Vol. 16 Num. 1 The FARMS Review

FARMS Review

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/msr

FR

THE FARMS REVIEW

The FARMS Review

The FARMS Review

The FARMS Review

Volume 16 • Number 1 • 2004

To Our Readers

Under the name of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS), the Institute for the Study and Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts (Institute) supports study and research on the Book of Mormon, the Book of Abraham, the Old Testament, and the New Testament and studies of the early formative period of the Christian tradition, ancient temples, and other related subjects. Under the FARMS imprint, the Institute publishes and distributes titles in these areas for the benefit of scholars and interested Latter-day Saint readers. Primary FARMS research interests include the history, language, literature, culture, geography, politics, and law relevant to ancient scripture. Although such subjects are of secondary importance when compared with the spiritual and eternal messages of scripture, solid research and academic perspectives can supply certain kinds of useful information, even if only tentatively, concerning many significant and interesting questions about scripture.

The Institute makes interim and final reports about this research available widely, promptly, and economically. These publications are peer reviewed to ensure that scholarly standards are met. The proceeds from the sale of these materials are used to support further research and publications. As a service to teachers and students of the scriptures, research results are distributed in both scholarly and popular formats.

The purpose of the *FARMS Review* is to help serious readers make informed choices and judgments about books published on the Book of Mormon and associated topics, as well as to publish substantial freestanding essays on related matters. We hope, thereby, to encourage reliable scholarship with regard to such subjects.

Reviews and articles are written by invitation. Any person interested in writing for the *FARMS Review* should first contact the editor. Style guidelines will be sent to the authors.

The opinions expressed in these reviews and articles are those of the authors. They do not necessarily represent the opinions of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, the Institute for the Study and Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts, its editors, Brigham Young University, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or the authors' employers. No portion of the reviews or articles may be used in advertising or for any other commercial purpose without the express written permission of the Institute.

The *FARMS Review* is published semiannually.

Contents

Mormon Studies

Early Christianity

Miscellaneous

Book Notes

Index to the *FARMS Review,* 2003

Editor's Introduction

Anti-Mormon Writings: Encountering a Topsy-Turvy Approach to Mormon Origins

George L. Mitton, associate editor

He always conceived every subject on so comprehensive a scale,
that he had not room in his head, to turn it over
and examine both sides of it.

Washington Irving[1]

Surely your turning of things upside down shall be
esteemed as the potter's clay: for shall the work say
of him that made it, He made me not?

(Isaiah 29:16)

Some have inquired as to why we devote so much space in response to anti-Mormon literature. Would that we could confine ourselves to discussions of positive things, but the negative ones are troublesome to some, and we think that they demand attention. It is our experience that a careful consideration of such writings is instructive and that the faith always comes out better understood and strengthened. Nevertheless, in this issue we offer essays on a remarkable range of subjects, including several of interest on some very positive works and developments. I will mention these briefly and then discuss some important general matters regarding anti-Mormon writings, helping to explain why we feel a need to study and respond to them.

---

1. Washington Irving, *A History of New York . . . by Diedrich Knickerbocker* (New York: Inskeep & Bradford, 1809), 1:120.

Some Congenial Things

I first take note of the essay by Benjamin N. Judkins on the status and quality of Book of Mormon apologetics—those many and extensive writings that have been prepared in defense of the faith. He describes these achievements modestly, and doubtless more could be said, but he gives a useful overview of the remarkable work and findings of those who have sought to improve our knowledge of the Book of Mormon, while impressively defending its doctrines, background, and historicity in ways the anti-Mormon press has seldom attempted to refute. His essay provides a useful summary for those who seek to learn more.

Kevin L. Barney calls our attention to a new "Reader's Edition" of the Book of Mormon, attractively edited by Grant Hardy. M. Gerald Bradford reviews an important new book of Latter-day Saint scholarship that treats the final hours of the life of Christ. Gaye Strathearn discusses a new scholarly work on the concern of the early Christians about salvation for the dead, which should be of interest to Latter-day Saints. Nathan Oman provides the results of his research on the term *secret combinations,* showing that its use in the Book of Mormon likely has a much broader meaning than the interpretation of some who have held that it was a reference only to Freemasonry—a narrow view that can result in misunderstandings of the Book of Mormon and a failure to appreciate its broad insights. John A. Tvedtnes offers a review of a book regarding Chinese discovery of America, raising the question of relevance to an understanding of Lehi's voyage.

John W. Welch introduces us to an important new translation and commentary on the *Book of Enoch* (known as *1 Enoch*). Since the discovery of this ancient work in Ethiopia and the study of it, together with related texts that have come to light, scholars have regarded it with growing interest, recognizing its importance in studying the theology of ancient Israel, its influence on the New Testament, and its help in understanding the meaning of early Christianity.[2] Latter-day

---

2. For an introduction see Margaret Barker, *The Lost Prophet: The Book of Enoch and Its Influence on Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1988).

Saints should be particularly interested because of its significance to revelations received by Joseph Smith. Welch discusses this with obvious excitement, which I share, and points the way for further study and understanding.

Responses to Anti-Mormon Writings—or ad Hominem Attacks?

We have included several responses to writings that are clearly anti-Mormon. I will not detail them all here, as readers can scan the contents and find what interests them most. What does anti-Mormon mean? Davis Bitton has written a thoughtful piece for us on "Spotting an Anti-Mormon Book." Some authors, even of virulent attacks on the church, nevertheless complain when we use the term *anti-Mormon* because they claim to "love the Mormon people." This despite the fact that they do their best to undermine our faith and the faith of our youth, vilify the prophets whose memory we hold dear, dishonor our scriptures, and trample on things that are sacred to us and thereby violate some of our most tender feelings. Most of their arguments have been given reply by the Saints, but they are repeated over and over as though no reply had ever been made. There is a sameness to this literature, but occasionally a new approach comes along. As a perceptive writer once remarked, "new errors, as well as new truths, often appear."[3]

Frequently, our answers and responses are given the silent treatment. We then have reason to suspect that writers or publishers find it difficult to reply to our findings. Oftentimes an attempt is made to respond by complaining that our essays are ad hominem attacks on the writers and their reputations, rather than efforts to cope with their arguments. These claims are usually made on the Internet.[4] It has even

---

3. John Jay, in *The Federalist,* no. 64.

4. A notable exception is a published response by Signature Books, through the vehicle of a book by D. Michael Quinn, which includes a great many of what appear to be contrived attacks on FARMS and its writers scattered throughout the notes of the book. From a scholarly standpoint alone, the work is thoroughly marred by this unseemly device. The editors and publisher should be ashamed of their use or allowance of it. See Quinn's *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View,* 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998).

been asserted that ad hominem is our "stock in trade." We have come to expect this sort of thing whenever we go to press. This is, of course, an attempt to render our arguments ineffective by destroying our reputation. It is an ad hominem attack on us that fails to answer our arguments. I am not aware of an author ever being discussed in our *Review* where there is not also a discussion of his or her writing. But some say we should not discuss writers at all—merely treat their work. This is not practical and would be unfair to our readers in many instances.

Why do we discuss authors? Frequently, some discussion is helpful when it brings out an author's past work, experience, training, or known attitudes that might affect competence or preparation to deal with a subject. An example appears in Craig L. Foster's review of Jon Krakauer's work in this issue. Prejudice and past known viewpoints can also place in perspective a writer's purpose or motives. Sometimes our reviewers are dealing with books that are outrageous, and they are understandably outraged and find it difficult to maintain a moderate tone. As editors, we have often used our red pencils to tone down a discussion when troublesome writings are under consideration. FARMS has received mail from many parts of the world—persons often express concern that they don't have information on a writer that might help them assess the validity of a work in question. Our own editor, Daniel C. Peterson, receives telephone calls with questions of that sort from far and near. I think that we would be derelict if we failed to provide such information when we have it and when it appears needed for a better understanding.

The Anti-Mormon "Concatenation"

Since the earliest days of the church, Latter-day Saints have found it necessary to confront anti-Mormon writings. Indeed, Joseph Smith recalled a spirit of sectarian persecution from the time, as a lad, when he first began to mention his visionary experiences—well before the church was organized (Joseph Smith—History 1:21–25, 28, 60). Extant early newspaper articles displayed a great spirit of ridicule and animosity toward him during and about his youth. These early articles tended to be written from a secular point of view. One must

search for any favorable comments on religion generally as Joseph Smith is discussed. Intellectually, these writers were a cut above the rest of us commoners, readily recognizing superstition and charlatanry as rumors passed by. Joseph, and the church after it was organized, soon learned the truth of the remarkable prophecy by the angel Moroni, made in Joseph's great obscurity, that his "name should be had for good and evil among all nations, kindreds, and tongues, or that it should be *both* good and evil spoken of among all people" (Joseph Smith—History 1:33).

In 1839, while languishing in Liberty Jail, Joseph Smith had occasion to reflect on the persecutions being heaped on him and his people. He recognized the role of anti-Mormon publications in contributing to this distress. In his review of these things, which has since been canonized, Joseph spoke of "libelous publications," "libelous histories," and of a "concatenation," or linked series of things, motivated by the adversarial spirit. He saw a need for the Saints to gather up these things and make adequate response to them—a response that should "be attended to with great earnestness" (D&C 123:4–7, 14). In replying to anti-Mormon writings, we try to be sensitive to these considerations.

Let me touch here on the origin of this kind of writing. There *is* a linked chain in anti-Mormon literature, going back to Joseph Smith's youth. Many writers have slavishly followed the early lead in their assessment of Joseph's character and conduct, and arguments made then are repeated holus-bolus to this day. It first began with newspaper writers in Palmyra and western New York. Probably the most influential, writing from a secular viewpoint, was Abner Cole, editor of the *Palmyra Reflector.* In a series of articles, Cole lampooned Joseph and the Book of Mormon unmercifully, first using as a basis some pirated sheets from the printer's office. He did this even before the Book of Mormon came off the press—and continued well after its publication.[5] Much of what he wrote appears foolish today—and should have then.

---

5. On Cole, see Andrew H. Hedges, "The Refractory Abner Cole," in *Revelation, Reason, and Faith: Essays in Honor of Truman G. Madsen,* ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002), 447–75.

Still, his columns appear to have had great influence in the formation of a negative opinion about Joseph and his work. Recently I took occasion to read through the file of the *Palmyra Reflector,* and I encountered ample indications of the significant role of newspapers in forming public opinion at the time. Many could not afford newspapers, but friends and relatives would save stacks of them and pass them on—sometimes to many families. I believe that Cole's severe satirical writings were important in forming unfavorable views among Joseph's contemporaries. Many derogatory claims about Joseph and the Smith family are found in his pieces and other newspapers of the time and were substantially repeated by people in later statements and "affidavits."

Perhaps we should give some slack to the people of Palmyra and western New York when we think about their reaction to Joseph and his unusual claims and doings. After all, "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46); "Is not this Joseph's son?" (Luke 4:22); and "No prophet is accepted in his own country" (Luke 4:24; cf. Matthew 13:54–57). They could not foresee or appreciate the remarkable results of Joseph's work and struggles, nor did they begin to comprehend the meaning of his experiences and the exceptional things happening to him when he lived in their midst. Their eyes could not "see afar off" (Moses 6:27). But if they deserve some slack, what shall we say of the anti-Mormon writers today, who should have the benefit of nearly two centuries of hindsight, yet still call in question Joseph's character and veracity by putting so much stock in the shabby collection of anti-Mormon comments and documents, often taken from the rumors, gossip, secondhand recollections, ill-informed opinions, and general hearsay of the time? The early critics had blinders, but should writers continue to wear them today, confining themselves to the narrow vision of that early period when considering Mormon origins?

Opposition to Joseph appears to have had sectarian roots, but the first written opposition appears to have been largely secular. This secular hostility seems to be an important source of the statements and affidavits also. Sectarian writers have produced the most anti-Mormon literature, but they have not been shy in using secular arguments and

efforts when it suits their purpose.[6] Note the comments of an observer just a century ago. Nels L. Nelson, a Latter-day Saint writer, complained of the "sins of the clerical profession against the Mormons" and held that it was "their prejudiced views and mistaken zeal that have propagated the hundreds of lurid 'Mormonisms Exposed,' which have come to be as necessary as narcotics to many good people." He found that "our confidence in them is shattered, by the way in which they misrepresent us,—from mere fragmentary and often misquoted passages."[7] He thought the remarkable fact that "hatred (of Mormons) can temporarily unite sects which love (of Christ) has never hitherto brought together, ought at least to raise a small doubt as to the real source of the inspiration."[8]

This situation is still the same today—one need merely examine the nature of books written against us found in the "cults" section of many bookstores. There appears to be moderation in the tone of a few of these writings, which is appreciated. However, the sectarian attack remains undiminished, and professional anti-Mormons still press "their ardent need of funds for the 'Mormon Crusade'" as they did in 1904.[9] Recently, alert readers of the *Review* will have noticed a growing need to respond to anti-Mormon writings deriving from the secular/agnostic/atheist wing rather than sectarian sources. This trend may continue, corresponding to the growing and obtrusive secularization of the society around us. From Louis Midgley, we have an investigative essay about *Signature Books*.[10] With its tendentious agenda, it appears to us that it is the publishing house that is far and away producing the most anti-Mormon literature of this genre.

---

6. See the flagrant recent example discussed by Daniel C. Peterson in his introduction, "Of 'Galileo Events,' Hype, and Suppression: Or, Abusing Science and Its History," *FARMS Review* 15/2 (2003): xvi–xxxi.

7. Nels L. Nelson, *Scientific Aspects of Mormonism; or Religion in Terms of Life* (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1904), 2–3.

8. Ibid., 4.

9. Ibid., 3.

10. See Louis Midgley, "The Signature Books Saga," in this number of the *FARMS Review,* pages 361–406.

On Taking Hurlbut and Howe Too Seriously

The first anti-Mormon book was published in 1834 in Painesville, Ohio (near Kirtland), by Eber D. Howe, editor of the *Painesville Telegraph.* Bearing the title *Mormonism Unvailed,* it was an attempt to discredit the reputation of Joseph Smith.[11] It has been responsible for much harm, despite its serious flaws, and has been used to the present by countless anti-Mormon writers as a foundation for their argument against the Prophet. Today, it should be clear that much in Howe's book is discredited and should be used only with the greatest caution and with a warning to readers of the remaining questions about its reliability. Alas, such warnings seldom appear.

Mormonism Unvailed used two basic thrusts against Joseph. Howe felt the first was the more important and featured it in the subtitle of his book. This was the charge of plagiarism, in which he alleged that the historical parts of the Book of Mormon were derived from an old manuscript by Reverend Solomon Spalding. Supported by statements of persons who claimed to remember details of the manuscript, it was a difficult argument for the Saints to answer until the manuscript was discovered in 1884.[12] Aside from a very few diehards, nearly all scholars today have rejected the theory and do not see any meaningful connection between the manuscript and the Book of Mormon.

Howe's second thrust has proved more enduring but should still be viewed with great suspicion. This concerns the statements or "affidavits"[13] collected by Doctor[14] Philastus Hurlbut, a Mormon excom-

---

11.   Eber D. Howe, *Mormonism Unvailed: Or, a faithful account of that singular imposition and delusion, from its rise to the present time with sketches of the characters of its propagators, and a full detail of the manner in which the famous Golden Bible was brought before the world to which are added, inquiries into the probability that the historical part of the said Bible was written by one Solomon Spalding, more than twenty years ago, and by him intended to have been published as a romance* (Painesville, OH: the author, 1834).

12.   For an overview, refer to Lester E. Bush Jr., "The Spalding Theory Then and Now," *Dialogue* 10/4 (1977): 40–69. See also Terryl L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 160–61.

13.   The alleged affidavits are not known to be extant, except as printed in *Mormonism Unvailed.*

14.   "Doctor" does not mean he was a medical doctor. It was part of the given name conferred on him by his parents.

municated for immorality, who visited Palmyra and vicinity in 1833 to obtain information against Joseph Smith on behalf of an Ohio anti-Mormon committee.[15] The committee's charge to Hurlbut was to

> obtain information that would show "the bad character of the Mormon Smith Family," divest Joseph of "all claims to the character of an honest man," and place him at an "immeasurable distance from the high station he pretends to occupy." To accomplish his task, Hurlbut traveled in Ohio, New York, and Pennsylvania collecting statements disparaging to the Smith name.[16]

Recently, Dale W. Adams has summarized Hurlbut's Palmyra efforts as follows:

> Hurlbut spent a month or more in Palmyra giving anti-Mormon lectures and securing anti-Smith statements. A reading of these statements suggests that most of them were collected at lectures given by Hurlbut, supplemented by talks given by local ministers who were critical of Joseph Smith, Jr. . . .
>
> In evaluating these statements it must be recognized they were not assembled from a random sample of people who knew the Smith family. It would not have been in Hurlbut's interests to seek statements that were neutral or complimentary to the Smiths. His rhetoric and the histrionics of the local ministers who helped him certainly fostered, or at least reinforced, negative testimonials by those who attended the anti-Smith meetings organized by Hurlbut in Palmyra.[17]

From the beginning, Latter-day Saint writers have challenged the Hurlbut-Howe statements and affidavits on several grounds. Briefly, they appear to contain selected rather than random comments; they

---

15. For an extensive review of Hurlbut's life and purposes, and a bibliography of the discussion of the affidavits, see Dale W. Adams, "Doctor Philastus Hurlbut: Originator of Derogatory Statements about Joseph Smith, Jr.," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 20 (2000): 76–93.

16. Dean C. Jessee, ed., *The Papers of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989–), 1:12, editor's note.

17. Adams, "Doctor Philastus Hurlbut," 82.

often appear to be hearsay and gossip rather than a reflection of firsthand knowledge; they appear to be coached to conform to a pattern, often using similar language; and in the absence of original documents, they may have been edited or "doctored" by Hurlbut or Howe. Sometimes they would have required remarkable memory of the purported detail of Joseph's doings or the alleged exact words of his conversation. For the most part, I am inclined to agree with the Saints' negative assessment of the statements. I still feel today much as Robert C. Webb expressed it when he reviewed these things long ago and wondered why critics could not "perceive the *essential rottenness* of the favorite theories on the origin and significance of Mormonism, and the utterly contemptible character of the 'evidence' upon which they are based."[18]

In 1990, Signature Books published a book by Rodger I. Anderson that attempted to rescue the Hurlbut-Howe and other similar statements from the ravages of Mormon sophistry.[19] There was a long line of Latter-day Saint writings in opposition to the statements and affidavits.[20] Anderson's book is useful in providing in the notes a substantial bibliography on the past discussion of the issues and brings together copies of many of the statements in question. But it is with great skepticism that I receive Anderson's conclusion that the affidavits "must be granted permanent status as primary documents relating to Joseph Smith's early life and the origins of Mormonism."[21] What *is* certain is that they are of great importance as primary documents related to the development of anti-Mormonism.

---

18. Robert C. Webb [J. E. Homans], *The Case against Mormonism* (New York: Walton, 1915), 3, emphasis added.

19. Rodger I. Anderson, *Joseph Smith's New York Reputation Reexamined* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990). Although not noted in the Signature Books publication, the book is based on Anderson's study in the *Journal of Pastoral Practice* 4/3 (1980): 71–108; 4/4 (1980): 72–105. It appears in a section titled "Para-Christianity," edited by the late Reverend Wesley Walters, who noted that "Mr. Anderson was raised a Mormon and is now a member of the Christian Reformed Church." Ibid., 4/3 (1980): 70.

20. The immediate ones that he was attempting to refute were recent studies by Hugh Nibley and Richard Lloyd Anderson. See Nibley's *The Myth Makers* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1961), now available in Hugh Nibley, *Tinkling Cymbals and Sounding Brass* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 103–406; and Richard Lloyd Anderson's "Joseph Smith's New York Reputation Reappraised," *BYU Studies* 10/3 (1970): 283–314.

21. R. I. Anderson, *Joseph Smith's New York Reputation Reexamined,* 114.

So far as I can find, Rodger Anderson did not attempt to defend the statements Hurlbut obtained to bolster belief in the Spalding theory of the origin of the Book of Mormon—statements appearing in *Mormonism Unvailed*.[22] For obvious reasons he appears to maintain a prudent silence about them since supporting them would give credence to a theory now almost universally rejected by students of Mormon origins. Dan Vogel, who has done extensive work on compiling and publishing documents that he sees as bearing upon Latter-day Saint history, *totally* excludes the Spalding statements, holding that they "shed no light on Mormon origins."[23] Some may think that these statements are not comparable to the Palmyra documents, but they are surely comparable in many ways. Both sets of documents are found only in the same book. Both sets were gathered by Hurlbut and on their face raise the question of coaching or editing. They also would have required persons to perform herculean feats of memory, even recalling the twenty-year-old Spalding manuscript as having specific Book of Mormon names in it, among other details, which somehow had vanished when the manuscript was later discovered. Surely these considerations raise serious questions about Hurlbut's methodology and his procedure in promoting both sets of documents on behalf of an Ohio anti-Mormon committee.

Soon after Anderson's book was published, Latter-day Saint responses appeared.[24] Even allowing for any misunderstandings in a complex subject, many questions remained about these documents. Moreover, another study of consequence soon appeared that raised deep questions about the honesty of statements in the documents.[25] Donald L. Enders tested the claim—appearing like a leitmotif in several affidavits and other sources—that Joseph and the Smith family

---

22. Howe, *Mormonism Unvailed,* 278–90.

23. Dan Vogel, comp. and ed., *Early Mormon Documents* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996–), 1:xiv.

24. See Richard Lloyd Anderson, in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 3 (1991): 52–80; and Marvin S. Hill, in *BYU Studies* 30/4 (1990): 70–74.

25. Donald L. Enders, "The Joseph Smith, Sr., Family: Farmers of the Genesee," in *Joseph Smith: The Prophet, the Man,* ed. Susan Easton Black and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1993), 213–25.

were a lazy, shiftless lot. Enders summarized the claims: The Smiths "were 'lazy,' and 'indolent.' One neighbor claimed that the Smiths' 'great objective appeared to be to live without work,' while another said, 'It was a mystery to their neighbors how [the Smiths] got their living.' Some even asserted that the Smiths had no legal claim to [their] property but were mere 'squatters.'"[26] Enders used a fresh approach to determine whether these claims of laziness were true. Daniel C. Peterson has summarized his approach and findings:

> Working from land and tax records, farm account books and related correspondence, soil surveys, horticultural studies, surveys of historic buildings, archaeological reports, and interviews with agricultural historians and other specialists—sources not generally used by scholars of Mormon origins—Enders concludes that, on questions of testable fact, the affidavits cannot be trusted.
>
> The Smiths' farming techniques, it seems, were virtually a textbook illustration of the best recommendations of the day, showing them to have been, by contemporary standards, intelligent, skilled, and responsible people. And they were very hard working. To create their farm, for instance, the Smiths moved many tons of rock and cut down about six thousand trees, a large percentage of which were one hundred feet or more in height and from four to six feet in diameter. Then they fenced their property, which required cutting at least six or seven thousand ten-foot rails. They did an enormous amount of work before they were able even to begin actual daily farming.
>
> Furthermore, in order to pay for their farm, the Smiths were obliged to hire themselves out as day laborers. Throughout the surrounding area, they dug and rocked up wells and cisterns, mowed, harvested, made cider and barrels and chairs and brooms and baskets, taught school, dug for salt, worked as carpenters and domestics, built stone walls and fireplaces,

---

26. Ibid., 214.

flailed grain, cut and sold cordwood, carted, washed clothes, sold garden produce, painted chairs and oil-cloth coverings, butchered, dug coal, and hauled stone. And, along the way, they produced between one thousand and seven thousand pounds of maple sugar annually. "Laziness" and "indolence" are difficult to detect in the Smith family.[27]

What then should we conclude about the reliability and usefulness of the Hurlbut-Howe materials? Are there elements of truth in them? Of course, for some things are known from other sources. Some things Joseph himself said were part of his experience. But what of the very ugly tone and the serious question of exaggeration and extravagant claims about him? At the beginning of his book, Anderson boils down the claims against Joseph's character:

> In affidavit after affidavit the young Smith was depicted as a liar and self-confessed fraud, a cunning and callous knave who delighted in nothing so much as preying upon the credulity of his neighbors. A money digger by profession, Smith spent his nights digging for treasure and his days lounging about the local grocery store [there's that laziness again!] entertaining his fellow tipplers with tales of midnight enchantments and bleeding ghosts, the affidavits maintained.[28]

The bitter spirit of the affidavits shows through, even in this summary. Their intemperate tone is of great significance to me. I am led to conclude that these documents are of questionable value or reliability in trying to fill out details in the life of young Joseph. And they are even more doubtful in assessing his character and true motivations, for the people of New York did not begin to understand him. In an insightful finish to his book, Rodger Anderson concludes:

---

27. Daniel C. Peterson and Donald L. Enders, "Can the 1834 Affidavits Attacking the Smith Family Be Trusted?" in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon: The FARMS Updates of the 1990s,* ed. John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 286–87.

28. R. I. Anderson, *Joseph Smith's New York Reputation Reexamined,* 2–3.

> Nondescript and of little consequence until he started attracting others to his peculiar blend of biblical Christianity, frontier folk belief, popular culture, and personal experience, Joseph Smith was an enigma to his incredulous New York neighbors. For them, he would always remain a superstitious adolescent dreamer and his success as a prophet a riddle for which there was no answer.[29]

Will we today ever master the riddle—the so-called "prophet puzzle"—if we confine ourselves to the western New Yorkers' myopic and topsy-turvy opinions of young Joseph?

Studying Joseph Smith's History "Right Side Up"

If we are to make progress in understanding the young Joseph Smith, it appears that we must give much closer attention to his own explanation and that of his close associates. After all, he knew more about it than anyone else. Much still awaits our consideration. Some have assumed that he did not reply to *Mormonism Unvailed,* or could not reply, but that is far from the truth. Rodger Anderson notes that "to defuse the potentially explosive documents, Smith read them aloud at public meetings, denouncing them as the work of Satan."[30] But it is the written response that is even more important, and much has survived that can help put the Hurlbut-Howe statements in perspective.

In the church periodical the *Messenger and Advocate,* published at Kirtland, Ohio, Joseph Smith's close associate, Oliver Cowdery, undertook to prepare and publish "'a full history of the rise of the church' in an effort to counter the distorted reports that had circulated."[31] It appeared concurrently with Howe's book in 1834 and was specifically intended to be a response to it and like challenges. The history took the form of a series of letters from Cowdery to W. W. Phelps. Oliver noted that "our brother J. Smith jr. has offered to as-

---

29. Ibid., 116.

30. Ibid., 3.

31. Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith,* 1:12, editor's note. Oliver had written of his "purpose as to convince the publick of the incorrectness of those scurulous reports which have inundated our land." Ibid., 1:45.

sist us."[32] To help at the outset, Joseph prepared a strong statement regarding his youthful behavior:

> During this time, as is common to most, or all youths, I fell into many vices and follies; but as my accusers are, and have been forward to accuse me of being guilty of gross and outragious violations of the peace and good order of the community, I take the occasion to remark, that . . . I have not, neither can it be sustained, in truth, been guilty of wronging or injuring any man or society of men; and those imperfections to which I alude, and for which I have often had occasion to lament, were a light, and too often, vain mind, exhibiting a foolish and trifling conversation.
>
> This being all, and the worst, that my accusers can substantiate against my moral character, I wish to add, that it is not without a deep feeling of regret that I am thus called upon in answer to my own conscience, to fulfill a duty I owe to myself, as well as to the cause of truth, in making this public confession of my former uncircumspect walk, and unchaste conversation: and more particularly, as I often acted in violation of those holy precepts which I knew came from God. . . . I do not, nor never have, pretended to be any other than a man "subject to passion," and liable, without the assisting grace of the Savior, to deviate from that perfect path in which *all* men are commanded to walk![33]

Oliver Cowdery published his own forceful defense of Joseph Smith's character. In a statement that apparently alludes to the Hurlbut-Howe claims, he says:

> [Joseph] passed the time as others, in laboring for his support. But in consequence of certain false and slanderous reports which have been circulated, justice would require me to say something upon the private life of one whose character has

---

32. *Messenger and Advocate* 1 (October 1834): 13.

33. Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith,* 1:13–14, irregular spellings and grammar retained in quotations from this source.

been so shamefully traduced. By some he is said to have been a lazy, idle, vicious, profligate fellow. These I am prepared to contradict, and that too by the testimony of *many* persons with whom I have been intimately acquainted, and know to be individuals of the strictest veracity, and unquestionable integrity. All these strictly and virtually agree in saying, that he was an honest, upright, virtuous, and faithfully industrious young man. And those who say to the contrary can be influenced by no other motive than to destroy the reputation of one who never injured any man in either property or person.

While young, I have been informed he was afflicted with sickness; but I have been told by those for whom he has labored, that he was a young man of truth and industrious habits. And I will add further that it is my conviction, if he never had been called to the exalted station in which he now occupies, he might have passed down the stream of time with ease and in respectability, without the foul and hellish tongue o[f] slander ever being employed against him. It is no more than to be expected, I admit, that men of corrupt hearts will try to traduce his character and put a spot upon his name: indeed, this is according to the word of the angel; but this does not prohibit me from speaking freely of his merits, and contradicting those falsehoods.[34]

Oliver's mention of the "word of the angel" alludes to the instruction and warnings given to Joseph Smith by Moroni, which appear in remarkable length and detail in the Cowdery letters and had to have been given to Oliver by Joseph himself. In this account, the angel is quoted as warning Joseph that "the workers of iniquity will seek your overthrow: *they will circulate falsehoods to destroy your reputation.*"[35]

Moroni and the Ritual Life of Joseph Smith

Many insights regarding Joseph Smith's early life and conduct are suggested by the angel Moroni's instruction as contained in the Cowdery

---

34. *Messenger and Advocate* 2 (October 1835): 200.

35. Ibid., 199, emphasis added.

letters. His instruction bids us to reflect on theological meanings and implications ignored by secular critics. From these enlightening essays, it is apparent that Joseph Smith was paced through special experiences to give him understanding essential to his future work and calling. Here I would observe that because of his prophetic calling and the things he was commanded to do, the arranged circumstances of his unique environment, and the resulting reaction of others and the opposing spiritual power, Joseph Smith was required to live a richly symbolic life—a ritual life, if you will. I say required because, if faithful to his calling, he would be forced through the pattern in many designed circumstances that he could not arrange or control. This is best seen by comparing his life with other prophetic figures whose lives have significant common elements or motifs, and especially with Christ, who was the great exemplar. Striving to understand the meaning behind the symbolic things Joseph exemplified can be a lifetime quest but very instructive indeed. Certainly Joseph Smith's neighbors did not begin to understand. Nor would I expect our agnostic-atheist detractors to grasp the significance of these subtleties either since they have already chosen to shut themselves off from an appreciation of transcendent things as obvious as the sun. But those who share our knowledge of the reality of spiritual forces—both good and ill—will recognize the supreme importance of such matters.

The ritual pattern is broad indeed, and I can only touch on two or three elements here. However, they are important ones in helping us to understand the meaning of Joseph's early experience. Surely the first one, which we have mentioned above, would be that of rejection by those who knew him in his youth, followed by contrasting acceptance later by many believers. Latter-day Saints are reminded of this pattern in the life of Christ when they sing in Parley Pratt's cherished hymn: "Once rejected by his own, Now their King he shall be known."[36]

Another important element is suggested by a passage in the *Lectures on Faith* that were given in Kirtland: Jesus "was exposed to more powerful contradictions than any man can be."[37] Surely Joseph Smith was exposed to "powerful contradictions" when his young mind was

---

36. "Jesus, Once of Humble Birth," *Hymns,* no. 196.
37. *Lectures on Faith* 5:2, in *Messenger and Advocate* 1 (May 1835): 122.

troubled over greatly contrasting things—a dilemma he faced of which his neighbors were oblivious or unaware. His attempt to meet this challenge, whether apt or not, can help explain some of the unusual things Joseph did.

A most significant feature in Joseph's early life that meets us very strongly in Moroni's instruction as recorded in the Cowdery letters, and in Joseph's own histories, is the element of *temptation.* Some years ago, while reading Bousset's noted study of Christ, I was struck with his comment on the Savior's temptation. Citing similar "schemata" in the lives of other prophetic figures, he noted that the New Testament relates "the prehistory of the hero before his public appearance according to a definite schema; the hour of illumination is followed by the hour of temptation."[38] Jesus's illumination occurred at baptism, when the Father's voice was heard and the Holy Ghost descended. This was followed with temptation by the devil in the wilderness. I was then strongly impressed that this basic pattern, *illumination followed by temptation,* is also a most significant element in the life of Joseph Smith.

Following the illumination of Joseph's marvelous first vision, he confesses that he "was left to all kinds of temptations; and, mingling with all kinds of society, I frequently fell into many foolish errors, and displayed the weakness of youth, and the foibles of human nature; which, I am sorry to say, led me into divers temptations, offensive in the sight of God" (Joseph Smith—History 1:28). When the angel Moroni instructed him, he "added a caution to me, telling me that Satan would try to tempt me (in consequence of the indigent circumstances of my father's family), to get the plates for the purpose of getting rich" (Joseph Smith—History 1:46).[39] In his earliest history (1832), Joseph said that after the first vision he "fell into transgressions and sinned in many things which brought a wound upon my soul and there were many things which transpired that cannot be writen and my Fathers

---

38. Wilhelm Bousset, *Kyrios Christos: A History of the Belief in Christ from the Beginnings of Christianity to Irenaeus,* trans. John E. Steely (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970), 82.

39. Compare the blandishment of offered riches as an important feature in the temptation of Christ.

family have suffered many persicutions and afflictions."[40] In that early history, Joseph explained that he "had been tempted of the advisary" to seek the plates for riches and that Moroni had explained that he was "left unto temptation that thou mightest be made acquainted with the power of the advisary therefore repent and call on the Lord."[41]

This last point from Moroni in Joseph's earliest history (1832)—that the process of temptation is instructive—is also given emphasis by Moroni as related in the Cowdery letters. Oliver Cowdery summarizes this concept, as it applied to Joseph Smith, as follows:

> You see the great wisdom in God in leading him thus far, that his mind might begin to be more matured, and thereby be able to judge correctly, the spirits. . . . God knowing all things from the beginning, began thus to instruct his servant. And in this it is plainly to be seen that the adversary of truth is not sufficient to overthrow the work of God. . . . In this, then, I discover wisdom in the dealings of the Lord: it was impossible for any man to translate the book of Mormon by the gift of God, and endure the afflictions, and temptations, and devices of satan, without being overthrown, unless he had been previously benefitted with a certain round of experience: and had our brother obtained the record the first time, not knowing how to detect the works of darkness, he might have been deprived of the blessing of sending forth the word of truth to this generation. Therefore, God knowing that satan would thus lead his mind astray, began at that early hour, that when the full time should arrive, he might have a servant prepared to fulfil his purpose.[42]

Much additional instruction appears in these letters about the training of Joseph Smith to discern between the influences of the two spiritual forces.

---

40. Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith,* 1:7.
41. Ibid., 1:8.
42. *Messenger and Advocate* 2 (October 1835): 199–200.

Joseph Smith's Environment and the Two Powers

My thoughts here are suggested by Oliver Cowdery's observation, reiterated by him elsewhere, that "two invisible powers were operating upon the mind of our brother while going to Cumorah."[43] The basic concept is that all persons are influenced by both the good and evil powers or spirits and must learn to judge, discern, and make choices between them. The doctrine is prominent in the Book of Mormon, especially in Lehi's teaching of the necessity that there be an "opposition in all things" and that God has given man to "act for himself," which requires that he be "enticed by the one or the other" (2 Nephi 2:11–16). The two powers are real, not imaginary, although the Book of Mormon says that it would come forth at a time when the devil would whisper "in their ears" that there is no devil (2 Nephi 28:22).

What has this to tell us about the environment in which Joseph did his work? There would be persons around him who were strongly influenced by God, and others by the devil—with most showing varying degrees of both. There would be things remaining from the two influences in the past, whether it be, for example, in traditions, institutions, literature, or other things. How would these affect perceptions about the restored gospel? Some things would bear witness of the coming restoration, and other things were planted to embarrass the new revelation and cause confusion. Many have thought they could judge Joseph Smith's work by comparing his revelations or teachings with ideas found in the environment, and when they find similar ideas, think that is the source of them rather than revelation. This is a mistaken assumption, for it is not necessarily so. It is interesting to find such correspondences, but even if everything had its counterpart somewhere in the environment, that still would not prevent God from revealing things to Joseph, calling him to a work, giving him authority and direction, and helping him discern what in the environment is sound and what is not. This simple truth seems to have escaped many anti-Mormon writers.

---

43. Ibid., 199.

Latter-day Saints have often seen the hand of God in preparing for the restoration, whether it be in the Protestant Reformation, aspects of the Renaissance, or the development of free government to make possible freedom of religion. Perhaps we should be more aware of things the evil power has done to prepare the groundwork for his opposition to the restoration. Surely the devil is capable of long-range planning. Joseph was confronted by such things, as are we today. It is the duty of everyone today to strive to discern between the two spirits.

Editor's Picks, by Daniel C. Peterson

In accordance with tradition, and on behalf of the *FARMS Review*, I now offer my rating of some of the books discussed in the present issue of the *Review*. My (inescapably subjective) evaluations emerge from personal examination of the books, coupled with a reading of the relevant reviews and after conversations either with the reviewers or with those who assist in the production of the *Review*. The final judgments, however, and the final responsibility for making them are mine. Here is the scale that I use in this rating system:

**** Outstanding, a seminal work of the kind that appears only rarely

*** Enthusiastically recommended

** Warmly recommended

* Recommended

Of the books treated in the present issue of the *FARMS Review*, we feel that we can recommend:

**** Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Thomas A. Wayment, eds., *From the Last Supper through the Resurrection: The Savior's Final Hours*

*** Grant Hardy, ed., *The Book of Mormon: A Reader's Edition*

*** George W. E. Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch, Chapters 1–36; 81–108*

*** Jeffrey A. Trumbower, *Rescue for the Dead: The Posthumous Salvation of Non-Christians in Early Christianity*

I wish to thank all those who have made this latest number of the *FARMS Review* possible. Shirley S. Ricks, the *Review*'s production editor, keeps us focused and on track, edits with talent and insight, and actually does most of the real work. She is indispensable. My two capable associate editors, Louis C. Midgley and George L. Mitton (author of a fine introduction), devoted many very valuable hours to improving the content and presentation of the essays. I deeply appreciate their judgment and helpfulness. Alison V. P. Coutts, assistant executive director and director of publications for BYU's Institute for the Study and Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts, the parent organization of FARMS, carefully read through the entire contents of the *Review,* offering useful comments and suggestions. Angela Barrionuevo, Julie Dozier, Emily Ellsworth, Paula Hicken, Marshelle Papa, Linda Sheffield, Sandra Thorne, and Elizabeth W. Watkins assisted with source checking, editing, and proofreading. Jacob Rawlins consulted on typesetting issues, and the actual typesetting was done by Mary M. Rogers. To all of them, and most especially to the reviewers and authors in this number of the *FARMS Review,* I offer my sincere thanks.

An Elegant Presentation

Kevin L. Barney

Readers of a certain age may recall participating, whether as a youth leader or as a young person, in a rite of passage in Latter-day Saint culture known as "standards night." At this event, a typical scenario that was played out was to offer a piece of cake, or perhaps a stick of gum, to a member of the audience. Usually one of the young people would readily agree; but before giving it over to the waiting youth, the leader would mash and squeeze the piece of cake through her unwashed hands or chew the piece of gum vigorously. It was, of course, still a piece of cake or gum. Nevertheless, the young person, disgusted by the treatment of this supposed "treat," recoils in horror and wants nothing further to do with it. This was meant as an object lesson on the need to maintain one's virtue and remain morally clean. But it also illustrates well the point for which I wish to adapt it: that the way something is handled and presented matters greatly as to how readily it will be received and appreciated.

The volume under review, *The Book of Mormon: A Reader's Edition* (hereafter simply *Reader's Edition*), edited by Grant Hardy, sets forth the 1920 edition of the Book of Mormon (which is in the public

domain and therefore available for such purposes) in a large and relatively expensive volume. Given that one can obtain a slender missionary edition for a few dollars (or, for that matter, usually for free), why should anyone buy this book? The answer lies in its presentation.

Although I suppose few of us have an actual first edition of the Book of Mormon in our personal libraries, many of us have a facsimile of the first edition and are therefore familiar with it. It of course purported to be scripture, but the first edition looked more like a novel than like the Bible. This perceived defect has been remedied over time in subsequent editions—most notably by Orson Pratt in the 1879 edition—by shortening the chapters and adding verse numbers, and subsequently in the 1981 edition by superimposing on the text the same apparatus (in three-columned footnotes) as was used for the King James Version (hereafter KJV) of the Bible published by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1979.

Ironically, however, as the official editions of the Book of Mormon over time have come to look more and more like the KJV, modern Bible translations have been moving in the opposite direction—away from the double-columned, verse-centric formatting of the KJV to presenting the text in a single-column setting, the dominant organization of which is the paragraph, not the verse. That is, modern Bible translations have been presenting the Bible to look more and more like a novel, in a format that is easier for the reader to grasp. The *Reader's Edition* presents the text of the Book of Mormon in a manner similar to that used by modern editions of the Bible. These modern editorial standards are used precisely because they enhance the readability of the text, making it easier for modern English readers to follow what is going on and to see connections between ideas and phrasing that might be lost in a more verse-centric presentation.

Inasmuch as the *Reader's Edition* has many features designed to enhance the readability, comprehension, and appreciation of the text, at this point I will simply attempt to describe them:

- The book begins with a useful sixteen-page introduction. For those approaching the text for the first time, the front and back matter in existing editions is barely sufficient to really explain what the book

is about. Hardy's introduction provides a more adequate entrée to the book for the uninitiated reader, without going too far in the other direction and overwhelming the reader with minutiae.

• Immediate context is provided to the reader by the use of in-text captions. These content headings allow the reader to see at a glance the theme of the next section of text. I personally find this in-text captioning system more useful than beginning-of-chapter headnotes. Good illustrations of where the headings clarify complicated narrative include the allegory of Zenos in Jacob 5 and the multiple strands of Helaman's narrative beginning in Alma 53.

• The text is presented in paragraphs, with the verse numbers still given but superscripted and reduced in size. Such a presentation style has become absolutely de rigueur in modern translations of the Bible. It helps the reader to see the larger context of a passage and also helps to discourage inappropriate verse-level proof texting.[1]

• Poetic passages, including in particular the quotations from Isaiah, are displayed in indented lines to show their Hebrew parallelism. Dividing the text into poetic lines is a critical refinement to the presentation that is tremendously helpful to the reader.

• Quotations from the Old Testament and prior Book of Mormon prophets are shown by various means, such as quotation marks, indenting, or italicizing.

• Limited footnotes are presented. Footnotes are used (1) when Nephite writers refer to specific past events or directly quote earlier figures (where the source of the quoted text is not known, the footnote simply indicates "reference uncertain"), (2) to indicate narrative lines that are broken off and then resumed, (3) when years are mentioned, (4) where sources have been edited, (5) to offer explanations of names, (6) to reflect alternate spellings, (7) to show alternate punctuation,

---

1. Inasmuch as the paragraph is a unit of thought, not of length, proper paragraphing greatly assists the reader by showing the sequencing and progression of thought in the text. Further, "paragraphing is also a matter of the eye. A reader will address himself more readily to his task if he sees from the start that he will have breathing-spaces from time to time than if what is before him looks like a marathon course." H. W. Fowler, *A Dictionary of Modern English Usage,* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 435.

and (8) to indicate the original chapter breaks in the first edition. The scope of the notes is comparable to what one finds in a good modern edition of the Bible and provides the reader with minimum information for making sense of the text.

- Appendix 1 sets forth testimonies of Joseph Smith and other witnesses.
- Appendix 2 provides a chronology of the translation. It also includes pictures of Joseph Smith, the Hill Cumorah, the Anthon transcript, a page from the printer's manuscript, a first edition of the Book of Mormon, and the Nauvoo House cornerstone (where the original manuscript was deposited and suffered badly from water damage).
- Appendix 3 sets forth two documents dealing with the loss of the 116 pages of manuscript.
- Appendix 4 provides a general description of Book of Mormon plates and records.
- Appendix 5 gives some basics of Book of Mormon poetry, including an introduction to chiasmus.
- Appendix 6 details the fifty most significant changes in the text over time.
- Appendix 7 contains the following charts and maps: (1) record keepers, (2) plates and records, (3) a chronology of the narrative, (4) leaders of the Nephites and Lamanites, (5) tables regarding key families in the text, (6) Jaredite kings, (7) a map of Lehi's journey through the Arabian peninsula, (8) a map showing western New York, and (9) a map showing relative locations of Book of Mormon places, together with a legend.
- Appendix 8 sets forth a glossary of names.
- The book concludes with four pages of suggestions for further reading.

In the course of preparing this volume, Hardy has had to make literally thousands of editorial decisions, and nearly all of them have been good ones. I am particularly impressed with his sense of restraint. The temptation to try to do *too much* in this volume must have been severe at times, but Hardy's editorial lodestar of enhancing the *readability* of

the text has served him well. The result is easily the most readily readable presentation of the Book of Mormon text in existence.

When I first approached this book, there were two issues that concerned me. The first was the cost of the book, which, at just under forty dollars, is significant. The cost is, however, to a great extent a function of size. In order to accommodate the felicitous editing of the text used in this edition, the book runs to over seven hundred large pages, bound in a handsome hardback cover. In my view, the significant advantages to the elegant presentation of the text in this edition are well worth the cost. It helps to realize that Hardy is donating all his royalties from the sale of the book to the church's Humanitarian Services fund.

Part of the problem is that we have become so accustomed to inexpensive missionary editions of the Book of Mormon that we may tend to take the book somewhat for granted and not fully appreciate its value. Further, because the missionary editions are printed on onionskin paper and are quite thin (presumably to lessen the intimidation factor), we forget how long and complex a text the Book of Mormon really is. To space the text properly so that it can really breathe requires a lot of pages. Rereading the Book of Mormon in this edition reminded me how intricately constructed the book is. As Hardy points out (p. xiii), the book's high degree of literary coherence in the face of such a complex internal structure is truly stunning. If Joseph Smith were simply the author and creator of this account, then he would well deserve the label of "religious genius" it has become trendy to assign to him.

My second concern had to do with the use of the 1920 edition text. As a practicing Mormon, for devotional purposes I would obviously prefer to have access to the 1981 edition text, which of course was not available for this project. But for me, at least, Hardy's appendix on textual changes largely moots this concern. The vast majority of the changes are so immaterial that they would scarcely be noticed, even if one were to read assigned passages from this text out loud in a Sunday School class. Indeed, reviewing these changes in the text, one cannot help but chuckle at the overdramatic assertions still common in anti-Mormon literature announcing the shocked discovery that there have been over three thousand changes in the text. Further, Hardy makes

it clear that he has no intention of somehow superseding the church's official 1981 edition. That edition has tools and advantages of its own, and in many contexts it will continue to be the edition of choice. The principal virtues of the *Reader's Edition* will become apparent not when used to look up individual verses, scripture-chase style, but in reading the book as a whole, or at least significant portions of it.

Although these initial two concerns were largely allayed when I read the book itself, a third concern arose at the conclusion of my reading, and that is the lack of an index. Many readers of this volume may not be Latter-day Saints or may otherwise lack ready access to the Topical Guide and other indexing resources of the official editions of the scriptures. I would hope that if a second edition is prepared, an index would be added.

There were very few points at which I noted an error or disagreed with Hardy's handling of an issue. As is obligatory in reviews such as this, however, I will mention a few:

- Hardy says that the "spokesman" of 2 Nephi 3:18 is probably Sidney Rigdon, referencing Doctrine and Covenants 100:9 (p. 69n). While this is true, the note could have been clearer on the timing involved. Since that section was not received until 12 October 1833, it should be apparent that this association was made only later, in retrospect, and that Joseph did not have Sidney in mind as he dictated the Book of Mormon passage. I mention this clarification only because there are those who continue to hold to the Spalding theory of Book of Mormon origins and think that Sidney Rigdon was involved in that book's creation, notwithstanding the fact that Joseph had not even yet met Rigdon.

- In the midst of the quotation of Isaiah 2 in 2 Nephi 12:5, Hardy puts the words "yea, come, for ye have all gone astray, every one to his wicked ways" in parentheses and notes that the phrases in parentheses are not in the KJV (p. 92n). Yet these words represent a clear allusion to Isaiah 53:6, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way." A note to this effect would have been helpful to the reader.

- Hardy properly gives the 1920 text of 2 Nephi 30:6 as "white and delightsome" (p. 133). In appendix 6 he properly gives the textual evidence for that reading and for the variant "pure and delightsome" (p. 668). Given the tremendous amount of discussion of this particular variant, however, this is one place where I would have preferred an actual footnote on p. 133 alerting the reader to the alternate reading and then cross-referencing the recitation of textual evidence in the appendix.

- Hardy writes that "the identifications of *neas* and *sheum* are uncertain" (p. 199n). It is fairly clear, however, that *sheum* derives from an Akkadian word for grain.[2] This association could be qualified with a "probably" or even a "possibly," as Hardy does in other notes where suggestions made are somewhat speculative.

These kinds of nits, however, were few and far between. Overall I found the notes to be excellent and innovative. For instance, I very much liked Hardy's treatment of chronological matters. He correctly gives the first year of the reign of Zedekiah as 597 BC, not 600. And he recognizes (p. xxii) that chronological correspondences to our calendar are necessarily approximate, both because of uncertainty over the length of the Nephite year and also because of uncertainty as to the year when Jesus was born. For the internal chronological systems based on either the reigns of the judges or the birth of Christ, Hardy simply designates the years with negative or positive numbers (e.g., -39 or +22) to show how the years relate to the sign of Christ's birth.

A significant problem with the official editions of the scriptures is that they do not handle quotations well. For example, to find quotations of the Old Testament in the New Testament it is necessary to look in the Bible Dictionary, s.v. "Quotations"; in situ cross-references are not consistently given, and even when they are given, they are often drowned in a sea of references so that their significance is not fully appreciated. To illustrate, try this experiment: First, read Hebrews 1 in the 1979 edition

---

2. Hildegard Lewy, "On Some Old Assyrian Cereal Names," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 76/4 (1956): 201–4, cited in Matthew Roper, "Right on Target: Boomerang Hits and the Book of Mormon" at www.fairlds.org/pubs/conf/2001RopM.html (accessed 17 March 2004).

of the KJV. Then read it again in an edition that shows the quotes with a different typeface, such as bold or italic. When you can immediately see and appreciate the extent to which the author is quoting from the Old Testament, it is a very different reading experience. This volume handles such quotations much better, not only with footnoted references in the text itself, but also by showing the quotes with either indented or italicized text. This intertextuality can especially be seen when Nephi interprets Isaiah at 1 Nephi 22 (such as at pp. 57–60) and in 2 Nephi 25 and following (pp. 117–34).[3]

I have a particular interest in the Hebraic poetry of the Book of Mormon,[4] and so I was especially pleased to see that Hardy used indentation to assist the reader in recognizing parallel lines. I was also relieved that Hardy did not try to go too far and replicate all of the poetic and rhetorical structures set forth by Donald W. Parry in his *Book of Mormon Text Reformatted according to Parallelistic Patterns* (hereafter *Parallelistic Patterns*).[5] Although the Hardy and Parry volumes overlap slightly in purpose, ultimately they serve very different needs. *Parallelistic Patterns* shows no attention to matters of font, spacing, graphic design, headers, and so forth, and is essentially unusable as one's primary text of the Book of Mormon. But that is not its reason for being—it is rather an explication of an argument, a resource, reference, and repository for detailed information regarding Hebrew poetic and rhetorical forms in the Book of Mormon text. Conversely, the purpose of Hardy's *Reader's Edition* is specifically that of providing a very readable presentation, and to get mired in the details set forth in *Parallelistic Patterns* would not have furthered that purpose. In my view, both *Reader's Edition* and *Parallelistic Patterns* are important volumes

---

3. I liked and appreciated Hardy's designation of some of this commentary as "Midrash" in the captions.

4. See for example Kevin L. Barney, "Poetic Diction and Parallel Word Pairs in the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 4/2 (1995): 15–81.

5. Donald W. Parry, *The Book of Mormon Text Reformatted according to Parallelistic Patterns* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1992). For a review of *Parallelistic Patterns,* see Jo Ann H. Seely, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 5 (1993): 203–8.

for the libraries of students of the Book of Mormon, and neither fills the particular role of the other as a tool of Book of Mormon study.

The glossary of names is useful because it is more than just a list. It identifies individuals by family relationships and place names by geographic orientations, and it gives the first reference in the text where the name occurs. Hardy also follows the excellent practice of the 1981 edition of using subscripted numbers to differentiate different people who bear the same name.

I was glad to see that in the "Suggestions for Further Reading" Hardy has included a section on "Critical Responses." To be useful as a scholar's edition, the book needs to point the reader to some of this literature.

I well remember a couple of decades ago attending conferences at Brigham Young University at which Truman Madsen managed to assemble some of the world's foremost scholars of religion, several of whom brought to bear their considerable skills and tools on the Book of Mormon itself. Those were heady times, but there has been too little of that kind of scholarly attention paid to the Book of Mormon since. As the Catholic scholar Thomas O'Dea famously noted many years ago, "the *Book of Mormon* has not been universally considered by its critics as one of those books that must be read in order to have an opinion of it."[6] Perhaps one of the more well known recent examples of this dictum is Harold Bloom, whose comments on the Book of Mormon do not reflect deep understanding and apparently were not benefited by an actual reading of the text.[7] The day when this sort of an effort will qualify as scholarship on the Book of Mormon has passed. Ideally accompanied by Terryl Givens's introduction to Book

---

6. Thomas F. O'Dea, *The Mormons* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 26, quoted at p. xxiii.

7. See Harold Bloom, *The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 85–86. Robert A. Rees, "Joseph Smith, the Book of Mormon, and the American Renaissance," *Dialogue* 35/3 (2002): 97 n. 40, concludes: "Frankly, I don't believe Bloom gave the book his best critical effort" and notes that "in conversation, one of Bloom's former students told me that Bloom confessed to him that he had not read the Book of Mormon."

of Mormon studies,[8] Grant Hardy's *Reader's Edition* now makes easily available, even for the uninitiated, a text of the Book of Mormon that can be understood and will reward careful reading. As various universities begin to flirt with the concept of "Mormon studies," this is a most welcome development indeed.

If it is not clear by now, let me reiterate that I loved this book and thought it was very well executed (and very much needed). A word of warning, however: reading the Book of Mormon all the way through in this edition might well spoil you from reading it any other way.

---

8. Terryl L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

Positivism and the Priority of Ideology in Mosiah-First Theories of Book of Mormon Production

Alan Goff

Every vision of history functions as a specific lens or optic that a theorist employs to illuminate some facet of human reality. Each perspective is both enabling, allowing a strongly focused study, and limiting, preventing consideration of other perspectives.[1]

---

1. Steven Best, *The Politics of Historical Vision: Marx, Foucault, Habermas* (New York: Guilford, 1995), 255.

Review of Brent Lee Metcalfe. "The Priority of Mosiah: A Prelude to Book of Mormon Exegesis." In *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology,* ed. Brent Lee Metcalfe, 395–444. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993. xiv + 446 pages. $26.95.

