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Abstract Review of *An Insider's View of Mormon Origins* (2002), by Grant H. Palmer.

THE CHARGE OF A MAN WITH A BROKEN LANCE (BUT LOOK WHAT HE DOESN'T TELL US)

Davis Bitton

Grant H. Palmer thinks the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has been dishonest by holding back information that controverts the traditional account of its origins. But he doesn't mind holding back quite a bit himself.

The present book is not just a view of Mormon origins but “an *insider's* view” of those origins. We are supposed to be really impressed. An “insider” must certainly know the facts. An “insider” surely wouldn't be so ill-bred as to write against his own religion. So thinks the general reader who comes across the advertising or examines the cover and opening pages of Palmer's book.

Am I in a position to give an “insider” perspective on America just because I live in America and am an American citizen? I shop at a certain store. Does that entitle me to claim “insider” status if I choose to write about that store? Perhaps if our author had been a secretary to the First Presidency, he could then write an insider's exposé of those things to which he was privy. Perhaps if he had served as church historian and thus had access to the full range of archival materials, he could claim to

Review of Grant H. Palmer. *An Insider's View of Mormon Origins*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002. xiii + 281 pp., with selected bibliography and index. \$24.95.

draw back the curtain. We see how inaccurate, how deliberately misleading, this word *insider* is in describing Palmer's point of view.

Palmer boasts of being an instructor in his high priests group. Those least familiar with the church, with the fact that almost all active male members beyond a certain age are high priests, and with the way in which most high priests groups pass teaching responsibility from one class member to another are most likely to be impressed. Palmer will not tell them otherwise.

He also boasts that he was employed by the Church Educational System (CES). He was not just a teacher, he wants us to know, but a *director* of institutes of religion. His final position was at the Salt Lake County jail. He says he volunteered to work at the jail, conjuring up an image of selfless community service. But if this stint was "toward the end of [his] career," before his retirement, then one presumes he was assigned there and was paid. In that location he "looked forward to focusing on basic Bible teachings and doing some counseling" (p. x). Whether he counseled prisoners by using the ideas in the present book, he doesn't say. He does say that he hoped to resolve some of his own questions in this jail atmosphere, where he "could freely contemplate them" (p. x).

Since he brings it up, can we go over that one more time? Palmer was *employed* by CES. He was paid from tithing funds. He knew going in what he was supposed to teach and accomplish. No one forced him kicking and screaming to teach the church's young people. If someone agrees to do something, shouldn't he do it? If someone can no longer honestly do what he has obligated himself to do, shouldn't he, in the name of decency, simply resign and seek other employment?

Palmer perhaps tells us more than he intends about his loyalty to his employer. He "wrestled with" these matters "for years" and began to "see a number of things differently" (p. x). Precisely how long these doubts and questions had plagued him he does not tell us, but he leaves the impression that for a period of many years he was a closet doubter pretending to teach the faith. Did he ever teach courses on the Book of Mormon during those years? Did his students learn to love its pages? Did his instruction strengthen their testimonies? Or

did he deliver sarcastic asides that betrayed his own attitude? Did he meet with individual students and let them know, in his version, the rest of the story? He doesn't tell us.

"Now that I am retired," he says, "I find myself compelled to discuss in public what I pondered mostly in private at that time" (p. x). "Compelled"? How so? These issues that he feels free to speak out about now, wearing the toga of a retired CES institute director, he "pondered mostly in private at that time." What does "mostly" mean? Was he working behind the scenes, talking to students or other individuals, giving talks, circulating essays against the church? He doesn't tell us.

By raising questions about Grant Palmer, am I guilty of an *ad hominem* attack? No. You see, Palmer is the one who brings all of this up at the front of his book. Since he is the one who claims to be an insider, it is perfectly fair, in responding to what he has written, to inquire what kind of insider he was or is.

For some reason, I am not inspired by this knight in shining armor. He may appear mild mannered, but he is not doing the Lord's work. He has lived a life of deceit for many years. His lance is broken.

