are confused about our understanding of the atonement. This confusion seems to explain why they disregard scholarly Latter-day Saint appeals to the church fathers and to writers like C. S. Lewis on the issue of deification or sanctification. They wrongly assume that they have overcome the arguments presented by Latter-day Saint scholars by quoting people who insist that deification involves sharing in the manifestations and activities of God, “but only by grace, never of right” (p. 312).

Another issue upon which the Ostlings tend to flounder is the vexing matter of the use by Christian churchmen and theologians of categories borrowed from Greek philosophy. I personally do not believe that the apostasy was caused by Greek philosophy. Instead, when things went wrong, efforts were made by clerics to sort the issues out by turning to philosophy. This tended to corrupt both philosophy and Christian faith. Be that as it may, the Ostlings correctly sense that Latter-day Saints have not been impressed with what theologians or councils have managed to do with materials they borrowed from alien sources. At times the Ostlings want to deny that much of anything was borrowed. But they could know something of its extent if they would consult some of their own best scholarship.⁸⁴ They rationalize this borrowing by invoking writers who assert that it was rather incidental and did not, when it did take place, impose “alien philosophical categories” on biblical teachings, but was merely “the result of a necessary search for words that would capture the sense of Scripture to guard against dangerous misreadings of the biblical text” (p. 317).⁸⁵ No doubt, if we put the best face on it, something like this took place. So there is some truth in the Ostlings’ assertion. But granting this much, they have not thereby overcome the difficulties generated when the vocabulary and concepts employed by pagan philosophers were taken over, especially when they formed some of the crucial scaffolding around which the biblical materials were then subtly woven and theological disputations played out.

Are the Saints Unsettled over Crucial Beliefs?

“Within Mormonism today,” according to the Ostlings, “there appear to be important competing strands relating to such core doctrines

84. Olson, for example, does not deny or sweep under the rug the heavy impact of Greek philosophy—specifically a combination of Stoicism and Neoplatonism or Middle Platonism—on early efforts to fashion a systematic Christian theology. See his *Story of Christian Theology*, 56, 86–88, 99–106, 173–95, 256–64.

85. Quoting Richard J. Mouw, “Can a Real Mormon Believe in Jesus?” *Books and Culture* 3/5 (September–October 1997): 13.

as sin, grace, and the atonement, and how to express them” (p. 324). They then introduce the speculation of O. Kendall White Jr., a sociologist who has been disaffected from the church from the moment he began to write about Mormon things in 1967, thus continuing their alliance with “liberals” among the Saints. Building on White—and after rejecting as a “neo-orthodox” perversion of traditional Latter-day Saint beliefs what is clearly taught in the Book of Mormon, hymns, sermons, and lesson materials—the Ostlings claim that one strand of Latter-day Saint thought downplays the atonement of Christ. They then contrast White’s highly idiosyncratic understanding of our beliefs—one not found in our scriptures—with mainstream evangelical opinions on the atonement.

The Ostlings invoke White to identify a profound shift in Latter-day Saint teachings. According to him, “the cultural crises since World War II have produced, inside Mormonism as well as among non-Mormon Christian theologians, a perspective of pessimism” (p. 324). By “produced,” what White has in mind is “caused” since he holds that beliefs are merely ideological reflections of the underlying economic substructure that change when it changes. White insists that there was, in post-war Europe and America, a tragic turning away from a liberal, life-affirming, optimistic understanding of human things in which a redemption from death and sin was not stressed and may not have been seen as necessary or desirable. What took the place of these older liberal, optimistic beliefs was “a more negative view of human nature . . . , along with an increased emphasis on the aspect of sin in human nature” (p. 324). He claims that these shifts were taking place among both Protestants and Latter-day Saints and insists that the desire of the Saints for respectability and the urge to present themselves “as mainline Christian[s]” is leading them to speak more “of grace” (p. 324). The Ostlings are encouraged by this presumed shift, since it leads them to think that we are rapidly moving toward evangelical dogmas. They also recognize that I have argued that the assertions made by White are nonsense. Hence the following:

LDS apologists at FARMS hated White's book. The reviewer Louis Midgley called it a "fine example" of a book that fails to take the Book of Mormon seriously. White's "underlying assumption" is that faith is "challenged by modernity" and that "believers ought to reach an accommodation with modernity by adopting its assumptions and reflecting its values." Midgley criticizes White for ignoring "notions of sin and dependence upon deity that are found in the Book of Mormon and in the early revelations to Joseph Smith." (p. 324)⁸⁶

In addition, I established that White was wrong in claiming that there once was a "traditional Mormon theology" that had downplayed or abandoned the atonement of Jesus Christ. We have never resembled liberal Protestants on these issues. Even the newer manifestations of evangelical anti-Mormonism cling to portions of White's speculation. For example, Mosser has recently insisted that "White convincingly showed that there was indeed a noticeable trend within Mormon theology away from the traditional synthesis," which he described as constituting, among other things, an "optimistic humanism."⁸⁷ Mosser correctly holds that White has tried to show that the new orthodoxy he thought he saw developing was "closer to Protestant fundamentalism and neo-orthodoxy than what [Mosser] and others esteem to be traditional Mormon thought."⁸⁸ However, he objects to White's claim that the new emphasis on the contents of Latter-day Saint scriptures has moved the Saints toward the Protestant theology known as neo-orthodoxy because "the characteristics Kendall White associated with neo-orthodoxy—God's sovereignty, human

86. The Ostlings are quoting from my essay entitled "A Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy Challenges Cultural Mormon Neglect of the Book of Mormon: Some Reflections on the 'Impact of Modernity,'" *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/2 (1994): 283, 285, 287.

87. Mosser, "The Saints Go Marching On," 78. In this section of his essay, Mosser deals with what he calls "The Challenge for Theology," presumably generated by what he calls "The Rise of Mormon 'Neo-orthodoxy.'"

88. *Ibid.*, 80.

depravity, and salvation by grace—are not the first ones that the word *neo-orthodoxy* conveys to many people's minds, at least among evangelicals."⁸⁹ The differing opinions of evangelical theologians on neo-orthodoxy are a small but instructive manifestation of what I consider to be evangelical theological promiscuity or looseness.

Mosser also implies that White maintains that the success the Church of Jesus Christ has enjoyed is due to an essentially humanist or "anthropocentric (human created) theology" and that the trends he imagines to be taking place among some Latter-day Saint scholars present an "ominous threat to Mormonism's future."⁹⁰ Mosser also realizes, however, that the current attention being given to the teachings in the Book of Mormon has not taken the Saints in the direction of either Protestant neo-orthodoxy or the fundamentalist faction that turned up in Protestant circles between the two great wars, which still has influence in contemporary evangelical religiosity.

Mosser seems somewhat encouraged to see indications that the Saints stress human sinfulness, the atonement made by Jesus for our sins, and our dependence on God for whatever is good.⁹¹ What he does not grant is that there has never been a time when the faithful believed otherwise. Mosser invokes White because he wants to show that Latter-day Saint emphasis on the atonement is a genuinely new development. He wants to believe that he and his associates may now be able to evangelize the Church of Jesus Christ. In some ways, he likes the renewed emphasis on the Book of Mormon, since he believes that "its theology is largely orthodox in nature"⁹²—that is, somewhat similar to what is believed by at least some factions of evangelicals. He and his associates want to see signs that on some

89. Some evangelicals see Karl Barth as a kind of Protestant liberal. Some prominent evangelical theologians have, however, been fond of Barth. Bernard Ramm is a good example. See Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, *Twentieth-Century Theology: God and the World in a Transitional Age* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1997), 297, 303, 307–8, cf. 65–77.

90. Mosser, "The Saints Go Marching On," 78.

91. *Ibid.*

92. *Ibid.*, 79.

crucial issues the Saints are moving toward their own understanding of orthodox Christianity. They then wrongly imagine that they can persuade the church that “many Mormon teachings depart radically from biblical and historical Christian faith”⁹³ by pounding away at the Book of Mormon, by showing that Joseph Smith was not a genuine prophet, and so forth. At this point, exactly like the Ostlings, Mosser and his associates have an agenda common to the more strident and less well-informed countercult versions of anti-Mormonism. They are not the least bit interested in a genuine interfaith dialogue in which we and they strive to understand each other better; they are, instead, interested in attacking our faith and its foundations. The difference is that they assume that they may be able to evangelize the entire church. They entertain this hope primarily because they have had a few civil conversations with a few Latter-day Saint scholars who have learned some of their code language and have been successful in communicating that we are in some ways closer to them than they had previously suspected. Thus they wrongly assume that a radical shift is taking place among the Saints that portends a possible negotiated surrender to their quaint notions of Christian orthodoxy. But it is simply not the case, as the Ostlings claim, that there are two “camps” that “claim to be speaking for ‘traditional’ Mormonism, quoting proof-text support from LDS scriptures” (p. 325).

As I have demonstrated, the Ostlings make much use of former Mormons, cultural Mormons, and dissidents in building their case against the church, although they actually share far less with them theologically than they do with the vast bulk of the Saints. Thus when they encounter a literature that actually sets forth what is found in the Latter-day Saint scriptures, they note that it sounds “very similar to the language of Protestant Evangelicals and other traditional Christians” (p. 325). And well it might, since it is also the language of the Bible (though it is, of course, read differently), is supplemented by further revelation, and is not burdened with the incrustations of

93. Ibid., 66.

creeds, confessions, and speculations of uninspired theologians. The Ostlings make a serious mistake by assuming that some of the quirky stuff they find in the pages of *Sunstone* and *Dialogue* or publications of Signature Books, provided by someone on the margins of the Latter-day Saint academic community (I have in mind White's book), either represents the faith of the Saints or constitutes a viable belief option among them. If I were to attempt to describe the range of evangelical theological stances and were to include within this spectrum liberal Protestants, including the Jesus Seminar, would not the Ostlings and other evangelicals have every right to complain that I simply had not understood what I was seeking to describe? I think they would. But fundamentalist countercultists and even much more reasonable and responsible evangelicals do not seem to see that trotting out those they describe as "liberal Mormons" makes exactly this kind of unfortunate mistake.

But the Ostlings are fond of those who describe themselves as increasingly marginalized in both a social and intellectual sense from their original Latter-day Saint faith; they love their "liberal Mormons," although they grant that these folks also "like to point out the beliefs and spiritual insights they hold in common with non-Mormons." According to the Ostlings, they admit that "the LDS Church cannot simply blend into the ecumenical landscape and, presumably, never will." Why? According to the Ostlings, one reason is that "the LDS scriptures simply do not allow Mormons to view the others as legitimate churches" (p. 323). But if something like this is so, why mention the bizarre speculation of White? He ignores the Latter-day Saint scriptures as he invents a Mormonism, much of which has never existed. The Saints have always seen themselves as members of the Church of Jesus Christ and not as a social group celebrating life-affirming optimism in which there is no need for an atonement from sin and death.

What the Ostlings do not say is that some of these same "liberal Mormons" may "hold in common with [at least some] non-Mormons" a fondness for the most radical forms of feminist ideology, homosexual hedonism, or other currently fashionable oddities that evangeli-

cals tend to abhor. I assume that the Ostlings would be bemused, and perhaps even a bit annoyed, if someone did this same sort of thing when attempting to describe the theological controversies currently taking place within the evangelical movement. The Ostlings are on more solid ground when they recognize that the Saints simply cannot, without giving up their history and scriptures—that is, their identity—blend into the evangelical world.

We have no interest in being numbered among those who have come to dominate conservative Protestantism in the United States since World War II. They misread our justifiable annoyance at their claim that we are not Christians. This does not signal that we are eager to be included in their club. We have from the beginning seen our faith as *sui generis*, though Christian as we understand that label. If they want a genuine interfaith dialogue with us, they must cease attacking our beliefs. The point of such a conversation is to better understand each other and not to destroy the other party.

Despite whatever illusions they may entertain, evangelicals are not for us the keepers of the gate to Christian respectability and orthodoxy. Our evangelical and fundamentalist critics do not control our way of understanding ourselves. Evangelicals do not have a kind of Good Housekeeping Seal of Christian Approval that we seek from them. And those among them who imagine that they might be able to negotiate our surrender and our eventual entrance into their religious world simply have not grasped who and what we are. Evangelicals are living in a make-believe world if they imagine that the pressure they put on the Saints by their efforts to demonstrate problems in our history, beliefs, or practices or by their attacks on the Book of Mormon will eventually lead to our surrender to their rather recent, highly unbiblical brand of conservative Protestantism. The editors of *The New Mormon Challenge*, who have indicated that they see *Mormon America* as “an excellent companion” to their own endeavors, make this mistake.⁹⁴ From our perspective, we are not losing the battle over the truth of the Book of Mormon. On the contrary,

94. Beckwith, Mosser, and Owen, “Introduction,” 20.

we are encouraged to see its critics reach out for more subtle and sophisticated arguments to buttress their unfaith as the old ones fall by the wayside. And our past is not such that our faith can be toppled by carping about this or that incident, as the Ostlings do, or by celebrating some recent revisionist history, and certainly not by turning a former Mormon historian into a stick with which to beat the church.

A RESPONSE TO PAUL OWEN'S COMMENTS ON MARGARET BARKER

Kevin Christensen

The reforming Deuteronomists with their emphasis on history and law have evoked a sympathetic response in many modern scholars who have found there a religion after their own heart. Thus we have inherited a double distortion; the reformers edited much of what we now read in the Hebrew Bible, and modern interpreters with a similar cast of mind have told us what the whole of that Hebrew Bible was saying. The fact that most ancient readers of the texts read them very differently is seen as a puzzle.¹

Why, in an article addressing Latter-day Saint claims, does Paul Owen devote a fifth of his paper to a critique of a book by a Methodist writer, Margaret Barker, on the basis of a few citations by three Latter-day Saint scholars?² Indeed, Barker reports that all her

1. Margaret Barker, *The Great Angel: A Study of Israel's Second God* (London: SPCK, 1992), 28.

2. Owen refers to quotations by Daniel C. Peterson, Martin S. Tanner, and Barry R. Bickmore (p. 477 n. 107). Future lists of Latter-day Saint authors citing Barker should include myself, M. Catherine Thomas, Kevin Barney, John A. Tvedtnes, Ross David Baron, Mark Thomas, Eugene Seaich, William J. Hamblin, Kerry Shirts, and Terryl L. Givens. A growing number of Latter-day Saint scholars have begun to read and discuss Barker's work, so tracking citations will become both more challenging and more telling.

Review of Paul Owen. "Monotheism, Mormonism, and the New Testament Witness." In *The New Mormon Challenge*, 301–8.

published work to date has been done while knowing “almost nothing”³ about Latter-day Saint texts and scholarship. In her book *The Great Angel: A Study of Israel’s Second God*, Barker addresses questions of Christian origins, asking, “What would a man from first-century Galilee have understood when he heard ‘Son of God,’ ‘Messiah’ and ‘Lord?’”⁴ In *The Great Angel*, she answers such questions with passages like this one:

What has become clear to me time and time again is that even over so wide an area, the evidence points consistently in one direction and indicates that pre-Christian Judaism was not monotheistic in the sense that we use the word. The roots of Christian trinitarian theology lie in pre-Christian Palestinian beliefs about the angels. There were many in first-century Palestine who still retained a world-view derived from the more ancient religion of Israel [that of the First Temple] in which there was a High God and several Sons of God, one of whom was Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel. Yahweh, the Lord, could be manifested on earth in human form, as an angel or in the Davidic king. *It was as a manifestation of Yahweh, the Son of God, that Jesus was acknowledged as Son of God, Messiah and Lord.*⁵

In devoting a substantial portion of his article to responding to a few pages in one of Barker’s books, Owen takes due notice of the profound significance her ideas have for Latter-day Saint claims, and further, by so doing he acknowledges that her work challenges the foundation of his own position. In his essay in *The New Mormon Challenge*, he argues “that the religion represented in the Old Testament is monotheistic” (p. 272) and that the ancient Israelite monotheism is different from the Latter-day Saint reading. He goes further and claims that “the religion of the Bible is monotheistic from start

3. Barker to Christensen, e-mail, August 2002.

4. Barker, *The Great Angel*, 1.

5. *Ibid.*, 3, emphasis in original.

to finish. The New Testament writers included Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit alongside God the Father in their worship and in their view of God's identity" (p. 314). Despite what this claim, if true, would imply about the clarity and consistency of the Bible, Owen admits in a footnote that it remained for the Nicene fathers to settle various tensions that had remained "unresolved." He blames "Middle Platonic assumptions" for the interpretations of Philo and of early Christians such as Justin Martyr and Origen (see p. 481 n. 169).⁶ He disputes a few of Barker's readings of texts in the Bible and Philo, but he evades a direct confrontation with the evidence supporting her main thesis. Indeed, her discussion of First Temple traditions shows that these specific readings of Justin, Origen, Philo, and much else descend from the views of earlier Jewish and Christian writers.⁷

Starting Positions

The occasion for Owen's essay is a book called *The New Mormon Challenge: Responding to the Latest Defenses of a Fast-Growing Movement*. It is the brainchild of Paul Owen and Carl Mosser, who a few years ago wrote an article called "Mormon Scholarship, Apologetics, and Evangelical Neglect: Losing the Battle and Not Knowing It?"⁸ It was a call for competent evangelical scholars to engage Latter-day Saint scholars in respectful dialogue, and the current volume comes out of that call. The editors state that the key point of difference is that "while the orthodox Christian traditions all affirm that there is but one God who is the absolute Creator of all other reality, Mormonism has historically denied the absolute creation of the world and has affirmed a plurality of deities" (p. 23). Since we differ on that point and others that derive from it, we are deemed to be non-Christian;

6. Compare Barker's discussions of Justin and Philo in *The Great Angel*.

7. If he is going to describe her work as containing "sweeping and unsubstantiated assertions" (p. 309), he should at least read all of her work and account for the substance behind her assertions.

8. Paul Owen and Carl Mosser, "Mormon Scholarship, Apologetics, and Evangelical Neglect: Losing the Battle and Not Knowing It?" *Trinity Journal*, n.s., 19/2 (1998): 179–205.

this is, however, expressed as politely as possible.⁹ A number of LDS scholars have written responses to various chapters, to which mine will be added.¹⁰ The discussion will be endless, as such things tend to be. Still, however endless the discussion, the outlines will no doubt be very clear because the outlines derive from consistent starting assumptions.

Owen bases his response on two fundamental assumptions:

- He assumes the authority of the received Old and New Testament texts—at least those passages and versions that he cites as proof texts—to be substantially accurate and without significant change.¹¹
- He assumes the authority of “orthodox” interpretations of the Old and New Testaments (that is, as articulated in the councils of the third to fifth centuries), *even when in explicit contradiction to the beliefs of earlier Christians* (see p. 481 n. 169).¹²

9. Craig L. Blomberg, “Is Mormonism Christian?” in *The New Mormon Challenge: Responding to the Latest Defenses of a Fast-Growing Movement*, ed. Francis J. Beckwith, Carl Mosser, and Paul Owen (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2002), 315–32, esp. 489 n. 69. See also p. 278, where he comments that philosophical monotheism is “a logical extension of the biblical doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. The same God who created the world exercises absolute sovereign providence over it.” Contrast Margaret Barker, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven: Temple Symbolism in the New Testament* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1995), 34–35: “Genesis 1 does not describe a creation out of nothing. It is one of the commonest misreadings of the text to think that it does. It describes the ordering and transforming of an existing chaos. The word translated ‘created’ is a Hebrew word only used to describe the activity of God. . . . The Aramaic version of Genesis, which is thought to be the oldest we have giving the traditions of the Palestinian Jews, translates the opening verses of Genesis thus: ‘From the beginning with Wisdom the Son of the LORD perfected [not created!] the heavens and the earth’” (bracketed material in the original).

10. For example, Blake Ostler has some responses at www.angelfire.com/az3/LDC/Philosophy.htm.

11. While he acknowledges the possibility of editing (for example, pp. 274, 470 n. 22), he allows for no substantial losses or changes (pp. 470 n. 19, 480 n. 154). He treats a favorable assessment of Josiah in 2 Kings 23:25, likely written to honor Josiah during his lifetime, as a decisive rebuttal of Barker’s thesis. However, 2 Chronicles 35:20–23, a post-exilic composition, does not flatter Josiah.

12. Owen acknowledges “unresolved” tensions until “the Nicene fathers clearly identified the Son as a distinguishable relation within God’s own substance” (p. 481 n. 169). From here, Owen reads back into the Old and New Testaments. Barker starts from the first century in order to read forward into the New Testament, rather than backward.

Barker's work deals directly with these assumptions in ways that undercut Owen's foundations:

- Barker questions the authority of several key texts and readings, starting her arguments by identifying unresolved tensions in the scriptures as we have them, including variant readings and corrupt passages, and by searching widely through relevant literatures in order to account for these tensions.
- She undercuts the authority of late "orthodox" interpretations by citing a wide range of earlier but neglected Christian texts and their Jewish antecedents, always working from a position of faith, not of skepticism.

In her first book, *The Older Testament*, Barker describes the problem she wants to explore: What was the background for the origins of Christianity? She then spells out her method of inquiry:

We have to find something appropriate for a group of Galileans, relevant to their needs and aspirations, but sufficiently coherent (and even recognizable) to draw the hostility of Jerusalem Judaism, as a threat to the Law. . . . Our task is to reconstruct a background *quite independent of New Testament considerations*, appropriate to the world of Jesus' first followers, and *known to exist as a single set of ideas* which threatened the Law. . . .

In order to reconstruct such a background, it is necessary to dig deep, and to work back through the writings of several centuries. I shall begin with the pseudepigraphon known as I Enoch (Ethiopic Enoch), and shall then devote the rest of this book to establishing the antecedents of this work, which is known to have been used by the earliest Christians. . . . This mythology underlies the creation theology of Romans 8, the exorcisms and miracles of the Gospels, the heavenly archetypes of Hebrews, and the first Temple imagery of the Fourth Gospel. It is the imagery of Revelation, Jude and the Petrine Epistles, and the song of its angels became the Sanctus

of the eucharistic liturgy. Little of this is derived directly from Enoch; the process rather has been one of following the Enochic stream to its source, and seeing what other waters have flowed from it.¹³

This is Barker's method. Her project is one of restoration, and it leads her to conclude that the origins of Christianity were linked to the First Temple traditions that had been opposed by the activities of the Deuteronomist reformers (starting with Josiah and continuing into the exile) but retained in the "evidence of pre-Christian texts preserved and transmitted *only by Christian hands*."¹⁴ The picture that emerges from Barker's inquiries involves her identification of a distinct constellation of related ideas that she can track through a broad range of writings, including Enoch and the New Testament, particularly Revelation. Owen barely acknowledges the existence of such key ideas or their antiquity. Indeed, his degree of reluctance inversely reflects their importance:

Temple theology is the original context of the New Testament insofar as the hopes, beliefs, symbols and rituals of the temple shaped the lives of those who came to be called Christians. Temple theology knew of incarnation and atonement, the sons of God and the life of the age to come, the day of judgement, justification, salvation, the renewed covenant and the kingdom of God. When temple theology is presented, even in barest outline, its striking relevance to the New Testament becomes clear.¹⁵

Of *The Great Angel*, Owen admits that it "covers a vast body of material from the Old Testament to the early church fathers" (p. 301). But of that vast body of material, he restricts his direct response to just a few passages in the Old Testament (one page of four actually

13. Margaret Barker, *The Older Testament: The Survival of Themes from the Ancient Royal Cult in Sectarian Judaism and Early Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1987), 5–6, emphasis in original.

14. Ibid., 6, emphasis in original.

15. Barker, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, ix.

addressing her readings), Philo (four pages), and the New Testament (one page). In every case in which he chides her for reading without regard to context, he neglects the overall context that she develops in her work, which in turn provides her context for the readings he questions. "Barker's reconstruction," he maintains, "could be questioned on numerous points of detail—nearly every paragraph contains assertions that require more argumentation than she provides" (p. 302).

Everyone's opinions can be questioned, and scholarship necessarily involves ongoing discussion. But Owen not only fails to confront most of what Barker does provide in *The Great Angel*, but he also does not even mention the existence of her six other books, all of which provide abundant arguments and evidences to support her reconstruction. Barker states exactly this in her introduction: "My first three books have been, in effect, an extended introduction to *The Great Angel*."¹⁶

Objecting to her basic premise in *The Great Angel*, Owen writes:

It only becomes necessary to identify the Angel of the LORD as a second God if one postulates (as Margaret Barker does) a linguistic and conceptual distinction between the Most High God (*El Elyon*) and the LORD (*YHWH*)—a distinction which itself rests on an entirely dubious reconstruction of Israel's religious history. (p. 280)

Yet, reading the first chapter of *The Great Angel*, we find that Barker's actual argument builds on existing distinctions in the text.

All the texts in the Hebrew Bible distinguish clearly between the divine sons of Elohim/Elyon and those human beings who are called sons of Yahweh. This must be significant.

16. See Barker, *The Great Angel*, xiii. For titles, see the bibliography in Kevin Christensen, "Paradigms Regained: A Survey of Margaret Barker's Scholarship and Its Significance for Mormon Studies," *FARMS Occasional Papers* 2 (2001): 89. Owen cites only *The Great Angel*, her fourth book, and one journal article. Her recent journal articles form the basis of her ninth book, *The Great High Priest*, which, at this writing, is in the hands of her publisher. She completed a commentary on Isaiah in 1997.

It must mean that the terms originated at a time when Yahweh was distinguished from whatever was meant by El/Elohim/Elyon. A large number of texts continued to distinguish between El Elyon and Yahweh, Father and Son, and to express this distinction in similar ways with the symbolism of the temple and the royal cult. By tracing these patterns through a great variety of material and over several centuries, Israel's second God can be recovered.¹⁷

While Owen wants to lock the canonical and traditional barn door, insisting that nothing is missing, Barker not only follows the hoofprints, but she also finds, saddles, and rides the missing horses. She invites us to join her exploration of the concept that "from the beginning Christians have claimed that Jesus was the fulfillment of the hopes expressed in the Old Testament. Our problem is to know exactly what those hopes were, and how they were expressed in first-century Palestine."¹⁸

The Authority of the Received Text

Owen assumes the authority of traditional texts and orthodoxy. Barker does not make this assumption but observes:

Recent work on the transmission of the New Testament has shown convincingly that what is currently regarded as "orthodoxy" was constructed and imposed on the text of the New Testament by later scribes, "clarifying" difficult points and resolving theological problems. . . . It may be that those traditions which have been so confidently marginalised as alien to Christianity on the basis of the present New Testament text, were those very traditions which later authorities and their scribes set out to remove.¹⁹

17. Barker, *The Great Angel*, 10, emphasis in original.

18. *Ibid.*, 2.

19. Barker, "The Secret Tradition," *Journal of Higher Criticism* 2/1 (1995): 50. She is citing Bart D. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University

Owen also takes a conservative attitude toward the received Old Testament text and contends “that the religion of the Old Testament was explicitly monotheistic and that this monotheistic outlook was inherited by Jesus and the apostles” (p. 272).²⁰ However, it is one thing to argue that “the religion represented in the Old Testament is monotheistic” and quite another to argue that the religion represented in the current Old Testament completely represents ancient Israelite and early Christian thought. Notice that Owen builds his case for a strict monotheistic orthodox outlook by citing exactly those passages in Isaiah 40–48 and Deuteronomy 6:4 that Barker attributes to exilic editing and composition (pp. 272–75).²¹ That is, he builds his foundation upon the very passages that are in question. He avoids the question of whether the state of the received Old Testament provides grounds for questioning the authority of the received texts and orthodox readings. Barker observes:

In Exodus 24.9–11 there is an account of how Moses received the Law on Sinai. He saw the God of Israel and he saw the sapphire pavement beneath the throne. . . .

In complete contrast we have the teaching of Deuteronomy, which emphasizes very strongly that the Lord was not seen when the Law was given. Deuteronomy 4.12 says that only a voice was heard, cf. Exodus 33.18–23, where Moses asks to see the glory of God and is told that nobody can see God and live. Now the Deuteronomists played an important part in collecting and transmitting the Old Testament texts,

Press, 1993). For other evidence, see Hugh Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 84–104, and *Mormonism and Early Christianity* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987), 168–322; John A. Tvedtnes, *The Most Correct Book: Insights from a Book of Mormon Scholar* (Salt Lake City: Cornerstone, 1999), 99–103; and Barry R. Bickmore, *Restoring the Ancient Church: Joseph Smith and Early Christianity* (Ben Lomond, Calif.: Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research, 1999), 25–62.

20. Compare Barker, *The Older Testament*, 30: “No simple map of this process is possible, but the whole area has been considerably muddled by the twin assumptions of Old Testament primacy and Old Testament purity.”

21. Compare Barker, *The Older Testament*, chapters on “Deuteronomy” and “Second Isaiah,” 142–83.

and it would seem that they were opposed to some of the traditions in Isaiah, Ezekiel, Enoch and, later, Revelation. This may mean that the type of Jewish religion in which Christianity had its root was seen by some Jews as heretical even before the time of Jesus.²²

Owen dismisses scholars who substitute “hypothetical and speculative reconstructions of Israel’s religious history for the words of the biblical text” (p. 274), but Barker perceives that what Owen accepts as an orthodox view of Israel’s history is itself a reconstruction. Which reconstruction best accounts for the Bible and other relevant materials? When the question is Which is best? rather than Which is the most orthodox? then genuine comparison and risk enter in. Owen sidesteps the risk by neglecting relevant comparisons. Of her own position, in comparison to orthodox suppositions, Barker says,

Enormous developments took place in the wake of enormous destruction [that is, the destruction of the temple and the monarchy by the Babylonians], and these two factors make certainty quite impossible. They make *all* certainty impossible, and this too must be acknowledged, for the cus-

22. Margaret Barker, *The Lost Prophet: The Book of Enoch and Its Influence on Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1988), 51–52. Incidentally, Owen spends two pages discussing the “Son of Man” passages in the New Testament, but although he includes a reference to Barker’s *Great Angel*, he does not address Barker’s readings and suggestions for an Enoch background, beyond the canonical reference to Daniel 7:13–14 (pp. 288–90). Her *Lost Prophet* also includes a chapter on “The Son of Man.” Owen claims that “the influence of Daniel 7 played a role in helping the earliest Christians to articulate their belief in Jesus’ divine status—that is, his inclusion within the unique identity of the One God” (p. 288). Here Owen’s note refers to *The Great Angel*, 225–28, with the caveat that he would “differ with some of the details of her reading of the evidence” (p. 474 n. 77). Barker comments, “I have heard this phrase ‘Including Jesus in the unique identity of God.’ What does it mean??? It seems to me to be devoid of content, a fudge. A common misunderstanding among evangelicals is that the Second Person ‘began’ in Bethlehem, i.e., that God somehow divided at that point and Jesus was born. The Christian teaching is that the Second Person is eternal and became incarnate at Christmas, not that the Second Person originated at that time. The early Christian understanding was that the Second Person appeared in the OT ‘not yet fully incarnate’” (Barker to Christensen, e-mail, August 2002).

tomary descriptions of ancient Israel's religion are themselves no more than supposition.²³ What I shall propose . . . is not an impossibility, but only one possibility to set alongside other possibilities, none of which has any claim to being an absolutely accurate account of what happened. Hypotheses do not become fact simply by frequent repetition, or even by detailed elaboration. What I am suggesting does, however, make considerable sense of the evidence from later periods.²⁴

Given that the Bible contains texts that demonstrate comparative variants, along with internal and theological differences, how do we account for such differences?²⁵ Accepting the existence of variant texts (such as the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Targums) and corrupt passages (see Barker's comments on Proverbs)²⁶ that demonstrate conscious editing and selection, what theologies and historical processes account for such editorial trends? While the Jews and Christians of the early centuries accused one another of changing the scriptures, what are the implications of those accusations, particularly when they provide examples of such changes?²⁷ Both Jewish and Samaritan

23. She gives her arguments in *The Great Angel*, 20–27, with reference to the debates that followed on the publication of John Van Seters, *In Search of History: Historiography in the Ancient World and the Origins of Biblical History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983). She also cites R. N. Whybray, *The Making of the Pentateuch* (Sheffield, Eng.: JSOT Supplements Series, 1987). More recently, Richard Friedman has responded to Van Seters, arguing for at least the antiquity of the source materials for the Bible, though Friedman too sees the final form of the Old Testament histories as products of a redaction by Ezra after the return from exile. See Richard E. Friedman, "The Antiquity of the Work," appendix 2 in *The Hidden Book in the Bible* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999), 350–60, for a defense of the age of the sources of the Torah, and "'Late for a Very Important Date,'" appendix 3 in *ibid.*, 361–89, for arguments against exilic composition.