Review of Edwin Firmage Jr. "Historical Criticism and the Book of Mormon: A Personal Encounter." In *American Apocrypha: Essays on the Book of Mormon,* ed. Dan Vogel and Brent Lee Metcalfe, 1–16. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002. xvii + 369 pages. $21.95.

Review of Susan Staker. "Secret Things, Hidden Things: The Seer Story in the Imaginative Economy of Joseph Smith." In *American Apocrypha: Essays on the Book of Mormon,* ed. Dan Vogel and Brent Lee Metcalfe, 235–74. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002. xvii + 369 pages. $21.95.

> One of the things one learns from the study of history is
> that such study is never innocent, ideologically or otherwise.[2]

Billy Collins, former U.S. Poet Laureate, writes a wonderful poem about "The History Teacher."[3] Not wanting to disturb the tender sensibilities of his students who after school are assaulting and manhandling each other, he softens the impact of the hard lessons of history. Among other topics, the historian teaches his students that "the Ice Age was really just / the Chilly Age," a time cold enough to require sweaters. The Spanish Inquisition was a period when people asked searching questions of each other about Spanish culture, such as the distance to Madrid and the term attached to hats worn by matadors. For all his students know, the Enola Gay dropped a single microscopic atom on Hiroshima, and in the Boer War soldiers told each other digressive narratives intending to make the other side nod off. Though I desire to tell comforting tales to those learning Mormon history, I'll have to tell a postmodern story instead: the old modern ways of organizing history with the belief that the historian can narrate the past with objectivity, free of all bias and ideology, is equivalent to telling children that the "War of the Roses took place in a garden."

Bryan Appleyard laments that scientists take for granted a particular epistemology without even being aware that the epistemology filters evidence (dismissing contrary evidence) and favors particular ideologies. When they speak to each other, they can take for granted that the ideology and epistemology are widely shared by other scientists. When speaking to a broader public, "they tend to reveal a startling philosophical naïveté."[4] Historians, since the end of the nineteenth century, have attempted to model their discipline on the sciences; unfortunately, what they mimicked was this shortcoming in scientific work. That attempt to make history scientific has proven a failure, and in the last three decades

---

2. Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 82.

3. Billy Collins, "The History Teacher," in *Sailing Alone around the Room: New and Selected Poems* (New York: Random House, 2001), 38.

4. Bryan Appleyard, *Understanding the Present: Science and the Soul of Modern Man* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), xv.

historiography has instead emphasized that history is more like literature than science. The model of science favored by these scientist historians (objective, value-free, free of all ideology and presuppositions) has largely fallen into disrepute even within the disciplines and philosophy of science. We should not be too surprised if historians lag behind these theoretical developments in science and sophisticated historiography; little more should we be surprised if amateur or self-appointed historians adopt the dominant-but-mistaken ethos of the discipline. We should not be surprised if professional and amateur historians also display a naïveté about textual analysis and understanding the past.

Dan Vogel and Brent Metcalfe have collected a group of essays about the Book of Mormon called *American Apocrypha: Essays on the Book of Mormon.* Published by Signature Books, this collection continues an ideological project from earlier books in Signature Book's Essays on Mormonism Series (see p. ii);[5] this project denies the essential historical claims of Latter-day Saint foundational events, mostly the historical nature of the Book of Mormon and first vision. While the editors of these volumes may believe the quaint notion that they have no ideology but are just doing impartial, unbiased, objective history, readers ought to realize that this is a myth.

Although the other essays in this volume deserve attention to both their weaknesses and strengths, I will narrow my focus to Edwin Firmage's "Historical Criticism and the Book of Mormon: A Personal Encounter" and Susan Staker's "Secret Things, Hidden Things: The Seer Story in the Imaginative Economy of Joseph Smith." These essays posit that when Joseph Smith dictated what they consider his novel or scripture, he encountered a crisis when Martin Harris lost the first 116 pages of the manuscript. When he resumed, Joseph Smith began not with those parts of the book placed first in the published volume and

---

5. The Essays on Mormonism Series includes Gary J. Bergera, ed., *Line upon Line: Essays on Mormon Doctrine* (1989); Dan Vogel, ed., *The Word of God: Essays on Mormon Scripture* (1990); D. Michael Quinn, ed., *The New Mormon History: Revisionist Essays on the Past* (1992); and Bryan Waterman, ed., *The Prophet Puzzle: Interpretive Essays on Joseph Smith* (1999). Another book in that series, George D. Smith, ed., *Faithful History: Essays on Writing Mormon History* (1992), collects essays from a couple of different ideological perspectives.

chronologically first in the narrative (1 and 2 Nephi), but with Mosiah through Moroni, composing the Nephi material last. Since this theory has elsewhere been defended by Brent Metcalfe, one of the editors of this volume, I will also address one of his essays in an earlier publication.[6]

I intend my approach to be contrapuntal; I will contrast the innocence of these writers about their own ideology with a recent book to underline how an adequate approach might develop, even among Book of Mormon critics who deny its historical claims. Huston Smith, in *Why Religion Matters,* decries the dominance of positivism (he usually uses the term *scientism*) in religious studies.[7]

Ideology and Worldview

We have made some progress over the past decade. Book of Mormon revisionists now rarely claim that they are merely doing objective historical research free of all bias, preconception, and ideology. These claims were common among Mormon revisionists just ten years ago. This positivism that claimed to free itself of all ideology became the dominant assumption of the modern university when it adopted the German disciplinary model. German universities "were positivistic to the core, and (because they have retained their place as the model for the American university) it is important to understand the militant secularism that is built into the word *positivism*."[8] Positivists deliberately set out to debunk religion, so with the collapse of the positivist project in the past forty years, some examination of the debunking itself needs to be undertaken. With religious studies and history still dominated by positivism at the level of the working historian, we should expect those who aspire to be called historians to also adopt the positivistic ethos.

---

6.   Brent Lee Metcalfe, "The Priority of Mosiah: A Prelude to Book of Mormon Exegesis," in *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology,* ed. Brent Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993), 395–444.

7.   Huston Smith, *Why Religion Matters: The Fate of the Human Spirit in an Age of Disbelief* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001).

8.   Ibid., 97.

Positivism commonly provides the worldview of those who deny the Book of Mormon historical status; this does not mean that all such historians fall under the category of revisionists, but this view is the dominant strain of history that emerged in the 1950s and 1960s, just when positivism was being challenged in philosophy, literary criticism, and historiography. But "worldviews tend to pass unnoticed,"[9] so before examining the textual claims of the Mosiah-first proponents, we must bring their worldview into focus. Positivism is just one version of modernity. Built into the modern worldview is what Huston Smith calls *scientism,* with two corollaries: (1) the scientific method is the only valid way to acquire knowledge, and (2) what science examines (material reality) is the fundamental reality. (These are parodies of science, so *scientism* as an ideology is not to be confused with *science.*) "These two corollaries are seldom voiced, for once they are brought to attention it is not difficult to see that they are arbitrary. Unsupported by facts, they are at best philosophical assumptions and at worst only opinions."[10] These assumptions are metaphysical presuppositions rather than being based on evidence (for they must be assumed before the researcher can define what counts as evidence). So consider the irony that the materialist claims only to deal with a material reality, precluding all supernaturalism, while making a metaphysical declaration. If we assume that material reality is the only reality, we have already excluded religious claims based on divine revelation. The result is that *positivists decide by fiat that any supernatural assertions are false.* This is the circumstance that Smith lays out as a condemnation of today's university—that its professors too often begin with the assumption that religion is false.

This habit of assuming that religion is untrue by subscribing to materialism is common in our universities, and we might also expect it of dilettantes who lack the credentials that academic degrees and teaching positions bestow:

---

9. Ibid., 48.
10. Ibid., 60.

Such antireligion in American higher education was launched in full force in the late 19th and early 20th centuries by confident apostles of secularization who sought to popularize the doctrines of positivism, epistemological foundationalism, and scientific objectivity. Of course, each of these perspectives has been thoroughly dissected for decades now by all manner of philosophers, historians, theologians, and social theorists. The corpse of logical positivism is badly decomposed, but its ghost still haunts the halls and classrooms of the academy.[11]

Christian Smith explains this persistent antireligious attitude by referring to Pierre Bourdieu's notion of *habitus,* which "involves persistent and deeply internalized mental schemes that correspond to and reinforce particular social conditions, and that operate prereflectively through human actors."[12] So why are our universities so habitually and uncritically antireligious? Because so many of their citizens adhere to an unreflective positivism and materialism "that is no less a matter of faith than is theism."[13]

Although explicit assertions that the researcher can obtain objectivity are seldom made now by Mormon revisionists, you might expect that positivism's adherents might make other claims to being ideology-free. As a matter of deeply ingrained training, you might also expect this positivism to be coupled with an antireligious approach by those who claim the mantle of scholarship. So when the editors of *American Apocrypha* make a sharp distinction between what they do and what believers in the Book of Mormon do because the latter are "apologists" for an ideology but the former are not, they have made a positivist assertion; by asserting that only people who disagree with them are defenders of an ideology, the editors make the familiar positivist claims from the flip side of the coin. Vogel and Metcalfe refer six times in the introduction to those who disagree with them by variants

---

11. Christian Smith, "Force of Habit: Hostility and Condescension toward Religion in the University," *Books and Culture* 8/5 (2002): 20.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid., 21.

of the words *apologist* or *defender*. This vocabulary assumes that it is possible not to be an apologist for an ideology. This remnant of positivism still dominates the antireligious fervor in institutions of higher education. But, as Huston Smith has pointed out, worldviews tend to be taken for granted.[14] The kind of hermeneutical, philosophical, and methodological analysis required to go beyond the still-dominant cultural positivism is often too complex to be taught to undergraduates. Even graduate programs often do not train students in postpositivistic approaches. The instructors in hermeneutical and methodological courses tend to mirror now-outdated conceptual schemes. But some graduate students stand a chance of being awakened from their culturally induced positivist slumbers because they can detour around their positivistic professors by reading broadly. Those without graduate training in the philosophy of their disciplines stand little chance of moving beyond positivism.

Vogel and Metcalfe also assert that Book of Mormon "apologists" have advanced ad hoc arguments. They are referring specifically to discussions of Book of Mormon geography. "Rather than accept negative evidence," these critics claim, "apologists often invent *ad hoc* hypotheses to protect and maintain a crumbling central hypothesis. This tactic violates what is called the principle of parsimony, or Occam's Razor, which posits that the best hypothesis is the simplest or the one that makes the fewest assumptions" (p. ix; all internal references are to *American Apocrypha*). Vogel and Metcalfe are still caught in a positivistic historiographical theory, for they do not seem to understand the role of worldviews and how these generalizations authorize or invalidate evidence and theories. If I adhere to a worldview that permits supernatural intervention and you are an apologist for one that denies such actions, my arguments are always going to feel ad hoc to you. But then, your arguments are going to sound ad hoc to me also. Vogel and Metcalfe have not considered the possibility that what we have here is a clash of worldviews rather than a clash of evidence; the Mosiah-first theories seem ad hoc to me because they deal with the Book of Mormon

---

14. H. Smith, *Why Religion Matters,* 48.

without accepting its complexity. Only one Book of Mormon revision-
ist has even recognized that Book of Mormon complexity is a problem
revisionists must engage.[15] His book is actually a rebuke to the writers
of this volume, who lack the literary critical skills to analyze the Book
of Mormon with the level of subtlety it deserves. The problem is that
worldviews are metaphysical constructs that define what counts as valid
support for a position.

Positivism is also manifest by one of the editors of *American Apoc-
rypha* when he consistently refers to those "Mormon apologists" who
disagree with his position[16] as if they are the only ones involved in the
controversy who are apologists. One of Vogel's contributions in this
book begins with the word *apologists*[17] and consistently accuses oppo-
nents of being defenders. It does not occur to Vogel that he is himself an
apologist for an ideology that rests on positivism, that being an apolo-
gist for an ideology is an inescapable condition. A similar positivistic
claim made by Vogel is that people who disagree with him use rhetoric,
while he just presents the facts. For those who believe that there were
gold plates, physical plates, for the Book of Mormon witnesses to see
and touch, Vogel says "this argument is designed more to persuade than
to enlighten."[18] But Vogel's argument seems designed the same way. He
believes he can separate the persuasive part of an argument from its
evidentiary value. Yet Vogel's assertion itself is rhetorical: in his own
words, it is "designed more to persuade than to enlighten." Only a posi-
tivist could believe in the false binary opposition that separates rhetoric
from logic in this way. "Whereas positivist forms of philosophy and sci-
ence adhere to the 'objectivist' belief in pure knowledge untainted by

---

15. Mark Thomas, *Digging in Cumorah: Reclaiming Book of Mormon Narratives* (Salt
Lake City: Signature Books, 1999), admits that the Book of Mormon is sophisticated but
makes only halting steps to examine that erudite and elusive quality.

16. Dan Vogel, "Echoes of Anti-Masonry: A Rejoinder to Critics of the Anti-Masonic
Thesis," in *American Apocrypha: Essays on the Book of Mormon,* ed. Dan Vogel and Brent
Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), 275–320; see especially his intro-
duction and conclusion. All of Brent Metcalfe's writing uses the same terminology.

17. Dan Vogel, "The Validity of the Witnesses' Testimonies," in *American Apocry-
pha,* 79.

18. Ibid.

theoretical presuppositions or external motivations and interests, . . . the construction of knowledge is indissociable from various human interests that serve as motives for action."[19] Vogel seems unaware of his argument's rhetorical grounding, particularly of the rhetoric of positivism to which he appeals. "'Historical vacuums' are frequently used for sweeping condemnations of certain forms of inquiry; I have never seen any historians attacked for working in a 'rhetorical vacuum.'"[20] To be critical in historiography today, one must be aware of one's own ideological and rhetorical commitments. Jörn Rüsen notes in an interview that historians usually attempt to avoid any discussion of their own rhetoric because they adhere to a lingering positivism:

> When traditional historians hear the word "rhetoric" they become upset. Why? Because they think rhetoric is the contrary of academic rationality; accepting rhetoric means the contrary of being a good scholar. A good scholar means: to follow methodological rules of research, to go to the archives, and to make a good, empirically based interpretation of what happened in the past. Rhetoric is something different. It is against reason, it is against rationality; it is just playing around with words. This common opinion of professional historians is completely wrong.[21]

The literature on historiography now emphasizes that the ideology and rhetoric of the historian are probably the most important influences in historical interpretations, often being more influential than any archival or secondary source evidence. If this is true, then those who publish with a press such as Signature Books must recognize that they have an ideology, that their ideology is a dominant influence in their writing, and that they select through their ideology which evidence they will see as important or unimportant.

---

19. Best, *Politics of Historical Vision,* 153.

20. Hans Kellner, *Historical Language and Historical Representation: Getting the Story Crooked* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 122.

21. Ewa Domańska, *Encounters: Philosophy of History after Postmodernism* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998), 151.

Vogel's goal in his essay about Book of Mormon witnesses is to deny any material or naturalistic witness of plates or angels. Following positivists who believe an event is valid only if it can be demonstrated empirically, he argues:

> Despite the use of naturalistic language in the Testimony of Three Witnesses—particularly the emphasis on seeing the plates with their "eyes" as well as the failure to mention the angel's glory—subsequent statements by Harris and Whitmer point to the visionary aspects of their experience. In other words, the event was internal and subjective and in the fullest sense a vision.[22]

While in the very act of accusing Joseph Smith of charlatanry, Vogel conflates visions with hallucinations to make the straightforward assertion that visionary experiences do not amount to historical evidence: "The real question is not the trustworthiness of the witnesses but whether testimony resulting from visions or hallucinations is reliable."[23] Vogel begins by implying that rhetoric designed to persuade does not have the same force of knowledge as his more valid logic. He ends his essay by asserting that only naturalistic, materialistic experience makes for valid historical evidence. He uses what Best calls a "positivistic rhetoric,"[24] while claiming that only his opponents engage in rhetoric. "Good historiography requires hermeneutical sensitivity, empathetic and imaginative reconstruction, and reflexive methodological sophistication,"[25] none of which this collection of essays demonstrates.

I have elsewhere pointed out the positivistic assumptions in Brent Metcalfe's work.[26] Vogel, similar to Metcalfe, is not self-critical and consequently ends up an uncritical apologist for positivism. Again,

---

22. Vogel, "Validity of the Witnesses' Testimonies," 86. See page 97 for a similar statement regarding the Testimony of Eight Witnesses.

23. Ibid., 108.

24. Best, *Politics of Historical Vision,* 237.

25. Ibid.

26. See Alan Goff, "Historical Narrative, Literary Narrative," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5/1 (1996): 50–102; and Alan Goff, "Uncritical Theory and Thin Description: The Resistance to History," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 7/1 (1995): 170–207.

positivism is that worldview that claims it has no worldview, that adheres to a naïve realism which assumes that it reveals the world exactly as it is, free of ideology and rhetoric.

> The deeper fact, however, is that to have or not have a worldview is not an option, for peripheral vision always conditions what we are attending to focally, and in conceptual "seeing" the periphery has no cutoff. The only choice we have is to be consciously aware of our worldviews and criticize them where they need criticizing, or let them work on us unnoticed and acquiesce to living unexamined lives.[27]

Because positivism is that ideology prohibiting self-criticism, Vogel and Metcalfe are not aware that they constitute the evidence from within a positivistic worldview while denying the validity of competing worldviews.

The positivist worldview denies the supernatural. That denial is not based on evidence but on presuppositions. Modernity presupposes that material reality is all there is. Religious belief requires that reality not be exhausted by a naïve materialism. But to claim that materialism is adequate to explain all of reality is to invoke a metaphysics.[28] We must recognize that modernity is being contradictory here, for to claim that materialism is all there is goes beyond material claims; it is not itself empirically verifiable.

> What is and is not seen to be scientism is itself metaphysically controlled, for if one believes that the scientific worldview is true, the two appendages to it that turn it into scientism are not seen to be opinions. (I remind the reader that the appendages are, first, that science is our best window onto the world and, second, that matter is the foundation of everything that exists.) They present themselves as facts. That they are not provable does not count against them, because they are taken to be self-evident—as plainly so as the proverbial hand before one's face.[29]

---

27. H. Smith, *Why Religion Matters,* 21.
28. Ibid., 42.
29. Ibid., 64.

Because worldviews are large-scale conceptual structures that shape and misshape what we permit as evidence for particular theories, "what is taken to be self-evident depends on one's worldview, and disputes among worldviews are . . . unresolvable."[30]

This modern worldview, of which positivism is just one subset, is imperialistic; it insists it is the only valid approach to truth.[31] Science, social science, religious studies, biblical criticism, history—all disciplines have accepted the modern assertion that religious claims are only metaphorical, out of the realm of true knowledge which they themselves deliver. In other words, "the modern university is not agnostic toward religion; it is actively hostile to it."[32] Since the contributors to *American Apocrypha* are uncritical apologists for that version of modernity called positivism, its readers must be aware of that larger historical background even if its editors are not.

Mosiah-First Theories

When I first read Brent Metcalfe's essay positing the Mosiah-first theory, I was a bit puzzled by its lack of focus. I did not recognize its ideological implication. Several textual relationships are relevant in the Book of Mormon; I have elsewhere argued that allusions from the Book of Mormon to the Pentateuch and the work of the Deuteronomist (Joshua through 2 Kings) are particularly important.[33] Other allusions from one or another Book of Mormon passage to earlier passages deserve careful attention. These three attempts to support a Mosiah-first theory bring ideological presuppositions. Firmage notes that "questions about the Book of Mormon's origins" cannot yet be answered, but the uncertainty does not "diminish the certainty of [the] conclusion that the Book of Mormon is a modern text" (p. 15). If you sneak in a hidden ideological assumption that Joseph Smith

---

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid., 69.

32. Ibid., 96.

33. Alan Goff, "Scratching the Surface of Book of Mormon Narrative," *FARMS Review of Books* 12/2 (2000): 51–82.

authored a thinly veiled autobiographical novel, it is hardly surprising that your conclusion will be that the scripture is a modern novel. Literary critics have long used tools of textual analysis such as allusion, transumption, intertextuality, and the like to analyze textual relationships. Rather than employ any of these sophisticated tools, Metcalfe, Firmage, and Staker use an ad hoc Mosiah-first theory as a shortcut to avoid the complex textual analysis the text requires.

But, as Metcalfe notes, belief in the Book of Mormon as an ancient text can survive the Mosiah-first hypothesis. Some believers who have considered the question of translation sequence *do* believe in Mosiah-first (John Welch, Royal Skousen, and Dan Peterson included, according to Metcalfe).[34] If you believe in the Book of Mormon, then you believe there were plates from which Joseph Smith translated. Therefore, it does not matter if the dictation started from Mosiah or Nephi, because the book is grounded in those physical records. But Metcalfe assumes that "intrinsically woven into the Book of Mormon's fabric are not only remnants of the peculiar dictation sequence but threads of authorship. The composite of those elements explored in this essay point to Smith as the narrative's chief designer."[35] If you take for granted that the plates did not exist but that Joseph Smith fabricated a novel out of his own mind and experiences, then the Mosiah-first theory means that you can no longer believe in the book as an authentic ancient record. The Mosiah-first presupposition is not, in itself, doing the ideological work for these three writers; it is the assumption that Joseph Smith is the work's novelist. This argument is obviously circular. Does this fact undercut it? Metcalfe, Firmage, and Staker never confess that they have not argued for their most crucial assumption: there were no gold plates. Perhaps, like Sterling McMurrin, these writers would best state more explicitly their ideological assumption that angels do not deliver books to boys.[36]

---

34. Metcalfe, "Priority of Mosiah," 396–99. John Welch and Tim Rathbone endorse the Mosiah-first theory in the FARMS Update collected in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research,* ed. John W. Welch (Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 3.

35. Metcalfe, "Priority of Mosiah," 433.

36. Blake Ostler, "An Interview with Sterling M. McMurrin," *Dialogue* 17/1 (1984): 25.

Metcalfe, Firmage, and Staker have different emphases, but they share a common ideological framework. Metcalfe, taking for granted an unargued evolutionary assumption that more complex forms must be chronologically later than what he considers "primitive" forms, grants the following:

> Occasionally the middle section of the book (Mosiah and Alma) displays concepts which are less well developed than in the initial section (1 Nephi–Omni). These earlier portions are more congruent with later sections. It is difficult to explain the more primitive elements in Mosiah and Alma unless one assumes that Mosiah was the first installment in the Book of Mormon narrative.[37]

This chronology is crucial for all three of these writers. They use versions of this theory to establish parallel chronologies between Book of Mormon events and episodes in Joseph Smith's life. Besides making assumptions about textual relationships, these authors assume primitive ideas about the relationship between literature and reality. These same assumptions appear when journalists interview novelists and persistently ask how much of the narrative is autobiographical. If Smith wrote the Book of Mormon as a novel, they cannot conceive of the possibility that he just made the material up using his own imagination. They fall into what Mark Thomas sees as a trap: "almost all serious Mormon scholarship on the book attempts to reconstruct its historical origins, making little or no effort at interpretation."[38] While Thomas agrees with these revisionists that the scripture is a modern work of fiction, he still condemns this fixation on proving origins as hindering a sophisticated literary understanding of the text. The ideological assumption that Joseph Smith wrote the book as a novel is almost always coupled with superficial textual analysis. Such an assumption depends on a dubious theory of fiction while at the same time insisting on the fictional status of the book: Joseph Smith made

---

37. Metcalfe, "Priority of Mosiah," 415–16.
38. Thomas, *Digging in Cumorah,* viii.

the narrative up but couldn't actually do so except as he expressed and transformed his own autobiography.

Because Susan Staker articulates more specifically than the other two writers the parallels between Book of Mormon narrative and Joseph Smith's life, her essay most precisely lays out the ideological assumption built into this project. "Thus the threshold story of Mormonism, the entrance to surviving portions of the Book of Mormon, is about a man whose plot line mirrors in crucial ways that of the nineteenth-century man with the seer stone who dictated the story" (pp. 235–36).

The Mosiah-first theory in the hands of these revisionists depends on a particular historical development of the Book of Mormon text. After the loss of the 116 pages, Joseph Smith started over at Mosiah. Mosiah, then, has the most primitive and least developed ideas and knowledge about Christ's mission and about doctrine. First and 2 Nephi, being last, are the most complex and developed. This theory also requires that Joseph Smith not know how the end of the story (1 and 2 Nephi) is going to develop when he dictated Mosiah, Alma, Mormon, and similar material:

> It is not difficult to explain why prophecies of Jesus in Mosiah and Alma 1–16 evidence no awareness of Nephi's prophecies of Jesus' American ministry. The explanation is simply that during the initial stages of the new 1829 translation (Mosiah to Alma 16), Joseph Smith himself had not yet conceived the notion of Christ's visit to America. The ignorance of Nephi's prophecies manifested by the characters in Mosiah and Alma 1–16 reflects the fact that Smith, the creator-translator, did not yet himself know the turn his narrative was to take. Nephi's unambiguous prophecies reflect the fact that they were translated, or as I would now prefer to say, composed, after the events they claimed to foretell. (Firmage, pp. 6–7)

I will examine the question of whether the individuals in Alma, Mosiah, Helaman, and 3 Nephi are not familiar with the material in 1 and 2 Nephi because "1 Nephi–Words of Mormon proves to be an epilogue

to the Book of Mormon proper not only in terms of order of composition but also in terms of subject matter" (p. 9).

Staker's commitment to this theory depends a good deal on the work of Firmage and Metcalfe. Her essay contains comments on typology or type-scenes and also some discussion of narrative voice. Her treatment would benefit from a reading in narrative and literary theory of what critics call focalization. Staker shows no awareness of the literary tools and concepts that could deepen her reading of the text. Nor does she show awareness that quite a few readers have discussed such notions as exodus and Moses typology in the Book of Mormon and its similarity to biblical typology.

Staker's position, like that of Firmage and Metcalfe, depends more on the presupposition that Joseph Smith was the author of a work of autobiographical fiction than it does on the Mosiah-first thesis. Having smuggled in that assumption, Staker constructs timelines for both Book of Mormon development and Joseph Smith's biography that are mutually dependent. Her chronology is based more on ideology than on anything else.

> Already, the March and April revelations demonstrate the complicated ways the Book of Mormon narrative and Smith's own world would mirror and interact over the course of the spring and summer. Ultimately, the complicated logic of the seer stories can be traced only when the dictation plot for the spring and summer of 1829 is expanded to include the chronology of Smith's work on both the Book of Mormon and its environing revelations. Indeed, the energy that drives and structures the complex seer narratives in both the ancient and modern texts seems derived as much from the problems facing Smith in 1829 as by problems within the Book of Mormon world. (p. 248)

These are grand claims. She stakes everything on a chronology that places Book of Mormon events alongside events in upstate New York and Harmony, Pennsylvania. For example, in April 1829 Staker claims that a revelation about Oliver Cowdery's possible translation

of records included remarks about "other hidden records awaiting translation. Arguably, this glimpse into Smith's future mimes Mosiah's story, which includes the discovery of several new records. . . . Strikingly, Smith enacts this same sub-plot within the frame of his own story during the time he is dictating Mosiah" (p. 250). Mosiah's recovery of actual records is not placed next to Joseph Smith's recovery of actual records, for Joseph Smith had possessed the gold plates for many months before this episode. The parallel does not seem striking to me. (Staker often refers to her parallels as "striking.") Any deviation in the Mosiah-first theory of composition or in the Joseph Smith chronology is going to spell trouble, for it will throw off her temporal parallels.

If readers were to ask these critics to make their ideological presuppositions explicit, they would find not only the positivistic and similar modern assumptions (such as unstated evolutionary models) at work but also the idea that Joseph Smith had no knowledge of the material later to emerge in 1 and 2 Nephi when he invented Mosiah–Moroni. At least some novelists must have the ending in mind from the very start of the writing process, but these three writers posit the other type of novelist, the kind who goes wherever the narrative leads with no master plan. I think we can examine this thesis, crucial to all three writers, to see if applies to the Mosiah-first theory of writing the Book of Mormon.

Allusion and Quotation Referring to 1 and 2 Nephi

Is it plausible to believe that 1 and 2 Nephi were composed last and not believe in those plates? Looking at passages that refer back to those first two books might illuminate this question.

The Promise of Prosperity in the Land

A promise first turns up in the Book of Mormon in 1 Nephi 2:20–21: "Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper and shall be led to a land of promise. . . . And inasmuch as thy brethren shall rebel against thee, they shall be cut off from the presence of

the Lord." This promise was, apparently, also recorded in the earlier record of Lehi, for the patriarch notes that he obtained the promise for his descendents (2 Nephi 1:9; in Alma 9:13–14, Alma also refers to the promise as originating with Lehi). This promise is alluded to or quoted more than forty times in the Book of Mormon. In a Mosiah-first Book of Mormon, it would first make its appearance in Mosiah 1:7, 17. Here Benjamin repeats the covenant by specifically telling his sons that they are "promises which the Lord made to our fathers" (Mosiah 1:7). The Mosiah-first revisionist might speculate that these promises really point back to the lost book of Lehi rather than to 1 and 2 Nephi. But this entire chapter shows fairly detailed knowledge of the initial rift between the Nephites and the Lamanites (a separation, by the way, that opened *after* Lehi's death and presumably after Lehi's record ended), the records and other symbols acquired from Laban, and the Liahona. If Joseph Smith is just winging it when he later composes the Nephi books, he will have to incorporate a lot of specific references. The real violence this theory does to the text is that it requires Smith to remember hundreds of prior compositions to "allude" back to a story that has not yet been written. If there really had been gold plates, this Mosiah-first theory would pose no difficulty, because those plates provide a way to overcome this problem. But since Staker, Metcalfe, and Firmage presume a priori that the plates did not exist, they must have some unnecessarily complicated theory to account for such "allusions" and "quotations." I would call that an ad hoc theory.

This covenant promise is alluded to or cited ten times in the book of Mosiah. It comes up prominently again when Alma advises his son Helaman in Alma 36–38. Two of these citations in chapter 36 envelop a reference to the Lehite exodus from 1 Nephi. Eleven citations of this promise appear in the book of Alma and four in Helaman. One would expect this promise to be more primitive in the earlier parts of the Mosiah-first Book of Mormon. Eleven passages with the promise are in 1 and 2 Nephi, though I do not find more complex development in those passages. The bridge books (Jacob–Words of Mormon) contain the promise twice (Jarom 1:9 and Omni 1:6). The more intuitive, simpler solution to textual relationships among these citations would cite

a promise first made in the text to Lehi or Nephi. To have the promise come first to Mosiah requires some additional explanation.

The Language of the Fathers

When King Benjamin is ready to pass his kingship and records to the next generation, he calls his sons together. He says of the plates of brass, "Were it not possible that our father, Lehi, could have remembered all these things, to have taught them to his children, except it were for the help of these plates . . ." (Mosiah 1:4), yet this is precisely what these Mosiah-first revisionists insist Joseph Smith did. He must remember all these hundreds (or perhaps even thousands) of allusions and then finally include them in 1 and 2 Nephi; the notion of intertextuality challenges the older notion of allusion in that it does not care about lines of filiation, that is, which passage came first. These revisionists are postmodern without knowing it, for they turn the notion of allusion on its head, having allusions come chronologically before the original passage, the antitype before the prototype, the reference before the initial iteration.

In this passage from the Book of Mormon, Benjamin specifically names the source—Lehi: "for he having been taught in the language of the Egyptians therefore he could read these engravings" (Mosiah 1:4). This takes us back to Mosiah 1:2, for Benjamin had taught his sons "in all the language of his fathers, that thereby they might become men of understanding; and that they might know concerning the prophecies which had been spoken by the mouths of their fathers." It is true that these revisionists might say that these passages allude back not to a nonexistent 1 Nephi, but to the recently lost book of Lehi. Nevertheless, Joseph Smith would have to refer back to a text he does not have and would still have to be relying for these manifold allusions on his own memory; having a set of plates alleviates this problem because it would then not place the burden of allusive memory on Joseph Smith but on Mormon or some other writer/editor. Some adequate explanation will have to be proffered about how Smith was able to keep all these allusions straight when it came to composing the Nephi books.

Benjamin is here alluding to 1 Nephi 1:2. Mormon is going to allude to this passage when his turn comes: "we have written this record according to our knowledge, in the characters which are called among us the reformed Egyptian" (Mormon 9:32). This is not Mormon's only allusion to this passage from Nephi. "I began," he also claims, "to be learned somewhat after the manner of the learning of my people" (Mormon 1:2). And Mormon is not the only author to allude to this passage from Nephi. Enos states that he also was taught by his father, "knowing my father that he was a just man—for he taught me in his language, and also in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Enos 1:1). There from the very end of the Mosiah-first Book of Mormon, we go to the first of the same volume. Zeniff alludes to the same passage when he says, "I, Zeniff, having been taught in all the language of the Nephites" (Mosiah 9:1).

The revisionist could claim that these passages do not really allude to 1 Nephi 1 but to Mosiah 1. But in Mosiah 1 the text already refers back to "the prophecies which had been spoken by the mouths of their fathers" (Mosiah 1:2); the very first two verses in the Mosiah-first Book of Mormon (dictated, according to this theory, on 7 April 1829) already refer to the passage from 1 Nephi (dictated about June 1829). These allusions become a difficult problem if you assume there were no plates to translate from.

Tree of Life Allusions

The earlier writers in the Mosiah-first Book of Mormon seem to know quite a bit about the two visions of the tree of life from 1 Nephi. There are many allusions to the tree of life material later in the scripture. For example, Alma's extended metaphor of planting the seed of faith ends by comparing the fully grown seed to the tree of life (Alma 32:40; see also 32:41 and 33:23). Alma refers to the fruit as "most precious, which is sweet above all that is sweet, and which is white above all that is white, yea, and pure above all that is pure" (Alma 32:42). This alludes to either Lehi's description of the fruit (1 Nephi 8:11) or Nephi's (1 Nephi 11:8). For these tree of life allusions, no comparable passage

exists in the early part of the Mosiah-first text to be the original. The only original text must be from 1 Nephi (or the lost book of Lehi).

Lamoni's conversion under Ammon's guidance is framed with vocabulary from the tree of life visions (Alma 19:6). Similarly, the book of Helaman refers to "laying hold upon the word of God" (Helaman 3:29), which is wording from 1 Nephi 8:24 or 1 Nephi 15:24. Such specific knowledge of passages not yet written poses a problem for the idea that Joseph Smith composed the Book of Mormon as Firmage, Staker, and Metcalfe want us to believe.

Tree of life allusions are so common throughout the Book of Mormon that to posit an extensive array of allusions written before the allegory itself complicates this theory beyond what its ideological foundation will bear. Let me provide just one more example. When Alma the Younger preaches to the Nephites, he calls them to repentance by asking a whole series of questions about their spiritual state. He then frames their return to God in a trope from Nephi and Lehi's records: "Yea, he saith: Come unto me and ye shall partake of the fruit of the tree of life; yea, ye shall eat and drink of the bread and the waters of life freely" (Alma 5:34). He closes his speech to the people at Zarahemla with a similar figure of speech: "Come and be baptized unto repentance, that ye also may be partakers of the fruit of the tree of life" (Alma 5:62). It seems overly complicated to posit that a whole web of allusions to these tree of life images is created first and then later the coherent story that ties them all together (the word of God is a double-edged blade as it cuts both ways).

Miscellaneous Allusions to 1 and 2 Nephi

After breaking with his brothers, Nephi organizes his people and achieves a level of righteousness they were not able to attain before there were Lamanites and Nephites. He states that "it came to pass that we lived after the manner of happiness" (2 Nephi 5:27). This passage is alluded to at least three times. A later prophet named Nephi engages in nostalgia for that earlier time: "Oh, that I could have had my days in the days when my father first came out of the land of Jerusalem, that I could have joyed with him in the promised land; then were his

people easy to be entreated, firm to keep the commandments of God, and slow to be led to iniquity" (Helaman 7:7). That level is surpassed later in the Book of Mormon during a time when there was no contention, lying, murder, adultery, nor revisionists: "and surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God. There were no robbers, nor murderers, neither were there Lamanites, nor any manner of -ites" (4 Nephi 1:16–17). Similarly, during Moroni's day, the passage explicitly quotes the promises made to the fathers: "they shall be blessed, inasmuch as they shall keep my commandments they shall prosper in the land. But remember, inasmuch as they will not keep my commandments they shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord" (Alma 50:20). Intervening verses note that the promise has been verified. Then the narrator notes, "behold there never was a happier time among the people of Nephi, since the days of Nephi, than in the days of Moroni" (Alma 50:23).

Similarly, when a group of Nephites severs their connection to the Nephite tradition by marking their foreheads (Alma 3:4), this reminds the narrator (Mormon) of how the Lamanites were first marked off from the Nephites (Alma 3:6-9). For Mormon, this marking is not a matter of race or descent but of adherence to different traditions (Alma 3:11). Mormon then explicitly refers to 2 Nephi 5:

> Thus the word of God is fulfilled, for these are the words which he said to Nephi: Behold, the Lamanites have I cursed, and I will set a mark on them that they and their seed may be separated from thee and thy seed, from this time henceforth and forever, except they repent of their wickedness and turn to me that I may have mercy upon them. And again: I will set a mark upon him that mingleth his seed with thy brethren, that they may be cursed also. And again: I will set a mark upon him that fighteth against thee and thy seed. And again, I say he that departeth from thee shall no more be called thy seed; and I will bless thee, and whomsoever shall be called thy seed, henceforth and forever; and these were the promises of the Lord unto Nephi and to his seed. (Alma 3:14-17)

The passage Mormon cites is 2 Nephi 5:21-24, but notice that the wording in that passage differs considerably from Mormon's though the source text is apparent:

> And he had caused the cursing to come upon them, yea, even a sore cursing, because of their iniquity. For behold, they had hardened their hearts against him, that they had become like unto a flint; wherefore, as they were white, and exceedingly fair and delightsome, that they might not be enticing unto my people the Lord did cause a skin of blackness to come upon them. And thus saith the Lord God: I will cause that they shall be loathsome unto thy people, save they shall repent of their iniquities. And cursed shall be the seed of him that mixeth with their seed; for they shall be cursed even with the same cursing. And the Lord spake it, and it was done. (2 Nephi 5:21-23)

This is very specific information that Mormon knows about Nephi's narrative and writings. If the Alma passage were written prior to the 2 Nephi passage, then Joseph Smith not only would have had to remember to pen the Nephi text without being able to refer back to the other passage but would also have had to build the specific reference to Nephi as the original source long before Nephi became the original source. All of this Joseph Smith would have to do without being able to refer to notes[39] while composing at a rate of thirty-five hundred words a day.[40]

Richard Rust has pointed out that we have yet much work ahead of us before we begin to appreciate how often the Book of Mormon alludes to itself. None of this work has been done by revisionists because they have no ideological interest in doing so; they, in fact, have an ideological interest in making the textual elements in the scripture as simple as their own reading of it. Rust points to one passage from 3 Nephi that refers to one of the first chapters in the Book of Mormon:

---

39. Terryl L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 32.

40. Ibid., 37.

the church was eclipsed by the wickedness of the people "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). This passage fulfills Lehi's oldest yearning for his son Lemuel, who is promised in the valley named after him that if he would be "like unto this valley, firm and steadfast, and immovable in keeping the commandments of the Lord," he would be blessed (1 Nephi 2:10).[41] Rust doesn't note another passage that alludes to this same material. Like the passage from 3 Nephi, Helaman 15 comments on the Lamanites who were more righteous than their contemporary Nephite brethren (it is, after all, Samuel the Lamanite speaking). The prophet then cites the Lamanites as an example to the Nephites for "as many as have come to this, ye know of yourselves are firm and steadfast in the faith, and the thing wherewith they have been made free" (Helaman 15:8). The textual elements that include allusion are too complex for revisionist readers to even mention or notice. The possibility of complex intertextual relationships is opened up (made possible) by the believer's ideological commitment to finding a rich and rewarding text; the same possibility is foreclosed by the revisionist's commitment to any old ad hoc explanation that will do the ideological work of dismissing the Book of Mormon as an ancient text.

I have mentioned only a few allusions to show the difficulties faced by Mosiah-first revisionists. The examples given are sufficient to raise an issue: if you propose a theory of textual development that has such counterintuitive results as to require a writer to allude to a passage before he has even composed that passage, more convincing evidence is called for than has been produced so far. The evidence ought to rely less on the ideological assumptions that there were no gold plates and that Joseph Smith composed a modern novel.

---

41. Richard Dilworth Rust, "Ancient Literary Forms in the Book of Mormon," *FARMS Review of Books* 14/1–2 (2002): 89.

Concluding Unscientific Postscript

Firmage notes in a brief autobiographical section of his essay how he came to believe no longer in the Book of Mormon and the church (see p. 13). This narrative form is common enough among Mormon intellectuals who have left orthodox belief that we ought to call it the conversion-to-modernity type-scene. "I have often thought that what happened to me in Berkeley was fundamentally a conversion or, if you like, an anti-conversion" (p. 2). *Conversion* is the right word, for not only did Firmage shift from believing the restored gospel, he adopted another form of religious belief—in modernity. For the sake of convenience, I call this religion the Church of Humanity, named after the positivistic church founded by Auguste Comte as a substitute for Christianity. Modernity is like a religion; it is an encompassing worldview that restructures the believer's frame of reference; it has its own ordinances and community (symposia instead of church attendance, sacramental publications rather than bread and water, testimonial panels at MHA meetings instead of church meetings, doctrines such as materialism rather than the atonement, and heretics who are college-educated yet still believers in Mormon claims). It also has a built-in logic of exclusion that from the outset declares competing faiths deficient; it claims to be the one-and-only true way to truth. Most importantly, it also requires a leap of faith, too often a leap that its adherents take uncritically. The version of modernity that has dominated intellectual culture over the past century is positivism. Positivism by its very definition denies validity to religious belief, restricting religion to the infancy of human development. Positivism privileges its positions over religion in ways that we now recognize as illegitimate. Positivism is not what it claims for itself, though its acolytes do not consider the possibility that postmodern thought has undermined its central claims.

So while the editors of *American Apocrypha,* most of its contributors, and the editorial leadership at Signature Books are positivists who misunderstand the nature of historical writing, it does little good for people like me to sit at the last-stop gas station as the Signature

stable of writers drive on up the road. I have been saying for more than a decade as they fuel up, "You know, that road you are on is a dead end that leads directly into the base of a cliff in a blind canyon; if you won't try another road, at least buckle up and drive slowly around that last bend." They then gun their engines and peel out of the gas station. Positivist historiography has exhausted itself and the New Mormon History will have to be reconfigured without positivism as its foundation. The shift will bring with it wrenching adjustments, but it cannot be avoided for the difficulty it requires.

The movie *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* is set in medieval England, AD 932. Part of the humor is supplied by the bevy of anachronisms. One of my favorites occurs at the beginning of the film when King Arthur rides up to a castle and asks two peasants to whom the castle belongs. The peasants take umbrage at the claim that he is their king or that they must have a lord, for they assert they live in a state of anarchy with a rotating executive selected weekly. The exchange rings with abundant Marxist language of domination, oppression, and a "self-perpetuating aristocracy" that takes advantage of the working class. Asked for the source of his own claim to be king, Arthur tells the tale of the Lady of the Lake and Excalibur. One peasant responds to this narrative with derision because for him "supreme executive power derives from a mandate from the masses, not from some farcical aquatic ceremony." To hear the peasant asserting these ideas that weren't minted until the modern period is to see the timeframe get jumbled. Brent Metcalfe, Susan Staker, and Edwin Firmage have a similar problem to overcome in their assertion that Joseph Smith wrote a novel that started with King Benjamin's speech; just as the peasant cites Marxists long before there were any, these revisionists have the Book of Mormon presenting complex and multiple passages long before they were written. If only their ideologically inspired narrative were as humorous, the new crop of Mormon film directors would soon be taking a movie into production about the pursuit of the positivist grail.

Priced to Sell

William J. Hamblin

In "Prophecy and Palimpsest," an article appearing in a recent issue of *Dialogue,* Robert M. Price offers his perspective on the origin of the Book of Mormon and a recommendation for how Latter-day Saints should understand the meaning and origin of that book. Dr. Price's position is straightforward and none too innovative; while providing no evidence, he insists that "virtually all critical scholars . . . agree that Joseph Smith did not discover the Book of Mormon but rather created it" (p. 67).[1] He further maintains that the claims Joseph Smith made surrounding the origin of the Book of Mormon are "manifestly false"

1. Price seems to be completely unaware of, or at least unwilling to engage, a large body of scholarship on the issues he raises. For the most recent popularizing summary (with detailed notes to numerous studies), see Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch, eds., *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002); see also Noel B. Reynolds, ed., *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997); and Terryl L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

(p. 76). But all hope for Mormons is not lost. If we recognize that fiction can be called inspired, then the Book of Mormon, as fiction, can also be called inspired. Price asserts that this insight will provide "a quantum leap in interpretative possibilities" that will "only enhance Smith's prophetic dignity, not debunk it" (p. 82).[2] In reality, this is simply more of the same type of assertions we have been hearing for years from cultural Mormons in venues such as *Sunstone, Dialogue,* and Signature Books. Price's entire case rests largely on argument from analogy. Unfortunately, none of the analogies he proposes are authentic.

Inspired Fiction?

Price believes that the insistence of most Latter-day Saints that the Book of Mormon is historical derives from our stubborn inability to

> understand the difference between fiction and lying. The problem [is] one of "bifurcation," the reduction of a complex choice to an over-simple one. One's alternatives are not either "fact or deception," "hoax or history." For example, were the parables of Jesus either factual or deceptive? Did he intend anyone to think he was talking about a real prodigal son . . . ? Of course not; he knew that his audience knew he was making it up as he went. (pp. 68–69)

I admit to being baffled by such statements. Is Price so uninformed about the controversy over the origin of the Book of Mormon that he thinks this is a significant analogy? While it is true that Jesus never claimed his parables were intended to describe actual historical events (and no one ever understood them as such), does Price not realize that Joseph Smith consistently claimed the Book of Mormon was authentic

---

2. Price makes these types of assertions throughout his article without once ever attempting to actually argue for his position. Why an inventive fiction writer—Stephen King, for example—should be said to have greater "prophetic dignity" than a man who actually saw God and spoke with him still remains obscure to me, even after reading Price's article.

ancient history and that *all* of his early followers accepted it as such?[3] It is obscure how the two examples are even vaguely analogous.

On the other hand, no one who accepts the Book of Mormon as authentic ancient history and scripture rejects the idea that fiction can be revealed and inspired by God. Indeed, acceptance of the historicity of the Book of Mormon necessarily entails the existence of inspired fiction since the Book of Mormon itself contains examples of inspired fiction: Jacob's allegory of the olive tree (Jacob 5) and Alma's allegory of the seed and the tree of life (Alma 32) are the two most obvious examples. The problem is not that believing Latter-day Saints are so simpleminded that we don't understand the difference between lying and fiction or the possibility of inspired fiction such as Jesus's parables. The problem is that cultural Mormons who reject the history of the Book of Mormon don't seem to grasp the fact that the debate surrounding the origin of the Book of Mormon is not framed by believers as a question of history versus fiction.[4] I have elsewhere outlined a simple logical argument related to the historicity of the Book of Mormon:

1.   Joseph Smith claimed to have had possession of golden plates written by the Nephites, and to have been visited by Moroni, a resurrected Nephite.

2.   If the Book of Mormon is not an ancient document, there were no Nephites.

3.   If there were no Nephites, there were no golden plates written by Nephites; and there was no Nephite named Moroni.

4.   If there was no Moroni and no golden plates, then Joseph did not tell the truth when he claimed to possess and translate these nonexistent plates, and to have been visited by a resurrected man.

5.   Hence, Joseph was either lying (he knew there were no plates or angelic visitations, but was trying to convince others

---

3.   Kent P. Jackson, "Joseph Smith and the Historicity of the Book of Mormon," in *Historicity and the Latter-day Saint Scriptures,* ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2001), 123–40.

4.   For a general introduction to a number of issues surrounding this question, see Hoskisson, *Historicity and the Latter-day Saint Scriptures.*

that there were), or he was insane or deluded (he believed there were golden plates and angelic visitations which in fact did not exist).

> If [agnostics and cultural Mormons] wish to maintain that the Book of Mormon is not an ancient document, but that Joseph Smith was somehow still a prophet, they must present some cogent explanation for Joseph's wild claims of possessing nonexistent golden plates and being visited by nonexistent angels. Thus the argument [made by believers in the historicity of the Book of Mormon] is not "If the Book of Mormon is not ancient, then it is not scripture," as [agnostics and cultural Mormons] would have us believe, but "If the Book of Mormon is not ancient, then Joseph Smith was not a prophet."[5]

Throughout his paper Price ignores the real issue; indeed, there is no evidence that he is aware that such arguments even exist. Instead, Price emphasizes his claim that the fact that "Joseph Smith [is] the author of the Book of Mormon, with Moroni and Mormon as its [fictional] narrators" (p. 69) does not imply that Joseph Smith was "a mischievous or malicious hoaxer" (p. 73) or "charlatan" (p. 69). Unfortunately, Price never explains why he feels this is the case. It is mere assertion, not argument. Instead of a serious study of the historical evidence and arguments, Price again argues by analogy that Herman Melville, the author of *Moby Dick,* uses Ishmael as a fictional first-person narrator, and no one has ever accused Melville of being a charlatan or hoaxer (p. 69). Unfortunately, this is an extraordinarily weak analogy. As far as I know, Melville never claimed that the resurrected Ishmael appeared to him and gave him the manuscript of *Moby Dick* on golden plates. Nor did he convince eleven people to publicly testify that they had seen the golden plates of *Moby Dick*. He did not proclaim the divine origin of *Moby Dick* throughout his life, nor did he go to the

---

5. William J. Hamblin, "An Apologist for the Critics: Brent Lee Metcalfe's Assumptions and Methodologies," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994): 453. In actuality, Price tacitly accepts this argument. As I will note below, since Price is an atheist, for him Joseph Smith cannot be a true prophet in any meaningful sense of the word.

grave defending those supernatural claims. I think we are justified in maintaining that there are some significant differences between the claimed origins of *Moby Dick* (which Melville always represented as fiction) and the claimed origins of the Book of Mormon (which Joseph Smith always represented as ancient and divinely inspired). Of course, using a first-person narrator in writing fiction does not make one a charlatan. But writing fiction and falsely testifying that the fiction is actual ancient history, taken from an ancient document provided by an angel, and proclaiming oneself a prophet on the basis of that "fiction" does make one a charlatan. Although not all fiction writers are charlatans, some fiction writers most certainly are. None of Joseph Smith's contemporaries were under any confusion about this issue. They either accepted the Book of Mormon as authentic ancient scripture or as a fraudulent fiction.

I have seen the claim that fiction can be inspired, and therefore that the Book of Mormon can be fiction and still be inspired, asserted endlessly by cultural Mormons. I have never *once* seen a response to the actual arguments of believers in Book of Mormon historicity regarding the significance of the question of historicity. The "inspired fiction" model is a red herring and a straw man. While I can understand why Price, who is apparently a neophyte when it comes to Book of Mormon studies, might think this argument is a significant new insight, the editors and peer reviewers of *Dialogue* have no such excuse. If they are aware of the actual history of the debate on the topic, they should have rejected Price's article for failing to engage and advance that debate, or at least they should have asked him to rewrite it to include a serious engagement with the real issues. If they are unaware of the history of the debate on historicity, they have no business publishing on the topic at all.

Pseudepigrapha?

A major claim of Price's article is that the Book of Mormon is pseudepigraphic—that it is falsely attributed to an ancient prophetic author. According to Price, "both the new prophets [authors of pseudepigrapha] and the establishment [supporters of a closed canon] try to

hide behind the names of the ancient, canonical prophets in order to claim authority" for their new pseudepigraphic scriptures (p. 72). He believes the Book of Mormon was created in precisely the same way that Old and New Testament pseudepigrapha were written (pp. 67–74). Indeed, for Price much of the Bible itself is essentially pseudepigraphic (pp. 78–81). He believes, for example, that Peter's vision in Acts 10:9–16 never really happened; instead, it was a literary pastiche created by cobbling together random phrases from the Septuagint Old Testament (pp. 79–80). For Price, "the Book of Mormon must be the product of that same process . . . the scrambling of motifs and distinctive phrases from previous literary texts in order to produce a new text of the same basic type" (p. 81). But Price's argument in relation to the Book of Mormon is problematic on a number of levels.

First, according to Price, new "inspired" pseudepigraphic authors wrote their new "revelations" under biblical pseudonyms such as Enoch, Moses, or Daniel (p. 70).[6] This was because new scripture would not be accepted since the scriptural canon was closed:

> The new visionary [author of a pseudepigraphic text] may not dare appear in public, but neither will the authorities dare to condemn "newly rediscovered" writings by the old, canonical prophets. In this way, the newer prophets managed to slip under the fence built around the scriptural canon. (p. 71)

Whatever the merits of this interpretation—and it is surely overly simplistic[7]—it is not analogous to Joseph Smith because the Book of Mormon does not claim to be the work of ancient biblical authors. Rather,

---

6. Price's overall explanation for pseudepigraphic writings is simplistic on a number of levels. There is no scholarly consensus as to the definition of pseudepigrapha; ideas about pseudepigraphy changed through time; the writing of pseudepigraphic texts began centuries before the closing of the canon—thus the existence of a closed canon cannot be the core cause for pseudepigraphy; many different Christian and Jewish communities understood canon and scripture differently; some had an open canon rendering pseudepigraphy pointless; different pseudepigraphic texts are accepted and rejected in different canons; etc. Furthermore, in Price's view, many biblical texts are pseudepigraphic (pp. 78–81), making the distinction between pseudepigrapha and canon rather arbitrary.

7. Price provides no bibliographic references to scholarly discussions of the pseudepigrapha that outline the evidence for his theory.

it is an entirely new set of scriptures by *nonbiblical* prophets. Joseph's intention was clearly not to make the Book of Mormon acceptable to contemporary Christians by creating new prophecy in the mouth of a revered biblical author such as Moses or Isaiah.[8] By Price's own definition, the Book of Mormon is not actually pseudepigraphic.

As a further part of his assertion that Joseph Smith wrote the Book of Mormon as a pseudepigraph in order to make it more acceptable to readers of a closed biblical canon, Price believes that "after setting forth the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith began to prophesy in his own voice" (pp. 74–75). Unfortunately for Price, the historical reality of Joseph's prophecies is quite different from Price's model. In an example of pure speculation, Price describes what he believes Joseph was thinking while considering foisting a fictitious Book of Mormon on the Christians of early nineteenth-century America: "If writings of old prophets are the only ones taken seriously, then by all means let's write one! It's the only way to gain media access!" (p. 72).