Palmer lacks the scholarly credibility that derives from publishing in refereed journals. Unlike some other CES teachers and historians, Palmer has produced little or no original research. He has not, to my knowledge, presented his own findings on any specific topic at conventions of historians, and I do not find his name in lists of scholarly publications.

Palmer uses another device to enhance his credibility. He presents himself as speaking for a group of historians. Who are these people? He wishes to leave the impression of a large group that includes, as he puts it, "the faculty of the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Church History at Brigham Young University, BYU history and religion professors and scholars from other disciplines and other church schools, and seminary and institute faculty," along with "unaffiliated scholars" (pp. vii–viii). Then he adds the members of the Mormon History Association. He doesn't tell us how many thousands belong to the association, how many of them are publishing scholars and how many

amateurs, how many are familiar with his work, and how many have specifically read and endorsed it. “We”—be sure to picture our author surrounded by a large crowd of disinterested pursuers of knowledge—“now have a body of authentic, reliable documents and a near-consensus on many of the details” (p. ix).

Palmer thus pretends to be the spokesman for a virtual unanimity of scholarly opinion. Isn’t this more than a little presumptuous? Except for the team behind the production of this book, whose previous writings proclaim their own resentment of the church, one is entitled to doubt that many established historians will jump onto the Palmer bandwagon.¹ He expresses thanks to his “friends and colleagues” who read his drafts and encouraged him (p. xiii). But who they are, he doesn’t tell us.

Although Grant Palmer earned a master’s degree in history at Brigham Young University, completing a thesis on the dissident Godbeites,² one sees little evidence of a thoughtful historian’s mind in the work here under review. Without challenge, Palmer accepts the claim of anti-Mormon Reverend Wesley P. Walters that no revivals occurred in the vicinity of Palmyra in 1820.³ The narrative traditionally accepted by Latter-day Saints, Palmer asserts (again repeating what others have charged), was concocted by Joseph Smith in 1838. At that time, under great pressure amid the failure of the Kirtland bank and the apostasy of some of his associates, Joseph (in Palmer’s version), wishing to strengthen his position, described the first vision in an entirely new way, making himself more important. When mentioned earlier, visions and appearances of heavenly beings were viewed as “metaphysical”—meaning, in Palmer’s idiosyncratic usage,

1. See the statement from the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History, in this number, page 255.

2. Grant H. Palmer, “The Godbeite Movement: A Dissent against Temporal Control” (master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 1968).

3. Wesley P. Walters, “New Light on Mormon Origins from the Palmyra Revival,” *Dialogue* 4/1 (1969): 60–81. See the response by Richard L. Bushman entitled “The First Vision Story Revisited,” *Dialogue* 4/1 (1969): 82–93; and Walters, “A Reply to Dr. Bushman,” *Dialogue* 4/1 (1969): 96–160.

that they did not happen in the real world but in the imagination. Now, from 1838 on, Joseph claimed that heavenly beings actually appeared. My summary may sound crude, but this is Palmer's fundamental conceptualization.

What does Palmer think of Milton Backman's book-length study of the first vision and its context, now in its second edition?⁴ He lists the first edition of this work (1971) in his bibliography but fails to come to grips with its content. What does he think of Richard Lloyd Anderson's detailed analysis of the first vision, its versions, and the setting of religious excitement extending from 1817 to 1820 and beyond?⁵ What does he think of the report that the Palmyra Methodists did hold a religious camp meeting in 1820? "In June 1820, the *Palmyra Register* reported on a Methodist camp meeting in the vicinity of Palmyra because an Irishman, James Couser, died the day after attending the gathering at which he became intoxicated."⁶ Does such evidence even matter to Palmer? He doesn't tell us.

The accepted standards of scholarly discourse require that previous work on a subject be mentioned in a bibliography, footnotes or endnotes, or the text itself. If the bibliography is vast—if I am writing, for instance, on the decline and fall of the Roman Empire—I may say something like this: "For a convenient review of scholarship on this

4. See Milton V. Backman Jr., *Joseph Smith's First Vision: Confirming Evidences and Contemporary Accounts*, 2nd ed., rev. and enl. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980); see also Backman, *Eyewitness Accounts of the Restoration* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983); and Backman, "Verification of the 1838 Account of the First Vision," in *Pearl of Great Price: Revelations from God*, ed. H. Donl Peterson and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1989).