24. Barker, *The Great Angel*, 12.

25. For a general survey, see Richard E. Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989). See also Kevin L. Barney for the most detailed Latter-day Saint comments on the Documentary Hypothesis to date, "Reflections on the Documentary Hypothesis," *Dialogue* 33/1 (2000): 57–99.

26. Barker, *The Older Testament*, 1 and 91–92.

27. Tvedtnes, "Jeremiah's Prophecies of Jesus Christ," 99–103; compare Tvedtnes, "The Messiah, the Book of Mormon, and the Dead Sea Scrolls," in *The Most Correct Book*, 328–43.

traditions describe a complete rewriting of the Bible by Ezra; what then are the implications of the existence of such a story, particularly since the Samaritan version accuses Ezra of tampering?²⁸ Barker never claims proof for her ideas but rather that “the more material which can be illuminated by the hypothesis, the more it deserves consideration.”²⁹ And regardless of whether she is correct in every single detail,³⁰ it is her overall hypothesis that is in question and should be tested.

How Firm a Foundation?

Owen introduces Barker’s view that “during and after the exile, the Deuteronomists instituted wide-ranging religious reforms that carried on the earlier program of King Josiah (cf. 2 Kgs 22–23; 2 Chr 34–35). These reforms involved the elevation of Law and demotion of Wisdom, the quenching of heavenly ascents and visions of God, and the enforcement of strict monotheism.” But in his view, “the whole hypothesis” is questionable “on methodological and historical grounds” (p. 302). Notice that he says that the hypothesis is questionable, but not the program. Indeed, *The New Mormon Challenge* manifests much the same agenda in dealing with Latter-day Saint claims. So how does Owen question her hypothesis?

If one wishes to follow Barker, it must be assumed that Josiah’s reforms had a *negative* influence on the religion of Judah—which is precisely the opposite of what the Bible states: “Neither before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the LORD as he did—with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength, in accordance with all the Law of Moses” (2 Kgs 23:25). (p. 303)³¹

28. Barker, *The Older Testament*, 191–92. John A. Tvedtnes, *The Book of Mormon and Other Hidden Books: “Out of Darkness unto Light”* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2000), 178–81.

29. Barker, *The Older Testament*, 261.

30. See Margaret Barker, *The Risen Lord: The Jesus of History as the Christ of Faith* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1996), xii.

31. Compare the discussion of this passage in 2 Kings 23:25 with Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* 108–16; and William J. Doorly, *Obsession with Justice: The Story of the Deuteronomists* (New York: Paulist, 1994), 37–45.

Owen oversimplifies the situation, leaving out mention that Josiah's reform foundered at his unexpected death in 609 B.C. (2 Kings 23:29–30; 2 Chronicles 35:20–27), some twenty-four years before the fall of Jerusalem. Josiah's successors are all condemned as wicked (2 Kings 23:31–33, 37; 24:8–9, 18–19; 2 Chronicles 36:1–14). Barker also observes that “the Dead Sea Scrolls and later Jewish tradition all recalled the post Josiah period as one of ‘wrath.’”

The devastation wrought by Josiah was never forgotten as can be seen in the later Jewish sources. The first temple ended at that time. He “hid away” the symbols of temple worship and people believed that they would be restored in the time of the Messiah. In other words, the Messiah would restore the true worship of the first temple. The sacred calendar of Deut. 16 has no place for atonement. Can the Deuteronomistic system introduced by Josiah have been the basis of Christianity?³²

From a Latter-day Saint perspective, we should note that the Deuteronomist reform was not a single, static movement based solely on the rediscovery of the Book of the Law during Josiah's time thirty-seven years before the destruction of the temple, but it occurred in a succession of waves, several decades apart, most likely involving entirely different generations of editors responding to changing situations.³³ The Deuteronomist response to the destruction of the First Temple and monarchy took place during the exile, long after Josiah's death and long after Lehi left. In overgeneralizing about the success and virtue of the whole Josiah/Deuteronomist reform, based on a single passage written by those reformers about their hero and patron, Owen shows the trust of the farmer who tells his wife that the fox he left to guard the chickens has assured him that the hens just have not been laying lately. Why would those who reformed Israel's religion say that what they were doing had a negative effect on the

32. Barker to Christensen, e-mail, August 2002.

33. See Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* 136–49; and Doorly, *Obsession with Justice*, 46–55.

religion of Israel? Why would they describe themselves as corruptors?³⁴ (As though they would write, “Lo, and we did corrupt the scriptures in our care, excising things most precious that happened to conflict with our agenda.”) But perhaps the fox really has been guarding the henhouse. All the farmer needs to do is to look. Does the picture the fox gives match what is inside? We can ask, How were Josiah’s reforms remembered? Is there any evidence for exilic editing of the Deuteronomist histories?³⁵ If so, what are the themes that they suppressed? Is there any evidence that the exilic efforts of the Deuteronomists had a negative effect? All these questions can be asked without reference to the Book of Mormon, though it happens that comparison to the Book of Mormon is profoundly illuminating.

Meet the Deuteronomists

Notice that of two passages in the second chapter of *The Great Angel* that summarize the Deuteronomist agenda, Owen chooses to quote the second, which restates most of the information in the first (p. 303). The chief difference in content between the two passages is that the earlier quotation ties the agenda of the Deuteronomist movement to specific passages in Deuteronomy.

First, they were to have the Law instead of Wisdom (Deut. 4.6). . . . [W]hat was the Wisdom which the Law replaced? Second, they were to think only of the formless voice of God sounding from the fire and giving the Law (Deut. 4.12).³⁶ Israel had long had a belief in the vision of God, when the glory

34. For a discussion of methods, see Hugh Nibley, “The Way of the Church,” in *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, 209–66.

35. See, for example, any of Barker’s books and, for comparisons, Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* and Doorly, *Obsession with Justice*. See also David Noel Freedman, *The Nine Commandments: Uncovering a Hidden Pattern of Crime and Punishment in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), which argues that the Bible contains a structure designed specifically to explain the destruction of the temple, the fall of the monarchy, and the exile. All three authors cite evidence that older texts were subordinated to an exilic redaction. See also Barney, “Reflections on the Documentary Hypothesis.”

36. A printing error is here in *The Great Angel*, which I have corrected. Deuteronomy 4:12 is the correct reference.

had been visible on the throne in human form, surrounded by the heavenly hosts. What happened to the visions of God? And third, they were to leave the veneration of the host of heaven to peoples not chosen by Yahweh (Deut. 4.19–20). Israel had long regarded Yahweh as the Lord of the hosts of heaven, but the title Yahweh of Hosts was not used by the Deuteronomists. What happened to the hosts, the angels?³⁷

So there is a biblical basis for Barker's inquiries, and Owen appears to be reluctant to acknowledge that this is so. Why is the Old Testament at odds with itself, describing the heavenly ascents and vision of God with acceptance in some places and rejecting them elsewhere? If these prohibitions in Deuteronomy 4 were original to Moses and authoritative, why do we have the throne visions of Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and others? Why does Revelation, which as Barker notes is the only New Testament book that expressly claims divine inspiration,³⁸ contain exactly the things that the Deuteronomists condemn? Why does the book of Enoch appear to contain exactly the things that the exilic Deuteronomists condemn, and why in turn does that book appear to condemn the returning exiles as apostate?³⁹ Why did the early Christians value the book of Enoch when it contains what the Deuteronomists condemned and when it appears to condemn the Deuteronomists?⁴⁰ Was there a relationship between the attitude about the Second Temple that appears in Enoch and what Jesus expressed when he "cleansed" the temple? Owen dodges the questions, but Barker has the answers:

37. Barker, *The Great Angel*, 13.

38. Margaret Barker, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ: Which God Gave to Him to Show to His Servants What Must Soon Take Place (Revelation 1.1)* (Edinburgh: Clark, 2000), 63.

39. "And they began again to build as before, and they reared up that tower, and it was named the high tower; and they began again to place a table before the tower, but all the bread on it was polluted and not pure. . . . And after that in the seventh week shall an apostate generation arise, And many shall be its deeds, And all its deeds shall be apostate' (1 Enoch 89.73; 93.9)." Cited in Barker, *The Lost Prophet*, 19. Also see her discussion in *The Older Testament*, 19: "If the roots of all this mythological material do lie in the Old Testament, and what we read in Enoch is a legitimate development, we find new significance in the claim that all who returned from the exile were impure and apostate."

40. Barker, *The Lost Prophet*, 16–32.

The Deuteronomists rewrote the tradition: “Then Yahweh spoke to you out of the midst of the fire; you heard the sound of the words but saw no form; there was only a voice” (Deut. 4.12). With this one should compare the contemporary Ezekiel, a temple priest who was able to describe “one like a man” on the fiery throne (Ezek. 1.26), or the tradition that Moses was permitted to see the “form” of the Lord (Num. 12.8).⁴¹

Curiously, early in his paper Owen cites another scholar who acknowledges that “the Deuteronomic reform was apparently not only a matter of where and how the God of Israel should be worshipped, but also a matter of the divine nature” (p. 274). Nevertheless, Owen shows a distinct uneasiness about acknowledging any issues that might be raised against the authority of any part of the Bible. “If one wishes to maintain with Barker that the Deuteronomistic movement had a negative impact on the religious faith of Israel, then one is compelled to reject the teaching of a large body of biblical literature” (p. 303).

On the contrary, we are not compelled to reject the teaching of a large body of biblical literature. We simply read with an awareness of the editorial slant in those books, accepting the Bible as “a record of the Jews, which contains the covenants of the Lord . . . [and] many of the prophecies . . . wherefore, they are of great worth” (1 Nephi 13:23), despite the notion that “they have taken away from the gospel of the Lamb many parts which are plain and most precious” (1 Nephi 13:26). Since Lehi was a contemporary of Josiah’s reform, which has been associated with the recovery of the Book of the Law, the Book of Mormon should and does show a profound influence from Deuteronomy.⁴² Owen claims that “The Book of Mormon itself plainly indicates that Deuteronomy was written prior to the time of the exile (1 Nephi 5:11; 3 Nephi 20:23)” (p. 274). He cites only 1 Nephi 5:11, which describes the brass plates as containing “the five books of Moses,” and 3 Nephi 20:23, which cites a prophecy from Deuter-

41. Barker, *The Great Angel*, 100.

42. See my discussion and references in “Paradigms Regained,” 9–10.

onomy 18:15. He might also have cited various studies showing Deuteronomistic influence throughout the Book of Mormon in terms of a profoundly nuanced understanding of the Law, a complex and subtle use of literary allusion and type scenes that reference the Deuteronomist history, sophisticated references to the politics in the Deuteronomist history, and so forth.⁴³ However, none of this excludes the possibility that the exilic editors changed, removed, or added things to the text.

Owen himself accepts the possibility of some exilic editing and does so without feeling compelled to reject the Old Testament altogether. He writes, "It is, of course, possible that the book of Deuteronomy underwent editing by later scribes, but there are good reasons for maintaining that the substance of Deuteronomy goes back to the time of Moses himself" (p. 274). He refers the reader to a number of books, which we may presume contain the good reasons.⁴⁴ From my perspective, the Book of Mormon provides additional evidence that the exilic phases of the Deuteronomist reforms proceeded just as Barker claims, reacting to the loss of the monarchy and the destruction of the temple:

The Deuteronomists had not favoured the monarchy, as can be seen from their surviving writings; they said that the wickedness of a king had caused the destruction of Jerusalem (2 Kings 24.3).⁴⁵ They were to reformulate Israel's religion in such a way that the monarch was no longer central to the cult. In addition, the exile of so many people to Babylon meant

43. Ibid.

44. Appendices B and C in Friedman's *Hidden Book of the Bible* give some good reasons for the antiquity of the source materials in the Pentateuch, though he also describes evidence for redaction and editing during the exile. I located a short but interesting study on the Web as of October 2002 (www.robibrad.demon.co.uk/deut.htm, section 7.1) that asserts that Hosea, a preexilic prophet, shows an awareness of Deuteronomy. None of this precludes the activities of editorial redaction of old materials.

45. According to Doorly, this assessment of King Manasseh is one stage in a searching process, not the final conclusion of the Deuteronomist school. Also, note that a century later, the Chronicler claims that Manasseh had repented (2 Chronicles 33:15–16; see Doorly, *Obsession with Justice*, 62–64).

that they were physically separated from the temple which had been the centre of their life. These two circumstances combined to alter radically the perception of the presence of God in the temple. The events of history necessitated an idea of God not located in the one holy place, but rather of God travelling with his people, and the Deuteronomists rejected all the ancient anthropomorphisms of the royal cult. Theirs was to be a God whose voice was heard and obeyed, but who had no visible form.⁴⁶

Clearly, this aspect of the Deuteronomist reform responds to the destruction of the monarchy and the loss of the temple. That dates these specific efforts to the exilic phase of the reform, and this is where we see an immediate contrast with the picture in the Book of Mormon. Lehi's vision in 1 Nephi 1 demonstrates exactly the themes that the Deuteronomist movement suppressed in their response to the exile.⁴⁷ Further, the Book of Mormon shows an in-depth awareness of the preexilic Wisdom traditions that Barker reconstructs based on "the evidence of pre-Christian texts preserved and transmitted *only by Christian hands*."⁴⁸ While Barker's reconstruction stands apart from the Book of Mormon (again, her concerns have to do with Christian origins, and she would not necessarily endorse any Latter-day Saint claims), the degree of fit is profound. One of the most important elements of the preexilic religion that the Deuteronomists changed involved the role of the high priest. For example, Barker observes that

The anointed high priest of the first temple cult was remembered as having been different from the high priest of the second temple cult since the latter was described simply as the priest who "wears many garments," a reference to the

46. Margaret Barker, *The Gate of Heaven: The History and Symbolism of the Temple in Jerusalem* (London: SPCK, 1991), 134–35.

47. Christensen, "Paradigms Regained," 15.

48. Barker, *The Older Testament*, 7, emphasis in original. Christensen, "Paradigms Regained," 37–50.

eight garments worn by him on Yom Kippur: "And who is the anointed [high priest]? He that is anointed with the oil of unction, but not he that is dedicated with many garments." (m. *Horayoth* 3.4). It was also remembered that the roles of the anointed high priest and the high priest of many garments differed in some respects at Yom Kippur when the rituals of atonement were performed. The anointed high priest, they believed, would be restored to Israel at the end of time, in the last days.⁴⁹

Why does this matter? The Hebrew *Messiah* and the Greek *Christ* both mean "anointed one." The implication is that during the exile after the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., the role of the anointed one was changed as part of a Deuteronomist reform. Barker shows that the early Christians saw Jesus as this anointed high priest and that this is the theme of John, Hebrews, and Revelation.

While Owen argues that "Mormons cannot consistently appeal to scholars who would explain the monotheism of Deuteronomy by appealing to a later exilic editor" (p. 274), he obviously did not foresee the kind of fit I describe in "Paradigms Regained."⁵⁰ It won't do to cite the passages from Deuteronomy 4 to condemn the Book of Mormon on these points because, as Barker shows, the same things were originally part of the Israelite tradition, and they do reemerge in Christianity. The affinity is remarkable, given that the separate bodies of work came through vastly different methods and without collusion.

Isaiah Seconds the Motion

Indeed, even the apparent conflict between the Book of Mormon quotations and the notion of a Second Isaiah, written during the exile (p. 470 n. 19), fits better than might appear at first glance. The seven chapters containing the Second Isaiah's arguments for monotheism do not appear in the Book of Mormon Isaiah quotations.⁵¹ And most

49. Barker, *The Great Angel*, 15.

50. Christensen, "Paradigms Regained," 24–28.

51. *Ibid.*, 77–81, and Barker, *The Older Testament*, 161–83.

of the Second Isaiah chapters that do appear in the Book of Mormon have ties to preexilic festival liturgies and could, therefore, be older, even if parts of Isaiah 40–55 had been edited, composed, or reinterpreted later.⁵² The Isaiah situation cannot be said to be completely resolved, nor can it said to be less than very promising.⁵³

For example, regarding the state of the texts of Isaiah 53, the fourth of Isaiah's Servant songs, Barker observes that

The subject of the fourth Song is atonement; this much at least is clear. What is not clear is the exact process by which this atonement was effected and it is these disputes which led to distortions in the Hebrew text and the wide variety of renderings in the versions. Since the Qumran Hebrew is substantially the same as the Masoretic, the problems in the Hebrew must have arisen before the major text families became distinct.⁵⁴

Barker here addresses the question of troublesome variants in a key text. Do such variants matter? Barker writes that

On the road to Emmaus, Jesus explained to the two disciples that it was necessary for the Anointed One to suffer and enter his glory (Luke 24.26); this must refer to the Qumran version of the fourth Servant Song [Isaiah 53], *since there is no other passage in the Hebrew Scriptures which speaks of a suffering Anointed One*.⁵⁵

Variations on Themes

The existence of such a key Isaiah variant again raises the question of whether the Old Testament as it stands comprehensively and

52. See Christensen, "Paradigms Regained," 77–81.

53. See Andrew C. Skinner, "Nephi's Lessons to His People: The Messiah, the Land, and Isaiah 48–49 in 1 Nephi 19–22," in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1998), 95–122.

54. Barker, *The Risen Lord*, 121–22.

55. Barker, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 136.

accurately represents the religion of Israel, particularly when such a key textual version had been lost for almost two thousand years. Discussing a forthcoming book on the versions of the books of Samuel found in the Dead Sea Scrolls, Donald W. Parry reports, "The scrolls teach us much about the formation of the Bible and how the scribal process of transmitting the text often changed it, affecting the version we have today. . . . I have found between 300 and 400 discrepancies in the book of Samuel alone, including a whole missing verse. Sometimes it's only a word or two that's changed, but it alters the entire meaning of the verse or chapter."⁵⁶

Owen does mention the much-discussed Deuteronomy 32:8–9 with its notable variants: *sons of Israel* in the Masoretic text (which underlies the King James translation) and *sons of El* in the Septuagint and the Dead Sea Scrolls. Here is the Revised Standard Version:

When the Most High [that is, Elohim] gave to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of men, he fixed the bounds of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God [the KJV has children of Israel].

For the LORD's portion [that is, Yahweh's portion] is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage.

Forced to deal with this passage, Owen confidently tells us what it means (see pp. 298–99). However, he does not inform the reader that early Christian readers read the passage quite differently—indeed, very much as Latter-day Saints do. The omission is particularly conspicuous since both Barker and Barry Bickmore discuss this issue.⁵⁷ For example, Barker observes:

Eusebius, writing about A.D. 320, shows in his *Proof of the Gospel* that the distinction between the two deities was still remembered in his time and that the second God was identified with Christ. Having quoted Deut. 32.8 he says of it: "In

56. Quoted in Todd R. Condie, "Reviving the Dead Sea Scrolls," *BYU Magazine*, spring 2002, 16.

57. See Barker, *The Great Angel*, 190–207; and Bickmore, *Restoring the Ancient Church*, 106–18.

these words surely he [Moses] names first the Most High God, the Supreme God of the Universe, and then, as Lord, His Word, Whom we call Lord in the second degree after the God of the universe . . . to One beyond comparison with (the angels), the Head and King of the Universe, I mean to Christ Himself, as being the Only Begotten Son, was handed over that part of humanity denominated Jacob and Israel." . . . (*Proof of the Gospel*, IV.9)⁵⁸

In discussing the Wisdom tradition as it currently appears in our Old Testament, Barker discusses clues to the origins of the apocalyptic traditions:

How are we to explain [Daniel's] dealings with heavenly beings, and his use of an inexplicable mythology? The elaborate structures of the book suggest that it was using a known framework, and not constructing imagery as it went along, but there is no hint of such imagery in Proverbs, *except in passages where the text is now corrupt*. This suggests that the wisdom elements in the non-canonical apocalypses which have no obvious roots in the Old Testament may not be foreign accretions, but elements of an older wisdom which reformers have purified.⁵⁹

It is patterns drawn from the symbolism of the First Temple that lie behind Barker's readings. Owen charges that she reads "into texts ideas that simply are not there" (p. 303)—but he does so without reference to that background context that she builds. For example, she writes:

The most vivid temple imagery to describe the presence of God is found, as a result [of the Deuteronomist reforms], in

58. Barker, *The Great Angel*, 192.

59. Barker, *The Older Testament*, 92, emphasis in original. See *ibid.*, 1: "Add to this the fact that a high proportion of the opaque texts of the Old Testament seem to be dealing with the same subject matter, namely angels, stars, and the elements which surface in later apocalyptic, and we have grounds for taking a fresh look at the Old Testament and those who transmitted it." See also Barker, "Beyond the Veil of the Temple: The High Priestly Origins of the Apocalypses," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 51/1 (1998): 1–21.

books which were not included in the Old Testament, even though many of them were known to the first Christians and used by them. To understand what they were really saying when they used temple language, we are very much dependent on these little-known books.⁶⁰

Owen, in contrast, prefers interpretations of the Nicene fathers, post-Christian Judaism, and late Christianity for his authoritative texts, for the most part excluding from the discussion just those texts that disappear around the time of the Nicene fathers. Against this, Barker asserts that “The roots of Christianity can be seen to go deep into the religion of Israel, and will not be properly recovered and understood simply by reading the authorized version of what that religion was.”⁶¹ Indeed, John Tvedtnes’s essay “The Messiah, the Book of Mormon, and the Dead Sea Scrolls” provides some excellent examples of just the kinds of things that have been missing from the authorized versions of Christian roots.⁶²

Owen on Barker’s Readings

Owen claims that “Barker’s handling of specific Old Testament texts is sometimes rather naive for a scholar of her reputation.”⁶³ For instance, we are told that Yahweh is an angel, since he is called ‘the Holy One of Israel,’ and the angels are also called ‘holy ones’” (p. 303).⁶⁴ Not only does he grossly oversimplify her argument on the

60. Barker, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 5.

61. Barker, *The Great Angel*, 231.

62. Tvedtnes, *The Most Correct Book*, 330–34.

63. Educated at Cambridge, Barker has authored nine books and has published articles in a variety of academic journals in England and America. She is a recognized expert on temple symbolism and in 1998 served a term as the president-elect of the Society for Old Testament Study (www.trinity-bris.ac.uk/sots/pastconferences.html). A number of her articles appear at Marquette University’s page at www.marquette.edu/maqom/. Notice too how carefully Owen hedges (both here and elsewhere), introducing a discussion by saying “sometimes” and then generalizing as though “sometimes” is representative.

64. Notice again the important rhetorical hedge/qualification of “sometimes.” This permits Owen to skate only where he chooses and to let the generalizations fall where they may, whether or not the sampling is representative or his reading actually is better.

pages he references, but he argues as though he has not previously observed passages in the Bible that describe Yahweh as an angel (see pp. 279–80).⁶⁵ For example, “And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush *was* not consumed. . . . And when the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses” (Exodus 3:2, 4).

Owen does not read Barker carefully, I would venture to guess, because his ideological commitments interfere with the possibility of taking her seriously. For example, “Barker overlooks the fact that ‘no sexual behavior of God has been described in the Old Testament’” (p. 302).⁶⁶ On the contrary, she does not overlook this: “Such similarities as do exist [between the mythologies of Canaan and Israel] show that many Canaanite elements, such as the ribald revelries of the heavenly court and the birth of the gods, have not been used.”⁶⁷

Owen claims that “Barker continually cites isolated passages from Philo, without due regard for their contexts, in the attempt to prove her case” (p. 304). Yet Owen continually neglects Barker’s overall context. She writes that “Philo shows by this imagery that his Logos originated in the royal cult and it corroborates what we have deduced from other texts about the nature of that cult.”⁶⁸ Regarding Philo, she observes:

What is said here about the Logos is very like what has been said by others of the Name in Deuteronomy. When we add to this the whole catalogue of significant titles which Philo gives to the Logos, of which King, Shepherd, High Priest, Covenant, Rider on the Divine Chariot, Archangel, and First-

65. Compare Barker’s richer discussion in *The Great Angel*, 28–47, 70–96.

66. But compare Raphael Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess*, 3rd enl. ed. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990).

67. Barker, *The Great Angel*, 23–24.

68. *Ibid.*, 122.

born Son can give a context for all the others, it seems more than likely that Philo drew his ideas of the mediator from his people's most ancient beliefs, and only *adapted* them to Greek ways of thinking.⁶⁹

While Owen builds from the settled conclusions of classical trinitarian monotheism,⁷⁰ Barker looks back to the untidy controversies that predate the Christian councils:

The battle against the "two powers" heretics began with the exegesis of Scripture, especially with [the] vision of Dan 7; . . . and the debates were always associated with Palestine. *All this points to a crisis precipitated by the rise of Christianity.* . . . The problem of the Memra, the problems of the Logos and the problem of the two powers are all one problem, caused by our losing sight of the Great Angel, and by the curiously perverted refusal on the part of Christian scholars to believe the claims of the first Christians.⁷¹

One of these first Christians is Justin, who remarks to Trypho "That there both is, and that we read of, another God and Lord under the Creator of all things who is also termed an angel in that he bears messages to men, whatever the Creator, above Whom there is no other god, wills to be borne to them."⁷² If such things were as

69. Ibid., 116.

70. Stephen E. Parrish, with Carl Mosser, "A Tale of Two Theisms," in *The New Mormon Challenge*, 193–218; Owen also comments: "Middle Platonic assumptions caused similar problems for early Christian apologists such as Justin Martyr and Origen, whose understanding of the Son's identity was similar to Philo's Logos. The tension remained unresolved until the Nicene fathers clearly identified the Son as a distinguishable relation within God's own substance" (p. 481 n. 169). Here again Owen shows his commitment to the late councils and consciously dismisses the explicit teaching and belief of the early Christians.

71. Barker, *The Great Angel*, 158, emphasis in original.

72. Ibid., 193, quoting Trypho 58. Also Barker, *Gate of Heaven*, 175. Contrast Owen, "If Barker's reading of the New Testament is correct, then why is the Son never described as a 'second God'?" (p. 308).

unthinkable as Owen imagines, why does such an important early Christian writer from a Palestine background express exactly what Barker claims?⁷³ Would Justin and Eusebius agree with Owen's claim that "Therefore, for Jews who were familiar with the Hebrew Bible, the identification of Jesus as Yahweh would have implied, not that he was a *second* God, but that he was somehow to be included within the identity of the *One* God (Deut 6:4). As Jesus said, 'I and the Father are one' (John 10:30)" (p. 308)? It happens that neither Justin nor the New Testament contains a phrase about Jesus being included within the "unique identity" of God (p. 288), Owen's favorite phrase. John 17:21-22 does report Jesus' prayer: "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: . . . that they may be one, even as we are one." Owen should know that Latter-day Saint writers favor these passages as an explanation of the oneness of God.

Owen accuses Barker of interpreting "with wooden literalness what Philo is attempting to imaginatively depict through philosophical contemplation" (p. 480 n. 165) in dealing with the Logos, yet she writes, "In all his philosophizing and allegorizing, Philo uses Logos in both its senses; it was the title of the Angel who appeared in human form but also the philosophers' Reason or divine order apparent in the creation. . . . One by one in the roles of the Logos we recognize the ancient Yahweh."⁷⁴ She recognizes that Philo is involved in demythologizing Hebrew traditions but that his commentaries nevertheless witness to what those traditions originally described. This is particularly evident when reading Philo in the sweeping context that she provides in *The Great Angel* in the chapters that Owen bypasses.⁷⁵

73. Compare Owen, "Barker contends that the earliest Christians identified Jesus as Yahweh" (p. 308). She's not only contending; she's demonstrating through quotation.

74. Barker, *The Great Angel*, 121.

75. Early on, Owen defines polytheism as the "belief in and worship of a plurality of gods, even if these gods are believed to be emanations of a supreme High God" (p. 272). Later he quotes Alan F. Segal as saying, "Philo allows for the existence of a second, principal, divine creature, whom he calls a 'second God,' who nevertheless is only the visible emanation of the High, ever-existing God" (p. 307). So, according to Owen's definition, Philo is a polytheist.

Conclusion

Margaret Barker's work restores lost truths about the origins of Christianity and its roots in the First Temple traditions of preexilic Israel. She recovers and displays fossils of that tradition and, in searching widely through an immense variety of writings, fleshes out those fossils and breathes life into them to show their relevance for contemporary Christians. In her works, Barker writes primarily to defend Christian faith from the corrosives of secular scholars who attempt to strip Christianity of its inspiration and Jesus of his divinity. In resisting her findings, Owen unconsciously reenacts the role and agenda of the ancient Deuteronomists all too precisely.

In criticizing Latter-day Saint scholars for citing Barker's work, Owen claims that "it is inconsistent to cite the conclusions of Barker's study while paying no attention to the arguments and methods used in arriving at those views" (p. 303). My monograph "Paradigms Regained" provides significant attention to her arguments and methods and good reasons for LDS scholars to continue to cite and explore Barker's work. In contrast, the most conspicuous thing missing from Owen's discussion of Barker's studies is any substantive discussion of the arguments and methods that she uses to arrive at her views. While her efforts may not demonstrate perfection—something that is now beyond our reach in any case—she does demonstrate a profound range and depth of scholarship and, above this, a most remarkable vision.

I am appending some brief comments by Margaret Barker herself, which I would title "A Demonstration of the Art of Self-Defense."

Appendix: Some Comments by Margaret Barker

The first question to ask those who do not like *The Great Angel* is Why did Jesus read the OT that way and why did *all* the early Christian fathers (I have checked as far as the mid-fourth century) also read the OT that way? Then ask why the Dead Sea Scrolls and later Jewish tradition all recalled the post-Josiah period as one of "wrath." The whole question needs to be set in as wide a context as possible. Just to quote a couple of verses here and there is not a responsible use of scripture.

The first issue concerns the definition of the canon of scripture. When was the Hebrew canon defined and by whom? Tradition says by a group of rabbis at Jamnia in about A.D. 95—that is, after the origin of Christianity. We do not know exactly what Jesus deemed to be scripture, especially which he deemed to be prophets. There is no list of book titles. Josephus speaks of holy books but gives no list of titles, and there were books mentioned at Qumran (for example, the book of Hagu) that were clearly of great importance for them but that we no longer have. Enoch was also as “popular” as Isaiah there, and we do know that Ezekiel only got into the Hebrew canon after much debate. The Ezra legend in 2 Esdras 14 says that Ezra dictated the scriptures to his scribes but was only permitted to make public twenty-four of the books; the other seventy were to be secret, only for the wise. Something must lie behind this legend! The Hebrew canon represents the choice of a particular group of Jewish people, and it was a smaller collection of books than the Greek canon adopted by the church. Special reverence has always been given to the Hebrew canon, but it has never been exclusive.

There is also the question of the history of the text of the OT and the differences between the Hebrew text we presently use and the one known at Qumran, which differs in significant places (for example, in having no mention of the sons of God/angels in Deuteronomy 32:8 and 43). Why did these passages disappear?

The way the first Christians understood the OT to refer to the Second Person cannot be disregarded by Christians, even though few Christians are aware that the OT was read this way. This is one of the strongest pieces of evidence for the “Second God.” There is also the mysterious figure of Wisdom, to whom the great church in Constantinople was dedicated. Who was she? She appears in Proverbs, but mainly in the longer Greek OT that includes Wisdom of Solomon and Wisdom of Jesus Ben Sirach—Wisdom there being the alternative name for the Second God. This is what the first Christians must have believed. Do we nowadays know more about the faith than those who first received it?

Do not allow Philo to be dismissed as a Hellenizer. He had a good grasp of the priestly traditions at the end of the Second Temple period and was chosen by the Jews of Alexandria as their spokesman before the Roman emperor. He cannot have been a heretic. Philo is clear about the Second God and exactly what was understood by that term.

I had a student ask me once: What happened to Yahweh in the NT? The Name simply disappears from Christian discussion. Try asking an evangelical Christian what he or she means by saying "Jesus is Lord."

I cannot understand why the claim that Jesus was Yahweh incarnate is held by them to be a threat. They presumably are happy to have a Trinity after the time of Jesus. If God does not change, the Trinity cannot have "begun" with Jesus. What happened was that the mediator of the Trinity came among us. Trinity/plurality must have been eternally a part of the way humans understood the unity of God. Ask what the Shema actually says: "The Lord our elohim (plural) is one Lord" (Deuteronomy 6:4).