According to Price, Joseph decided to write a fictional scripture set in ancient times because the closing of the biblical canon prevented his own personal prophecies from being acceptable among other Christians. But the Book of Mormon was actually published in March 1830.[9] By that time Joseph Smith had already revealed seventeen sections of the Doctrine and Covenants (D&C 2–18) over the course of twenty-one months in his own "prophetic voice." If the purpose of writing the Book of Mormon was to avoid the problems associated with claiming to be a new prophet with new scripture in a prophetless world with a closed canon, as Price claims, why was Joseph Smith making independent new prophecies originating from his own new personal revelations at precisely the time he was supposedly writing a book to avoid the very problem he was creating for himself?

---

8. This statement applies to the Book of Mormon as a whole, even though it does contain quotations from biblical figures: for example, Isaiah (2 Nephi 12–24 = Isaiah 2–14) and Christ (3 Nephi 12–14 = Matthew 5–7). On the other hand, Joseph does restore revelations from Moses (Moses 1–6), Enoch (Moses 7), and Abraham (Abraham 1–5); Price does not mention these texts in his argument.

9. Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 110.

Whence God?

A final serious concern I have with Price's article is his confusing use of religious language. Throughout his article Price talks of God and inspiration as if they were real objective facts. He describes "reading the prophetic Word of God" (p. 70); he claims (without providing any evidence) that "most theologians now accept that God might inspire an authoritative pseudepigraph as easily as he might inspire a parable" (p. 74). Joseph obtained an "inspired result" (p. 76) of scripture writing. Elsewhere Price speaks of the "divinely inspired prophecy of Joseph Smith" (p. 77). Take, for example, this statement: "If we feel entitled to decree that God could never sink to inspiring a pseudepigraph (and if we think we are privy to the literary tastes of the Almighty, we are claiming to be prophets ourselves!), then we have no option but to dismiss the biblical pseudepigraphs along with the Book of Mormon" (p. 73). This language is astonishingly confusing given the fact that Price is an atheist and believes in neither God nor divine inspiration.

Red flags certainly should go up in one's mind when reading Price's brief biography at the end of this issue of *Dialogue;* it mentions that he has published with Prometheus Books and is director of a "Secular Humanist Center" (p. 249). These organizations are all associated with Paul Kurtz's secular humanist movement, which is a strong ally of George D. Smith in his atheistic attacks on Mormonism.[10] Price's personal atheism is made abundantly clear from his publications in other venues, of which I will cite only a few.[11]

For example, in "From Fundamentalist to Humanist,"[12] Price documents his personal odyssey from fundamentalist adolescent through

---

10. See Louis Midgley, "The Signature Books Saga," in this number of the *FARMS Review,* pages 361–406; Midgley, "Atheists and Cultural Mormons Promote a Naturalistic Humanism," review of *Religion, Feminism, and Freedom of Conscience: A Mormon/Humanist Dialogue,* ed. George D. Smith, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 7/1 (1995): 229–38; Midgley, "George Dempster Smith, Jr., on the Book of Mormon," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 4 (1992): 5–12.

11. Price is a member of the Atheist Alliance and an editor for their journal, *Secular Nation;* see www.atheistalliance.org/library/news_082602.html (accessed 9 January 2004).

12. "From Fundamentalist to Humanist (1997)"; see www.infidels.org/library/modern/robert_price/humanist.html (accessed 9 January 2004).

seminary to a liberal Christian view, and finally to atheism. As such it is a fairly typical "testimonial" of apostasy—the conversion from belief to disbelief. The result is that for Price religion is merely a form of literature, poetry, or drama.

> [Religion] was really a kind of esthetic experience. Worship was something akin to the awe we feel at great art or at beholding the starry sky. Poetry could offer essentially the same, genuinely spiritual experience. Religion came to seem to me basically a matter of drama and theater. That is not to denigrate it. Rather, to see it as theatrical is to explain why it is so powerful, like an engrossing film or play that leaves the viewer changed.[13]

For Price, God is simply a character in fiction: "I had come to view religion simply as a matter of spiritual experience. 'God' was mainly part of the language of worship, not necessarily anything more."[14] "To get something out of a Shakespeare play, you by no means need actually believe in Hamlet or Polonius. Only a fool would think you do. And, I suggest, no Christian need believe in a historical Jesus or his resurrection to have a powerful Easter."[15] On the other hand, to my knowledge Shakespeare never said that the resurrected Hamlet appeared to him in a dream and gave him a prewritten play *Hamlet* on golden plates. Shakespeare also never claimed to have been resurrected and ascended into heaven. Frankly, the two examples are not even slightly analogous.

If there is no God, there is naturally no inspiration. Prophecy and revelation are merely forms of literature.

> But this meant that religion is nothing more than a creation of human imagination. . . . I realized I do not esteem Jesus as any greater a teacher than Aristotle or Epicurus. I guess I agree

---

13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Robert M. Price, "Religious and Secular Humanism: What's the Difference?" at www.secularhumanism.org/library/fi/price_22_3.htm (accessed 9 January 2004), a reprint from Robert M. Price, "Religious and Secular Humanism," *Free Inquiry* 22/3 (2002).

more with Nietzsche than with Jesus. . . . Religion now seems
to me a kind of nursery school version of philosophy. . . . The
Bible continues to fascinate me . . . though now it seems as
bizarre to "believe" the Bible as it would be to "believe" the
Iliad or Hamlet![16]

In fact, religion is nothing more than brain chemistry:

One of the most intriguing areas of recent research in brain
science, and one that bears directly on our question, is that of
the physical, organo-chemical character of religious experi-
ences. As discussed in books like Matthew Alper's *The God
Part of the Brain,* studies indicate that the mystical experience
of God . . . [is a function] of the temporal parietal lobe of the
brain. . . . I suspect that this is the final reduction, the ultimate
demystification of religion's metaphysical claims.[17]

Far from believing that Joseph Smith's writings are truly inspired in
the sense that Latter-day Saints understand the term, when Price writes
that Smith's writings are "the same sort of thing as the Bible . . . [and]
no more a hoax than Deuteronomy" (p. 82), he is simply saying they are
both equally bogus, but bogus in an interesting and pleasantly aesthetic,
fictional sort of way, though necessarily nursery-schoolish. When he
talks of the God of Mormonism, Price is referring to electrochemical
activity in the temporal parietal lobe of Joseph Smith's brain—nothing
more.

I could go on, but I think the point is obvious. Price is an atheist.
Religion can be called inspired in precisely the same way that litera-
ture or art can be called inspired. Spirituality is simply an interior hu-
man emotion with its origins in brain chemistry. Let me emphasize

---

16. Price, "From Fundamentalist to Humanist."

17. Price, "Religious and Secular Humanism." What studies like Alper's actually deal
with is brain activity during "mystical" experiences, which Price reductionistically as-
sumes are normative for all types of religious experience. But even if the temporal pari-
etal lobe of the brain is stimulated during all religious experiences, it no more proves that
there is no objective divine reality outside the brain than the fact that certain regions of
the brain are stimulated by light or sound proves that there is no such thing as light or
sound outside the brain.

that I am not revealing a dark hidden secret here. In his publications outside of *Dialogue,* Price makes no attempt to mask his true beliefs or lack thereof. On the contrary, he openly evangelizes for atheism. Nor am I claiming that Price is a bad person because he is an atheist; he may well be a wonderful father and ethical human being. I am not even claiming that his position is wrong because he is an atheist. But the masking of his atheism in his *Dialogue* article does make a monumental difference in trying to understand what he is really saying. And his talk of God, prophecy, and inspiration is confusing at best, and perhaps disingenuous when given to a Latter-day Saint audience who understand those terms in a very specific, real, and concrete sense. What Price is really saying is that if we cease to believe in the reality of God and revelation, then the Book of Mormon is scripture in precisely the same sense that the Bible or Qur'an or Bhagavad Gita are scripture—they are all equally "inspiring" fiction.

While I can't speak to Price's motives for writing this article, I find it very difficult to believe that the editors and peer reviewers of *Dialogue* are not aware of the real implication of Price's position. The peer reviewers and editors of *Dialogue* have not done Latter-day Saints a service publishing this type of equivocation—and this is by no means the first time they have done so. For me this is an issue of truth in advertising. Does it not make a difference if God exists? Does it not make a difference if Jesus is the Son of God? Does it not make a difference if Christ really rose from the dead? Does it not make a difference if Joseph Smith really saw God? Does it not make a difference if the resurrected Christ really appeared to real Nephites? Does it not make a difference if there really is the possibility of eternal life? Does it not make a difference if the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the restored church that has the keys to eternal life? The answer, I think, is obvious: it makes a difference; it makes all the difference in the world and in the world to come. For those truly seeking the way, the truth, and the life, Price's view is lentil pottage he is trying to trade us for our true birthright.

"Secret Combinations": A Legal Analysis

Nathan Oman

Since the publication of the Book of Mormon in 1830, those subscribing to an environmental explanation have sometimes argued that its account of Gadianton robbers and secret combinations is a thinly veiled attack on Masonry, reflecting the burst of anti-Masonic feeling in New York in the last half of the 1820s. Alexander Campbell seems to have been the first one to advance the anti-Masonic thesis, writing in February 1831.[1] However, Campbell soon rejected his original explanation in favor of the Spalding theory, which rapidly became the dominant non-Mormon explanation for the Book of Mormon in that century.[2] The anti-Masonic thesis, however, was revived and deepened in the opening decades of the twentieth century.[3] By the time of her famous 1945 biography of Joseph Smith, Fawn Brodie was confidently asserting that the Book of Mormon's discussion of secret combinations "were bald parallels of Masonic oaths."[4] Since the publication of *No Man Knows My History,* the

---

1. See Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 125.

2. See ibid., 231 n. 37 (which states that Campbell accepted the "Spalding-Rigdon hypothesis" later in life) and ibid., 127 (which states that the Spalding theory was the dominant non–Latter-day Saint explanation of the Book of Mormon in the nineteenth century). For a summary of the Spalding theory, see Lester E. Bush Jr., "The Spalding Theory Then and Now," *Dialogue* 10/4 (1977): 40.

3. See Walter F. Prince, "Psychological Tests for the Authorship of the Book of Mormon," *American Journal of Psychology* 28 (July 1917): 373–89.

4. Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History* (New York: Knopf, 1945), 65.

anti-Masonic thesis has become common among non–Latter-day Saint writers on Mormonism.[5] In recent years, Dan Vogel has been its most articulate proponent.[6]

Scholars have disputed the thesis. Richard Bushman, Blake Ostler, Daniel Peterson, and D. Michael Quinn have been its main critics.[7] The basic thrust of their arguments is that the claimed parallels between Masonry and the Gadianton robbers are superficial. Peterson, for example, notes that some proponents of the thesis have argued that the fact that both Masons and Gadianton robbers wore lambskin aprons is significant (see 3 Nephi 4:7).[8] However, he argues that this parallel is trivial since there is but a single reference to "lambskins" as Gadianton garb, which has no particular significance in the narrative, and the Book of Mormon lists other clothing worn by the robbers.[9]

---

5. See, for example, Thomas F. O'Dea, *The Mormons* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 23, 35, 57; Robert N. Hullinger, *Mormon Answer to Skepticism: Why Joseph Smith Wrote the Book of Mormon* (St. Louis: Clayton, 1980), 100–104; David Persuitte, *Joseph Smith and the Origins of the Book of Mormon* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1985), 174–80.

6. See Dan Vogel, "Mormonism's 'Anti-Masonick Bible,'" *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 9 (1989): 17–30; Dan Vogel, "Echoes of Anti-Masonry: A Rejoinder to the Critics of the Anti-Masonic Thesis," in *American Apocrypha,* ed. Dan Vogel and Brent Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), 275–320.

7. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism,* 128–31; Blake Ostler, "The Book of Mormon as a Modern Expansion of an Ancient Source," *Dialogue* 20/1 (1987): 66, 73–76; 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), 181; D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View,* 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997), 202 and 511–12 n. 216. All citations in this paper are to this revised edition of Quinn's book. Quinn takes the anomalous position that *secret combinations* in the Book of Mormon refer to black magic and occult murders, or at any rate that they were understood this way by the book's first readers. Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View,* 207. However, Quinn's thesis does not seem to have caught on even with environmental critics eager to locate the Book of Mormon entirely in a nineteenth-century context. See, for example, Vogel, "Echoes of Anti-Masonry," 276. For a recent discussion, see Paul Mouritsen, "Secret Combinations and Flaxen Cords: Anti-Masonic Rhetoric and the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12/1 (2003): 64–77.

8. Peterson, "Notes on 'Gadianton Masonry,'" 180.

9. Ibid., 203. Matthew B. Brown, "Girded About with a Lambskin," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 6/2 (1997): 124–51, provides a much lengthier treatment of the issue. Brown argues that the lambskin passages are more important to the narrative than Peter-

The critics of the anti-Masonic thesis also point out that the Book of Mormon's secret combinations exhibit features absent from anti-Masonic rhetoric.[10] For example, Blake Ostler has argued that "the Book of Mormon secret societies differ from Masons in the precise ways they are similar to ancient Near Eastern bands of robbers."[11] In addition, critics of the thesis argue that certain key features of anti-Masonic rhetoric are absent from the Book of Mormon's discussions of Gadianton robbers. For example, Quinn argues that a stock element of the anti-Masonic furor of the 1820s was a denial that Masonry had any ancient origins.[12] In contrast, even the opponents of secret combinations within the Book of Mormon narrative acknowledge their ancient roots (see 2 Nephi 26:22; Alma 37:21–30; 3 Nephi 3:9).

The argument over the anti-Masonic thesis is multifaceted, involving as it does attempts to find or refute parallels between two complex phenomena. In his most recent work on the subject, Vogel claims to "respond to all of the major and most, if not all, of the minor arguments against the anti-Masonic thesis."[13] He then goes on to discuss no less than seventeen specific subdisputes.[14] A comprehensive discussion of the debate is beyond the scope of this paper. I will not survey the full range of arguments offered for or against the anti-Masonic thesis, nor will I attempt to lay the issue to rest.[15] Instead, I will focus on one possible line of analysis of a single issue within the debate.

---

son claims. However, Brown also holds that rather than being a Masonic reference, the lambskins in the Book of Mormon may have connections with ritual clothing that was worn in ancient Israel, Egypt, and Mesoamerica.

10. See, for example, Ostler, "Book of Mormon as a Modern Expansion," 73–76.

11. Ibid., 74. While Ostler rejects a crude version of the anti-Masonic thesis and regards the Book of Mormon as at least in part an authentic ancient text, he believes that anti-Masonic rhetoric had some influence on the Book of Mormon. He writes: "[Certain passages about secret combinations] appear to be influenced by anti-Masonic terminology and concerns. They may be explained best, it seems to me, as Joseph Smith's independent commentary on Masonry, sparked by his reflection on Nephite secret combinations." Ibid., 76.

12. Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View,* 203.

13. Vogel, "Echoes of Anti-Masonry," 277.

14. See ibid., 277–305.

15. Participants on both sides have claimed that the debate has been decisively settled. Compare William J. Hamblin, "An Apologist for the Critics: Brent Lee Metcalfe's

One claim made by the proponents of the anti-Masonic thesis is that during the late 1820s the term *secret combination* had a unique and nearly exclusive association with Masonry. Vogel claims that "after extensive reading in the primary pre-1830 sources" he was "unable to find another use for the term and doubted that one would be found."[16] It is, of course, undisputed that the term *secret combination* was used in the late 1820s to refer to Masonry.[17] What critics of the anti-Masonic thesis question is whether or not it had an exclusively Masonic meaning.[18] I hope to throw light on this question by examining the use of the phrase *secret combination* in legal materials both from before the publication of the Book of Mormon and from the subsequent period of Joseph Smith's lifetime. This approach has been taken and criticized before.[19] However, I hope to show that previous attempts to use legal materials have been incomplete and in some ways mistaken. I also seek to respond to the claim that such legal materials are irrelevant to the anti-Masonic thesis. I conclude that the phrase *secret combination* did not have an exclusively anti-Masonic meaning either before or after the publication of the Book of Mormon and that, on the contrary, it was a term used to discuss hidden, criminal conspiracies.

Assumptions and Methodologies," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994): 499–500 (which states that Daniel Peterson's work had definitively laid the anti-Masonic thesis to rest) with Vogel, "Echoes of Anti-Masonry," 275 (which states that the truth of the anti-Masonic thesis has "long [been] regarded as obvious"). I will take the fact that ink continues to be spilled after more than 170 years as evidence that the question remains open to fruitful discussion.

16. Vogel, "Echoes of Anti-Masonry," 318 n. 75. Compare with Peterson, "'Secret Combinations' Revisited," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1 (1992): 184, 185 n. 5. Peterson writes, "On 26 August 1989, Vogel and his sometime coauthor Brent Metcalfe, in a Salt Lake City conversation with me and my colleague, Prof. Stephen D. Ricks, declared flatly that the phrase 'secret combination' was never used at the time of the translation and publication of the Book of Mormon, except to refer to Freemasonry." Ibid., 185 n. 5.

17. Dan Vogel, as quoted in Peterson, "'Secret Combinations' Revisited," 184.

18. See Peterson, "Notes on 'Gadianton Masonry,'" 189–97; Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View,* 511–12 n. 216.

19. See Peterson, "Notes on 'Gadianton Masonry,'" 191–93; and Vogel, "Echoes of Anti-Masonry," 300–301.

Background

In 1826, Captain William Morgan, a resident of Canandaigua, a town a short distance from Palmyra, New York, prepared to publish an exposé of secret Masonic rituals after quarreling with members of his Masonic lodge.[20] However, he never printed his tell-all account. In September of that year, he disappeared near Niagara, and it was almost universally believed that he had been murdered by vengeful Masons. When those indicted for the murder were either acquitted or received light sentences, there was a wave of anti-Masonic agitation in response. New York State saw repeated conventions, mass meetings, and newspaper articles denouncing Masonry as a threat to the Republic and a criminal fraternity bent on protecting its own. In particular, people were outraged at the perceived infiltration and perversion of the legal system by Masons in the Morgan case.[21] The epicenter of all this activity was just a few miles from Joseph Smith's home in Palmyra. Anti-Masonry even became, for a short time, a national political issue in the late 1820s and early 1830s.[22] Anti-Masons repeatedly referred to Masonry as a "secret combination."[23] Proponents of the anti-Masonic thesis have pointed to this phrase as one piece of evidence supporting their argument, claiming that the term was so closely tied with Masonry as to constitute an intentional reference.[24]

In order to effectively criticize the claim that the phrase *secret combination* refers exclusively to Masonry, Quinn has argued that "it is necessary to find someone (preferably a non-Mason) using the phrase 'secret combination' in a non-Masonic context before the . . . murder of William Morgan in 1826."[25] Peterson has found one 1826 reference to "secret combination" that is arguably outside of the

---

20. See Allen E. Roberts, *Freemasonry in American History* (Richmond, VA: Macoy and Masonic Supply, 1985), 228–29.

21. Vogel, "Mormonism's 'Anti-Masonick Bible,'" 21.

22. Ibid., 19–21.

23. See, for example, ibid., 22.

24. Vogel, "Echoes of Anti-Masonry," 300.

25. Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View,* 511 n. 216.

context of anti-Masonry.[26] On 15 December 1826, Andrew Jackson wrote a letter to Sam Houston, attacking his long-time political opponent Henry Clay.[27] In it, he accused Clay of "secrete [*sic*] combinations of base slander" to smear Jackson's wife in the press.[28] Peterson has pointed to this letter as an instance of a non-Masonic context in which the phrase *secret combination* was used.[29] Quinn has criticized this conclusion.[30] According to Quinn, Jackson was an active Mason attacking Clay, a lapsed Mason.[31] He thus speculates that Jackson may have been using the phrase *secret combination* as a sarcastic dig at Clay.[32] Although there is no direct evidence that Jackson meant the term to convey any Masonic subtext, Vogel refers to Quinn's argument appreciatively.[33] He also states that "regardless, the term 'secret combination' did not take on its full anti-Masonic meaning until 1827–28."[34] This is a strangely inconsistent addition to Quinn's analysis since Vogel seems, in effect, to argue that Jackson's comment was an ironic play on a common political phrase that would not become a common political phrase for another two years.

Looking at Legal Materials

Peterson has also looked at legal materials. In 1990, John W. Welch, a professor at Brigham Young University's J. Reuben Clark Law School, conducted a computerized search of nineteenth-century legal materials for Peterson.[35] In his piece, Peterson noted the limitations of his research: "Unfortunately, . . . many states did not begin printing reports with any degree of comprehensiveness until midway through

---

26. Peterson, "'Secret Combinations' Revisited," 186–87.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid., 187.

29. Ibid.

30. Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View,* 511–12 n. 216.

31. Ibid. But Peterson noted the connections of Jackson and Clay to Masonry in his article. See Peterson, "'Secret Combinations' Revisited," 187 and 187 n. 11.

32. Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View,* 512 n. 216.

33. Vogel, "Echoes of Anti-Masonry," 301–2.

34. Ibid., 302.

35. Peterson, "Notes on 'Gadianton Masonry,'" 219 n. 74.

the nineteenth century, and a large number of the older opinions are not on computer since they are not of current legal interest."[36]

Nevertheless, Peterson located ten legal cases from the nineteenth century that used the phrase *secret combination*.[37] The earliest reported opinion he located was from 1850,[38] and all but one of the cases he cited were from federal courts, half of them being from the United States Supreme Court.[39] Although he does not mention it, the exclusively federal nature of the materials that Peterson seems to have examined is potentially significant because during the nineteenth century, there was comparatively little federal law. The amount of federal criminal law was miniscule. Finally, very few criminal cases made their way to the U.S. Supreme Court.[40] Indeed, under the Judiciary Act of 1789 in force during the lifetime of Joseph Smith, the U.S. Supreme Court lacked appellate jurisdiction in criminal cases,[41] an important point since the term *combination* was often used to refer to conspiracy[42]—one would expect it to appear more often in criminal matters. In 1990, Welch did not have extensive access to computerized versions of early nineteenth-century state opinions,[43] although at least partial federal coverage—mainly Supreme Court decisions—would

---

36. Ibid., 191–92.

37. Ibid., 190–93.

38. The case is *Marshall v. Baltimore & Ohio Railroad Co.,* 57 U.S. 314 (1850); Peterson, "Notes on 'Gadianton Masonry,'" 192.

39. Peterson, "Notes on 'Gadianton Masonry,'" 190–93.

40. Today the Supreme Court's docket always includes a contingent of criminal cases. However, most of these cases involve a federal constitutional challenge to a state criminal conviction. Prior to the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment in the wake of the Civil War, none of the federal constitution's rights for criminal defendants applied to state convictions. Even after the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment, it wasn't until well into the twentieth century that the Supreme Court interpreted it as applying the Bill of Rights to the states.

41. Richard H. Fallon Jr., Daniel J. Meltzer, and David L. Shapiro, *Hart and Wechsler's The Federal Courts and the Federal System,* 5th ed. (Westbury, NY: Foundation, 2003), 32. The Supreme Court could take jurisdiction in criminal cases by issuing a writ of habeas corpus, although this was extremely rare. Ibid.

42. Peterson, "Notes on 'Gadianton Masonry,'" 189.

43. John W. Welch, memorandum to Daniel Peterson, 18 September 1989 (copy in my possession) ("a lot of the older opinions are not on computer").

have extended into the eighteenth century. Thus, the legal universe that Peterson's research covered was severely constrained, and his results were understandably inconclusive.

In his book *Digging in Cumorah,* Mark Thomas also examines early legal materials as a potential source for alternate uses of "secret combination."[44] He concludes that "Peterson's hypothesis that 'secret combinations' is a vague, generalized symbol with no specific referent cannot be substantiated by the very legal documents where he suggests that evidence will be found."[45] Unfortunately, Thomas's examination of legal sources is too narrow to be of any real value. Apparently taken with Peterson's discussion of labor disputes and the possible connection of the phrase *secret combination* with early labor unions, Thomas turned his attention exclusively to six early nineteenth-century cases dealing with striking workers.[46] Thomas claims that Peterson "is certain that an examination of precedent-setting cases of labor unions ('combinations') will support his broad interpretation that excludes Masonry."[47] While Peterson does discuss unions, the late nineteenth-century cases he cites deal with a variety of subjects.[48] Nevertheless, Thomas's research is limited to labor cases. This choice is puzzling. The proto-unionists that Thomas discusses were prosecuted under the common law of conspiracy. The labor cases simply use the term *combination* to refer to the agreement necessary to form the conspiracy. There is nothing special about its application to labor unions. Once this point is understood, Thomas's choice to limit his research to labor disputes makes little sense. What is more, since labor cases formed only a miniscule fraction of all early nineteenth-century litigation,[49] the fact that the phrase *secret combi-*

---

44. Mark D. Thomas, *Digging in Cumorah: Reclaiming Book of Mormon Narratives* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1999), 209–12.

45. Ibid., 212.

46. Ibid., 210–11.

47. Ibid., 210.

48. See Peterson, "Notes on 'Gadianton Masonry,'" 191–93.

49. Lawrence M. Friedman, *A History of American Law,* 2nd ed. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985), 553: "The labor problem . . . was practically speaking of major legal importance only after the Civil War."

nation does not occur in a sample of those cases has limited significance since the vast majority of nineteenth-century cases involving combinations of any kind had nothing to do with labor unions. For example, I was able to locate only one appellate case from *anywhere* in the United States before 1826 involving labor unions and the word *combination,*[50] yet during just the period of the 1820s, the supreme court of New York alone used the term in over thirty cases.[51]

Combinations and Secret Combinations in Early Judicial Opinions

Since Peterson made the first foray into legal materials in search of secret combinations more than a decade ago, the availability of early judicial opinions in computerized format has dramatically expanded. It is now possible to search the decisions of many state and federal courts from the closing decades of the eighteenth and early decades of the nineteenth centuries. However, there are still reasons to be cautious about the results of such searches. First, coverage remains very incomplete both because not all early case reporters are available in computerized format and because coverage of cases in the early reporters themselves is very incomplete.[52]

Second, the vast majority of the available cases come from appellate courts, which fact distorts any searches in a variety of ways. Appellate decisions make up only a small fraction of all litigation. Judges decide most cases without any published opinion, and this was more markedly the case in the early nineteenth century than today. Most cases are never appealed. Furthermore, the cases in the appellate reports tend to be exceptional. This does not mean that they were the high-profile cases of the time, although sometimes they were. Rather

---

50. *People v. Melvin,* Yates Selected Cases 112 (N.Y.Sup. 1809) (involving an attempted strike by cordwainers).

51. On 19 July 2002 I ran the search "DA(BEF 01/01/1830 & AFT 01/01/1820) & COMBINATION!" in the NY-CS database on Westlaw, which for this period includes reports from the state supreme court and the chancery court. The search produced thirty-four opinions. Note that during the early nineteenth century the high court of New York was called the supreme court, as opposed to the court of appeals, as it is now known.

52. Friedman, *History of American Law,* 322–25.

it means that they have a different character than most litigation. Generally cases turn on questions of fact. "Did John actually steal Abner's cow?" However, appellate cases generally turn on issues of law. "Can multiple defendants be joined in a single suit at equity?" Although the categories of law and fact were more fluid in the early nineteenth century, appellate cases from the period still tend to contain involved legal discussion. This does not mean that the cases were exclusively technical or that they were devoid of discussion of events. On the contrary, they often provide fascinating windows into bits of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century life. However, in evaluating the virtues and the limitations of searching such materials, it is important to remember that we are looking at a narrow and, in some ways, unrepresentative slice of the legal past.

Webster's 1828 dictionary defines the word *combination* as an

Intimate union, or association of two or more persons or things, by set purpose or agreement, for effecting some object, by joint operation; in a *good sense,* when the object is laudable; in an *ill sense,* when it is illegal or iniquitous. It is sometimes equivalent to league, or to conspiracy. We say a *combination* of men to overthrow government, or a *combination* to resist oppression.[53]

It is generally acknowledged that *combination* was a widely used word in the 1820s. Certainly, a review of judicial opinions from the period bears this out. For example, a search of pre-1826 legal opinions reveals that the term *combination* was used in conjunction with conspiracy or fraud in more than 150 cases.[54] Thus the New

---

53. Quoted in Peterson, "Notes on 'Gadianton Masonry,'" 189, emphasis in original.

54. On 18 July 2002, a search of the Westlaw ALLCASES-OLD database using the search term "DA(BEF 01/01/1826) & COMBINATION! /S (FRAUD! CONSPIRI!)" produced 154 opinions. This search would produce all cases in the database from before 1 January 1826 in which any permutation of the word *combination* appeared in the same sentence with any permutation of the words *fraud* or *conspiracy.* Thus the search included terms such as *conspiracies, conspirator, conspirators, frauds, fraudulent, fraudulently,* and so forth.

York Supreme Court wrote in 1823 of a "case of a combination or conspiracy,"[55] and the high court of Maryland in 1821 referred to a statute that "declaring . . . to be conspirators, [those] who should be engaged in certain combinations, subjected them to the law of conspiracy as it then existed."[56] The most common formulation seems to have been *fraudulent combination.* For example, during the period from 1820 to 1823 alone, there were twelve cases in the high court of Joseph Smith's New York containing that phrase.[57]

The word *combination* also seems to have had connotations of secrecy. First, as already noted, there is its ubiquitous association with fraud, which always carries with it such connotations. In addition, *combination* was frequently used as though it were synonymous with *secret agreement.* For example, the supreme court of Pennsylvania, writing in 1810, while summarizing the Roman law of fraud for its common law readers, noted "that fraud, according to the understanding of civilians, consisted in combination and secrecy, benefit to ourselves, and injury to others."[58] In another fraud case decided in the same year, the same court used the term *secret contract* as a synonym for *combination.*[59] The cases also frequently laid emphasis on the secrecy in which combinations conduct their affairs. Thus, in an 1820

---

55. *McDonald v. Neilson,* 2 Cow. 139, 179 (N.Y.Sup. 1823). For direct quotations from court decisions, the first number represents the opening page of the decision, and the second represents the cited page number. Occasionally, I was unable to determine the exact pagination from the electronic versions I used.

56. *State v. Buchanan,* 5 H. & J. 317, 334 (Md. 1821).

57. See *McDonald v. Neilson,* 2 Cow. 139 (N.Y. 1823); *James v. Morey,* 2 Cow. 246 (N.Y. 1823); *Clark v. Henry,* 2 Cow. 324 (N.Y. 1823); *Henry v. Davis & Clark,* 7 Johns.Ch. 40 (N.Y.Ch. 1823); *Bacon v. Bronson,* 7 Johns.Ch. 194 (N.Y.Ch. 1823); *Hadden v. Spader,* 20 Johns. 554 (N.Y. 1822); *Slee v. Bloom,* 20 Johns. 669 (N.Y. 1822); *Neilson v. McDonald,* 6 Johns.Ch. 201 (N.Y.Ch. 1822); *Star v. Ellis,* 6 Johns.Ch. 393 (N.Y.Ch. 1822); *Tiernan v. Wilson,* 6 Johns.Ch. 411 (N.Y.Ch. 1822); *Slee v. Bloom,* 5 Johns.Ch. 366 (N.Y.Ch. 1821); and *Myers v. Bradford,* 4 Johns.Ch. 434 (N.Y.Ch. 1820). Note that this list includes cases from both the highest state law court and the highest state court of equity, which prior to 1848 were separate. In Joseph Smith's day, law and equity still occupied different courts in the New York system.

58. *Cheriot v. Foussat,* 3 Binn. 220 (Pa. 1810).

59. *Lazarus v. Bryson,* 3 Binn. 54, 58 (Pa. 1810).

salvage case, the court discussed the way in which the law created incentives to avoid "combination[s] to secrete" shipwrecked valuables and referred to such combinations as an example of "covert malversation ["corrupt administration"]."[60] Likewise an early Kentucky case speaks of the land transfers "secretly made" by a "fraudulent combination."[61] In 1799, the Maryland Chancery, in a case involving the various financial misdeeds of an insolvent debtor, spoke of the "secret act" of a "fraudulent combination" directed at his creditors.[62] Perhaps the most bizarre case that I located was decided by the Connecticut Superior Court in 1793. The case involved a slander lawsuit in which the plaintiff alleged that the defendants falsely accused him of complicity in rape in order to "cover the shame" of the supposed rape victim. In its opinion, the court discusses the alleged "wicked combination" and its relationship to the "secret assault on the body of Marcia Maples."[63]

Broadening the review to include cases from after the outbreak of anti-Masonic agitation but still within the lifetime of Joseph Smith reveals the same patterns of use. Four years after the publication of the Book of Mormon, in one of the ubiquitous cases involving shady land deals, the supreme court of Virginia discussed a "secret understanding and a combination" between real estate speculators.[64] A year earlier a Kentucky court heard a case regarding "the combination . . . to secrete" debt from creditors.[65] An opinion written by the Illinois Supreme Court during the period Joseph Smith resided in the state speaks of a crooked attorney who, "secretly combining" with another against his client, formed a "corrupt combination."[66] A Missouri case from 1840, in discussing litigation regarding real estate transactions,

---

60. *Hollingsworth v. Seventy Doubloons & Three Small Pieces of Gold,* 12 F.Cas. 380, 381 (D.C.Pa. 1820).

61. *Bradley v. Buford,* 2 Ky. 12, 12 (Ky.App. 1801).

62. *Cheston v. Page's Executors & Devisees,* 4 H. & McH. 466, 480 (Md.Chan. 1799).

63. *Monroe v. Maples,* 1 Root 553, 553 (Conn.Super. 1793).

64. *Spengler v. Snapp,* 32 Va. 478, 487 (1834).

65. *Bibb v. Smith,* 31 Ky. 580, 581 (Ky.App. 1833). The words omitted by the ellipses are "between Smith and Allen."

66. *Frisby v. Ballance,* 5 Ill. 287, 298 (1843).

mentions a "combination" between speculators and "other persons to secrete" deeds to land.[67]

These cases suggest three things. First, in the period prior to the anti-Masonic outcry of the late 1820s, *combination* was widely used and had a richer meaning than simply conspiracy or agreement. It could also carry strong overtones of secrecy, deception, and covertness. Second, *combination* was not a term specific to any one branch of activity. The opinions speak with equal ease about combinations to take abandoned shipwrecks and combinations to avoid debt. Third, the anti-Masonic rhetoric of the 1820s does not seem to have had any effect on the general use of the term. Judging by the judicial materials, the term has absolutely no association with Masonry either before or after Morgan's 1826 disappearance. Nothing indicates that the term carried any Masonic subtext in later cases. Given this background meaning, *combination* was a natural choice for anti-Masons seeking an epitaph with which to label the objects of their propaganda. However, the same background meaning also provides a plausible explanation of why in translating the Book of Mormon Joseph Smith would have chosen the word to describe the Gadianton robbers.

Although both Masons and Gadiantons were referred to simply as a "combination" (see Helaman 2:8; Ether 8:18), the disputed phrase in the controversy over the anti-Masonic thesis is *secret combination*. However, this phrase also appears repeatedly in judicial opinions from the period. I was able to locate two cases from before 1826 using the precise term. In addition several cases from after the publication of the Book of Mormon use the term in substantially the same way as the pre-1826 cases. This in turn suggests that, contrary to what proponents of the anti-Masonic thesis have implied, the anti-Masonic uproar of the 1820s did not dramatically change the meaning or usage of the term, although any such claim must be qualified by the conservative nature of legal language.

The first opinion using the term that I located was the case of *Duval v. Burtis,* decided by the Kentucky Court of Appeals in 1819.[68] The

---

67. *Truesdell v. Callaway,* 6 Mo. 605, 612 (1840).
68. *Duval v. Burtis,* 9 Ky. 120 (Ky.App. 1819).

case revolved around a confused set of transactions involving nego-
tiable instruments, cross-boarder attachments of property, lawsuits in
two states, an attempt to assign the rights from one lawsuit to another,
an alleged double- and triple-crossing assistant to a con man, and an
expensive Kentucky horse named Porto. According to the plaintiff,
the defendant had been in league with a shady character from Ten-
nessee who purchased Porto on credit and then left the state. In his
response to the suit, the defendant denied that there was any "secret
combination" between himself and the Tennessean. Although the
case touches on a wide variety of issues in a comparatively short opin-
ion (two pages), one of the issues about which there is not even the
slightest hint is Masonry. Absolutely nothing in the opinion suggests
that the court is using the term *secret combination* to refer to anything
other than a covert pact to steal a horse.

The second pre-1826 case that I located was much closer to the
publication of the Book of Mormon in both time and space. In July
1825, just fourteen months before Morgan's disappearance in the same
state, the supreme court of New York issued its opinion in *Fellows v.
Fellows.*[69] This opinion is a much grander document than the brief
ruling of the court in *Duval v. Burris.* Modeled on the early opinions
of the House of Lords, it contains a lengthy summary of the case by
the clerk of the court, excerpts from the speeches offered by counsel
during oral argument, and a string of separate opinions by the court's
judges. The case involved a bitter family dispute that stretched over
more than a decade. Stripping away the complex financial machina-
tions of all parties, the story is simple. A son, in order to sell real estate
encumbered with various obligations, transferred title to his father,
who was to hold the property in trust during the course of the sale,
which was to extend over several years. The father, however, swindled
his son, sold the property, and pocketed the proceeds. The son then
died, and his widow obtained a judgment against the father. The fa-
ther, in a vain attempt to avoid the judgment, transferred his property
to another son, who was to hold it in trust for him. The widow then
brought a second suit against all her in-laws, arguing that the whole

---

69. *Fellows v. Fellows,* 4 Cow. 682 (N.Y.Sup. 1825).

scheme was a fraud. In the case before the supreme court upholding her victory in the second lawsuit, the judges and attorneys used various terms to describe the erring members of the Fellows clan. They were guilty of "combining and confederating." They constituted a "fraudulent combination," an "unlawful combination," a "combination and confederacy," and a "secret and fraudulent combination." Finally, Justice Woodworth referred to them as a "fraudulent and secret combination."

The *Fellows* case is especially instructive for two reasons. First, it provides a clear and obviously non-Masonic use of the term *secret combination* from the immediate vicinity of Joseph Smith that is almost contemporaneous with the outbreak of the anti-Masonic agitation that is supposed to have inspired the Gadianton robbers. Second, the involved discussion of the various actors in the reported opinion and their frequent use of differing phrases to describe the same criminal activity provide a marvelous study of how the phrase *secret combination* was understood in relation to other terms. What *Fellows* shows is that *secret combination,* far from being a bit of jargon newly coined for the exclusive use of anti-Masons in the late 1820s, fits comfortably into a set of very common terms that had been used for decades to describe all kinds of criminal activities.

Furthermore, if we compare these cases with others using the term *secret combination* in the two decades after the publication of the Book of Mormon, we find that the use and meaning of the term seems untouched by anti-Masonry and carries no new overtones. In 1833, members of the Tennessee Supreme Court considered a case in which they expressed concern about adopting a rule that would expose sureties to the risk of ruin at the hands of "secret combinations."[70] Seven years later, a Kentucky court, in discussing "robbers, thieves, etc.," suggested that those using common carriers were exposed to a special risk from such "secret combinations."[71]

---

70. *Wells v. Grant,* 12 Tenn. 491, 494 (1833). Although the identity of the secret combinations is not clear, from context the court seems to have in mind combinations between debtors and creditors against sureties.

71. *Frankfort Bridge Company v. Williams,* 39 Ky. 403, 405 (1840).

Interestingly, this case used the term specifically to refer to conspiracies between legitimate businesses and outlaws on the highway, which is suggestive, given the Book of Mormon's repeated references to the Gadiantons as robbers (see Helaman 6:18; 3 Nephi 1:27; 4 Nephi 1:17) and their sometime association with respectable elites (see Helaman 1–2).[72] An 1843 case from South Carolina uses the phrase in a different context. After the Bank of South Carolina suspended specie payments three times during the financial panics of the 1830s, the state attorney general claimed that the bank had violated its charter and should be dissolved. A circuit court that ruled in the bank's favor discussed the various legitimate reasons a bank might suspend specie payments. Among them it listed "secret combinations" of predatory foreign corporations.[73] These cases suggest that contrary to the position occasionally adopted by Quinn and Vogel,[74] one need not assume that every post-1826 reference to secret combinations carries an anti-Masonic subtext or has an anti-Masonic rhetorical pedigree. Rather, the legal materials suggest that the phrase carried a fairly constant meaning both before and after the outbreak of anti-Masonic agitation.

On Legalese

Vogel has questioned the usefulness of examining legal documents at all for understanding the language of the Book of Mormon. "Legalese," he declares, "was not the language of Joseph Smith, nor

---

72.   Indeed, John W. Welch has argued that the Book of Mormon's choice of the word *robbers* to designate the Gadiantons draws on an ancient legal distinction between outlaw bands and mere thieves. See his "Theft and Robbery in the Book of Mormon and in Near Eastern Law" (FARMS paper, 1989). See also Thomas, *Digging in Cumorah,* 196, who argues that Gadianton robbers were identified with social elites.

73.   The circuit court's opinion is included in the introductory notes to the intermediate court of appeals of South Carolina's opinion in *State v. The Bank of South Carolina,* 1 Speers 433 (S.C.Err. 1843). Because there was doubtless some time between the decision of the circuit court and the court of errors, the date of the circuit court may be earlier—for example, 1842; however, it is undated.

74.   Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View,* 511–12 n. 216; Vogel, "Echoes of Anti-Masonry," 302.

was it the language of his intended audience."[75] There is some merit to this criticism. Certainly, lawyers have a well-deserved reputation for tortured prose, and as I indicated earlier, appellate cases such as those I have examined are more likely to be technical. Likewise, while Joseph Smith studied law later when he was serving as a judge in Nauvoo[76] and some of his revelations from that period use legal terms (see D&C 132:7),[77] there is no evidence that he had any extensive familiarity with legal materials in the Palmyra period.[78] Nor is there any reason to suppose that the Book of Mormon is (generally speaking) written in technical legal language.[79]

---

75. Vogel, "Echoes of Anti-Masonry," 301.

76. See Scott H. Faulring, ed., *An American Prophet's Record: The Diaries and Journals of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), 321. See also Dallin H. Oaks, "The Suppression of the *Nauvoo Expositor,*" *Utah Law Review* 9 (1964–1965): 862, 875 (which discusses Joseph Smith's exposure to Blackstone's *Commentaries* in Nauvoo City Council meetings). By the Nauvoo period, Joseph was deeply involved in quite complex civil litigation, and it is unlikely that he would have escaped familiarity with at least some technical legal terms. See Dallin H. Oaks and Joseph I. Bentley, "Joseph Smith and Legal Process: In the Wake of the Steamboat *Nauvoo,*" *Brigham Young University Law Review* 1976/3 (1976): 735 (which discusses in depth Joseph Smith's civil litigation in Nauvoo).

77. Truman Madsen has noted: "Some of the verses [from section 132] describe the conditions of the everlasting covenant in such terms as an attorney might use who had spent days thinking up every possible synonym, nuance, and contingency so that no loophole would remain." Truman G. Madsen, *Joseph Smith the Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1989), 22–23.

78. However, it is worth noting in this regard that Joseph had had experience with the law by 1826. In that year he was charged with being a "'disorderly person'" in connection with money-digging activities in Pennsylvania. See Gordon A. Madsen, "Joseph Smith's 1826 Trial: The Legal Setting," *BYU Studies* 30/2 (1990): 91.

79. John Welch, however, has noted the existence of legal materials and legal concepts in the Book of Mormon, although he identifies elements of ancient Hebrew law, rather than early American jurisprudence. See John W. Welch, "Law and War in the Book of Mormon," in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon,* ed. Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 46–102; John W. Welch, "Lehi's Last Will and Testament: A Legal Approach," in *The Book of Mormon: Second Nephi, The Doctrinal Structure,* ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1989), 61–82; John W. Welch, "Legal Perspectives on the Slaying of Laban," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1 (1992): 119–41; John W. Welch, "Law in the Book of Mormon: The Nephite Court Cases" (FARMS paper, 1996); John W. Welch, "'If a Man . . .': The Casuistic Law Form in the Book of Mormon" (FARMS paper, 1987); John W. Welch, "Series of Laws in the Book of Mormon" (FARMS paper, 1987); John W. Welch, "Judicial Process in the Trial of Abinadi" (FARMS paper, 1981).

However, it would be unwise to overstate the force of this argument. Despite its reputation among lay people, legal language is not an impenetrable mass of exclusively technical jargon. Certainly, legal writing can be turgid, but much of it uses words in their ordinary senses. To evaluate the strength of the "legalese" criticism, it is important to understand something about legal language. While we should be cautious in generalizing about ordinary language on the basis of legal materials, it is simplistic to assume that all judicial opinions can be dismissed as irrelevant "legalese." Rather, attention to the way specific words are used and an appreciation for what is—and is not—technical about legal language is needed.

Obviously, legal language contains many technical terms. These fall into essentially three different categories. First, there are those words that are specific to the law itself. In Joseph Smith's day most of these terms were drawn from the common law of England, which was inherited by Americans at the time of the Revolution. The exclusively technical terms of this body of law, in turn, date back to the late medieval period and consist of a pastiche of Latin words and what is known as "law French." Law French was a strange linguistic descendant of the medieval French spoken by the eleventh-century Norman conquerors of England. A mongrel language that reminded one modern legal scholar of "the taunting Frenchman from *Monty Python and the Holy Grail,*"[80] law French was the official spoken language of the English courts from about 1250 until about 1500, and it continued to be the language of written reports for about another

---

80. David Franklin, "Pardon My Law French," *Greenbag* (Summer 1999): 421. This article contains the following example of seventeenth-century law French, which gives one some sense of its bizarre quality: "Richardson Chief Justice de Common Banc al assises de Salisbury in Summer 1631 fuit assault per prisoner la condemne pur felony, que puis son condemnation ject un brickbat a le dit justice, que narrowly mist, et pur ceo immediately fuit indictment drawn per Noy envers le prisoner et son dexter manus ampute et fix al gibbet, sur que luy mesme immediatement hange in presence de Court." Ibid. This kind of tortured language led one distraught French diplomat to write in the time of Elizabeth I that law French "may be worthily compared to some old ruines of some faire building, where so many brambles and thorns are grown, that scarecely it appeareth that ever there had bin any house." Ibid.

century thereafter.[81] From it are drawn terms such as *replevin,*[82] *trover,*[83] *larceny,*[84] and *trespass.*[85] Other technical terms such as *habeas corpus,*[86] *assumpsit,*[87] and *nisi prius*[88] are either Latin or have Latin roots. All of these terms are purely technical and have no English meaning outside of the common law. In the case of some of the words drawn from law French, they have no nonlegal meaning at all, having never been natural words in any tongue other than the unique language of the medieval English courts.

The second class of technical terms includes those words that have meanings in ordinary English but have substantially different meanings in the law. A classic example of this kind of term is the word *malice.* In ordinary speech *malice* has the connotation of malevolence and

---

81. Franklin, "Pardon My Law French," 421.

82. "An action whereby the owner or person entitled to repossession of goods or chattels may recover those goods or chattels from one who has wrongfully . . . taken [them]." *Black's Law Dictionary,* 6th ed. (St. Paul, MN: West, 1990), 1299. For an example, see *Henderson v. Ballantine,* 4 Cow. 549 (N.Y.Sup. 1825) (a New York case from Joseph Smith's period that uses the term *replevin*).

83. "In common-law practice, the action of trover . . . is a species of action on the case, and originally lay for the recovery of damages against a person who had *found* another's goods and wrongfully converted them to his own use." *Black's,* 1508. For an example, see *Ex Parte Ward,* 5 Cow. 20 (N.Y.Sup. 1825) (a New York case from Joseph Smith's period that uses the term *trover*).

84. "Felonious stealing, taking and carrying, leading, riding, or driving away another's personal property, with intent to convert it or to deprive [the] owner thereof." *Black's,* 881. For an example of such technical language, see *Mills v. McCoy,* 4 Cow. 406 (N.Y.Sup. 1825) (a New York case from Joseph Smith's period that uses the term *larceny*).

85. "An unlawful interference with one's person, property, or rights." *Black's,* 1502. For an example, see *Hodges v. Chace,* 2 Wend. 248 (N.Y.Sup. 1829) (a New York case from Joseph Smith's period that uses the term *trespass*).

86. "The name given to a variety of writs . . . having for their object to bring a party before a court or judge." *Black's,* 709. For an example, see *Ex parte Tayloe,* 5 Cow. 39 (N.Y.Sup. 1825) (a New York case from Joseph Smith's period that uses the term *habeas corpus*).

87. "A promise or engagement by which one person assumes or undertakes to do some act or pay something to another." *Black's,* 122. For an example, see *Gourley v. Allen,* 5 Cow. 644 (N.Y.Sup. 1825) (a New York case from Joseph Smith's day that uses the term *assumpsit*).

88. "The *nisi prius* courts are such as are held for the trial of issues of fact before a jury and one presiding judge." *Black's,* 1047. For an example, see *Flower v. Allen,* 5 Cow. 654 (N.Y.Sup. 1825) (a New York case from Joseph Smith's period using the term *nisi prius*).

conscious ill will. In the common law, however, *malice* is an element of the crime of murder—famously defined as "the unlawful killing of any reasonable creature in being with malice aforethought"[89]—and has a significantly different meaning. *Malice* specifically refers to the state of mind necessary for a homicide to become a murder. Generally, this has been understood at a minimum as knowledge that the actions one is engaged in will result in the death of another. What has been universally agreed is that subjective ill will is not a necessary component of the legal concept of malice. Thus, the loving child who poisons her dying mother in order to ease her suffering from a terminal illness has acted with "malice" under the law, regardless of her subjective altruism. However, the man who, in a fit of rage, insults his worst enemy who then, as a result of a rare disease, dies of a heart attack has not acted with "malice," despite his hatred and ill will.

Third, there are those terms that have substantially the same meaning in ordinary English and in the law but which the law defines with greater precision. For example, in ordinary speech the word *assault* means "to attack." In the law, it has essentially the same meaning but is refined with greater precision. An assault is an action by one person that causes another person to have a reasonable fear of serious bodily injury. Thus a man who takes a swing at his wife's face with a baseball bat has assaulted her in both the ordinary and legal sense of the word. On the other hand, a toddler who kicks an NFL linebacker has not committed an assault because while he attacks the linebacker, any fear of serious bodily injury that the linebacker might have is not reasonable. Likewise, a man who brandishes a machete threateningly over his victim's head has not assaulted him if the victim is looking the other way. This is because the victim's ignorance of the machete means that it cannot cause him to have any fear of bodily injury at all. Such examples of precise definitions that substantially track ordinary speech but that occasionally produce anomalous results could be multiplied endlessly. For example, the technical definition of murder given in the preceding paragraph falls into this category.

---

89. The definition is attributed to the great seventeenth-century chief justice Sir Edward Coke.

Armed with this more nuanced understanding of the technicality of legal language, it is possible to better appreciate the usefulness of early judicial opinions for evaluating the anti-Masonic thesis. The phrases *combination* and *secret combination* do not seem to fall into any of these classes of technical "legalese." *Combination* was not a specifically legal term of art such as words drawn from Latin or law French. Nor does it seem to have had a technical meaning in either of the two ways explained above.

Perhaps significantly, none of the cases that I reviewed involved jury instructions regarding the meaning of the word *combination,* which further strengthens the claim that the word was not being used in a technical sense. In instructing juries, judges often provide explanations of technical legal terms. I qualify the significance of this absence for two reasons. First, the coverage of published opinions during this era is incomplete.[90] Second, prior to the American Revolution, juries enjoyed a great deal of autonomy and were relatively free from strict judicial oversight.[91] In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, however, this changed as judges began to "rein in" juries with, among other things, more technical instructions.[92] Juries in the 1820s still enjoyed a greater amount of autonomy than do modern juries. Thus even though judges were seeking to more tightly control juries, we should expect fewer cases involving jury instructions than we see today. Nevertheless, New York opinions from before 1826 included discussion of jury instructions related to trespass on the case,[93] larceny,[94] and the distinction between theft and ordinary trespass.[95] It is thus not unreasonable to expect that there would be jury instructions defining *combination* if it were in fact a technical term. The absence of

---

90. Friedman, *History of American Law,* 322–25.

91. Morton J. Horwitz, *The Transformation of American Law, 1780–1860* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), 28.

92. Ibid., 141–43.

93. See *Merritt v. Brinkerhoff,* 17 Johns. 306 (N.Y.Sup. 1820) (which discusses the rights and duties of a mill owner vis-à-vis downstream users of the millstream).

94. *People v. Anderson,* 14 Johns. 294 (N.Y.Sup. 1817) (which discusses what must be found by the jury in order to hold the accused guilty).

95. *Dexter v. Taber,* 12 Johns. 239 (N.Y.Sup. 1815) (which discusses the distinction between theft and trespass in the context of an allegedly slanderous accusation).

such instructions is suggestive. All of this points to the conclusion that, contrary to what some have suggested,[96] *combination* and *secret combination* were not technical legal terms in the first half of the nineteenth century. They were used in legal opinions, but they were not "legalese." Rather they were similar to terms such as *trade,*[97] *business,* or *livelihood*[98] that appeared in legal opinions without taking on any special legal meaning. Far from being "irrelevant" for understanding normal language, such nontechnical legal materials can provide us with valid samples of how common words and phrases were understood.

Limitations, Implications, and Conclusions

Legal materials suggest that contrary to the claims of proponents of the anti-Masonic thesis, the term *secret combination* did not have an exclusively anti-Masonic meaning. Rather it seems to have been used as a general term to refer to hidden criminal agreements and conspiracies. It was used this way prior to the disappearance of Captain Morgan and continued to be used in the same way after the outbreak of anti-Masonic agitation. The continuity of meaning in the legal opinions suggests that those who see in every post-1826 use of the term an anti-Masonic subtext are probably overplaying the linguistic influence of anti-Masonry. Rather, in the absence of specific evidence linking a use of the term to anti-Masonry, the best way of reading post-1826 uses of *secret combination* is probably to simply look at their contexts and take the plain meaning at face value. Admittedly, there are more post-1826 occurrences of the term than pre-1826 occurrences in the legal materials. It might be tempting to attribute this increase to the influence of anti-Masonic rhetoric. However, it is probably a mistake to do so. A more likely explanation

---

96. For example, Vogel argues, "It is irrelevant what the phrase 'secret combinations' meant in technical language at the time, even if it did have a separate legal definition." Vogel, "Echoes of Anti-Masonry," 301.

97. See, for example, *Smith v. Lusher,* 5 Cow. 688 (N.Y.Sup. 1825) (referring to "partners in trade").

98. See, for example, *Seymour v. Ellison,* 2 Cow. 13 (N.Y.Sup. 1823): "His business was . . . very limited; affording him but a scanty livelihood."

is simply that there were more judicial opinions as the century progressed. As the American population and the American economy grew during the first half of the century, the amount of litigation increased accordingly. In addition, as the century progressed, the publication of judicial opinions became more regular and comprehensive. The influence of anti-Masonry as an explanation is simply dwarfed in comparison to the explosion in the volume of published opinions during the nineteenth century.[99]

Still, it is important to understand the limitations of legal materials. Judicial opinions tell us something about the way in which language was understood at different periods of time. However, the meaning of the phrase *secret combination* is only one part—and not the most important part—of the debate over the anti-Masonic thesis. Obviously, analysis of legal materials is not the same thing as analysis of the Book of Mormon, and an interpretation of the phrase *secret combination* is not the same thing as an interpretation of the Gadianton robbers. These are important issues, but they are clearly beyond the scope of this paper. Likewise, legal materials can be technical. Their use will require a nuanced sense of when it is—and is not—possible to generalize based on legal writings.