5. Richard L. Anderson, "Joseph Smith's Testimony of the First Vision," *Ensign*, April 1996, 10–21.

6. Milton V. Backman Jr., "Awakenings in the Burned-Over District: New Light on the Historical Setting of the First Vision," *BYU Studies* 9/3 (1969): 309, referring to "Effects of Drunkenness," *Palmyra Register*, 28 June 1820, also quoted in Walter A. Norton, "Comparative Images: Mormonism and Contemporary Religions as Seen by Village Newspapermen in Western New York and Northeastern Ohio (1820–1833)" (Ph.D. dissertation, Brigham Young University, 1991), 255. See Richard L. Bushman's discussion of these matters in "Just the Facts Please," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/2 (1994): 126–27, esp. n. 3.

subject, see . . .” Even then, as I discuss a specific topic—for example, lead in the sewer pipes of ancient Rome as a weakening influence on the health of the population—I must not pretend that I first thought it up but should mention previous significant works. This standard of scholarly etiquette is dictated by courtesy, consideration, and basic honesty. Assured that the author has done his or her homework, the reader is provided with specific signposts for further study. Palmer flatly fails on all these counts. He pretends that other works don’t exist. He presents information as his own that is straight out of previous anti-Mormon works. He gives no hint of alternative explanations or of the rebuttals already published elsewhere of the interpretation he espouses.

Since he doesn’t bother to do it, may I mention two standard reference works? *Studies in Mormon History, 1830–1997: An Indexed Bibliography* was published in 2000.⁷ In 1996 appeared *A Comprehensive Annotated Book of Mormon Bibliography*.⁸ In such bibliographical works and in journal articles and books down to the present, we discover that for half a century or more a few critics have been saying many of the same things Palmer presents in his current book. Some of the charges have become standard tropes in different anti-Mormon ministries. Realizing that many of his readers will not know their staleness, Palmer mainly gathers together previous accusations and, by publishing them within the covers of a newly minted book, tries to shock the reader. None of this does he clearly tell us.

We also find persuasive rejoinders from Latter-day Saint scholars. Can Palmer be so obtuse that he finds all scholarship by loyal Latter-day Saints beneath his contempt? Or, by omitting virtually all references to such scholarship, is he callously taking advantage of the fact that many readers will not know about it and thus will be more easily swayed by his tract? He doesn’t tell us.

7. James B. Allen, Ronald W. Walker, and David J. Whittaker, comps., *Studies in Mormon History, 1830–1997: An Indexed Bibliography* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000).

8. Donald W. Parry, Jeanette W. Miller, and Sandra A. Thorne, comps., *A Comprehensive Annotated Book of Mormon Bibliography* (Provo, Utah: Research Press, 1996).

Not everyone will want to plow through all this material. Just as many believers in the Bible feel no desire to read tedious scholarly literature from the ever-flowing river of biblical studies, so many Latter-day Saints (also, of course, believers in the Bible) feel no compulsion to read the often contentious, inconclusive studies about details of church history. Just as many lovers of Shakespeare ignore technical literature about the Bard and the possible “influences” on him in order to focus their attention on the plays themselves, so many Latter-day Saints are satisfied with reading the scriptures, finding in them sufficient light, knowledge, and inspiration. But for anyone who wishes to read it, the scholarship is there, not kept “secret” by the church and not concealed behind locked doors, as Palmer implies.

For each of the chapters and topics taken up by Grant Palmer, inevitable questions arise. How new is this charge? Is it accurate? Is it the whole story? Is this another exercise of going back over familiar territory and, by privileging the attack literature, making the early Saints appear to be either knaves or fools? Is there another way of looking at it? Don’t count on Palmer to explore these questions.