It is very important to read the OT texts as Jesus' contemporaries read them. Try reading Josephus's *Antiquities* version of Genesis 18, where Yahweh and the two others become simply three angels, or of Genesis 22, where the angel of the Lord becomes God. They simply did not distinguish. An angel was the way that the Divine was perceived by the human.

Margaret Barker
August 2002

KORIHOR SPEAKS, OR THE MISINTERPRETATION OF DREAMS

Michael D. Jibson

Introduction and Overview

Begin with the assumption that any scholarly study of history must exclude all forms of supernatural phenomena. Only facts established by scientific inquiry may be accepted as evidence for or against any historical interpretation, and claims of the supernatural must be interpreted in strictly naturalistic terms. By extension, historical sources that imply the acceptance of supernatural phenomena must be rejected. Now examine the origin of the Book of Mormon.

This rigid positivism, the acceptance only of that which natural sciences can demonstrate, is the starting point of Robert Anderson's psychoanalytic interpretation of the Book of Mormon and its relationship to the life of Joseph Smith. In contrast to the supernatural claims of the book's adherents, he offers the "science" of "applied psychoanalysis" (pp. xxix–xxx), the use of psychoanalytic principles to study groups, individuals, and "creative works" (p. xi). He explains at the outset that his own perspective in writing this work is "explicitly naturalistic" (p. xiii). "This book," he tells us, "is not about 'Did Joseph

I thank Marilyn A. Roubidoux, M.D., and Kathleen A. Diehl, M.S.W., for their helpful and insightful comments in reviewing this manuscript.

Review of Robert D. Anderson. *Inside the Mind of Joseph Smith: Psychobiography and the Book of Mormon*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1999. xiv + 263 pp., with index. \$19.95.

Smith create the Book of Mormon?’ but ‘How did Joseph Smith create the Book of Mormon?’” (p. xxvi). That is not quite true; much of Anderson’s book is focused on why we should accept a naturalistic, nonspiritual origin for the Book of Mormon or, rather, on why we should reject Joseph Smith as a legitimate spiritual guide. Interestingly, in his discussion of the psychoanalytic method to be used, he shifts to a less extreme position than earlier in his introduction, claiming only that the psychoanalyst is not equipped to address issues of the supernatural and therefore must focus elsewhere while maintaining neutrality on theological and spiritual issues.

I will summarize my critique of the book initially, then follow with detailed reviews, first of the book, then of the methodology. Briefly stated, I found the book seriously flawed. First, the methodology is weak; applied psychoanalysis is not science by any reasonable definition of the term and enjoys no currency as such in contemporary academic psychiatry. Furthermore, the method Anderson applied in his study fell short of even minimal standards of objectivity. Second, the selection bias of source material was significant, with a decided preference for writers antagonistic to Joseph Smith, even when they were of questionable reliability and when better sources were available. Third, the data were not sufficient to support the conclusions, which were based instead on extensive supposition and speculation. Finally, the author failed to maintain the theological neutrality he espoused in his introductory remarks and instead assumed a position of hostility to religious faith in general and Mormonism in particular. Readers predisposed to think ill of Joseph Smith, the Book of Mormon, or the religious faith of Latter-day Saints will undoubtedly like this work. It will be of less interest to anyone else and will be particularly disappointing to dispassionate readers seeking genuine insight into the life and work of Joseph Smith.

Review of the Study

Introduction: Methods and Assumptions

Anderson introduces himself as having once been “a sincere and earnest young missionary” who at some point “no longer partici-

pated in Mormon worship" (p. xi). Yet he remains fascinated by the history and social impact of the church and acknowledges the life-changing consequences of its teachings. His purpose in undertaking this study is evolutionist, based in the hope that the church, like any enlightened society, will naturally advance from its primitive theological stance to a final secular humanist attitude:

I would like to assist in the continued evolution of the Mormon church. . . .

Our pluralistic society, awash in social problems of drugs, family disintegration, illegitimacy, violence, and destructive sexual behavior, can use the stabilizing influence of such an institution in promoting family and health values. If this work nudges the Mormon church toward its potential as a world caregiver in a nondoctrinal sense, then I will consider the undertaking worthwhile. (p. xiii)

In describing his study, Anderson explains that he approaches the Book of Mormon as psychoanalytic source material, comparable to free associations or dream images. He interprets these images in light of psychoanalytic concepts and in the context of Joseph Smith's life. In this sense, "the Book of Mormon can be understood as Smith's autobiography" and can be used to "develop a reasonably complete psychoanalytic profile of Joseph Smith" (pp. xxvii–xxviii).

As is to be expected for any psychoanalytic study, much of the book is devoted to a review of specific incidents in the Smith family and in the life of "the child Joseph" (p. 1). Lucy Mack Smith's 1845 dictation of Joseph's history is the primary source for family information.¹ Beyond Lucy Mack Smith, he grants little credibility to historians from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and Brigham Young University, "who must follow the directions from the Mormon hierarchy," with consequent "documentary unreliability,"

1. Dan Vogel, ed., *Early Mormon Documents* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996), 1:227–450. Anderson refers to all quotations from Vogel's work under the heading "Lucy Smith History." This includes some documents not attributed to Lucy Mack Smith, a practice I found somewhat misleading.

and instead gives preference to “others, including antagonists” (p. xxvi). In what follows, this proves to be something of an understatement, as he gives virtually unmodulated credence to antagonistic writers and critics and conspicuously omits other sources.

Anderson concludes his introduction with a review of psychoanalysis and its application to history and biography. He correctly notes the difference between psychiatry and psychoanalysis. Psychiatry is a medical specialty focused on “the diagnosis and treatment of mental dysfunction” (p. xxviii). I would add to Anderson’s description that psychiatric treatments include medications, cognitive and behavioral therapies, psychodynamic psychotherapies, and other modalities. Psychodynamic therapies focus on the putative drives, defenses, intrapsychic conflicts, and other unconscious processes postulated to underlie thought, feeling, and behavior. Psychoanalysis is one form of psychodynamic psychotherapy based on a particular set of assumptions about childhood development and the workings of the adult mind. Psychoanalysis is neither the most common nor the most effective form of therapy, and it is among the weakest in its scientific foundations. Despite a dearth of validating data to support the practice, psychoanalytic theory is sometimes applied outside the clinical situation, hence the term “applied psychoanalysis.”

Although Anderson is careful in his rather idealized description of the field to point out the limitations of its application to the writing of biographical history, his work shows little of the caution and reserve suggested in his introductory comments. Most of the study consists of his attributing specific qualities of character to Joseph Smith, then searching for psychoanalytic evidence of those qualities in the Book of Mormon. Given the rich variety and complexity of characters in the Book of Mormon, it is possible to find in that text just about anything. This study has more of the quality of a psychoanalytic fishing expedition than rigorous research, and Anderson fails to demonstrate that his conclusions are more credible than any of the innumerable other possibilities that could have been presented. Even within psychoanalysis, it is almost inconceivable that another analyst, reading this same material, would necessarily reach the same conclu-

sions. In fact, numerous psychiatrists, including psychoanalysts, have examined the Book of Mormon and the life of Joseph Smith and have expressed an enormous divergence of views, helpfully noted by Anderson himself (pp. xiii, 125–26). The significance of this disagreement should not be overlooked; there is nothing approaching consensus among mental health professionals regarding Joseph Smith or any aspect of his work. As a consequence, the invocation of professional authority for any specific view is premature and unjustified.

Anderson also considerably overstates the position of psychoanalysis in contemporary psychiatry, implying that it constitutes the pinnacle of psychiatric achievement, limited in practice to those few who are willing to undergo its demanding training. In fact, psychoanalysis has been in decline for nearly half a century, left behind by the broader and deeper currents of empirically based psychiatric thought. Psychoanalysis has not kept pace with the rigorous neurological and behavioral research of the past few decades and is now considered by most psychiatrists to be “scientifically bankrupt”² and passé. Because the theory of psychoanalysis and its place in modern psychiatry may be unfamiliar to some readers, I present the psychoanalytic method in greater detail in a later section.

Despite my disagreement with many of the points laid out in Anderson’s introduction, I was impressed by the quality of writing, depth of background information, and academic demeanor of this section. So sober and scholarly is this introductory material that it is easy to be swept along in the current of his narrative without a critical look at his stated assumptions and the narrow confines of his method. I found those assumptions both extreme and indefensible, and it was clear at the outset that they would determine the final shape of the study: No serious consideration of supernatural (i.e., spiritual) phenomena can be entertained. All Latter-day Saint scholarship is tainted. What does that leave?

My concerns proved to be well founded. Far from the stance of theological and spiritual neutrality championed in Anderson’s

2. Edward Shorter, *A History of Psychiatry: From the Era of the Asylum to the Age of Prozac* (New York: Wiley, 1997), 146.

introduction, his writing assumes a clear tone of advocacy for the supremacy of a narrow understanding of reason so prominent in the Enlightenment and for the essentially positivist perspective that followed. Neither is there neutrality in his choice of historical material. Even from writers whose independence of the Mormon hierarchy is beyond question, Anderson's selections betray a decidedly antagonistic bias that severely curtails the credibility of his work.

Equally troubling is his failure to stay within other guidelines he initially outlined. Despite repeated acknowledgment of the questionable credibility of much of his source material, he accepts it wholeheartedly when developing his thesis. At other points, after acknowledging the lack of evidence for certain critical historical claims, he proceeds as though his assumptions regarding them are certain. He acknowledges the limitations of his methodology, then grossly overinterprets his data. His tendency to slip suddenly from his scholarly narrative to editorial comments when critiquing the flawed faith of "devout Mormons" becomes more frequent and pointed as the work progresses. Most of these comments are both condescending and inappropriate in the context in which they appear, a disappointing lapse in a purportedly academic study (and one of D. Michael Quinn's "seven deadly sins of traditional Mormon history").³

Joseph Smith's Personal and Family Background

The body of the work opens with a review of the Smith family history found in official sources, followed by an overview of the Book of Mormon. Anderson takes pains to refute the 1820 date for the Palmyra revival, arguing that the events Joseph described seem more

3. D. Michael Quinn, *The New Mormon History: Revisionist Essays on the Past* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), viii. The seven deadly sins are (1) to "shrink from analyzing a controversial topic," (2) to "conceal sensitive or contradictory evidence," (3) to fail to "follow the evidence to 'revisionist' interpretations that [run] counter to 'traditional' assumptions," (4) to use historical "evidence to insult the religious beliefs of Mormons," (5) to "disappoint the scholarly expectations of academics," (6) to "cater to public relations preferences," and (7) to "use an 'academic' work to proselytize for religious conversion or defection." I refer specifically to #4 in this case, but Anderson also ran afoul of #5 and #7 here and elsewhere.

appropriate to 1824. He cites this as evidence that the account of the first vision is "not internally consistent" (p. 9), a theme further developed as the book progresses, leading finally to the conclusion that the story was made up years after the fact.

Anderson draws three major conclusions from his examination of the Smith family. The first is that the family was grossly dysfunctional and racked by avoidable poverty, frequent dislocations, conflicts over religion, and Joseph Smith Sr.'s emotional immaturity, recurrent alcoholism, and obsessive treasure hunting. Lucy was emotionally unavailable because of two possible episodes of depression. Her own character may have been deficient, as circumstantial evidence could be consistent with premarital pregnancy. Joseph Sr.'s immaturity is evidenced by his belief in magic and Lucy's description that at one point during young Joseph's leg surgery he "burst into tears and 'sobbed like a child'" (p. 26). His alcoholism may have been referred to by a suggestive line in a blessing given to Hyrum. Anderson characterized Joseph Sr. as "a picture of fragility" (p. 177).

The second point is that the defining event in young Joseph's life was his leg surgery. This event is described in terms of a helpless young child facing the powerful doctor, Nathan Smith, who wielded a large amputation knife and inflicted horrible pain. During this ordeal, his parents, who should have been giving him comfort and support, instead broke down and required him to bolster them. The Book of Mormon is posited as his fantasy attempt to deal with this traumatic event.

The third point is that Joseph's personality is consistent with a clinical diagnosis of narcissistic personality disorder with additional antisocial tendencies. (The technical term *antisocial* is correctly used here, not referring to the popular meaning of a lack of interest in social interaction but to a severe personality disorder characterized by a "pervasive pattern of disregard for and violation of the rights of others.")⁴ As such, he was exquisitely sensitive to public humiliation, maintained a false and superficial public persona, felt little genuine

4. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 4th ed. (Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Association, 1994), 649.

affection or empathy for other people (including Emma), had no qualms about acting deceitfully to protect his public or self-image, and was motivated by a desire to manipulate and control the people around him. Other features of narcissism include “splitting”—the casting of people and issues in polar, black-and-white terms, with no sense of ambiguity or nuance. Anderson is brutal in his assessment of Joseph Smith’s character: he describes him as a deceitful and dishonest youth and adult, the primary evidence for which is his youthful involvement in folk magic and his alleged sexual indiscretions as an adult. This critique of character is repeatedly relentlessly, with little acknowledgment of any redeeming characteristics.

I found this assessment curious. Lucy Mack Smith’s history describes the family in much more functional and affectionate terms than those assumed by Anderson.⁵ He actually quotes one such passage from her history (p. 233) and then inexplicably disregards it. Her description of Joseph’s leg surgery includes a more balanced account of the support offered by his parents and was clearly intended to illustrate Joseph’s fortitude and consideration for his mother’s welfare. The assumption that Joseph saw this procedure exclusively in threatening terms is far from certain; it is equally likely that he saw the surgery (and the surgeon) as the only hope to save his leg. This was clearly his mother’s view of the incident.⁶ Regarding antisocial traits, Joseph seems to fall somewhat short of the mark. Typical behaviors associated with antisocial personality disorder include fights, use of weapons, physical cruelty to persons and animals, vandalism, arson, assault, theft with and without confrontation of the victim, and burglary in a well-established pattern before age fifteen.⁷ Anderson offers only one youthful issue: involvement in folk magic. His major source of information on this topic is Quinn’s *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*,⁸ but he does not follow Quinn’s

5. Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:276, 281–82.

6. Ibid., 1:262–68.

7. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 90, 650.

8. D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987). See reviews of Quinn’s revised and enlarged 1998 edition by John

thesis that folk magic was part of the cultural milieu in which Joseph grew up and from which both he and Mormonism emerged. Anderson cites Joseph Sr.'s attachment to folk magic as evidence of immaturity. In the case of Joseph Jr., he cites it as evidence of self-deception and intentional fraud.

Anderson's blithe dismissal of the numerous accounts (which he acknowledges) of Joseph's care for Emma was especially striking. Rather than attempting to incorporate the abundant evidence of Joseph's genuine love and concern for his wife into a more complex and balanced view of his subject, Anderson simply disregards it. It was a puzzle to me that anyone, especially a psychiatrist, could see another human being as so utterly unidimensional. I would have preferred to see some attempt to include a broader view of Joseph's personal history in a psychiatric study.

In the context of Joseph Smith's supposed narcissistic vulnerability, three specific instances of traumatic public humiliation are cited. The first is his 1826 trial in South Bainbridge, New York, in connection with money digging for Josiah Stowell. Two versions of the story are mentioned. The first, by Oliver Cowdery in an 1835 issue of the *Messenger and Advocate*,⁹ describes Joseph's arrest as a disorderly person and his honorable acquittal. The second version, which Anderson strongly endorses, is taken from H. Michael Marquardt and Wesley P. Walters's *Inventing Mormonism*;¹⁰ W. D. Purple's 1877 "Historical Reminiscences";¹¹ Wesley P. Walters's Utah Lighthouse Ministry articles

Gee, William J. Hamblin, and Rhett S. James, in *FARMS Review of Books* 12/2 (2000): 185–414. See also Stephen E. Robinson's review in *BYU Studies* 27/4 (1987): 94–95, and Stephen D. Ricks and Daniel C. Peterson, "The Mormon as Magus," *Sunstone*, January 1988, 38–39.

9. Oliver Cowdery, *Messenger and Advocate* 2 (October 1835): 200–201 (letter to W. W. Phelps).

10. H. Michael Marquardt and Wesley P. Walters, *Inventing Mormonism: Tradition and the Historical Record* (San Francisco: Smith Research Associates, 1994), 63–87. See reviews by Richard L. Bushman in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/2 (1994): 122–33, and by Larry C. Porter in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 7/2 (1995): 123–43.

11. W. D. Purple, "Joseph Smith, the Originator of Mormonism: Historical Reminiscences of the Town of Afton," *Chenango Union*, 3 May 1877, p. 3.

"From Occult to Cult with Joseph Smith, Jr."¹² and "Joseph Smith's Bainbridge, N.Y., Court Trials";¹³ an 1883 encyclopedia article on "Mormonism";¹⁴ John Phillip Walker's *Dale Morgan on Early Mormonism*;¹⁵ and Jerald and Sandra Tanner's *Joseph Smith and Money Digging*.¹⁶ In Anderson's opinion, Joseph's character was demonstrated to be grossly deficient, and he was in fact bound over for trial but was allowed to escape to spare Josiah Stowell embarrassment. This interpretation has been strongly criticized as fitting poorly with available records, which tend to support Oliver Cowdery's story.¹⁷ Furthermore, Anderson admits the lack of direct evidence that Joseph experienced this event as particularly humiliating but postulates that Joseph's narcissism would make it so. Anderson believes that this was a crucial event in persuading Joseph to abandon his practice of magic and move toward the Christian mainstream.

The second public humiliation was the death in 1828 of Joseph and Emma's first child, born with severe congenital malformations. According to Eber Howe's 1834 *Mormonism Unveiled*,¹⁸ Joseph had predicted that his son "would be able when two years old to translate the Gold Bible" (p. 91). Although Anderson acknowledges Howe's antagonism, his frequent quotations from this work (nine in this chapter alone) and his use of Howe's descriptions as evidence of Joseph's

12. Wesley P. Walters, "From Occult to Cult with Joseph Smith, Jr.," *Journal of Pastoral Practice* 1 (1977): 121-37.

13. Wesley P. Walters, "Joseph Smith's Bainbridge, N.Y., Court Trials," *Westminster Theological Journal* 36 (1974): 123-37.

14. "Mormonism," *New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* (New York, 1883), 2:1576, quoted in Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 2nd ed. (New York: Knopf, 1971), 427-29.

15. John Phillip Walker, ed., *Dale Morgan on Early Mormonism: Correspondence and a New History* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1986), 129-30. See the review by Gary F. Novak in *FARMS Review of Books* 8/1 (1996): 122-67.

16. Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Joseph Smith and Money Digging* (Salt Lake City: Modern Microfilm, 1970), 21-23.

17. See Gordon A. Madsen, "Joseph Smith's 1826 Trial: The Legal Setting," *BYU Studies* 30/2 (1990): 91-108.

18. E. D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled* (Painesville, Ohio: Author, 1834), 246-47, 264, 267, 269.

compensatory Book of Mormon fantasies suggest confidence in Howe's accuracy. Anderson also lauds Howe's work as "the first major attempt to understand Joseph Smith" (p. 125). Anderson again acknowledges lack of direct evidence that Joseph suffered humiliation as a result of this event, but he surmises it based on his assessment of Joseph's narcissistically enriched character.

The third humiliation was the loss of the 116-page manuscript entrusted to Martin Harris. This posed the threat that Joseph would be publicly exposed as a fraud if he were unable to reproduce the work. Ironically, Anderson suggests that the several months following this incident, during which no work was done on the Book of Mormon, were the healthiest of Joseph's life.

The Composition of the Book of Mormon

The mechanism by which Joseph composed the Book of Mormon, in Anderson's view, was akin to the process of free association in psychoanalytic therapy. The speed with which he dictated left little room for reflection, Anderson opines, and so was a relatively pure manifestation of unconscious processes. The theological aspects of the book, of secondary interest in this analysis, were simply the product of Joseph's "religious genius" applied to the current issues of the day, lifted liberally from sermons he heard during the Palmyra revival. Additional structure was added by Oliver Cowdery, who was familiar with Ethan Smith's *View of the Hebrews*.¹⁹

A major lapse in the book is Anderson's handling of contemporary witnesses. Oliver Cowdery is discussed only in the context of his possible contribution to the composition of the Book of Mormon and his enabling of Joseph's narcissism, a result of his falling under Joseph's charismatic spell. His account of the translation and his role as a witness of the work are disregarded. Emma is similarly characterized as a victim of Joseph's charisma, and her account of the translation

19. Ethan Smith, *View of the Hebrews; or The Tribes of Israel in America*, 2nd ed. (Poultney, Vt.: Smith and Shute, 1825, 1st ed. 1823).

is accordingly discarded. Martin Harris is dismissed as an unstable “religious addict” (p. 88), whose stories are without credibility. David Whitmer’s accounts of these events,²⁰ though internally consistent over many years and free of the taint of the “Mormon hierarchy,” are almost completely ignored. These accounts inconveniently portray a radically different picture than does Anderson’s story.

The Sword of Laban

Anderson is primarily interested in the correlation of the Book of Mormon’s characters and plot line to the life of Joseph Smith. His first psychoanalytic interpretation deals with the sword of Laban, which he finds symbolic of Nathan Smith’s scalpel. This story is described as a compensatory fantasy in which Joseph gains mastery over the frightening and powerful surgeon, killing him, and even taking his identity, as Nephi dresses in Laban’s clothes. The powerful Laban is, of course, Nathan Smith, the similarity in names providing further evidence of the parallel. The characters in Lehi’s family represent Joseph’s own. Both he and Nephi are the fourth child. Laman and Lemuel are representative of Alvin and Hyrum, whom Joseph symbolically demeans in order to take precedence over them. Sam represents Sophronia (p. 51), and Zoram “the first person the child Joseph could control . . . his next younger sibling, Samuel Harrison” (p. 47). The story continues with the Liahona, evidence of the family’s involvement with folk magic. Finally, the journey through the wilderness and to the promised land represents the family’s many relocations and eventual arrival in Palmyra.

Some of the specific psychoanalytic processes invoked here and later in the study include symbolic representation, compensatory fantasy, splitting, regression, and projection. Symbolic representation is the expression of a thought, feeling, or relationship as a disguised image (circumstance, character, etc.) of a story. Thus, a threatening

20. Lyndon W. Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews: A Restoration Witness* (Orem, Utah: Grandin Book, 1991).

figure in the real or fantasy life of an author would be represented as an equally threatening character but with an altered identity. Compensatory fantasy is the reworking of a personal experience to change it, usually to the opposite of its reality. In Joseph Smith's case, a humiliating defeat might be reworked to become a brilliant conquest. Splitting is the dissection of an individual or situation into polar extremes, usually of all good and all bad components, only one of which appears at any moment, but which may be juxtaposed dramatically without any acknowledgment of ambiguity or inconsistency. Regression is the assumption of a more childlike view of the world, with concomitant emotional immaturity and interpersonal dependence. Projection is the attribution of personal thoughts and feelings to other people. Armed with this range of operations, it is possible to fit nearly any story to any personal history. If the images are similar, it is symbolic representation; if they are diametrically opposed, it must be compensatory fantasy. If no obvious relationship one way or the other appears, it must be especially important material to be so thoroughly disguised. In the absence of a live patient to verify the interpretations, this approach is fraught with difficulty.

In his discussion of 1 and 2 Nephi, Anderson also offers a number of criticisms of the Book of Mormon narrative in order to bolster his case that many Book of Mormon events are improbable. One of the first of these involves the incident in which Nephi's steel bow breaks and is replaced "with a child's bow made of a straight stick" (p. 49). Anderson sees this as a childish fantasy arising from the Smith family's very real experience with hunger. Other inconsistencies or lapses in credibility that he finds in these chapters include the allegedly exaggerated population estimates, size of wars, and description of the temple, criticisms repeated later in the book.

This section, even with its conspicuous inconsistencies, such as Laman and Lemuel representing Alvin and Hyrum, with whom Joseph by all accounts enjoyed a warm and even admiring relationship, is somewhat stronger than what follows. I found the steady stream of trivial criticisms of the Book of Mormon more annoying and tiresome

than persuasive. The characterization of a wooden bow in ancient times as a child's toy, for example, makes no sense.

A favorite theme throughout the book is sexual promiscuity, either through polygamy or extramarital affairs, which Anderson tends to merge into one category. Referring to Jacob 1:15–3:7, he finds within Jacob's sermon on chastity (in which polygamy is proscribed) psychoanalytic evidence of marital discord. In this context he points out the "coercion and emotional pressure" (p. 129) brought to bear by Joseph on at least two women, including the thirty-eight-year-old Eliza R. Snow.

Third Nephi as Compensatory Fantasy

Citing the similarities in the names of 2 Nephi and 3 Nephi, Anderson places his discussion of the ministry of the Savior immediately after 2 Nephi, even though he acknowledges that this does not correspond to the writing of the book. Later it becomes clear why he did so: the psychological case he builds for Joseph in the writing of Helaman and the earlier chapters of 3 Nephi fits poorly with the message of Christ's visit. His primary observation regarding the later chapters is that the highly idealized description of the Lord's ministry juxtaposed against the destruction that preceded it is an example of the black-and-white thinking typical of narcissistic personality disorder. He suggests that the death of Joseph's deformed infant son emerges as the "compensatory exaggerated fantasy" (pp. 108–9) of Christ blessing the children, followed by their communion with heavenly messengers.

I found this concept of compensatory fantasy for the death of a deformed child more plausible than many of the other interpretations offered to this point. The problem with this interpretation, however, is the similarity of this narrative to the New Testament. It is interesting to speculate, while reading the Gospels, about the direction Christ's ministry might have taken in a less hostile environment. From that perspective, Anderson's brush here tars all Christianity, not just that taught in the Book of Mormon. A conspicuous example

of that is his gratuitous criticism of the destruction preceding Christ's appearance as unjust. "Thousands died, presumably including children, infants, and pregnant mothers" (p. 107). Matthew 24 contains the same images, though seen through the lens of apocalyptic prophecy. I was left with the impression that this and other similar criticisms were aimed broadly at biblical, as well as Book of Mormon, Christianity.

King Benjamin's "Camp Meeting"

Moving into Mosiah and Alma, Anderson acknowledges the complexity of the narrative and the richness of the theological content. The former he cites as evidence against the several psychiatric diagnoses previously ascribed to Joseph Smith by other writers, including schizophrenia, paranoia, auditory hallucinations, and dissociation. The latter he attributes to the Protestant debates that had gone on since the opening of the Reformation. His failure to give serious treatment to the theological content of the Book of Mormon is one of this book's greatest and most consistent omissions.

Specific images are again ascribed to events and persons in Joseph's life. King Benjamin's sermon is a reworking of an American camp meeting. Benjamin is equated with Benjamin Stockton, who reportedly told the Smiths that Alvin was in hell because he had not joined a church. The sermon, which Anderson describes as "despair-producing . . . for salvation requires perfection in behavior and even thought" (p. 134), reflects Benjamin Stockton's "condemnatory tone" (p. 132).

I find it unlikely that this interpretation of the sermon will ring true to most readers. Perhaps it is my own long-standing opposition to the late ascendancy of "self-esteem" as a primary focus of character that leads me to see King Benjamin's sermon as a powerful counterpoint to that perspective, focused on the need for well-established Christian principles such as humility, faith, love, service, and salvation through the atonement of Christ—salvation immediately available, even to those not perfect in behavior and thought.

Anderson asserts that the various travelogues in Mosiah reflect the travels in Joseph's early life. Alvin is represented as Abinadi, a good man who dies at the hands of the wicked (or incompetent). Joseph appears in the heroic characters Alma, Alma the Younger, and Ammon. In an interesting twist, Anderson cites the characterization of Alma the Younger as Joseph Smith's "striking portrait, in psychological terms, of himself before his conversion" (p. 139). He then quotes the passage describing Alma as wicked, idolatrous, flattering the people, hindering the church, stealing hearts, and causing dissension. He also points out that one early account of Joseph's initial vision mentioned an angel, not the Father and Son. Although Anderson denies that either type of vision took place, he considers this evidence that the story was later changed. I was curious that he did not continue the parallel of Alma and Joseph, since it would lead to the conclusion that Joseph, like Alma, experienced a dramatic and authentically life-changing conversion.

He describes the incident with Ammon as "phallic narcissism" (p. 145): a daring, "counterphobic," and omnipotent image of oneself (p. 146). Characters in the story include Isaac Hale as King Lamoni, Emma as Abish, Emma's brothers as the thieves, and Joseph's deceased son as the Anti-Nephi-Lehies. Other incidents from Alma include the encounter with Nehor (the death of Alvin at the hands of an incompetent physician), Ammon's boasting ("exaggerated, bizarre euphoria" [p. 154], perhaps representing hypomania), Alma's longing to be an angel ("Smith's confession that his grandiose view is genuinely shaken" [p. 155]), the sermon to Corianton on adultery (the condemnation of adultery means that he committed it), the Ram-eumptom (his rejection by Protestants), Alma's sermon on faith (the death of Joseph's son), quotations from Zenock (whose frequent references to "son" suggest the death of Joseph's firstborn), and many wars (Joseph's "retaliatory rage" [p. 155] at the humiliation of the death of his son), with the number and violence of the wars reflecting "a shocking level of retaliatory bitterness" (p. 162). I did not find these interpretations to be particularly persuasive, although I thought

some of Anderson's discussion of Joseph's relationship with the Hale family was rather interesting.

Korihor Reprieved

The story of Korihor deserves special attention because it parallels so closely the argument offered throughout Anderson's book. He suggests that the Korihor incident is an attempt by Joseph to divert himself from his anguish and represents his "continued struggle with fate or the existence of God" (p. 156). He paraphrases Korihor at length:

You people are unnecessarily tied down by your religious beliefs. Why are you waiting for Christ? No one can foretell the future. The prophecies you believe in are foolish traditions only. What assurance do you have of their truth? You can't know that Christ will come. The idea of a remission of sins is the effect of a mental illness brought on by the traditions of your fathers. These traditions are not true. Further the idea of an atonement is unreasonable, for each man is responsible for himself and the results of his life are his own doing. If a man becomes prosperous, it is because of his self-discipline, intellect, and strength. Whatever a man does is no crime. . . .

I don't teach tradition as fact and don't like seeing people tied down unnecessarily by illusion. You do these ancient ordinances and rituals to gain control over the people, keep them in ignorance, and keep them suppressed. This is not emotional freedom but bondage. You don't know those ancient prophecies are true, and it is unreasonable to blame these people for the sin committed by a parent in the Garden of Eden. No child should be blamed for what a parent does. You say Christ shall come to make this right. But you don't know Christ will come. You say he will be slain for the sins of the world, and thereby you lead this people after foolish traditions for your own ends. You keep them in bondage so you

can glut yourselves with their work, and they dare not be assertive or enjoy their rights or enjoy their own possessions lest they offend you, your traditions, whims, dreams, visions, and pretended mysteries, and your unknown God—a being they have never seen or known, which never was nor ever will be. (p. 156)

Anderson's response to this passage is threefold. First, he posits that this represents Joseph's own questions about the existence of God, especially as he grapples yet again with the death of his son. Second, he gives it whole-hearted personal endorsement, declaring Korihor's arguments "almost unanswerably strong" (p. 157). Indeed, this message parallels the core attitude of the Enlightenment, a philosophical stream in which Anderson unambiguously places himself. Although Anderson fails to mention this, it is also the standard line of traditional psychoanalysis, which has a long history of open hostility to religion as antithetical to personal growth and fully independent functioning. He notes that the resolution of the episode in Alma is God's "punishing violence" (p. 158), rather than a more philosophically satisfying counterargument. Finally, he comments on the casual violation of Korihor's freedom of speech, a pattern that Joseph repeated, of which the "destruction of the *Nauvoo Expositor* in 1844 is only the most conspicuous, and most deadly, example" (pp. 157–58).

In his endorsement of Korihor's position, Anderson misses two crucial points in the story. The first is that the most appropriate response to a reasoned argument against the existence of spiritual experience as a valid determinant of personal values and world view is not rhetorical, but experiential. Those attacked by such argument will never be convinced, because for all the eloquent contentions made against their position, they have personal experience to the contrary. They can respond by sharing their personal knowledge, or, more convincingly, they can invite their opponent to gain the same experience. Neither of these would work with Korihor because he had already witnessed the reality of the spiritual world and still de-

nied it. There is not much that can be done by discussion or experimentation with an opponent who looks at the sun and denies that it shines.