It is also important to understand how narrow the scope of materials covered by even my comparatively comprehensive search is. The reported decisions of the appellate courts from the early nineteenth century form a very small part of the legal universe. Legal language, in turn, forms only a narrow part of all language. The narrowness of my research cuts both ways. Proponents of the anti-Masonic thesis can point out that a review of such materials does not constitute extensive reading in the primary pre-1830 sources.[100] On the other hand, the repeated appearance of the phrase *secret combinations* in such a narrow slice of language also suggests that its use may have been much more widespread.

---

99. See, for example, Friedman, *History of American Law,* 409 (which discusses the rise of the West's reporter system).

100. Vogel, "Echoes of Anti-Masonry," 301.

Finally, it is important to understand the way in which previous discussions of legal materials in the context of the anti-Masonic thesis have been mistaken. Neither *combination* nor *secret combination* were technical legal terms. Their use was not confined to any one area of the law. It is thus a mistake to expect to find them especially concentrated in one kind of litigation. It is also a mistake to assume that their use in judicial opinions would have been unintelligible or foreign to lay people. Nor should we expect to find some alternate exclusive use of the term. Thus, while the anti-Masonic thesis posits that *secret combination* was a term with an exclusively (or nearly exclusively) anti-Masonic meaning, in using legal materials to criticize the thesis, it is a mistake to go looking for an alternative exclusive meaning, whether it be describing labor unions or guerrilla fighters.

Ultimately, I think that the issue of the term *secret combination* and the anti-Masonic thesis comes down to a choice between two options. First is the claim that *secret combination* carried such an exclusively anti-Masonic meaning that its use in the Book of Mormon, especially with regard to latter-day prophecies, was a direct and intentional reference to Masonry.[101] This position depends on the exclusivity and uniqueness of the anti-Masonic use of the term. The second position is that the term had a broader meaning and cannot be read as a simple reference to Masonry. This position does not involve a denial that anti-Masonry may have changed the connotation of the term in some contexts or that anti-Masonic uses of the phrase are useful in understanding the original language of the Book of Mormon translation. However, it does involve the claim that *secret combination* had a broader meaning than that attributed to it by proponents of the anti-Masonic thesis. I believe that the legal materials discussed in this paper

---

101. Interestingly, Vogel's earlier treatment of anti-Masonic readings of the Book of Mormon is considerably more tentative and less strident than his later response to critics. In 1989, he wrote, "Right or wrong, it's certain that Martin Harris and other early readers held anti-Masonic interpretations of the Book of Mormon's contents. How deep these went is not entirely clear." Vogel, "Mormonism's 'Anti-Masonick Bible,'" 28. In 2002, although he offers substantially the same evidence, Vogel wrote more certainly that "Joseph Smith was aware of the Masonic connotation, and his use of the phrase [*secret combinations*] was clearly intentional." Vogel, "Echoes of Anti-Masonry," 300.

severely undermine the first position and suggest that the phrase *secret combination* cannot be read as a simple reference to Masonry. On the contrary, judicial opinions from the early nineteenth century provide numerous, concrete examples of non-Masonic uses of the term.

Recent Trends in Book of Mormon Apologetics: A Critical Assessment of Methodological Diversity and Academic Viability

Benjamin N. Judkins

Terryl L. Givens, in his most recent offering, *By the Hand of Mormon,*[1] presents students of American history with a new and vibrant look at the founding text of one of the fastest-growing religions in the world today. This work, his second from Oxford University Press, and now published in paperback, will reach large audiences both in the academic world and among Latter-day Saints more generally. Hopefully, this book, praised by those both inside and outside the church, will lead to a general improvement in the quality of discussion and debate regarding the Book of Mormon.

Givens advances many valuable new insights and conclusions. However, the premier contribution of this work is its careful and far-reaching review of the literature surrounding the Book of Mormon and its origins. Givens has shown himself to be a master of synthesizing large amounts of information and telling a single coherent story. It might take students new to the field years to discover for themselves all the various facets of the literature discussed in this single work. If for no other reason than this, *By the Hand of Mormon* is an invaluable contribution to the field.

Such a work, published by a respected university press, is precisely what is needed to increase both the visibility and accessibility of this

---

1. Terryl L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

literature to the wider academic community. Indeed, this seems to have been an overarching goal of many Latter-day Saint scholars for some time now and has no doubt contributed to the increasing methodological sophistication and professionalization of the field. This being the case, the success of Givens's book raises the question of how soon we will see an engagement with the scholarly world, as well as what the outcome of these discussions will be.

I examine recent developments in the apologetic literature surrounding the Book of Mormon in an attempt to address these questions. My purpose is twofold: first, I wish to develop a clearer typology of current trends in order to help students analyze new arguments and relate them to larger debates in the field. While many ways exist to group any large body of literature, for the purposes of the current project it is most helpful to construct the different schools of thought around the methodology that they employ and the theoretical assumptions that support them. Second, I plan to comment on what portions, if any, of this research would be capable of standing up to rigorous and sustained scholarly scrutiny by the larger academic community. This second goal must be recognized as theoretically ambiguous from the outset. The purpose of Latter-day Saint apologetic literature has never been to convince the wider community of the truth of our positions or the historicity of our scriptures. Rather, as Givens so eloquently illustrates, Latter-day Saint scholarship has tended to be an in-house project. The literature is composed of works written for the immediate community with the express purpose of demonstrating why belief is not irrational.[2] The mission of the LDS academic community has not, for the most part, been to demonstrate why belief is necessary but to show how a proper understanding of the larger historical, textual, and archaeological frameworks is *sufficient* to *allow* belief.

Having thus outlined my plan, I am not certain why the broader academic community would ever examine Mormon apologetic literature. Clearly, it was not intended for them and contains very little of interest to those outside the immediate community. Yet the increas-

---

2. Ibid., 118.

ing savvy and credentials of Latter-day Saint scholarship, as well as our growing involvement in more general scholarly efforts (such as the preservation of ancient texts or the dissemination of Dead Sea Scrolls facsimiles), may prompt an engagement between the two communities at some point in the future. This might happen if outside researchers were to begin to seriously consider how a Latter-day Saint viewpoint might skew scholarship in predictable ways. Indeed, some in the evangelical academic community have already begun to ask exactly this question.[3] At what point, if ever, Latter-day Saint scholars will force a confrontation with the rest of the academic world is unclear, but it is an interesting matter for speculation. Yet the success of a work such as *By the Hand of Mormon* serves to push us toward such an engagement.

The current generational transition, symbolized best by the retirement of Hugh Nibley from the fray, has also opened the door for some reorganization of the literature and its priorities. Thus the moment seems especially auspicious for reexamining the major contours and trends in the field.

The current article is organized around the two methodological divisions that are most salient to understanding the nature of current scholarship, as well as its strengths and potential weaknesses. Briefly, these are external (archaeological) versus internal (ethnographic and textual) approaches. It is also important to consider what assumptions a given school makes about the nature of translation in its analysis of the Book of Mormon. Some approaches seem to lead to quite strong literalist views on this process, while others do not necessarily have a single coherent position.

It may also be appropriate at this point to say a few words about what this paper does not do. First, the literature reviewed for this project covers mainly the last ten years, unlike the much more extensive review offered

---

3. 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): 203. For their response to the perceived crises, see 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, MI: Zondervan, 2002). Responses to *The New Mormon Challenge* have appeared in the *FARMS Review of Books* 14/1–2 (2002) and in the *FARMS Review* 15/1 (2003).

by Givens. While I do discuss important works from previous decades that still have a substantive impact on current thought, no effort is made to survey these earlier periods systematically. Second, the literature that I have discussed tends to focus on Near Eastern cultural elements rather than on the Mesoamerican setting of the Book of Mormon. The greater part of the current literature approaches the question of historicity from this Near Eastern angle. While important research is being done on the Mesoamerican front, it would take a specialist in those fields to interpret it. Lastly, I have focused on trends in the quasi-official literature, produced by circles affiliated (at least informally) with Brigham Young University (BYU) and the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS). The bulk, though not all, of the academically responsible literature comes from these sources. These scholars possess much informal power when it comes to setting attitudes and trends. This fact alone should be enough to justify our interest in them.

External versus Internal Evidence

Since the 1950s, the most brilliant light in Latter-day Saint scholarship and apologetics has been Hugh Nibley. In many ways he marked the roads that at least two subsequent generations of scholars are following. Nibley was also quite vocal on what paths would not, or should not, be taken. It would be naïve to think that his stance on these issues has had no effect on the direction of Book of Mormon scholarship. In particular, Nibley—due possibly to the perceived lack of success of the New World Archaeological Foundation (NWAF)[4] and other large-scale archaeological expeditions in locating clear evidence for Latter-day Saint claims, which, it must be emphasized, was never the explicit goal of NWAF—was persistently hostile toward the role of archaeology in Book of Mormon studies.

For a work as grounded in artifactual reality as the Book of Mormon, this may be viewed as a rather peculiar stance. The very nature of the golden plates and their story seems to encourage an external methodological approach. The book presents itself as a literal history of mul-

---

4. See Daniel C. Peterson, "On the New World Archaeological Foundation," in this number of the *FARMS Review,* pages 221–33.

tiple large civilizations and continues to be read that way by its ever-growing audience. This lends strong impulses toward an empirical and seemingly more scientific investigation of the archaeological record.

Yet we must address the question of whether one should allow a book's origin to totally set the agenda for how it is to be investigated, read, and understood. The strong tendency of the Book of Mormon to overwhelm all historically defined frameworks would seem to indicate that, yes, the best way to study it would be as history buried in the ground. Yet, as Nibley was always fond of pointing out, the extant archaeological record is spotty and incomplete at the best of times. Verifiable civilizations larger than the Nephites' have slipped into the sands of time never to be seen again.

Also challenging is how we are to understand the history we see related in the Book of Mormon. The Bible, too, purports to be a historical account of a historical people facing historical problems. All of this led scholars to read the Bible incorrectly for centuries. They assumed that a people as historically minded as the Jews could not have had myths, and thus the only proper framework for reading the Bible was history as defined by Western academic traditions.

Of course, later scholarship by the likes of Frank Moore Cross, Bernard Batto, Raphael Patai, Margaret Barker, and others has shown that it is impossible to understand the Bible without seeing it as a document rich in very unhistorical mythology (and this applies not only to books like Genesis, but also to histories like 1 and 2 Kings). Indeed, the very attempt to historicize that which could only exist and have meaning in another frame of reference is probably one of the greater mistakes that the field of Western humanities has made. Even Israel's experience of its day-to-day history was determined in large part by its cognitive mythological frameworks, which were clearly written back into its own sacred history. Thus, one of the questions facing biblical archaeologists is how to study a people whose history is a part of their own myth complex. What sorts of artifacts should one look for in this vastly more complicated and vexing setting?

It is not clear why these same issues should not be applicable to the Book of Mormon. After all, it claims to be a product of the same culture and historical theories that ultimately gave us the Bible. How

the Jaredites actually fit into the Nephite myth complex and what evidence of them one can rationally expect to see are examples of issues that have yet to be addressed by the Latter-day Saint scholarly community. Finding answers to these questions using external sources is difficult, and Nibley despaired of ever being able to use archaeology to its full effect in defending the Book of Mormon.

However, a new generation of scholars is moving ahead with various archaeological projects with surprisingly good results. Rather than focusing on Mesoamerica, an area that has yet to yield anything identifiably "Nephite" in character, recent work has focused on Lehi's departure from the Near East. These studies are viewed as the most promising development to date in many FARMS and Latter-day Saint academic circles. They may also demonstrate a return to respectability for archaeology in the Book of Mormon literature not seen since the early days of Thomas Ferguson.[5]

In a 1999 article in the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies,* S. Kent Brown discussed a new find by a German archaeological team working in Yemen.[6] Archaeologists working on an excavation of a temple near Marib uncovered an altar with an inscription bearing the name Nihm (an ancient tribal group). This find was immediately hailed as significant due to Marib's proximity to the spice trails leading southeast along the coast of the Empty Quarter. Book of Mormon scholars had postulated for some time that the most probable escape route for Lehi and his family was along this ancient highway. If correct, this would likely place Lehi's point of departure for the New World somewhere in Oman.[7]

---

5. See Daniel C. Peterson and Matthew Roper, "*Ein Heldenleben?* On Thomas Stuart Ferguson as an Elias for Cultural Mormons," in this number of the *FARMS Review,* pages 175–219.

6. S. Kent Brown, "'The Place That Was Called Nahom': New Light from Ancient Yemen," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8/1 (1999): 66–68. See Warren P. Aston, "Newly Found Altars from Nahom," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 10/2 (2001): 56–61.

7. Warren P. Aston and Michaela K. Aston, *In the Footsteps of Lehi: New Evidence for Lehi's Journey across Arabia to Bountiful* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994); and S. Kent Brown et al., "Planning Research on Oman: The End of Lehi's Trail," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 7/1 (1998): 12–21.

Since Hugh Nibley, scholars have been looking for a place along this route that bore the name Nahom. This, they hoped, would indicate the place where Ishmael could have been buried. Significantly, Nephi's story also indicates that this place already bore the name before the group arrived (they did not name it themselves) and that it would be the proper sort of place to bury a loved one (Ishmael was buried there but presumably died somewhere else). The temple at Marib seems to fit the description in that it was close to a large grave complex and had the same consonant construction (NHM) used in both Nihm and Nahom. This usage of the name NHM in the complex dates back to the period of Lehi's exodus.

In Welch's view, the Marib find is the single most significant development in Book of Mormon studies in a decade. Evidently that sentiment is shared—the research has been reviewed in the *Ensign*,[8] and Givens has called it "the first actual archaeological evidence for the historicity of the Book of Mormon."[9] The find was even mentioned in an April 2001 General Conference address.[10]

Also interesting is the fact that the direction from this temple to the area of the coast of Oman that Brown and others are proposing as the location of Bountiful is nearly due east (the direction of travel indicated in the Book of Mormon). Multiple iron deposits have been found in the local coastal area of the proposed Bountiful. While these deposits are small, both could yield tons of ore, more than enough to make the few tools Nephi needed.[11]

As exciting as these discoveries are, a few cautionary notes are in order. First, the mainstream scholarly community has yet to offer a countertheory or a challenge to the Latter-day Saint interpretation of the findings. Our reconstruction of the vowels in the name seems to be relatively secure, meaning that we need not reject the reconstruction a priori. However, there may not be any reason to privilege our

---

8. See "Book of Mormon Linked to Site in Yemen," LDS Scene, *Ensign,* February 2001, 79.

9. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon,* 120.

10. John K. Carmack, "United in Love and Testimony," *Ensign,* May 2001, 76–77.

11. Wm. Revell Phillips, "Metals in the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9/2 (2000): 36–41.

reading of this tribal name over a number of other possible recon-
structions either.

It is instructive to remember that the noted Israeli archaeologist
Yigael Yadin and many others spent much time and energy trying to
prove that they had located the walls (and gates) of biblical Jericho.
Even though Jericho is accepted as a historical place and its location is
relatively well known, they were never able to generate a consensus in
support of their finds. Eventually, the field dismissed their theories af-
ter much scrutiny and acrimonious debate with the biblical minimal-
ist school.[12] This should be a cautionary tale for us. We are seeking to
establish something much more controversial than the fact that Jericho
had walls, and we have much slimmer evidence (a reconstructed tribal
name on a set of pagan votive altars) than Yadin and others brought to
bear. When we consider the fact that not a *single piece* of evidence is uni-
versally accepted by the entire academic community for the existence
of a preexilic Jewish kingdom, we must ask ourselves how likely these
recent finds are to stand up to serious cross-examination in a field that
will not be inclined to accept our preferred interpretations of these
sites. Following the traditional pattern of Latter-day Saint apologet-
ics, these finds serve more to demonstrate the rationality of belief to
those who already believe than to convince others of the historicity
of the Book of Mormon. Nibley was familiar with these controver-
sies. Still, it appears that a different generation of scholars has yet to
learn biblical archaeology's most powerful cautionary lesson—claims
to large, ground-breaking finds may be so controversial as to prevent
them from being accepted.

More interesting are archaeological projects that seek to situate
the Book of Mormon narrative within the emerging general picture
of the ancient Near East rather than to declare some place (Yemen,

---

12. For a recent discussion of this and other controversies involving the minimalist
school, see Zeev Herzog, "Deconstructing the Walls of Jericho: Biblical Myth and Ar-
chaeological Reality," *Prometheus* 4 (2001): 72–93. For the original archeological notes
proposing that the city of Jericho was in fact uninhabited at the time of the Joshua story,
see Kathleen M. Kenyon, *Excavations at Jericho,* vols. 1–2 (London: British School of
Archaeology in Jerusalem, 1960–65).

Oman, or Chile) to be a Book of Mormon land. Take, for instance, the seemingly counterfactual statements in the Book of Mormon regarding the mixing of Hebrew and Egyptian scripts or language usage patterns. A number of sources coming to light over a wide geographic and temporal range demonstrate the existence of such practices. The accumulation of these many small pieces of evidence, helping to build a new and unexpected picture of cultural practices, may shed more light on the Book of Mormon's historicity than any single large find.

Archaeological evidence now supports the practice of writing in a transcribed Semitic language, using modified Egyptian scripts, going back as far as the eighteenth century bc. Perhaps the best early example of such artifacts recently discussed in conjunction with the Book of Mormon would be the Byblos Syllabic inscriptions—an example of a document produced in a Phoenician city and inscribed on "copper plates."[13] In fact, many examples of Egyptian and hybrid writing are associated with Byblos during the Bronze Age.[14]

Even more relevant from the point of view of Book of Mormon scholars is the discovery of two silver scrolls, excavated from a secondary bone repository in burial cave 24 on the west side of Hinnom Valley in Jerusalem. The significance of this discovery, made by Gabriel Barkay in 1980, was not immediately evident, as the oxidized strip of silver could not originally be read. The process of unrolling the strips took three painstaking years; significantly, the scrolls were dated to 600 bc. They contained a brief inscription very similar to

---

13.   William J. Hamblin, "Metal Plates and the Book of Mormon," *Insights* (July 1994): 2, quoting from George E. Mendenhall, "Byblos Syllabic Inscriptions," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary,* ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 4:178–80.

14.   It is important not to overgeneralize on the basis of Byblos alone. Throughout the Bronze Age this city was a virtual dependency of the Egyptian government. It was used as a major export center for local cedar (a precious commodity in Egypt) and other goods. At a certain point the leading families of Byblos were given, or took, Egyptian names and titles and were quite versed in a variety of Egyptian cultural matters. The Egyptians did not generally enjoy this level of influence throughout the region. For a basic overview of the relationship between Egypt and its neighbors during the Bronze Age, see Donald B. Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).

Numbers 6:24–26.[15] This find is important for a number of reasons. First, it definitively verifies a tradition of inscribing sacred texts upon precious metals in Jerusalem at Lehi's time. But even more important, this is the oldest attested quotation of any part of the Pentateuch, demonstrating its existence before the Babylonian captivity. This point, contested by biblical minimalists, is an essential requirement for Lehi to have had the five books of Moses on the brass plates.

Recent smaller finds have also demonstrated that scribes in the region were versed in both Egyptian and Hebrew scripts and occasionally mixed the two (for instance, adopting Egyptian numbers or words). Examples of clerical records, magical spells, and religious texts have been found on both papyri and ostraca ranging from the Bronze Age to the second century BC. These and similar finds are helping to place the reference to "reformed Egyptian" (Mormon 9:32) on the golden plates in its proper historical context and to support the overall historicity of the Book of Mormon.[16] If one is looking for external evidences of the Book of Mormon, it will probably be an accumulation of many small finds, rather than a single inscription or breakthrough archaeological discovery, that will provide the most sound and defensible arguments.

Internal Evidence: Textual versus Ethnographic Approaches

While current Latter-day Saint scholarship seems to be placing increased emphasis on the search for external evidences, another approach, pioneered by Hugh Nibley, seeks to defend the Book of Mormon through internal evidences. Increasingly, however, two

---

15. William J. Adams Jr., "Lehi's Jerusalem and Writing on Metal Plates," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3/1 (1994): 204–6; Dana M. Pike, "Israelite Inscriptions from the Time of Jeremiah and Lehi," in *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem,* ed. John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely, and Jo Ann H. Seely (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004), 76, 213–15.

16. John A. Tvedtnes and Stephen D. Ricks, "Jewish and Other Semitic Texts Written in Egyptian Characters," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5/2 (1996): 156–63. For more on the issue of Egyptian scripts, see John Gee, "Two Notes on Egyptian Script," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5/1 (1996): 162–76.

separate approaches to internal evidences are emerging. One relies on detailed textual and grammatical analysis and brings with it, by necessity, certain strict theories of the origin and translation processes.[17] The other seeks for broader cultural and literary correspondences and does not necessitate the strong ad hoc assumptions about the nature of translation (which is not to say that some authors do not hold them anyway).

Textual School

Early in his career, Nibley pointed to certain literary anomalies in the Book of Mormon (especially in 1 Nephi) that seem to be consistent with its claimed origins.[18] This generated substantial interest in subjecting the work to textual analysis. But it would probably be more accurate to place the genesis of the modern textual school with a 1967 lecture in Germany on ancient biblical poetic forms. The lecture was attended by a young missionary named John Welch. Intrigued by the existence of poetic forms in the Bible, Welch decided to see if these forms (known since the eighteenth century but rarely commented on until the beginning of the twentieth) were also in the Book of Mormon. Many examples of complicated poetic structures, including chiasmus, presented themselves; possibly the most elegant example is found in Alma 36.[19] The use of literary and textual tools to investigate the Book of Mormon has since been embraced by the main Latter-day Saint apologetic circles, including FARMS.

---

17. See, for instance, any of Royal Skousen's works on creating a critical text of the Book of Mormon. For a typical example of the uses of this work, see a recent article: Noel B. Reynolds and Royal Skousen, "Was the Path Nephi Saw 'Strait and Narrow' or 'Straight and Narrow'?" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 10/2 (2001): 30–33; for a response to this argument, see Paul Y. Hoskisson, "Straightening Things Out: The Use of *Strait* and *Straight* in the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12/2 (2003): 58–71.

18. Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert, The World of the Jaredites, There Were Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988).

19. John W. Welch, "A Masterpiece: Alma 36," in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon,* ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1991), 114–31.

While much of the primary research utilizing this approach was conducted previous to our time period, it should be noted that the school is still strong and continues to produce work.[20] In 1997, Kevin L. Barney published an article expanding his previous work on *enallage.* Briefly, enallage is a switch between single and plural tenses for dramatic or poetic effect, a device common in the Old Testament.[21] This work is valuable since most readers who follow the literature are by now aware of parallelism, but some important devices other than enallage have received less attention.

Welch's discovery of chiasmus and the subsequent exploration of other archaic poetic forms has generally been a very positive development in terms of internal evidences. Yet a subjective quality to the reading of any text cannot be avoided. Thus a chiasm may, in some cases, exist more in the eye of its beholder than on the page. Those attempting to use these literary forms in their analyses need to be on constant guard against forced readings. Not every investigator asks questions such as "Is this the sort of place I would logically expect the text to suddenly break into verse?"

A Latter-day Saint Web site purports to have found the "key" to the so-called Davidic Chiasmus (a simple variation of other well-documented forms).[22] The site provides a set of rules whereby readers can find these literary structures for themselves. And find them they do—in both ancient scripture and modern revelation. The fact

---

20. For three recent book-length studies, see Hugh W. Pinnock, *Finding Biblical Hebrew and Other Ancient Literary Forms in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999); John W. Welch, ed., *Chiasmus in Antiquity: Structures, Analyses, Exegesis* (Provo, UT: Research Press, 1999); and Richard Dilworth Rust, *Feasting on the Word: The Literary Testimony of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1997).

21. Kevin L. Barney, "Enallage in the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3/1 (1994): 113–47; and Kevin L. Barney, "Divine Discourse Directed at a Prophet's Posterity in the Plural: Further Light on Enallage," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 6/2 (1997): 229–34; David Bokovoy, "From Distance to Proximity: A Poetic Function of Enallage in the Hebrew Bible and the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9/1 (2000): 60–63.

22. See Jared R. Demke, "Interpretive Key to Understanding the Davidic Pattern: FAQs," ed. Scott L. Vanatter, Davidic Chiasmus and Parallelisms, www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/3500/ (accessed 29 April 2004).

that chiasmus appears to show up in the Doctrine and Covenants has led these individuals to expect it in any document that was partially the product of divine inspiration. Casting even wider nets, they have found the same pattern in dozens of political documents and even in Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" speech. Applying their rules, I have also been able to locate the Davidic Chiasmus in such presumably uninspired works as modern novels and the Manhattan telephone directory (a text that is totally random and can therefore reflect any pattern one cares to project upon it). All of this illustrates the need to set clearer ad hoc guidelines as to what sorts of parallels we are willing to accept as nonspurious. Otherwise, through lax application, the search for ancient poetic and interpretive forms could very well become a Mormon Kabbalah.[23]

Another key is to locate poetic forms arcane enough that Joseph Smith could not just have picked them up by reading the Bible. Barney has located examples of word groups in both the Old Testament and the Book of Mormon. Basically, a word group is formed when related words or concepts are used serially as a rhetorical device to make some central point.[24] As the reader may suspect, this pattern is used frequently in the Book of Mormon. Yet it is simple and obvious enough that it has been picked up in other places as well. For instance, when the British comedy troupe Monty Python wishes to lampoon the Bible (such as the extensive quotation from the *Book of Armament,* chapter 4, provided by Brother Maynard in *Quest for the Holy Grail*), they employ word groups to great comedic effect. Clearly, most Latter-day Saints would be uncomfortable with the assertion that this troupe of off-color comedians is receiving revelation because they are sensitive to the idiosyncrasies of biblical grammatical usage. Interestingly enough, their audience (most

---

23. See John W. Welch, "Criteria for Identifying and Evaluating the Presence of Chiasmus," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14/2 (1995): 1–14.

24. Kevin L. Barney, "Poetic Diction and Parallel Word Pairs in the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 4/2 (1995): 15–81; see John A. Tvedtnes, "Word Groups in the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 6/2 (1997): 262–68; and James T. Duke, "Word Pairs and Distinctive Combinations in the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12/2 (2003): 32–41.

of whom do not read the Bible frequently) is also sensitive enough to this usage to understand the humor. If Joseph Smith grew up immersed in the text of the Bible, one must wonder how much more sensitive to these constructions he would have been. What other ancient poetic forms could he have detected and added to his own vocabulary?

In our zeal to find evidence of ancient poetic forms, we should not set the bar so low that it becomes meaningless in terms of serious apologetics, or even analysis. Not all scholars do this, and many of the structures pointed out by Welch and others are undeniably complex and clearly the product of a conscious authorial effort. Yet these gems can easily become obscured behind a pile of rather weak and dubious examples.

More than other approaches, the textual school also raises the issue of the nature of translation and revelation. If one argues for the historicity of the Book of Mormon based on certain very specific patterns of word usage or grammatical intricacies, one is almost de facto obliged to adopt a direct, word-for-word theory of translation. While providing a theoretical basis for expecting ancient literary forms (thus solving one set of problems), such an approach makes it increasingly difficult to deal with the Isaiah problem and extensive use of New Testament texts (and their theology) in this theoretical framework. Some solutions to these problems, such as those provided for consideration by Blake Ostler, are invalidated by the textual school's basic assumptions.[25]

In addition to complicating matters with regard to the Book of Mormon, a literal theory of translation also complicates our ability to use and talk about the Bible. John Welch, Ann Madsen, and many other Latter-day Saint scholars continue to adhere to a "one Isaiah" position, often reasoning that two out of Isaiah's three parts *must* have been on the brass plates since they are quoted in the Book of Mormon. The idea that the third part (never quoted, along with the late first chapter) must also have been there, or that the same individual wrote and edited all three parts, requires further critical interrogation.[26]

---

25. Blake T. Ostler, "The Book of Mormon as a Modern Expansion of an Ancient Source," *Dialogue* 20/1 (1987): 66–123.

26. For some variations on the textual approach to Isaiah in both a biblical and Book of Mormon context, see Donald W. Parry, *Harmonizing Isaiah: Combining Ancient Sources*

Also elusive is the contention made by some students of the textual school, when writing in other contexts, that the entire Pauline corpus must have been written by Paul, that all the Gospels were written by the stated authors within a few years after Christ's death, or that Moses literally came down off the mountain with the five books of the Torah dictated from the mouth of God. It would appear that overly literal theories of translation and transmission could lead one to make (or reinforce) a group of assertions about the nature of scripture that, while respectable by the standards of seventeenth-century biblical scholarship, must be considered very marginal today. The Isaiah problem is only the tip of the iceberg facing students of the textual school.

Not all approaches to the Book of Mormon as a historical document generate these problems. In fact, it may be possible to deal with multiple authors of the book of Isaiah in purely textual terms.[27] Yet the attitude of retreating behind a fundamentalist posture and refusing to seriously address these problems is disturbing. It is hard to believe that any research would stand up to academic scrutiny if it fails to engage the last hundred years of scholarly thought.

Ethnographic School

True genius is set apart not just by the depth of its understanding but also by the breadth of its reach. It is this later characteristic that truly made Hugh Nibley distinct. While Nibley was among the first to point out the importance of textual forms, he was never fully pulled in that direction. In fact, most of Nibley's efforts went into identifying and discussing unique texts, beliefs, and patterns of behavior found in the Near East and demonstrating how these same general patterns were present in Latter-day Saint scripture. By so doing, he hoped to

---

(Provo, UT: FARMS, 2001); Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch, eds., *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998); John W. Welch, "Authorship of the Book of Isaiah in Light of the Book of Mormon," in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon,* 423–37; Victor L. Ludlow, *Isaiah: Prophet, Seer, and Poet* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982).

27.   One may even be able to muster the academic sources to argue for one Isaiah without turning to the brass plates as a crutch. However, current trends in Isaiah scholarship are making this task increasingly difficult.

date these texts to *at least* the period of late antiquity and hence create a space where rational individuals could allow their faith to grow.

For years this approach has been the main school of Book of Mormon scholarship. Its goals have been modest—to show how the practices, beliefs, and traditions of Lehi's people were congruent with certain modes of life in antiquity. Methodologically, the approach was, and continues to be, the loosest of all the schools discussed. This has led to frequent charges of "parallelomania," not all of which have been unfounded.[28] Yet this same lack of rigor has an advantage in that it does not privilege any single theory of translation.[29]

Many of the most interesting arguments in favor of ancient origins of the Latter-day Saint scriptures have come out of this school. Nibley's work on the accuracy of 1 Nephi from the perspective of desert nomads stands out as one of the first and still most readable products of the field.[30] His later work examining Enoch and Abraham in a pseudepigraphical setting brought superb research skills and a fine argumentative sense to bear on the issue. Current writers strive to hold this torch aloft with varying degrees of success.

Much of the work currently being done by this school does not seem, even on the surface, to be a defense of the Book of Mormon. Rather, it appears and functions as an explanation of some difficult or interesting passage, using the tools of comparative religion. Through the careful employment of these tactics, the average Latter-day Saint may be repeatedly exposed to the idea that the Book of Mormon is a wholly ancient text that can be understood best in terms of other ancient (rather than nineteenth-century) texts without ever realizing that they have been part of an apologetic project. Literally too many books and articles fall into this school to cite them all. Official or quasi-official presses publish

---

28. Douglas F. Salmon, "Parallelomania and the Study of Latter-day Scripture: Confirmation, Coincidence, or the Collective Unconscious?" *Dialogue* 33/2 (2000): 129–56. See William J. Hamblin's review of Salmon's article in "Joseph or Jung? A Response to Douglas Salmon," *FARMS Review of Books* 13/2 (2001): 87–104.

29. It does, by assumption, see the Book of Mormon as an ancient text, though possibly an expanded one.

30. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*.

many of these. Rather than attempt to review all of them, I will mention two works that are relatively indicative of what is available.

The first is S. Kent Brown's book *From Jerusalem to Zarahemla*.[31] Published by the BYU Religious Studies Center in 1998 and intended to offer cultural exegesis on the Book of Mormon, the book also succeeds in conveying a lot of powerful arguments as to its historicity without ever explicitly or obviously addressing this issue. Chapters such as "Recovering the Missing Record of Lehi" and "The Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon" provide interesting internal discussions of the Book of Mormon while almost subconsciously defending the work's historicity. In the final analysis, this sort of work might actually be the most useful to the Latter-day Saint reader, not because it makes the clearest and most defensible apologetic arguments (a project that does not interest most members of the church anyway), but because it conveys enough historical information to substantially improve the quality of an individual's personal scriptural study.

Also in the same general school is *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon,* edited by John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne.[32] This work presents sixty-nine short articles on a variety of both comparative religion and more clearly apologetic topics. While concise, it offers an exceptionally good overview of the developments in Book of Mormon scholarship from 1992 to 1997. The majority of the works presented in this period continued to focus on internal evidences, and many of those pieces were ethnographic in orientation. Yet conversations with scholars in the field lead me to believe that more weight is often put on the textual studies.[33]

---

31. S. Kent Brown, *From Jerusalem to Zarahemla: Literary and Historical Studies of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1998).

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

33. For an example of a more openly apologetic work, see Noel B. Reynolds, ed., *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997). Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch, eds., *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002), summarizes the best evidences and theories in favor of the ancient origins of the Book of Mormon.

While offering new and exciting exegesis is one of the main advantages of this school, it is also capable of both reorienting our most fundamental views of biblical cultures and producing very interesting apologetic arguments. One of the most recent studies attempting to accomplish both of these goals is Daniel C. Peterson's "Nephi and His Asherah."[34] In the previous decades, newly translated texts and archaeological finds have forced a sea change in how preexilic Israel is imagined. One of the most disturbing finds to emerge from this realignment for orthodox scholars is the growing realization that ancient Israel was far from monotheistic, even in the officially sanctioned cult. Instead, there was a hierarchy of Sons of God (possibly symbolized by the menorah),[35] ordered by family relations. The consort of El (God the Father) was a female deity called Asherah. As El's personality was increasingly collapsed into his son's (YHWH), Asherah's role was transformed from mother to wife. Eventually her identity was subsumed as well, making way for modern monotheism. Raphael Patai and others have demonstrated at length how this pattern of belief survived many purges to eventually reemerge in medieval Kabbalah.[36]

The Latter-day Saint community is increasingly becoming aware of these and other radical critiques of ancient Israel through the works of authors outside our tradition, such as Frank Moore Cross, James H. Charlesworth, James L. Kugel, Elaine H. Pagels, and, most recently, Margaret Barker, among others. Barker's arguments about the existence of a second god in ancient Israel, the importance of the early Enoch literature, and the previously unsuspected links between the ancient temple cult and

---

34. Daniel C. Peterson, "Nephi and His Asherah," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9/2 (2000): 16–25. For a more extensive treatment of the subject, see Daniel C. Peterson, "Nephi and His Asherah: A Note on 1 Nephi 11:8–23," in *Mormons, Scripture, and the Ancient World: Studies in Honor of John L. Sorenson,* ed. Davis Bitton (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 191–243.

35. Margaret Barker, *The Gate of Heaven: The History and Symbolism of the Temple in Jerusalem* (London: SPCK, 1991).

36. Raphael Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess,* 3rd ed. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990). See Judith M. Hadley, *The Cult of Asherah in Ancient Israel and Judah: Evidence for a Hebrew Goddess* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

Garden of Eden narrative have been especially well received by the Latter-day Saint academic community in recent years.[37]

Obviously, this radically reformulated (but increasingly well attested) vision of ancient Israel differs from anything available in Joseph Smith's day. Thus one might think that it could prove a potentially devastating critique to the historicity of the Book of Mormon. If Joseph were consciously crafting a vision of ancient Israel, he would almost surely have crafted the wrong one. However, Peterson has shown, through a careful and innovative symbolic analysis of Nephi's vision of the tree of life, that the Book of Mormon actually supports this revised historical view. He goes on to make a convincing argument that the underlying symbolism behind that vision can only be understood in its full richness if we take Asherah's dual aspect as Mother of God and Tree Goddess into account. Without this vital piece of information, it is not clear why a vision of the mother of God would answer Nephi's questions about the meaning of the tree in his father's vision.

While Peterson's argument starts off strong, the reader gets a feeling that some of his later assertions are forced. In fact, this is a common trend in much of the literature in the ethnographic school.[38] Perhaps in our enthusiasm we may impose more weight on our parallels than they can bear. That fact notwithstanding, research that places the Book of

---

37. Margaret Barker, "The Great High Priest," *BYU Studies* 42/3–4 (2003): 65–84; Margaret Barker, *The Great Angel: A Study of Israel's Second God* (Louisville, KY: Knox, 1992); Margaret Barker, *The Lost Prophet: The Book of Enoch and Its Influence on Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1988); and Margaret Barker, *The Older Testament: The Survival of Themes from the Ancient Royal Cult in Sectarian Judaism and Early Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1987). See Kevin Christensen, "The Temple, the Monarchy, and Wisdom: Lehi's World and the Scholarship of Margaret Barker," in *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem,* ed. John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely, and Jo Ann H. Seely (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004), 449–522. Kevin Christensen, "Paradigms Regained: A Survey of Margaret Barker's Scholarship and Its Significance for Mormon Studies," *FARMS Occasional Papers* 2 (2001).

38. For example, this same pattern is also evident in Welch's frequently discussed article comparing Lehi's vision to the Zosimus narrative. This piece begins by offering one of the best literary parallels to a Book of Mormon narrative, then trails off toward the end. See John W. Welch, "The Narrative of Zosimus and the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 22/3 (1982): 311–32.

Mormon within the rapidly emerging picture of the ancient Near East is likely to be valuable both in defending the work's historicity and in providing powerful new exegetical tools for its readers.[39]

The challenge is to place clear ad hoc restrictions on what sorts of cultural or mythic parallels we are willing to accept as nonspurious. After all, parallels can be generated by a variety of pathways. They may be the result of Carl Jung's archetypes, forced readings, or random chance. While these possibilities can never be eliminated, they can be controlled by being clear about what parallels are likely to have been considered substantive by the ancient authors themselves and by specifying why we should expect to see similarities in the first place.

I am also attracted to this school of thought in that it does not pressure scholars to adopt any particular theory of translation and transmission, as the textualist school does. The issues of translation involved here are clearly complicated and beyond the scope of this article. They cut right to the heart of the meaning of religious experience and the phenomenology of language. Until these issues are addressed and solved in some compelling way (a project that may not even be possible), I think we need to bracket these questions rather than build theories based on our assumptions about what the process ought to have been.

Conclusion

This paper has advanced a typology of current Book of Mormon (apologetic) scholarship employed in FARMS and other Brigham Young University circles. Obviously, any typology that sets out to create overly rigid categories is vulnerable to the claim that it does not perfectly account for all subjects. Some may fit in more than one category, while others (hopefully the minority) fall through the cracks completely. Yet the real value of this exercise has been to compare and

---

39. Note, for instance, a recent piece on the Web site of FAIR (Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research). In a 2001 article entitled "Do We Have a Mother in Heaven?" Kevin L. Barney draws on both the ancient Asherah traditions and Peterson's article in defense of the church's modern theological stance on the issue of gender and deity, www.fairlds.org/pubs/MotherInHeaven.pdf (accessed 10 March 2004).

contrast different aspects of a literature that is almost always viewed as a unitary whole. By doing so, I hope to gain traction on the methodological issues that underlie these scholarly efforts, as well as to isolate trends that show the greatest potential.

The work of those who seek external evidences is clearly gaining a prominence in the post-Nibley era that it has not seen in the last fifty years. This movement is being buoyed by the strength of many of the recent finds, particularly the inscribed altars in Yemen. Many Latter-day Saint scholars point to these developments as the first clear external evidence of the Book of Mormon's historicity. It is hard to overstate the impact that these recent discoveries have had on the Book of Mormon community. However, the history of biblical archaeology should teach us to treat such developments with all due caution. Finds that are seen as controversial are all too easily explained away by their opponents; this process is abetted by the incomplete nature of the archaeological record. The seeming enthusiasm with which the "discovery" of the walls of Jericho was received, only to be later discredited by the biblical minimalist school, should serve as a powerful cautionary note. As exciting as the Yemen find is, it is unlikely that a single discovery, if controversial in nature, will gain universal assent.

More likely to advance our cause with the wider scholarly community are the myriad small finds, almost all by archaeologists and historians who are not Latter-day Saints, that are rapidly changing our vision of life in the ancient Near East. Particularly helpful have been the discoveries of inscribed metal scrolls and hybrid writing systems. Inevitably, more material of this sort is waiting to be discovered, and it will only strengthen our case.

Even more promising are the internal evidences that the Book of Mormon offers. The textual school has done a generally excellent job of illustrating the existence of ancient literary forms in the Book of Mormon. The examples of chiasmus from Alma and Mosiah continue to be among the most impressive internal evidences.

Two challenges face the textual school today. The first is to continue to find new and striking patterns that will have as great an impact as those that were uncovered in the 1980s and early 1990s. The

law of diminishing marginal returns indicates that this might not be easy. As I previously noted, word groups are just not as convincing as many of the previous observations in the literature. Second, the textual school seems to mandate some very strong assumptions about the Book of Mormon and how it was translated. Without much effort, these same assumptions can spread to the Bible and lead Latter-day Saint scholars to defend stances that are now the exclusive territory of fundamentalist Protestants and ultraorthodox Jews. Clearly, no apologetic research that is open about these assumptions will even receive a hearing, let alone be accepted, by the wider community. If the textual school wishes to avoid intellectual marginalization and isolation, it must develop ways to seriously confront and deal with the problems posed by those passages in the Book of Mormon that echo texts from Isaiah and the New Testament. Unfortunately, it is not clear that they perceive their isolation as a problem or are interested in taking steps to broaden their potential appeal.

The ethnographic school, founded and championed by Hugh Nibley, cannot point to a single large achievement or discovery on which to rest its laurels—rather, it seeks to situate the Book of Mormon as an ancient document through a slow and steady process of building up literally thousands of parallels with the ancient world. It is more in the traditional Latter-day Saint vein of seeking to open a space for rational belief rather than attempting to "prove" a proposition (an exercise that the current philosophy of the scientific method shows to be impossible anyway). This is not to say that the school has not shown great promise. In fact, it has probably made the most substantial contributions of all. Especially helpful are recent efforts to use the work of Margaret Barker and others to situate the Book of Mormon in the emerging vision of what life in the ancient Near East must actually have been like. Efforts to show the Book of Mormon's compatibility with this world (knowledge of which was totally unavailable to Joseph Smith and his contemporaries) serve both to reinforce the historicity of the work and to provide a powerful new lens for examining its essential message. The recent work of Daniel C. Peterson, John Gee, John A. Tvedtnes,

and others all offer striking new ways of reading the text—even some of its most Christian, nineteenth-century–sounding sections.

The ethnographic school itself is not free from methodological issues. One must specify what cultural parallels are expected in a given place and what sorts of parallels would be significant before conducting any investigation. At a minimum, an ongoing dialogue between theory and empirical investigation must occur. If it does not, it becomes very difficult, if not impossible, to defend a set of correlations against the charge of spuriousness. In fact, it is the lack of such theoretical considerations that has led to the not totally unjustified charge of parallelomania, particularly with regard to Nibley's work.

However, these problems can largely be dealt with through proper research design and a greater sense of perspective when presenting our findings. For instance, rather than simply presenting *all* the parallels between the Book of Moses and the ancient Enoch literature at once,[40] Nibley could have begun with a discussion of Mani's brief review of an *Apocalypse of Enoch* as provided in the Cologne Codex. After seeing which points an ancient reader (like Mani) found significant in the Enoch literature, he would have been in a much stronger position to point out those very same issues and images in the Book of Moses. Suddenly the parallels we find take on meaning, and we are less susceptible to charges of engaging in fishing expeditions and forced readings of the primary texts.

The ethnographic school also has the advantage of not mandating any specific theory of transmission. Thus difficult questions surrounding the nature of translation can be bracketed while the overall study of the Book of Mormon goes forth. In the long run, we can probably expect this school to be the most productive, provided it can resolve some of its pressing methodological issues.

---

40. Hugh Nibley, *Enoch the Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1986).

Abanes's "Revised" History

Michael G. Reed

Not long after the initial publication of *One Nation under Gods,* critics exposed many problems in the book.[1] Abanes has since admitted that such criticisms "proved enlightening" (paperback edition [PB], p. 438) and "raised some thought-provoking issues" (PB, p. 440)—issues that, in fact, persuaded him not only to add a twelve-page postscript (although in order to do so he dropped his original appendixes on Mormon terms and notable Mormons to keep close to his original pagination), but also to make several revisions to his original publication.

---

1. See, for example, the reviews posted by the Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research (FAIR) at www.fairlds.org/apol/onug/ (accessed 5 May 2004) and Zion's Lighthouse Message Board (ZLMB) at p080.ezboard.com/bpacumenispages (accessed 5 May 2004). I will make only a few observations that will both supplement and support other reviews: Kathryn M. Daynes, *Journal of American History* 90/1 (2003): 228–29; D. L. Jorgensen, *CHOICE: Current Reviews for Academic Libraries* 40/3 (2002): 484; and Louis Midgley, "Editor's Introduction: On Caliban Mischief," *FARMS Review* 15/1 (2003): xi–xxxvii.

Having read both editions and having had several conversations with Abanes, I conclude that, although his changes may seem commendable, they are actually superficial. Furthermore, many more problems in the revised paperback edition must be attended to before it can begin to resemble "A History of the Mormon Church," as the book's subtitle proclaims. Unfortunately, addressing all the errors in Abanes's book is not possible in a short essay. An earlier reviewer was right: "A topic-by-topic discussion, looking at the evidence and evaluating it, would require a book as long as the book being reviewed; in fact, it would require more space, because weighing evidence, considering pros and cons, simply cannot be accomplished without a more ample treatment of each issue."[2] I will make only a few observations that will both supplement and support conclusions found in other published reviews.

The Fun and Games of Scapegoats

In the hardback edition, Abanes takes many quotations out of context, two of which appear in a section of chapter 9 titled "America's Fighting Prophet." There he argues that Joseph Smith was the kind of person who would often beat up "individuals who had displeased him in some way." Abanes supports this claim by mentioning Joseph's boasting "about his violent deeds" (hardback edition [HB], p. 178). However, the passage he cites actually refers to the popular recreational sport of stick-pulling: "I feel as strong as a giant. . . . I pulled up with one hand the strongest man that could be found. Then two men tried, but they could not pull me up" (HB, p. 179).[3] Abanes similarly uses a comment from Joseph Smith about a wrestling match: "I wrestled with William Wall, the most expert wrestler in Ramus, and threw him" (HB, p. 178).[4]

---

2. "A Dancer/Journalist's Anti-Mormon Diatribe," *FARMS Review* 15/1 (2003): 264.

3. Abanes introduces this quotation by claiming that "Smith fought and boasted again of his strength" (HB, p. 179). He cites *History of the Church,* 5:466.

4. Citing *History of the Church,* 5:302. My rebuttal to these quotations, however, should not be perceived as a denial that Joseph Smith was involved in fights during his

Even the Mormon critic J. P. Holding[5] notes these misrepresentations: "Abanes attempts to show that Joseph Smith was a temperamental and combative sort; . . . he had used examples of Smith engaging in competitive sport and misplaced them as evidence of a specially combative nature."[6]

How did these errors happen? Abanes defends himself:

> My apparent misappropriation of quotations about Joseph actually is *a result of an editorial error* wherein the quotes about Joseph and his sporting experiences (pulling up sticks) were *juxtaposed with the wrong explanatory comments.* This incorrect positioning of text, as well as other numerous hard cover typos and editorial errors, will be corrected in the soon to be released paperback edition (July/August). Please do compare that edition with the hard bound book. You will see that the quotes remain, but the order of them is inverted and *previously deleted prefacing comments are re-inserted.*[7]

---

lifetime. As Marvin S. Hill observes in the foreword of *The Essential Joseph Smith:* "We know from newspaper accounts and court records that Smith was involved in more than one fight. Yet the evidence is plentiful that he had to be provoked by direct insult before he would resort to violence. We must remember it was customary in this period for direct confrontations and even duels to be fought over personal differences. Andrew Jackson, Henry Clay, and Senator Thomas Hart Benton, to name but three, were involved in duels to protect their honor or public image. Many a frontier preacher took to brawling when heckled from the crowd. This was a rough age by our standards. As for Joseph Smith, we know that he did not relish fighting, that he felt deep remorse over it. He told Allen Stout in Nauvoo on one occasion that he had been too quarrelsome at times, that 'in his youth he had learned to fight much against his will,' and 'whenever he laid his hand in anger on a fellow creature, it gave him sorrow and a feeling of shame.' Apparently Smith sought repentance in this area." Hill continues, "Nonetheless, evidence of his temper does not offset the many examples we have of his general tendency to treat people with courtesy and consideration." *The Essential Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995), xxi–xxii.

5. James P. Holding is the author of *The Mormon Defenders: How Latter-day Saint Apologists Misinterpret the Bible* (self-published, 2001). For a review of this book, see Russell C. McGregor, "The Anti-Mormon Attackers," *FARMS Review* 14/1–2 (2002): 315–19.

6. See J. P. Holding, "Handle with Care: A Review of Richard Abanes' *One Nation under Gods,*" available online at www.tektonics.org/abanesrvw.html (accessed 5 May 2004).

7. Ibid., quoting Abanes, emphasis added.

After making these corrections, Abanes explained to me personally[8] that Robert W. Grover, his editor, was to blame for the quotations that were taken out of context.

This assertion seems questionable for several reasons: (1) The errors conveniently bolster Abanes's thesis that Joseph was a "fighting Prophet." (2) The prepublished "uncorrected proof" of his book does not verify that Abanes had *originally* placed the quotations in their proper context.[9] (3) On the very next page, Abanes attempts to substantiate his view of the Prophet by taking out of context yet another wrestling quotation—an error that he did not correct in his paperback edition.[10] (4) The notion that his editor is responsible for the misrep-

---

8. And then posted comments at p080.ezboard.com/fpacumenispagesfrm64.show Message?topicID=87.topic (accessed 5 May 2004).

9. The context in which these quotations are found in the uncorrected proof (galley) is identical: "Smith would boast about his violent deeds. In the *History of the Church,* for example, under the date March 13, 1843, we find this entry: 'I wrestled with William Wall, the most expert wrestler in Ramus, and threw him.'. . . On June 30, 1843, Smith fought and boasted again of his strength, saying: 'I feel as strong as a giant. . . . I pulled up with one hand the strongest man that could be found. Then two men tried, but they could not pull me up'" (pp. 164–65).

10. According to Abanes, Joseph "used his physical might in ways that had little to do with fun and games. . . . Jedediah M. Grant, a high-ranking LDS leader under Brigham Young, recalled that on one occasion Joseph accosted a Baptist minister for simply doubting that Smith had seen Jesus Christ. According to Grant, Smith hit the preacher and threw him to the ground so violently that the minister 'whirled round a few times, like a duck shot in the head'" (PB, pp. 178, 179). He *hit* the minister? *Nowhere* in the source that Abanes cites did Jedediah Grant claim this. Rather, Grant reports an entirely different scenario: "The Baptist priest who came to see Joseph Smith . . . stood before him, and folding his arms said, 'Is it possible that I now flash my optics upon a Prophet, upon a man who has conversed with my Savior?' 'Yes,' says the Prophet, 'I don't know but you do; would not you like to wrestle with me?' That, you see, brought the priest right on to the thrashing floor, and he turned a summerset right straight. After he had whirled round a few times, like a duck shot in the head . . ." (*Journal of Discourses,* 3:66, 67). It seems that Wandle Mace may be referring to this occasion when he says: "I have been with him [Joseph Smith] at times when approached by a long faced religious stranger who seemed to think it almost a sin to smile, and the prophet should be as cheerless and sedate as himself—challenge some one for a wrestle—to the utter astonishment of the religious stranger, who would be almost shocked at the mention of a wrestle, but would extol Jacob who seemed to be an accomplished wrestler, and also a great favorite with God." *Autobiography of Wandle Mace,* 70, MS 921, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

resentations has been rejected as false: "I did not, and indeed could not, make any editorial cuts to the book," Grover said. A late delivery of the manuscript (less than three months before the planned ship date, which the publisher refused to change) and a lengthy manuscript (about three times the expected page count) meant that he was able "to correct grammatical errors only."[11]

False Equations

Abanes argues in both editions of his book that early leaders of the church taught that Joseph Smith's character was "on par with Jesus Christ's." He substantiates this claim by relying on quotations that declare the Prophet to be the greatest man who "lived upon the face of this earth"[12] and that affirm that no person in the world has had "a better character" (PB, p. 174).[13] In so doing, however, Abanes does not note that the Saints would have understood the existence of an unmentioned qualification within these declarations. Brigham Young, for instance, declares: "I do not think that a man lives on the earth that knew [Joseph] any better than I did; and I am bold to say that, *Jesus Christ excepted,* no better man ever lived or does live upon this earth."[14] George Q. Cannon qualifies his proclamation that Joseph was the greatest prophet that "ever stood before God upon the earth" by adding the phrase "*excepting the Lord Jesus Christ.*"[15] Concurring with this distinction, Wilford Woodruff declares: "No greater prophet than Joseph Smith ever lived on the face of the earth *save Jesus Christ.*"[16] The Doctrine and Covenants contains John Taylor's declaration that the Prophet Joseph Smith did more, "*save Jesus only,* for the salvation of men in this world, than any other man that ever lived in it" (D&C 135:3).

---

11. Robert W. Grover, e-mail to Michael G. Reed, 28 April 2004.
12. Citing Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses,* 1:41.
13. Citing Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses,* 14:203.
14. *Journal of Discourses,* 9:332, emphasis added.
15. *Journal of Discourses,* 11:31, emphasis added.
16. *Journal of Discourses,* 21:317, emphasis added.

Abanes likewise turns a blind eye to the fact that Joseph himself understood his own imperfections and that he was subordinate to Jesus:

> I never told you I was perfect.[17]

> I told them I was but a man, and they must not expect me to be perfect; if they expected perfection from me, I should expect it from them; but if they would bear with my infirmities and the infirmities of the brethren, I would likewise bear with their infirmities.[18]

> None ever were perfect but Jesus; and why was He perfect? Because He was the Son of God, and had the fullness of the Spirit, and greater power than any man.[19]

> Who, among all the Saints in these last days, can consider himself as good as our Lord? Who is as perfect? Who is as pure? Who is as holy as He was? Are they to be found? He never transgressed or broke a commandment or law of heaven—no deceit was in His mouth, neither was guile found in His heart. . . . Where is one like Christ? He cannot be found on earth.[20]

> I do not, nor never have, pretended to be any other than a man "subject to passion," and liable, without the assisting grace of the Savior, to deviate from that perfect path in which all men are commanded to walk![21]

> Although I was called of my Heavenly Father to lay the foundation of this great work and kingdom in this dispensation, and testify of His revealed will to scattered Israel, I am subject to like passions as other men, like the prophets of olden times.[22]

---

17. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith,* comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 368.