What does Palmer think of the adroit employment of parallel literary structure throughout the Book of Mormon? He doesn’t tell us. What is his explanation of the beautiful, intricate chiasmic passages? Anyone truly willing to give the Book of Mormon a fair hearing as something worthy of respect will study such works as *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon* (1991),⁹ *Reexploring the Book of Mormon* (1992),¹⁰ *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon* (1999),¹¹ and Richard Dilworth Rust’s *Feasting on the Word: The Literary Testimony of the Book of Mormon* (1997).¹² But don’t count on Palmer to tell us about them.

9. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne, eds., *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991).

10. John W. Welch, ed., *Reexploring the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992).

11. John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne, eds., *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1999).

12. Richard Dilworth Rust, *Feasting on the Word: The Literary Testimony of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1997).

What, by the way, does Palmer think of John L. Sorenson's *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* and his many other books and articles?¹³ A brilliant, well-trained anthropologist, Sorenson analyzes the evidence with a sophistication far removed from, say, Ethan Smith. It is far easier to pretend that the Book of Mormon came from a fairy tale, mixed in with some New England religious and political controversy. Knowing the impression he wishes to leave, Palmer does not include so much as a footnote acknowledging the existence of significant, substantive work on the other side. He prefers not to tell us.

An example of rich symbolism in the Book of Mormon is the recurring use of the exodus motif. Several Latter-day Saint scholars, trained in literary analysis and appreciative of such patterns in the Old and New Testaments, have described and analyzed the exodus parallels.¹⁴ With sophomoric innocence, Palmer excitedly lists twenty points of similarity between the wanderings of the children of Israel and the journey of the Lehitites to their promised land (pp. 74–78). Flat-footed and clueless, he has no explanation except that Joseph Smith must have been guilty of lifting the episodes. Did he consider the possibility that, besides the fact that the two voyages did have certain similarities, the prophet Nephi,

13. John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (1985; reprint, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1996); Sorenson, *The Geography of Book of Mormon Events: A Source Book* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1992); Sorenson, *Images of Ancient America: Visualizing Book of Mormon Life* (Provo, Utah: Research Press, 1998); and Sorenson, *Mormon's Map* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2000). Many others could be added.

14. See George S. Tate, "The Typology of the Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon," in *Literature of Belief: Sacred Scripture and Religious Experience*, ed. Neal E. Lambert (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1981), 245–62; Terrence L. Szink, "To a Land of Promise," in *Studies in Scriptures: Volume Seven, 1 Nephi to Alma 29*, ed. Kent P. Jackson (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987), 60–72; S. Kent Brown, "The Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 30/3 (1990): 111–26; Alan Goff, "Boats, Beginnings, and Repetitions," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1 (1992): 67–84; Bruce J. Boehm, "Wanderers in the Promised Land: A Study of the Exodus Motif in the Book of Mormon and Holy Bible," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3/1 (1994): 187; Mark J. Johnson, "The Exodus of Lehi Revisited," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3/2 (1994): 123–26; and, more recently Noel B. Reynolds, "Lehi as Moses," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9/2 (2000): 26–35.

writing as a historian, chose to cast the experience of his family in this framework? Such historical shaping was well accepted in the ancient world and especially by the writers of sacred history. Having access to the plates of Laban, Nephi was familiar with the flight from Egypt.

Palmer thinks that Joseph Smith used Ethan Smith's *View of the Hebrews* as the source for at least the structural part of the Book of Mormon.¹⁵ Will readers know that a reprint of *View of the Hebrews*, with an informative introduction by Charles Tate, was published in 1996 by the Religious Studies Center at Brigham Young University?¹⁶ Any interested person can read it and draw his or her own conclusions. Will they know of John W. Welch's long list of "unparallels" between those two books?¹⁷ Palmer doesn't tell us.