Alma and Nineteenth-Century Politics

The latter chapters of *Alma* and most of *Helaman*, Anderson suggests, represent Joseph's narcissistic black-and-white thinking, personal immaturity, and inability to "handle complex feelings" (p. 174). These chapters describe his regression to a child's view of the world (hence the invincible sons of *Helaman*, whose confidence in their mothers' faith "is, theologically, nonsensical" [p. 184]) and probably represents Lucy's intervention with the doctors to save Joseph's leg.

I found these associations particularly weak. Anderson recognizes this and lamely responds "that a theory has only to be better than the alternative(s) it seeks to replace, not completely satisfactory in all respects" (p. 138). In this case, apparently any theory that excludes the supernatural is superior to any theory that includes it.

In a dramatic shift of perspective, Anderson speculates that the conflict between Moroni and the king-men represents the national election of 1824, in which the aristocratic John Quincy Adams conspired with Henry Clay to steal the election from the populist Andrew Jackson. Jackson's hickory poles were the image co-opted as Moroni's title of liberty. The basis for this jump from intrapsychic to national issues was the appearance in the narrative of the Lamanite queen: "I find the queen's presence to be strong circumstantial evidence that Smith was writing out sectional rivalries and national dissensions as part of his darkest conflicts" (p. 178)—a breathtaking leap. The queen is purported to represent Rachel Jackson, who died four years later, following Andrew Jackson's election.

Inevitably, the Gadianton robbers are ascribed to Freemasons and the national anti-Masonic hysteria following the 1826 disappearance of William Morgan and the publication of his exposé of Masonic rites the following year. Interestingly, although Anderson's review of national politics at this time correctly points out that Andrew Jackson

was the high-ranking Mason and John Quincy Adams aligned himself with the anti-Masons, he offers no resolution of the previous image of Jackson as the champion of liberty and Adams as the conspirator.

Regarding Joseph Smith (and by extension, his followers), however, Anderson's opinion is clear:

As a psychiatrist, I am most struck by what this narrative of secret combinations and compensatory power suggests about Smith's psyche. Any patient who talks so incessantly about an evil hidden brotherhood is revealing an unending conflict. What the patient opposes is the underside of the conflict, in this case recognizing the advantages of such secret oaths and contracts in binding people together, even illicitly. Tellingly, in the Nephite narrative, the evil powers are steadily gaining, corroding from within. And the compensatory fantasy of "good" within this context of extreme evil is absolute power.

As I read this scenario, Smith feels intensely envious of others and their possessions; he declared that the desire for possessions is evil, yet repeatedly and secretly tries to obtain "gain," even by illicit means. Ultimately he attempts to deal with his envy, not by acceptance and humility, but by asserting absolute God-given omnipotence. Psychologically speaking, this story of moral conflict and the eventual ascendancy of secret evil is a troubling prediction that sadly is borne out by Smith's future. Within a few years, he declares all marriages void except those performed by the Mormon priesthood; he not only stepped outside the religious and legal bounds of monogamy, but also took other men's wives as his own. Within ten years Mormonism gave rise to the Danites, a secret organization that began with self-protection and loyalty to Mormon priesthood leaders, whether "right or wrong," and ended with vigilantism. Lying, control of judges, and bloc voting contributed to violent expulsion from Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois. The Mormons demonstrated repeatedly that they could not live with anyone, including those who originally welcomed them with Christian kindness. The

Mormon temple ceremony of the early 1840s eventually included secret oaths and covenants of obedience that had their counterpart in Masonic oaths, including covenants to kill or be killed if secrets were divulged, and an oath of vengeance that remained part of the ceremony for almost 100 years. Smith's secret political Council of Fifty, which crowned him president, high priest, and king, was resolved to make him president of the United States or, failing that, to establish a new Mormon empire in the West. These secret oaths re-emerged as an element at Mountain Meadows in 1857 where over 100 non-Mormon men, women, and children were murdered. Then, united by oaths and fear of retaliation from within the church, the Mormons delivered up a single scapegoat and successfully blocked U.S. territorial courts from delivering justice. Mormonism became America's most despised religion. (pp. 193–94)

Although this passage is lengthier than most others on this subject, it is representative of Anderson's view not only of Joseph Smith, but of the faith he founded. Mention of the Mountain Meadows Massacre, irrelevant to a study of the origin of the Book of Mormon, alerts us to the possibility that the author's motives may be other than academic. Anderson's initial scholarly, detached demeanor slips into this type of invective with increasing frequency through the course of the book, eventually leaving the impression that it was more facade than fact.

The juxtaposition of Anderson's idealized and devalued views of Mormons is especially striking. On the one hand, he denounces them as having "demonstrated repeatedly that they could not live with anyone" and as "America's most despised religion" (p. 194). Yet only a few pages later, he characterizes their lives as "exemplary" (p. 212). I was puzzled by his apparent lack of awareness of the discrepancy between these dichotomous views and his inability to accept the inevitable ambiguity of any biographical history.

Regarding the similarity between the Gadianton robbers and Freemasons, there is unquestionably a parallel. On the other hand,

the last century has demonstrated the destructive potential of secret combinations in a remarkable variety of contexts, including organized crime, Third World kleptocracies, inner-city street gangs, drug cabals, and, most recently, international terrorists. The remarkable prescience of these passages contrasts sharply with the small and parochial view that this was merely a response to local fear of Freemasons.²¹

Progressive Deterioration

In the early chapters of 3 Nephi, Anderson describes Joseph as moving toward total personality disintegration. Only now does it become clear why the ministry of Christ was discussed earlier: it is not reflective of such chaotic disintegration. I found this section of the work particularly unconvincing, and several interesting connections made earlier seemed to unravel with these increasingly random associations.

Anderson suggests that the book of Ether is the story of the dictation of the Book of Mormon itself, beginning with the use of magic and filled with unending conflict and final destruction. This he takes as evidence of profound dysfunction in the Smith family. The account of the final battle, because it mentions wine and swords, “signals yet another battle between Smith and his surgeon” (p. 210).

Final Chaos

The similarity in the ages of Mormon and Joseph Smith during pivotal events in their lives suggests that Mormon “is yet another surrogate for Smith” (p. 201). Anderson sees the graphic description of the final battle (Mormon 4:10–12) in personal terms: “To a psychiatrist, this passage communicates that Smith’s internal morality and personal ethics, battered by fury ever since the death of his son, are giving way, as represented by the Nephite capitulation to evil and their inability to withstand the Lamanites” (pp. 202–3).

21. See Daniel C. Peterson, “Notes on ‘Gadianton Masonry,’” in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 174–224.

Finally, the Book of Moroni, with its intermingled chapters of faith and destruction, is described in extreme terms. In Mormon's last letter,

Smith directly expresses the oral rage of a child raised in deprivation, deception, and trauma. . . . As I read this passage [Moroni 9:8–10], I hear oral rage behind narcissism, mixed with the fever, thirst, and torture of childhood surgery. It is as though, even as his "grandiose self" forms into a prophet and church president, the dangerous underside of his psychological world erupts to the surface one final time. (pp. 213–14)

The theological passages of Moroni, in contrast, are totally dismissed: "It is a conundrum that Smith erects a message of goodness on top of coercion, deceit, destruction, and hatred. I, no doubt like many readers, see the goodness as superficial" (p. 213). This is indeed a conundrum. For those readers who see these closing theological teachings as both genuine and good, the assertion that a description of "coercion, deceit, destruction, and hatred" (p. 213) must represent Joseph Smith's personal projection falls rather flat.

The Narcissistic Mirror

In his final chapter, Anderson reiterates many of the themes that appear repeatedly through the book, mostly those regarding Joseph's narcissism and deceitfulness. He introduces a more interesting topic, however, with a nice discussion of the role of the Book of Mormon in the common people's reaction to the Enlightenment: the Great Awakening. Although I do not agree with the assertion that this explains the origin of the book, I think it does help account for the large number of people who embraced both the book and its associated faith.

He follows this with a discussion of the consequences of narcissistic personality disorder for interpersonal relationships, in this case between a leader and his followers. He also makes observations on the role of "mirroring." Though once heretical in psychoanalytic theory, this interpersonal dynamic has since gained acceptance. Simply stated,

the leader sees his importance in the role granted him by his followers and strives to either become, or appear to be, what they believe him to be. In this case, Anderson sees Joseph Smith as trapped by his followers' expectations of him and by a growing web of deceit to maintain the image that he actually was what they desperately wanted him to be.

Although Anderson does not mention it, mirroring need not be a pathological process. It was originally proposed as the route to a healthy self-image when the child saw his or her importance in the eyes of a parent. It is only considered pathological when it involves deception and exploitation. Anderson clearly sees Joseph Smith in the latter category. Despite that, he cannot overlook yet another obvious point, that the Book of Mormon is "a permanent touchstone to the infinite" (p. 242). The inconsistency of a disturbed and depraved impostor writing a memoir of dream images from his oedipal narcissistic conflicts and composing a work that speaks broadly to a large population of competent adults is never addressed. I find that inconsistency insurmountable.

The Method of Applied Psychoanalysis

Professional Apologetics

I suspect that my pointed critique of this book will be written off by its proponents as Mormon apologetics (p. xx). Although I do not find that term particularly offensive, it is not the "Mormon" faith I feel the need to defend. It has always stood, and continues to stand, on its own merits. It is instead the field of psychiatry and its relationship to psychoanalysis that require explanation. For the past forty years the field has worked steadily to regain the scientific footing it shared with the rest of medicine until the early part of the twentieth century. Psychoanalysis is now widely seen in the profession as a diversion from that pursuit, rather than the acme of psychiatric development.²² Works based entirely on psychoanalytic principles and as-

22. Shorter, *A History of Psychiatry*, 145–46.

sumptions lend little credibility to the scientific foundations of the field and do much to perpetuate unfortunate stereotypes.

Popular resistance to psychiatric diagnosis and care has been based on a number of issues, including the stigma associated with psychotic behavior, the sense of personal failure sometimes attached to mood disorders, and the fear that personal values and beliefs would be questioned or criticized by the therapist. Although this is much less of a problem now than in past decades, my experience as a Latter-day Saint psychiatrist suggests that those concerns continue and are at least as common in the LDS community as in society at large. I spent much of my early career attempting to reassure my religious compatriots that they had no need for such concerns, that the field was focused on the identification and treatment of specific psychopathology and harbored no fixed preconceptions about the nature or value of faith or religious practice. But this is not always the case, and a purely psychoanalytic perspective too often assumes the antiquated stance of psychiatry as fundamentally hostile to faith. The arbitrary designation within psychoanalysis of rational experience as superior to religious experience is unjustified. Are not the members of a community of faith more attentive to one another than those of a social club? Are there any books with as much impact on moral behavior as scripture? Is there any educational program, political policy, or social philosophy with as much power to transform lives as a single authentic religious experience?

Classical psychoanalysis is the last vestige of psychiatry to accept such narrow and outmoded notions. Mainstream contemporary psychiatry seeks to understand the role of religious belief and practice in the life of the individual, in parallel with other personal and cultural values. More recently, solid evidence has emerged in favor of religion as beneficial to physical and mental health.²³ Interestingly, the benefits are most pronounced for those with high “intrinsic religiosity,” that

23. Harold G. Koenig, Michael E. McCullough, and David B. Larson, *Handbook of Religion and Health* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

is, those who really believe and for whom that belief is important.²⁴ In contrast, those who approach religion as a social and philosophical exercise enjoy limited benefits. In the face of these developments, a brief consideration of the history and perspective of psychoanalysis is in order.

The Theory and Practice of Psychoanalysis

Psychoanalysis refers to both a psychological theory and a psychotherapeutic technique first comprehensively published by Sigmund Freud in his 1899 work, *The Interpretation of Dreams*²⁵ (the year 1900 was attached to the book for marketing reasons).²⁶ The theory of psychoanalysis was born of the idealized late nineteenth-century view of natural science as the route to all truth and described the unconscious mind in terms of drives, objects, and forces analogous to those of classical mechanics. These drives, it was postulated, seek expression, but when they run afoul of external constraints (e.g., social norms, parental disapproval, physical or emotional threats) or internal conflict (e.g., desecration of self-image, violation of values, competing drives), they must be modified or diverted. Failure to do so appropriately leads to predictable forms of psychopathology. Defenses were postulated as unconscious mechanisms to prevent unacceptable drives or impulses from reaching consciousness or behavioral expression.

Psychoanalytic therapy preceded and gave rise to the theory. Freud and others noted that certain patients with neurological and other complaints improved when given the opportunity to express themselves (initially through hypnosis and later through free association—the uninhibited thought stream of a conscious patient). Freud was an exceptional observer and described specific patterns of thought,

24. Ibid., 127–28, 148–49, 310.

25. Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Delran, N.J.: Gryphon Editions, 1993).

26. Eric T. Carlson, *The Interpretation of Dreams: Notes from the Editors* (Delran, N.J.: Gryphon Editions, 1993), 3–4.

feeling, and experience expressed through free association. Among the patterns he noted were a preponderance of sexual themes and a variety of childhood traumas, often related to the same events. Freud concluded that many of these traumatic sexual experiences were actually childhood fantasies, leading to his conceptualization of a complex theory of psychosexual development, including discrete stages (oral, anal, genital, etc.), each with a characteristic conflict to be resolved and characteristic problems associated with developmental failures.

By far the most important of these, in Freud's view, was the oedipal conflict, beginning with attachment to the mother, then recognition of the father as a threat to that relationship, and finally a reconciliation of these competing issues. Resolution of the oedipal conflict was seen as essential to emotional maturation, and its failure was a prescription for psychological dysfunction.

Freud recognized that these descriptions were metaphorical but believed that they had independently verifiable counterparts within the brain that would one day be identified. In that sense, he believed that he had "discovered," not merely described, the workings of the unconscious mind. Such findings still await neurobiological confirmation. Freud was nevertheless rigid in his adherence to his theory and tolerated no deviation from psychoanalytic orthodoxy.

It should be noted here that the problem with psychoanalysis was not its attempt to observe and characterize purely subjective experience. In fact, this is done routinely. Depression is both debilitating and treatable, so it is not surprising that mental health professionals have gained great skill in recognizing and even quantifying this experience. In addition, researchers in the field have accumulated a vast body of highly reproducible data on the subject. Although some of this is based on observable correlates, such as sleep disturbance or loss of appetite, it is primarily the subjective experience that is of interest and has been studied. Other subjective experiences, such as being in love, have not been studied with the same scrutiny, largely because the utility of doing so is limited (being in love may occasionally be debilitating, but it is rarely treatable, in my experience).

Instead, psychoanalysts saw *rationality* as an antidote to the primitive and potentially destructive drives that, left unmodulated by internal defense or external constraint, would make savages of us all. The assumption that all drives are primitive and utterly self-serving leads to the unfortunate conclusion that all “true” motives are negative and shameful. Anderson gives a wonderful example of exactly this assumption in action. “Every therapist with psychodynamic experience has had the experience of proposing a painful interpretation, only to have the patient exclaim, ‘No!’ break into sobs, and correct the therapist with even a more painful truth” (p. xxxi). This unfortunate paradigm was finally countered by the humanist school, which saw at least some innate drives as pointing toward mature adulthood.

Psychoanalysis and Religion

In this context, one of Freud’s primary goals with psychoanalytic theory was the rejection of religion as a legitimate expression of human experience. His anointed successor, Carl G. Jung, who vehemently disagreed on this point, cited this issue as the basis for his contentious split with Freud. He related a particularly striking example of Freud’s attitude in this regard:

I can still recall vividly how Freud said to me, “My dear Jung, promise me never to abandon the sexual theory. That is the most essential thing of all. You see, we must make a dogma of it, an unshakable bulwark.” He said that to me with great emotion, in the tone of a father saying, “And promise me this one thing, my dear son: that you will go to church every Sunday.” In some astonishment I asked him, “A bulwark—against what?” To which he replied, “Against the black tide of mud”—and here he hesitated for a moment, then added—“of occultism.” First of all, it was the words “bulwark” and “dogma” that alarmed me; for a dogma, that is to say, an undisputable confession of faith, is set up only when the aim is to suppress doubts once and for all. But that no

longer has anything to do with scientific judgment; only with a personal power drive.

This was the thing that struck at the heart of our friendship. I knew that I would never be able to accept such an attitude. What Freud seemed to mean by "occultism" was virtually everything that philosophy and religion, including the rising contemporary science of parapsychology, had learned about the psyche. To me the sexual theory was just as occult, that is to say, just as unproven an hypothesis, as many other speculative views. As I saw it, a scientific truth was a hypothesis which might be adequate for the moment but was not to be preserved as an article of faith for all time.²⁷

In addition to the counter-evolutionary social implications of surrender to the occult, Freud believed that religion harmed the individual by blocking personal growth and fully independent functioning. This position continues to be championed by many current psychoanalysts.

Freud's opposition to religion is curious. There is nothing in psychoanalytic theory to preclude religious phenomena, either as purely intrapsychic or authentic perceptual experience. Other entirely subjective phenomena were acceptable to the theory, which did not reject cognitive, emotional, esthetic, or interpersonal experience as illegitimate or necessarily pathological. Freud's painful experience of European anti-Semitism has often been cited as the basis for this attitude and may well be a sufficient explanation.

Psychoanalysis as Science

Freud had a second blind spot, at the other end of the positivist spectrum. Although he touted psychoanalysis as science, he limited his scientific inquiry to observation, categorization, and hypothesis

27. Carl G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (Glasgow: Collins Sons, 1967), 173–74.

generation. These are important first steps in the acquisition of empirically derived knowledge but must be supplemented with hypothesis testing and modification.

The origin of a hypothesis is observation, followed by categorization and measurement. The face validity of a hypothesis is its ability to describe (and occasionally explain) existing observations. The true validity of the hypothesis, however, is its power to predict new observations. Psychoanalytic theory is very strong in its ability to describe observations but lacks the capacity to accurately predict what intrapsychic conflicts will emerge, how they will be manifested, what defenses will be brought to bear, what resolution will be sought, and what pathology will erupt if the conflicts fail of resolution.

Both Freud and his modern adherents have been remarkably resistant to the testing of psychoanalytic hypotheses. Anderson echoes the response of psychoanalytic apologists and dismisses this dearth of essential studies, saying that they would be difficult and unethical (p. 29). This is clearly not true; excellent data have been gathered on other theories of development despite methodological difficulties and without ethical compromise. Even today, the gold standard of psychoanalytic validation is the vigor with which heads nod in professional meetings where theoretical papers are read.

The imprimatur of science requires more, and contemporary psychiatry has long since moved on. Taking elements of widely varied perspectives on individual development and psychopathology, the field readily incorporates neurobiological, behavioral, humanist, and other approaches that prove themselves to be theoretically or clinically valid. Psychoanalysis is among these contributors but has no unique capacity to explain, predict, or modify development or psychopathology.²⁸

Psychoanalysis in Contemporary Psychiatry

Psychoanalysis has consequently slipped from its ascendancy in the American psychiatry of the 1950s. Specific landmarks are telling.

28. An excellent, comprehensive critique of psychoanalysis as science is found in Frederick Crews, *Skeptical Engagements* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

Among these was the decision in the 1980 edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III)* to exclude all psychoanalytic terminology and assumptions in favor of a symptomatic approach to mental disorders. This move had the desired consequence of strengthening the reliability of diagnoses, that is, the probability that different observers would categorize the same phenomenon in the same way. This greatly facilitated empirical studies and accelerated the pace of research in the field.

Of note in Anderson's study is his juxtaposition of the validated definitions of the current edition of the manual, *DSM-IV*, with speculative psychoanalytic descriptions of the same phenomena, particularly narcissism. Readers unfamiliar with the workings of mental health research may not recognize that *DSM-IV* is the standard of the profession, while the psychoanalytic writing is supported by little validating evidence and enjoys limited acceptance.

Psychoanalysts, threatened with extinction by irrelevance, made a number of desirable adaptations. First, they made peace with the formerly heretical schools of object relations, self-psychology, and others. Second, they abandoned their long-standing refusal to admit psychologists, social workers, and other mental health professionals to psychoanalytic training. Third, they began to acknowledge that psychoanalysis is applicable to a fairly limited range of psychopathology and has no special capacity to bring about therapeutic benefit. Finally, they acknowledged the efficacy of biological and behavioral approaches in the treatment of psychopathology. In so doing, they allowed their long-standing position that only psychoanalysis truly addressed the underlying conflicts at the heart of most psychiatric disorders to take its rightful place among the relics of history.

In modern psychiatric training, psychoanalysis serves two major functions, both practical. First, psychoanalysts remain masterful observers, and their skill in this regard is an essential tool to be passed on to psychiatrists of all perspectives. Second, many psychoanalytic concepts have value in psychiatry because they provide useful categories in which to organize observations, even in the absence of widespread acceptance of their theoretical underpinnings. Psychiatrists casually speak of ego strength, defenses, transference, superego,

and so forth, not because they accept the theory that lies behind these concepts, but because of their utility in organizing specific observations.

Applied Psychoanalysis

Psychoanalysis has a unique perspective to offer the writing of biography and the analysis of history, but that perspective is philosophical, not scientific. In the absence of validated studies of this method and its findings, it should be considered in the same category as literary criticism, philosophical debate, or political analysis. These are all useful pursuits, but they are recognized as highly subjective and not bolstered by verifiable empirical data.

Applied psychoanalysis is particularly weak in this regard. In working with individual patients, the psychoanalyst can at least test a specific interpretation by presenting it to the patient and observing the response. Not so in applied psychoanalysis. A subject's behavior may be interpreted from the psychoanalytic perspective in light of known life experiences, and in some cases useful insights may result. Similarly, it may occasionally be possible to "read back" from existing biographical accounts or creative works to understand something of the subject's early experience. But the limitations on these techniques must be strictly observed. This approach is not based on empirical data, and its hypotheses cannot be empirically tested.

For applied psychoanalysis to make a legitimate contribution to the writing of history or biography, three major problems must be avoided. First, the internal consistency of psychoanalytic interpretations may not be cited as evidence for the validity of this point of view. They may lead to specific insights, but those insights must stand on their own, subject to the same critical analysis as insights from any other historical or biographical model. The fact that a coherent story can be told does not mean that the story is accurate.

Second, care must be taken to avoid circular arguments. It is easy to postulate a particular event in the subject's life, find something consistent with it in the subject's later work, and then cite that as evi-

dence that the original event actually took place. There is no basis for acceptance of such arguments.

Third, it is impossible to avoid the projection of the analyst's preconceptions and prejudices into these interpretations. It is partially for this reason that psychoanalytic trainees are required to undergo personal analysis to bring to light their own intrapsychic conflicts. In practice, this training analysis serves more the function of acculturation than intrapsychic peacemaking, and significant personal issues invariably remain or arise during the continued course of life.

Despite his clear acknowledgment of the first two dangers, Anderson is prone to both faults. He repeatedly suggests that his "scientific" approach has face validity because he is able to make internally consistent interpretations. Further, he cites problems in Joseph Smith's early life, many of them questionable (e.g., Joseph's humiliation at the death of his firstborn, Lucy's possible premarital pregnancy), as evidence that he *would* fraudulently create a religious text. He then interprets elements of the Book of Mormon as products of those early problems and cites passages of the Book of Mormon as evidence that the family dysfunction actually occurred. Note this confessional passage in his discussion of the final chapters of Ether:

This very dark view of Joseph Smith's early infancy and childhood is admittedly extreme speculation, and there is no historical documentation of such emotional deprivation from his mother's history that would justify such furious hatred in the story. (Reports of the family's economic and social inferiority and dysfunction do come from later outside antagonistic testimonies which are rejected by devout Mormonism.) But with our present state of naturalistic (psychological) knowledge, this reading from the Book of Mormon back into Joseph's life may be the closest we can get to what happened. (p. 212)

I would suggest that "the closest we can get to what happened" is to read what Joseph and Lucy Mack Smith said happened. Their accounts

are remarkably similar and describe the family in very different and more positive terms than does Anderson's. This more objective view of Joseph's life shows only passing similarity to the overall message of the Book of Mormon, suggesting against a contemporary origin for the book.

The third problem was not even acknowledged in the work. Anderson repeatedly makes interpretations based on his preconceptions and personal perspective, not the available evidence. He attempts to cover many of these interpretations with professional authority, using phrases such as "Psychiatrists agree that . . ." and "Speaking as a psychiatrist . . ." I tallied more than two dozen such references before I grew bored with the exercise; I agreed with only a handful of them.

Alternative Views

The bankruptcy of the notion that a story's plausibility is evidence of its validity is easily demonstrated. As I read Anderson's account of the "Sword of Laban" incident, I allowed myself to associate freely on the subject of Laman and Lemuel. My thoughts quickly turned to my own childhood and the relationships within my family. Like Nephi at the time of the story, I was one of four children, but as I allowed the emotional content of the story to carry my associations forward, I immediately thought of a particularly toxic dyad that periodically invaded my home. There was in the neighborhood a young bully, whose name bears striking phonetic and anagrammic similarity to both Laman and Laban, who, though a year his senior, frequently played with my older brother. My relationship with that brother (who went on to live a life more akin to that of Nephi than Laman or Lemuel) was only occasionally marred by the usual "sibling rivalries" when the neighbor was not present, but when they were together, I was completely at their mercy (as Nephi was with Laman and Lemuel). On one occasion when I was somewhere between five and seven years old, this "Laman/Laban" had me so frightened that I fled from

him through the house and into the darkened garage. Rounding a turn, I suddenly slipped and fell against the sharp corner of the furnace, cutting my forehead to the bone and causing a terrifying fountain of blood that covered nearly my entire field of vision. Over the next few hours, as I received maternal and professional ministrations, I imagined myself dying of this injury, but I also imagined growing large and powerful enough to defend myself and inflict the same type of injury on him. In fact, I knew that there was a large hunting knife in the garage, not far from the furnace, with which I could maim or even behead him. I had no trouble, as I reflected on this incident, imagining it giving rise to the sword of Laban story. From a psychoanalytic standpoint, the advantage of my splitting this malefactor into two characters was obvious; I could kill him as Laban, then return home with a healthy, but humbled, Laman in tow. I thought of similar personal incidents that could relate to the broken bow (bows had special significance in my family), frequent wanderings in the wilderness, the storm at sea, Alma's conversion, and other Book of Mormon stories.

To the best of my knowledge, I have never been accused of writing the Book of Mormon, so what are these stories doing there? In contrast to the suggestion that these stories are reworkings of Joseph Smith's early life, they seem to represent more universal types. Certainly the heroes of the Book of Mormon invite readers to imagine themselves as such grand and noble characters. These are powerful and useful images, not only for young people in need of ideals as they mature, but for everyone seeking to find within themselves the seeds of nobility and heroism. The idealized way the characters are portrayed is tacit recognition that the authors intended them to be seen exactly this way. Similarly, the clarity with which the villains are portrayed, rather than reflecting the black-and-white thinking of the narcissist, may be the authors' desire to highlight the contrasting elements of good and evil, the existence of which is fundamental to religious literature. We may occasionally turn to Ecclesiastes to assure ourselves that the ambiguities of life are common, but when faced

with moral choices, we find the Ten Commandments and Beatitudes far more helpful.

I would raise a similar argument regarding the detailed and graphic description of war. I did not see these as evidence of “narcissistic rage” (p. 141) but as an unusually candid guide for the faithful in times of war. In fact, most of the wars in the Book of Mormon are glossed over, with only passing mention that they occurred and a few statistics on each. A few, however, are described in detail. The first of these, in Alma 46–62, deals with the complex issues of citizens’ and soldiers’ responsibilities in time of war, critical information for those many generations who have had to face some form of warfare during the course of life. Interestingly, these passages do not contain many black-and-white answers. Some good citizens were pacifists and enjoyed the blessings of God. Their children went to war and vigorously took the lives of their enemies but also enjoyed the blessings of God. One group of soldiers was miraculously preserved. Another equally righteous and faithful group was called upon to give up their lives. To the religiously attuned citizen facing a spectrum of societal demands and moral issues in deadly conflicts ranging from World War II to Vietnam, these passages provide essential material. The second detailed account of warfare, in Mormon 2–6 and Moroni 9, is more graphic in its description of the atrocities of war, while simultaneously highlighting the endpoint of a society that willfully rejects all things religious, themes also addressed in Ether 13–15.

Faith and Its Proofs

Because Anderson so frequently brings this up, I would like to comment on the assertion that the Book of Mormon suffers from a lack of archaeological evidence to bolster its standing. Anderson repeatedly states that there is an absolute paucity of physical evidence for the Book of Mormon and that it should be rejected on that basis. I will leave it to the folks at FARMS to address the issue of the existence of such data, and focus instead on the assumption that such evidence is necessary to the development of faith and testimony.

Some years ago, while interviewing for entry into a graduate program in biochemistry, I was challenged by the chairman of the department with the following situation. A Latter-day Saint colleague of his had declared moot the study of genetic types (such studies were in a very primitive state back then) of native American peoples to determine if they were of Semitic origin, because the outcome was a foregone conclusion. He asked my opinion on the matter. Anxious for admission to the program, I mumbled something about how exciting it would be to do just such an experiment. As I have reflected on that issue, I have concluded that from one perspective his colleague was right—the results are moot, not because the answer is known, but because it is irrelevant. Imagine that I had done the experiment—and found no relationship. Would my faith in the Book of Mormon be shattered? No, my faith was not based on that type of evidence and would not have been seriously affected (and rightfully so; the technology in use twenty-five years ago is no longer considered valid). On the other hand, if the results had shown a clear connection between those peoples, would that chairman have presented himself for baptism?

What type of evidence does exist for the Book of Mormon? Anderson answers this question quite satisfactorily. “It is his [Joseph Smith’s] followers’ exemplary lives that counterbalance his miraculous story and make it believable. In my professional judgment, their lives are the sole ‘objective’ evidence for the validity of the Book of Mormon” (p. 212). Even in the absence of any other evidence, this would be compelling. The power to deeply and permanently change lives is the Holy Grail of psychotherapy, yet here is a single volume able to do just that. As it happens, the story is also bolstered by the subjective experience of millions of adherents. These two considerations remain untouched by Anderson’s critique.

Regarding acceptance of the Book of Mormon, Anderson again comes to our aid with a pertinent observation. “My position is that belief in the Book of Mormon is an act of faith, not the result of scientific or academic inquiry” (p. 138). Was there some question about

this? This is precisely the function of the Book of Mormon. It is the starting point for a religious journey that will include both conceptual and experiential elements. The journey requires the acquisition of authentic, personal spiritual experience. For many people, the first such experience comes in response to a sincere inquiry regarding the Book of Mormon. Its reliability is confirmed by the comparable experiences of others and by periodic renewal. Its validity is attested by the qualitative changes wrought in the life of the individual. It is highly reproducible among different observers, hence the specific instructions and promise in Moroni 10:4–5 and the constant encouragement from church leaders to seek such experience. It is noteworthy that it is those leaders, not Mormonism's detractors, who recommend that the experiment be tried.

Conclusion

The method of psychoanalysis—long on concept, short on data—provides but one perspective on history and has no special validity in the interpretation of biographical data. This study is severely flawed in its initial assumptions that spiritual phenomena cannot be studied, that applied psychoanalysis has scientific credibility, and that devout Mormon historical perspectives lack veracity. These assumptions lead to a decided and unjustified bias in the selection and interpretation of historical sources. The resulting black-and-white appraisal of Joseph Smith is inconsistent with the complexity of his character and his history. This book is little more than a repetitious compilation of the same antagonistic histories we have already seen, dressed in grand new trappings. But on close inspection, the emperor has no clothes. I found this book disappointing in every regard, all the more so because of the inappropriate implication of professional authority attached to it. As I noted at the outset, those whose view of Mormonism tends to the negative, sensational, and critical will undoubtedly be attracted to this work. More objective readers will find little here of interest.