18. *History of the Church,* 5:181.

19. *History of the Church,* 4:358.

20. *History of the Church,* 2:23.

21. *Messenger and Advocate* 1 (December 1834): 40.

22. *History of the Church,* 5:516.

The Latter-day Saints also understood that Joseph Smith had imperfections:

> Now, was not Joseph Smith a mortal man? Yes. A fallible man? Yes. Had he not weaknesses? Yes, he acknowledged them himself, and did not fail to put the revelations on record in this book [the Book of Doctrine and Covenants] wherein God reproved him. His weaknesses were not concealed from the people. He was willing that people should know that he was mortal, and had failings.[23]

> I thanked God that He would put upon a man who had those imperfections the power and authority He placed upon him . . . for I knew that I myself had weakness, and I thought there was a chance for me.[24]

> [I] knew all the time that Joseph was a human being and subject to err.[25]

> And just such phases to a degree have I witnessed in the life and character of our great Prophet, who stood in the presence of both the Father and the Son and personally conversed with them both, being often visited by holy angels, while continually receiving by revelation the word of the Lord to his people. And yet he was altogether of "like passions with his brethren and associates."[26]

Latter-day Saints understand that Joseph Smith, Brigham Young,[27] or any other servant who has been called to lead Christ's church is

---

23. George Q. Cannon, in *Journal of Discourses,* 24:274. See Doctrine and Covenants 3:3–9 for an example of the Prophet being reproved.

24. Lorenzo Snow, quoted in Neal A. Maxwell, "Out of Obscurity," *Ensign,* November 1984, 10.

25. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses,* 4:297.

26. Benjamin F. Johnson, "Patriarch Benjamin F. Johnson's Letter to Elder George F. Gibbs: Johnson Tells of His Close Association with the Prophet Joseph Smith," *Doctrine of the Priesthood* 7/5 (1990): 4.

27. Abanes continues: "Eventually Young came to be viewed as practically a god on earth to the Saints" (PB, p. 222).

subordinate to the Savior. For those who have acquired an understanding of the faith of the Saints, this should go without saying.

In the hardback edition of *One Nation under Gods,* while attempting to expose the Saints' veneration of Joseph Smith "as a god" (HB, p. 175), Abanes inadvertently changes the meaning of a statement made by Brigham Young. "Brigham Young, for instance," according to Abanes, "warned that no one would ever get into God's celestial kingdom 'without the consent of Joseph Smith. . . . He reigns there as supreme a being in his sphere, capacity, and calling, as God does in heaven'" (HB, p. 175).[28] But Brigham Young was merely teaching that Joseph Smith, as head of a dispensation, holds keys necessary for us to enter into the celestial kingdom.[29] Abanes uses the elision to create the false impression that Brigham Young was equating Joseph Smith's status in the celestial kingdom with God's. When Brigham Young declared that Joseph "reigns *there* as supreme a being in his sphere," the "there" spoken of was not the celestial kingdom, but, rather, the spirit world.[30] Brigham Young's parallel, therefore, would no more have equated Joseph's status to God's than the apostle Paul's statement would have equated the status of husbands to Jesus Christ's: "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body" (Ephesians 5:23).

---

28.   Citing *Journal of Discourses,* 7:289.

29.   "Joseph Smith holds the keys of this last dispensation, and is now engaged behind the vail in the great work of the last days." Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses,* 7:289. "I bear this testimony this day, that Joseph Smith was and is a Prophet, Seer, and Revelator—an Apostle holding the keys of this last dispensation and of the kingdom of God, under Peter, James, and John. And not only that he was a Prophet and Apostle of Jesus Christ, and lived and died one, but that he now lives in the spirit world, and holds those same keys to usward and to this whole generation. Also that he will hold those keys to all eternity; and no power in heaven or on the earth will ever take them from him; for he will continue holding those keys through all eternity, and will stand—yes, again in the flesh upon this earth, as the head of the Latter-day Saints under Jesus Christ, and under Peter, James, and John. He will hold the keys to judge the generation to whom he was sent, and will judge my brethren that preside over me; and will judge me, together with the Apostles ordained by the word of the Lord through him and under his administration." Parley P. Pratt, in *Journal of Discourses,* 5:195–96.

30.   Within the text replaced with ellipses, Brigham Young indicates where Joseph Smith reigns: "He holds the keys of that kingdom for the last dispensation—the keys to rule in the spirit-world; and he rules there triumphantly." *Journal of Discourses,* 7:289.

Having had this pointed out to him, Abanes nevertheless continues to insist that he did not misrepresent President Brigham Young. "Where is the celestial kingdom??????" Abanes asks. "Answer: In the spirit world. . . . [He rules] 'in the spirit world'—i.e., celestial kingdom."[31] Abanes prides himself on being a "highly regarded authority on cults"[32] but did not seem, at least originally, to understand the distinction between the spirit world and the celestial kingdom. In his paperback edition, Abanes makes the wise decision to give Brigham Young's quotation in its entirety. However, he does not clarify the difference between these two postmortal realms by providing an explanatory footnote.

I believe that one final false equation, which is central to the book's thesis, should not be overlooked—this one is so pervasively laced throughout Abanes's publication that the book's very title celebrates it. Abanes believes that "LDS leadership has not yet given up on its long-held dream of taking over the U.S. government (and the world) should the opportunity ever present itself" (PB, p. xvii). Latter-day Saints believe "that they were divinely chosen vessels destined to rule the earth *along with Christ* during his millennial reign" (PB, p. 95) and that "in the end, the Mormons would come out as the sole rulers over every other government" (PB, p. 266). "Mormons saw themselves as the only legitimate rulers of the United States and the world" (PB, p. 336). "Will The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints ever. . . ascend to the place of pre-eminence over America, and eventually the world, as Joseph Smith prophesied? Brigham Young thought so, as did every other nineteenth century Mormon, especially LDS leaders. Throughout the twentieth, and now into the twenty-first century, the belief has continued to be an integral part of Mormonism" (PB, p. 434). "What would such a scenario mean for America? Continued freedom? Greater liberty and prosperity? Widespread pluralism? Perhaps not. . . . That question, of course, will have to be answered in years to come" (PB, p. 436). His claims that the Saints are convinced that they are destined to "one day enjoy global

---

31. See pub26.ezboard.com/fpacumenispagesfrm58.showMessage?topicID=97.topic (accessed 5 May 2004).

32. See front cover flap of hardback edition.

domination" (PB, p. xviii) blurs Latter-day Saint doctrine and falsely equates the Church of Jesus Christ with the kingdom of God.

> To these gods in the making, America's day of doom has always been just around the proverbial corner, right along with the realization of their grandiose vision. Celebrated Mormon historian B. H. Roberts put the Latter-day Saint vision of America's future in even starker terms, saying: "[T]he kingdom of God . . . is to be a political institution that shall hold sway over all the earth; to which all other governments will be subordinate and by which they will be dominated." (PB, pp. xviii–xix [pages misnumbered])[33]

To look at this quotation in context, Roberts explains in *The Rise and Fall of Nauvoo* that "it is proper for the reader to know that Joseph Smith[,] when speaking strictly[,] recognized a distinction between 'The Church of Jesus Christ' and the 'Kingdom of God.' And not only a distinction[,] but a separation of one from the other." Abanes quotes Roberts that "the Kingdom of God . . . is to be a political institution that shall hold sway over all the earth; to which all other governments will be subordinate and by which they will be dominated." However, Roberts further says:

> While all governments are to be in subjection to the Kingdom of God, it does not follow that all its members will be of one religious faith. The Kingdom of God is not necessarily made up exclusively of members of the Church of Christ. In fact the Prophet taught that men not members of The Church could be, not only members of that Kingdom, but also officers within it. It is to grant the widest religious toleration, though exacting homage and loyalty to its great Head [Jesus Christ], to its institutions, and obedience to its laws.[34]

---

33. Quoting B. H. Roberts, *The Rise and Fall of Nauvoo* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1900), 180.

34. Ibid.

Why doesn't Abanes provide this information that Roberts believed was "proper for the reader to know"? Was he so blinded by his own agenda that he overlooked Roberts's distinction? Does Abanes simply not want to tell his readers since doing so would undermine the conclusion toward which he is leading them? Or is he unaware of the distinction because he is actually quoting from a secondary (perhaps anti-Mormon) source? Whatever the answer, any one of the above possibilities casts doubt upon Abanes's ability to draw an "objective sketch" of Mormonism (PB, p. x).[35]

Conclusion

One Nation under Gods is *not* a "history," despite what the title may claim. The publication does not meet the basic standards of scholarship. Abanes repeats the same sensational distortions as the anti-Mormon sources and writers who have preceded him and faithfully employs their faulty methodology. Although Abanes has made a few corrections in his paperback edition, readers looking for a "history of the Mormon Church" should look elsewhere.

---

35. See also Allen L. Wyatt, "Chapter 10, A New Beginning: Brigham and the Kingdom of God," available online at www.fairlds.org/apol/onug/pg222b.html (accessed 5 May 2004).

Sally Denton's *American Massacre:* Authentic Mormon Past versus the Danite Interpretation of History

Robert H. Briggs

In 1950 Juanita Brooks authored her now-classic history, *The Mountain Meadows Massacre.*[1] In 1962 she published a revised edition and in 1970 added a new introduction, correcting minor errors and offering refinements in her views. Then in 1976 William Wise wrote *Massacre at Mountain Meadows.*[2] But Wise was not up to the challenge of this daunting historiographical problem. Based largely on secondary sources and full of stock heroes and villains from the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century anti-Mormon Danite genre, *Massacre at Mountain Meadows* could not boast of nuance, rigor, or sophistication in its treatment of sources. It is among the worst of the twentieth-century treatments of the massacre.

---

1. Juanita Brooks, *The Mountain Meadows Massacre* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1950).

2. William Wise, *Massacre at Mountain Meadows: An American Legend and a Monumental Crime* (New York: Crowell, 1976).

Review of Sally Denton. *American Massacre: The Tragedy at Mountain Meadows, September 1857.* New York: Knopf, 2003. xxiii + 306 pp., with bibliography and index. $26.95.

In 2002 Will Bagley published *Blood of the Prophets: Brigham Young and the Massacre at Mountain Meadows*.[3] Although Bagley's work was flawed by his jaundiced view of Brigham Young and an inconsistent interpretive framework, it at least had the advantage of his familiarity with the primary sources of the massacre and with Utah and Western history generally. Now Sally Denton offers us *American Massacre: The Tragedy at Mountain Meadows, September 1857.* Just as Wise borrowed heavily from Brooks, so, too, does Denton borrow from Bagley, R. Kent Fielding, and others who have written recent treatments of frontier Utah. Mostly, however, she relies on the old counter-Mormon literature. Unfortunately, Sally Denton's *American Massacre* has done little to advance our understanding of the massacre or its many challenging historiographical problems.

Organization and Content

American Massacre is divided into a prologue, three parts, and an epilogue. The first part deals with the founding and growth of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The second traces the 1857 passage of the Fancher train through frontier Utah at the outbreak of the Utah War to the bloody massacre at Mountain Meadows in southern Utah Territory. The third treats events after the massacre: the settlement of the Utah War, the government investigations in the late 1850s, and the trial, conviction, and execution of John D. Lee in the 1870s. The brief epilogue sketches the impact of the massacre on such figures as Mormon leader Brigham Young, perpetrator John D. Lee, mediator Thomas Kane, Judge John Cradlebaugh, and survivor Sarah Dunlap. It concludes with the discovery of human bones during repairs to the cairn monument in 1999, with some observations on contemporary issues concerning the massacre site.

In part 1, "The Gathering," Denton describes Joseph Smith and the religious movement he founded. She traces the progress of the church from New York to Kirtland, Ohio, and then to Jackson County, Mis-

---

3. Will Bagley, *Blood of the Prophets: Brigham Young and the Massacre at Mountain Meadows* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002).

souri. Denton follows the well-trod history of the growth of the church, the gathering of the faithful into centralized locations, the clashes with old settlers and detractors, the death of the prophet-leader Joseph Smith, and the beginning of the western exodus under Brigham Young to the Great Basin of the American West. She leaves off with the Gunnison massacre of 1853 on the Sevier River in central Utah.

Denton's discussion of Joseph Smith is influenced by the controversial psychoanalytical methods of Fawn M. Brodie and Robert D. Anderson.[4] She seems unaware of the weakness in these psychoanalytical approaches or in psychiatry's efforts to regain its scientific footing by distancing itself from the excessive claims of Freudian analysis in its early history.[5]

Denton also relies heavily on the work of R. Kent Fielding, whose 1993 study, *The Unsolicited Chronicler,*[6] argues for Mormon involvement in the deaths of John W. Gunnison, his Mormon guide, and six members of Gunnison's survey party in central Utah. In her acknowledgments, Denton lists Fielding first and acknowledges her special debt to him. She cites the Fieldings' works, *The Unsolicited Chronicler* and *The Tribune Reports of the Trials of John D. Lee,*[7] some seventy times, more than David Bigler and Will Bagley combined. Again,

---

4. The editions Denton consulted were Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet,* 2nd ed. (New York: Knopf, 1971), and Robert D. Anderson, *Inside the Mind of Joseph Smith: Psychobiography and the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1999).

5. See the discussion of Robert D. Anderson's study in Michael D. Jibson, "Korihor Speaks, or the Misinterpretation of Dreams," *FARMS Review of Books* 14/1–2 (2002): 223–60.

6. Robert K. Fielding, *The Unsolicited Chronicler: An Account of the Gunnison Massacre, Its Causes and Consequences, Utah Territory, 1847–1859: A Narrative History* (Brookline, MA: Paradigm, 1993).

7. Robert K. Fielding and Dorothy S. Fielding, eds., *The Tribune Reports of the Trials of John D. Lee for the Massacre at Mountain Meadows, November, 1847–April, 1877* (Higganum, CT: Kent's Books, 2000). The Fieldings' book is engrossing, although not for the reasons Denton favors. The *Tribune Reports* grant a revealing view of the extremes of anti-Mormon prejudice in frontier Utah. In our current era of relative civility and tolerance, the blatantly anti-Mormon stance of the nineteenth-century *Salt Lake Daily Tribune* is jolting. The prejudices of some in Protestant America of that era—whether anti-Catholic, anti-Semitic, or anti-Mormon—were extremely virulent.

Denton seems unaware of the controversial nature of Fielding's Gunnison massacre thesis or that it represents a minority view among Western historians.[8] She relies heavily on Fielding for her interpretation of both the Gunnison and Mountain Meadows massacres.

Continuing her synthesis of questionable or controversial secondary sources, Denton argues in part 2, "The Passage," that the "heart" of the Mormon reformation was "the revival of blood atonement" (p. 106). However, there is stronger evidence that the heart of the reformation was instead personal reformation, communal economic innovations, and a dramatic increase in the number of those entering plural marriage. Having introduced her readers to "Danite chief Bill Hickman" (p. 81), Denton henceforth conflates every other Mormon marshal, militiaman, or church official into a "Danite." Thus she identifies Anson Call as a Danite (p. 85), she cites the alleged work of Brigham Young's "Avenging Angels" (p. 106), and she claims that federal officials could not challenge the "vigilante tactics of the Danites" (p. 108). She describes John D. Lee's "status with the Danites" in southern Utah (p. 154) and presents the Nauvoo Legion's tactical repulse of Colonel Johnston's Utah expeditionary force in eastern Utah as "the Danites [burning] Fort Bridger" and "forty-four Danites [raiding] an army supply train" (p. 168). When in summer 1858 the Latter-day Saints returned to Great Salt Lake City from the "Move South," Denton maintains that Brigham Young "surrounded

---

8. The consensus view of the Gunnison massacre is that Gunnison's government surveying party was attacked and killed near the Sevier River in central Utah by a party from the Pahvant band of the Ute tribe in retaliation for the deaths of their fellow tribesmen killed earlier by a passing emigrant train. A detailed article is Josiah F. Gibbs, "Gunnison Massacre—1853—Millard County, Utah—Indian Mareer's Version of the Tragedy—1894," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 1/3 (1928): 67–75. Standard treatments are found in Robert V. Hine, "Kern Brothers: Edward Meyer (1823–63) and Richard Hovendon (1821–53)" and Richard A. Bartlett, "Transcontinental Railroad Surveys," in *The New Encyclopedia of the American West,* ed. Howard R. Lamar (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 593, 1120; and Brigham D. Madsen, "John Williams Gunnison," in *Utah History Encyclopedia,* ed. Allan K. Powell (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1994), 241. Will Bagley does not credit the accusation of Mormon involvement; see Bagley, *Blood of the Prophets,* 44–45; and David Bigler concludes, "there is no convincing evidence or motive for such involvement." David L. Bigler, *Forgotten Kingdom: The Mormon Theocracy in the American West, 1847–1896* (Spokane: Clark, 1998), 83.

his properties with Danites" (p. 184). Describing Amasa Lyman as "devout and kindhearted," Denton says further that Lyman was "a high priest, apostle, and Danite since the early days at Kirtland" (p. 212). She notes that Lyman urged participants in the massacre to make "'full confession and take the consequences.'" Then, dramatically, she concludes: "[Lyman] would be excommunicated" (p. 212). This juxtaposition insinuates that Lyman's observations about the massacre may have cost him his church membership. Of course, it was his dalliance in spiritualism and other matters, not Mountain Meadows, that led to Lyman's excommunication.[9] Seeing Danites everywhere, it is only a small step for Denton to conclude that the Mountain Meadows massacre was the work of Mormon Danites under orders of the Mormon prophet Brigham Young.

In part 3, "The Legacy," Denton narrates the two-decade period from the massacre through the conviction and execution of John D. Lee. Borrowing again from Fielding and Bagley, she analyzes the massacre. Then returning to surer ground, Denton describes the events of 1858, including the work of Thomas L. Kane as mediator of the Washington-Mormon disputes, the appointment of peace commissioners, and the presidential pardon and resolution of the Utah War. By 1859, the influx of government officials and soldiers temporarily energized the massacre investigation. Denton describes the work of Judge John Cradlebaugh, Utah Indian Superintendent Jacob Forney, U.S. Army Captains James Lynch and Reuben P. Campbell, Army surgeon Dr. Charles Brewer, and U.S. Marshal William Rogers, who in the course of their duties acquired information concerning the massacre and left reports or correspondence later collected in important government documents. During most of the 1860s the overriding governmental preoccupation was, of course, the Civil War and its aftermath. Meanwhile, in 1861 Mark Twain described the massacre in *Roughing It*. In the mid-1860s, disaffected Mormon Charles Wandell, using the pseudonym Argus, published an exposé of the massacre in the *Utah Reporter* and loudly

---

9. Ronald W. Walker, "When the Spirits Did Abound: Nineteenth-Century Utah's Encounter with Free-Thought Radicalism," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 50/4 (1982): 314–15, 318, 321.

queried why the perpetrators had not been prosecuted. As the 1860s gave way to the 1870s, wealthy Mormon William Godbe formed the Godbeite group. After his excommunication from the Church of Jesus Christ, Godbe started the *Mormon Tribune,* which later became the *Salt Lake Daily Tribune.* Eventually sold to gentile interests in Salt Lake City, the *Daily Tribune* became the mouthpiece for the most vocal and strident of the anti-Mormons in Utah.

Meanwhile, in 1870 Brigham Young excommunicated John D. Lee, who moved with his remaining families to Lonely Dell at the confluence of the Paria and Colorado rivers in northern Arizona. Hoping to escape notice, Lee plied his ferry trade on the Colorado. But in 1871 Philip Klingensmith, the former Mormon bishop in Cedar City and a massacre participant, provided an affidavit to court officials in Pioche, Nevada, that was leaked to the press and widely circulated in 1872. This and other events rekindled interest in prosecuting massacre perpetrators. Passage of the Poland Act in 1874 strengthened the jurisdiction of federal courts in Utah. Sitting in the second district court in Beaver, Judge Jacob Boreman's grand jury issued an indictment for murder against nine alleged perpetrators. The leading defendants were William H. Dame, Isaac C. Haight, John M. Higbee, Philip Klingensmith, John D. Lee, and William Stewart.

Denton closes with the two trials of John D. Lee. The first, which took place in summer 1875, concluded in a hung jury, nine to three for acquittal. For the second trial in 1876, Sumner Howard had replaced William Carey as U.S. attorney in Utah Territory. In a controversial move, Howard sought Mormon cooperation in obtaining new witnesses to overcome the weaknesses of the prosecution's case in the first trial. With introductions from Mormon leadership, Howard interviewed Mormon wagon drivers Samuel Knight and Samuel McMurdy and Indian interpreter Nephi Johnson, all of whom had been at the massacre and near Lee. At the second trial in September 1876, Howard presented a lean but focused case, calling these witnesses as well as Jacob Hamblin who, while not at the massacre, had an interview with Lee some days after it. Lee's defense lawyers were not able to shake the prosecution witnesses nor did they call any witnesses of their own in rebuttal. The jury convicted Lee of first-degree murder, and Judge

Boreman sentenced Lee to death. Lee chose the option of dying by firing squad. After his legal appeals and request for clemency were denied, Lee was executed at Mountain Meadows on 23 March 1877.

Denton, like Bagley, argues that there was a corrupt "deal" between the U.S. attorney for Utah and the Mormon prophet. According to this argument, the quid pro quo in the corrupt bargain was Mormon guarantees of a conviction of John D. Lee in exchange for federal prosecutor guarantees that further Mountain Meadows prosecutions would be dropped. This argument is entirely circumstantial, while the countervailing evidence is the little-known, behind-the-scenes efforts of Howard, Judge Boreman, and others to pursue prosecution of massacre defendants and fugitives from justice—Isaac Haight, John Higbee, and William Stewart.[10] But as Congress never approved the funding requests from Utah officials, the fugitives were never captured. Besides, the nation was pursuing an impassioned antipolygamy crusade against the Mormon leadership. In 1877, after the deaths of Brigham Young and George A. Smith, there was more bang for the congressional buck in antipolygamy measures than in Mountain Meadows prosecutions. Thus, as federal antipolygamy efforts and funding increased, Mountain Meadows prosecutions declined correspondingly. The public soon lost interest.

This third part is not without its shortcomings—examples include Denton's faulty massacre analysis in chapter 11 and her theory of a corrupt "deal" between Howard and Young in chapter 15. Yet this section is better than either of the first two since the errors of fact and interpretation are less frequent and less glaring. Additionally, while still demonstrating her considerable skills at synthesis and prose style, Denton shows that she can approach balance and evenhandedness in treating the Mormon past, if not actually achieving it. Here at least, the Danite interpretation of Latter-day Saint history is less apparent.

---

10. At the time of Lee's second trial in September 1876, the prosecutors agreed not to prosecute Philip Klingensmith and William H. Dame. The trial transcripts and legal pleadings in the two trials of John D. Lee are in HM 16904, Jacob Boreman Collection, Mormon Americana Collection, The Huntington Library, Art Collections and Botanical Gardens, San Marino, CA.

Evaluation

Denton tells a rip-roaring tale with both economy and color. She also shows skill in synthesizing secondary sources. With better knowledge of her sources and more care in interpreting them, she could be a skillful popularizer. Although she interjects the opinions of past writers on the massacre far too often—quoting, for example, Stenhouse, Gibbs, Brooks, Wise, Fielding, Quinn, Bigler, and Bagley at excessive length—she organizes her sources and maintains a coherent narrative thread. How, then, did her project miscarry so badly?

Denton's book is marred by errors of fact and interpretation too numerous to list. These difficulties mostly stem from Denton's uncritical use of sources. The book's shortcomings can be thus summarized:

• Of the many eyewitnesses to the massacre, John D. Lee is relied upon almost exclusively.

• Lee's views and opinions on militia aims, means, and motives need counterbalancing, yet there are virtually no references to other militia eyewitnesses.

• A critical method for interpreting the John D. Lee accounts (or any others) is lacking.

• Heavy reliance is placed on secondary sources and on counter-Mormon sources from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

• There is no discernible method or effort to distinguish between evidence (eyewitness accounts in primary sources) and rumor (e.g., in the works of the Stenhouses and the *Salt Lake Daily Tribune,* etc.).

Reliable Sources

Denton cites sources by or about John D. Lee more than one hundred thirty times.[11] Besides Lee, the only other perpetrator accounts

---

11. The five Lee sources upon which Denton relies are John D. Lee, *Mormonism Unveiled; Including the Remarkable Life and Confessions of the Late Mormon Bishop John D. Lee; (written by himself) and Complete Life of Brigham Young* (St. Louis: Vandawalker, 1891; reprint, Albuquerque: Fierra Blanca, 2001); *Journals of John D. Lee, 1846–47 and 1859,* ed. Charles Kelly (1955; reprint, Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1984); Robert G. Cleland and Juanita Brooks, eds., *A Mormon Chronicle: The Diaries of John D. Lee, 1848–1876*

she mentions are those of former Mormon bishop Philip Klingen-smith, whom she cites seven times. Are these sources sufficient? Since the human enterprise we call "writing history" condenses the complexity of the past, is the "history" (the narrative account) representative of the "past" (the actual complex of events and actors) under consideration? Specifically, is Denton's narrative synthesis representative of the authentic source material?

I have provided an appendix listing key primary sources. Before the reader forms his or her opinion, consider the extent of the sources listed there. These were witnesses to events surrounding the massacre or to important episodes in its aftermath. Most are militiamen of the Iron Military District in southern Utah. What the appendix shows is that, besides John D. Lee, more than sixty additional witnesses provide approximately eighty-five additional primary documents, very few of which Sally Denton considers in her study. On this ground alone, Denton's treatment of the massacre is inadequate.

Reliable Methods of Interpretation

To be sure, John D. Lee is an important source, and his statements should be considered in reconstructing the massacre. By Lee's own account, he played a central role in the deadly affair. But Denton does not address the obvious question about the reliability of Lee's accounts: After Lee's 1876 murder conviction branded him the most notorious mass murderer in the nineteenth-century American West, wouldn't he logically be tempted to shade his account to justify his own conduct or deflect blame to others? Put another way, how reliable are the accounts of John D. Lee?

In evaluating John D. Lee and every other witness or alleged perpetrator at Mountain Meadows, one should require verification of details from other reliable sources. Next, as I have argued elsewhere,[12] close

(Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1983); Juanita Brooks, *John Doyle Lee: Zealot, Pioneer Builder, Scapegoat* (1973; reprint, Logan: Utah State University Press, 1992); and *Writings of John D. Lee,* ed. Samuel N. Henrie (Tucson: Hats Off Books, 2001).

12. Robert H. Briggs, "Wrestling Brigham," review of *Blood of the Prophets: Brigham Young and the Massacre at Mountain Meadows,* by Will Bagley, *Sunstone,* December 2002,

analysis of the text of the perpetrator or witness narratives shows that they are composed of different elements, some of which are more reliable than others. Among the perpetrators of the massacre, their narrative accounts are a form of apologia—verbal accounts structured as a defense or justification. Many of the accounts have one or more main thematic points whose function is to excuse or justify the narrator. These are sustained by subsidiary themes supporting the main themes.

To a surprising degree, however, many of the accounts contain a second component, elements that admit or confess to participation in crime. Both common sense and the common and statutory law of many jurisdictions interpret such statements in this light: individuals would not make such admissions against their personal interests unless they were true. Thus, given the improbability that a militiaman would make such a confession unless it was true, these statements are reliable, especially when independently verified.

The militia statements also contain a third element, "incidental detail." These are elements in the narrative that are neither part of the defense nor of the (possibly unintended) confessions, about which each narrator would have "no reason to lie." When independently verified from other sources, these elements are likely reliable. Thus within each militia statement we may find elements of varying degrees of veracity. The most reliable element is a confession or admission of criminal involvement. The next most reliable element is incidental details, particularly when independently verified. The least reliable is the apologia itself with its evasions, denials, and excuses.

If we impose the requirement of verification or corroboration on these categories, it yields a useful hierarchy of reliability that we can apply to perpetrator and witness accounts alike. Elements of a statement can be ranked from lesser to greater reliability as follows:

62–65; a longer version, "Mountain Meadows and the Craft of History," was previously available online at www.sunstoneonline.com.

1. Accusations against others, uncorroborated
2. Incidental detail, uncorroborated
3. Confessions, uncorroborated
4. Accusations against others corroborated by other reliable evidence
5. Incidental detail corroborated by other reliable evidence
6. Confessions corroborated by other reliable evidence

As a general rule, then, if one confesses his or her personal involvement in crime and the involvement is verified by others, it is trustworthy. Similarly, incidental detail (things about which there is no reason to lie), when verified by others, is also reliable.

Consider the example of John D. Lee's account as contained in *Mormonism Unveiled,* the posthumous work edited and published by his lead defense lawyer, William W. Bishop, upon which Denton relies so heavily. For this discussion I will operate under the assumption that John D. Lee authored the manuscript on which the first edition of *Mormonism Unveiled*[13] was based and that it substantially conforms to Lee's (now lost) manuscript. However, readers should be aware that even with the original 1877 *Mormonism Unveiled,* there are lingering concerns about the reliability of the text because of possible editorial changes made to Lee's manuscript by Bishop or possibly other editorial hands. Thus Samuel Nyal Henrie argues that after Lee's death, "his manuscripts were sent to a St. Louis publisher who padded them with anti-Mormon introductions, commentaries, interpolations and appendices. His last writings, which were intended only to recover some of his reputation by telling the true story, were instead propagated in the Midwest and East under an unauthorized title, *MORMONISM UNVEILED.*"[14] Concerns about later editions, including the 1891 edition upon which Denton relies, are magnified because of interpolations in these later editions.

---

13. John D. Lee, *Mormonism Unveiled, or the Life and Confessions of the Late Mormon Bishop John D. Lee* (St. Louis: Bryan, Brand, 1877).

14. *Writings of John D. Lee,* 6.

With this caveat in mind, we turn to *Mormonism Unveiled*.[15] The John D. Lee of *Mormonism Unveiled* presents an apologia consisting of defenses, self-justifications, and accusations against others. But the book also contains confessions and intriguing incidental details. *Mormonism Unveiled* and the 1877 Lee-Howard statement contain admissions of John D. Lee that focus on his own role before, during, and after the massacre, among which are these:

• Lee considered that killing the Arkansas company was in keeping with his religious vows.

• In a militia planning meeting in Cedar City, Lee discussed plans for an attack on the emigrant company with fellow militia major, Isaac Haight.

• Following that meeting and while en route to his home at Fort Harmony, Lee told Paiutes bound for the Mountain Meadows that he would meet them there and lead them.

• He conveyed orders to other militiamen to send Paiutes to the Meadows.

• On the day of the first attack, Monday, 7 September 1857, Lee was the only white man present.

• In one incident that day, Lee was so close to the fighting that he was shot through his shirt and hat.

• He had multiple interactions with the Indians during the week.

---

15. One thing that makes the Mountain Meadows massacre so difficult for Latter-day Saints to discuss even today is that it is still amazingly divisive *within* the LDS community. It is the closest thing we have to a family feud. There are still strong partisan positions among the descendants of Brigham Young, George A. Smith, Isaac C. Haight, John D. Lee, Jacob Hamblin, Samuel Knight, Samuel McMurdy, and Nephi Johnson, to name only a few. Each of these individuals now has thousands of descendants. The descendants of the much-married John D. Lee probably now number in the tens of thousands, many of whom are faithful members of the Church of Jesus Christ. In discussing the motives and actions of John D. Lee as contained in *Mormonism Unveiled* and the Lee-Howard statement, I do so to illustrate the results that can be obtained by applying a rigorous method that distinguishes between confession, incidental detail, and exculpatory statement. I do not mean to cause pain to Lee's descendants, although I appreciate that the process may be painful nonetheless. But since *Mormonism Unveiled* forms a key part of Denton's *American Massacre,* analyzing this alleged work of John D. Lee is unavoidable.

- He was seen by the emigrant camp at a distance and by two emigrant boys at close range.
- During the night before the main massacre, Lee was present in the militia council at Mountain Meadows that developed the massacre plan.
- On the day of the main massacre, Friday, 11 September 1857, Lee went to the emigrant camp and delivered deceptive terms of surrender to decoy the emigrants from their protective enclosure.
- He was selected to convey to Brigham Young an account of the massacre.
- In his role as Indian farmer, he made a false financial report of expenses for Indians involved in the massacre.

Implicit in Lee's confession is his position as the senior militia officer with operational command and control of the militia in the field at Mountain Meadows. Thus, the John D. Lee of *Mormonism Unveiled* admitted his criminal involvement in key aspects of the massacre and its aftermath. Since many of these elements are also verified by other sources, they are highly reliable.[16]

At the opposite end of the reliability scale are the elements of *Mormonism Unveiled* containing Lee's self-justifications or accusations against others. They include:

- At the outbreak of the Utah War in late summer 1857, when Mormon leader George A. Smith toured the southern settlements, Smith discussed with Lee measures against overland emigrants, not U.S. expeditionary troops.
- In a militia planning council in Cedar City in early September 1857, Lee acted under compulsion, not voluntarily, when he assumed the role of leading the Paiutes at Mountain Meadows.
- Lee arrived at the Mountain Meadows after the first attack but was not present for any part of it.

---

16. Robert H. Briggs, *The Tragedy at Mountain Meadows Massacre: Toward a Consensus Account and Time Line* (St. George, UT: Dixie State College, 2002), lecture delivered 13 March 2002 for the Juanita Brooks Lecture Series in St. George, Utah.

- After the first attack, Lee discouraged rather than encouraged further Paiute attacks on the emigrant company.

- In the militia council at Mountain Meadows the night before the main massacre, Lee was the lone voice pleading that the emigrants be released unharmed.

- On the day of the massacre, Lee acted under orders, not on his own initiative as a leading militia field officer, when entering the emigrant camp.

- During the massacre, it was his fellow militiamen, not Lee, who killed the wounded men and women riding near Lee.

- In his meeting with Mormon leaders in Great Salt Lake City some weeks later, Lee disclosed fully the role of the Iron County militiamen in the massacre, including his central role, rather than suppressing these facts.

As contained in *Mormonism Unveiled* and the Lee-Howard statement, Lee's defense is to blame others. Therefore, unless verified by other reliable evidence, we should be skeptical of these accusations.

Where Denton goes awry, then, is in her nearly exclusive use of *Mormonism Unveiled* for eyewitness observations and her failure to use any discernible critical method in interpreting it. Before relying on the unsubstantiated portions of *Mormonism Unveiled,* serious students of the massacre must grapple with the reliability issue. This Denton fails to do.

The Larger Issue—Bias in the Nineteenth-Century Counter-Mormon Canon

Besides John D. Lee, Sally Denton cites the nineteenth-century works of the Stenhouses, *Rocky Mountain Saints* and *"Tell It All,"* some sixty times.[17] Next, she cites the most virulent anti-Mormon nineteenth-

---

17. The editions cited by Denton are T. B. H. Stenhouse, *The Rocky Mountain Saints: A Full and Complete History of the Mormons, From the First Vision of Joseph Smith to the Last Courtship of Brigham Young* (London: Ward, Lock, and Tyler, 1871); Mrs. T. B. H. Stenhouse, *"Tell It All": The Story of a Life's Experience in Mormonism, A Thrilling Record of Woman's Life in Polygamy* (Hartford, CT: Worthington, 1874).

century Utah newspaper, the *Salt Lake Daily Tribune* some thirty-six times.[18] Denton cites other works in the same mold: C. V. Waite, *The Mormon Prophet;* C. P. Lyford, *The Mormon Problem;* Ann Eliza Young, *Wife No. 19;* Bill Hickman, *Brigham's Destroying Angel;* Nelson Winch Green, *Fifteen Years among the Mormons;* B. G. Parker, *Recollections of the Mountain Meadow Massacre;* Josiah F. Gibbs, *The Mountain Meadows Massacre;* and Frank J. Cannon, *Brigham Young.*[19]

These works are representative of a larger body of literature that we may term the nineteenth-century counter-Mormon canon. It is not that these works are wholly unreliable. If nothing else, singly and collectively, they remind us of the virulence of the period. In addition, they contain perceptions and interpretations of past events useful to the historian. But to illustrate the problem of both patent and latent bias in these early sources, let's briefly examine a similar problem in another context: the problem of bias in Euro-American sources of Native American peoples.

Beginning five hundred years ago, the Indians of North America were uprooted, first by Europeans and then by Euro-Americans. Not surprisingly, the history of these successive eras has largely been written by Euro-Americans. By and large, what survives from that long period of colonization is European and Euro-American source materials. These sources contain the unconscious biases, prejudices,

---

18.   As noted above, many of these references are to the Fieldings' *Tribune Reports of the Trials of John D. Lee,* an edited version of the *Salt Lake Daily Tribune*'s running series of reports on the progress of the criminal proceedings against Lee from the beginning of Lee's first trial in summer 1875 through his execution in March 1877.

19.   Denton's bibliography cites these works as follows: Catherine V. Waite, *The Mormon Prophet and His Harem* (Cambridge, MA: Riverside, 1866); C. P. Lyford, *The Mormon Problem: An Appeal to the American People* (New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1886); Ann Eliza Young, *Wife No. 19* (1875; reprint, New York: Arno, 1972); William A. Hickman, *Brigham's Destroying Angel: Being the Life, Confession, and Startling Disclosures of the Notorious Bill Hickman, the Danite Chief of Utah* (Salt Lake City: Shepard, 1904); Nelson W. Green, *Fifteen Years among the Mormons* (New York: Dayton, 1859); B. G. Parker, *Recollections of the Mountain Meadow Massacre* (Plano, CA: Reed, 1901); Josiah F. Gibbs, *The Mountain Meadows Massacre* (Salt Lake City: Salt Lake Tribune Publishing, 1910); Frank J. Cannon and George L. Knapp, *Brigham Young and His Mormon Empire* (New York: Revell, 1913).

and assumptions of the Euro-American colonizers. Similarly, the majority of the Euro-American histories of Indian peoples have unconsciously received and reflected the biases and presuppositions in the sources.

Now, however, new historical aims and methods have changed the field. Part of these new approaches involves a self-conscious effort to shed past prejudices against native peoples. Of course the old, biased sources are still used. But now the historian or ethnohistorian makes conscious efforts to shear away the blatant prejudices and even the hidden biases of the past. Used consistently, this interpretative method is a means to achieving a sympathetic treatment of Indian peoples and cultures, one that reflects their own self-understanding rather than a Euro-American one.[20]

Robert M. Utley's 1984 study, *The Indian Frontier of the American West, 1846–1890,* illustrates this approach and makes an additional point. In the foreword, distinguished Western historians Howard R. Lamar, Martin Ridge, and David J. Weber comment on one of the "arresting themes" in Utley's study: "that two thought worlds existed neither of which ever understood the other."[21]

This observation is equally true of Protestants and Latter-day Saints in nineteenth-century America. Both strove to be the Christian light on a hill to the world. Both made exclusive claims to be God's chosen. This made their positions irreconcilable. Further, more than is generally recognized, many Protestant reformers pursued the moral and political crusades of the nineteenth century in the hope that America would be established as a Protestant nation. Abolitionism, Southern reconstruction, antipolygamy, prohibition, and Sunday closing laws were among the most prominent of these crusades.

Focusing on the antipolygamy crusade, we are shocked even today by its energy, zeal, and excesses. We need only recall that the anti-

---

20. For a discussion of this and many other issues facing historians of the New Indian History, see the essays in Donald L. Fixico, ed., *Rethinking American Indian History* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997).

21. Robert M. Utley, *The Indian Frontier of the American West, 1846–1890* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984), xv.

polygamy legislation, from Morrill (1862) to Edmunds-Tucker (1887), eventually criminalized the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its members, including law-abiding monogamists. Thus, to vote in Idaho, each male of legal age had to deny affiliation with the church, even if, like most of the Saints, he was monogamous. The effect was to disenfranchise all Mormon males. In *Davis v. Beason* (1890),[22] the United States Supreme Court, in a unanimous decision, upheld the government position, noting that the free-exercise clause was bounded by the concept of "general Christianity" and the recognition that legislatures could criminalize those acts "recognized by the general consent of the Christian [i.e., Protestant] world in modern times as proper matters for prohibitory legislation."[23]

American courts began the nineteenth century by reading the common law as protecting or privileging general Protestantism. They concluded the century by reading constitutional law in a similar light: they viewed the United States Constitution as incorporating and protecting general Protestantism. The Latter-day Saint position was swept aside by the *assumption* that the Constitution protected general Protestantism, which in turn could define those acts to criminalize under the law. In keeping with Protestant assumptions, the penal law criminalized bigamy and, by extension, polygamy. Thus it was impossible that there could be a valid constitutional basis for the plural marriage system under the First Amendment free exercise of religion clause. Why? Because general Protestantism, not the upstart Church of Jesus Christ, defined and dictated the limits of the free exercise of religion.[24] Ipso facto, the Latter-day Saint position was beyond consideration.[25]

---

22. *Davis v. Beason,* 133 U.S. 343 (1890).

23. Analyzed and quoted in Sarah Barringer Gordon, *The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 227.

24. Gordon's treatment of these complex political, religious, and constitutional issues in *The Mormon Question* is excellent.

25. Postcolonialism offers an even more provocative example. Postcolonial studies focus on West versus East; European colonizers versus the non-European colonized; Eurocentric assumptions and European domination; and cultural imperialism, political control, and intellectual-cultural hegemony through controlling the content and transmission

What does this have to do with the Mountain Meadows massacre and its sources? Everything. It means that, like whites and Indians, Protestants and Latter-day Saints constituted "two thought worlds . . . neither of which ever understood the other." It means that whatever the theological differences over the Godhead, the Christian canon, or religious authority, it was polygamy that antagonized the Protestant majority. It was polygamy that made the Saints seem more "Asiatic" than American to most Protestants. It was the direct challenge that Mormon polygamy hurled at Protestant public morality that caused late nineteenth-century Protestants to view the Church of Jesus Christ as a counter-Protestant, if not anti-Protestant, religion. And it was polygamy that galvanized widely divergent Protestant denominations into a united politico-moral crusade against the church. The resulting clash produced bitter hostility among the antagonists. That virulence of feeling is reflected as a blatant anti-Mormonism in most late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literature on the Saints, including the sources and literature dealing with the Mountain Meadows massacre. Of course, the Saints had both patent and latent biases, too. But in the historiography of the massacre,

---

of texts. Norman J. Wilson, *History in Crisis?: Recent Directions in Historiography* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999), 125–36. Analogizing to the Mormon experience in nineteenth-century Protestant America, are there any interesting points of comparison? We may need to reevaluate the manner in which Protestant America dominated Mormon Utah, its subservient colony. While the Protestant antipolygamy crusade failed to crush Mormonism, it did succeed in establishing Protestant hegemony on the issues of Mormon marital practices and direct church involvement in politics and economics, a substantial exercise of control. Moreover, as Protestant elites in all three branches of the federal government oversaw the criminalization of the Church of Jesus Christ and forfeiture of most of its assets, leading Protestant denominations (e.g., Episcopalians, Methodists, Presbyterians, and others) increased their "colonizing" efforts in Utah. The period is commonly called the "Americanization" of Utah. But was it not in fact an overt attempt to "protestanticate" Mormonism through compulsive means? The larger implications of the analogy are beyond the scope of this review. But cultural imperialism or dominance over the colonized through control of texts is not. The Mountain Meadows massacre occurred nearly one hundred fifty years ago. It was an awful disaster and should never be forgotten. But what of the virulent anti-Mormon treatments of it that have continued unabated for a century and a half? Are these not continuing attempts at cultural dominance through control of texts—texts here meaning, or at least including, history texts?

historians have been aware of an LDS bias in the LDS sources, yet not always fully aware of anti-Mormon bias in the non-Mormon sources.

An interesting example is the Fieldings' *Tribune Reports* on the trials of John D. Lee. In their commentary, the Fieldings do not consider whether the *Salt Lake Daily Tribune* might have been slanted toward the anti-Mormon political propaganda objectives of the Liberals. Unconsciously they accept the Liberal party line and are oblivious to bias in the *Daily Tribune*'s reporting. Thus, the *Salt Lake Daily Tribune*'s series on the Lee trials reflects nineteenth-century anti-Mormon prejudice while the Fieldings' commentary reflects how that prejudice is perpetuated in the twenty-first century. The *Salt Lake Daily Tribune* was known for its bitter hostility and antagonism toward the "Mormon priesthood." Even among other anti-Mormons of Utah, the *Daily Tribune* distinguished itself as "ultra" anti-Mormon. It was the political organ of the Liberal Party in Utah, whose platform was the expansion of gentile interests and influence in Utah's political and economic spheres and the diminishment of Latter-day Saint influence. Considering the political balance of power in Utah, they recognized that statehood would further entrench LDS influence. Thus, they aggressively opposed LDS initiatives for statehood. Their main lobbying tools against the Mormon priesthood were polygamy, Mormon "meddling" in political and economic matters, and Mormon "lawlessness." Mormon violations of the antipolygamy laws and the Mountain Meadows massacre were for them prime examples of this lawlessness. In reporting on the Lee trials and casting light on the massacre nearly two decades before, the Liberals and the *Daily Tribune* had a political ax to grind.

That prejudice, in short, is what makes the Mountain Meadows massacre such a vexing historiographical problem. That is what requires the interpreter of this awful event to develop a sophisticated method for shifting the sometimes maddeningly contradictory source material. That is what demands that the historian consistently and rigorously apply his or her interpretative method to all source material.

What Sally Denton has done is interpret the Mountain Meadows massacre from *Mormonism Unveiled* and similar works from the

nineteenth-century counter-Mormon secondary sources. Shunted aside are many dozens of other eyewitness accounts, the majority of them not known to Juanita Brooks a half century ago (see appendix below). In them lies the genuine history of the great calamity at Mountains Meadows.[26] Even for a journalistic treatment like *American Massacre,* Denton's decision to jettison the new source material in favor of antiquated nineteenth-century anti-Mormon secondary sources was an unfortunate choice. It's a shame, too, because she has obvious talent as both a synthesizer of complex material and a prose stylist. In the final analysis, the deepest disappointment is this: In finding a Danite under every cedar and sage in frontier Utah, Denton unwittingly robbed *American Massacre* of the fascinating complexity of authentic history.

Appendix
Eyewitnesses and Sources to the
Mountain Meadows Massacre

This bibliography lists eyewitnesses to the massacre or to important events in its aftermath. Where a position in a militia unit is identified, these are from the 1857 muster rolls of the Tenth Regiment or Iron Military District.[27] This district covered the Mormon villages of

---

26. Although some of the new sources show that Juanita Brooks's view of the massacre needs updating, they also show that she was not far off in her landmark study, *The Mountain Meadows Massacre.* Further, these sources reinforce the insight that she emphasized in later editions of her book: that the massacre "could only have happened in the emotional climate of war." Brooks, *The Mountain Meadows Massacre,* rev. ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962), vi. I'm sure that many of the new details concerning military matters—from the Iron Military District muster rolls to the threat southern Utahans perceived of military invasion from Texas or California; from the role of militia couriers and communiqués to the reliable chronology that Private Joseph Clews affords of "massacre week"—all these and more would have fascinated Brooks.

27. Utah Territorial Militia (Nauvoo Legion), 10th Regiment Battalion and Company Muster Rolls, 10 October 1857, Utah State Historical Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah. This roster reflects the militia positions or offices as of September 1857 and has some slight changes from the previous militia roster in June 1857. The June 1857 Iron County Militia Roster is archived as MSS 801, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

Beaver, Parowan, Paragoonah, Cedar City, Washington, Pinto, and Gunlock and the small "fort" villages of Fort Johnson, Hamilton Fort, Fort Harmony, and Fort Clara. The regiment consisted of nine companies in four battalions. Each company had four to five platoons, but for simplicity's sake the platoons are omitted.

Anonymous militiaman, witness, or participant at Mountain Meadows—interview, 1859

Anonymous Ute Indian, witness, central Utah—interview, 1857

Arthur, Christopher J., adjutant to Captain Edwards, Co. G, 3rd Bat.—interview, 1892

Ashworth, William B., witness—autobiography, undated

Barton, William, 2nd lieutenant, Co. C, 1st Bat.—interview, 1892

Bradshaw, John, private, Co. F, 3rd Bat.—Lee trial testimony, 1875

Bringhurst, John B., witness, Toquerville, 1873–74 (observations of Isaac Haight)—statement, 1928

Call, Anson, witness, Bountiful, 1857 (observations of J. D. Lee)—affidavit, 1877

Chatterley, John, private, Co. F, 3rd Bat.—statement, 1919

Farnsworth, Philo T., captain, Co. A, 1st Bat.—Lee trial testimony, 1875

Campbell, Mary Steele, witness, Cedar City—interview, 1892

Clews, Joseph, private, Co. F, 2nd Bat.—statement, 1876

Edwards, William, private, probably attached to Parowan unit—affidavit, 1924

Fish, Joseph, private, Co. C, 1st Bat.—autobiography, undated

Hakes, Collin R., witness, Beaver and Mountain Meadows (Lee execution)—affidavit, 1907; statement, 1914; affidavit, 1916

Hamblin, Jacob, 2nd lieutenant, Co. H, 4th Bat.—journal, 1857; interviews, 1859; affidavits, 1859; statement, 1871; Lee trial testimony, 1876

Hamblin, Rachel, witness, Mountain Meadows—interviews, 1859

Hamblin, Albert, witness, Mountain Meadows—interview, 1859

Hamilton, John, Sr., private, Co. F, 3rd Bat.—Lee trial testimony, 1875

Hamilton, John, Jr., 2nd lieutenant, Co. F, 3rd Bat.—Lee trial testimony, 1875

Hancock, George W., witness, Payson—interview, 1857

Haslam, James H., regimental fifer—Lee trial testimony, 1876; affidavit, 1885

Henderson, John H., private, Co. C, 1st Bat.—interview, 1892

Higbee, John M., major, 3rd Bat.—statement, 1894; statement, 1896

Higgins, Henry, sergeant, Co. G, 3rd Bat.—affidavit, 1859

Hoag, Annie Elizabeth, witness, Fort Harmony—Lee trial testimony, 1875

Hoops, Elisha, private, Co. A, 1st Bat.—Lee trial testimony, 1875

Jackson, Samuel, private, Co. F, 3rd Bat.—Lee trial testimony, 1875

Johnson, Nephi, 2nd lieutenant, Co. D, 2nd Bat.—Lee trial testimony, 1876; interview, 1895; affidavit, 1909?; statement, 1910?

Kershaw, Robert, private, Co. A, 1st Bat.—Lee trial testimony, 1875

Klingensmith, Philip, private, Co. D, 2nd Bat.—affidavit, 1871; Lee trial testimony, 1875

Knight, Samuel, private, Co. H, 4th Bat.—Lee trial testimony, 1876; interview, 1892; interview, 1895; affidavit, 1896?

Macfarlane, John M., adjutant to Major Isaac C. Haight, 2nd Bat.—Lee trial testimony, 1875

Macfarlane, Daniel, adjutant to Captain Joel White, Co. D, 2nd Bat.—affidavit, 1896

McMurdy, Samuel, sergeant, Co. E, 2nd Bat.—Lee trial testimony, 1876

Martineau, James H., regimental adjutant to Col. William H. Dame—statement, 1890; statement, 1907

Morrill, Laban, private, Co. D, 2nd Bat.—Lee trial testimony, 1875; autobiography, undated

Morris, Elias, captain, Co. E, 2nd Bat.—interview, 1892

Nowers, Willson Gates, sergeant or private, Co. A, 1st Bat.—interview and statement, 1892

Pearce (Pierce), James, private, Co. I, 4th Bat.—Lee trial testimony, 1875

Pete, Indian boy, witness, Pahvant camp near Beaver—interview, 1857

Pitchforth, Samuel, witness, Nephi—diary, 1857

Platt, Benjamin, private, Co. H, 4th Bat.—autobiography, undated

Pollack, Samuel, sergeant, Co. E, 2nd Bat.—Lee trial testimony, 1875

Riddle, Isaac, private, Co. H, 4th Bat.—Lee trial testimony, 1875

Roberts, William, private, Co. B, 1st Bat.—Lee trial testimony, 1875

Robinson, Richard, 2nd lieutenant, Co. H, 4th Bat.—Lee trial testimony, 1875; interview, 1892

Rogerson, Josiah, court reporter, Beaver and Mountain Meadows (Lee trials and execution)—stenographic record, 1875, 1876, 1877

Shelton, Marion Jackson, witness, Fort Harmony—diary, 1858–59

Shirts, Don Carlos (Carl), 2nd lieutenant, Co. H, 4th Bat.—interview, 1859

Smith, Silas S., captain, Co. B, 1st Bat.—Lee trial testimony, 1875

Smith, Jesse N., captain, Co. C, 1st Bat.—journal, 1857; Lee trial testimony, 1875

Spoods, Ute Indian, witness, southern Utah—interview, 1857

Thompson, Edward W., 2nd lieutenant, Co. A, 1st Bat.—Lee trial testimony, 1875

Tullis, David W., private, Co. H, 4th Bat.—interview, 1859; interview, 1892

White, Joel W., captain, Co. D, 2nd Bat.—Lee trial testimony, 1875 and 1876

White, Mary Hannah Burton, witness, Hamilton Fort—interview, 1892

Willden, Elliott, private, Co. F, 3rd Bat.—interview, 1892

Willis, John Henry, 2nd lieutenant, Co. G, 4th Bat.—Lee trial testimony, 1875

Willis, Thomas T., private, Co. G, 3rd Bat.—Lee trial testimony, 1875

Young, William, private, Co. I, 4th Bat.—Lee trial testimony, 1875

The Denton Debacle

Robert D. Crockett

Sally Denton's *American Massacre* is the "Native Americans didn't do it" version of the Mountain Meadows Massacre of 1857 near Cedar City, Utah. The massacre has recently attracted much attention with the refurbishing of the memorial at Mountain Meadows and the publication or republication of three other widely acclaimed books: Will Bagley's *Blood of the Prophets,* which I have reviewed earlier;[1] Jon Krakauer's bestseller *Under the Banner of Heaven;* and William Wise's *Massacre at Mountain Meadows.*[2]

Denton's polished writing style is more readable than Bagley's. That is about the best one can say of this work, though, because Denton's pursuit of Native American political correctness fails her

---

1. Robert D. Crockett, "A Trial Lawyer Reviews Bagley's *Blood of the Prophets,*" *FARMS Review* 15/2 (2003): 199–254.

2. Will Bagley, *Blood of the Prophets: Brigham Young and the Massacre at Mountain Meadows* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002); Jon Krakauer, *Under the Banner of Heaven: A Story of Violent Faith* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), reviewed by Craig L. Foster, in this number of the *FARMS Review,* pages 149–74; William Wise, *Massacre at Mountain Meadows: An American Legend and a Monumental Crime* (New York: Crowell, 1976; reprint, Lincoln, NB: iUniverse.com, 2000).

when she gets into the tough issue of culpability beyond the direct participants. In an area that demands a thorough knowledge of the relevant literature, Denton is deficient. She also relies heavily on secondary sources, many of which are suspect because of their own failure to adequately document primary sources. Her work, therefore, is largely a reinterpretation of old sources rather than a treatment of new sources and material. Her suggestion that she is an insider to the Latter-day Saint psyche (p. 293) proves unconvincing because she makes mistakes that careful historians of Mormon Americana do not.