On the details of priesthood restoration, will readers of this book know that church members were provided with an article by Professor Larry Porter that spells out what we know, leaving intact Joseph Smith's integrity?¹⁸ More important, will they know that *BYU Studies* published seventy primary documents relating to this question,

15. Rather than arguing his own case, Palmer cites a private task paper by B. H. Roberts that was posthumously published as "Book of Mormon Difficulties: A Study," in Roberts, *Studies of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Brigham D. Madsen (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 63–148. Palmer fails to acknowledge that Roberts explicitly said the possible connection between Ethan's and Joseph's books was not his own considered, final conclusion. Ignoring all subsequent statements by Roberts about the Book of Mormon and, even more importantly, the witness provided by his life and his final great historical and theological works, Palmer picks what he chooses. Once again, he doesn't tell us the whole story. For a concise summary, including a specific response to the five or so questions that triggered Roberts's study fourscore and more years ago, see Daniel C. Peterson, "Yet More Abuse of B. H. Roberts," *FARMS Review of Books* 9/1 (1997): 69–86.

16. Ethan Smith, *View of the Hebrews: 1825 Second Edition Complete Text*, ed. Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1996).

17. John W. Welch, "View of the Hebrews: 'An Unparallel,'" in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 83–87.

18. Larry C. Porter, "The Restoration of the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods," *Ensign*, December 1996, 30–47. Palmer cites this article but only along with others for the purpose of showing that we do not know exactly when the Melchizedek Priesthood was restored. This is not an earth-shaking discovery since Latter-day Saints, lacking a firm statement from Smith and Cowdery, have never claimed to know the exact date. Porter provides a likely scenario.

the indispensable point of departure for any responsible discussion?¹⁹ Palmer doesn't tell us.

Palmer wants us to see the Book of Mormon witnesses as living in a very different world from our own. But this gap can be overdrawn. After all, do we and they have *nothing* in common? Are the witnesses to be discredited on *everything* they ever said on any subject throughout their whole lives? And what about the sources Palmer uses to put the witnesses under an unflattering cloud? Is there any principle by which one can weigh such information? Determined to portray the witnesses as confused simpletons living in a daze and unable to tell the difference between what they saw and what they imagined, Palmer shows no ability to negotiate such pathways, or even to recognize them. Richard Anderson addresses some of these questions in his chapter "The Case against the Witnesses."²⁰ Not using Palmer's jaundiced eyes, Anderson, who earned a law degree at Harvard Law School and a Ph.D. in ancient history at the University of California, Berkeley, sees the witnesses, even with their foibles, as having credibility on the key question. Palmer's snub of Anderson in a one-sentence dismissive footnote is shameful.²¹

The single most important witness is Oliver Cowdery. For the current state of research on Cowdery, serious readers will not want to miss an award-winning article, "The Return of Oliver Cowdery" by Scott H. Faulring, and two informative articles by Larry E. Morris.²²

19. Brian Q. Cannon, ed., "Priesthood Restoration Documents," *BYU Studies* 35/4 (1995–96): 163–207. A helpful introduction sets the stage for the documents.

20. Richard Lloyd Anderson, "The Case against the Witnesses," in *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 151–79.

21. For an important recent contribution, see Richard L. Anderson, "Personal Writings of the Book of Mormon Witnesses," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1997), 39–60.

22. Scott H. Faulring, "The Return of Oliver Cowdery," in *The Disciple as Witness: Essays on Latter-day Saint History and Doctrine in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks, Donald W. Parry, and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2000), 117–73; Larry E. Morris, "Oliver Cowdery's Vermont Years and the Origins of Mormonism," *BYU Studies* 39/1 (2000): 106–29; and Morris, "The Private Character of the Man Who Bore That Testimony: Oliver Cowdery and His Critics," *FARMS Review* 15/1 (2003): 311–51.

For David Whitmer, Lyndon W. Cook has published the surviving testimonies, enabling readers to judge for themselves.²³ On Martin Harris there is no adequate full-scale study, but we know the essentials about his return to the church and his fervent testimony of the Book of Mormon, repeated at the end of his life.²⁴

I wonder if readers of Palmer's book will be aware that they are reading a prosecutor's brief. It is apparent that the author (with some help from anti-Mormon critics) has convinced himself of certain things and writes his book for the purpose of making that case. No contrary evidence is allowed. In our courts, after a prosecutor has made his best possible case, the defense attorney is given full opportunity to respond, to bring forth additional evidence, and to cross-examine the testimony on the other side. Don't count on Palmer for any such explanation. He calls himself a "fair-minded investigator," but he must have his own private definition of fair-minded.