VAN WAGONER'S *SIDNEY RIGDON*: A PORTRAIT OF BIOGRAPHICAL EXCESS

Howard K. Harper, Steven C. Harper, and David P. Harper

Richard Van Wagoner's award-winning biography, *Sidney Rigdon: A Portrait of Religious Excess*, is undoubtedly the best to date. It argues accurately that Rigdon played a crucial role in the development of early Mormonism and that his contribution was diminished in the wake of his unsuccessful bid to shoulder Mormon leadership after the martyrdom of Joseph Smith. Alas, though, this much-needed treatment of Rigdon is also fundamentally, not simply tangentially, defective. The book paints an inaccurate portrait of Sidney Rigdon, based largely on a mistaken clinical diagnosis. This Rigdon becomes a tool for criticizing modern Mormonism. One need not read all the way to his epilogue to recognize Van Wagoner's agenda, but it is most clearly stated there. He intends to expose the "warts and double chins of religious leaders" and "warns all of us that we must ultimately think for ourselves rather than surrender decision-making to others, especially to those who dictate what God would have us do" (pp. x, 457–58). In this way Van Wagoner casts Sidney Rigdon as an object lesson calculated to censure modern Mormons for what his related *Journal of Mormon History* essay calls "group gullibility."¹ To that end, Van Wagoner's biography of Rigdon employs

1. Richard S. Van Wagoner, "Sidney and Me," *Journal of Mormon History* 22/2 (1996): 151.

Review of Richard S. Van Wagoner. *Sidney Rigdon: A Portrait of Religious Excess*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994. x + 493 pp., with appendixes and index. \$28.95.

a reductionist psychological approach akin to what Gary Bergera describes as a "dogmatic use of theories of personality,"² achieving something similar to what historian Robert Brugger calls "clinical profiles promenading as biography" and psychologist Alan Elms terms "pathography."³

Van Wagoner thinks of Sidney Rigdon as "a biographer's dream" (p. x), presumably because of Rigdon's rich, unusual life and his significant contributions to a remarkable religious movement. But Rigdon is also a biographer's nightmare. Rigdon biographers must deal with a shortage of evidence. Van Wagoner addresses that problem by diagnosing Rigdon with the bipolar disorder commonly called manic-depression. Based on bits of evidence described as "ample," Van Wagoner fleshes out Rigdon's personality using an "inventory of symptoms taken from the *Diagnosical and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*," essentially concluding that because Rigdon had the disorder, he must have had its symptoms (p. 117). Complicating the matter, he conflates manic-depressive disorder with "madness," which he uses synonymously with "religious excess." This abuses biography in two ways. First, available evidence does not allow a clinical diagnosis of manic-depressive disorder. Second, persons with bipolar disorders like manic-depression should not be passed off as mad. Persons who suffer manic-depression are afflicted by a disorder of internal etiology that can be debilitating but also remarkably creative. Manic-depression does not necessarily make one's religiosity pathological, though Van Wagoner uses it to portray Rigdon so. Rather than appreciating the complexity of a life, this portrait of religious excess is shallow, caricaturing Rigdon's long, varied life in a clinical profile. That profile is inaccurate, a misdiagnosis of a man long since dead.⁴

2. Gary James Bergera, "Toward 'Psychologically Informed' Mormon History and Biography," *Sunstone*, December 1991, 29.

3. Robert J. Brugger, review of *Shrinking History: On Freud and the Failure of Psychohistory*, by David E. Stannard, *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 38/1 (1981): 131. Alan C. Elms, *Uncovering Lives: The Uneasy Alliance of Biography and Psychology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 9.

4. Joseph Smith pathographer Fawn Brodie paused momentarily to note the "difficulties of clinical diagnosis of a man long since dead." Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows*

Sidney Rigdon: A Portrait of Religious Excess is a compounding of errors calculated to reprove perceived anti-intellectualism in "modern Mormons."⁵ It may, however, be more misleading than imperfect religious leaders with unexposed warts and double chins.

This volume misled a highly regarded historian. John Brooke's review in the *Journal of American History* lauds Van Wagoner's "signal contributions" and accepts the reading of Rigdon's "mood swings, suggesting that they were a manic-depressive disorder caused by head injuries, first as a child and second when he and Joseph Smith were tarred and feathered by a mob in Ohio in 1832. Van Wagoner sees this disorder as the key to Rigdon's erratic performance."⁶ As Brooke naively notes, Van Wagoner makes his case for a manic-depressive Rigdon based on a childhood head injury (the incredible evidence of which will be treated hereafter). But manic-depression, by definition, cannot be caused by injuries. Mood disorders are only diagnosed when "it cannot be established that an organic factor [like injury or illness] initiated and maintained the disturbance."⁷ Rigdon suffered brain trauma on 24 March 1832. Manic-depression was not the cause of any mania or depression he experienced as a result of that.

Rigdon was dragged from his bed and across cold earth "by his heels . . . so high from the ground that he could not raise his head

My History (New York: Knopf, 1978), 419. Ronald W. Walker, "The Challenge and Craft of Mormon Biography," *BYU Studies* 22/2 (1982): 189, emphasizes this point: "It is difficult enough to pronounce a diagnosis with the patient emitting a stream of consciousness on the couch without being a biographer separated from a subject by time and distance."

5. Van Wagoner, "Sidney and Me," 151.

6. John Brooke, review of *Sidney Rigdon: A Portrait of Religious Excess*, by Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Journal of American History* 82/3 (1995): 1208. David Whittaker's review expressed concern at Van Wagoner's "description of religious faith as . . . mental illness." *Journal of Mormon History* 23/1 (1997): 192–93.

7. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 3rd ed., rev. (DSM III-R) (Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Association, 1987), 217, 228. Organic factors—meaning factors that are not part of a person's normal physiology—could include tumors, infectious agents, drugs, or head trauma. Since the publication of *Sidney Rigdon*, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 4th ed. (DSM IV) (Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Association, 1994), has been published; see 350–66 for relevant information.

from the rough, frozen surface.” The abuse left Rigdon unconscious and his “head highly inflamed” and led directly to a delirious state in which he threatened to kill both his wife and Joseph Smith.⁸ Rigdon’s *delirium typifies the actions neurologists and neuropsychologists expect to follow the trauma described. Indeed, people who experience such trauma generally respond aggressively as Rigdon did or fall into a passive, sluggish state. The recovery of aggressive ones is often more successful.*⁹ Rigdon’s “derangement, as documented by several witnesses, lasted much longer than after the mobbing in Hiram” (p. 127). Effects of the beating, including mood swings, may have lasted a lifetime. However, the mood swings that follow a traumatic brain injury are qualitatively different from manic-depressive illness and are not symptoms of that condition. There is scant evidence of dementia later in Rigdon’s life, but a sufferer of manic-depressive illness endures repeated manic episodes, which cannot be caused by head trauma.

To account for a manic-depressive Rigdon prior to 1832, Van Wagoner suggests that Rigdon’s presumed clinical illness or “debilitation”—said to have “*often* plunged him into the blackest despair or spiraled him into unrealistic ecstasy”—was “possibly precipitated by a childhood head injury” (pp. viii–ix, emphasis added). As a result, Rigdon’s “existence was overshadowed by melancholia, a metaphysical sadness best known today as Bipolar Affective Disorder or Manic-Depressive Illness” (p. viii).¹⁰ “When Sidney was seven years old,” Van

8. *History of the Church*, 1:265.

9. “Severely injured patients may display a pattern of acute confusional behavior shortly after return to consciousness that can last for days but rarely for more than several weeks. The confusional state is typically characterized by motor restlessness, agitation, incomprehension and incoherence, and uncooperativeness, including restive and even assaultive behavior.” Muriel D. Lezak, *Neuropsychological Assessment*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 189. “Aggressive behaviors, temper outbursts, and agitation are well-known consequences of cerebral injuries. These behaviors are the most difficult consequences of brain injury for caregivers to evaluate or manage and one of the most stressful for families to experience.” Thomas Galski et al., “Predicting Physical and Verbal Aggression on a Brain Trauma Unit,” *Archives of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation* 75/4 (1994): 380.

10. One cannot accurately diagnose manic-depressive illness unless it “cannot be established that an organic factor initiated and maintained the disturbance” (DSM III-R, 217).

Wagoner writes, "he had been thrown from a horse. His foot got caught in a stirrup and he was dragged some distance before being rescued" (p. 116). Loammi Rigdon, Sidney's younger brother who became a doctor, purportedly made the following statement—the only known one—about this incident and its effects on Sidney:

He received such a contusion of the brain as ever afterward seriously affected his character, and in some respects his conduct. His mental powers did not seem to be impaired, but the equilibrium of his intellectual exertions seems thereby to have been sadly affected. He still manifested great mental activity and power, but was to an equal degree inclined to run into wild and visionary views on almost every question. (pp. 116–17)

This is problematic evidence. Judging from the genealogical data provided by Van Wagoner, Loammi Rigdon must have been four years old at the time of Sidney's accident, making his memory of the event questionable. Moreover, Sidney and Loammi had minimal contact throughout their adult lives, so his statement is suspicious; perhaps it is an effort by Loammi or others to explain Sidney's embarrassing involvement in Mormonism or to discredit Mormonism via Sidney. This seems likely when it becomes clear that the source of the statement is an 1875 newspaper unsympathetic to Sidney Rigdon and Mormonism. By that time the four-year-old observer had lived nearly sixty-nine years and been dead for a decade.¹¹ Nevertheless, this is the "medical opinion" (p. 117) that bears the heavy burden of supporting

11. Loammi Rigdon died in 1865 (see pp. 11 n. 1, 13 n. 13). Loammi's purported statement appeared in the *Baptist Witness*, 1 March 1875, as noted in J. H. Kennedy, *Early Days of Mormonism* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1888), 63. There is no evidence that Van Wagoner or any other Rigdon biographers ever saw the *Baptist Witness* citation themselves, and we too have been unable to locate it. It is likely that all biographers who mention Loammi's statement have relied on Kennedy's report of it. Kennedy's *Early Days of Mormonism* was published in London and New York simultaneously and quotes a part missing from Van Wagoner in which Loammi expresses what could be seen as an explanation for his brother's embarrassing involvement in Mormonism. Sidney's head injury, Loammi reportedly concluded, made him "a fit subject for any new movement in the religious world" (p. 63).

Rigdon's presumed manic-depressive illness. If true, the statement is evidence of an injury that may cause depression but cannot cause the clinical condition known as manic-depression. If fabricated, the statement was designed to mislead and lacks credibility. In either scenario its value as medical opinion is wildly overstated.

Van Wagoner cites Alexander Campbell's analysis of Rigdon's "fits" but fails to adequately assess Campbell's motives. Campbell was no disinterested observer. He was apparently "first to make public [or private] mention of Rigdon's 'peculiar mental and corporeal malady'" (p. 117).¹² Campbell and Rigdon were close associates in the Reformed Baptist movement of the 1820s. Their relationship changed when Rigdon fell "into the snare of the Devil in joining the Mormons" and "led away a number of disciples with him" (p. 81).¹³ Rigdon underwent a rapid transformation from trusted aide and "prominent" preacher in Campbell's movement to Joseph Smith's spokesman,¹⁴ where revelations equated him with John the Baptist and the priesthood empowered him, as it did the ancient apostles, to authoritatively lay on hands. Campbell was "always disrespectful to Rigdon" after that (p. 60).¹⁵ While smarting over the loss of his lieutenant to Joseph Smith (whom Campbell considered a charlatan prophet, successfully but wrongly usurping the role of primitive Christianity's restorer), Campbell "forewarned that he intended to expose the claims of Mormonism 'by examining the character of its author and his accomplices.'" In that context Campbell "disparaged his former lieutenant by referring to his eccentricity—the first public assessment," Van Wagoner wrote, "of Rigdon's possible manic-depressive illness" (pp. 80–81). With motivation to disrepute, Campbell felt "induced to ascribe" Rigdon's "apostasy" to a "peculiar mental and corporeal mal-

12. *Millennial Harbinger* 2 (1831): 100–101.

13. *Ibid.* Rigdon's influence on those who had been followers of him and Campbell turned very many into followers of Joseph Smith and himself. In the Kirtland, Mentor, Hiram area of northern Ohio, Campbell lost a significant following to the Mormons.

14. See Henry K. Shaw, *Buckeye Disciples: A History of the Disciples of Christ in Ohio* (St. Louis, Mo.: Christian Board of Publication, 1952), 41–44.

15. See Doctrine and Covenants 35:3–5; 36:2.

ady, to which he has been subject for *some years*. Fits of melancholy succeeded by fits of enthusiasm accompanied by some kind of nervous spasms and swoonings” (p. 81, emphasis added) now seemed noteworthy. Campbell was describing behavior said to have been ongoing while Rigdon was his associate, during which time Campbell praised Rigdon in print for his success in gaining converts.¹⁶ Campbell’s comments could be seen as self-interested—praise for Rigdon when he brought converts and defamation when he took them back.

Early in the book Van Wagoner describes Sidney Rigdon as “well suited for preaching.” “Rigdon was blessed,” he states, “with a powerful and mellifluous voice, enthusiasm, and a prodigious memory for scripture.” Continuing with some hyperbole, Van Wagoner says that “his listeners gulped his words in like a gush of cool water. An avatar of eloquence who carried the flame of the visionary tradition, he could sway by the sheer force of his faith, passion, and ideological fervor” (p. viii). Rigdon’s gift for clear, powerful preaching is attested by his friends and foes in sources both within and outside the Church of Jesus Christ. As a Reformed Baptist, Rigdon was noted for his prowess at the pulpit.¹⁷ In 1821 Rigdon was considered “the great orator of the Mahoning [Baptist] Association.”¹⁸ An associate found him “fluent in utterance, with articulation clear and musical.”¹⁹ Upon joining Mormonism, Rigdon was assigned to preach to nearby Shakers, lift up his voice in the eastern United States, and proclaim the gospel in Cincinnati and elsewhere. In 1833 he was ordained to speak for Joseph Smith because he was “mighty in testimony” and in “expounding

16. In June 1828 Campbell noted how effective Rigdon had lately been: “Bishops Scott, Rigdon, and Bentley, in Ohio, within the last six months have immersed about eight hundred persons.” “Extracts of Letters,” *Christian Baptist*, 2 June 1828, 263. Between early 1828 and 1830 Rigdon was “one of the leading preachers of the Disciple faith upon the Western Reserve, prominent in all the councils of the church, listened to with love and respect, and in close personal fellowship with the great men of that denomination.” Kennedy, *Early Days of Mormonism*, 67.

17. Shaw, *Buckeye Disciples*, 44.

18. Kennedy, *Early Days of Mormonism*, 65.

19. Amos S. Hayden, *Early History of the Disciples in the Western Reserve, Ohio* (Cincinnati: Chase & Hall, 1875), 191–92.

all scriptures.”²⁰ At the dedication of the Kirtland Temple in March 1836, Rigdon “spoke two hours and a half in his usual logical manner. His prayer and address were very forcible and sublime, and well adapted to the occasion.”²¹ A listener noted Rigdon’s “mild and persuasive eloquence of speech” (p. 171).²² “Even Jedediah Grant,” Van Wagoner noted, “a caustic Rigdon critic in later years, admitted that he [Rigdon] ‘was truly a man of talents, possessing a gift for speaking seldom surpassed by men of this age’” (p. 111).²³ Rival David Whitmer remembered that Rigdon was a “powerful orator” (p. 73).²⁴

This evidence contrasts starkly with manic speech, as defined by the standard diagnostic reference:

Manic speech is typically loud, rapid, and difficult to interrupt. Often it is full of jokes, puns, plays on words, and amusing irrelevancies. It may become theatrical, with dramatic mannerisms and singing. Sounds rather than meaningful conceptual relationships may govern word choice (clanging). . . . Frequently there is a flight of ideas, i.e., a nearly continuous flow of accelerated speech, with abrupt changes from topic to topic, usually based on understandable associations, distracting stimuli, or plays on words. When flight of ideas is severe, speech may be disorganized and incoherent.²⁵

It is difficult to listen to manic speech. Yet every known account of Rigdon’s public speaking describes him as eloquent if sometimes

20. See Doctrine and Covenants 49:1, 3; 61:30–31; 93:51; and 100:9–11.

21. *History of the Church*, 2:414. See *Messenger and Advocate* 2/6 (March 1836): 274–81.

22. Quoting Edmund Flagg, *The Far West* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1838), 113.

23. Jedediah M. Grant, *Collection of Facts Relative to the Course Taken by Elder Sidney Rigdon in the States of Ohio, Missouri, Illinois, and Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Brown, Bicking & Guilbert, 1844), 6.

24. David Whitmer, *An Address to All Believers in Christ* (Richmond, Mo.: David Whitmer, 1887), 35.

25. DSM III-R, 215. Rigdon opposed the use of dramatic mannerisms in preaching. John Welch and Jan Shipps, eds., *The Journals of William E. McLellin, 1831–1836* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press and BYU Studies, 1994), 148.

overstated. He clearly maintained his faculties for speaking clearly and convincingly during the most expansive and the most depressing periods of his life. The same could not be said of one who suffered manic-depressive disorder.²⁶

Van Wagoner considers Rigdon's Nauvoo illness a classic bout of manic-depressive illness, but a specific form of recurrent malaria accommodates the evidence much better (see pp. 117, 267–70, 279, 281). He notes that Rigdon suffered aguelike symptoms beginning in 1839, and that “ague again brought him low during the season of 1840” (p. 279). He recognizes these symptoms as indicative of the widespread malaria of that time and place, and remarks that the parasitic disease often manifested itself “by months or even years of anemia and periodic fevers” (pp. 266–67). Van Wagoner nonetheless dismisses malaria, citing McKiernan's 1971 Rigdon biography as evidence that he “contracted an unspecified disease (not malaria) which disabled him for months at a time” (p. 117).²⁷ McKiernan had reasoned that “if Rigdon had suffered from chronic malaria he would have been bedfast for a few days each month as the disease completed its cycle, but Rigdon was confined to his sickbed for months at a time.”²⁸ But this is wrong. Rigdon was not incapacitated for months at a time. Rigdon's son John wrote that his father suffered from “bilious temperament” and was “sick most of the time in Nauvoo. . . . For weeks at a time he would not be able to leave his bed.”²⁹ Otherwise, as Van

26. Representing himself before a Clay County, Missouri, magistrate in 1839, Rigdon answered charges of treason by appealing to the sufferings he had endured as a servant of the Lord. “He spoke of tar and feathers, homeless children, mobbings, hunger, cold, and of destitution,” Van Wagoner wrote, recognizing that Rigdon's “unique rhetorical skills served him well” (p. 254). Alexander Doniphan, a witness to Rigdon's performance, noted, “Such a burst of eloquence it was never my fortune to listen to. At its close there was not a dry eye in the room.” *Saints Herald* 31/31 (1884): 490.

27. F. Mark McKiernan, *The Voice of One Crying in the Wilderness: Sidney Rigdon, Religious Reformer, 1793–1876* (Lawrence, Kans.: Coronado, 1971), 108.

28. *Ibid.*, 165 n. 36.

29. J. Wycliffe Rigdon, “Life Story of Sidney Rigdon,” 161, emphasis added, in Family and Church History Department Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City. See also Karl Keller, ed., “‘I Never Knew a Time When I Did Not Know Joseph Smith’: A Son's Record of the Life and Testimony of Sidney Rigdon,” *Dialogue* 1/4 (1966): 15–42, quoted by Van Wagoner on p. 117.

Wagoner recognized, “the public record shows him to be engaged in numerous activities” (p. 282). John Rigdon confirmed that sometimes Sidney “would be able to be around and at such times he would on Sundays preach to the people.”³⁰

Rigdon is thought to have suffered from malaria in Nauvoo in 1839 and again in 1840, and clearly some sort of illness nagged him until 1844. Considering the length of Rigdon’s periods of incapacitation—weeks, not months—and the five-year duration of the illness, it seems likely that a specific type of recurrent malaria caused the “poorest health of his life.”³¹ Strains of the recurrent malaria type prevalent in nineteenth-century North America typically cause cyclical fevers approximately eight days after infection. This initial attack is followed by a relatively long latency period of between four and fourteen months. Following the second attack, newly released parasites attack the body at regular intervals of three weeks to three months, with each attack lasting a few days to a few weeks.³² One could hardly find a better example of typical symptoms of this type of malaria than Rigdon’s Nauvoo illness. It exactly explains the timing of his first two

30. J. W. Rigdon, “Life Story of Sidney Rigdon,” 161.

31. McKiernan, *Voice of One Crying*, 108.

32. There are four types of malaria, all caused by parasites of the genus *Plasmodium*. One of the types frequently kills its host and the other three are said to make the host wish for such relief. Once injected into the bloodstream through the bite of an infected mosquito, parasites are carried to and infect the liver. They rapidly reproduce there and are released back into the bloodstream to prey upon the host’s red blood cells. Two of the four types of malaria recur in cycles because a portion of the parasites remain in the liver in a latent state, later to reproduce again and reinfect the blood. Francisco J. López-Antuñano and Gabriel A. Schmunis, “Plasmodia of Humans,” in *Parasitic Protozoa*, ed. Julius P. Kreier, 2nd ed. (San Diego: Academic Press, 1993), 5:135–266. The malaria species *P. vivax* was the one form of latent malaria present in North America in the 1830s and 40s. Common in temperate areas, its latent quality allows it to survive in human hosts over winter months when the *Anopheles* mosquito, the nonhuman host that serves as the site for the parasite’s sexual reproduction and the vector by which the disease is transferred to humans, cannot survive the cold. The parasite probably survived in its initial latent period in Rigdon over the winter of 1839 and 1840 (a more likely scenario than Rigdon contracting nonrecurrent malaria two years in a row). Malaria of this type was common in New York, Pittsburgh, and Nauvoo as well as other American areas during Rigdon’s lifetime.

attacks of malaria, as well as the periods of incapacitation he endured for days to weeks at a time, but also why he could be regularly engaged in normal activities.³³ Typically the immune system eradicates this type of malaria approximately five years after infection, which coincides with the duration of Rigdon's illness suffered while he lived in "sickly," malaria-infested Nauvoo from 1839–44 (see p. 267).³⁴

Van Wagoner dismisses malaria and opts instead to equate what John Rigdon called his father's "bilious temperament" with melancholia, which Van Wagoner—basing his verdict on a textbook classified by the Library of Congress as juvenile literature (p. 117)—concludes was synonymous with manic-depression.³⁵ Bilious temperament is not a specific illness but an umbrella for symptoms similar to those of "people infected with the benign [recurrent] form" of malaria who "show diminished vitality, indolence, soon become continuously tired and occasionally have fever."³⁶ Professor James Jensen, a world-renowned malariologist, has examined all available evidence and concluded that Rigdon probably suffered from malaria and that his symptoms could well have been caused by the recurrent type noted

33. Both Van Wagoner and McKiernan concede that Rigdon contracted malaria in 1839, the beginning of his five-year illness (pp. 267–68).

34. Dickson D. Despommier, Robert W. Gwadz, and Peter J. Hotez, *Parasitic Diseases*, 3rd ed. (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1995), 184; J. W. Rigdon, "Life Story of Sidney Rigdon," 161; and McKiernan, *Voice of One Crying*, 108. On sickly Nauvoo, see H. Dean Garrett, "Disease and Sickness in Nauvoo," in *Regional Studies in Latter-day Saint Church History: Illinois*, ed. H. Dean Garrett (Provo, Utah: BYU Department of Church History and Doctrine, 1995), 169–82.

35. He cites Dianne Hales, *Depression* (New York: Chelsea House, 1989), 26, as saying that the ancient Greek physician Galen first connected melancholia and mania. This is mistaken. Hales cites Aretacus as "proposing for the first time that melancholia and mania . . . were symptoms of a single disorder." Van Wagoner relied on the findings of a second-century A.D. physician, cited in a book for juveniles that is "not intended to take the place of the professional advice of a physician," (as noted on the copyright page of Hales's book), and inaccurately cited what it said.

36. Karlhans Salfelder, M.D., *Protozoan Infections in Man: Colour Atlas* (Stuttgart: Schwer, 1988), 109. These symptoms could be mistaken for those of melancholia, which a 1942 medical dictionary define as "apathy and indifference to one's surroundings, mental sluggishness and depression." Thomas L. Stedman, *Stedman's Shorter Medical Dictionary* (Chicago: American Publishers, 1942), 359.

above. Recognizing the impossibility of conclusively diagnosing malaria in the long-since dead—given the impossibility of discovering the parasite in the patient's blood—Professor Jensen wisely qualifies his assessment. But it is imprudent for Rigdon biographers to preclude malaria as a cause of Rigdon's illness for the same reason. Based on circumstantial evidence, the case for malaria outweighs that for manic-depressive illness.³⁷

Evidence of Rigdon's moodiness comes from accounts, as Van Wagoner notes, that "attempted to disparage Rigdon." To say, as one witness did, that Rigdon sank into despondency "when dark clouds overspread the horizon," is merely to declare that depressing circumstances cause depressing feelings (p. 117). Rigdon's life was marked by depressing and edifying events. His frequent persecutions escalated to beating and imprisonment and were complicated by nearly constant financial strains, by malaria, and by ecclesiastical responsibilities he believed came from God. Such environmental factors could account for whatever mental instabilities Rigdon manifested without labeling his religiosity excessive.

In his classic study *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James notes that "nothing is more common in the pages of religious biography than the way in which seasons of lively and of difficult faith are described as alternating. Probably every religious person has the recollection of particular crisis in which a directer version of the truth, a direct perception, perhaps, of a living God's existence, swept in and overwhelmed the languor of the more ordinary belief."³⁸ Such

37. From statements made in interviews with Professor James Jensen at Provo, Utah, 9–23 January 1997. Professor Jensen is Trager Professor of Parasitology at Brigham Young University. A modest assessment of his contributions to the field of malaria research shows him to be among the world's leading experts. Jensen's professorship is named for his mentor during a postdoctoral program at the Rockefeller Institute, after which he taught and researched at Cornell University and Michigan State University School of Medicine before joining the faculty at Brigham Young University. His distinguished research includes malaria field studies in Brazil, Columbia, Peru, Indonesia, and the Sudan, where his work spanned seventeen years. We appreciate Professor Jensen's willingness to lend his expertise to this paper, but he is in no respect accountable for the results.

38. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Penguin, 1985), 65.

a common religious phenomenon could account for Rigdon's spiritual exuberance while tar and feathers, brain bruises, poverty, imprisonment, and disease depressed him. In context, Rigdon's experiences might well be judged normal by a pragmatist like James.³⁹ Anyway, James argues that pathological behavior is not an appropriate criterion for determining the usefulness of religious experience. This approach to determining the value of religiosity is markedly different than Van Wagoner's. James asks whether religious experience was useful, and if so considers it positive without regard to categories of mental health. Van Wagoner asks whether his subject was mad, and if so considers the religious experience excessive. Van Wagoner's portrait of religious excess is the sum of various "eccentricities." Repeated allusions mark Rigdon as "mad," an "addict," a "fool" who experienced "frequent bouts of mania" (though none clearly documented), suffered from "dementia" (after the 1832 head trauma), and therefore "walked perilously close to the abyss of madness" (p. 457) or "the edge of religious madness" (p. 17). Therefore Rigdon "manifested a pathological kind of religiosity" (p. 457).

Van Wagoner considers evidence that appears to support his preferred diagnosis and overlooks evidence to the contrary. He does not consider "implications carefully while evaluating the available biographical and historical evidence." He does not weigh "all of the relevant evidence" nor consider alternative possibilities.⁴⁰ In his introduction, Van Wagoner proclaims himself "a rock-ribbed skeptic" (p. x). But the book and the related essay reveal a remarkable willingness to credit the incredible and to scrutinize Brigham Young but not Alexander Campbell. The labels *gullible* and *skeptical* are applied self-servingly, without appreciating how nuances of those characteristics can describe each of us. His Rigdon is best described by the word *zealot*. Yet perhaps the most interesting feature that emerges from this

39. Ibid., 189–258.

40. Bergera, "Toward 'Psychologically Informed' Mormon History," 29; James Clifford, *From Portraits to Puzzles: Problems of a Literary Biographer*, John W. Harrelson Lectures (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1970), 131.

biography is how Van Wagoner becomes his subject. He is “an avatar of eloquence who . . . could sway by the sheer force of his faith, passion, and ideological fervor” (p. viii). Regarding this issue, Ronald W. Walker has written: “Fervid passions not only distort personality but often refocus a book into something which is no longer biography.”⁴¹ Also, “Since a biographer often interprets his subject in his own image or at least as a reflection of his own concerns, ‘the first method of modern biography . . . is self analysis.’ By seeking to understand his personal motivation in subject, thesis, and fact selection, in short, by psychoanalyzing self, the author may avoid distortions in interpretation.”⁴² It is his own “thirst for wholeness” that inspires Van Wagoner’s remarkable zeal to expose Rigdon’s warts and double chins (see p. x). He has probably added appendages that the important and still elusive Rigdon never had.

41. Walker, “Mormon Biography,” 182.

42. Ibid., 189–90.

GEORGE Q. CANNON AND THE FAITHFUL NARRATIVE OF MORMON HISTORY

Davis Bitton

I have no desire to argue that George Q. Cannon (1827–1901) was a great historian. It is stretching it even to say he was a historian at all. And I do not pretend that his view of history was any different from that of John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, or even B. H. Roberts (1857–1933), although I do think that Roberts moved the writing of “inside” Mormon history to a new level.¹ What I will attempt to demonstrate is that Cannon exerted an extraordinary influence on the self-conception of the Mormon past that became standard among faithful Latter-day Saints. Let us briefly notice the areas in which George Q. Cannon promoted a way of thinking about the past.

1. He talked about history in his sermons. I have read every surviving Cannon sermon. It would be going too far to say that when he stood at the pulpit he always talked about history. Instead, like his brethren among the General Authorities, he typically talked about

I read a version of this essay at “Telling the Story of Mormon History,” a symposium held at Brigham Young University, 16 March 2002, under the sponsorship of the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History.

1. Davis Bitton, “B. H. Roberts as Historian,” *Dialogue* 3/4 (1968): 25–44; revised as a chapter in Bitton and Leonard J. Arrington, *Mormons and Their Historians* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1988), 69–86.

Review of George Q. Cannon. *Life of Joseph Smith the Prophet*. Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1888; reprint, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986. ix + 562 pp., with index. \$23.95.

the current situation and offered counsel. I can say that one of his frequent tropes was a quick review of the history of the restoration, showing how, in the face of seemingly insuperable odds, the work had continued to progress.²

2. He participated in the dedication of monuments and in celebrations commemorating the achievements of the past. I have attempted to put this kind of memorialization into a larger framework in an article entitled “The Ritualization of Mormon History.”³

3. He showed an interest in the preservation of primary sources and, at the end of his life, began the large multivolume work we know as *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* by Joseph Smith. The project was taken over and carried to a successful completion by B. H. Roberts.⁴

When we remember that George Q. Cannon was a General Authority from 1860 to his death in 1901—first as an apostle, then as a counselor to President Brigham Young, and from 1880 the first counselor to Presidents John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, and Lorenzo Snow—and that his publishing house, George Q. Cannon and Sons, published the great majority of titles intended for the Latter-day Saint audience, it should not be surprising that his way of thinking, talking, and writing about history had a powerful shaping influence on the collective memory of the early Saints.

From 1866, the beginning of the *Juvenile Instructor*, he was its editor and publisher; in its pages appeared many short, first-person narratives. In 1879, the first volume of the Faith-Promoting Series, published by Cannon and Sons, appeared. Thirteen more volumes, for

2. See, for example, the sermons found in *Journal of Discourses*, 10:340–48 (28 October 1864); and *Journal of Discourses*, 23:114–23 (3 April 1881).

3. Davis Bitton, “The Ritualization of Mormon History,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 43/1 (1975): 67–85; revised as a chapter in Bitton, *The Ritualization of Mormon History and Other Essays* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 171–87.

4. Davis Bitton, *George Q. Cannon: A Biography* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1999), 446. For Roberts’s evaluation of this whole project, quite critical of Cannon, see *The Autobiography of B. H. Roberts*, ed. Gary James Bergera (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990), 222–23.

the most part first-person narratives, followed over the next nine years.⁵ Cannon's *My First Mission*, a distillation of his experience, led the way as volume 1. Volume 3 was the remarkable *Leaves from My Journal by Wilford Woodruff* and volume 7 the *Journal of Heber C. Kimball*. Other firsthand accounts included C. V. Spencer's mission to Great Britain in the 1850s, William Budge's mission to England and Switzerland in 1878–80, Thomas Shreeve's mission to Australia and New Zealand in 1878–80, Llewelyn Harris's 1878 experience with the Zunis, Amasa Potter's mission to Australia in 1856–58, David P. Kimball's experience on the Salt River in 1881, and life sketches of Robert Aveson, William Anderson, John Tanner, Briant Stevens, and Daniel Tyler.