American Massacre revisits some of the difficulties inherent in the nineteenth-century "Mormon question," but from a twenty-first-century relativistic perspective. Nineteenth-century American Protestants had developed their own version of manifest destiny (p. 71)—a belief that nothing could stand in the way of democracy, egalitarianism (among white Protestants, at least; blacks, Catholics, and Native Americans were another story), and emerging feminism. This assurance came head-to-head with Mormonism, the alien peoples it attracted, its theocracy, its policy of Native American accommodation, and its doctrine of plural marriage. Mormonism was as antithetical to Protestant manifest destiny as the Jews were to the Spanish crown in the fifteenth century. Denton takes up these "Mormon question" issues, as is appropriate, but she examines them in the light of shallow, twenty-first-century political correctness and postmodernism, the latter of which holds that there are no social or religious truths and that history should be judged against new standards of relativism.[3] Matters of faith, eternal truth, and obedience to ecclesiastical leaders are as foreign to the twenty-first-century skeptic as a challenge to manifest destiny was to the nineteenth-century Protestant, so they do not enter into the discussion at all. To say it more succinctly, Denton discusses the massacre out of context.

---

3. David Gergen, *Eyewitness to Power: The Essence of Leadership, Nixon to Clinton* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), 341.

Denton's Story

Denton's version of the massacre begins in earnest with the Gunnison affair. John W. Gunnison was a lieutenant in the United States Army assigned to Captain Howard Stansbury's survey in 1849. Gunnison developed an unusual interest in frontier Mormonism, traveling with future Mormon apostle Albert Carrington as his guide to the Great Salt Lake area basin (pp. 63–64). In Washington, Gunnison actively worked to defray public misperceptions of Mormons at the height of the "runaway" officials scandal (p. 67).[4] Gunnison's publication of *The Mormons, or, Latter-Day Saints, in the Valley of the Great Salt Lake* in 1852 was a major early glimpse into Mormon theocracy in the Great Basin.[5] According to Denton, Gunnison believed his work to be objective, but the Latter-day Saints did not (p. 67).

The massacre of the Gunnison party on the Sevier River by Native Americans on 26 October 1853 attracted the attention of one of the runaway officials, Judge William W. Drummond, in 1857 (p. 87). In correspondence with Gunnison's widow, he blamed the Mormons for the Gunnison massacre. The *New York Times* published the correspondence on 1 May 1857, raising national ire against the Latter-day Saints (p. 90). President James Buchanan's message to Congress in that same year also blamed the Saints for the Gunnison massacre (p. 90), and General Winfield Scott was ordered west with an army. Albert Sidney Johnston later replaced Scott.

---

4.   President Millard Fillmore appointed non-Mormon federal judges and a territorial secretary to the territory in 1851. As Stenhouse's sarcastic nineteenth-century work against the church puts it, they "very soon after their arrival concluded that Utah was not the most pleasant place for unbelievers." They almost immediately fled the territory and published a statement to the Eastern press to explain their departure. The officials' published statement implied that, due to polygamy, there was a shortage of women "for the Federal officers." Their departure and their published statement led to substantial public ridicule, even from sources hostile to the church. T. B. H. Stenhouse, *The Rocky Mountain Saints* (New York: Appleton, 1873), 278. Later, Judge W. W. Drummond repeated the actions of his predecessors and fled town in 1857. Ibid., 285.

5.   John W. Gunnison, *The Mormons, or, Latter-Day Saints, in the Valley of the Great Salt Lake: A History of Their Rise and Progress, Peculiar Doctrines, Present Condition, and Prospects, Derived from Personal Observation, during a Residence among Them* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1852; reprint, Brookline, MA: Paradigm, 1993).

Picking up the story of the Fancher train in Salt Lake City, Denton lauds the Fancher train members as "orderly, peaceable, Sabbath-loving and generally Christian people" (p. 156). Her accounts of difficulties with local residents (pp. 122–24) are not groundbreaking, except that Denton recounts a "divine revelation" from Brigham Young, read aloud to massacre perpetrators early in September, commanding them to "raise all the forces they could muster and trust, and with the arrows of the Almighty make a clean sweep of them, and leave none to tell the tale" (p. 153). Denton also mentions a letter signed by Brigham Young, carried by the Native Americans, "ordering the emigrants to be killed" (p. 159). I will discuss also both this "revelation" and the letter below.

Denton's account of the massacre of over 140 members of the Fancher train from 7 to 11 September 1857 covers the same ground as many others. However, Denton attempts by her account to remove all Native Americans from the scene of the massacre, blaming the Mormons for the entire affair (p. 156). Like Juanita Brooks,[6] Bagley, and Wise, Denton relies heavily on John D. Lee's uncorroborated report to Brigham Young concerning the massacre in order to tar Young with the brush of a cover-up. None of these writers has given any weight to Brigham Young's detailed affidavit denying the meeting.[7]

Like Bagley, Denton spends considerable effort recounting Colonel Thomas Kane's history with the Saints, including his efforts to conciliate the parties to the Utah War (p. 180). Denton spends time on Judge John Cradlebaugh's early initial investigations (pp. 188–93). Cradlebaugh convened the Provo grand jury, "many of whom were the very men he believed to be participants in the crimes he was investigating" (p. 190). Denton relies very heavily upon Cradlebaugh's

---

6. Juanita Brooks, *The Mountain Meadows Massacre* (1950; reprint, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962).

7. Brigham Young, affidavit, 30 July 1875, in Brooks, *Mountain Meadows Massacre,* 286 (1962 ed.). Original affidavit is in Brigham Young Collection, Family and Church History Department Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (hereafter Church Archives). While Brooks attaches the affidavit to her work, she does not discuss it in the context of explaining Lee's meetings with Young. Brooks, *Mountain Meadows Massacre,* 140–42.

account of his work, or at least upon T. B. H. Stenhouse's 1873 account of Cradlebaugh's work.[8]

Denton devotes only a few pages to the period of time between the successful denouement of the defense against President Buchanan's Utah War and John D. Lee's trial. She covers Brigham Young's pleasant visit to the Lee household in 1861 (p. 210), Young's purported desecration of the rock cairn shrine, and Argus's reports (1870–71) in the *Corinne (Utah) Reporter* (pp. 210–12).[9]

Denton recounts the two trials of John D. Lee, the second of which she reports culminated in a deal to thwart justice. As Denton puts it:

> In a calculated and mutually beneficial deal, Young and [United States District Attorney Sumner] Howard came to terms. Young would make available all witnesses and evidence necessary for a conviction of Lee. In exchange, Howard would limit the testimony implicating Young, George [A.] Smith, and other church leaders in the affair, and drop charges against [William] Dame [head of Mormon militia]. (p. 228)

Denton's Theories about the Native Americans

Readers may find themselves surprised by Denton's treatment of Dimick Huntington's 1 September 1857 diary entry, particularly after reading Bagley's assessment of it. In my review of Bagley, I discuss the fact that Bagley calls this diary entry "disturbing new evidence" that Brigham Young ordered the Native Americans to commit the massacre.[10] Denton uses this diary entry as well, but she and Bagley do not

---

8. I have discussed my view of Cradlebaugh's reliability elsewhere in "A Trial Lawyer," 220–24.

9. See ibid., 212–13 nn. 37–38.

10. "Kanosh the Pahvant Chief[,] Ammon & wife (Walkers Brother) & 11 Pahvants came into see B & D & find out about the soldiers. Tutseygubbit a Piede chief over 6 Piedes Bands Youngwuols another Piede chief & I gave them all the cattle that had gone to Cal[.] the southa rout[.] it made them open their eyes[.] they sayed that you have told us not to steal[.] so I have but now they have come to fight us & you for when they kill us then they will kill you[.] they sayed the[y] was afraid to fight the Americans & so would raise grain & we might fight." Dimick B. Huntington diary, MS 1419 2, 12–13, Church Archives.

agree as to its meaning. Because Denton's objective is to demonstrate that the Native Americans were *not* involved in the massacre, she says some remarkable things about the diary entry. A careful reading of her statement is required:

> His diary repudiates the Mormon leader's lifelong denials and makes clear that on September 1, Young was met with disconcerting resistance from the Indians as he tried to enlist their support against the wagon train. Church officials have steadfastly maintained that the chiefs left that day in time to travel nearly three hundred miles to marshal their warriors, and begin the massive attack on the Arkansas pioneers just six days later. (pp. 158–59)

In other words, Denton interprets the diary entry as showing that the Native Americans refused to become involved. Her claim that the church has always maintained that chiefs Tutsegabit and Youngwuds then left the meeting and traveled three hundred miles in six days to organize the attack is both contradictory and inaccurate, for the church has never made that argument. Denton thus argues, with no support or citation, that the church made up a story about Tutsegabit and Youngwuds so that it could lay blame for the massacre upon the Paiutes.

Denton's reason for doubting the ability of Tutsegabit and Youngwuds to make such a journey is exactly the same as mine: it could not be done. To that extent, both Denton and I part company with Bagley's use of the diary entry; he offers it to show that Brigham Young organized the first assault on the Fancher train with the Paiutes. But the greater message to be taken from this discussion of the Huntington diary entry is that Bagley and Denton have reached opposite conclusions about its meaning. Bagley says that the diary shows the chiefs preparing to carry out the attack on Brigham Young's orders. Denton says that it shows their refusal to carry out Brigham Young's orders. The reason for the difference? The two authors have different stories to tell. Bagley wishes to implicate the Mormon leaders in a way no serious historian has ever done before. Denton wishes to blame high Mormon officials but to extricate entirely the Native Americans.

Exculpating Native Americans, however, from the massacre is as impossible as it is to implicate high Mormon leaders in the affair. One of the earliest on-the-ground interviews after the massacre was that of Indian agent Garland Hurt, a bitter enemy of the Saints.[11] Hurt reported that after hearing rumors of a massacre, he asked a teenage boy fluent in the language to visit the Southern Paiutes (the Piedes) on 17 September 1857.

> He returned on the 23d, and reported that he only went to Ammon's village, in Beaver county, where he met a large band of the Piedes, who had just returned from Sioux county. They acknowledged having participated in the massacre of the emigrants, but said that the Mormons persuaded them into it. . . . [John D. Lee] prevailed on them to attack the emigrants, who were then passing through the country, (about one hundred in number,) and promised them that if they were not strong enough to whip them, the Mormons would help them. The Piedes made the attack, but were repulsed on three different occasions, when Lee and the bishop of Cedar city [Klingensmith], with a number of Mormons, approached the camp of the emigrants under pretext of trying to settle the difficulty. . . . [T]he work of destruction began, and, in the language of the unsophisticated boy, they cut all of their throats but a few that started to run off, and the Piedes shot them.[12]

Denton acknowledges Hurt's report (p. 267) and agrees that his "official report of the massacre was the first and most accurate on the record" (p. 159). However, the only statement she uses from the Hurt report is that the "'Indians insisted that Mormons, and not Indians, had killed the Americans'" (p. 159). Denton has deceived the reader with the way she uses the Hurt report. The Indians' first report to Hurt, from Indians not affiliated with the Paiutes, was that Indians were not responsible. This is the only quotation Denton uses. But Hurt

---

11. Garland Hurt to Jacob Forney, 4 December 1857, 35th Cong., 1st sess., H. Exec. Doc. 71, serial 956, p. 199.

12. Ibid., 203, emphasis deleted.

was suspicious, and he investigated further. He found and reported the truth. Indians and Mormons committed the atrocity. Yet, because Hurt's final conclusions don't square with Denton's thesis, we are not told about them.

Moreover, Hurt's report does not square with Denton's view of Mormon Native American policy. It is certainly correct to say that changing standards of ethical conduct have led to widely swinging views of the Mormon Native American policies.[13] Hurt does not support Denton's very negative recitation of that policy. Perhaps, by relying solely upon a secondary source of Hurt's report, Denton missed Hurt's assessment. Denton tells us that the Native Americans were "mistreated by the Mormons since the sect's arrival among them. Indian agent Garland Hurt was loved by many and held more sway with them than Huntington or Young" (p. 115). On the contrary, we can read from Hurt's report (and again, I cite from the primary source) after he left the territory:

> It is due, however, to the Mormon community to admit that [the Native Americans'] wants were greatly mitigated by the liberal contributions of flour and other articles of food, made under the directions of their Indian missionary enterprise, whose agents were unusually active during the past season.
>
> The plan of operating under this missionary system is quite peculiar to Mormonism; and perhaps the most objectionable feature in it is their inordinate desire to court the favor and alliance of the natives to the exclusion and prejudice of all other communities; and yielding too far to this disposition, not only tempt themselves with a violation of the laws of the country, but actually tempt the Indians to take advantage of their position, which they seem well to understand and appreciate, and tax them with a thousand annoyances that might otherwise be obviated.[14]

---

13. Sondra Jones, "Saints or Sinners? The Evolving Perceptions of Mormon-Indian Relations in Utah Historiography," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 72/1 (2004): 19–46.

14. Hurt to Forney, 4 December 1857, 201.

Even Hurt, who disliked Latter-day Saints, could not accuse them of abuse or neglect of the Native American population. Instead, he challenged the missionary system for providing aid and sustenance to those he himself referred to as "wild" and "very degraded people."[15] He said he disapproved of the Saints' perceived practice of providing aid to the Native Americans "to the exclusion and prejudice" of other (presumably, white) communities. We cannot today fully understand what Hurt meant when he said that the church's practice of courting favor with the Native Americans would "tax them with a thousand annoyances," but plainly Hurt objected to things that would benefit the Native Americans.

It is easy to see why Denton failed to accurately assess Mormon Native American policy. The text of her book does not rely upon the primary source for Hurt's report, relying instead upon a secondary source. This is a strange lapse since she makes reference in her bibliography to the primary source.

Orders to Kill the Fancher Train

Denton recounts the claim that two Native Americans, Tonche and Jackson, reported to federal investigators that they carried a letter from Brigham Young ordering them to kill the people in the Fancher train. She admits that this vignette is contrary to her conclusion that the Native Americans refused to cooperate with Brigham Young's request (p. 159). Nonetheless, she cites no source for her claim about the letter.[16]

---

15. Ibid., 200.

16. The source is obviously Major James Henry Carleton's report of 1859. It is difficult to say whether Carleton had firsthand reports. "It is said to be a truth that Brigham Young sent letters south, authorizing, if not commanding, that the train should be destroyed. A Pah-Ute chief, of the Santa Clara band, named 'Jackson,' who was one of the attacking party, and had a brother slain by the emigrants from their corral by the spring, says that orders came down in a letter from Brigham Young that the emigrants were to be killed; and a chief of the Pah-Utes named Touche, now living on the Virgin River, told me that a letter from Brigham Young to the same effect was brought down to the Virgin River band by a man named Huntingdon, who, I learn, is an Indian interpreter and lives at present in Salt Lake City." James Henry Carlton to Maj. W. W. Mackall, 25 May 1859, House Doc. No. 605, 57th Cong., 1st Sess. (reprint, Roy, UT: Eborn Books, 2000). There are two problems with Carleton's report. First, it is highly unlikely that these two Native Americans could read any

Denton further asserts that it was reported that a "divine revelation from Brigham Young was read aloud" to the participants "'commanding them to . . . attack them, disguised as Indians, and with the arrows of the Almighty make a clean sweep of them, and leave none to tell the tale.'" Denton tells us that this information comes from some of the participants to the crime (p. 153). Her source for this alleged fact is to a sensational exposé common of the era: Catharine Van Valkenburg Waite's *The Mormon Prophet and His Harem; Or, An Authentic History of Brigham Young, His Numerous Wives and Children.*[17] Waite was an early suffragist married to a federal judge. She did not name names or provide sources in her book. Her stated objective was to reclaim the "suffering women of Utah."[18] She is the sole source for this "revelation," which has no basis in historical fact.[19]

Colonel Thomas L. Kane

For the length of her work, Denton spends an unusual amount time discussing Colonel Thomas L. Kane. Non-Mormon Kane is held in high esteem by the Latter-day Saints for his unstinting advocacy of the Saints' position in the face of an increasingly hostile press and government, as well as for his successful efforts to avert a catastrophe between them and the army.[20] Yet Denton tells us that this hero had feet of clay: she paints him as a silly, fussy, strutting martinet who is

---

letter from Brigham Young. Second, according to Dimick Huntington's diary, Huntington was in Salt Lake City during these events.

17. Mrs. C. V. [Catharine Van Valkenburg] Waite, *The Mormon Prophet and His Harem; Or, An Authentic History of Brigham Young, His Numerous Wives and Children* (Cambridge: Houghton, 1866).

18. Ibid., preface. She hopes the women "rescue themselves from the snares of the religious imposters," p. 66 of 4th ed.

19. "A revelation from Brigham Young, as Great Grand Archee, or God, was despatched to President J. C. Haight, Bishop Higbee, and J. D. Lee, commanding them to raise all the forces they could muster and trust, follow those cursed gentiles (so read the revelation), attack them, disguised as Indians, and with the arrows of the Almighty make a clean sweep of them, and leave none to tell the tale; . . . for this was the mandate of Almighty God." Ibid., 76.

20. See Lance B. Wickman, "Thomas L. Kane: Outrider for Zion," *Ensign,* September 2003, 56–63.

unable to get himself out of bed because of imagined illnesses and who travels incognito to disguise his imagined fame (pp. 176, 180). Denton has little good to say about Kane, contemptuously describing him as arrogant and effeminate (p. 180).

Denton's discussion of Kane is mercilessly out of context. Biographies and journals of nineteenth-century "Renaissance" men reveal that many accomplished men adopted what appear today to be affectations of self-importance and prolixity.[21] Stenhouse, no advocate of Brigham Young nor necessarily fair with his sources when discussing Mormonism, treated Kane respectfully in his nineteenth-century work, *Rocky Mountain Saints.* Stenhouse tells us that "in the relations of Col. Kane with the Mormons at that time, there was exhibited evidence of the highest Christian charity and personal heroism of character."[22]

The claim that Kane was responsible for covering up the massacre (p. 47) finds no support in history, nor does Denton cite primary sources for her view other than Kane's participation in advising Young to respond to federal inquiries in 1858 (p. 208). As I point out in my review of Bagley's *Blood of the Prophets,* the massacre investigation spanned decades and involved sitting presidents, cabinet members, attorneys general, federal district attorneys, federal marshals, territorial marshals, and more. Kane was out of the picture shortly after the massacre.

The Van Vliet Episode

Denton's scholarship and logic also prove problematic in her discussion of the Van Vliet episode. Army Quartermaster Captain Stewart Van Vliet came to Salt Lake City on 8 September and left after midnight on 14 September 1857 to arrange for the advancing army's provisions.

Denton tells us that Brigham Young carefully shielded Van Vliet to hear nothing of the massacre, because if Van Vliet came to know

---

21. See, for example, Edward Rice, *Captain Sir Richard Francis Burton: A Biography* (1990; reprint, Cambridge, MA: Da Capo, 2001).

22. Stenhouse, *Rocky Mountain Saints,* 383.

about it, "an invasion of Utah Territory would be expedited" (p. 165). There is no historical support for this claim. The claim is also impossible to support. Because the massacre was not over until 11 September 1857,[23] there is no possibility that Brigham Young could have known of the massacre before his last meeting with Van Vliet on 13 September 1857. My review of Bagley's work discusses the factors of distance and chronology in the reporting of an event occurring three hundred miles away in pioneer Utah.[24]

Denton also says that on 13 September 1857, with Van Vliet in attendance at church service, "the sermon was delivered not by Young, who exclaimed he was too furious to conduct the service, but by another church elder" (p. 165). Young, however, delivered two famous sermons that day which have long played important roles in understanding the Utah War.[25]

The "Deal" to Thwart Justice

Denton's claim of a deal between the church and U.S. District Attorney Sumner Howard is extraordinary for its lack of support, but by its constant repetition in massacre histories, the "deal" has now become commonly accepted as the truth of the matter by scholars and journalists alike. Denton has only two references to support this charge: Bagley's work and the *Salt Lake Tribune* (p. 276), although the latter source mentions nothing about a deal. The newspaper did, however, elsewhere float its theories about a deal made with U.S. District Attor-

---

23.   Robert K. Fielding and Dorothy S. Fielding, eds., *The Tribune Reports of the Trials of John D. Lee for the Massacre at Mountain Meadows, November, 1847–April, 1877* (Higganum, CT: Kent's Books, 2000).

24.   Crockett, "A Trial Lawyer," 208.

25.   Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses,* 5:226–31, 231–36 (13 September 1857). Denton's failure to know of Young's sermons suggests a rather light review of her secondary sources. On 13 September 1857, in the Bowery, Brigham Young indeed said he was too angry to preach but then filled the day with two lengthy sermons nonetheless. Regardless of who spoke, I would have imagined that anybody writing about this event would have taken time to examine the *Journal of Discourses* to see what was actually said with Van Vliet in attendance.

ney Sumner Howard, which Denton does not cite.[26] In any event, my review of Bagley's book shows that the evidence does not support the theory of a deal. Official correspondence shows efforts by the federal machinery to prosecute others for at least eight years after Lee's trial.[27]

Conclusion

This brief review points out a number of critical shortcomings in Denton's work. Her efforts to exculpate the Native Americans from the massacre are not supported by any serious scholarly work. This defect alone should warn the reader that a politically correct view of a massacre so deeply embedded among politically incorrect topics such as Mormons, polygamy, federal government misperceptions, and white relations with Native Americans is not going to get very far without an understanding of the context of the evidence. Context is crucial, and Denton has not built it up sufficiently for her book.

I object to the use of secondary sources for her conclusions when primary sources are more reliable. Although her bibliography occasionally refers to primary sources, her analysis relies almost entirely on secondary sources. The older secondary sources—in particular, Catharine Waite's 1866 book—should be viewed with great suspicion. Denton's reinterpretation of these sources is not the type of scholarship or discussion needed to parse the details of the massacre. Brooks's work was a watershed in setting forth the context of the massacre and the details of some of the events. Bagley's work shows years of efforts to aggregate primary sources (although often of suspect quality). Denton's work, however, is merely entertaining rhetoric compiled from secondary sources. For a clear picture of what really happened at Mountain Meadows, one need not look here.

---

26. "A Word in Defense," *Salt Lake Daily Tribune,* 27 September 1857, p. 2, col. 1. The only evidence the paper cites in support of a deal theory is that Howard had dismissed the charges against William Dame, selected an all-Mormon jury, affirmed in his opening statement that he had no evidence to indict higher church authorities, and interestingly, disparaged the Liberal party that was so closely affiliated with the *Tribune.* Fielding and Fielding, *Tribune Reports of the Trials of John D. Lee.*

27. Crockett, "A Trial Lawyer," 231–50.

DOING VIOLENCE TO JOURNALISTIC INTEGRITY

Craig L. Foster

The noted author Paul Fussell once commented, "If I didn't have writing, I'd be running down the street hurling grenades in people's faces."[1] Perhaps the same could be said about Jon Krakauer. Both he and his works are complex, introspective, and, without doubt, "in your face" and controversial. Krakauer is fascinated by people who are on the edge physically and emotionally, those who push the limits to the extreme. His writing reflects this fascination as he tries to define for his reading audience what it is like to go to extremes. Krakauer has succeeded where many others have failed because he is, without argument, a gifted writer. His text flows seamlessly, creating a literary picture that touches a reader to the very core.

Krakauer has used his writing talents to look at the fringes of the Latter-day Saint community in his book *Under the Banner of Heaven,* in which he examines the double murders committed in 1984

by the ex-Mormon brothers Ron and Dan Lafferty and explores the fundamentalist communities of Colorado City–Hildale on the Utah-Arizona border and Bountiful in British Columbia.[2] His accounts of murder and seduction are mixed with events and teachings in Latter-day Saint history in an attempt to portray these fringe elements as murderous and libidinous offspring of a religion steeped in its own history of violence and quirkiness.

As a means to understanding Jon Krakauer's approach to this topic, an understanding of his background is necessary. A former carpenter and fisherman turned freelance writer, Krakauer's accumulation of literary accomplishments was slow but steady. His workhorse approach to writing initially gained him a respectable reputation among readers and publishers of outdoor magazines. However, he could not make a living writing about mountain climbing and other outdoor-related activities. Krakauer soon branched out and began to write on other subjects. For example, since he had been a carpenter, he decided to write an article about architecture, feeling he could bluff his way to being published in *Architectural Digest*.[3] He also wrote about a commercial fishery for *Smithsonian* and published other articles in *Rolling Stone, Playboy, Time,* the *Washington Post,* the *New York Times,* and *National Geographic*.[4] He gave these magazines "whatever they wanted" because, as he related, "I wanted to pay the rent, I didn't have any grandiose ambitions of being an artiste; I wanted to pay the . . . bills, so I worked really hard."[5]

Krakauer's hard-scrabble career beginnings seem to belie his upper–middle-class childhood and youth. He was born in 1954 in Brookline, Massachusetts, where his father, Lewis, was finishing his medical

---

2. Although Krakauer's book discusses the Lafferty murders, as well as the fundamentalist communities of Colorado City–Hildale and Bountiful, this book review focuses rather on Krakauer's discussion of the history and doctrines of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

3. "An Interview with Jon Krakauer," as published at www.randomhouse.com/boldtype/0697/krakauer/interview.html (accessed 25 August 2003).

4. "'Under the Banner of Heaven' Author Visits Oregon State," *Corvallis Gazette-Times,* 25 July 2003.

5. "An Interview with Jon Krakauer."

studies.[6] Lewis Krakauer was born in Brooklyn in 1927 to first-generation Russian-Polish Jewish emigrants.[7] His parents were Jay T. and Ruth A. Krakauer. The senior Krakauer had emigrated from Czestochowa, Poland, in 1904. He arrived on the *Aurania,* which sailed from Liverpool, England, and arrived at Ellis Island in that same year. At the time of his arrival, he was listed as a Russian Hebrew and gave Jakob Krakauer as his name.[8]

Jakob Krakauer, whose family name means "a person from Krakow, Poland," later anglicized his name to Jay Krakauer.[9] He worked as a civil engineer with the New York City subway system.[10] Lewis became a medical doctor and moved with his wife, Carol, and family to Corvallis, Oregon, where he practiced medicine.[11]

Although Jon Krakauer's relationship with his father was often strained and volatile, he picked up several things from him. First, he gained a love for mountain climbing. Second, he gained a great love of the outdoors.[12] And third, he inherited a gift for writing from his

---

6. "About Jon Krakauer," found at "Jon Krakauer Under the Banner of Heaven: A Story of a Violent Faith," as published at www.randomhouse.com/features/krakauer/author.html (accessed 21 July 2003). While Krakauer grew up in Corvallis, he later lived for a time in Seattle and presently lives in Boulder, Colorado, with his wife of twenty-three years, Linda Moore.

7. United States Population Schedule, 1930 Census, Brooklyn Borough, King's County, New York, E.D. 24–1508, sheet 29A, lines 5–7, available at ancestry.com (accessed 22 March 2004).

8. Passenger Record for Jakob Krakauer, available at www.ellisislandrecords.org (accessed 27 August 2003). When Krakauer emigrated, most of Poland was under the control of the Russian Empire.

9. Heinrich W. Guggenheimer and Eva H. Guggenheimer, *Jewish Family Names and Their Origins: An Etymological Dictionary* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1992), 427; and Mail .Jewish Mailing List 34/15 (22 January 2001).

10. 1930 census.

11. Lewis Krakauer died 24 September 2001. Corvallis (Benton County, Oregon) City Directory (Los Angeles: Polk, 1958–); "Lewis J. Krakauer," *Corvallis Gazette-Times,* 25 September 2001 as found at www.gazettetimes.com/articles/2001/09/26 (accessed 15 September 2003); and ancestry.com—Social Security Death Index, "Lewis J. Krakauer" (accessed 27 August 2003). Between 1958 and 1990, Lewis J. Krakauer and his family resided in Corvallis where he continued with his medical practice until his retirement.

12. Biography section of Jon Krakauer's official Web site—www.cwu.edu/~geograph/krakauer.htm (accessed 27 August 2003).

father, who edited *The Year Book of Sports Medicine* on several occasions.[13] It was because of mountain climbing that he wrote his first article. In 1974 he went to Alaska for the first time and climbed in the Brooks Range. He wrote about his experiences in the *American Alpine Journal.* Three years later he described his experiences climbing the Devil's Thumb for *Mountain.*[14] And, as a final legacy from his parents, Krakauer learned to view the divine through agnostic, if not atheistic, eyes.[15]

Krakauer's writing career has included stints as a contributing editor for *Outside* and *Men's Journal,* as well as authorship of several books. During his early career, Krakauer was viewed as a "nature writer." However, he has more recently been described by one reviewer as more of "an adventure writer" on a par with Jack London.[16] Krakauer's first well-received book was *Into the Wild,*[17] which recounted the fateful journey of Christopher McCandless. In an attempt to understand himself and find inner peace, McCandless gave up his successful upper–middle-class life and journeyed to Alaska's wilderness, where he ultimately died from hunger and exposure. Krakauer placed McCandless's experience within the context of other "spiritual daredevils and sons of dominating, successful fathers."[18] His discussion of McCandless's painful relationship included revelations of his own unhappy relationship with his father. Krakauer, who readily admits to relating to the subject of his work, gave a sympathetic portrayal of McCandless. Indeed, one reviewer wrote, "Mr. Krakauer has

---

13. James L. Anderson, Frank George, Lewis J. Krakauer, Roy J. Shephard, and Joseph S. Torg, eds., *The Year Book of Sports Medicine, 1981* (Chicago: Year Book Medical, 1981); Krakauer, ed., *The Year Book of Sports Medicine, 1984* (Chicago: Year Book Medical, 1984); and Krakauer, ed., *The Year Book of Sports Medicine, 1987* (Chicago: Year Book Medical, 1987).

14. "An Interview with Jon Krakauer."

15. "Dateline NBC," found at www.msnbc.com (accessed 15 July 2003).

16. "Spilt Ink Presents Jon Krakauer," as found at www.spiltink.com (accessed 4 February 2004).

17. Jon Krakauer, *Into the Wild* (New York: Villard, 1996).

18. "Jon Krakauer," Gale Literary Databases, found at www.galenet.com/servlet/ GLD, n. 18 (accessed 25 August 2003).

taken the tale of a kook who went into the woods, and made of it a heart-rending drama of human yearning."[19]

Jon Krakauer's best-known book is *Into Thin Air*[20]—his cathartic look at the 1996 climbing disaster on Mount Everest. As a part of the climbing team, Krakauer offered personal insight into what was, without doubt, a horrific experience of hunger, fatigue, poor decisions, a terrible snowstorm, and freezing temperatures. Eight climbers, including four of his team members, died, while others suffered debilitating injuries from frostbite and exposure. Krakauer blamed "his own actions, or failure to act" as a factor in the deaths of two of his team members. He had been paid by *Outside* magazine to climb Mount Everest and then write his experiences; he did, in fact, write a riveting article. He then went on to write his best-selling *Into Thin Air* in a three-month "sprint of writing and emotional purging."[21]

The book "was a sensation, riding best-seller lists for two years, translated into 24 languages, a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize and a National Book Critics Circle award. There are now more than 3.6 million copies in print."[22] *Into Thin Air* was, without doubt, a literary tour de force. It was Krakauer at his finest, as he looked at what drives men to go to the edge of life itself and take incredible chances. So traumatizing an experience was the Everest debacle for Krakauer that he "established the Everest '96 Memorial Fund at the Boulder Community Foundation, endowing it with royalties from his book."[23]

However, the book has not been without its critics. The climbing world has been rocked by a heated debate over the accuracy and even veracity of Krakauer's account. Describing this controversy, one writer clarifies:

> What is surprising is how bitter, how defensive and how wounded
> Jon Krakauer sounds these days. Much of this bitterness stems

---

19. Ibid.
20. Jon Krakauer, *Into Thin Air* (New York: Villard, 1998).
21. "Plumbing the Depths of Faith," at www.theage.com.au/articles (accessed 16 August 2003).
22. Timothy Egan, "What's Left after Everest?" *New York Times,* 13 July 2003.
23. "Author Visits Oregon State."

from this fact: Since "Into Thin Air" was published nearly two years ago, the book has been under almost constant sniper fire from a small and close-knit group of climbers, a few of whom were on Everest in 1996, who dispute some of his book's facts and interpretations. In their view, Krakauer didn't merely get things wrong—he got things intentionally, maliciously wrong.[24]

Accusations of shoddy research and even plagiarism found their way into the debate. Some people in the mountain-climbing community have suggested that Krakauer borrowed heavily, without proper attribution, from Jim Curran's *K2: The Story of the Savage Mountain.*[25] In 1998 journalist Steve Weinberg looked at the controversy about *Into Thin Air,* including accusations of bias and shoddy research.[26] While the article only touched on his book and the controversy, Krakauer was, nonetheless, extremely offended. He responded, "'I take my reputation as a reporter more seriously than I take my reputation as a writer. . . . I didn't rely on fact-checkers to catch my errors.'" He had been determined to "'get it right the first time.'"[27]

Krakauer also takes seriously his effort to understand the psyche and motivation of people on the edge, those who go to the extreme. Perhaps this is why his works contain not only riveting action and thoughtful analyses of human nature, but also reveal what makes Krakauer himself tick. He has acknowledged this. "'People think of me as this outdoor writer. But I'm really a seeker, a doubter. I'm interested in those people who take things too far, because I see something of myself in them.'"[28]

Krakauer's search involves an uneasy relationship with religion. He was raised in an agnostic household.[29] In fact, in an interview

---

24. Ibid.

25. Telephone interview with North Las Vegas City attorney and mountain-climbing enthusiast Kenneth Long, 30 August 2003.

26. Steve Weinberg, "Why Books Err So Often," *Columbia Journalism Review,* July–August 1998.

27. "Coming Down," Salon Wanderlust (August 1998), found at archive.salon.com/wlust/feature/1998/08/cov_03feature.html (accessed 8 June 2004).

28. "Plumbing the Depths of Faith."

29. Ibid.

with Tom Brokaw, Krakauer explained that his family members were, "'for all intents and purposes, atheists.'"[30] In regard to religion, he has demonstrated a certain skepticism as well as cynicism. While he admitted to "trying to figure out religion," he also readily confessed that he does not believe in Jesus Christ.[31] Furthermore, while he claims to ache for a belief in God,[32] he also acknowledges that he does not "know what God is, or what God had in mind when the universe was set in motion," or "if God even exists" (p. 338).[33] Even so, he admits to "praying in times of great fear, or despair, or astonishment at a display of unexpected beauty" (p. 338).

However, Krakauer's doubts run deeper than the simple questioning of the reality of Deity. Indeed, his doubts also exhibit a very real animosity to faith. When asked in a 1996 interview what made him angry, he answered: "self-righteous religious fanatics."[34] He has also confessed to being "troubled by this sheeplike acceptance that faith is always good."[35] When asked in an interview if Dan Lafferty was crazy, Krakauer answered:

> I don't think Dan's crazy at all. He's no crazier than John Ashcroft. The difference between Dan Lafferty and John Ashcroft is *not* very great. I mean, John Ashcroft hasn't killed anybody. And that's a very important distinction. John Ashcroft isn't a Mormon, but he's a fundamentalist. Their belief systems are remarkably similar. That really scares me. That you have people

---

30. "Dateline NBC" (15 July 2003).

31. Notes taken by Steven L. Mayfield at a talk and book signing by Jon Krakauer at Trolley Corners Theater, Salt Lake City, Utah, on 18 July 2003 (copy in possession of author).

32. Ibid.

33. In Chris Nashawaty, "Jon Krakauer Gets Religion," *Entertainment Weekly,* 18 July 2003, 47, Krakauer explains: "I grew up in a family of atheists, so the closest thing I've ever had to religion is climbing."

34. Paul Roberts, "Profile: Jon Krakauer," *Outside* online, found at web.outsideonline.com/disc/guest/krakauer/profile.html (accessed 27 August 2003).

35. "Plumbing the Depths of Faith."

in high positions of government making decisions that affect the survival of the world who are consulting their God.[36]

In *Under the Banner of Heaven,* Krakauer elaborates on this theme, "There is a dark side to religious devotion that is too often ignored or denied. As a means of motivating people to be cruel or inhumane—as a means of inciting evil, to borrow the vocabulary of the devout—there may be no more potent force than religion" (p. xxi).

In spite of, or perhaps because of, the author's open disdain for religion, he inexplicably chose for his latest work a look at what he considers the violent history of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. *Under the Banner of Heaven* is, according to Krakauer's publicists, the result of questions arising during his childhood, at which time he knew a number of Latter-day Saints. "Although he envied the unfluctuating certainty of the faith professed so enthusiastically by these Mormon friends and acquaintances, he was often baffled by it, and has sought to comprehend the formidable power of such belief ever since."[37]

While a study of Mormonism's supposed violent past became the final product of Krakauer's endeavors, his original goals were different. Eric Johnson of the Mormonism Research Ministry, an evangelical Christian ministry that has been challenging the Church of Jesus Christ since the ministry's founding in 1979, explained that Krakauer "originally wanted to write a book titled *History and Belief* that would focus 'on the uneasy, highly charged relationship between the LDS Church and its past.'"[38] According to D. Michael Quinn, Krakauer first approached him and other Mormon intellectuals about writing a book concerning the problems intellectuals face in a church known for its conservative and authoritarian approach to its history and doctrine.[39] The premise of Krakauer's original project, and certainly that of the final product, reflect his continued uncomfortable relationship with faith and religion in the face of what he views to be rational thinking.

---

36. Nashawaty, "Krakauer Gets Religion," 47, emphasis in original.

37. "About Jon Krakauer."

38. Eric Johnson, "Under the Banner of Heaven," as found on the Mormonism Research Ministry Web page www.MRM.org (accessed 1 April 2004).

39. Typed statement in possession of author.

Both Krakauer and his book have gained significant publicity in recent months, and reviews have come down on both sides. Indeed, the book gained some media attention two weeks prior to its release with "Church Response to Jon Krakauer's *Under the Banner of Heaven*," by Richard E. Turley, managing director of the Family and Church History Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.[40] This hard-hitting response, according to Krakauer, was considered a "god-send" by the marketers at Doubleday—they believed it helped propel the book onto the best-seller lists.[41]

Adding to this preemptive strike was Michael Otterson of the Public Affairs Department. During a press conference, he made comments that were reprinted in the *Salt Lake Tribune.* His remarks make it very clear what he and other representatives of the church thought of Krakauer and his book. "This book is not history, and Krakauer is no historian. He is a storyteller who cuts corners to make the story sound good." He then goes on to explain:

> The exceptions are the rule by his standards. One could be forgiven for concluding that every Latter-day Saint, including your friendly Mormon neighbor, has a tendency to violence. And so Krakauer unwittingly puts himself in the same camp as those who believe every German is a Nazi, every Japanese a fanatic, and every Arab a terrorist.[42]

Accusations of bias notwithstanding, Krakauer does have his defenders—for example, Holly Mullen of the *Salt Lake Tribune,* who accused the Church of Jesus Christ of sending its "public relations machine . . . into damage-control overdrive."[43] Even so, some of the comments made by reviewers make one wonder if the ardent support of *Under the Banner of*

40. "Church Response to Jon Krakauer's *Under the Banner of Heaven*," available at www.lds.org/newsroom/mistakes (accessed 9 July 2003).

41. Mayfield notes.

42. Mike Otterson, "Church: Best-Selling Author Is No Historian," *Salt Lake Tribune,* 13 July 2003.

43. Holly Mullen, "Mullen: 'Banner' Account of Early Mormondom Stirs the Beehive," *Salt Lake Tribune,* 3 August 2003.

Heaven stems from more than just an admiration of Krakauer's remarkable writing skills and fascinating storytelling style. For example, Martin Naparsteck of the *Salt Lake Tribune* illogically claims that "because truth trumps accuracy and courage is more important than pleasing readers, *Under the Banner* should be read by anyone hoping to understand if there is a causal connection between Mormon history and the violence associated with oddball polygamist cults."[44] The reviewer for the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* says it was "difficult to find fault with Krakauer's findings that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints tries to clean up its history,"[45] while the reviewer in BooksMags.com advises readers that if they "prefer to wallow in ignorant bliss, leave [the book] on the shelf."[46]

Perhaps one of the most favorable and revealing reviews was written by Clay Evans of Scripps Howard News Service and appeared in the KnoxNews. He begins: "That The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or Mormons, would object to this book is hardly a surprise." He then mentions the "sometimes violent past and selective history of the mainstream church," giving as examples Joseph Smith, plural marriage, and the Mountain Meadows massacre. Evans concludes the review by affirming, "So of course the Mormon church is upset. But this book, with extensive notes and footnotes, won't be shouted down by people representing a faith that, as a matter of policy, strives mightily to control and sanitize its past."[47]

A *San Francisco Chronicle* review declares that Krakauer "masterfully weaves Mormon history and modern polygamy into a seamless story about the strangest subculture of the American Southwest."[48]

---

44. Martin Naparsteck, "Truth Trumps Accuracy in 'Under Banner of Heaven,'" *Salt Lake Tribune,* 27 July 2003.

45. Ed Gray, "Writer Stirs a Controversy among the Mormons," *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette,* 27 July 2003.

46. "Challenging the Creationist Approach to Mormon History," www.booksmags.com (accessed 29 August 2003).

47. Clay Evans, "'Banner' Examines Sect's Violent History: Krakauer's Carefully Researched Book Studies Mormon Fundamentalists," *KnoxNews,* 24 August 2003. Perhaps Evans does not realize that extensive documentation does not necessarily mean careful documentation. He also shows a serious bias against the Church of Jesus Christ.

48. Don Lattin, "Blood Faith and Fanaticism: Krakauer Weaves '84 Murders into Enthralling History of Mormon Breakaway Polygamists," *San Francisco Chronicle,* 13 July 2003.

A *St. Petersburg Times* review describes the book as "a piece of solid reporting,"[49] and *USA Today* affirms that "Krakauer also explores the often blood-soaked roots of the Mormon faith."[50] *Barnes & Noble Presents* declares Krakauer's work as "provocative but also convincing,"[51] while BooksMags.com proclaims Krakauer's efforts a "superb job of chronicling several schisms in the Mormon church."[52]

According to one *Salt Lake Tribune* review, "Krakauer never pretends to be historian or master of theology. He is a journalist, powerfully gifted in writing non-fiction."[53] Obviously, for this fellow journalist, gifted writing supercedes thorough research and accuracy. "The fact is, Krakauer probably knows more about early, unvarnished church history than most practicing Mormons today. His premise for connecting zealotry with unspeakable violence is as sound as any."[54]

---

49. Ellen Emry Heltzel, "Obsession, Murder and Mormonism," *St. Petersburg Times,* 13 July 2003.

50. Deirdre Donahue, "Murder by Zealot Mormon Sect Sparks Deeper Look," *USA Today,* 13 July 2003.

51. Paul Evans, "God's Soldiers," *Barnes & Noble Presents,* July–August 2003, 72.

52. "Challenging the Creationist Approach to Mormon History." Other positive book reviews include Lauren F. Winner, "Of Marriage and Murder: Two New Books Shed Light on the Hidden—and Sometimes Violent—World of Mormon Fundamentalism," *Newsday,* 13 July 2003; Lev Grossman, "Thou Shalt Kill," *Time,* 21 July 2003; Malcolm Jones, "Murder in the Name of God: Best-Selling Journalist Jon Krakauer Finds Religion—in a 1984 Double Homicide," *Newsweek,* 21 July 2003; Tom Walker, "Mormons, Author Battle over Accuracy," *Denver Post,* 13 July 2003; "Banner Ruffles Some Feathers," *Book Magazine,* July–August 2003; Cathy Lynn Grossman, "In the Name of GOD," *USA Today,* 17 July 2003; "Newsalert," The Berean Call at www.thebereancall .org/newsletters/aug03/other.htm (accessed 9 September 2003); "Banner of Blood," *The Inkslinger: The King's English Bookshop* 11 (Summer 2003): 1, 7; Timothy Egan, "Krakauer Draws Fire from Mormon Church," *Toronto Star,* 19 July 2003; and, Jane Lampman, "When Certainty Reigns, Reason Goes into Thin Air," *Christian Science Monitor,* 17 July 2003.

53. Mullen, "'Banner' Account of Early Mormondom."

54. Ibid. One of the best reviews was the press release prepared by Richard E. Turley Jr., which is available on www.lds.org/newsroom/mistakes/. However, Mullen's review berates Turley for questioning Krakauer's "admitted lack of faith in God." While Mullen sees no problems with Krakauer's methodology and analysis, Robert Wright's "Thou Shalt Kill," *New York Times,* 3 August 2003, gave a mixed review, complimenting the fascinating chapters but questioning some of the analysis.

Notwithstanding the positive reviews, a number of mixed and negative reviews point out fundamental flaws in Krakauer's book. One reviewer charges Krakauer with being a "one-sided journalist,"[55] and another with viewing such religious actions as wearing sacred garments as "freakishness rather than fervor."[56] The *Wall Street Journal* describes the book as "quite misleading,"[57] while the *International Herald Tribune* complains that the book "provides more voyeuristic astonishment than curiosity or understanding."[58] A *Deseret News* review describes Krakauer as lacking "the personal understanding of religious devotion necessary to deal with such a complex topic."[59] And *Christianity Today* warns its readers to "keep in mind the origin of Krakauer's project, [which started] with an agenda."[60] Even more to the point are the comments found in the Japanese-published English-language newspaper *Daily Yomiuri,* which notifies its readers that the book is not "an unbiased history." The review concludes with this insightful comment:

> Ultimately, we are left feeling that *Under the Banner of Heaven* would have been a better book had Krakauer had a more authoritative grasp of his material. He is not a historian, and his principal strengths are his vigorous writing and a fascination with those on society's fringes. Here, as an avowed agnostic, Krakauer is in unfamiliar territory, and in treating the Lafferty murders as a particularly Mormon crime, he places himself in danger of papering over the fact that any murder committed in the name of God is extremist, rather than religious in nature.[61]

---

55. Lee Benson, in his review titled "Krakauer's Writing Is One-Sided," *Deseret Morning News,* 21 July 2003, goes even further by questioning not only the analysis but accusing Krakauer of being "unfair" in his approach.

56. Janet Maslin, "Book Review: *Under the Banner of Heaven,*" *International Herald Tribune,* 25 July 2003.

57. Naomi Schaefer, "Review," *Wall Street Journal,* 11 July 2003.

58. Maslin, "Book Review."

59. Dennis Lythgoe, "Author Blunders over LDS History," *Deseret Morning News,* 6 July 2003.

60. "Hearing Voices," *Christianity Today,* September–October 2003.

61. Annabel Wright, "Krakauer's Book on 'Mormon Murder' Case Falls Short of Its Goals," *Daily Yomiuri,* 16 September 2003, found at www.yomiuri.co.jp. Two British publications also had interesting reviews which, while appreciating Krakauer's writing and storytelling skills, expressed concern about some of his conclusions: "Hells Bells:

Krakauer uses charged language when describing certain events and practices in the Mormon past. This language is probably used to reinforce negative stereotypes. This practice reflects a proven bias on Krakauer's part against religion in general and conservative religion in particular. Krakauer's book has serious problems that must be addressed. These include historical and factual errors, which are either the result of a knowing deception or an ignorance of Mormon history, doctrine, and church government. Either way, they should send up red flags to any reader with an understanding of the Church of Jesus Christ. Krakauer also cannot hide his lack of familiarity with general American history. This is obvious with the main theme of his book—that the origins or foundations of Mormonism have bred a significant amount of violence.

While Krakauer focuses on the "story of violent faith," he does so without putting the church within the historical and social context of the nineteenth century. No doubt some Saints engaged in violent behavior. However, was this violent behavior a result of Latter-day Saint teachings or were the teachings that touched on aspects of violence a result of the social milieu in which the Saints lived?

David H. Fischer has shown that aspects of violence in early America were the result of what he called the "backcountry" culture.[62] This culture was strongly influenced by descendants of the Scots and Irish as well as by other groups from the traditional Celtic fringe of Great Britain and the north border country of England. The backcountry consisted mainly of the southern highlands of Appalachia, the old Southwest, and the Ozark Plateau, as well as places to which their descendants migrated. In these regions "a climate of violence" developed, "which remained part of the culture of that region to our own time."[63] Personal violence or *lex talionis* (the rule of retaliation) was expected and encouraged by people of Scots-Irish heritage in the

---

Mormons Who Murder," *Economist,* 3 July 2003, and Jacqui Goddard, "Mormon Fury as Author Likens 'Fundamentalist' Wing to the Taleban," *Scotsman,* 28 July 2003.

62. David H. Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 10, 765, 769–70.

63. Ibid., 769.

backcountry. The concept of accepted violence and retaliation was taught within the community and among the families.[64]

Characteristics of this culture of violence included perceptions of men as "warrior castes"; the concept of honor as "a pride of manhood in masculine courage, physical strength and warrior virtue"; and defense of honor by "lashing out instantly against . . . challengers with savage violence." "To behave dishonorably was to commit an 'unmanly act,'" "order was a system of retributive violence," and vigilantism was an accepted part of backcountry culture.[65] This tradition of violence extended to Missouri, where it rubbed up against, and most certainly influenced, the early Latter-day Saints. Violent confrontations in the form of vigilantism, dueling, and other forms of extralegal justice were not only accepted but romanticized. Indeed, "Ozark vengeance" continued into the 1950s in parts of Missouri.[66] Without doubt, "These backcountry order ways created an exceptionally violent world."[67]

In his review, Turley mentions several of the book's problems regarding its handling of church history and doctrine. For example, Krakauer states that "a disgruntled client had filed a legal claim accusing Joseph of being a fraud" (p. 57). However, Josiah Stowell, Joseph Smith's employer, not only did not file the complaint, but testified in Joseph's behalf at his trial. Joseph Smith was found innocent.[68]

Krakauer demonstrates a further lack of knowledge when he discusses the letter Brigham Young sent to southern Utah Mormons telling them not to attack members of the Baker-Fancher party and, instead, to see to their safety until they were out of Utah Territory. Unfortunately, the letter arrived too late to stop the now infamous Mountain Meadows massacre. Young's attempts to thwart this tragedy are belittled by Krakauer, who insinuates duplicity on the part of church

---

64. Ibid., 663, 765, 769–70.

65. Ibid., 690, 764, 767.

66. Dick Steward, *Duels and the Roots of Violence in Missouri* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 1, 205.

67. Fischer, *Albion's Seed,* 770.

68. The trial is discussed in Gordon A. Madsen, "Joseph Smith's 1826 Trial: The Legal Setting," *BYU Studies* 30/2 (1990): 105, as quoted in Turley, "Review," 3.

leaders by claiming that "the actual text of Brigham Young's letter remains in some doubt, because the original has disappeared (along with almost every other official document pertaining to the Mountain Meadows massacre). The excerpt quoted above is from a purported draft of the letter that didn't surface until 1884, when an LDS functionary came upon it in the pages of a 'Church Letter Book'" (p. 221n).

However, as Turley explains, the text of Brigham Young's letter does not remain "in some doubt." As with most of Brigham Young's correspondence, this letter was copied immediately after being written by using a letterpress book that contained onionskin pages to create a mirror image of the document. "A perfect mirror image of Young's famous letter is right where it should be in Brigham's 1857 letterpress copybook. It is a contemporaneous copy and was available to and used by the prosecution in the trial that led to John D. Lee's conviction and subsequent execution in the 1870s."[69]

Turley and others have demonstrated that Krakauer seems to lack historical training. Evidently Krakauer took at face value statements and accusations made in jaundiced secondary literature. Rather than searching for and analyzing the primary sources, Krakauer merely regurgitates old assertions. He announces, for example, the existence of "compelling circumstantial evidence [which] suggests that [Samuel H. Smith] succumbed from poison administered by Hosea Stout" (p. 194). Quinn, in *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power,* affirms:

> William [brother of Joseph and Samuel H. Smith] eventually concluded that Apostle Willard Richards asked [Hosea] Stout to murder Samuel H. Smith. The motive was to prevent Samuel from becoming church president before the full Quorum of Twelve arrived. William's suspicions about Stout are believable since Brigham Young allowed William Clayton to go with the pioneer company to Utah three years later only because Stout threatened to murder Clayton as soon as the apostles left. Clayton regarded Hosea Stout as capable of

---

69. Turley, "Review," 7–8.

> homicide and recorded no attempt by Young to dispute that
> assessment concerning the former Danite.[70]

Quinn bases this statement on the June 1892 letter of William Smith
to a Brother Kelley. The letter was written almost forty-eight years
after Samuel Smith's death and William Smith's bitter estrangement
from Brigham Young and the other apostles. In addition, while Mary B.
Smith Norman, Samuel Smith's daughter, claimed in 1908 that her fa-
ther had been poisoned, there appear to be no contemporary sources
indicating death by poisoning. Furthermore, while no one who has
read Stout's diary would contest accusations of violence, even leading
to death, there is no evidence whatsoever that Stout murdered Smith.
Quinn acknowledges this lack. Even so, he still places credence in a
rather tenuous assortment of evidence. Krakauer, on his part, appears
to have read Quinn's book and either ignored the extensive endnotes
on this matter or chose not to mention the serious lack of facts sup-
porting Quinn's assertion.[71]

The following statement is among the potpourri of historical and
doctrinal errors found in *Under the Banner of Heaven:* "Mormons es-
teem three books of scripture above all others" (p. 6n), when in reality
four books constitute the Latter-day Saint canon. Krakauer is also in-
correct in his assertions that Native Americans are, according to the
Book of Mormon, descended from the lost tribes of Israel (p. 69). And
regarding the Mountain Meadows massacre, he announces that Wil-
liam Aden was killed on 10 September 1857 (p. 221). That would have
been the night before the actual massacre. Aden was killed at least two
and probably three days before the 11 September massacre.