A recurring charge in several chapters is that Joseph Smith made up stories in the 1830s, especially in 1835 and then again in 1838, to strengthen his hand during times of opposition and crisis. Explaining something more fully is apparently not allowed. If you don't write it down at the time it occurred—remember this when you are working on your personal history—it didn't happen. Palmer wants us to picture a nervous Joseph Smith desperately trying to come up with stories that will make his position secure. But Joseph did not live in isolation and had not abandoned his old friends and family. How many of these—his own parents and siblings, his strong-willed wife Emma, his friends, other devoted followers from earlier days—would have to "go along" with changes in his narrative? How many of these good

23. Lyndon W. Cook, ed., *David Whitmer Interviews: A Restoration Witness* (Orem, Utah: Grandin Books, 1991).

24. Rhett Stephens James, "Martin Harris," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 2:374–76. See also Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses*, chaps. 7–8, especially the careful analysis of Stephen Burnett's 1838 letter; Matthew Roper, review of *Mormonism: Shadow or Reality?* by Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *FARMS Review of Books* 4 (1992): 169–215; and Roper, "Comments on the Book of Mormon Witnesses: A Response to Jerald and Sandra Tanner," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2/2 (1993): 164–94.

people, whose sincerity I hope we are not required to reject, stood up and complained, pointing out what Palmer seems sure of? How large was this conspiracy? Palmer doesn't tell us.

Working on a biography of Joseph Smith that promises to be better than any treatment to date is Richard L. Bushman of Columbia University. A mature and respected historian, Bushman is among those willing to go over everything we can know about the founding events of the restoration and, if possible, lay them out with greater precision.²⁵ Reports on Bushman's current thinking on Joseph Smith do not indicate that his views are at all similar to Palmer's.²⁶ Palmer is not a reliable guide.

As Palmer well knows, knowledgeable Latter-day Saints never claim to prove the historicity of the Book of Mormon in an ironclad way by external or internal evidences. Each person is urged to read the book and decide for himself or herself—not to skim through hurriedly, not to read a few verses chosen at random, not to read it while a caustic critic whispers snide slurs in his ear. No, anyone who really wants to know should read carefully, ponder, and pray. The Holy Ghost will testify of the truth of this great sacred record. That is the promise.

Listen to how Palmer trivializes personal inspiration. "Most of us have felt this spiritual feeling when reading the Book of Mormon or hearing about Joseph Smith's epiphanies," he says. He had the *same feeling* when listening to faith-promoting stories that turned out to be exaggerated or made up. Others have had the *same feeling*—how does he know?—about their religion. He doesn't wish to deny that the Holy Ghost exists and speaks to human beings, but the resulting "emotional feelings"—notice how the witness of the Spirit is downgraded—are not a sure guide to truth (pp. 131–33). Palmer renders a sweeping pronouncement on what the Holy Ghost can and cannot do—the mem-

25. Bushman, "Just the Facts Please," 122–33, is a good example of how thoroughly he is willing to examine the original sources.

26. Richard L. Bushman, "The Visionary World of Joseph Smith," *BYU Studies* 37/1 (1997–98): 183–204; Bushman, "A Joseph Smith for the Twenty-First Century," *BYU Studies* 40/3 (2001): 155–71; Bushman, "The Character of Joseph Smith," *BYU Studies* 42/2 (2003): 23–34.

ber of the Godhead who, as the Savior said to his apostles, “shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26). That Palmer wishes to disparage a personal witness profoundly precious to many people tells a lot about him and the spirit animating him.