No documentation supports these narratives. Historians using this material must assess its authenticity by comparing it to diaries, letters, or other documents close to the events. Judging by George Q. Cannon's account of his sojourn in Hawaii, the changes could be as innocent as casting an experience into a retrospective mode rather than recounting it day by day. Some omission and highlighting were of course inevitable. Surviving handwritten documents by some of these authors force us to conclude that the manuscripts received some revision—correction of spelling, recasting of sentences, insertion of paragraph divisions—as they were prepared for publication.

Describing travel, persecution, healings, dreams, and visions, the Faith-Promoting Series cumulatively equates to a Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* for the Saints. Suffering and frustration were not omitted, as witness Wilford Woodruff's series of accidents and the misfortunes of many others. Daniel Tyler even admitted to a lack of proselytizing success, but he did it in such a way as to encourage rather than dissuade other young Saints. "I baptized none personally while on that mission of about three and a half years," he wrote, "and yet, although I suffered much affliction and persecution, I look back upon it as one

5. Cannon's *Life of Nephi* (vol. 9) and George Reynolds's refutation of the Spaulding theory of the origin of the Book of Mormon (vol. 11) were not first-person narratives and in this respect were different from the others.

of the happiest times of my life.”⁶ A Latter-day Saint convention was being established.

The inclusion of many specifics, including the names of witnesses who could confirm or deny the events, lends credibility to these accounts. But they are selective. Tales of disillusionment or apostasy were disqualified. And these accounts had to contain a moral.

Most of the volumes of the Faith-Promoting Series were published during the 1880s, a time of intense pressure for Cannon. In 1887, the year of the Edmunds-Tucker Act, the most punitive antipolygamy legislation to date, *Eventful Narratives*, the thirteenth volume in the series, appeared. The preface clearly states the purpose of the series: “The principal object in issuing them has been and is to increase faith in the hearts of those who peruse them, by showing how miraculously God has overruled everything for the benefit of those who try to serve Him.”⁷ This series was Cannon’s way of conveying this lesson to the broad reading audience of the church.

Cannon’s magnum opus was the *Life of Joseph Smith the Prophet*. This work was reprinted in 1986 as part of the Classics in Mormon Literature series. In a preface, historian Donald Q. Cannon notes that it has been “a very popular book for a long time”; that it is eulogistic, “designed to build faith”; that it “tells the story of the Prophet, but it does not attempt to analyze him or to probe deep beneath the surface events of his life in a critical way”; and that it “always presents Joseph Smith and the Church in the most favorable light” (p. 6).⁸ All this is true enough, but more needs to be said.

6. Daniel Tyler, “Incidents of Experience,” in *Scraps of Biography*, vol. 19 of Faith-Promoting Series, ed. George Q. Cannon (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1883), 46.

7. *Eventful Narratives*, vol. 13 of Faith-Promoting Series, ed. George Q. Cannon (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1887), iii.

8. My references are to the pagination of the reprint edition (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986), which inserts dates of death in the genealogical data of note 1 and references to the published Joseph Smith, *History of the Church* (the multivolume “documentary” history) in parentheses after some quotations.

George Q. Cannon's original preface, penned in late 1888, brings the reader into the intense religious atmosphere of the prison cell—he was then serving a term in the territorial prison for unlawful cohabitation.⁹ Cannon does not hide his own fervent conviction about Joseph Smith. Rather than allowing it to emerge as a conclusion reached after telling Smith's life story, the author's testimony is trumpeted in the opening lines: "Joseph and Hyrum are now dead; but like the first martyr they yet speak. Their united voice is one of testimony, admonition and warning to the world." Cannon's motive in writing the book is stated forthrightly: "It is in the hope that the Saints may find joy in reading of their beloved Prophet and Patriarch, and that the world may judge more fairly of these benefactors of mankind, that this book is written" (p. 1).

Although working on the project "in the midst of a somewhat busy and laborious life"—an understatement—Cannon considered the labor a "loving duty" that had brought him comfort. "The closing chapters," he says, "were finished in prison for adherence to the principles which they [Joseph and Hyrum Smith] taught, and for this, the life is invested with a dearer regard." He even hated to send the completed manuscript off for publication: "To send the work away now is like being torn from a beloved companion, when most the solace of his friendly presence is needed" (p. 1).

Cannon had help on this project. "To many friends the author is indebted for information here embodied," he wrote, "and he takes this occasion to thank them, hoping to live yet to meet them and express his gratitude in the flesh" (p. 1). We wish he had been more specific about these "many friends." It would seem natural for a member of the First Presidency such as Cannon to enlist the help of the Church Historian's Office in preparing his work. Whether he spent time in that office or had material delivered to his own office is not known. His three oldest sons all worked on the project. As early

9. For the details, see Bitton, *Cannon: A Biography*, 292–96.

as the fall of 1882, Frank J. Cannon was “preparing the History of Joseph Smith.”¹⁰ Abraham H. Cannon also had a hand in it. “We revised what Frank had written of the Prophet’s History,” Abraham wrote on 20 August 1886.¹¹ A year later John Q. Cannon went over the whole thing and revised it.¹² So a draft manuscript by George Q. and his three oldest sons was in existence even before 1888.

George Q. Cannon was writing and revising through much of the summer of 1888 and in the fall spent many hours in proofreading and preparing the manuscript for the press.¹³ “Every spare moment of my time,” he wrote on 15 June, “I have worked on my History of Joseph.”¹⁴ He thoroughly revised and approved the finished product. He would not have allowed this book to appear under his name if it did not represent his views on the life of Joseph Smith.

After an introductory section about the primitive Christian church, the apostasy, the Reformation, the French Revolution, and the rise of modern sectarianism, Cannon offered what is no less than a hymn of praise to his subject. Joseph Smith’s “lofty soul,” he said, “comprehended the grandeur of his mission upon earth.” In his physical appearance “he seemed to combine all attractions and excellencies.” Joseph Smith, he said, had been “a retiring youth” but the Spirit made him bold; had been a humble farmer, but “divine authority sat so becomingly upon him that men looked at him with reverent awe”; had been unlearned, but “he walked with God until

10. Abraham H. Cannon Journal, 24 October 1882 (hereafter AHCJ). The holograph original of this journal, in 19 volumes, is housed in L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. Photocopies of the original are in the Family and Church History Department Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and in Manuscripts Division, University of Utah Marriott Library, Salt Lake City, Utah.

11. AHCJ, 20 August 1886.

12. AHCJ, 7 November 1887.

13. George Q. Cannon Journal, 31 March; 26 and 31 May; 2, 5, 7–9, 15–16, 23 June; 6, 15, 25, and 30–31 August; and 4–8 September 1888. Hereafter abbreviated as GQCJ. I was given access to this journal during the preparation of my biography of Cannon, cited in note 4. The journal is located in the Family and Church History Department Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

14. GQCJ, 15 June 1888.

human knowledge was to his eye an open book, the celestial light beamed through his mind" (p. 19).

Just as Jesus was ridiculed during his life and only later could be seen "illuminated by the eternal sunshine of heaven," standing "outlined against the blue vastness of the past in sublime simplicity," so Joseph Smith should now be seen "as he towered in the full radiance of his labors . . . the reconciler of divergent sects and doctrines, the oracle of the Almighty to all nations, kindreds, tongues and peoples." Joseph Smith's "life was exalted and unselfish," his death "a sealing martyrdom, following after that which was completed upon Calvary for the redemption of a world" (pp. 19, 21).

Whether the casual, unbelieving reader would be drawn in or turned off by these opening pages, there was no false advertising. This book would not be history or biography in the dispassionate mode. After such an opening, it is no surprise to find in the following sixty-five chapters a Joseph Smith without fault, a persecuted people, knavish enemies, and the eventual martyrdom that concludes the book. Good and evil are as clearly contrasted as in any medieval morality play or modern Western novel.

However, Cannon's *Life of Joseph Smith the Prophet* was not merely a grandiloquent homily. Holding it together is a string of factual statements that no one would contest—although, as suggested, some might well take exception to the spin he put on them. The book is interlarded with many documents. Available to Cannon were early newspapers and published works by George A. Smith, Thomas Ford, and Josiah Quincy. Documents such as the Wentworth letter of 1842, including the Articles of Faith, are printed in their entirety.

A short chapter that deserves careful attention is chapter 56, "Eternal Marriage." Did George Q. Cannon give a clear account of the origins of plural marriage? Did he, in prison, defend it? The answer to the first question is no, but he comes close. "Eternity and plurality of marriage" are not distinguished but melded together and explained as the product of revelation. Joseph Smith "did not write it for a time," Cannon says, "although he obeyed its commands and taught it to

Hyrum and other faithful men, who, in prayer and humility before God, accepted and fulfilled its requirements" (pp. 438–39). It was on 12 July 1843, Cannon explains, that the revelation was dictated to William Clayton, on 13 July that a copy was made by Joseph C. Kingsbury, and on 12 August that it was presented to the stake presidency and high council of the Nauvoo Stake. He acknowledges Emma Smith's ambivalence. At first she did not accept it, "but later she became convinced of its truth and gave good women to her husband to wife as Sarah of old administered to Abraham" (p. 439).¹⁵

Then this editorial comment: "There is not one word in the revelation, nor was there one word in the Prophet's teaching other than purity and self sacrifice." It was a system that would make possible the satisfaction of every woman's right to "virtuous wifeness and maternity"; it was "a code of moral law by which the modern world, under the light of Christian truth, may achieve social redemption and be forever purified" (pp. 438, 440). An experienced soldier in the defense of polygamy for nearly forty years, Cannon could have said much more. But he said something about the subject, and it was not an apology or retraction.

In chapter 48, "Manliness of Joseph," we are treated to several complimentary quotations from contemporaries. Cannon does not choose to quote those who derided Joseph Smith, for his point is that even some who were not members of the Church of Jesus Christ were able to recognize something of the greatness of the man. He did not claim more than he should:

The foregoing opinions quoted from the Prophet's contemporaries and observers—his opponents, candid though they were—are as favorable as could be looked for in a skept-

15. Among scholarly analyses of the origins of plural marriage are Danel W. Bachman, "A Study of the Mormon Practice of Plural Marriage before the Death of Joseph Smith," (master's thesis, Purdue University, 1975); James B. Allen, *Trials of Discipleship: The Story of William Clayton, a Mormon* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987); and Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996). Compton's book was reviewed by Richard Lloyd Anderson and Scott H. Faulring and by Danel W. Bachman in *FARMS Review of Books* 10/2 (1998): 67–104, 105–37.

tical, materialistic age. They prove all that can be asserted of the Prophet by his believers, except the essential feature of his inspiration. This could not be testified to by any except a believer. His reviewers, whom we have quoted, judge entirely from external evidence. They saw the phenomenon presented by his life and work, and recorded it, excluding entirely from their consideration of his character and deeds all thought of the superhuman. . . . It cannot be expected that any non-believer will testify to the prophetic power of Joseph Smith. To admit it is to believe. (pp. 357–58)

It is a thoughtful analysis. “No words of a believer can of themselves convince an unbeliever,” he wrote. “There is but one power of demonstration, and that is to seek by humble prayer for the voice of the Holy Spirit. So surely as man prays in faith and meekness, so surely will the answer come” (p. 360).

The book concludes with a vivid, rapid-fire description of the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum Smith. There is no epilogue or concluding chapter describing the trial of the assassins, the continued persecutions, the expulsion of the Saints from Nauvoo. With Joseph Smith dead and buried, author Cannon had finished his work—except for this final paragraph: “The enemies of truth were sure that they had now destroyed the work. And yet it lives, greater and stronger after the lapse of years! It is indestructible for it is the work of God. And knowing that it is the eternal work of God, we know that Joseph Smith, who established it, was a Prophet holy and pure” (p. 527). Such, even in prison, was the powerful conviction of George Q. Cannon.

Cannon was not trying to satisfy a doctoral committee or to please reviewers in secular journals. Readers would not have expected from him the flat exposition of an encyclopedia article. What they got—and arguably what was and is valuable—was not merely a life of Joseph Smith but what George Q. Cannon thought and felt about the life of Joseph Smith.

Cannon’s work served a purpose. For the Saints, it was a reassuring and satisfying reaffirmation. For the outsider, the book, even with its heavy moralizing, told the Prophet’s life in its essentials. The

discerning reader would have little difficulty in recognizing that it told as much about Latter-day Saint self-perception as about Joseph Smith.

*Although already simple, the work was not, in Cannon's estimation, simple enough for children. In 1898, George Q. enlisted the help of his 21-year-old son Joseph J. "My son Joseph submitted to me some manuscript of a 'Child's History of Joseph' which he is compiling under my directions," George Q. wrote.¹⁶ "Under my directions"—that is the key. Knowing how to use assistance, George Q. Cannon would again review the work, make whatever changes he thought necessary, and take responsibility for it. When published in 1900, *The Latter-day Prophet: History of Joseph Smith Written for Young People* must have filled a niche, for it came out again with a different subtitle—*Young People's History of Joseph Smith*—in 1912, 1914, and 1918. Always interested in children, Cannon was anxious to provide the new generation with a life of the Prophet that would stick in their minds.*

To call *The Latter-day Prophet* a Mormon version of Parson Weems's mythologized life of George Washington may be too strong. But Cannon was not afraid of indoctrination. Some kind of societal indoctrination would take place under any circumstances, as he well knew, and he wanted the rising generation of Latter-day Saints to understand and feel something of what he understood and felt about Joseph Smith.

The closest thing to a general history that Cannon produced, *The History of the Mormons: Their Persecutions and Travels*, appeared in 1890, just two years after his Joseph Smith biography.¹⁷ He of course knew this short, quick survey of article length was not a "full" history. When that full history was written, whether the author was friendly or hostile, every reader would recognize two "remarkable facts":

16. GQCJ, 23 August 1898.

17. George Q. Cannon, *History of the Mormons: Their Persecutions and Travels* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1890).

One is that in all the course of their interesting and troublesome [*sic*] career, though marked at every stage by honesty, thrift and good order, the people were constantly maligned by their neighbors and accused of views and practices inimical to the peace and welfare of the country. The other is that no sooner was one subterfuge of their opponents pierced by the light of truth and utterly disproved, than a second was brought forward and urged successively throughout the confines of township, county, state and nation.¹⁸

He added a third obvious fact: "After each onslaught, no matter how great the increase in virulence, the people have gained in strength, in numbers, in prosperity and in the ability to withstand every kind of attack."¹⁹

Cannon was writing in 1889 or early 1890. The federal onslaught was indeed increasing in virulence. It was about to force a momentous capitulation. Not knowing what was just around the corner, he considered the time ripe to review the sixty years of Mormon history.

Essentially, this little work is a lawyer's opening speech on behalf of a defendant. From the beginning, he writes, the Latter-day Saints had been persecuted. Starting with the Missouri persecutions and the driving of Mormon refugees from the state, the pattern had continued in Illinois, forcing the massive flight to the Rocky Mountains. What were the motives? What caused these other Americans to hate the Saints? For Cannon, the truth of the matter was made clear in Missouri.

It is true the mobocrats laid numerous offenses at their [the Latter-day Saints'] doors. Cunning villains have always been ready with stories calculated to inflame the ignorant mind and appeal to popular clamor. It was at first charged against the Mormons that their religion was an imposture—they believed in revelation from on high. Another offense was that

18. *Ibid.*, I.

19. *Ibid.*

in their domestic affairs they were “peculiar”—they were reserved in their deportment and dealing; they did not mix with the wild elements of mankind which surrounded them; in short, they minded their own business. These were atrocious crimes indeed! For these were they outraged, plundered and butchered! Many of them came from New England, where the anti-slavery movement was beginning. They were recognized as “Yankees,” were accused of secreting and “stealing” negroes, and were hated as abolitionists with all the bitterness that the men who lived on the border of the slave states at that time felt for adherents of that doctrine. This was held up as a most grievous offense, and they were driven out at the point of the bayonet.²⁰

This catalogue of charges is not quite complete, for it omits the apprehensions of the Missourians that the Mormons would somehow stir up the Indians. But here is Cannon’s fundamental point:

No charges of immorality then! No talk of *imperium in imperio*! No holy abhorrence of polygamy! No loyal anxiety to repress violations of law, for there were charges neither of misdemeanor nor of felony! No high-voiced hypocrisy about disloyalty or treason; for they [the Latter-day Saints] were law-abiding, obedient to judicial summons and patriotic.²¹

A prosecuting attorney might point out that in the late stages of the Missouri conflict some Mormons were indeed charged with crimes. But Cannon would stick to his allegation: the original case against the Mormons did not include charges of polygamy or grandiose aspirations of political independence.

In Illinois, Cannon said, the old charges of fanaticism were raised, but in this Northern state allegations of abolitionism carried less terror. A new objection must be found. It was found in the Mormons’ bloc voting.

20. *Ibid.*, 2–3.

21. *Ibid.*, 3.

The members believed that in union there is strength. They carried the theory into practice—not only in religion, but in commerce and politics. It was a great stumbling block to their neighbors. The independence which made them free to select the best candidates, and the good sense which caused them to cast a united vote for them, gave their enemies a weapon which has ever been readily used against them.²²

Only now, according to Cannon, did various other charges begin to be hurled against the Saints:

Having started out to give the Mormons a bad name, it was easy to charge them with the prevailing crimes of horse-stealing, counterfeiting, harboring vile characters, and of living, as a community, by a system of plunder. Lawless persons from up and down the river found it to their advantage to shield their own practices and divert suspicion from themselves by attaching it to the unpopular citizens.²³

Cannon recognized that the charges were made, dismissed them as essentially groundless, and tried to explain them. More recent research showing some basis for the charges of counterfeiting and theft might throw doubt on his claims of complete Mormon innocence, but his understanding of the general group psychology remains plausible. If some individual Saints were guilty of crimes, he insisted, they could have been tried and punished; after all, they lived as a minority in a country of law. Such charges were really a smoke screen. “The people were objectionable—that was all. That was the head and front of their offending.”²⁴

Cannon traces the forced departure from Illinois, the hardship on the plains, the service in the Mormon Battalion, and the raising of the American flag in the Salt Lake Valley when it was still Mexican

22. *Ibid.*, 4.

23. *Ibid.*

24. *Ibid.*, 8.

territory. For a brief period the Saints enjoyed peace in their valley home. Then came false and corrupt officials, who perjured themselves in making baseless charges. The result was the Utah expedition of 1857, a “senseless and unjustifiable expedition” that was not only “a farce, but a costly crime.”²⁵

Then came the anti-Mormon legislation. Now Cannon is speaking as if cornered. Many times he had been told that if the Saints would only stop polygamy, all would be well. “How hollow and mocking these phrases . . . sounded to a people who had passed through every form of tribulation before polygamy was known! We saw the old spirit of mobocracy which had driven us out from civilization in a new garb, to fit the changed circumstances of the case.”²⁶

The closing pages are Cannon’s address to the world, as it were. Standing his ground, with the shells of Edmunds-Tucker and confiscations and imprisonment and denial of the franchise exploding around him, he proclaimed: “We mourn for our unhappy country and those who will have to reap the whirlwind after such abundant sowing of the wind.”²⁷ For Cannon, it was the Latter-day Saints who were the defenders of liberty—meaning, of course, freedom of religion as they understood it: “When we shall have emerged from under the clouds and the sorrows, the love of freedom will have left an impress so indelible upon us that we will hold it as priceless to ourselves but too precious to be denied to others.”²⁸

Looking back over the tortuous path his people had followed, he saw clearly

the fate of those who have pitted themselves against the work and have sought to destroy the people. We have had presidents, governors, judges and other prominent and noted men, who have undertaken the task of “solving the Mormon problem” by violence and by the framing of various devices

25. *Ibid.*, 11, 10.

26. *Ibid.*, 11.

27. *Ibid.*, 14.

28. *Ibid.*

and schemes having in view the overthrow of the people. But who of them has prospered? Who has achieved fame or credit? It is true that some have attained some notoriety for the time being. This was not because of any superior merit which they possessed, but because their names have been connected with that of the Mormons. This notoriety has, of course, been only temporary. Everyone has sunk into dishonor and oblivion.²⁹

Governor Thomas Ford's published apprehension that his name would be remembered only for his role in the Mormon conflict had, as far as Cannon was concerned, been fulfilled, and the same was true of the other leading anti-Mormons.

Cannon concluded by lauding the Latter-day Saints for their "high conception of the rights of man," frugality, temperance, industry, perseverance, honesty, virtue, and "our hatred to vice in every form, and to litigation and violence."³⁰

We have been the pioneers in western civilization. About forty-five years ago we were compelled to leave the cities and pleasant places of our race and launch forth into an unknown wilderness. From that day until the present we have been the pioneers of the regions where we settled. We carried with us the printing press. Among the first buildings erected by us have been school-rooms. The first American paper published in California was issued from a Mormon press. The first farming operations performed by American labor there were carried on by the Mormons. The first gold discovered in California, which has created such a revolution, was dug by Mormons. We are the first Anglo-Saxons who have practiced irrigation. We came to Utah as religious exiles. We came here with a determination to make it our home,

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid., 15.

because we desired to be where we could worship God according to the dictates of our own consciences, undisturbed by mobs and religious bigotry.³¹

He contrasted these achievements with the desolation of places in Illinois and Missouri once occupied by Latter-day Saints and now showing signs of blight.

Cannon was proud of the high credit rating of his people: "In the commercial world our credit is of the highest. We can be trusted in financial circles because we always fulfill our obligations. Merchants, bankers, business men of all parts of the country, yield us freely this praise."³² He was speaking from experience, but this was before the extreme financial difficulties that would follow the Panic of 1893. The short "history" concluded with the manifesto of 12 December 1889. Just a year later, a new printing of Cannon's short history also included the Woodruff Manifesto of 1890.

The History of the Mormons was not so much history as it was an oration. The main value of such "history" is to serve as a reminder of the framework within which people like Cannon saw themselves and their past. They were not aloof bystanders but actors in the drama. To step back and see things neutrally was impossible for a committed participant. Concessions on details could be made, perhaps, but the essential pattern—a wronged people driven from place to place while sustained by their God—was not negotiable.

While encouraging a remembrance of things past, Cannon wished that remembrance to serve a present purpose. It should explain, create empathy with those who had gone before, and evoke admiration and appreciation. Above all, for Latter-day Saints, it should reinforce faith in the restored gospel. To subordinate the priceless jewel of religious faith to the paltry prattle of secular historians, incurably handicapped in their blindness and deafness to the spiritual dimension, would be a pitiful thing indeed. For Cannon, it was unthinkable.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid., 16.

Throughout Cannon's life, Latter-day Saints were the object of outrageous vilification. I am not referring to mild ridicule or the tendency to see them as curiosities from outer space—strange people to be ogled at and whispered about. Eskimos and Zulus and headhunters in New Guinea received similar bemused appreciation. I am referring rather to the hate-filled denunciations that effectively defined the Latter-day Saints as less than human, especially those calling for their extermination. With anti-Mormon journalism and travel books being published every year, Cannon could easily conclude that it was not his responsibility to represent the critics but to describe events as they appeared to the Saints. If this was “apologetic” in the sense of being a one-sided defense, he might have reasoned, so be it. The prosecution was already being heard and in many venues it was the only voice being heard.

It probably helps, also, to remember the importance given to *testifying* by George Q. Cannon and his colleagues among the General Authorities of the church. He had been a personal observer of much Latter-day Saint history and was an important participant in certain parts of it. Why should he write as if he were a disinterested observer? He would testify of what he was convinced of, of what he *knew*. We don't read the actual words “I testify to the truth of these things in the name of Jesus Christ,” but his tone is often one of proclaiming or bearing witness. This, needless to say, is not the history of a textbook or a learned treatise but the fervent witness of a believer.

If George Q. Cannon had models, historical works that were widely read and admired, they would include Thomas Babington Macaulay's popular *History of England*, perhaps J. L. Motley's *History of the United Netherlands*, and George Bancroft's *History of the United States*. While based on extensive research, these works all had a strong point of view and did not mind letting the reader know who wore the white hats and who wore the black hats. If we think Cannon was too severe in his condemnation of Governor Lilburn W. Boggs, we might find it illuminating to read Motley's description of Philip II of Spain: “If Philip possessed a single virtue it has eluded the conscientious

research of the writer of these pages. If there are vices—as possibly there are—from which he was exempt, it is because it is not permitted by human nature to attain perfection even in evil.”³³

With the introduction of the seminar system and training of graduate students in history, followed by the organization of historical associations and the publication of professional historical journals, Americans—as well as readers of history in most other countries—became familiar with norms that included careful documentation, reliance on primary sources, and avoidance of rank partisanship.³⁴ At least these were the stated goals. Whether they were realized is another question.³⁵

What academic historians have a hard time realizing is that most people who enjoy reading history are not interested in footnotes. They may not even care about “objectivity,” if that frequently misused term is in their vocabulary. They do like to think that what they are reading is true in the sense of being faithful to the reality of the past, but they seldom wish to go through the tedious exercise of looking at events from different points of view or weighing the evidence and assigning degrees of probability. What they want is a *story* compellingly told. They like strong, colorful characters and dramatic confrontations. Admittedly, there may be a certain audience for detailed, analytical works, but the biographies and histories most widely read for pleasure by the general public will continue to be those that, like novels, tell a story and let us know who are the good guys and the bad guys. For his generation—and apparently for many believing Latter-day Saints right down to the present—George Q. Cannon satisfied that desire.

33. J. L. Motley, *History of the United Netherlands* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1867), 3:534–43, as quoted and cited in Dom David Knowles, *The Historian and Character* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 3.

34. See summary of this development, with references, in Bitton and Arrington, *Mormons and Their Historians*, 126–29.

35. The most stimulating analysis and critique is Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

The fact remains that for every chapter he wrote, if not for almost every page, significant scholarship has been produced during the past century. A perusal of the substantial bibliography in my *Images of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (1994) or the massive bibliography in *Studies in Mormon History, 1830–1997* demonstrates how far we have come since Cannon wrote. The student or casual reader may not think it necessary to delve into the intricacies of economic life at Nauvoo, for example, and may be quite satisfied with a simplified survey. I do think that any reader intelligent enough to pursue the subject at all should exercise sufficient critical faculty to recognize the point of view of the book in question as well as its limitations. And to pretend that scholarship during the twentieth century does not exist, or has contributed nothing worth mentioning, cannot be defended.

The historian cannot avoid thinking about audience. For whom does he or she write? The tone and terminology appropriate to the in-house audience might not be easily understood by others, and they might be turned off by a testimony-bearing tendency or a partisanship so extreme as to lack credibility. The chasm between faith-promoting history and critical history is impossible to ignore, at least in its extreme manifestations on both sides. To some extent I blame readers who, professing interest in the subject, refuse to read works from the other side—believers so easily offended that they are unwilling to learn from outside historians, and “outsiders” who turn up their noses at all in-house history. But writers of history bear responsibility as well. One longs for the kind of history that can be read with profit by everyone. It is a goal seldom achieved perhaps, but well worth pursuing.

HISTORICAL PARADIGMS IN CONFLICT: THE NAUVOO PERIOD REVISITED

Glen M. Cooper

Rightly did Joseph Smith say “No man knows my history,” a statement that Fawn Brodie considered disingenuous. Joseph’s observation, however, expresses a fundamental truth: It is difficult to reconstruct “what actually happened” and why so-and-so did such-and-such. In principle, these same difficulties face scholars trying to write the history of any person. Joseph Smith was not special in this regard. Since there exists more documentary material about his life than about most people, contradictory statements and perspectives are inevitable. In addition, the controversy that attended him and his deeds and the conflicting testimonies about him leave us to discern the truth. *Cultures in Conflict*, however useful it may be as a collection of source documents, is very poor as a work of scholarship. The historical commentary that accompanies each primary source selection manifests prejudice, generalization, poor evaluation, and tendentious misreadings of those sources. One editorial commentary is in fact so agenda-driven that one even suspects that the choice of primary documents is not representative.

Why begin a review of a book about Nauvoo with mention of Joseph Smith? Because Hallwas and Launius treat him as the central

Review of John E. Hallwas and Roger D. Launius, eds. *Cultures in Conflict: A Documentary History of the Mormon War in Illinois*. Logan, Utah: Utah State University, 1995. x + 369 pp., with bibliographic notes and index. \$22.95, paperback; \$39.45, hardback.

figure in the Nauvoo “passion play.” It is primarily Joseph Smith’s motives and mind that such historians attempt to divine. Elden Watson, the author of a review of *Cultures in Conflict* that appeared in an earlier issue of *FARMS Review of Books*,¹ notes that the portrait of Joseph Smith that Hallwas and Launius present is far from flattering: Watson makes a case that the book is anti-Mormon because of its attack on the character of Joseph Smith. While I acknowledge that the portrait of Joseph Smith is uncomplimentary, I am not concerned with the status of this book as anti-Mormon. *Cultures in Conflict* is presented as a serious work of historical scholarship, and I evaluate it against standards appropriate for such a book.² It is unfortunate, however, that reviewing this book requires an examination of some rudimentary historiographical principles. Furthermore, since I suspect that many who consider themselves Latter-day Saints would find nothing reprehensible in Hallwas and Launius’s portrait of Joseph Smith, to call the book “anti-Mormon” is both inaccurate and beside the point.

In preparing the present essay, I have had access to three previous reviews. Since each review fails in one or more ways to do justice to this book, I feel compelled to offer my own analysis in the form of a review essay. Several critical issues require further development than is possible within the dimensions of an ordinary review. Mine was mostly written before I read the others.³ I shall comment on the earlier reviews as necessary. The first chronologically, by Glen M. Leonard, while making a few useful but diplomatic observations, ultimately

1. Elden Watson, review of *Cultures in Conflict: A Documentary History of the Mormon War in Illinois*, by John E. Hallwas and Roger D. Launius, *FARMS Review of Books* 12/1 (2000): 355–70.

2. I would apply the same rigorous criteria to all books, including those about the history of my faith, in spite of the fact that I am a believer—a fact that, according to Hallwas and Launius, renders my remarks dispensable.

3. My review existed in penultimate form before I read the others. I was originally requested to write a review of *Cultures in Conflict* for *Dialogue*. When my review was completed, however, it was rejected. The reason proffered was that the book had been published too long for them to print a review of it. I express sincere gratitude to the editor of the *FARMS Review of Books* for providing a home for this review essay.

fails to grapple with the faults of the book.⁴ The next, by Watson, almost completely misses the point of *Cultures in Conflict* as a work of scholarship.⁵ Ironically, therefore, he falls right into the caricatured pattern of myth and belief that Hallwas and Launius describe, which I shall discuss below. Donald G. Godfrey has written the third review, in my opinion the best of the three,⁶ but although he makes some accurate criticisms and his review should be read, it is too short to be of any real use. I intend to demonstrate here that *Cultures in Conflict* has major deficiencies when measured against the standards of serious historical scholarship.

The title of the book accurately reflects the ethnic character of the Nauvoo conflict, at least with regard to the Latter-day Saints, and the clash of incompatible cultures, each with its peculiar way (or ways) of viewing itself and others. The primary sources presented in *Cultures in Conflict*, some complete and some excerpted, from parties both favorable and hostile to the Saints, vividly illustrate this ethnic incompatibility. The nearly one hundred sources are arranged in a logical order covering six periods in Nauvoo history (1839–46), beginning with a section entitled “The Coming of the Mormons” and ending with “The Exodus and the Battle of Nauvoo.” In addition, the editors offer historical commentary and analysis of those texts. As I shall demonstrate via representative examples, methodological flaws mar the editors’ description and treatment of these documents. For example, the editors claim that not only were cultures in conflict (which I accept), but that individuals, namely the Latter-day Saints, also were conflicted within themselves. They therefore adopt a psychologistic scheme, complete with psychoanalytic jargon, to explain both the large-scale, cross-cultural conflict as well as an apparent disparity between Mormon beliefs and actions. Even if it is true that the Saints were thus internally conflicted, simply too much must be assumed

4. Glen M. Leonard, review of *Cultures in Conflict*, by John E. Hallwas and Roger D. Launius, *BYU Studies* 36/2 (1996–97): 235–40.

5. Watson, review of *Cultures in Conflict*.

6. Donald G. Godfrey, review of *Cultures in Conflict*, by John E. Hallwas and Roger D. Launius, *Journal of Mormon History* 26/1 (2000): 226–30.

a priori: The amount of theoretical reconstruction required on the basis of the most tenuous evidence ought to make any rational person consider this approach more in terms of what it tells us about two scholars writing at the close of the twentieth century than about Latter-day Saint beliefs and actions of the 1840s.