Perhaps one of the more glaring instances of Krakauer's limited
knowledge of Latter-day Saint history and doctrine appears in his dis-

---

70. D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power* (Salt Lake City: Sig-
nature Books, 1994), 153.

71. Ibid., 384–85 nn. 50–54. As examples of Stout's violent nature, Quinn references
Stout's published diaries, Juanita Brooks, ed., *On the Mormon Frontier: The Diary of
Hosea Stout 1844–1861,* 2 vols. (1964; reprint, Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press,
Utah State Historical Society, 1982). However, there still is no evidence, contemporary or
after the fact, to suggest the murder of Samuel Smith at the hands of Hosea Stout.

cussion of Elizabeth Smart's kidnapping. In March 2003, Elizabeth Smart was found alive and well in Sandy, Utah. Her kidnapping the previous June had made news not only in Utah but across the country and, indeed, around the world. Smart's kidnappers were arrested, and she was returned to her family. It would not be an exaggeration to say that people all over the world were able to celebrate a happy ending to a story that could have been a horrible tragedy. However, very soon after her rescue, rumors began to filter out to the media that Elizabeth Smart's captors were religious fanatics with a connection to the Church of Jesus Christ and that she had been kidnapped in order to become a polygamous wife.[72]

Although many of the media attempted to distinguish between the mainstream church and its various offshoots, more often than not there was confusion in the resulting newspaper and television reports wherein the reader or listener might not have been able to differentiate between the various groups. Moreover, at the public announcement of the charges against Brian David Mitchell and Wanda Barzee, Smart's abductors, the rumors and suggestions of sexual assault seemed to be confirmed.[73]

---

72. Kevin Cantera and Michael Vigh, "Elizabeth a 'Plural Wife'?" *Salt Lake Tribune,* 15 March 2003; "Polygamy May Be Motive," *Ogden Standard-Examiner,* 16 March 2003; Tomas Alex Tizon and David Kelly, "Abduction May Be Rooted in Polygamy," *Los Angeles Times,* 15 March 2003; Dean E. Murphy, "Utah Girl's 9-Month Ordeal Poses a Puzzle Strange and Biblical," *New York Times,* 16 March 2003; "Hostage Girl 'Wed' Abductor," *Daily Mirror* (London), 15 March 2003; and Duncan Campbell, "Kidnapped Girl's Ordeal Over after Nine Months," *Guardian* (Manchester), 14 March 2003. The 17 March 2003 issue of the *National Enquirer* ran front-page pictures of Elizabeth Smart in the robes and veil she was forced to wear in public with the headline, "Elizabeth Smart's Life on the Run," and a subheadline that read, "Their Shocking Wedding Night."

73. See the *National Enquirer* source mentioned in note 72, and "Charges Delayed in Elizabeth Smart Case," *Washington Post,* 17 March 2003; Nick Madigan, "Abducted Girl's Relatives Say Her Captor Brainwashed Her," *New York Times,* 17 March 2003; "Suspects Charged in Utah Teen's Abduction," *Washington Post,* 18 March 2003; "Charges Filed in Utah Abduction," *USA Today,* 19 March 2003; Kevin Cantera, Michael Vigh, and Stephen Hunt, "Accused Abductors Charged with Felony Sexual Assault," *Salt Lake Tribune,* 19 March 2003; and the description of charges filed on 18 March 2003 found at www.thesmokinggun.com/archive/mitchellcharge1.html (accessed 19 April 2004).

Taking advantage of sensational headline news, Krakauer quickly did some rewriting and added a chapter about Elizabeth and her subsequent return to her home and family. *Under the Banner of Heaven* mentions Mitchell's desire to make Smart a "polygamous concubine." Krakauer concludes that Smart would have been susceptible to Mitchell's "weird, self-styled wedding ritual" to "'seal'" her to himself in "'the new and everlasting covenant'—a Mormon euphemism for polygamous marriage" (p. 44). He then explains:

> Raised to obey figures of Mormon authority unquestioningly, and to believe that LDS doctrine is the law of God, she would have been particularly susceptible to the dexterous fundamentalist spin Mitchell applied to familiar Mormon scripture. The white robes Mitchell and Barzee wore, and forced Elizabeth to wear, resembled the sacred robes she had donned with her family when they had entered the Mormon temple. When Mitchell bullied Elizabeth into submitting to his carnal demands, he used the words of Joseph Smith—words she had been taught were handed down by God himself—to phrase those demands. (p. 45)

To back up his claim, Krakauer quotes Debbie Palmer, a former fundamentalist plural wife and currently an antipolygamy activist, as follows: "'Being brought up as she was made her especially vulnerable. . . . Mitchell would never have been able to have such power over a non-Mormon girl'" (p. 45).

These two statements demonstrate not only a bias that any scholar or informed journalist would seek to avoid but also, as already suggested, an ignorance of Latter-day Saint doctrine and practice. Two examples will suffice. First, Krakauer stated that Elizabeth would have worn temple robes when she accompanied her family into a Latter-day Saint temple (p. 45). This, of course, is false. As she was born in the covenant, she would not have gone into the temple to be sealed to her parents. And with the exception of being sealed to their own parents, youth are allowed only in specific parts of the temple, such as the baptismal font. Even if she had not been born in the covenant and

had later been sealed to her parents, Elizabeth would not have worn the temple robes since she would not, at that time, have gone through the endowment ceremony.

Second, the statement by Debbie Palmer turns out to be ludicrous. Palmer moved with her parents to the fundamentalist community of Creston Valley, British Columbia, when she was two years old. She was raised in this community and entered into her own plural marriage when she was fifteen years old. Eventually she left the fundamentalist community and has since been an outspoken critic of so-called Mormon fundamentalism (pp. 30–37).[74] Therefore, for Krakauer to use Palmer as an expert on whether or not Mitchell would have influence over a girl who has been raised in the Church of Jesus Christ is unreasonable.

This brings us to another point of concern—the numerous examples of highly charged, inflammatory, and prejudicial language that appear to be used for shock value and to reinforce negative stereotypes. In discussing the origins of the church, Krakauer borrows heavily from polemical works on Mormonism, picking up on the ever-present theme of Joseph Smith's treasure hunting and folk magic. For example, he describes Smith's "scrying" and "money digging." "Soon his necromantic skills," according to Krakauer, "were sufficiently in demand that he was able to command respectable fees to find buried treasure for property owners" (pp. 56–57).

Krakauer also attributes to Joseph Smith a "nimble mind and an astonishingly fecund imagination" (p. 55). Indeed, according to Krakauer, Smith "could sell a muzzle to a dog" (p. 55) and thus was able to invent something that would appeal to people. This involved dabbling in folk magic. "Joseph's flirtation with folk magic as a young man had a direct and unmistakable bearing on the religion he would soon usher forth" (p. 56). In fact, in introducing Moroni's original

---

74. Ancestral File, William Blackmore Family Group Record; "The Bishop of Bountiful," as found at CBC News, at www.cbc.ca/fifth/polygamy/debbie.html (accessed 15 July 2003); and Robert Matas, "Woman to Bring Suit against Mormon Church," *Globe & Mail,* 19 November 2002, at the Utah State site of the American Atheists, 64.177.238.218/UtahAA/flds.html (accessed 15 July 2003).

visit, Krakauer writes that "peep stones and black magic would again loom large in Joseph's life" (p. 57).

Krakauer's accusations of Joseph Smith's supposed involvement with black magic are not original and are certainly not well founded. Indeed, such accusations appeared in print as early as 1830 when Abner Cole, under the pseudonym of Obadiah Dogberry, published "The Book of Pukei" in the *Palmyra Reflector*.[75] Stories and charges of Smith's practicing black magic swirled about during his lifetime and continue to the present.[76] While it has been debated by historians whether or not Joseph and other members of the Smith family actually practiced magic, there is consensus that the type of magic the Smiths might have practiced would have been folk magic. This type of magic is sometimes referred to as white magic. Folk magic was common and socially acceptable among common or backwoods people throughout most of the nineteenth century. Black magic was viewed with understandable fear and loathing by these common people and would not have been practiced by the Smiths.[77]

---

75.   Obadiah Dogberry [pseudonym for Abner Cole], "The Book of Pukei," *Palmyra Reflector,* 12 June 1830, 36–37, as quoted in Mark Ashurst-McGee, "Moroni: Angel or Treasure Guardian?" *Mormon Historical Studies* 2/2 (2001): 48.

76.   Craig Foster, *Penny Tracts and Polemics: A Critical Analysis of Anti-Mormon Pamphleteering in Great Britain, 1837–1860* (Salt Lake City: Kofford Books, 2002), discusses the mid-nineteenth-century imagery of Joseph Smith and early Mormons practicing magic. Two tracts of William J. Schnoebelen and James R. Spencer, *Whited Sepulchers: The Hidden Language of the Mormon Temple* (Idaho Falls: Triple J, 1990) and *Mormonism's Temple of Doom* (Idaho Falls: Triple J, 1987), are examples of the sensational and illogical accusations of Smith's involvement in black magic that exist to the present.

77.   The most detailed and important discussion of the Smiths' purported belief in and practice of folk magic is D. Michael Quinn's *Mormonism and the Magic World View* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987; 2nd ed., 1998). Quinn's premise is that the Smiths were part of the social and cultural milieu of the time. Alan Taylor, in "The Early Republic's Supernatural Economy: Treasure Seeking in the American Northeast, 1780–1830," *American Quarterly* 38/1 (1986): 29 n. 10, suggested that for Joseph Smith, "treasure seeking represented a relatively immature but sincere manifestation of [his] religious concerns." Stephen D. Ricks and Daniel C. Peterson, "Joseph Smith and 'Magic': Methodological Reflections on the Use of a Term," in *"To Be Learned Is Good If . . .,"* ed. Robert L. Millet (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987), 143, conclude that "to the extent that treasure seeking was practiced by Joseph Smith, it was . . . a 'deeply spiritual' exercise, and was viewed as being done by the power of God." Alan

Perhaps Krakauer's most volatile statements appear when he discusses one of the main themes of his book, plural marriage. He introduces the topic by announcing that "the LDS leadership has worked very hard to persuade both the modern church membership and the American public that polygamy was a quaint, long-abandoned idiosyncrasy practiced by a mere handful of nineteenth-century Mormons" (p. 5). He then suggests that Joseph Smith introduced plural marriage in part because he "remained perpetually and hopelessly smitten by the comeliest female members of his flock" (p. 118) and because "it was impossible for Joseph to conceal so much illicit activity from his followers" (p. 122). "Neither Emma's tears nor her rage" (p. 118), nor her haranguing him about his "philandering" (p. 124), "were enough to make Joseph monogamous" (p. 118). Thus he took multiple women as wives. According to Krakauer, "Not even this profusion of wives, however, managed to sate his appetite" (p. 121) nor stop his "sexual recklessness" (p. 122).

Even more astounding to Krakauer are the "still pubescent girls" (p. 120) whom Joseph married. Falling into the same trap as many people and even some historians, he places his own modern values onto another place and time and, when their marriage patterns do not conform to his worldview, he looks upon it and writes about it with an open-mouthed, suitably shocked, and offended approach. For example, Krakauer suggests in an interview that Mormons would be uncomfortable with how he portrayed their history, "They will not like the fact that I point out that Joseph Smith told 14-year-old girls

---

Taylor, in his article "Rediscovering the Context of Joseph Smith's Treasure Seeking," *Dialogue* 19/4 (1986): 18–28, concludes that treasure seeking and the practice of folk magic were good and could be practiced only by those who were pure. Two very informative essays place folk magic and treasure seeking in its historical and cultural setting: W. R. Jones, "'Hill-Diggers' and 'Hell-Raisers': Treasure Hunting and the Supernatural in Old and New England," in *Wonders of the Invisible World, 1600–1900: The Dublin Seminar for New England Folklife Annual Proceedings 1992,* ed. Peter Benes (Boston: Boston University Press, 1995), 97–106, and Wayland D. Hand, "The Quest for Buried Treasure: A Chapter in American Folk Legendry," in *Folklore on Two Continents: Essays in Honor of Linda Dégh,* ed. Nikolai Burlakoff and Carl Lindahl (Bloomington, IN: Trickster, 1980), 112–19. See also Mark Ashurst-McGee, "A Pathway to Prophethood: Joseph Smith Junior as Rodsman, Village Seer, and Judeo-Christian Prophet" (MA thesis, Utah State University, 2000).

'God says you should marry me, if you don't . . .' His way of getting laid doesn't reflect well on him."[78]

Beyond being simply offensive, Krakauer's comments are problematic in several ways. First, Joseph Smith did not marry a plurality of fourteen-year-olds as suggested by Krakauer. In fact, only Helen Mar Kimball can be positively identified as being fourteen.[79] While Nancy Maria Winchester could have been fourteen years old, she was probably fifteen by the time of her marriage. Second, the idea that Smith married a parcel of pubescent girls is sheer fallacy. Along with the fourteen-year-old and probable fifteen-year-old who married Smith, only two sixteen-year-olds married him. While there were three seventeen-year-olds, there were no known eighteen-year-olds and only three nineteen-year-old women who married Smith. As puberty is traditionally recognized as the time period surrounding menarche, or the onset of menstruation, and, since the average age of menarche was about fourteen to fifteen years at that time, only one to two of Joseph Smith's wives could possibly have qualified as a "pubescent girl."[80]

Besides, marriages of younger girls were not uncommon in the past. Peter Laslett, the noted social historian, published an interesting essay concerning the age at menarche in Europe since the eighteenth century. Laslett noted that while girls in Britain and Western Europe reached menarche at a later age, girls in America and Eastern Europe started menstruating at a younger age. Indeed, according to Laslett's research, in eighteenth-century Belgrade, Serbia, girls as young as eleven and twelve were not only marrying, but having children. In

---

78. Nashawaty, "Jon Krakauer Gets Religion," 47.

79. According to Richard Lloyd Anderson and Scott H. Faulring, "The Prophet Joseph Smith and His Plural Wives," review of *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith,* by Todd Compton, *FARMS Review of Books* 10/2 (1998): 79, Kimball was nearly fifteen at the time of her sealing to the Prophet.

80. Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2001), 4–8, 604–7. Joseph Smith's sixteen-year-old wives were Fanny Alger and Flora Ann Woodworth. While Joseph Smith had ten wives who were teenagers at the time of their marriage, he had thirty-three known wives and eight possible wives, for a total of forty-one wives. Thus, only a quarter of his plural wives were teenagers.

fact, at one point, eighty-seven percent of all women between the ages of fifteen and nineteen were married.[81] On the American side of the Atlantic, between 1634 and 1662 about 220 marriageable girls were brought to Quebec to marry. These girls were called *les Filles du Roi,* or the king's daughters. While most of the girls were sixteen to twenty years old and the second largest group were between the ages of twenty and twenty-five, at least seventy-six (the fourth largest grouping statistically) were between the years of twelve and fifteen. Thus it was not surprising to have women marrying and bearing children at a younger age. Indeed, it was common in newer regions of settlement and farming in both the United States and Canada for women to marry at a younger age.[82]

For example, in seventeenth-century Chesapeake Bay and environs, it was common for young women to marry at age sixteen or younger. Both brides and grooms were very young in colonial America.[83] In fact, American marriage laws borrowed heavily from traditional English common law.[84] Under the common law, the age at which the law conferred nuptial rights on individuals was twelve for women and fourteen for men. Most states and territories accepted those two ages as the minimum ages for marriage. Even as late as the turn of the

---

81. Peter Laslett, "Age at Menarche in Europe since the Eighteenth Century," in *Marriage and Fertility: Studies in Interdisciplinary History,* ed. Robert I. Rotberg and Theodore K. Rabb (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 291. Basically, one-third of all fifteen-year-old girls and over half of all sixteen-year-old girls already had husbands (ibid., 293).

82. Peter J. Gangné, *King's Daughters and Founding Mothers: The Filles du Roi, 1663–1673* (Pawtucket, RI: Quintin Publications, 2001), 1:17–23; Silvio Dumas, *Les Filles du Roi en Nouvelle-France: Étude Historique avec Répertiore Biographique,* Cahiers d'Histoire 24 (Quebec: La Société Historique, 1972), 67; and Richard A. Easterlin, George Alter, and Gretchen A. Condran, "Farms and Farm Families in Old and New Areas: The Northern States in 1860," in *Family and Population in Nineteenth-Century America,* ed. Tamara K. Hareven and Maris A. Vinovskis (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 39–40. Naturally, Quebec's situation was different to a degree from other new frontiers. Even so, these patterns are comparable to other American regions.

83. Michael Gordon, ed., *The American Family in Social-Historical Perspective,* 3rd ed. (New York: St. Martin's, 1983), 16, and Fischer, *Albion's Seed,* 674–75.

84. Michael Grossberg, *Governing the Hearth: Law and the Family in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 106.

twentieth century, seven states still allowed twelve-year-old girls to marry. Utah's minimum age for girls was fourteen.[85]

While the marriage age for both women and men has risen over the years in the United States and other parts of the Western world, there are still some ethnic and social groups that continue to accept and even encourage marriages between younger couples. Most recent was the international debate over acceptable marriage ages caused by the union of a twelve-year-old Gypsy (or Roma) girl and a fifteen-year-old boy in Romania: "Marriage age for [Gypsies] has been 11 to 14 years old for hundreds of years."[86] Simply stated, among certain groups and cultures, marrying at a young age continues to the present.

Thus, Krakauer's *Under the Banner of Heaven* offers a flawed and biased story. He demonstrates his own ignorance in regard to histori-

---

85. S. N. D. North, comp., and Desmond Walls Allen, ed., *Marriage Laws in the United States, 1887–1906* (Conway: Arkansas Research, 1993), 2, information arranged alphabetically by state and territory.

86. Alison Mutler, "Child Bride Protests Wedding: 12-Year-Old Girl Stalls Arranged Roma Ceremony," *Kansas City Star,* 28 September 2003; "Child Bride: Sex Abuse or Cultural Diversity?" from BBC News at news.bbc.co.uk (accessed 7 October 2003); and, "Child Bride Fuels Ire in Romania," *USA Today,* 1 October 2003. An example showing the obvious misunderstandings and how values and prejudices can be projected onto other people and cultures is demonstrated in the declaration that the fifteen-year-old boy could be charged with rape because "a bloodied bedsheet [was shown wedding guests] to prove the marriage had been consummated." In reality, among Middle Eastern, North African, Gypsy, and other cultures, the practice of showing a bloody bedsheet or garment is not to show that the marriage was consummated but to prove that the bride was a virgin. Since gifts and money are traditionally exchanged between the families of the bride and groom, and since a wife is traditionally considered property of the husband, her virginity needs to be proven. A discussion of this custom can be found in the following: Edward Westermarck, *Marriage Ceremonies in Morocco* (London: Macmillan, 1914), 159, 228, etc. (see index, s.v. "Virginity, marks of the bride's"); Hilma Granqvist, *Marriage Conditions in a Palestinian Village* (Helsinki: Akademische Buchhandlung, 1931–35), 2:127–30; and I. Ben-Ami and D. Noy, eds., *Studies in Marriage Customs* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1974), 54, 174, 260, 262, as cited in Jeffrey H. Tigay, "Examination of the Accused Bride in 4Q159: Forensic Medicine at Qumran," n. 1, found at ccat.sas.upenn.edu/jwst/4q159.htm (accessed 22 April 2004). Regarding this practice among Gypsies or Romani, W. R. Rishi, in *Excerpts from Roma,* www.romani.org/rishi/rmoral.html (accessed 22 April 2004), wrote, "A Romani girl has to prove her virginity on the night of consummation of her marriage; otherwise she is sent back to her parents as no boy would accept such a girl." While this practice is repugnant to most Westerners, it is, nonetheless, a tradition of these people which must be placed within their historical and cultural context.

cal research and analysis. And, while some errors can be expected from a novice attempting to deal with the Latter-day Saint past, not everything Krakauer has done in his book can be viewed as innocent mistakes. Indeed, with whatever agenda in mind, Krakauer appears to have created a book that focuses on the negative and sensational in order to portray the church in an unflattering light.

Krakauer portrays himself as a martyr in behalf of truth and honesty. He vacillates publicly between anger and belligerency, hurt and puzzlement. In a *Salt Lake Tribune* editorial, he admits to being sad that the church had "elected to regard [his] book in such a reductionist light." He then proceeds to accuse the church of sanitizing their historical record and concludes by lamenting, "I am disappointed that [church leaders] continue to do everything in their considerable power to keep important aspects of the church's past hidden in the shadows. And I am especially disappointed that they feel such an urgent need to attack writers, like me, who present balanced, carefully researched accounts of Mormon history that happen to diverge from the official, highly expurgated church version."[87]

Krakauer's denials of being an anti-Mormon fly in the face of his comments. In addition, his book-signing schedule not only at bookstores but also at churches—including the First Parish of Cambridge Church (Cambridge, Massachusetts), Unity Church (Boulder, Colorado), First Congregational Church (Portland, Oregon), and Unity Temple on the Plaza (Kansas City, Missouri)—seems to lend credence to the application of this designation.[88] It is not difficult to imagine why these churches hosted book signings for Krakauer, given the nature of the subject. No doubt they invited their congregations to attend and hear the dark side of Mormonism.

Further adding to the perception that *Under the Banner of Heaven* is an anti-Mormon book in a fancy cover are the reactions found on various online anti-Mormon sites and in their publications. For example,

---

87. Jon Krakauer, "Krakauer: Church Rigidly Controls Its Past," *Salt Lake Tribune,* 13 July 2003.

88. www.randomhouse.com/features/krakauer/appearances.html (accessed 21 July 2003).

the Mormonism Research Ministry Web site recommends the book for "those who would like to better understand the polygamist mindset,"[89] and John L. Smith, an anti-Mormon from Marlow, Oklahoma, describes Krakauer's book as "the most fascinating" book he has read in years. In addition, he offers the book for sale to the readers of his publication, the *Newsletter*.[90] And the negative impact of Krakauer's book extends beyond American borders. In November 2003, the *Ghanaian Chronicle* claimed that Krakauer had "revealed the Mormon Church as a fertile breeding ground for killers, child abusers, racists, polygamists and white supremacists."[91]

In conclusion, Krakauer's *Under the Banner of Heaven* has not lived up to expectations nor to its pre- and postpublication publicity. Moreover, his obvious biases against both religion in general and the Church of Jesus Christ in particular have made the book nothing more than a flawed, sensationalistic work that, it is hoped, will soon be forgotten along with many similar anti-Mormon works of the past.

---

89. Johnson, "Under the Banner of Heaven."

90. John L. Smith, "A Fabulous New Book," *Newsletter* 2/18 (November–December 2003): 2. John L. Smith recently began a newsletter not associated with UMI, which operation he sold several years ago and in which he no longer has any input.

91. Nicholas Wapshott, with additional files from Raymond Archer, "The Mormons Are No Saints . . . And They Are Not About to Change," *Ghanaian Chronicle on the Web,* 20 November 2003. The article is very critical of the Church of Jesus Christ. The second paragraph announces that Krakauer had concluded in his book that "the Church is an authoritarian, racially intolerant, homophobic organization, whose members encourage extreme-right militias and [are] reluctant to shake off their polygamous past." The article, which is not only unfriendly toward the church but also toward the political party in power, suggests that the church has "the closest links with the Central Intelligence Agency" and bribed the Minister of Information and Presidential Affairs when it was trying to build the temple in Accra, which was dedicated in January 2004.

Ein Heldenleben?
On Thomas Stuart Ferguson as an Elias for Cultural Mormons

Daniel C. Peterson and Matthew Roper

"Thomas Stuart Ferguson," says Stan Larson in the opening chapter of *Quest for the Gold Plates,*[1] "is best known among Mormons as a popular fireside lecturer on Book of Mormon archaeology, as well as the author of *One Fold and One Shepherd,* and coauthor of *Ancient America and the Book of Mormon*" (p. 1).[2] Actually, though, Ferguson is very little known among Latter-day Saints. He died in 1983, after all, and "he published no new articles or books after 1967" (p. 135). The books that he did publish are long out of print. "His role in 'Mormon scholarship' was," as Professor John L. Sorenson puts it, "largely that of enthusiast and publicist, for which we can be grateful,

---

1. For another review of this book, see John Gee, "The Hagiography of Doubting Thomas," *FARMS Review of Books* 10/2 (1998): 158–83.

2. Other Larson publications on Ferguson include Stan Larson, "The Odyssey of Thomas Stuart Ferguson," *Dialogue* 23/1 (1990): 55–93; and Larson, "Thomas Stuart Ferguson and Book of Mormon Archaeology," in *Mormon Mavericks: Essays on Dissenters,* ed. John Sillito and Susan Staker (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), 243–83.

---

but he was neither scholar nor analyst."[3] We know of no one who cites Ferguson as an authority, except countercultists, and we suspect that a poll of even those Latter-day Saints most interested in Book of Mormon studies would yield only a small percentage who recognize his name.[4] Indeed, the radical discontinuity between Book of Mormon studies as done by Milton R. Hunter and Thomas Stuart Ferguson in the fifties and those practiced today by, say, the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS) could hardly be more striking. Ferguson's memory has been kept alive by Stan Larson and certain critics of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, as much as by anyone, and it is tempting to ask why. Why, in fact, is such disproportionate attention being directed to Tom Ferguson, an amateur and a writer of popularizing books, rather than, say, to M. Wells Jakeman, a trained scholar of Mesoamerican studies who served as a member of the advisory committee for the New World Archaeological Foundation?[5] Dr. Jakeman retained his faith in the Book of Mormon until his death in 1998, though the fruit of his decades-long work on Book of Mormon geography and archaeology remains unpublished.[6]

The professional countercultists John Ankerberg and John Weldon will serve to illustrate this initially puzzling phenomenon. In their memorable tome *Behind the Mask of Mormonism,* they persist in trumpeting the story of the late Thomas Stuart Ferguson as an example of an authority on archaeology and a "great defender of the faith" who lost his testimony when he learned that the Book of Mormon was

---

3. John L. Sorenson, in addendum to John Gee, review of . . . *By His Own Hand upon Papyrus: A New Look at the Joseph Smith Papyri,* by Charles M. Larson, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 4 (1992): 118.

4. Professor William Hamblin asked a history class in spring 1996 if they had ever heard of Thomas Stuart Ferguson. Out of ninety students, none had. There is no reason to suppose that Ferguson's name-recognition has increased since 1996.

5. For further information on the founding and purposes of the New World Archaeological Foundation, see Daniel C. Peterson, "On the New World Archaeological Foundation," in this number of the *FARMS Review,* pages 221–33.

6. For a brief sketch of Professor Jakeman's contribution to research on the Book of Mormon, see "Memorial: Max Wells Jakeman," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 7/1 (1998): 79.

merely a work of American frontier fiction.[7] They do this despite the fact that Ferguson, a lawyer based in northern California, was neither an archaeologist nor, for that matter, a scholar.[8] (In our judgment, based on conversations with several of those who knew him, as well as on a fair amount of reading, Ferguson seems, among other things, to have lacked patience, or the scholar's temperament. He apparently expected that conclusive evidence would emerge almost immediately to "prove" the Book of Mormon true. But archaeology simply does not work that way—not in the world of the Bible and certainly not in the far more imperfectly understood world of pre-Columbian Mesoamerica.) The object of Ankerberg and Weldon's exercise seems to be to increase the potentially shocking effect on Latter-day Saints of Ferguson's apparent loss of faith by overstating his prominence as a scholar and intellectual.[9]

---

7 . John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Behind the Mask of Mormonism* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1992), 289–90, quoting Jerald Tanner and Sandra Tanner, *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* 5th ed. (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1987), 332; compare John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Mormonism* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1992), 289–90. *Behind the Mask of Mormonism* is a quietly revised reprinting—it even bears the same copyright date as its original, although it was actually published roughly three years later—of *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Mormonism.* One of the present reviewers examined *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Mormonism* in considerable detail, in Daniel C. Peterson, "Chattanooga Cheapshot, or the Gall of Bitterness," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 5 (1993): 1–86, and, when they stealthily revised it and reissued it as *Behind the Mask of Mormonism,* examined it again in Daniel C. Peterson, "Constancy amid Change," *FARMS Review of Books* 8/2 (1996): 60–98.

8. See Peterson, "Chattanooga Cheapshot," 55–56. As their frequent and very displeased allusions to it in *Behind the Mask of Mormonism* make unmistakably clear, Ankerberg and Weldon were well aware of the critique to which they had been subjected in "Chattanooga Cheapshot." Although they quietly changed a number of passages to evade that critique, they appear to have consciously decided to repeat their incorrect claims about Thomas Stuart Ferguson.

9. Compare Janis Hutchinson, *The Mormon Missionaries: An Inside Look at Their Real Message and Methods* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Resources, 1995), which speaks of "BYU's Stuart Ferguson," although Ferguson never worked for BYU. Kurt Van Gorden, *Mormonism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), p. 9 n. 9, makes "Thomas Steward [*sic*] Ferguson" the "founder of the Archaeology Department at Brigham Young University." Jerald Tanner and Sandra Tanner, *The Changing World of Mormonism* (Chicago: Moody, 1981), 140–41, 356, and Tanner and Tanner, *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* 332–33, also make much of the Ferguson case. See, however, the statement of John L. Sorenson in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 4 (1992): 117–19.

Thomas Stuart Ferguson's interest in the Book of Mormon and Mesoamerica did not begin with his 1946 trip to Mexico in the company of J. Willard Marriott. Rather, it seems to have originated during his student days at Berkeley in the 1930s, where he associated with Jakeman and with his future collaborator, the eventual General Authority Milton R. Hunter. So far as any mortal can know, Elder Hunter, who earned a PhD in history from the University of California and served as a director of the New World Archaeological Foundation, also believed in the Book of Mormon until the day of his death in 1975. Isn't Elder Hunter's career at least as interesting and significant as Thomas Ferguson's? "One needs to examine all the relevant evidence," declares Larson, "in order to have as well-rounded a picture of Ferguson as possible" (p. 6). But why should anybody outside of his family *care* about having a "well-rounded picture of Ferguson"? In the discipline of Thomas Stuart Ferguson studies, the final state of Ferguson's testimony may be, as Larson puts it, "a major enigma" and a subject of "intense controversy" (p. 3). But it remains unclear why it should be of anything more than peripheral interest anywhere else—except, again, to his family and perhaps one or two specialist intellectual historians of contemporary Mormonism.

What we seem to have in Larson's book is a hagiography of a doubting Thomas Ferguson, a depiction of Ferguson as a role model. Listen to the author's occasionally almost reverent language: Ferguson possessed a "deep-seated desire to follow the truth wherever it led him—even if it took him far from the fervent convictions of his youth" (p. 213). "His legacy is a commitment to the search for truth" (p. 218). (Is that *not* the legacy of, say, Wells Jakeman?) Echoing Eric Hoffer's classic study of Nazis and other fanatics, Larson says that the early Ferguson "expect[ed] with the certainty of the true believer that he would find archaeological proof of the historical authenticity of the Book of Mormon" (p. 217).[10] But in the last thirteen years of his life Ferguson became much more "broad-minded" (p. 217). He "developed

---

10. Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements* (New York: Harper, 1951).

a more tolerant attitude about the opinions of others, felt that religion served a genuine need in human life, found relaxation in working in the garden, and enjoyed life immensely" (p. 218). "The bottom line of Ferguson's position was that whatever works for a person and gives meaning to life was, by definition, good for that person" (p. 218).

Larson's work is strikingly partisan in its defensiveness toward a doubting Thomas Ferguson. Do we really have any direct evidence, for example, of precisely how much Bruce Warren knew about the state and history of Ferguson's testimony? Larson provides none but still paints Dr. Warren as disingenuous for having supposedly engaged in a cover-up of Ferguson's faltering religious belief (pp. 269–74). But this seems unjustified and, very probably, unfair. Given Thomas Stuart Ferguson's evident lack of candor about his views—it is noteworthy that Larson refuses to call *him* "deceptive"—can Warren really be blamed if he was wrong about them? Especially in light of the fact that, as Larson himself observes in another context (where, once again, it is taken to count against Warren), Warren's "total association with Ferguson during the last thirteen years of his life"—the very time, be it noted, of Ferguson's apparent doubts—"consisted of a five-minute conversation in 1979" (p. 272)? In a letter to one of the authors, Warren puts it at about *two* minutes and remarks that his statement in the preface to *The Messiah in Ancient America* "was written in the spring of 1987 before I knew anything about Tom Ferguson's problems with the Book of Abraham or the various negative letters he had written between 1970 and the time of his death." Warren had been led to believe that Ferguson was in touch with Bookcraft and was revising the book for publication when he died.[11]

At several points in Larson's book, judgments are pronounced without a clear basis to justify them. For example, Ferguson was convinced that we now have the original ancient manuscript from which the Book of Abraham purportedly derives and dismissed any contrary opinion as "a dodge" (p. 112). But this is, at best, disputed. Yet Larson picks up the same notion. "Now that all the Joseph Smith Egyptian

---

11. Bruce Warren, e-mail to Daniel C. Peterson, 7 May 1996.

papyri have been translated," he reports, not "even the name of Abraham is found anywhere among the papyri" (p. 105). Consider, too, the following: "Disenchanted, he became a Mormon 'closet doubter'"—that is, someone who "privately disbelieves some of the basic teachings of the Church but keeps that disbelief hidden from his/her public image. Typically this state of skepticism is preceded by an extended period of strong belief in those same tenets" (p. 134). What undergirds Larson's judgment here? A survey? Personal experience? (Mark Hofmann might serve as a potential counterexample.) More importantly, after noting that Ferguson's beliefs subsequent to the early 1960s can be known only from "his conversations and letters" (p. 135). Larson declares that the years 1969–70 "are a documentary blank with no known letters" (p. 136). Undeterred by this lacuna, though, he proceeds to tell us what happened during that time period: Ferguson went through "a period of soul-searching and reflection" and "agonized to find a spiritual meaning to his beliefs. He reexamined his assumptions about the Book of Abraham and even began to question the historicity of the Book of Mormon" (p. 136). Fawn Brodie herself could hardly have bettered this.[12]

Nevertheless, we are quite prepared to entertain the idea that Thomas Stuart Ferguson lost his faith. It seems the most plausible reading of some of the evidence. There are, however, several contrary indications that muddy the waters a bit. For instance, the 1975 symposium paper on which Larson places such weight can be read, in a few passages, as expressing at least a hope that the Book of Mormon *might* be true. And Thomas Ferguson's son Larry recalls sitting on a patio with his father shortly after his father had returned from a trip to Mexico with Elder Howard W. Hunter of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. It was only one month before the senior Ferguson's entirely unexpected death. "For no apparent reason, out of the blue," Larry recalls, Thomas Stuart Ferguson turned to his son and bore his testi-

---

12. On her propensity to read Joseph Smith's mind, see Hugh Nibley, "No, Ma'am, That's Not History: A Brief Review of Mrs. Brodie's Reluctant Vindication of a Prophet She Seeks to Expose," in *Tinkling Cymbals and Sounding Brass: The Art of Telling Tales about Joseph Smith and Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 1–45.

mony. "Larry," he said, "the Book of Mormon is *exactly* what Joseph Smith said it is." Sometime earlier, Ferguson had borne a similar testimony to his wife, Larry's mother, and, during the year before he died, he had participated in an effort to distribute the Book of Mormon to non–Latter-day Saints.[13] He included his photograph along with the following testimony in several copies of the book:

> We have studied the Book of Mormon for 50 years. We can tell you that it follows only the New Testament as a written witness to the mission, divinity, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And it seems to us that there is no message that is needed by man and mankind more than the message of Christ. Millions of people have come to accept Jesus as the Messiah because of reading the Book of Mormon in a quest for truth. The book is the cornerstone of the Mormon Church.
>
> The greatest witness to the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon is the book itself. But many are the external evidences that support it.[14]

Ferguson also called Robert and Rosemary Brown of Mesa, Arizona, and told them that, yes, the writings of the amateur Egyptologist Dee Jay Nelson had caused him a brief period of doubt about the Book of Abraham. But, he said, their devastating exposé of Nelson's charlatanry had turned him right around.[15] Shortly before his death, he also told the Browns that Jerald and Sandra Tanner had been publishing material from him without his permission and indicated that he was

---

13.   Larry Ferguson, telephone conversation with Daniel C. Peterson, 15 April 2004; see Larry Ferguson, "The Most Powerful Book," *Dialogue* 23/3 (1990): 9.

14.   The statement is reproduced in Bruce W. Warren and Thomas Stuart Ferguson, *The Messiah in Ancient America* (Provo, UT: Book of Mormon Research Foundation, 1987), 283. As can be seen from its publication date, this book appeared several years after Ferguson's death. It is a reworking of Ferguson's much earlier work *One Fold and One Shepherd* (San Francisco: Books of California, 1958).

15.   See Robert L. Brown and Rosemary Brown, *They Lie in Wait to Deceive: "A Study of Anti-Mormon Deception,"* ed. Barbara Ellsworth (Mesa, AZ: Brownsworth, 1981). This hilarious and truly devastating book is now available online at www.fairlds.org/pubs/liw/liwv1.html (accessed 28 April 2004).

contemplating a lawsuit against them. He even declared that some of what had been published as coming from him was a forgery.[16]

Let us, however, accept the possibility that Ferguson may indeed have lost his faith in Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon for a time. We don't wish to seem callous. As believers, we care about the fate of Thomas Ferguson's soul. As human beings, we are concerned about the pain that a discussion like this might cause to members of his family, who are still very much alive. But having said that, the question that frankly comes to our minds when we consider the claim that Thomas Ferguson lost his faith is "So what?"

The apostasy of prominent religious figures is hardly a novelty. One thinks of the Talmudic sage Elisha Ben Abuyah, for example, or perhaps even of the spectacular instance of Sabbatai Zevi. The founder of Neoplatonism was an apostate Egyptian Christian by the name of Ammonius Saccas. St. Augustine apostatized from the anthropomorphizing Christianity in which he had been raised and became a Manichaean. Then he apostatized from Manichaeism, converting to the Neoplatonized and anti-anthropomorphic Christianity of Bishop Ambrose of Milan. C. S. Lewis was an apostate from the atheistic naturalism that reigned almost unquestioned among Oxbridge intellectuals of the 1920s. Early Latter-day Saint history certainly has no lack of apostates, as even the most casual student of the subject knows. Every conversion is presumably an apostasy from *something*.

Individual apostasies have little or nothing to say, in themselves, about the truth claims of the systems that the apostates have left behind. We note this, once again, only because a considerable number of polemicists against the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have sought to use the case of Thomas Stuart Ferguson to score points against the church. We do not intend to take up this particular (and, in our opinion, largely illegitimate and irrelevant) issue any further, but only to suggest that every tradition (religious or nonreligious) has its apostates—emphatically including evangelical Protestantism. (One thinks of the many fundamentalists who shed their childhood

---

16. Robert Brown, telephone conversation with Daniel C. Peterson, 15 April 2004.

faith in liberal divinity schools, or of the recent and ongoing emigration of certain evangelical intellectuals to Rome, or Franky Schaeffer's recent, noisy defection to Eastern Orthodoxy. Ernest Hemingway was raised in an evangelical Protestant home.)

Still, Stan Larson apparently sees the doubting Thomas Stuart Ferguson as a significant harbinger, a role model, and wants his readers to see him in the same way. But is this justified? "The odyssey of Ferguson," wrote Larson in the earlier printed version of this work, "is a quest for religious certitude through archaeological evidences."[17] Precisely. And there's the rub. Larson refers to Ferguson's growing conviction of his personal role to demonstrate to the world the authenticity of the Book of Mormon, "His major goal in life" was "proving that Jesus Christ really appeared in ancient Mexico after his crucifixion and resurrection" (p. 69). This sort of language, if it accurately reflects Ferguson's self-image, perhaps offers a clue to the reason for his possible loss of faith. He was distressed, for example, that inscriptions related to the Book of Mormon were not forthcoming. But it is only within the past few years that any inscriptional evidence even of the biblical "house of David" has been found. The earlier incarnation of Larson's book quotes a letter from Ferguson to his friend Wendell Phillips, telling about his plans for a trip to the Near East in April 1961. Ferguson intended to travel, among other destinations, to Oman, where, he said, he would "climb to the top of the mountain nearest the sea in Oman and look around for any inscriptions that might have been left on the mountain by Nephi, where he talked to the Lord."[18] Was he *serious*? Ferguson's feeling that one of his early manuscripts "would be a powerful influence for world peace" (p. 16), if it is accurately reported, suggests some degree of estrangement from reality. Likewise, his prediction—following brief remarks about the problem of identifying the Preclassic inhabitants of the Upper Grijalva River basin—that "the solution may well have far-reaching implications and results for the general welfare of the present inhabitants

---

17. Larson, "Odyssey of Thomas Stuart Ferguson," 57.
18. Ibid., 67; Larson, "Ferguson and Book of Mormon Archaeology," 255.

of the earth" clearly seems to ask of archaeology far more than it can ever possibly deliver.[19]

"My personal experience with Tom Ferguson and his evangelism," recalls Professor John L. Sorenson,

> crystallized in a period of 10 days that he and I spent in intensive archaeological survey in April 1953 in the Chiapas central depression. In the field, out of my academic training I saw a host of things which did not register with him. His primary concern was to ask wherever we went if anyone had seen "figurines of horses." That epitomized his unsubtle concept of "proof." I could only cringe at this jackpot-or-nothing view of archaeology. No wonder the man's "quest" failed! He began with naive expectations and they served him right to the end.[20]

"He wondered," reports Larson, "why the evidence for the antiquity of the Book of Mormon was not coming forth as expected. He was genuinely disappointed that the archaeological support for the Book of Mormon was not being discovered at the rate he had anticipated" (p. 69). Again, though, progress in Mesoamerican archaeology did not destroy the testimony of M. Wells Jakeman. An interesting future question for research would center on why a professional expert in the field remained evidently undisturbed by matters that may have proved troubling to the faith of an amateur. Were Ferguson's expectations unrealistic? As Sorenson said in 1996 of Professor Jakeman, whose Berkeley dissertation dealt with "the ethnic and political structure of Yucatan immediately preceding the Spanish conquest," "he remained methodologically cautious his whole life regarding 'proof' of the Book of Mormon," yet "he also still remains a believer in the Book of Mormon."[21] Are the two facts related?

---

19. Thomas Stuart Ferguson, "Introduction concerning the New World Archaeological Foundation," Papers of the New World Archaeological Foundation 1 (Orinda, CA: NWAF, 1956), 6.

20. John Sorenson, e-mail to Daniel Peterson, 23 April 1996. Compare Sorenson, in addendum, 118 (see note 3 above).

21. Sorenson to Peterson, 23 April 1996.

We argue that Thomas Ferguson was methodologically incautious in his believing days and that this continued into his apparent time of doubt. He was uncritical even as a critic. In 1970 and 1971, we are told, Ferguson was troubled by the "new data on the First Vision" (p. 119). In fact, Larson seems to buy into this when he tells us that "a forthright attitude by the LDS Church leaders about . . . the First Vision would radically alter the perceptions of most members" (p. 119). Ferguson seems to have been likewise troubled by evidence for Joseph Smith's legal examination before a justice of the peace in South Bainbridge, New York, in 1826 (pp. 142–44). Yet subsequent research suggests that these may be nonissues.[22]

The Book of Abraham

The Pearl of Great Price looms large in Ferguson's story, as Larson tells it (pp. 85–132). Ferguson's entire religious outlook changed, he says, "because of the rediscovery and translation of some of Joseph Smith's original papyri of the Book of Abraham" (p. 85). But was it really so simple? Were there no other contributing factors? Larson himself may have unwittingly suggested one: "During the Civil Rights Movement," he says of Ferguson, "he questioned the rightness of the Mormon Church's ban on priesthood for the blacks, and due to that position he developed a quiet skepticism concerning the Book of Abraham, which speaks of someone being cursed 'as pertaining to the Priesthood' (Abr. 1:26). The stage was set for a radical change in his understanding of that Mormon scripture" (p. 70). While this alleged position of Ferguson's does establish him on the side of the progressive angels, it also suggests that he may have been predisposed to reject the Book of Abraham. Sorenson says that Ferguson was "eventually trapped by his unjustified expectations, flawed logic, limited information, perhaps offended pride, and lack of faith in the tedious research that real scholarship requires."[23]

---

22.   See, for example, Gordon A. Madsen, "Joseph Smith's 1826 Trial: The Legal Setting," *BYU Studies* 30/2 (1990): 91–108; Milton V. Backman Jr., *Joseph Smith's First Vision: Confirming Evidences and Contemporary Accounts,* 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980).

23.   Sorenson, in addendum, 119 (see note 3 above).

Does the Book of Abraham controversy provide solid grounds for Ferguson's loss of faith? Larson seems to think so. We do not. Leonard Lesko and John A. Wilson told Ferguson that the standing figure in Facsimile 1 should have the head not of a man but of the jackal-god Anubis (pp. 95–99). But, as Professor John Gee has pointed out, the question is really moot: Whether the figure had a human head or an Anubis mask, it would still be a priest.[24]

This leads to a broader critique of Larson's work: It is not balanced. He cites Stephen Thompson as a Latter-day Saint Egyptologist who rejects the Book of Abraham (pp. 98–99, 116, 121, 124, 125, 131, 194, 226), but he takes no account of John Gee, a Latter-day Saint Egyptologist who emphatically does not. He never confronts Gee's writing on the Pearl of Great Price.[25] Are Thompson's criticisms of the Book of Abraham fatal to its historical claims? Let's look at a couple: Thompson claims that religious persecution did not exist in the ancient world until the time of Antiochus Epiphanes IV in the second century BC; the Egyptians, he says, were remarkably tolerant religiously. And human sacrifice, he says, was never practiced by ancient Egyptians. However, Thompson seems to have missed a Thirteenth Dynasty text stipulating that unauthorized intruders into the temple should be burned alive. And he overlooks a Twelfth Dynasty execration ritual

---

24. John Gee, "Abracadabra, Isaac and Jacob," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 7/1 (1995): 79–82.

25. See, for example, John Gee, "Telling the Story of the Joseph Smith Papyri," *FARMS Review of Books* 8/2 (1996): 46–59; Gee, "Abracadabra, Isaac and Jacob," 19–84; Gee, "'Bird Island' Revisited, or the Book of Mormon through Pyramidal Kabbalistic Glasses," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 7/1 (1995): 219–28; Gee, "A Tragedy of Errors," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 4 (1992): 93–117; Gee, "Abraham in Ancient Egyptian Texts," *Ensign,* July 1992, 60–62; Gee, "Notes on the Sons of Horus" (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1991); and Gee, "References to Abraham Found in Two Egyptian Texts," *Insights* (September 1991): 1, 3. Also significant, but appearing after the publication of Larson's book, are John Gee, "Eyewitness, Hearsay, and Physical Evidence of the Joseph Smith Papyri," 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, UT: FARMS, 2000), 175–217; and John Gee and Stephen D. Ricks, "Historical Plausibility: The Historicity of the Book of Abraham as a Case Study," in *Historicity and the Latter-day Saint Scriptures,* ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2001), 63–98.

that includes human sacrifice and was found at Mergissa, in Nubia, accompanied by a disarticulated skeleton with the skull upside down, smashed pottery, and the remnants of burnt red-wax figurines. But then, it is noteworthy (especially for an argument that relies heavily on charges of anachronism) that *all* of Thompson's evidence comes from the Egyptian New Kingdom, whereas Abraham almost certainly lived in the considerably earlier Middle Kingdom.[26]

And this, in turn, suggests an even broader problem: Larson appears to be ignoring a sizeable body of positive evidence for the historicity of both the Book of Mormon and the Book of Abraham. What is more, the evidence continues to accumulate. Critics of the Book of Abraham have long claimed that there was no Egyptian cultic influence in Syria at the time of Abraham, as the book seems to suggest. But over the past fifty years, historians have come to recognize that Egypt "dominated" Syria and Palestine during the Middle Kingdom. Moreover, Gee and Ricks have located published evidence of the worship of Egyptian gods in the Middle Bronze II period at Ebla, in Syria.[27] This is the right time for Abraham, it is the right place, and it even includes (among others) the right god—the Fayyum crocodile god Sobek, who seems to appear in Facsimile 1. He has also identified a possible reference in Egyptian materials to the place-name *Olishem,* previously attested only in Abraham 1:10 and an ancient inscription near the site of Ebla.[28]

Dr. Larson recounts Thomas Ferguson's encounters with Bay area Egyptologists Henry L. F. Lutz and Leonard Lesko, as related by Ferguson (pp. 92–99). Professor Lutz died in 1973. It would be useful, however, to have Professor Lesko's side of the story, if he still recalls it. A Latter-day Saint former graduate student and associate of Professor Lesko says that the subject of Joseph Smith and Mormonism had never come up in their exchanges until just after Ferguson's visit to Lesko in late 1967 or early 1968. But he recalls Lesko asking him, one day in his office, if he (the student) knew a Tom Ferguson. Was he a Mormon? Professor Lesko

---

26. Gee and Ricks, "Historical Plausibility," 80.

27. Ibid., 78–80.

28. Ibid., 75–76, 78–80.

explained that Ferguson had come into his office with some pictures and asked if he could identify them. Yes, he could. Do they have anything to do with Abraham? Ferguson asked. No. Whereupon Ferguson, still not identifying himself as a Latter-day Saint, left. But the encounter bothered Professor Lesko, whom his Mormon student remembered as being "virtually apologetic" as it dawned on him what the conversation had really been about. Lesko thought it was a setup. The student recalls that Lesko went to a file cabinet and got out a fat folder of materials about the Book of Abraham, which he showed to him. If Ferguson had been forthright, Lesko said, he could have told him a lot more. He would, he said, have referred him to Hugh Nibley. The student remembers Lesko as being at pains to tell him that he would never have said anything negative about Joseph Smith or Mormonism.[29]

Larson devotes a considerable amount of space to citations of Egyptological opinions on the Book of Abraham and recent critiques of the Book of Mormon that have little or nothing to do with Thomas Stuart Ferguson. For this and other reasons, it is manifestly apparent that critiquing recent defenders of Latter-day Saint belief is the real purpose of his book and that its rather cursory biography of Thomas Stuart Ferguson is only a convenient (and largely neglected) vehicle for that critique. But how much value do non-Mormon critiques of the Book of Mormon really possess? Larson cites a very negative appraisal by Yale's Michael Coe. Recently, however, Sorenson has taken Professor Coe to task for brushing aside the Book of Mormon "without studying it more than casually"—ironically doing to it what Coe had accused Sir J. E. S. Thompson of doing to the Grolier Codex, a document whose unorthodox discovery was allowed to stand in the way of recognition that it is, indeed, an ancient Mesoamerican book.[30]

---

29. Incidentally, if the Egyptologists really said that the Book of Abraham papyri were just garden-variety pieces of the Book of the Dead, they were wrong. Perhaps Ferguson misunderstood them. For, at a very minimum, the papyri include materials from the Book of Breathings.

30. John L. Sorenson, "The Book of Mormon as a Mesoamerican Record," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins,* ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997), 391–521, especially 482–87.

Ferguson's 1975 Paper on Book of Mormon Geography

Larson calls Ferguson's 1975 paper, entitled "Written Symposium on Book of Mormon Geography," an "insightful document" that is still worth examining (pp. 177–78). Actually, though, what Ferguson had to say in 1975 was of little scholarly value, and the kindest and most appropriate response would be to politely ignore it. Unfortunately, though, some critics of the church continue to cite the paper with glee, praising it as an enlightened commentary on the imminent collapse of the Book of Mormon. "All the rest of us who participated in that exchange (not just me) were embarrassed by the utter naïveté of what Tom wrote," Sorenson has stated.

> For example, in his list of "archaeological tests" for which he would expect to find American "evidence," he did not even distinguish between statements about the Old World (e.g., reference to "glass" and "grapes," in quotations from Isaiah) and statements about the Nephite setting in the New World. His whole dashed-off little "paper" was full of methodological and epistemological over-simplicities. It appeared that his mind was by then closed to "the search for truth," for he paid not the slightest attention to what other, better qualified LDS scholars said on the same occasion concerning what he considered the damning lack of "evidences."[31]

Warren recalls feeling "pleased that Tom was being more cautious with his statements about Book of Mormon geography but [sensed] that he was leaning over backwards toward the critical side of the issues involved."[32] In his book, Larson focuses on four issues or "tests" mentioned by Ferguson that he feels are still relevant to the current discussion on the Book of Mormon: plants, animals, metals, and script and language (pp. 175–234). Since Larson's discussion represents an expansion on Ferguson's earlier criticisms as well as a partial critique of work by John Sorenson, we will examine each of these in turn.

---

31. Sorenson to Peterson, 23 April 1996.
32. Warren to Peterson, 7 May 1996.

Plants

Much of Larson's discussion of "Archaeology and the Book of Mormon" (pp. 175–234) appears to be dependent on Deanne Matheny's 1993 critique of John Sorenson's book *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*.[33] Shortly after Matheny's critique appeared, however, it received a thoughtful and careful review and response by Sorenson.[34] In reading Larson's book, one comes away with the impression that Larson wrote much of this chapter under the influence of Matheny's critique, somewhat prematurely and without awareness of the fact that Sorenson's response would appear as soon as it did. The careful reader will find traces of hasty and superficial revision in this section, apparently made after the author encountered that response. In our view, though, Sorenson's critique seriously undermined many of Matheny's arguments, and Larson should have paid greater attention to it. While Larson occasionally gives grudging acknowledgment to some of Sorenson's points, his treatment overlooks other significant ones. This is evident in his discussion of plants as they may relate to the Book of Mormon (pp. 179–81).

Larson refers to Matheny's citation of a survey of pre-Columbian crops in Chiapas, Mexico (p. 180). Since few of the crops mentioned in the Book of Mormon text were identified in this survey, Larson, following Ferguson's lead, suggests that this poses a serious problem for the Book of Mormon. In his 1994 article, however, Sorenson addressed the inadequacy of this plant survey cited by Matheny and provided cogent reasons for believing that the botany of pre-Columbian Mesoamerica was probably far more diverse than is generally assumed.[35] Oddly, Larson simply cites the Matheny article; he does not address Sorenson's careful response.

Larson likewise neglects to address significant issues relating to Book of Mormon grains. For example, Sorenson showed in his 1994

---

33. Deanne G. Matheny, "Does the Shoe Fit? A Critique of the Limited Tehuantepec Geography," in *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology,* ed. Brent Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993), 269–328.

34. John L. Sorenson, "Viva Zapato! Hurray for the Shoe!" *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994): 297–361.

35. Ibid., 339–40.

article that a variety of New World plants that would easily fit the ambiguous references to "grain" in the Book of Mormon were known in ancient Mesoamerica.[36] Two grains, however, which are mentioned by name—barley and wheat—suggest at least two possibilities: (1) Those terms could refer to New World grains that were identified by Old World names, even though they were not biologically the same, or (2) they could refer to genuine New World barley and wheat.

Sorenson suggested that edible New World seeds may have been labeled with names like *barley, wheat,* or *sheum,* and he proffered amaranth as one example of a New World grain that could potentially have been designated by any one of those names. Larson's complaint that *amaranth* cannot refer to all three Book of Mormon terms (p. 221 n. 28) is a red herring since Sorenson was not claiming definitive identifications for any of these crops, but merely suggesting possibilities. In fact, Larson knows better because Sorenson has since documented at least seven possibilities—of which amaranth was only one. Why does Larson obscure this issue? It is a well-known fact that, when the Spaniards first encountered the New World, they often employed Old World terms to designate American crops, even though, botanically speaking, these were often of a different variety or species. It is neither unreasonable nor without historical parallel that Book of Mormon peoples from the Old World might have adopted a similar practice. In fact, the Book of Mormon text itself seems to provide evidence for such word borrowing at Mosiah 9:9, where *sheum* is said to have been cultivated by Zeniff's people, *in addition to* barley and wheat. As Robert F. Smith first observed, *sheum* is a perfectly good Akkadian cereal name, dating to the third millennium BC, which in ancient Assyria referred to barley.[37] Regardless of its New World application, however, an obvious question arises: Just how did the author of the Book of Mormon happen to come

---

36. Ibid., 338–39.

37. Robert F. Smith, "Some 'Neologisms' from the Mormon Canon," in *Conference on the Language of the Mormons* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Language Research Center, 1973), 66. This point has been noted by John L. Sorenson in *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1985), 185–86; Sorenson, "Viva Zapato!" 338.

up with a term like *sheum* for the Zeniffites and just happen to use it in an agricultural context? Was this simply a coincidence?