Cymbals should ring out when he admits that “perhaps more than any other volume except the Bible, it [the Book of Mormon] successfully motivated people to confront their sins and come to Christ” (p. 65). Let those words sink in: “perhaps more than any other volume except the Bible.” From Palmer, in his present state of mind, this is a mind-boggling concession. In 1989, Eugene England published a compilation entitled *Converted to Christ through the Book of Mormon*.²⁷ The number of such testimonies could be multiplied by thousands and tens of thousands. In 1997 appeared Jeffrey R. Holland’s *Christ and the New Covenant: The Messianic Message of the Book of Mormon*.²⁸ Palmer doesn’t tell us to what extent his soul was stirred by that powerful apostolic witness. But never mind. Our author thinks the Book of Mormon should be—what? Repudiated? Denied? Or merely ignored? He doesn’t tell us.

“I cherish Joseph Smith’s teachings on many topics,” Palmer writes, “such as the plan of salvation and his view that the marriage covenant extends beyond death. Many others could be enumerated” (p. 261). What those “many” other teachings of Joseph Smith are, he doesn’t tell us. And if those “many” teachings come from someone who cannot be trusted, if they are found in sacred works here undermined and disparaged, what then? Palmer doesn’t tell us.

Palmer is not reluctant to instruct the church leaders on what they should do. We find him urging Latter-day Saints to:

- Stop telling “religious allegories to adults as if they were literal history” (p. 261). “Religious allegories” is Palmer lingo for the first vision, priesthood restoration, the coming forth of the Book of Mormon.

27. Eugene England, ed., *Converted to Christ through the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989).

28. Jeffrey R. Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant: The Messianic Message of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997).

- Stop being gullible and expecting “infallible guidance” (p. 261). I think that means stop following the prophet and sustaining the General Authorities.

- Stop being exclusive and condescending toward others (p. 261). I think he means stop claiming that ours is God’s true church and that we have anything to offer others.

- Know Jesus rather than pursue “a metaphysical approach to truth” (p. 262) Does the “metaphysical approach” he disdains bear any resemblance to the restoration events he has dismissed as figments of imagination? I think maybe if we gave up our beliefs in prophets, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price, he might consider us quite far on the road to enlightenment.

- Concur with the “many people, both in our church and in other traditions, who write and comment about religion in ways that differ from the official canon” (p. 263). This means, I take it, that those ordained and sustained are to be rejected in favor of—whom? I assume he includes himself and the anti-Mormons who recognize in him a useful device for presenting their views.

In general, Palmer wants the Church of Jesus Christ to be “more Christ-centered” (p. 263). It should, he asserts, follow the example of Seventh-Day Adventists and the Community of Christ (formerly the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints). Will readers of Palmer’s book know that the Book of Mormon testifies of Christ on every page? Will they know that loyal Saints pray several times each day in the name of Christ? Will they know the full import of the weekly participation in the sacrament? Will they know that the Saints are repeatedly urged to follow the Savior’s example? None of this does Palmer adequately tell us. He wishes to leave the impression that the emphasis on Christ occurred only “recently” and only at the upper levels (p. 263).

“In many sacrament meetings,” he writes, “the tendency remains to simply mention Jesus’ name and then talk about other matters” (p. 263). What planet has this man been living on? The “mention” includes an opening congregational hymn, an opening prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, a sacrament congregational hymn always explicitly devoted to the

Savior and his atoning sacrifice, and administering and distributing the emblems of the Lord's supper, which could scarcely be more "Christ-centered." Those "other matters," if they are not specifically about the Lord Jesus and his role in time and eternity almost always have to do with applying the gospel of Jesus Christ in different situations of life. How often does Palmer attend sacrament meeting? He doesn't tell us.

Palmer tells us that he will soon publish a book about Jesus. I can hardly wait. In the meantime, even if they treat their subject differently from each other, lacking the consistency Palmer requires of participants in the restoration, even if they tell about "superstitious" Galilean peasants and fishermen, I think I'll just read and ponder the four Gospels. After all, they too were written by insiders. Somehow Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, faithful and true to their covenants, seem like insiders one can trust. Their lances were not broken.