Furthermore, with reference to the title *Cultures in Conflict*, it is clear enough that the Latter-day Saints constituted a new culture or ethnicity; however, that those outside of Latter-day Saint culture were another unified “culture” is doubtful. It seems that this latter group was unified only in its hatred of Joseph Smith and Mormonism. So one group, the Latter-day Saints, constituted a new culture that repudiated the values of the surrounding “culture,” and another group, the hostile neighbors, in response to the (alarming) growth of the first, polarized against it. To apply the term *culture* to this latter group in the same sense as to the Saints is to commit the fallacy of equivocation.

Conflict in Illinois during this period involved large groups of people—the primary documents, some of which are reproduced by Hallwas and Launius, amply attest to this. Of greater concern to me, however, is another conflict involving the editors themselves, their treatment of this material, and the methods of sound historical scholarship. I perceive two historiographical paradigms in conflict: (1) the older approach to history that respects the validity of a historical text and considers how its textual detail can contribute to a historical picture, while reserving judgment about individuals and motivations per se; and (2) the “psychohistorical” approach, which, although giving the illusion of rational objectivity, reduces historical detail to generalities and produces essentialized caricatures of agents, assigning their characters and motivations to general types. The latter method, although generally decried by scholars, is the one employed by Hallwas and Launius in their treatment of these primary sources of Mormon history. This approach to historiography has been discredited when applied to “serious” historical figures such as Thomas Jefferson (no matter how well-written the works are), but religious figures, considered only liminally rational or not at all, are

apparently still considered fair game. (I am referring, of course, to Brodie's imaginative treatment of the life of Joseph Smith, which, incredibly, is still regarded even by some educated people as Joseph's definitive biography.)⁷

In addition, although providing scholars ready access to relevant primary documents from this formative period of Mormon history is praiseworthy, it soon becomes clear that the selection and editing of these documents is driven by the editors' agenda of speaking for the (hitherto ignored) "non-Mormon" neighbors and systematically deconstructing and discrediting Mormon accounts, employing the slippery notion of myth. So *caveat lector*: let the reader be wary. The term *myth* is used in this book to mean anything that is fervently held to be true (but which is in fact false) by a self-deceived people, which shapes their thoughts and actions for better or worse. Myth seems ultimately to mean what these editors do not like. The result is a drastic and self-conscious revisionism—the editors aim to demonstrate the presence of virtue in those who are not Mormons and the lack thereof among the Mormons.

Perhaps the most innovative feature of *Cultures in Conflict* is its attempt to speak for the other side. The editors observe that previous historians have paid little attention to the perspective of those not belonging to the church, so they will champion them. These earlier historians, mostly Latter-day Saints for whom the Nauvoo period constitutes an important part of their sacred history (and hence not part of "objective history"), have "failed to explore fully the wide range of available documents" (p. 5). According to the editors, these scholars have emphasized the victimization of their coreligionists without justly considering the claims of their opponents. While speaking for those who have been ignored seems a noble task, the approach rapidly becomes imbalanced in the other direction. One virtue of the book is that it provides many neglected documents. It is to be hoped, therefore, that historians will consider them in future histories of

7. Fawn Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet* (New York: Knopf, 1945).

Mormon Nauvoo. The editors' specious arguments, however, must be countered by meticulous attention to textual detail and sound reasoning, neither of which graces the present book. Slipshod analysis and trendy conclusions must be defeated by continually rereading the primary sources and discarding, as far as possible, all a priori preconceptions. To do otherwise is to speak unfairly and misleadingly for the dead, appropriating their suffering for the use of modern agendas.

The subject of the Mormon conflict in Illinois is extremely complex, and it would be very difficult or altogether impossible to evaluate it fairly in a brief introduction. Entire books could (and ought) to be written for this purpose. Nevertheless, Hallwas and Launius essayed in a mere eight pages to provide comprehensive conclusions about what happened and why. Thus they have reduced the complexities of the conflict to superficial comprehensibility by invoking a trendy explanatory notion: a simplistic and misleading notion of myth, which, as I indicated above, is a facile psychological concept. They accuse previous historians of ignoring "the crucial influence of myth on the attitudes, perceptions, actions, and interpretations of the early Saints" (p. 5). Furthermore, they claim that since believing Latter-day Saint historians belong to "the same interpretive community" (p. 1) as the Saints in Nauvoo, they are thus incapable of assuming a historical perspective on their coreligionists. This conclusion is doubtful since contemporary Latter-day Saint historians have the benefit of a century and a half of subsequent experience and hindsight.

The editors' usage of the term *myth* as an explanatory concept plays off uneasily against current usage. In everyday parlance, myth has a negative meaning: a fable or false account believed in by primitive, nonrational people. According to these editors, who anticipate the reader's negative response, a myth is "not a fable or falsehood but a story or understanding about events and situations that have great significance for the people involved." But J. O. Robertson in *American Myth, American Reality* is more to the point: "Myths are not deliberately, or necessarily consciously, fictitious";⁸ instead, they are uncon-

8. James O. Robertson, *American Myth, American Reality* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980), 5.

sciously fictitious, in other words, a kind of self-deception undermining the editors' claim that such myths are not falsehoods. Pivotal to the Mormon *mythos*, according to Hallwas and Launius, was the myth of "persecuted innocence," whereby the Latter-day Saints thought of themselves as inherently innocent because they were God's chosen people. This view implied that their opponents were inherently guilty since any opposition to the efforts of the chosen people to build the kingdom of God on earth was perceived as persecution by evil and conspiring men. The other side, in this view, had its own countermyths—the "Gentiles" saw themselves as patriots in the American myth of democracy and equality, defenders of the democratic way of life against despotic religious separatists led by their power-hungry prophet.⁹ Subtleties of belief and religious outlook were irrelevant to them, since they saw their freedoms threatened by the growing political and economic power at Nauvoo.

What may at first seem like a historiographically transparent notion is actually a rudimentary psychoanalytical scheme: Myths, as the theory goes, are part of the subconscious content that influences a subject's conscious thoughts, intentions, and behaviors. The situation in which a subject says or apparently intends one thing but actually does something else has been of special interest to philosophers and psychoanalysts at least since Freud for its supposed evidence of the actual subconscious disunity of the human mind. The solution to the question of the subject's paradoxical intention, in this view, is to invoke supposed unconscious motivations and desires. In the case of Joseph Smith and his followers, how can the historian explain the apparent inconsistency between their professed high moral values and the accounts that allege serious wrongdoing on their part? Or, stated differently, how can a mass of conflicting testimonies be reconciled, preferably without critically and painstakingly assessing each one

9. In a review of *Zion in the Courts: A Legal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830–1900*, by Edwin B. Firmage and Richard C. Mangrum, *Journal of the Southwest* 32/2 (1990) 241, Launius more clearly states his views about the antidemocratic character of Mormonism, "a religious organization whose views on government . . . run so contrary to the most cherished principles of the United States."

individually on the basis of its manifold textual detail? This is surely a daunting task. One easy way is to adopt the ready-made theories of the psychoanalysts, as well as the literary critics who have appropriated their jargon, and to resolve the apparent paradox in terms of unconscious myths. The Nauvoo scenario would appear as follows: The Saints, via conversion and membership in the same interpretive community, invest themselves in the myth of “persecuted innocence” (p. 300) by taking on the identity of the Lord’s chosen, which operates in their subconscious. The result is that they understand themselves as innocent in whatever they do to further the Lord’s kingdom. All who obstruct them are persecutors and thereby are inherently guilty. The Saints’ own evil is thus projected onto their supposed persecutors. Such is the superficial level of historical discussion once the older and sounder philological methods of historical criticism are abandoned.

An example of how the editors use the concept of myth to elucidate an account by psychoanalyzing its subject is furnished by a speech delivered by Joseph Smith on 26 May 1844 in which he publicly denies “spiritual wifeism” (pp. 138–41). The editors assume Joseph Smith was actually guilty of the adultery charges to which he was responding, even though Smith insisted publicly on his innocence. This apparent contradiction is read as an instance of the “myth of persecuted innocence”: Smith is the Lord’s chosen prophet, so whatever he does, he is by definition innocent. But, I ask, what if Smith were not actually guilty of *adultery* but instead were following a program of legitimate, though clandestine, plural *marriage*? Then he would have been truly innocent of the charge of adultery and not just mythically so. Furthermore, what Smith denies is spiritual wifeism and adultery, not polygamy or plural marriage. These are very different things; spiritual wifeism is apparently the adulterous version of plural marriage luridly depicted by John C. Bennett in his exposé and apparently practiced by him.¹⁰ This may seem like quibbling over details, but often

10. John C. Bennett, *The History of the Saints; Or, an Exposé of Joe Smith and Mormonism* (Boston: Leland & Whiting, 1842).

the details undermine superficial explanations and suggest others not considered before. But why should it be necessary to remind a scholar of this?

Nowhere do these editors consider the possibility that Smith or any of his followers might actually have been virtuous, but every account of their supposed crimes is given disproportionate credence. In statements calculated to offend, Smith is everywhere contrasted with "men of integrity . . . such as William and Wilson Law" (p. 112). Furthermore, with regard to the supposed misuse of the law to free Smith from arrest,¹¹ textual evidence suggests that Smith and his followers truly misunderstood the *habeas corpus* provision of the Nauvoo Charter and thought that it could legitimately be applied outside of Nauvoo. Smith was no lawyer—his (mis)quoting of that portion of the charter in a speech of June 1843,¹² reproduced on page 96, suggests how he truly understood it. Joseph Smith quotes it as follows: "The municipal court shall have power to grant writs of *habeas corpus* arising under the ordinances of the city council." The actual Nauvoo Charter reads: "The municipal court shall have power to grant writs of *habeas corpus* in all cases arising under the ordinances of the city council." This version contains the phrase *in all cases*, and thus the meaning of the entire clause is significantly different. Omitting the phrase that restricts the power of the Nauvoo City Council significantly with regard to *habeas corpus* would rule out its application in arrests by federal or state authorities, whether in Illinois or Missouri. Joseph Smith's version suggests that he thought that writs of *habeas corpus* are wholly within the authority of the city council, whereas the actual passage indicates quite otherwise. If this passage was truly misread, misunderstood, and misapplied, how tragic the consequences! The question as to why people misread in this way is a question for

11. The *habeas corpus* provision of the charter was used on several occasions to free Joseph Smith from arrest, a practice which infuriated his enemies and created new enemies, who cited this as evidence that Joseph considered himself above the law.

12. This followed Smith's triumphal return to Nauvoo when he was freed after having been arrested (or kidnapped) by a Missouri official.

our would-be psychologists. (But since they seem not even to have noticed the variant reading, I would not place much confidence in their answer.)

In their discussion of the resolutions of the Carthage Convention, which met on 1–2 October 1845 to consider the Saints' decision to leave Nauvoo the following spring, the editors suggest that, in groping after the true reason for incompatibility between the communities, the delegates lacked "a modern comprehension of myth, or the vocabulary for expressing it" (p. 305). Would the resolutions of the Carthage Convention have been stated more clearly if they had held the sophisticated psychomythic perspective of these editors? This I doubt. Yet the editors want to foist their own notions onto long-dead agents. The delegates had no need of any "modern comprehension"—they understood exactly whom they did not like and why, and who had to leave—namely, the Mormons.

Elsewhere in their analysis of a specific Latter-day Saint account,¹³ the editors proclaim, "The tendency of myth to gloss over the complexities of history is striking" (p. 321). This could be read ironically. They mean those who are self-deceived by myth, but the statement could also be read as applying to those who employ the mythic concept in historical analysis. I would rephrase it thus: "The tendency of those who employ a mythical paradigm to gloss over the complexities of history is striking." One of the dangers of using psychoanalytical concepts in historiography is that it tends to reduce the detail of a subject's account to standard forms and archetypes.¹⁴ Critical detail is lost, and the historian usually ends up revealing more about himself than about his subject. That is the case here, and with much of

13. Joseph Lee Robinson (1811–90) left an account of the last days of Nauvoo. But no date is given for this manuscript: how can we completely assess its historical value? Hallwas and Launius are consistently careless about such details. It would be useful to know since clues within the text suggest that it was written near the end of his life, and if so, then some of the details about Nauvoo polygamy found in no other source may be legitimately questioned (because of faulty memory, etc.).

14. Here the subject's account is categorized as describing "an episode in the cosmic struggle between God and the devil, good and evil." I read the account and see no such thing. I see, rather, a wealth of interesting details about the man's religious faith.

the other commentary also. Moreover, the editors attempt both to place a particular selection in its historical context as well as to show how it proves their theory of Mormon vice and gentile virtue via the intermediary myth. I find this explanatory theory to be inadequate, as are all attempts to view historical data through the lens of a simplistic a priori theory. The result is a loss of important detail and a distortion of events, either in their content or significance.

Just how superficial an analysis is advocated by Hallwas and Launius may be seen from this statement: "It is impossible to produce anything other than a simplistic, inaccurate history if documents of the era are not evaluated critically as expressions of myth and ideology" (p. 8). This is a very revealing declaration since they unequivocally state their intention to read texts not for what the texts can tell us but for what they want to find in those texts. This approach biases the reading with imported concepts. Do the editors mean that all histories written before these explanatory notions were invented are to be discarded? Such a procedure privileges and prioritizes this particular theory to an unacceptable degree. Documents (if they express anything at all) express intention that must be understood against the sociolinguistic background of their time. A competent historian must be thoroughly familiar with the idiom of the period under consideration. Myth and ideology are modern constructs foisted upon these accounts, forcing them to say things never intended by their authors. So, the result is that the editors allow neither side to speak for itself but make both speak to the editors' own agenda.

Furthermore, in their attempt to speak for the other side, Hallwas and Launius dismiss the work of believing Latter-day Saint historians about their own religious history, claiming that it is impossible for believers to understand the truth about their own sacred history. This is another egregious fallacy, that of *ad personam*, or dismissing a person's statements or arguments simply because of some personal feature of his character, instead of examining his words on their own merits. The reason for this, they maintain, is that this very history is central to the myths held by the believer that cannot, by

definition, be false for him. In this, Hallwas and Launius rely on the views of Jan Shipps: "By its very nature [sacred history] can only be *retold* and defended; not reinvestigated, researched" (quoted on p. 2).

An example of rejecting a work of scholarship on these grounds concerns a landmark (and lengthy) legal study by Elder Dallin H. Oaks before he became an apostle.¹⁵ The editors casually dismiss this thorough and fair study, asserting that Oaks "has tried to pound a square peg into a round hole in seeking to legitimate the clearly illegal act of destroying the *Expositor*" (p. 9 n. 6). Oaks's leadership role in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is also mentioned, evidently intended to cast his scholarship into doubt. But I ask: If the destruction of the *Expositor* were "clearly illegal" (as nonlawyers Hallwas and Launius characterize it), then how could there be room for Oaks's extensive legal discussion? Nevertheless, Oaks is to be commended for the thorough character of his scholarship in considering all perspectives in the *Expositor* affair, doing so in the context, as far as possible, of the legal knowledge, practice, and precedents of the time. He has thus exerted a much greater effort to understand the complexities of these events than Hallwas and Launius seem capable of doing. Furthermore, Oaks does not whitewash the Saints but criticizes their deeds when appropriate. He clearly distinguishes which actions of the Nauvoo City Council were legal and which were not, according to the legal practice of the time. Rather than offhandedly dismissing the work of a scholar such as Oaks, Hallwas and Launius could learn a sounder and more just way of handling historical texts and issues, which approach is lacking in their present treatment.

In a description of their method in the preface, the editors propose to read each account "as a symbolic structure, an expression of the author's inner self" (p. ix). This sounds less like historiography and more like an attempt at the (pseudo-)objectivity of psychoanalytic "science." Once again, this conceptual importation is blatant. They continue to sound not like historians so much as literary critics:

15. Dallin H. Oaks, "The Suppression of the *Nauvoo Expositor*," *Utah Law Review* 9/3 (1965): 862–903.

"We would like to help historians . . . to read better, to realize that nonfiction writing provides not just facts but fascinating self-revelations." As I stated earlier, the approach they take does produce self-revelations, but of the historian's self, not the subject's. I cringe whenever humanistic scholarly discussion degenerates into talk of symbols and universals because these are several steps removed from direct evidence. I am usually uncertain what scholars mean by these terms or how such concepts are more relevant to the subject under discussion than to those doing the discussing. Symbolic structure and self-revelations may be appropriate for discussing a poem in freshman English but are not suitable for analyzing historical documents, at least among professional historians.

Consistent with their predilection for literary criticism, these editors seem more interested in the writing per se, the style of a given account, and not in its credibility as a historical source. Some sources are praised for no other reason than being well-written (in the editors' opinion), and others are criticized for falling short of some unstated standard. For example, on pages 340 and 342 two accounts written by anonymous reporters describing Nauvoo in late 1846 are praised for the quality of their prose. The first is called a "very effective piece of writing," and the second, "another well-written description of Nauvoo." On the other hand, the apparent misspellings in Vilate Kimball's account (pp. 214–16) are taken as evidence of her lack of education. Thus the old stereotype of the Latter-day Saints' ignorance and gullibility is underscored. The editors are apparently ignorant of the fact that English spelling was not standardized until a later period. Who would take Shakespeare's multifarious spellings, for example, as evidence of a lack of education? The historian's purpose ought not to be to admire beautiful writing but to evaluate a source for its historical value, a practice which is almost completely lacking in this book. A rhetorically well-crafted piece of prose may be worthless as historical evidence; yet, if we allow ourselves to admire its style, we may be prone to deception. One of the conspicuous features of Brodie's historical fiction that deluded many was her fine

prose style. (It truly makes a good read.) That a work of history is well-written does not entail that it is soundly researched or carefully reasoned.

In analyzing so many personal historical accounts, Hallwas and Launius indulge in a kind of crude psychologizing attempt to reveal the self behind the words. Very often the editors claim to know what an individual was thinking or really intended. On page 3, for example, while discussing the actions and motivations of the dissenting Mormons who published the *Expositor*, they declare that "the dissenters' actual motive" was to reform the "Mormon church." The editors do not, however, explain how they are privy to this information. Was it divined, or does it derive from their pseudoscientific psychologizing analysis? What evidence is there on which to base any analysis, apart from the dissenters' own statements? The dissenters' actions and words suggest a far more complex intention than simply to reform the church. A historian should show an awareness that no bare facts can be extracted from an account: The truth of an author depends on his rhetorical stance and purpose as depicted by the manifold detail of the text, not by a hypothetical reconstruction of the contents of his inner self. Motivation is not among the phenomena but must be rationally inferred, and this is largely determined by the paradigm from which an author's reasoning derives.

The dissenters' actions were, according to the editors (who accept their tendentious statements in the *Expositor* at face value), "an ethical protest by some Nauvoo church members against what they believed was oppression from an ecclesiastical institution gone awry" (p. 111). How ethical was it to launch a slanderous attack, filled with innuendo and obscene rhetoric, which they must have realized (and even perhaps intended) would bring mob action against the church leaders as well as possible injury to ordinary people? They probably realized there was no other way to wrest control of the church from Joseph Smith than to generate a popular uprising against the leaders. In addition, the editors make another misstatement: The dissenters were not just "some Nauvoo church members," as Hallwas and Launius maintain, but high-ranking leaders in the church and community,

some of whom apparently had clashed with Smith (and perhaps others) over business matters. Although Hallwas and Launius assert that "There is no evidence . . . that the dissidents wanted anything but the reforms they mentioned in their newspaper" (p. 160), the rhetoric in the *Expositor* and the actions of the dissidents provide abundant evidence to the contrary.

Attempts at mind reading are even more blatant in other passages in which psychoanalytical jargon is used freely. In describing the deliberations of the Nauvoo City Council against the dissenters, which occurred on 8 June 1844,¹⁶ the editors refer to the "inner tensions of the accusers." And with Orson Spencer's remark about the dissenters being "covenant breakers," we are told that he "unconsciously put his finger on the repressed anxieties that haunted the Mormon mind" (p. 149). This is a great example of pretended historiography. The editors' introduction contains the following assessment of the conflict: "In psychological terms, both sides repressed (and hence ignored) their own potential for evil and projected it onto their ideological opponents" (p. 6). In describing an account by a former member,¹⁷ the editors comment: "This letter reveals the inner state of people who have rejected the core myths of their church" (p. 169). "Unconsciously"? "Repressed"? "Projected"? "Inner state"? Please. These terms belong in the psychoanalyst's vocabulary, not the historian's. Have we learned *nothing* from Brodie's example of how *not* to write history? Since the book under review is a collection of primary documents, perhaps it would have been better served had the editors simply provided the necessary historical background and withheld commentary. The slipshod analysis that they do provide is worse than none at all.

If historical or textual analysis is to be included at all in a book such as this, it should be thorough, at least in the case of the pivotal accounts. Every historical document has a rhetorical purpose, for

16. This is the meeting at which the *Expositor* was determined to be a nuisance that must be eradicated.

17. Letter of Isaac and Sarah Scott, dated 16 June 1844, describing what they object to in Latter-day Saint doctrine and practice.

example, that a historian should take into account. Furthermore, a historian must possess a command of the way language was used in the particular period under examination. These editors seem to be clueless as to the explosive power of the obscene rhetoric of the *Expositor* in the linguistic context of the time. As mentioned earlier, Oaks, in his thorough analysis of the legal aspects of that affair, shows a keen awareness of such linguistic details. I add that, given its lurid content, even the name of the paper is racy—"expositor" means "one who exposes, who strips (something) naked." Future historians ought to pay closer attention to the details in the words themselves to avoid unwarranted conclusions such as those of the present editors. One must be aware that English has changed since the days of Joseph Smith—it is easy to read an account from that time and think we understand it. Fortunately, reference works can provide clues as to what various words meant then—the Oxford English Dictionary and the reprint of the 1828 Webster dictionary ought to be basic tools for the historian of this period.

Hallwas and Launius seem oblivious to the fact that certain sources are inherently untrustworthy, something that can be ascertained from the texts themselves. For example, one woman reports that she solemnly promised not to tell what passed between her and church leaders but then proceeded to break her confidence in the letter reproduced on pages 122–25.¹⁸ How can such a source be trusted? She lied once—why not again? Furthermore, the testimony of the disaffected from any group must be taken with caution by virtue of the fact that they are *disaffected*. Similarly, an interview with Sarah Pratt (pp. 125–28), who became estranged eighteen years earlier, is included in all its bitter detail, describing events that supposedly took place over forty years earlier. (The amount of elapsed time since the events described ought to be sufficient to render this account suspect). The editors take particular delight in this account, which con-

18. A lengthy letter written by Martha Brotherton at the request of John C. Bennett, dated 13 July 1842; she was supposedly propositioned by Joseph Smith with the connivance of other church leaders.

tains details of Smith's supposed adulterous encounters and John C. Bennett's ameliorating abortions that are found in no other source.¹⁹ Pratt's report contains details that surpass nearly all other sources and is replete with stylistic details of disaffection that could be demonstrated by thorough textual scrutiny. My scientific background predisposes me to prefer simpler explanations; it is simpler to suppose that Pratt and Bennett had the adulterous relationship while Orson was away on church errands than to hypothesize a broad conspiracy between the leaders of the church and their married paramours. The possibility that Pratt lied and had ample motivation for doing so, as the wife of a leading apostle, is not even considered, although the editors are quick to impute deception to other accounts that seem to favor the standard Latter-day Saint view of Nauvoo polygamy. But these editors enthusiastically and uncritically accept such unfavorable testimony as valid. In both cases, the responsible historian must assess the author's intention as manifest in her words, not from an *a priori* and anachronistic theory.

Specific reports of Mormon vice are given disproportionate credibility without considering the validity of the testimony. "The evidence of Mormon theft is substantial" (p. 67). This assertion is supported only by a few anecdotes remembered decades after the supposed events, which is hardly "substantial" evidence. Even the minimal reported cases of theft may have been normal for neighboring populations of the time and not due to any supposed condoning of theft by the Saints. This possibility is not even considered—theft is explained through the mythical notion of the Mormons' "inherent innocence" and their arrogant belief in their right to take whatever they pleased. I suspect the reason Hallwas and Launius so readily accept these reports is their predilection for simple *a priori* theory: They already know that the Saints were antidemocratic, self-righteous, deluded,

19. Including how Joseph Smith supposedly frequented houses of prostitution, had intercourse with married women so that the children of these illicit unions would appear to belong to the cuckolded husband, and employed the expert services of the abortionist "Dr." Bennett.

and dangerous fanatics, so they all too readily accept slim evidence that favors this view, and any evidence to the contrary is simply false.

The most damaging criticism I have of this book is that the editors fail to appreciate what *religion* is. This is a lethal flaw in historians who undertake to write about the history of a religious group. They make the outrageous claim: “The only documented case of out-and-out religious persecution enacted in Hancock County” was the persecution of the dissenters and the destruction of the press by means of which they “dared to point out Mormon shortcomings in their newspaper and demand reform” (p. 6). In this view, the editors seem uncritically to follow the resolution of the Carthage Convention: “We do not believe [the Mormons] to be a persecuted people. We *know* that they are not; but that whatever grievances they may suffer are the necessary, and legitimate consequences of their illegal, wicked and dishonest acts” (p. 307). I point out, however, that religion is more than beliefs and rituals, a fact that we tend to forget in our secular society. It is an entire way of living. Latter-day Saints were trying to build a community, as they and many other religious traditions—such as those of Jews and Muslims—have sought to do at various times and places. Whatever outside agency frustrates that purpose commits to some degree or other religious persecution, whether an outsider would call it that or not. Religious persecution is thus classified by those who suffer it. Nauvoo would not have existed in the first place without Mormonism, and their neighbors outside that way of life well knew that it was the *religion* that held the Latter-day Saints together as a people, an *ethnicity*. In fact, there were, as is well-documented, numerous instances of religious persecution directed against the Saints as a religious people. At the very least, if compelling the Latter-day Saints to leave Nauvoo in 1846 was not religious persecution, I do not know what could be.

In conclusion, although the historical commentary is almost worthless (except perhaps as itself a historical curiosity for future scholars), *Cultures in Conflict* should be read and compared with sounder scholarship, or even serve as an invitation for other scholars

to do better work. Future scholars should employ time-proven methods of reading historical documents, which are not as easy as invoking a theory such as myth or an ideology that reduces all the details to a simple entity that can easily be dealt with. Such methods are faithful to details of fact, circumstance, and rhetorical situation and require genuine effort to employ them well. I trust that one day someone educated in this more thorough method will produce a good history of the Nauvoo period.²⁰ I suggest that one can have a valid way of understanding this period without believing that Joseph Smith was a “miserable impostor,” that the Saints were his dupes, justifying evil through “myth,” or that the opposition was a homogeneous evil mob. But that historical treatment is yet to be written. If *Cultures in Conflict* does make a contribution, it is in showing how those not belonging to the Church of Jesus Christ had legitimate concerns about their neighbors. But to champion them instead of the members of the church is to commit the same error of which the editors accuse Latter-day Saint historians. Lastly, I am disappointed that such low-grade history could be published by a reputable academic press.

20. Perhaps the recent book by Glen M. Leonard is a step in the right direction. Glen M. Leonard, *Nauvoo: A Place of Peace, a People of Promise* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002).

THE ANTI-MORMON ATTACKERS

Russell C. McGregor

The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun. (Ecclesiastes 1:9)

Years ago and long before *recycling* was a word most people would recognize, Hugh W. Nibley likened the anti-Mormon enterprise to selling old clothes from a shiny new pushcart. Thus, while the Bible tells us there is “no new thing under the sun,” certainly some new twists in some of the old approaches turn up. The back cover of *The Mormon Defenders: How Latter-day Saint Apologists Misinterpret the Bible* features the following recommendation:

As a former fifth-generation member of the LDS Church, I enthusiastically recommend *The Mormon Defenders* as an able, insightful, and engaging defense of truly biblical Christianity.
—Kevin James Bywater

It comes as a mild surprise to find that Mr. Bywater has written the foreword from which this statement has been excerpted (p. 6). It seems unusual to me for a book’s recommendation to be quoted directly from the book itself.

Review of James Patrick Holding. *The Mormon Defenders: How Latter-day Saint Apologists Misinterpret the Bible*. Self-published, 2001. 160 pp. \$8.99.

A further self-recommendation is found in the author's introduction, which is titled, "Aggressive Apologetics: The Growing Mormon Mission." "Holding"¹ takes up the theme introduced by Mosser and Owen's essay on the need for better quality evangelical apologetics² and promises to deliver the goods in the form of "top-notch Biblical scholarship" (p. 10). This level of self-certification makes no concessions to false modesty. Whatever the actual quality of the scholarship here, the author certainly thinks it is formidable.

This book is, in part, another response to Blomberg and Robinson's *How Wide the Divide?*³—a book that seemingly continues to disturb those who have trouble accepting the proposition that individuals can believe differently and still be Christians. Holding attempts to widen the divide by attacking on seven fronts: divine embodiment, trinitarianism, premortal existence, baptism for the dead, vicarious ordinances in general, the role of works in salvation, and exaltation. Part of Holding's shiny new pushcart is found in the manner of presentation. The book has a distinct apologetic handbook feel, with the key points being reiterated in summary form at the end of each chapter. This provides the reader with a useful way to survey quickly what Holding thinks he has proven in those chapters.

In the foreword, Bywater claims that the book makes it clear that "Mormonism is not biblical" (p. 6). What neither he nor Holding spells out is what they mean by "biblical." The hermeneutic approach appears to shift as the author moves from subject to subject; the only overriding principle appears to be a search for whatever readings provide the most useful argument against Latter-day Saint beliefs

1. I have reason to believe that James Patrick Holding is a pseudonym for Robert Turkel.

2. See Carl Mosser and Paul Owen, "Mormon Scholarship, Apologetics, and Evangelical Neglect: Losing the Battle and Not Knowing It?" *Trinity Journal*, n.s., 19/2 (1998): 179–205.

3. Craig L. Blomberg and Stephen E. Robinson, *How Wide the Divide? A Mormon and an Evangelical in Conversation* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1997). While both evangelicals and Latter-day Saints can and do take issue with some of the book's contents, the continuing dismay in anti-Mormon circles seems to arise from the mere fact of the book's existence.

and truth claims. Thus, in his attempt to support the nonscriptural notion of an ontological trinity, he builds up what he calls an “interpretive template” based on a mixture of canonical, deuterocanonical, and noncanonical Wisdom literature (pp. 36–40), which he then uses to control the biblical passages he chooses to examine. Then, having relied on these sources to teach Latter-day Saints how to read the Bible, he subsequently chides Latter-day Saint apologists for citing the same sources.

Holding then shifts his ground when dealing with the subject of baptism for the dead. Here the author frankly rejects what he admits is the “majority view” of 1 Corinthians 15:29 (namely, that it describes a proxy baptism on behalf of the unbaptized dead) by appealing to an argument from silence and to pagan customs—in other words, he bases his argument entirely on nonbiblical grounds. In place of this view, Holding asserts the following:

Therefore, we argue that the majority interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15:29 is off the mark. A more reasonable thesis is that the practice was devoid of theological meaning and thus not requiring Paul’s explicit condemnation, or else, that we are misunderstanding the passage completely. (p. 70)

Either the passage doesn’t mean anything, or we don’t understand it—but whatever the case, its meaning must be sacrificed. *What* isn’t biblical?

In contrast to this approach, Holding becomes a staunch and loyal enthusiast for majority opinion or scholarship as soon as it suits his purposes. In response to the great commission in Mark 16:15–16 (“And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned”), he argues that “the reader may be surprised to see this verse cited by LDS apologists, knowing that it is almost universally declared to be not part of the original Gospel of Mark” (p. 110). Just exactly why the fashions of scholarship should determine which passages of scripture form part of the faith of

the Latter-day Saints is not clear, but Holding does not even attempt to address the real issue regarding the authenticity and authority of that passage; the actual question has to do not with Mark's authorship but rather with whether Jesus actually made the statement. Matthew 28:19–20 would seem to suggest that he did say it or at least something very much like it.

Quite apart from these kinds of problems, Holding preempts half the discussion of the faith of Latter-day Saints as a form of biblical Christianity by repeatedly assuming that Mormon and Christian are distinct categories. Note that he does not attempt to argue this but simply assumes it. This he does frequently and consistently, as in the following examples:

- “A fundamental point of contention between Mormonism and Christianity . . .” (p. 11).
- “Perhaps the most obscure issue upon which Christians and Mormons disagree . . .” (p. 35).
- “The difference between Mormon and Christian belief on the nature . . .” (p. 51).
- “If one verse could be nominated to represent the different ways in which Mormonism and Christianity approach the Bible . . .” (p. 63).

These quotations are a sampling of an assumption that is not developed but simply reiterated throughout the book. Holding cannot claim to be ignorant of the relevant literature since he refers to it,⁴ yet he fails entirely to interact with it. Is this his idea of “top-notch scholarship”?

A detailed critique of his arguments would run to many pages and would be tedious. What is worthy of note is that the real nuts-and-bolts content of this book is substantially the same as most of the doctrinal anti-Mormon books produced by evangelical Protestants. The approach is always the same: since the Bible says what “we” (i.e., the evangelicals) think it means, and since “they” (i.e., any-

4. See, for instance, p. 29 n. 69, which refers to Stephen E. Robinson's *Are Mormons Christian?* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1991).

one else) think it means something different, it follows that “they” are not biblical. Holding has at least made an effort to justify this assumption with something resembling a structured argument, but that argument turns out, upon inspection, to be fatally flawed by its tendentiousness.

Where this book really does improve on some of those of its predecessors is in its tone. It neither bristles with hostility, as most earlier productions do, nor drips with insincere, condescending friendliness, as some of the more recent efforts do. Apart from one lapse in Bywater’s foreword, I saw none of the usual accusations of “dishonesty” that conservative Protestant anti-Mormons tend to fling at Latter-day Saints for failing to describe our own faith in terms amenable to the hostile caricatures our opponents have fashioned and prefer. His approach is businesslike and his tone scholarly. Nonetheless, his agenda is clear from the title he has chosen. For defenders do not contend against other defenders; attackers do. And since Holding’s book purports to “contend with *The Mormon Defenders*” (back cover), its single purpose appears to be to attack.

Holding also unfortunately fails to define crucial terms, such as *biblical*, *Christian*, and *Mormon*. Perhaps he felt it necessary to avoid such definitions since they might raise questions that would undermine his entire enterprise. He shifts his ground from chapter to chapter and from topic to topic as he keeps his focus on whatever angle of attack seems most profitable at the time. He relies heavily on such fallacies as the argument from silence, particularly when he insists that the many biblical accounts of divine appearances in human form do not indicate that God might not take some other form when no one is looking (pp. 15–16) or that Jesus might not simply be dissolving his body when he does not need to put in an earthly appearance (pp. 22–23). Holding thus fails to accomplish his stated task. “Top-notch biblical scholarship” from our evangelical Protestant brothers and sisters may someday be brought to bear on Latter-day Saint truth claims, but it has not been accomplished in this book.

THE AUTHORITY OF "ACADEMIC FREEDOM": ON TWO CASES OF MISEDUCATION AT BYU

Ralph C. Hancock

As the authors report with admirable candor in their preface, this book arose from controversies at Brigham Young University (BYU) in which they were involved as young student journalists. Upon the "firing" of two professors (Cecelia Konchar Farr and David Knowlton), Bryan Waterman and Brian Kagel (editors, respectively, of the *Student Review* and the *Daily Universe*) were motivated "to begin plotting books about academic freedom at the Mormon school" (p. vii). The 453-page outcome, a collaborative effort, is an amply (if not evenly) documented account of certain episodes of ideological commotion at BYU in the 1990s, framed by an overview of the history of the issue of "academic freedom" at the church university. This result is in many ways quite impressive, though the original, polemical motivation (for from the outset there is no doubt about the authors' sympathy) seems not to have been much affected by the process of researching and writing. They alert us early on, somewhat delicately, to the fact that the "narrative leans toward the experience of some faculty members, due to our level of personal access to them" (p. x), and that the book is "primarily journalistic in tone" (p. ix). At the same time, they hope it will "measure up . . . to standards expected

Review of Bryan Waterman and Brian Kagel. *The Lord's University: Freedom and Authority at BYU*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998. xii + 453 pp., with index. \$19.95.

of professional historians” (p. ix), whatever that means. So we know better than to expect a perspective of Olympian serenity. Given these limitations, the story—or the side of the story they tell—is presented quite skillfully, even engagingly. Still, it is disappointing that amid all this reporting and documenting, the authors apparently managed to avoid reflecting on the central questions that hover over practically all the events and arguments considered.

The subtitle itself suggests certain questions: what do we mean, what might we mean, what ought we to mean by “freedom”? by “authority”? What is at stake in the diverse uses of these terms—for example, in politics, in higher education, in religion? How does each of these terms relate to the other—are they necessarily antagonists? We need not doubt the sincerity of the authors in assuring us that they “do not seek to turn ‘freedom and authority’ into a heavy-handed interpretive framework” (p. ix). But the only way to back up this assurance would be to reflect on this very framework and thus to achieve some perspective on the original project of the book itself and on the passions surrounding and infusing it. Such reflection the authors forego.

The price of this missing reflection is a muddling of categories that pervasively conditions the tone of the book and dooms any attempts at careful analysis. From the first chapter—“The Uses of Mormon Education”—it is clear that whereas “authority” is identified with the church (as if the rejection of one authority did not inevitably expose us to another), “freedom” is neatly associated with the unexamined authorities implicit in “a desire for legitimacy in traditional academic modes” (p. 6) and even “an uneducated people’s desire for respectability in the eyes of the American nation” (p. 7). The authors mention, but do not even pause to consider, the idea that “BYU, by allowing religious perspectives in the classroom, actually affords a greater amount of academic freedom than that found at secular universities” or that “Mormon education” might be considered “as an alternative to prevailing national models and aims to be rooted in the revelatory as much as” and therefore, I suggest, not simply as opposed to, “the rational” (pp. 4, 5). Waterman and Kagel show slight

interest in elaborating on such an alternative or in asking to what degree the policies and decisions of the BYU administration that arouse their indignation might be reasonably interpreted as instrumental to such an “alternative,” because they are themselves altogether overawed by the prestige of “prevailing national models.” They therefore end up, somewhat despite themselves, writing a brief for assimilation to “mainstream American values,” provided that these are understood in the progressive version—that is, as uncontaminated by the “culturally conservative backlash against the perceived excesses of modern democratic society” (pp. 12, 13). Thus they find themselves deeply embarrassed by BYU’s apparent determination “to deviate from contemporary academic models and preserve a safe space for Mormon education, even at the expense of outstanding faculty and national reputation”—where “outstanding faculty” is understood, of course, as a strict correlate of “[progressive] national reputation.” This book is the story of that embarrassment and of a failure to be ashamed of it.

This said, much of the story is well told and well documented. Anyone trying to find a way into the historical record of BYU’s developing mission in the face of various challenges from the evolving culture it partly inhabits will discover here many valuable references and even, if he or she proceeds discriminately, quite a useful orientation. The first part of the book (chaps. 1–4), “Contexts,” is particularly to be recommended in this sense; here the authors offer very readable and interesting accounts—based on ample research—of feminism (chap. 2), student journalism (chap. 3), and the Honor Code (chap. 4) at BYU. In these chapters the protagonists are often allowed to speak for themselves, and so the uncritical bias of the authors is not too obtrusive—or only intermittently intrusive, particularly as they conclude each chapter. For example, much in the chapter on feminism could pass for an even-handed, blow-by-blow, and decade-by-decade account of an ongoing debate if it were not introduced by a remark about “official endorsements of gender essentialism, most recently found in the church’s 1995 document *The Family: A*

Proclamation to the World" (p. 23), and concluded with a reinforcement of the book's governing paradigm concerning the tension between "conservative religion" and "national academic standards" (p. 62). The authors leave no doubt that, for them, there can be no questioning of the authority of "national academic standards," least of all from the standpoint of "conservative religion," nor can any prophetic authority (or even, apparently, recent scientific evidence) be allowed to flout the prestige of gender constructivism in the "progressive" academy.

Similarly, they conclude a useful if somewhat tendentious account of the history of the Honor Code with an ominous remark about "the precarious nature of one's status at BYU" and strike a final pose of heroic resignation before the brutal fact that "constant enforcement" will likely remain a necessity "as BYU continues to manufacture students—who then become model Mormons—for years to come" (p. 169). Such seething resentment and contempt for an explicit and widely shared mission of Brigham Young University—to foster the development of Latter-day Saints—the authors apparently take to be compatible with "standards expected of professional historians."

The motives of resentment and contempt become more intrusive in "Controversies," the second, main part of the book (chaps. 5–10). Here the authors are up to their necks in the recent issues and controversies closest to their hearts—or to their spleens—and here they rely most heavily on their own experiences and their favorite sources. They show no more sense of nuance in dealing with the complex, qualitative issues surrounding faculty review processes and standards than one would expect of student journalists, happy to assume, when it suits their cause, that the right number of publications or the right numbers on "teacher evaluation scores" should automatically decide the case (p. 203). Not that any such standard of judgment is explicitly developed. The only consistent interpretive theme here is the rightness of the dissidents' cause, a consistency untroubled by a certain difficulty in pinning down what that cause is supposed to be: is it the traditional commitment of the university to rational inquiry, to "in-

formation and knowledge," as Waterman put it in one of his self-quoted contributions to the debate (p. 227), or is it the "postmodern" or "radical feminist" commitment to "change," which of course never means changing the minds of the radicals?

But the main distortion in Waterman and Kagel's account consists simply in the amount of text devoted to the cases the authors have always been convinced deserve to be *causes celebres*. By quoting their heroes and their heroes' fans (including, not infrequently, themselves) copiously enough, they are able to reassure themselves that they have played a major role in events, which, if they are not demonstrably of world-historical proportions in the precise Hegelian sense, at least have a chance of winning the favorable attention of the guardians of national academic prestige, whom they of course take to be the court of last appeal. To be sure, Waterman and Kagel deserve credit for giving some space to the arguments of their adversaries—space in the pages of their book but none in their minds. Thus, when they cite massive evidence for support for the BYU administration among faculty and the larger LDS community (p. 244; before concluding the chapter on Farr and Knowlton with what are no doubt supposed to be touching vignettes on the post-BYU lives of their heroes), they clearly do so only as evidence of the desperately blind conformism of the unenlightened masses.

Chapter 7 is particularly useful in revealing the links, or at least the presumption of solidarity, between the small dissident milieu at BYU and a would-be movement aiming directly at a radical transformation of the church. Waterman and Kagel give ample space to a number of "Mormon Intellectuals" (roughly, the subset of those who think themselves competent to reform the church and who succeed in getting quoted in newspapers) who openly courted excommunication and finally managed to achieve it. One is Lavina Fielding Anderson, whose radical antinomianism includes the notion that "the priesthood, the temple, the church must be taken down stone by stone and built again on the sure foundation of Jesus Christ"—as that foundation is interpreted by each "individual member," that is

(p. 275). This is clearly incompatible with any institutional authority. Another is Janice Allred, who insisted on her right as a member of the church to promote new practices and doctrines concerning a Holy Ghost/Heavenly Mother (pp. 292–93); and finally the inimitable Paul Toscano, fully inhabiting his self-created role as a prophet crying repentance to the fallen church hierarchy—“Wo be unto him that is at ease in Zion”—and offering to correct their “false teachings” (p. 273). If decisive differences exist between the opinions and aims of such persons, which are clearly incompatible with any plausible understanding of loyalty to the church as presently constituted and the views of the dissident-heroes at BYU, then our authors show remarkably little interest in defining such differences. Of course they are as free as their heroes, under the blessed laws of the land, to dissent from the church, to leave it, to attack it, or even to try to start their own. But then we must be clear what is at stake. Given this complete failure to discriminate among the various advocates of greater “freedom” at BYU and in the church more generally, the authors’ occasional efforts at reassurance regarding the faithfulness or sincerity of the dissidents they wish to champion rings rather hollow. Do they really want to endorse any and all attacks on the church as presently constituted?

Lacking any capacity to criticize even the most radical critiques of the church, the authors are completely deaf to any arguments—including many they briefly cite—for understandings of “academic freedom” different from their own “unfettered”—that is, boundless—notion. Since they do not wish to consider the possibility—or rather, the plain fact—that certain core teachings of the church simply contradict the liberationism of their heroes, they can only ascribe arguments of their opponents to some dark “alliance with broader conservative forces in the academy and in the culture at large” (p. 408). And so their last chapter consists of an ambitious attempt, though grafted onto an argument developed earlier by Scott Abbott (see p. 426), to describe the rise of a certain neoconservatism in America and to trace LDS suspicion of secularization and sense of opposition to the world to this outside political movement. To be sure, real connections exist between certain neoconservative intellectuals and some faithful

church leaders and scholars. This can be explained by the unalarming fact that the two groups hold a number of concerns and viewpoints in common. But Waterman and Kagel's suggestion of some sinister political hijacking of the LDS mainstream is a laughable nonstarter for the simple reason that, as the authors themselves once let slip, a certain "religious and social conservatism" among Mormons preceded the development of ties with the neoconservatives (p. 429). The wonder is that our young authors apparently cannot even conceive of the possibility of a critical standpoint outside the "secular world" defined by the most recent academic fashions.

My critique of Waterman and Kagel's contemptuous and therefore careless examination of issues surrounding *The Lord's University* should in no way be taken to imply that the question of just what such a university should be has been finally or even adequately answered. Certainly a simple opposition between "us" (Latter-day Saints) and "them" ("secular," "worldly," "intellectual") will not be enough to guide us in seeking to expand the mind's freedom as we explore truths gratefully received on the authority of revelation. To begin with, we cannot even see how much we are already conditioned by "the world," how much we ourselves owe to it, without first carefully examining the world's self-understanding, as represented, for example, in ideas, and in literary and artistic expressions. Such examinations would in some cases justify and ground our suspicions regarding "the world" and in other cases open us more fully to whatever is virtuous, lovely, of good report, or praiseworthy. But the narrative and the arguments offered by Waterman and Kagel do little to advance such a task of discriminating engagement with the world of learning. If no richer understanding of the relationship, even the creative tension, between "academic freedom" and the "authority" of the restored Church of Jesus Christ than that at work in the accounts given by these manifestly bright and enterprising former students should come to inform discussions of such matters at BYU, then this failure would in itself constitute a much heavier judgment on the pursuit at Brigham Young University of its noble mission than any of the complaints so amply voiced in this volume.

THE BIBLE CODE

John A. Tvedtnes

The so-called Bible Code study conducted in Israel stimulates frequent questions. Several articles and a book have resulted from the study, which purports to demonstrate that hidden in the Hebrew text of the Pentateuch—the first five books of the Old Testament—are prophecies of future events. The researchers suggest that because only God can know the future, this is evidence that God inspired even the very wording in the Pentateuch.

Orthodox Jews and fundamentalist Christians alike have hailed the study as support for the divine authenticity of the Bible, which many of them hold to be inerrant and complete. They point out that most of the Bible Code researchers are statisticians, not theologians. Of late, some Latter-day Saints have been impressed with the code research, and it is their interest that prompts my examination of the methodology used and the problems involved.

The idea of a hidden code in the Bible was first introduced in a 1988 note published in the *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* and written by three Israeli statisticians from the Jerusalem College of Technology and the Hebrew University.¹ A follow-up article by the

1. Doron Witztum, Eliyahu Rips, and Yoav Rosenberg, response to D. J. Bartholomew, "Probability, Statistics, and Theology," *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, series A, 151/1 (1988): 173–74.

Review of Michael Drosnin. *The Bible Code*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997. 264 pp., with index. \$29.00, hardback; also available in paperback.

same authors appeared in 1994 in a refereed journal,² *Statistical Science*.³ An editorial note by the journal's editor, Robert Kass, noted that "the paper is . . . offered to *Statistical Science* readers as a challenging puzzle."⁴ Several other scholars supported the study. Among these were five mathematicians (one from Yale University and two each from Harvard University and the Hebrew University in Jerusalem) who, in 1988, issued a public statement endorsing the work. Other supporters included researchers at Johns Hopkins University and the U.S. Department of Defense. A summary of the research appeared in 1995 in *Bible Review*.⁵

In 1997 the Bible Code was popularized in a book by journalist Michael Drosnin, who followed developments and interviewed the original researchers.⁶ The book reached a much wider audience and introduced the research to the layman. About the same time, the code concept came under fire from critics. Chief among these were two Bible scholars whose critiques were published in the August 1997 issue of *Bible Review*.⁷ I shall return to their comments later.

In order to evaluate the code study, one must first understand how it was conducted.⁸ The researchers developed a computer program that takes the Hebrew text of Genesis, then skips over a specified number of letters, printing out, for example, every fifteenth letter. These are then placed in a matrix, usually a rectangular box, in which

2. Refereed journals ask one or more scholars in the relevant field to review or referee an article prior to publication to ensure that it meets scholarly standards.

3. Doron Witztum, Eliyahu Rips, and Yoav Rosenberg, "Equidistant Letter Sequences in the Book of Genesis," *Statistical Science* 9/3 (1994): 429–38.

4. *Ibid.*, 306.

5. Jeffrey B. Satinover, "Divine Authorship? Computer Reveals Startling Word Patterns," *Bible Review* 11/5 (1995): 28–31, 44–45.

6. Michael Drosnin, *The Bible Code* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997).

7. The articles were published together with an editorial preface entitled "The Bible Code: Cracked and Crumbling," *Bible Review* 13/4 (1997): 22. The articles are Ronald S. Hendel, "The Secret Code Hoax," 23–24; and Shlomo Sternberg, "Snake Oil for Sale," 24–25.

8. The term *equidistant letter sequences* or ELS was first noted in 1958 by a Rabbi Weissmandel before computers were available to most people. The Israeli statisticians acknowledge their indebtedness to Rabbi Weissmandel, whose observations prompted them to investigate the phenomenon using a computer program.

the letters forming the words are adjacent to each other on a horizontal plane. If, in the matrix, there are other words in close proximity, running horizontally, vertically, or diagonally (much like word searches in game books readily available in the United States), the connection is considered significant, provided the words “fit” together or make some kind of sense. The words formed by this method are, in and of themselves, unimportant since the laws of chance would produce valid words from time to time using the computer’s methodology. But when the researchers find several related words within the same matrix, they feel they have demonstrated their point. One of their most important finds is the name Yitzhak Rabin (reading vertically) in close proximity to the words “assassin will assassinate” (reading horizontally). This, they suggest, is an ancient prophecy about the assassination of the well-known Israeli prime minister.

The 1994 study involved a search of the book of Genesis for the names of the thirty-four most prominent Jewish men from the ninth through nineteenth centuries, including standard abbreviations of famous rabbis on the list. They paired these with the dates of birth or death of these men, who lived long after Genesis was written. They claimed that each of the names was found in close proximity to an important date in the individual’s life. They further claimed that the process did not work on various other books, such as the Samaritan version of the Pentateuch, biblical texts outside the Pentateuch, or Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*.

The prophecies that can be found using this method vary according to how many letters are skipped. Thus, a lengthy Bible passage could, theoretically, produce more than one such message, depending on whether each tenth, eleventh, or twelfth letter (or sometimes every thousandth letter) is picked. The researchers claim that, statistically, the intersection of related words cannot be chance occurrences. Examples include the proximity of the name of the king of Judah, Zedekiah, with his real given name Mattaniah (see 2 Kings 24:17).

However, this methodology is fraught with several problems. One involves the nature of the Hebrew text. No definitive version of

the books Genesis through Deuteronomy exists. Though a standard text is used in the synagogue, different ancient manuscripts vary in their readings. For example, among the Dead Sea Scrolls different versions of the book of Exodus vary widely. The omission or change of even a single word or letter can affect the results of the computer search. The code researchers have relied on a specific edition of the Masoretic Hebrew text (MT). Problematically, however, the MT was formulated in the centuries after Christ, and the earliest MT manuscript dates to the ninth century A.D. The Dead Sea Scrolls, on the other hand, are a millennium older.

Another question deals with orthography. Some words have more than one possible spelling in the Bible and, in fact, are spelled differently in various manuscripts of the same passage. Originally, some Hebrew letters were used only to represent the semivowels *y* and *w*, as well as *h*, but were later used to also denote vowel sounds (*i*, *o* or *u*, and *a*). This led to misreadings in some later manuscripts that would also affect the results of a computer search.

But the coup de grace came when two Bible scholars examined the Bible Code in the pages of the August 1997 issue of *Bible Review*. Ronald S. Hendel of Southern Methodist University entitled his review "The Secret Code Hoax." Rabbi Shlomo Sternberg, who teaches mathematics at Harvard, called his article, "Snake Oil for Sale."

Examining the question of Yitzhak Rabin's assassination, Sternberg noted that "the computer found that if you skip every 4,772 letters, the name Yitzhak Rabin is embedded in the biblical text. In other words, there is a *yod*, the first letter of Yitzhak, followed 4,772 letters later by the second letter of his name, and so on. This means that if you print out the letters of the Hebrew Pentateuch (using the Koren edition) in rows 4,772 letters wide, the name Yitzhak Rabin will appear in a vertical column" (p. 24). To Sternberg, this stretched credulity too far.

Sternberg also took up the challenge launched by the principal Bible Code researcher, Michael Drosnin, in an article published in the 9 June 1997 issue of *Newsweek*, in which he said, "When my crit-

ics find a message about the assassination of a prime minister encrypted in *Moby Dick* I will believe them.” Sternberg asked an Australian mathematics professor, Brendan McKay, “to search *Moby Dick* for such encrypted messages. He found 13 ‘predicted’ assassinations of public figures, several of them prime ministers or presidents or their equivalents.” Two examples appear in Sternberg’s article. One has a message reading, “Pres—Somoza—dies—he was shot—gun,” which one might connect to the 1980 assassination of former Nicaraguan president Anastasio Somoza. The other has “Igandhi” in a vertical line intersected by a horizontal line reading “thebloodydeed,” which brings to mind the assassination of Indian prime minister Indira Gandhi in 1984. Using the same reasoning for Sternberg’s study as that employed by the Bible Code researchers, we would have to conclude that God also dictated *Moby Dick* and that Herman Melville was a prophet! A Web site at cs.anu.edu.au/~bdm/dilugim/moby.html cites the various “Assassinations Foretold in *Moby Dick*” and includes the *Moby Dick* prediction of the death of Princess Diana. But even Robert Louis Stevenson predicted the princess’s death and that of President Kennedy in his *Treasure Island*, as can be seen by the examples posted at www.nsl.com/.../torah.

The truth is, however, that with enough permutations, one can find such “prophetic” messages in *any* lengthy text. A Greek Orthodox priest of my acquaintance, using the Bible Code software, found the name Joseph Smith (written in Hebrew characters) several times in the book of Genesis. I wonder how the many evangelical Christians who have bought into the Bible Code business would react to this kind of information—or to the fact that Orthodox Jewish researchers have found the names of many medieval rabbis, alongside their birthdates.

Not content to use the Bible Code software packaged with Drosnin’s book, some enterprising soul has come up with software that can help search the Bible in Hebrew, Greek, and English.⁹ To buy

9. One can order the software online at www.biblecodes.com. Web sites given in this review were valid as of October 2002.

into this idea, one must acknowledge that God built the original code in Hebrew but made provision for Greek and English translations in which the code would also work. But given the large number of Web sites on the Bible Code, it seems unnecessary to make such a purchase.¹⁰

Perhaps the strangest of these Web sites is run by a Latter-day Saint who believes that the real Bible Code is in gematria, in which each letter is assigned a numeric value (this late use of the Hebrew alphabet did not exist in Old Testament times).¹¹ He and his followers take the numeric value of each letter in a word, add them together, then look up that number in *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the [King James] Bible* to see what word they find. (Evidently, they are oblivious to the fact that Strong could have arranged his words a bit differently and still been within his own parameters.)

But his method goes beyond just the Bible. This group also uses telephone numbers, street addresses, zip codes, and even Social Security numbers to make predictions. Using this method, the owner of the site claims that his own marriage, including the size of the ring he bought for his bride and its price (plus his own Social Security number and the house he bought just prior to his marriage) have all been predicted. He has a number of followers on his message board, and it is clear from the traffic there that these people believe that anything and everything has not only been foreseen by God but that God has made use of the telephone directory and virtually every book ever published to encode messages for us to decipher. This being the case, all of the "Moby Dick" arguments seem to fall on deaf ears. I find it particularly ironic that the ideas held by this group of Latter-day Saints smack of predestination, which conflicts with the church's concept of the agency of man.

Meanwhile, the May 1999 issue of *Statistical Science*, the journal that published the original study five years earlier, included a refuta-

10. It is not feasible to insert here all the Web sites on the subject. One of the more prominent is www.biblecodecritic.com.

11. See www.greaterthings.com/Word-Number.

tion by four statisticians, who wrote that “despite a considerable amount of effort, we have been unable to detect the codes.”¹² The issue is still being debated in print and on a number of Web pages. One of the more impressive of these is a denunciation of the Bible Code by a growing list of mathematicians from around the world, some of whom accept the Torah (Genesis through Exodus) as inspired scripture but reject the concept of a hidden code.¹³

My recommendation to Latter-day Saints is to stick to what the prophets—ancient and modern—have told us about the future and not rely on this latest superstitious fad.

12. For the full article with an impressive bibliography, see Brendan McKay, Dror Bar-Natan, Maya Bar-Hillel, and Gil Kalai, “Solving the Bible Code Puzzle,” *Statistical Science* 14/2 (May 1999): 150–73.

13. See www.math.caltech.edu/code/petition.html.

LATTER-DAY SAINT DOCTRINES AND THE BIBLE

Stephen D. Ricks

Some years ago, while attending the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in San Francisco and hustling from one session to another, I was approached by Carl Mosser, himself an evangelical Protestant and a graduate student in biblical studies. He and his associate, Paul Owen, authored an article, "Mormon Scholarship, Apologetics, and Evangelical Neglect: Losing the Battle and Not Knowing It?"¹ in which they detailed the woefully inadequate preparation of evangelicals to deal with Latter-day Saint issues and to respond to Latter-day Saint scholars. Mosser reiterated what he had stressed when we met at BYU some time before: that we could disagree—indeed, we would have to disagree—on a number of issues, but that we could do so with civility and respect. Reading *Biblical Mormonism*, I am impressed by its absence of shrillness and stridency, by its civility and respect toward other traditions—even when taking issue with their beliefs—but also by its tone of self-assurance in presenting the subject. Richard Hopkins—host of the Sunday evening radio talk

1. Carl Mosser and Paul Owen, "Mormon Scholarship, Apologetics, and Evangelical Neglect: Losing the Battle and Not Knowing It?" *Trinity Journal*, n.s., 19/2 (1998): 179–205.

Review of Richard R. Hopkins. *Biblical Mormonism: Responding to Evangelical Criticism of LDS Theology*. Bountiful, Utah: Horizon, 1994. 285 pages, with scripture and subject indexes. \$19.98.

show “Religion Today” on Salt Lake City radio station KTKK—is the author of *Biblical Mormonism*. His book provides its readers with an introduction to the proper interpretation of scriptures, a discussion of the “Nature and Characteristics of God” from a Latter-day Saint perspective, an examination of the “Number of God” and of “God and Man,” a treatment of Latter-day Saint views on salvation (“Mormon Soteriology”), and a discussion, from biblical materials, on death, resurrection, judgment, and salvation for the dead in Latter-day Saint theology (“Mormon Eschatology”).

Hopkins wishes to argue, through a careful examination of the relevant biblical texts, that Latter-day Saint doctrines are eminently defensible from the Bible. This irenic examination of the biblical sources is a far cry from the writings of James White, whose screeds against the church mark him as a direct spiritual descendent of “Dr.” Walter Martin. A few years ago White was on a radio talk show with two of my friends, who asked him how he knew that the Bible is true and normative. This question White was utterly unable to answer. But the difficulty is that the intent of someone like White is not to understand but to score points against potential opponents. That evening’s encounter on the radio also raised the (for Protestants) insuperable problem of authority in religious matters. The question of authority is the key unresolved—and unresolvable—difficulty for Protestants and, in the Western Christian tradition, the key strength for Latter-day Saints and for Roman Catholics, both of whom accept particular individuals as continuing sources of authority. (This reminds me of the story related by the late Elder LeGrand Richards, who said that a Catholic acquaintance once told him, “You Mormons are all ignoramuses. You don’t even know the strength of your own position. . . . If we are right, you are wrong; if you are right, we are wrong; and that’s all there is to it. The Protestants haven’t a leg to stand on.”)²

Biblical Mormonism’s introduction to the proper interpretation of scriptures contains an excellent set of “Some Rules of Biblical Her-

2. LeGrand Richards, *A Marvelous Work and a Wonder* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1950), 3–4.

meneutics,” which were borrowed from a Protestant handbook of “biblical hermeneutics,” thus enabling the Latter-day Saint reader to engage in discussions with non-Latter-day Saints using the very set of rules that Protestants themselves wrote. These principles include “rules for the interpretation of sentences,” “rules by which the meanings of words shall be ascertained,” “rules for the interpretation of figurative language,” “rules for interpretation of rare words,” “interpreting scripture as a whole,” “interpreting the Old Testament in light of the New,” and “interpreting the scriptures.” In his discussion of “exegesis” (interpretation of the text of the Bible), Hopkins helps Latter-day Saints to understand that a simple translation may mask difficulties that a reading of the original would have clarified. For example, the late Keith Marston, in his *Missionary Pal: Reference Guide for Missionaries and Teachers*, cites a possible textual contradiction in the story of Saul’s vision on the road to Damascus between Acts 9:7, where the King James Version states, “And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man,” and Acts 22:9, where we read, “And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me.” However, the meanings of the Greek words for “hear” in these two passages are different: while the Greek word *akouontes* (plus genitive object) in Acts 9:7 means simply “to hear,” the phrase in Acts 22:9 *ouk ekousan* (plus accusative object) means “to hear with comprehension.” Thus, while Paul’s companions saw a light and heard a voice while with him on the road to Damascus, they were not able to understand that voice (p. 33).

Biblical Mormonism contains a good discussion of salvation by grace (pp. 139–64). Hopkins observes that “justification” and “sanctification” come through a combination of faith and “a system of righteous works” (p. 143). It is astonishing that, though fundamentalists and evangelicals do not in fact claim that “grace” is achieved by faith alone, they act as though it is. It is also remarkable that fundamentalists and evangelicals do not treat believing and faith as though they were an act, although many other reasonable individuals do. I am reminded of the paradoxical situation of an individual who became a

“born-again” Baptist in 1959 (thus entitling himself to irresistible grace), then joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints about twenty years later, thereby “canceling” the promised, presumably irresistible grace and salvation for himself. Reading *Biblical Mormonism* gives us a great opportunity to understand just how defensible the relation of faith and works is to salvation.

Occasionally Hopkins nods off in his discussion. For instance, he uses the phrase *genitive tense* rather than the more correct *genitive case* (p. 35). Still, Hopkins’s careful analysis and lucid exposition more than repay a thoughtful reading of the book.

Biblical Mormonism is a model study of the plan of salvation based on a careful examination of the biblical texts. It shows how defensible Latter-day Saint doctrines are when properly elucidated and interpreted. In any literary or textual study truth cannot be “proven” solely on the basis of the text itself: probabilities have to be weighed against each other, the most compelling instances ranked higher than others. Austin Farrer’s observations on rational argument in religious discussion show how important a contribution the principles of rational argumentation presented in *Biblical Mormonism* make to the elucidation and defense of Latter-day Saint teachings from the text of the Bible: “Though argument does not create conviction, the lack of it destroys belief. What seems to be proved may not 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.”³

3. Austin Farrer, “The Christian Apologist,” in *Light on C. S. Lewis*, ed. Jocelyn Gibb (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1965), 26.

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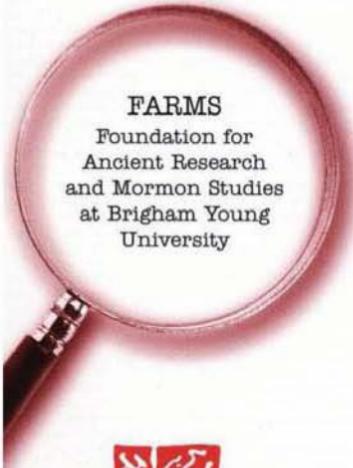
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