In addition to the suggestion that they may be loan words, Sorenson and others have argued that Book of Mormon references to "barley" and "wheat" may indeed refer to actual varieties of those species of grain that at one time existed in the New World but have not yet been identified by archaeologists. Sorenson, for example, cites the astonishing discovery of pre-Columbian domesticated barley at various North American sites in Arizona, Oklahoma, and Illinois.

> So here was a domesticated barley in use in several parts of North America over a long period of time. Crop exchanges between North America and Mesoamerica have been documented by archaeology making it possible that this native barley was known in that tropical southland and conceivably was even cultivated there. The key point is that these unexpected results from botany are recent. More discoveries will surely be made as research continues.[38]

In spite of this, Larson continues to insist that "the lack of evidence for the existence of wheat in the New World remains a major difficulty in verifying the antiquity of the Book of Mormon" (p. 181). We think, rather, that reference to *sheum* in an 1830 Book of Mormon, thirty-seven years before Akkadian could be deciphered, poses a greater "problem" for those who choose to view that text as nineteenth-century fiction. In fact, as we have noted already, reference to wheat may not pose a problem at all if, like *sheum,* that term was applied to some other New World crop—for which there are various plausible candidates. Still, doesn't the case of pre-Columbian domesticated barley suggest the wisdom of a little patience and vindicate the reasonableness of a faith that similar evidence for wheat may one day be forthcoming as well?

It is vitally important that those seeking to draw broad conclusions from archaeology (whether regarding the Book of Mormon or with respect to other matters) understand the severe limitations of

---

38. Sorenson, "Viva Zapato!" 341–42.

currently available data and that they realize how much work remains to be done. Tentativeness and humility are very much in order. A recent article by Anthony P. Andrews and Fernando Robles Castellanos will serve to illustrate our point. Writing about a relatively small region, the northwestern portion of the Yucatan Peninsula between the coast and Merida, Andrews and Castellanos report:

> To date, we have gathered data on 249 pre-Hispanic and 154 historic sites, and visited most of these in the field. When the project began in 1999, only 69 pre-Hispanic sites had been reported in our survey area. We have obtained surface collections from more than 220 localities, and sketch maps of approximately 50 sites, have made detailed maps of 39 sites, and have excavated 29 test pits at 15 sites.[39]

Thus, according to Andrews and Castellanos, in 1999—just five years ago—only 69 of the 249 pre-Hispanic sites (28 percent) that they have now identified in this relatively small region were even known to archaeologists. Of the 249 pre-Hispanic sites mentioned in their article, 207 were from the Preclassic era (ca. 700 BC–AD 250), which is essentially the period of the Book of Mormon Nephites.[40] Their group prepared "sketch maps" of only one-fifth, or twenty percent, of the 249 sites, leaving the other eighty percent as yet unmapped. Those who insist that, if the Book of Mormon were true, we would have a museum full of artifactual evidence proving it, vastly overestimate the completeness of current archaeological knowledge about pre-Columbian Mesoamerica.

Animals

Elephants. Larson believes that the single reference to "elephants" in the Book of Mormon (at Ether 9:19) poses a problem for Latter-day

---

39. Anthony P. Andrews and Fernando Robles Castellanos, "An Archaeological Survey of Northwest Yucatan, Mexico," *Mexicon* 26/1 (2004): 12. Our thanks to John A. Tvedtnes for bringing this article to our attention.

40. See the table at Andrews and Castellanos, "Archaeological Survey," 8.

Saint belief (pp. 184–88). He cites the currently accepted view of scholars that elephants such as the mammoth and mastodon were extinct more than ten thousand years ago, long before even the Jaredite era (p. 187). A minority of scholars, however, have suggested that some few species of elephant may have survived in isolated regions of the Americas into later historical times. Larson's argument here does not address much of the evidence supportive of this view.[41]

In 1934, W. D. Strong published a significant article summarizing numerous North American Indian traditions suggesting historical knowledge of the mammoth.[42] Strong divided these traditions into two groups: (1) "'myths of observation,'" so called because they were based upon "the observation of fossil bones, objects which would appear to have always excited human interest," and (2) actual "'historical traditions,' [which] seem to embody a former knowledge of the living animals in question, perhaps grown hazy through long oral transmission."[43] It is this later group of traditions that tends to support the idea of late survival of the mammoth or mastodon. These traditions, which can be found among Native Americans from the Great Lakes region to the Gulf of Mexico, led Ludwell H. Johnson to conclude not only that man and elephant had coexisted, but that the mammoth and the mastodon may have survived until as late as 2000 BC in certain regions of North America.[44]

Other scholars have discussed pictographic evidence of trunked animals found at several sites in North America and also in Mayan codices and other artistic representations found in Mesoamerica and Central America. Zoologist W. Stempel claimed on the basis of such a representation at Copan that these could not be tapirs, but that the

---

41. A good starting point would have been the annotated sources on elephants compiled in John L. Sorenson, "Animals in the Book of Mormon: An Annotated Bibliography" (FARMS paper, 1992).

42. W. D. Strong, "North American Indian Traditions Suggesting a Knowledge of the Mammoth," *American Anthropologist* 36 (1934): 81–88.

43. Ibid., 81.

44. Ludwell H. Johnson III, "Men and Elephants in America," *Scientific Monthly* 75 (1952): 215–21.

images must represent mammoths.[45] No less an authority than Eric Thompson found some of these elephantine-like representations to be "a difficult thing to be explained away by non-believers."[46] In 1930, an "elephant-like" stone statue was discovered near the Tonolá River on the Isthmus of Tehuantepec.[47] Although certainly not definitive, such evidence may be suggestive of the late survival of mammoths or mastodons into this tropical region of southern Mexico, for which Sorenson and others have suggested links between the Olmec cultural tradition and the Jaredites.

In 1993, three Russian archaeologists announced the discovery that a species of dwarf mammoth had survived until as recently as two thousand years ago on Wrangel Island in the Siberian Arctic.[48] Oddly, Larson feels that this remarkable discovery has no relevance to the question of the elephant in the Book of Mormon. Instead, he writes that "the evidence that neither the mammoth nor the mastodon of North America survived the last Ice Age is strong" (p. 188). But his statement misses the mark on several counts. Mammoths were not supposed to have survived so late *anywhere,* yet a minority of scholars have suggested that some few species of elephant may have survived in scattered or isolated regions into relatively recent historical times. As the Russian archaeologists noted in one report, "hardly anyone has doubted that mammoths had become extinct *everywhere* by around 9,500 years before present"; however, these new discoveries "force this view to be revised."[49] And if the mastodon did survive into recent historical times in one place, it is not unreasonable to suppose that it might have survived, in at least limited numbers, in other regions as well.

---

45. W. Stempel, "Die Tierbilder der Mayahandschriften," *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 40 (1908): 704–18.

46. Eric Thompson, "The 'Children of the Sun' and Central America," *Antiquity* 2/6 (1928): 167.

47. Gladys Ayer Nomland, "Proboscis Statue from the Isthmus of Tehuantepec," *American Anthropologist* 34 (1932): 591–93.

48. S. L. Vartanyan, V. E. Garutt, and A. V. Sher, "Holocene Dwarf Mammoths from Wrangel Island in the Siberian Arctic," *Nature* 362 (25 March 1993): 337–40.

49. Vartanyan, Garutt, and Sher, "Holocene Dwarf Mammoths," 337, emphasis added.

Larson's statement likewise shows unawareness that some American elephant remains have, in fact, been dated much later. The mastodon at Devil's Den, Florida, has been dated to 5000 BC[50] and, in the Great Lakes region, to 4000 BC.[51] Jim Hester suggests that, while the general picture of late Pleistocene extinctions may be true, samples such as the above apparently reflect "lingering survival [of the mastodon] in isolated areas."[52] Some time ago, Sorenson summarized similar evidence for survival of the mastodon as late as 4000 BC in southern Arizona. Sorenson makes the reasonable observation that "in the moist lands of Mesoamerica elephants and other large Pleistocene animals certainly lived later than in the drying Southwest."[53]

Of course, the Book of Mormon only requires that some species of mammoth or mastodon survive into the middle of the third millennium BC, and nothing in the Book of Mormon text requires that Jaredite "elephants" were ever abundant or numerous. Latter-day Saints could reasonably hypothesize, based on current scientific evidence, that, shortly thereafter, during the great dearth in the reign of Heth (Ether 9:30–35), the small surviving population of the elephants finally became extinct. Be that as it may, the idea of late survival of the elephant does not now seem so unlikely as it once did.

Horses. An even better known Book of Mormon question involves the text's reference to "horses." According to Larson, the apparent absence of the horse from America during the Jaredite and Nephite periods poses a serious challenge for defenders of the historicity of the book (pp. 188–94). In his 1975 critique, Ferguson had stated, "That evidence of the ancient existence of these animals is not elusive is found

---

50. Robert A. Martin and S. David Webb, "Late Pleistocene Mammals from the Devil's Den Fauna, Levy County," in S. David Webb, *Pleistocene Mammals of Florida* (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1974), 144.

51. Jim J. Hester, "Late Pleistocene Extinction and Radiocarbon Dating," *American Antiquity* 26/1 (1960): 71, 74.

52. Ibid., 74.

53. John L. Sorenson, "The Elephant in Ancient America," in *Progress in Archaeology: An Anthology,* comp. and ed. Ross T. Christensen (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 1963), 98.

in the fact that proof of their existence in the ancient Old World is abundant" (p. 246).

But this is extraordinarily naïve. Archaeology is a very chancy business at best. Most ancient artifacts, buildings, animal and human remains, and the like, are gone forever, leaving not a trace behind. Although the Bible, Crusader accounts, and other records as late as the sixteenth century mention lions in Israel, for example, it was not until 1983 that a single skeletal specimen dating to the biblical period was discovered.[54] Other large mammals that still survive in that land but were unattested until the 1960s and 1970s include the desert leopard and the oryx. "It is probable," writes Jacques Soustelle, "that the Olmecs kept dogs and turkeys, animals domesticated in very early times on the American continent, *but the destruction of any sort of bone remains, both human and animal, by the dampness and the acidity of the soil keeps us from being certain of this.*"[55] Some years ago, Bruce Warren pointed out to one of us in conversation that, although hundreds of thousands of cattle were driven from Texas to Wyoming between 1870 and 1890, an archaeologist would be hard pressed to find even a trace of them. As Professor Edwin Yamauchi has remarked, in an aphorism that should preface every critique of the Book of Mormon on these grounds, "*The absence of archaeological evidence is not evidence of absence.*"[56] And even if artifacts do survive, the odds are that we either will not find them or will not know what to do with them or how to interpret them when we do. Professor John E. Clark, a well-respected field archaeologist, makes the practical limits of archaeological research painfully clear in a memorable image: "Suppose that the town of Provo, Utah, has been completely covered for many years,

---

54. Louise Martin, "The Faunal Remains from Tell Es-sa ʿIdiyeh," *Levant* 20 (1988): 83.

55. Jacques Soustelle, *The Olmecs: The Oldest Civilization in Mexico* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 23, emphasis added.

56. Edwin Yamauchi, "The Current State of Old Testament Historiography," in *Faith, Tradition, and History: Old Testament Historiography in Its Near Eastern Context,* ed. A. R. Millard, James K. Hoffmeier, and David W. Baker (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 34.

and long forgotten. Dig three excavations about the size of telephone booths. Now reconstruct the history of Provo."[57]

Consider the case of the Huns of central Asia and eastern Europe. They were a nomadic people for whom horses were a significant part of their power, wealth, and culture. It has been estimated that each Hun warrior may have owned as many as ten horses. Thus, during their two-century-long domination of the western steppes, the Huns must have had hundreds of thousands of horses. Yet, as the Hungarian researcher Sándor Bökönyi puts it with considerable understatement, "we know very little of the Huns' horses. It is interesting that not a single usable horse bone has been found in the territory of the whole empire of the Huns. This is all the more deplorable as contemporary sources mention these horses with high appreciation."[58]

Accordingly, if Hunnic horse bones are so rare despite the vast herds of horses that undoubtedly once inhabited the steppes, why should we expect extensive evidence of the use of horses in Nephite Mesoamerica—especially considering how limited are the references to horses in the text of the Book of Mormon? Zoo-archaeologist Simon J. M. Davis notes that the majority of bones found in archaeological sites are those of animals that were killed for food or other slaughter products by ancient peoples. It is rare to find remains of other animals in such locations. "Animals exploited, say, for traction or riding [such as horses], may not necessarily have been consumed and may only be represented by an occasional bone introduced by scavenging dogs." Thus, "the problem of correlating between excavated bones and the economic importance of the animals in antiquity is far from being resolved."[59] In fact, "One sometimes wonders whether there is any similarity between a published bone report and the animals exploited by ancient humans."[60]

---

57. John E. Clark, conversation with Daniel C. Peterson, 26 May 2004.

58. Sándor Bökönyi, *History of Domestic Mammals in Central and Eastern Europe,* trans. Lili Halápy (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1974), 267.

59. Simon J. M. Davis, *The Archaeology of Animals* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 24. We would like to thank John A. Tvedtnes for providing this reference.

60. Ibid., 23.

In his discussion of horses, Larson claims that Sorenson tried to buttress "his position that the horse might have survived into Book of Mormon times" (p. 190). He concludes that "Sorenson's three arguments for a late survival of the horse do not hold up under scrutiny" (p. 192). And, in fact, one of the three propositions does indeed seem to be incorrect. After close study of the topic and discussion with Sorenson, we believe that it rests on a simple note-taking error. We are grateful to Larson for his careful proofreading, which will ensure that the error is not perpetuated. But what of his other objections?

Hester did report that horse remains from St. Petersburg, Florida, had been dated to 2040 BP (before present), or just before the time of Christ. While he calls this date "anomalous" and says that it is "suspect" because "the strata are unconsolidated and the fauna may have been redeposited,"[61] it is difficult to see how stratigraphic uncertainties would affect radiocarbon dating.

Larson maintains, against Sorenson, that Ripley Bullen did not claim that horses could have survived until 3000 BC in Florida. Rather, he says, "Bullen spoke in general of the extinction of mammals in Florida" and, contrary to Sorenson's assertion, "not specifically of the horse" (p. 191). We disagree. A careful reading of the document in question indicates that Bullen did include horses in his general statement about the possible survival of Pleistocene fauna. Sorenson never said that Bullen believes in such survival, merely that he allows that it might have occurred.

Larson claims that Sorenson takes Paul Martin's statement about the theoretical possibility of horses and certain other Pleistocene fauna surviving to as late as 2000 BC out of context, since, in fact, Martin says that only extinct species of bison have been indisputably demonstrated to have survived into the postglacial period (p. 191). But Martin's view of the current state of the empirical evidence (with which, by the way, Sorenson tells us he tends to agree) does not rule out (even for him) the theoretical possibility of future evidence that may mandate revision of current ideas. Dr. Sorenson is only saying

---

61. Hester, "Late Pleistocene Extinction," 65; cf. 70.

that Martin did not regard the question as definitively closed. And his reading of Martin appears to us to be correct.[62]

Although horses are generally thought to have been extinct by the Preclassic period, several Mesoamerican sites have yielded horse remains found in a context suggesting later survival. Mercer excavated horse remains that showed no signs of fossilization from several sites in southwest Yucatan.[63] Additional tooth and other bone fragments, heavily encrusted with lime, were discovered by Robert T. Hatt at another site in Yucatan that may have been pre-Columbian.[64]

As his next target, Larson turns to a find of horse teeth from a site in the Yucatan called Mayapan (p. 192). Larson claims that Sorenson "misrepresented the evidence" (p. 192). The find is not really pre-Columbian, he says, but prehistoric Pleistocene. He points out that the horse teeth were "heavily mineralized [fossilized]" (p. 192) and were the only materials at the site showing that characteristic. He notes that "the reporting scholar did not suggest that the Mayan people had ever seen a pre-Columbian horse, but that in Pleistocene times horses lived in Yucatán, and that 'the tooth fragments reported here could have been transported in fossil condition' by the Maya as curiosities" (p. 192). Thus, Larson concludes, Sorenson's "assertion about pre-Columbian horses must be corrected to refer to ancient Pleistocene horses" (p. 192), which would put them thousands of years before the Jaredites (pp. 31–32).

We are at a loss, however, to see where the article "misrepresented the evidence." Every item that Larson cites as a corrective to it is *men-*

---

62. On the issue of the horse, Sorenson states, "Larson's premature certainty on questionable points recalls Ferguson's own premature certainties. On [p. 190], Larson says, 'No depictions of the horse occur in any pre-Columbian art.' Maybe, and maybe not. There are those (non-Mormons) who believe there are such depictions. Larson just happens not to know enough about the matter. A great deal of care and effort deserves to be exercised in further research before the question can be settled. ('Negative evidence' is particularly problematic in any area of science.) Merely to quote some authority who agrees with one's presupposition is not a substitute for the exhaustive study that still ought to be done." Sorenson to Peterson, 23 April 1996.

63. Henry C. Mercer, *The Hill-Caves of Yucatan: A Search for Evidence of Man's Antiquity in the Caverns of Central America* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1896), 172.

64. Robert T. Hatt et al., "Faunal and Archeological Researches in Yucatan Caves," *Cranbrook Institute of Science Bulletin* 33 (1953): 71–72.

tioned in it. (It is true that Sorenson was unimpressed with the idea of Pleistocene curios, for which, he says, the biologist proposing the idea can cite neither evidence nor precedents.) Furthermore, although Larson seems to be saying that Sorenson misapplied the term *pre-Columbian* to the Mayapan finds, the term comes from the original "reporting scholar" himself—Clayton Ray, of the Museum of Comparative Zoology in Cambridge, Massachusetts—who was using it to say, at a minimum, that the horse remains do not derive from the colonial or postcolonial period. The title of Ray's article, from the *Journal of Mammalogy,* is "Pre-Columbian Horses from Yucatan," and he applies the label "pre-Columbian" not only to the discoveries at Mayapan but to those made in three caves in southwestern Yucatan—excavated by H. C. Mercer and later studied by Hatt—in which horse material was found associated with pottery and showing no sign of fossilization. Ray concludes, "The [Mayapan] tooth fragments reported here could have been transported in fossil condition as curios by the Mayans, *but the more numerous horse remains reported by Hatt and Mercer (if truly pre-Columbian) could scarcely be explained in this manner.*"[65]

Incidentally, horse bones were also found in association with cultural remains at Loltun Cave in northern Yucatan. There, archaeologists identified a sequence of sixteen layers numbered from the surface downward and obtained a radiocarbon date of about 1800 BC from charcoal fragments found between layers VIII and VII.[66] Significantly, forty-four fragments of horse remains were found in the layers VII, VI, V, and II—above all in association with pottery. But the earliest Maya ceramics in the region date no earlier than 900–400 BC.[67] Archaeologist Peter Schmidt notes,

> What clearly results is that the presence of the horse, *Equus conversidens,* alone is not sufficient evidence to declare a stratum

65. Clayton E. Ray, "Pre-Columbian Horses from Yucatan," *Journal of Mammalogy* 38/2 (1957): 278, emphasis added.

66. Peter J. Schmidt, "La entrada del hombre a la Península de Yucatán," in *Orígenes del Hombre Americano (Seminario),* comp. Alba González Jácome (Mexico: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1988), 253. We would like to thank John L. Sorenson for providing us with a copy of this reference.

67. Ibid.

totally Pleistocene given the long series of combinations of this species with later materials in the collections of Mercer, Hatt and others. Something went on here that is difficult to explain. [Difficult to explain, that is, in light of current theories about the extinction of the pre-Columbian horse.] If a late survival of the horse and other Pleistocene animals is postulated as an explanation of the situation, it would have to be extended almost to the beginnings of the ceramic era, which will not please the paleontologists.[68]

The point here is, simply, that the question of pre-Columbian horses is not closed. That's all. And it seems to us that Professor Sorenson's caution here is better grounded than Larson's certainty.[69]

Tapir as "Horse." As Professor Sorenson and others have repeatedly pointed out, the practice of naming flora and fauna is far more complicated than critics of the Book of Mormon have been willing to admit. For instance, people typically give the names of familiar animals to animals that have newly come to their attention. Think, for instance, of sea lions, sea cows, and sea horses. When the Romans, confronting the army of Pyrrhus of Epirus in 280 bc, first encountered the elephant, they called it a *Lucca bos* or "Lucanian cow." The Greeks' naming of the hippopotamus (the word means "horse of the river" or "river horse") is also a good example. (Some will recall that the hippopotamus is called a *Nilpferd,* a "Nile horse," in German.)

---

68. Ibid., 255, translation by John L. Sorenson.

69. On this side issue, Sorenson claims: "Nowhere have I ever claimed that 'horses' in the sense of *Equus equus* (the horse as we know it colloquially) survived from the Pleistocene down to Book of Mormon times. My position has always been that other animals could have been termed 'horses' in the English translation of the Book of Mormon yet that perhaps a true Equus form survived down to 'historical' times. The FARMS Update of June 1984, 'Once More: The Horse,' ended with the appropriate qualification (penned by me) to which I still adhere: 'A careful study of the reported remains . . . ought to be done. Radiometric dating might also be worthwhile. Full references to related material will be furnished to any qualified person who desires to carry out such a study.' No such study has yet been done, regardless of the confidence with which establishment scholars may claim that late survivals were impossible. They have never examined the relevant scientific evidence." Sorenson to Peterson, 23 April 1996.

When the Spanish first arrived in Central America, the natives called their horses and donkeys *tzimin,* meaning "tapir." The Arabs' labeling of the turkey as an Ethiopian or Roman rooster *(dīk al-ḥabash* or *dīk rūmī),* the Conquistadors' use of the terms *lion* and *tiger* to designate the jaguar, and the fact that several Amerindian groups called horses *deer* represent but a few more examples of a very well-attested global phenomenon. The Nephites too could easily have assigned familiar Old World names to the animals they discovered in the New.

Larson dismisses Sorenson's suggestion that the Mesoamerican tapir may have been considered by some Book of Mormon writers to be a kind of "horse" or donkey, declaring that the tapir is much more like a pig (pp. 192–93). Here, though, it is important to remember that Sorenson was comparing the horse to the larger Mesoamerican tapir *(Tapiris bairdii)* and not one of the smaller species. It is also noteworthy that Sorenson is not the only scholar to suggest the similarity. Kamar Al-Shimas notes that in contrast to pigs, the tapir is one of the cleanest of animals.[70] Hans Krieg likewise feels that the comparison with the pig is unfortunate.

> Whenever I saw a tapir, it reminded me of an animal similar to a *horse* or a *donkey.* The movements as well as the shape of the animal, especially the high neck with the small brush mane, even the expression on the face is much more like a horse's than a pig's. When watching a tapir on the alert, . . . as he picks himself up when recognizing danger, taking off in a gallop, almost nothing remains of the similarity to a pig.[71]

"At first glance," note Hans Frädrich and Erich Thenius, "the tapirs' movements also are not similar to those of their relatives, the rhinoceros and the horses. In a slow walk, they usually keep the head lowered." When one observes them running, however, this changes:

---

70. Kamar Al-Shimas, *The Mexican Southland* (Fowler, IN: Benton Review Shop, 1922), 112.

71. Hans Krieg, cited by Hans Frädrich and Erich Thenius, "Tapirs," in *Grzimek's Animal Life Encyclopedia,* ed. Bernhard Grzimek (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1972–75), 13:19–20, emphasis added.

In a trot, they lift their heads and move their legs in an elastic manner. The amazingly fast gallop is seen only when the animals are in flight, playing, or when they are extremely excited. The tapirs can also climb quite well, even though one would not expect this because of their bulky figure. Even steep slopes do not present obstacles. They jump vertical fences or walls, rising on their hindlegs and leaping up.[72]

While most species of tapir are much smaller, Baird's tapir, the Mesoamerican species native to Mexico and Guatemala, is rather large. Adult tapirs of this species are about a meter high, nearly two meters in length, and can weigh over 300 kilograms.[73] As one authority notes, "This is the largest of the Tapirs, *equaling a small donkey in bulk and sometimes almost so in size*."[74] Likewise, A. Starker Leopold describes Baird's tapir as "the *size of a pony* but chunkier and with much shorter legs."[75] Ernest P. Walker describes them as "about the size of a *donkey*."[76] Tapirs can also be domesticated quite easily if they are captured when young.[77] Young tapirs who have lost their mothers are easily tamed and will eat from a bowl. They like to be petted and will often allow children to ride on their backs.[78] "Ordinarily, the tapir makes no vocal sound, although when alarmed or excited it emits a sharp squeal *like that of a horse*."[79] Since many authorities on animals have compared the tapirs to horses or donkeys, one cannot so easily dismiss the suggestion that Nephi and others might have as well.

---

72. Ibid., 20.

73. Ibid., 18–19.

74. Ivan T. Sanderson, *Living Mammals of the World* (Garden City, NY: Hanover House, [1955]), 224, emphasis added.

75. A. Starker Leopold, *Wildlife of Mexico: The Game Birds and Mammals* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), 488, emphasis added.

76. Ernest P. Walker, *Mammals of the World* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1964), 2:1347, emphasis added.

77. Al-Shimas, *Mexican Southland,* 112.

78. Frädrich and Thenius, "Tapirs," 28–29.

79. Leopold, *Wildlife of Mexico,* 491, emphasis added.
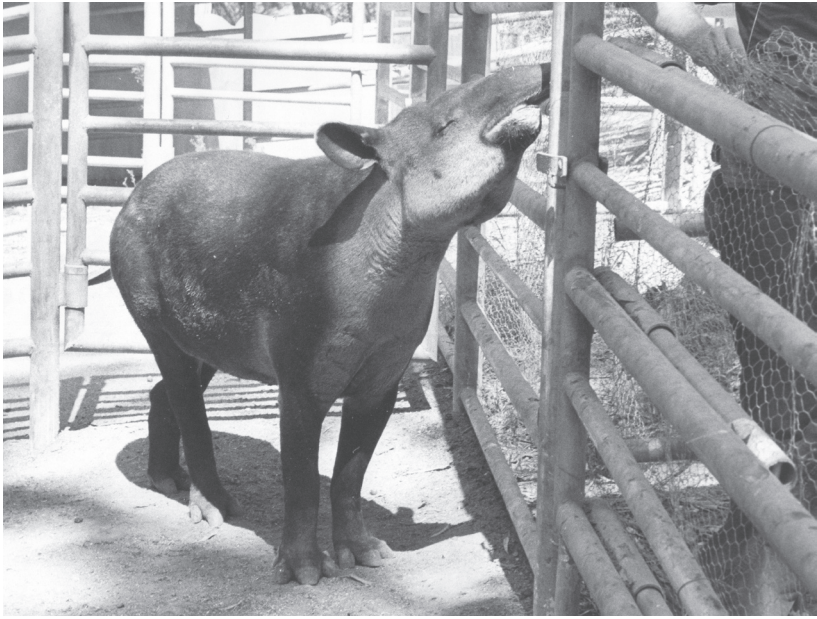
Baird's tapir at the fence. Robert A. Wilson/Tapir Preservation Fund.

Metals

Following and expanding upon Ferguson's critique, Larson discusses the issue of metals in the Book of Mormon (pp. 195–204). The conventional view, which Larson accepts, is that metallurgy was unknown in Mesoamerica until about AD 900. In several publications, however, Sorenson has questioned the adequacy of this opinion for explaining Mesoamerican culture.[80]

"The reconciliation of archaeological evidence with ancient written sources," notes Miriam Balmuth, "is one of the more frustrating and, at the same time, tantalizing exercises both for the historian and

---

80. John L. Sorenson, "Preclassic Metal?" *American Antiquity* 20/1 (1954): 64; Sorenson, "Indications of Early Metal in Mesoamerica," *Bulletin of the University Archaeological Society* 5 (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 1954): 1–15; Sorenson, "A Reconsideration of Early Metal in Mesoamerica," *Katunob* 9/1 (1976): 1–21; Sorenson, *Ancient American Setting,* 278–88; Sorenson, "Metals and Metallurgy relating to the Book of Mormon Text" (FARMS paper, 1992).

for the classical archaeologist."[81] Take, for example, the question of tin. Ancient Near Eastern documents seem to refer to tin, yet, because no archaeological specimens have been found, some scholars argue that tin was not really known. "If Assyriologists were asked to confine their translations to the material culture recovered through excavation," observe J. D. Muhly and T. A. Wertime, "they would be in serious trouble." The written record refers to tin, but archaeology has apparently not caught up with the historical sources. Consequently, "The absence of actual objects made of metallic tin from excavations in Mesopotamia is a problem, but not a serious one." They further note that since tin was considered a precious metal, it was frequently controlled by rulers and recycled by being melted down for reuse.[82] Similarly, P. R. S. Moorey reiterates that, in societies like ancient Mesopotamia where metals were imported, they were often recycled. He also observes that metal finds tend to be rare in settlement and temple excavations anyway. "What evidence there is, is primarily mortuary. When an archaeological period is ill-represented in the mortuary record its metalworking is likely to be more than even obscure." "Consequently the actual amount of metal recovered through excavation at any period is no guide to the scale of contemporary use nor to the full range of techniques and the repertory of forms."[83]

The observation that the discovery of metal artifacts is often rare even when historical sources indicate their use in a particular site or region is equally true of pre-Columbian America. "The chroniclers give the impression that in many parts of America metal objects were in common circulation at the time of the Conquest, and the detailed inventories of the loot sent back to Spain during the conquests of Mexico and Peru emphasize how inadequately the archaeological

---

81. Miriam S. Balmuth, "Remarks on the Appearance of the Earliest Coins," in *Studies Presented to George M. A. Hanfmann,* ed. David G. Mitten, John G. Pedley, and Jane A. Scott (Mainz: Von Zabern, 1971), 1.

82. J. D. Muhly and T. A. Wertime, "Evidence for the Sources and Use of Tin during the Bronze Age of the Near East: A Reply to J. E. Dayton," *World Archaeology* 5/1 (1973): 117.

83. P. R. S. Moorey, "The Archaeological Evidence for Metallurgy and Related Technologies in Mesopotamia, c. 5500–2100 BC," *Iraq* 44/1 (1982): 14.

discoveries reflect the actual situation."[84] "At the time of the Spanish Conquest, the Totonac had a certain amount of precious metals. . . . Nevertheless, as far as we know, metal artifacts have not appeared in archaeological sites definitely identified as Totonac."[85] "Mayapan, as the result of looting, is so poor in objects of metal that it is difficult to say that the few objects that remain really give an adequate picture of what was once to be found there."[86] "The total absence of metal during the Toltec period [i.e., at Tula] is inexplicable, since this was already in the full epoch of the use of gold, silver and copper. This presents a mystery that up to now none have been able to explain; was the use of metal much later or have the archaeologists not had the luck to find it? The only two objects which have been found correspond undoubtedly to the Aztec Horizon."[87] "The Aztec testimony that the Toltecs were mastercraftsmen has not yet been confirmed by archaeology. . . . Tula has yielded no metal of any kind, neither copper nor gold, but this need scarcely surprise us, for as yet no fine tombs, where one would expect such treasures, have been located there. On the other hand, many of the ornaments portrayed in stone are painted yellow, a color reserved for gold in the Mexican canon."[88]

Larson argues that the lack of evidence for metallurgy in ancient Mesoamerica during Book of Mormon times "constitute[s] a major problem for the historicity of the Book of Mormon" (p. 204), yet there are likewise substantial intellectual challenges in accepting the currently prevailing scholarly view at face value.[89] Metals were known

---

84. Warwick Bray, "Ancient American Metal-Smiths," *Proceedings of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland for 1971* (London: The Institute, 1971), 32.

85. Isabel Kelly and Angel Palerm, *The Tajin Totonac: Part 1. History, Subsistence, Shelter and Technology,* Smithsonian Institution Institute of Social Anthropology Publication 13 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1952–), 245.

86. William C. Root, "Report on Metal Objects from Mayapan," in *Mayapan, Yucatan, Mexico,* ed. H. E. D. Pollock et al., Carnegie Institution of Washington Publication 619 (Washington, DC: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1952), 399.

87. Jorge R. Acosta, "Los Toltecas," in *Los Señorías y Estados Militaristas* (Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1976), 158.

88. Michael D. Coe, *Mexico: From the Olmecs to the Aztecs,* 4th ed. (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1994), 141, 142.

89. "It is surprising that contacts which may have spread new types of maize, peanuts, etc., about 1450 B.P. did not also spread metal artifacts as curiosities or trade pieces."

and worked in northwestern South America from at least 1500 bc.[90] It is also well established that there was regular maritime trade between Ecuador and West Mexico from at least 1500 bc.[91] This and other evidence has led some Mesoamerican scholars to question the currently accepted picture that ancient Mesoamericans had no knowledge of or interest in metals until ad 900.

At Nayarit in western Mexico, Chinesca earrings have been found that date to between 100 bc and ad 250. "Carelessly rendered openwork ear ornaments curiously suggest multiple metal rings," although so far "no metal from the Protoclassic period has been found."[92] These and similar clay ornaments are in a style commonly found in northern South America, where similar figurines have earrings of the same style in metal. As one scholar explains:

> The earrings may have been made of perishable material such as fiber or cordage, but this seems unlikely. An interesting possibility is that some of these multiple earrings might have been metal. We know of no metal objects of the antiquity we ascribe to the West Mexican shaft-chamber tomb figures, though metal was in common use in South America by

Barbara Pickersgill and Charles B. Heiser Jr., "Origins and Distribution of Plants Domesticated in the New World Tropics," in *Origins of Agriculture,* ed. Charles A. Reed (The Hague: Mouton, 1977), 826. "The majority of scholars," notes Dudley Easby, an authority on Mesoamerican metallurgy, "relying on circumstantial evidence, believe that fine metallurgy in ancient Mexico was limited to a few centuries before the arrival of the Spaniards. Perhaps they are right, but it seems to me that their theory leaves much to be explained. I daresay the historical aspect of the problem merits more investigation." Dudley T. Easby Jr., "Aspectos técnicos de la orfebrería de la Tumba 7 de Monte Albán," in *El Tesoro de Monte Alban* (Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1969), 393–94, translation by Matthew Roper.

90. Dorothy Hosler, "Ancient West Mexican Metallurgy: South and Central American Origins and West Mexican Transformations," *American Anthropologist* 90/4 (1988): 835.

91. Allison C. Paulson, "Patterns of Maritime Trade between South Coastal Ecuador and Western Mesoamerica, 1500 bc–ad 600," in *The Sea in the Pre-Columbian World: A Conference at Dumbarton Oaks, October 26th and 27th, 1974,* ed. Elizabeth P. Benson (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collections, 1977), 141–60.

92. Elizabeth K. Easby and John F. Scott, *Before Cortés, Sculpture of Middle America: A Centennial Exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1970), fig. 99.

that time. The oldest dated metal objects in West Mexico are placed at about A.D. 600–700, three to five centuries later than the dated shaft-chamber tomb figures, and a great abundance of metal artifacts is characteristic of the Postclassic after A.D. 900. Nevertheless the oldest metallurgy in Mesoamerica appears to occur in West Mexico, and this is one of the features convincingly attributed to an introduction from South America by sea. Furthermore, later contexts do yield a considerable number of small rings made of copper wire.

Given that metal is the most obvious material to use for the earrings portrayed and that nothing else in the archaeological record could represent such earrings, the multiple earrings shown on West Mexican shaft-chamber tomb figures are intriguing indications of some interesting possibilities. First, the use of metal may be older in West Mexico than is now known. Second, some of the tomb figures may continue later than our present dating evidence would indicate. Neither possibility is proven; however, it would not be surprising to find one or both borne out when fuller information is acquired.[93]

Ferguson and Larson suggest that Book of Mormon references to "chains" pose a problem for the Book of Mormon (p. 195). Of course, chains were known at a late period in pre-Columbian times. Some of these seem to have been associated with Mesoamerican elite. "When the king went to war, he wore besides his armour, particular badges of distinction," which included such ornaments as "a necklace, or chain of gold and gems."[94] Ixtlilxochitl, brother of the king of Texcoco, is said to have given Cortés "a golden chain as a sign of peace."[95] Obviously, in Aztec times, a metal chain of gold and gems was part of the royal

---

93. Michael Kan, Clement Meighan, H. B. Nicholson, *Sculpture of Ancient West Mexico: Nayarit, Jalisco, Colima* (Albuquerque: Los Angeles County Museum of Art in association with University of New Mexico Press, 1989), 65.

94. Abbé D. Francesco Saverio Clavigero, *The History of Mexico,* trans. Charles Cullen (London: Robinson, 1787), 2:365.

95. Hugh Thomas, *Conquest: Montezuma, Cortés, and the Fall of Old Mexico* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993), 458.

regalia. Actual links from chains that appear to date to AD 1100–1550 have been unearthed in west Mexico.[96] Were chains known in ancient Mesoamerica before AD 900? According to the standard view, no, but enigmatic references in the literature dealing with pre-Columbian art describe representations of "chains" on Classic and Preclassic monuments.[97] Perhaps the earliest known example can be found at Abaj Takalik in Guatemala. "A feature of the individual on this stela [Stela 2], as well as that on Stela 1, is a chain which hangs diagonally to the rear from the belt."[98] Were these chains of precious metal and gems similar to those worn by later Aztec rulers? This seems a reasonable interpretation.[99]

Specimens of metal bells are well known in late pre-Columbian history after AD 900. In some places where metals were scarce, Mesoamericans sometimes made artistic imitations of such objects in clay and sculpture. At Chachalcas and Zempoala in Central Veracruz, Mexico, at the time of the Spanish Conquest, "they had so little copper that they imitated metal bells in pottery."[100] Such imitations of metal bells show a knowledge of metal bells even if the artists themselves did not possess any metal. Similar clay bells known from some Toltec sites have been said to "tantalizingly suggest metal prototypes."[101] Other

---

96. Mountjoy and Torres, "Production and Use of Prehispanic Metal Artifacts," 138, 141.

97. Tatiana Proskouriakoff, *A Study of Classic Maya Sculpture,* Carnegie Institution of Washington Publication 593 (Washington, DC: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1950): 65, 70, 154–55.

98. J. Eric S. Thompson, "Some Sculptures from Southeastern Quezaltenango, Guatemala," *Notes on Middle American Archaeology and Ethnology* 17 (30 March 1943): 103.

99. For example, representations of chains in art from the arctic Ipiutak culture have been taken to be "imitations of similar metal objects." Helge Larson, "The Ipiutak Culture: Its Origin and Relationships," in *Indian Tribes of Aboriginal America,* ed. Sol Tax (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), 26; likewise Froelich Rainey states that such ivory carvings of chains were clear indications that the Ipiutak "had been in touch with metal working people." See Rainey, "The Ipiutak Culture: Excavations at Point Hope, Alaska," *Current Topics in Anthropology* 2 (1971): 26.

100. José García Payón, "Archaeology of Central Veracruz," in *Handbook of Middle American Indians* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964–76), 11:542.

101. George C. Vaillant, *The Aztecs of Mexico: Origin, Rise and Fall of the Aztec Nation* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1950), 149.

specimens are known from North America dating from AD 900 to the 1500s.[102] Similar clay bells are also known in Mexico from the Post-classic period.[103] Nine pottery bells, part of a lavish mortuary offering, were found in a tomb near the town of Columba, Guatemala, and date to the Late Classic.[104] Additional specimens from Mexico date to the Preclassic period.[105] A small ceramic vase "in the form of an acrobat or juggler wearing bells attached to his ankles" was found at Monte Alban and dates to the Monte Alban II period (100 BC–AD 300).[106] During excavations at Gualupita near Cuernavaca, Morelos, Mexico, archaeologists discovered a "carefully grooved pendant perforated at the neck" in the manner of a metal bell. The archaeologists who ex-cavated the find argued that the object was "probably of Gualupita II date," around 400–100 BC.[107] Other archaeologists have discussed a stone pectoral found in the Maya lowlands. Carved on the pectoral is a seated figure attired in elaborate regalia of the Izapan style. Joined to the left armband is an elongated object to which are "attached bell-shaped objects with pendant beads." On stylistic grounds, Coe dates the piece to 300 BC.[108] Significantly, there was a word for bell in the Proto-Mixe-Zoquean language as early as 1500 BC.[109]

One aspect of the issue of Mesoamerican metallurgy that was un-known to Ferguson and is still often ignored is the question of lin-guistic evidence. In 1985 Sorenson cited an early study by Robert E. Longacre and René Millon indicating that there were words for metal

---

102. Nathaniel Spear Jr., *A Treasury of Archaeological Bells* (New York: Hastings House, 1978), 203–5.

103. Ibid., 227.

104. Alfred V. Kidder and Edwin M. Shook, "A Unique Ancient Maya Sweathouse, Gua-temala," in *Amerikanistische Miszellen,* Mitteilungen aus dem Museum für Völkerkunde in Hamburg 25 (Hamburg: Appel, 1959), 70.

105. Spear, *Treasury of Archaeological Bells,* 206–7.

106. Frank H. Boos, *The Ceramic Sculptures of Ancient Oaxaca* (South Brunswick, NJ: Barnes, 1966), 466 fig. 435.

107. Suzannah B. Vaillant and George C. Vaillant, *Excavations at Gualupita* (New York : American Museum of Natural History, 1934), 98, 99 fig. 29.

108. Michael D. Coe, *An Early Stone Pectoral from Southeastern Mexico,* Studies in Pre-Columbian Art and Archaeology 1 (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1966), 11, 14, 17.

109. Robert E. Longacre and René Millon, "Proto-Mixtecan and Proto-Amuzgo-Mixtecan Vocabularies," *Anthropological Linguistics* 3/4 (1961): 29.

in Proto-Mixtecan.[110] "In identifying terms that must have been in use before the descendant tongues split apart," he wrote, summarizing their article, "the researchers were puzzled by the fact that a word for 'metal' seemed to have existed in the proto-language at about 1000 BC. Of course metalworking is not supposed to have been going on then."[111] Larson claims, however, that Sorenson's statement that the researchers were "puzzled" misrepresents his source (p. 197), but we do not see any evidence of misrepresentation. Longacre and Millon found that the linguistic evidence for these terms was considered "solid" (p. 197).[112] As far as we can see, the only reason they questioned it was on the basis of the apparent absence of archaeological evidence for metals at so early a period. Unwilling to grant that metals could have been known so early, they suggested that the original meaning of the terms for *bell* may have been *rattle,* but they note that this possibility is remote and that "it is impossible to be certain of this."[113] This suggests not only puzzlement but also discomfort at countering the accepted paradigm. More recent linguistic research, however, has yielded additional evidence that Larson has chosen to ignore. Since Longacre and Millon's study was published, Lyle Campbell and Terrence Kaufman have found words for metal in Proto-Mixe-Zoquean, which is thought to have been the language of the Olmecs.[114] Roberto Escalante has also discovered words for metal in Proto-Mayan, Proto-Proto-Huaven, and Proto-Otomanguean.[115] In short, there is now solid linguistic evidence that all of the major proto-languages of Meso-

---

110. Ibid., 22, 29.

111. Sorenson, *Ancient American Setting,* 279.

112. Larson's quotation of Longacre and Millon is taken from "Proto-Mixtecan and Proto-Amuzgo-Mixtecan Vocabularies," 22.

113. Longacre and Millon, "Proto-Mixtecan and Proto-Amuzgo-Mixtecan Vocabularies," 22.

114. Lyle Campbell and Terrence Kaufman, "A Linguistic Look at the Olmecs," *American Antiquity* 41/1 (1976): 80–89.

115. Roberto Escalante, "El vocabulario cultural de las lenguas de Mesoamérica," in *La Validez Teorica del Concepto Mesoamerica: XIX Mesa Redonda de la Sociedad Mexicana de Antropología* (Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1990), 155–65.

america had words for metal. This evidence should be confronted and not ignored.[116]

Larson complains about the complete absence of iron in ancient Mesoamerica (p. 197). Yet he does not appear to have addressed all of the evidence. In 1938, for example, archaeologist Sigvald Linné found a tomb that included an "iron plate." According to Linné, "The iron plate is no doubt to be counted among the most remarkable objects that have at any time been discovered in Mexico seeing there is nothing to indicate that it is of post-Columbian origin."[117] In another find, which dates before AD 400, Linné found more iron artifacts in another tomb—including an iron pyrite mirror and a "metal-resembling substance," in "small, irregular shaped pieces. Analysis has shown them to contain copper and iron."[118] René Rebetez noted several pre-Columbian artifacts such as mirrors, necklaces, and a pendant from the Tarascan region, which consisted of iron stuck to slate stone. It is not yet understood how the artificial bonding was done, but the presence of iron in the find is noteworthy. Some nineteen other similar objects are in private collections.[119] Edwin M. Shook and Alfred V. Kidder reported an interesting find—three lumps of iron oxide, "moulded to conical form"—from a tomb at Kaminaljuyú, which dates to the Miraflores period (100–200 BC).[120] A companion tomb in the same

---

116. Hosler, an authority on metals in pre-Columbian west Mexico, cites this same linguistic evidence for metals in Mesoamerica but fails to note the antiquity of these terms in "Ancient West Mexican Metallurgy," 833.

117. Sigvald Linné, *Zapotecan Antiquities and the Paulson Collection in the Ethnographical Museum of Sweden,* Ethnographical Museum of Sweden (n.s.) 4 (Stockholm: Bokförlags Aktiebolaget Thule, 1938), 53; cf. 75. See Alfonso Caso and D. F. Rubín de la Borbolla, *Exploraciones en Mitla, 1934–1935* (Mexico: Instituto Panamericano de Geografía e Historia, 1936), 10, 34, translation by John L. Sorenson.

118. Sigvald Linné, *Mexican Highland Cultures,* Ethnographical Museum of Sweden Publication 7 (Lund, Sweden: Ohlssons, 1942), 132.

119. René Rebetez, *Objetos Prehispánicas de Hierro y Piedra* (Mexico: Librería Anticuaria, n.d.), 6–8, 14–15.

120. Edwin M. Shook and Alfred V. Kidder, *Mound E-III-3, Kaminaljuyu, Guatemala,* Contributions to American Anthropology and History 53 (Washington DC: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1952), 33.

structure contained two or three other "cones" of a similar nature.[121] Since molding iron oxide to a particular form would be exceedingly difficult, the lumps are almost certainly oxidized iron objects. Significantly, Kaminaljuyú is considered by Book of Mormon students to be the most likely candidate for the immediate land of Nephi,[122] the only region for which the Book of Mormon states that iron technology was known to the Nephites.

Iron was probably also used in the weaponry of the Mesoamerican elite. Ixtlilxochitl states that the Toltecs had "clubs studded with iron."[123] Another tradition relates that Cuaomoat and Ceutarit, the ancestral heroes of several west Mexican tribes, "taught them to make fire and gave them also machetes or cutlasses of iron."[124] The question of Mesoamerican swords has, of course, been discussed elsewhere.[125] Larson dogmatically insists that the blades encountered by Limhi's party had to have been similar to Europeans ones, but they could just as easily have been macuahuitl or cimeter-like weapons inset with blades of iron—meteoric or otherwise.

Larson's suggestion that Book of Mormon references to metallurgy imply some kind of massive "ferrous industry" is totally unjustified (p. 196).[126] The text implies nothing of the kind. "The Book of Mormon does specify the practice of smelting [iron into steel] among the Jaredites" (p. 196). True enough, but the practice is only mentioned once in early Jaredite history—where it was considered one of the notable deeds of Shule, who is described as "mighty in judgment" (Ether 7:8). "Wherefore, he came to the hill Ephraim, and he did molten out

---

121. Ibid., 118.

122. Sorenson, *Ancient American Setting,* 141–46, 167–75.

123. Alfredo Chavero, *Obras Históricas de Don Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl* (Mexico: Editora Nacional, 1952), 1:56, translation by Matthew Roper.

124. Robert H. Barlow, "Straw Hats," *Tlalocan: A Journal of Source Materials on the Native Cultures of Mexico* 2/1 (1945): 94.

125. Matthew Roper, "Swords and 'Cimeters' in the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8/1 (1999): 34–43.

126. Quotation from Ray T. Matheny, "Book of Mormon Archaeology: Sunstone Symposium #6, Salt Lake Sheraton Hotel, August 25, 1984," typescript, 1984, David J. Buerger Collection, MS 622, box 33, fol. 17, Manuscripts Division, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah.

of the hill, and made swords out of steel for those whom he had drawn away with him; and after he had armed them with swords he returned to the city Nehor, and gave battle unto his brother Corihor" (Ether 7:9). In spite of this great achievement by Shule, there is no subsequent mention of steel among the Jaredites (Ether 9:17). Perhaps the skill of making steel may not have been passed down to later generations.

Nephi's metallurgical skills included the ability to make some form of steel, a skill already known in the ancient Near East. He indicates that he taught these and other skills to some of his people shortly after his arrival in the land of promise, yet there is no further mention of steel after the time of Jarom (Jarom 1:8). When the Zeniffite colony returned to the land of Nephi, they are said to have used iron and some other metals for decorative purposes, but not steel (Mosiah 11:8). What this may suggest is that the ability to make steel among Book of Mormon peoples was limited to a few individuals or lineage groups and that it could have been lost after only a few generations.

In many African villages, for example, one family of artisans might supply the metallurgical needs of thousands, yet the ferrous skills possessed by those few could easily be lost in just one raid. It seems reasonable to suggest that a similar situation occurred among the early Jaredites and Nephites in ancient Mesoamerica. In a recent study of North American copper pan pipes, one scholar attempted to explain why certain copper technologies, if once available in North American Middle Woodland cultures, were not passed down to subsequent groups. She reasoned, "The technological information must have been restricted to a limited number of individuals and artisans. Following the disruption of the interaction sphere, this information in the hands of so few artificers and entrepreneurs was not passed on and was consequently lost. There was no retention of that knowledge and when, half a millennium later new societies developed, it was with new copper techniques and new artifact styles."[127]

---

127. Claire G. Goodman, *Copper Artifacts in Late Eastern Woodlands Prehistory,* ed. Anne-Marie Cantwell (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Center for American Archeology, 1984), 73, quoting Anne-Marie Cantwell, "Pan Pipes in Eastern North America" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society for American Archaeology, Minneapolis, 1982).

Script and Language

Following Ferguson's critique, Larson conjectures why no pre-Columbian Hebrew or Egyptian scripts have yet been uncovered in Mesoamerica and suggests that this poses a major problem for the historicity of the Book of Mormon (pp. 204–6). Still, while it would certainly be interesting to find examples of such scripts, it is hardly surprising that we have not. Surviving examples of Mesoamerican writing from the Preclassic period are extremely rare, even though it is believed that such records were at one time numerous, and it is not difficult to catalog reasons why this should be so. Records written on perishable materials would not be expected to survive. Mormon indicates that the Nephites' enemies systematically tried to destroy any records possessed by the Nephites (Mormon 6:6), and the deliberate mutilation and destruction of records for political and ideological purposes is well known in Mesoamerican history.[128] In reference to an inscribed stela in a hitherto unknown script recently found in a river in Veracruz, distinguished Mayanist Linda Schele suggests, "There may, in fact, have been many such writing systems that for one reason or another, did not survive."[129]

The issue of potential influences of Old World Semitic languages upon Mesoamerica is an interesting one that has yet to receive serious scholarly attention by Mesoamerican scholars. In a preliminary study made over thirty years ago, Pierre Agrinier, a non-Mormon Mesoamerican archaeologist, compiled evidence suggesting a potential relationship between Zapotec and Hebrew.[130] In 1964, Professor William Shipley, a linguist at the University of California at Berkeley, reviewed Agrinier's work, which had been forwarded to him by Thomas Stuart Ferguson. In a letter written that year, Shipley stated:

---

128. For historical examples from recent pre-Columbian history, see Joyce Marcus, *Mesoamerican Writing Systems: Propaganda, Myth, and History in Four Ancient Civilizations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 146–52, 265–66, 269, 351.

129. "Stone Slab in Mexico Reveals Ancient Writing System," *New York Times,* 8 March 1988.

130. Pierre Agrinier, "Memorandum on Linguistic Evidence for the Presence of Israelites in Mexico," unpublished paper in possession of Matthew Roper.

The evidence presented in the report, particularly that having to do with possible indications of common origin for Hebrew and Zapotec, are certainly adequate to demonstrate the desirability of further research in this same, and other similar, directions. The recurrence of certain consonants in the two languages, notably the highly stable bilabial series, is suggestive of some historical relationship or other meaningful tie. The general technique so far used may certainly be refined as work progresses, yielding ever more dependable results.

I should say that this research points to possible results of a highly important and dramatic nature. If valid evidence of the type sought could be found, then, certainly, a major reorganization of the history of the Old World–New World relationships would be necessary. Current general research in historical linguistics is consonant with the methods and aims of your work—its value cannot be overestimated.[131]

Agrinier published a brief synopsis of his preliminary studies in 1969.[132] Following up on that report, Robert F. Smith uncovered even closer correspondences between Zapotec and Egyptian.[133] Unfortunately, these preliminary studies did not receive wide circulation and are not yet well known. More recently, anthropologist Mary Foster, apparently independent of the earlier work by Agrinier and Smith, has compiled extensive linguistic evidence suggesting similar influences upon New World languages. According to Foster,

Linguistic reconstruction across hitherto postulated genetic boundaries demonstrates that Afro-Asiatic languages, and in particular ancient Egyptian, are genetically close, and possibly ancestral, to a group of geographically distant languages in

---

131. William Shipley to Thomas S. Ferguson, 24 June 1964, Berkeley, California, copy in possession of Matthew Roper.

132. Pierre Agrinier, "Linguistic Evidence for the Presence of Israelites in Mexico," *Newsletter and Proceedings of the SEHA* 112 (28 February 1969): 4–5.

133. Robert F. Smith, "Report on the Sawi-Zaa Linguistic Memorandum of Pierre Agrinier" (unpublished manuscript, 13 March 1969); Smith, "Sawi-Zaa Word Comparisons" (unpublished manuscript, September 1977).

both the Old and New Worlds. In the Old World these include Dravidian of southern India, Chinese, Malayo-Polynesian; and in the New World, Quechua of the Southern American Andes, and such Mesoamerican languages as Zoquean, Mayan, Zapotec, and Mixtec.[134]

Apparent connections with certain pre-Columbian New World languages are of particular interest. "Specifically, the Mixe-Zoque languages of southern Mexico, hypothesized to derive from the language spoken by the Olmec peoples, as well as the Mayan languages of Mexico and Central America, are demonstrably closely related to, and probably descended from, ancient Egyptian."[135] "Because some connections between Old and New World languages are so close as to throw doubt on an exclusive scenario of ancient Bering Straits crossings, migration theories will need revision."[136] Based upon her own analysis of these languages, Foster believes that "a wider Egyptian influence in the New World is very probable, with languages both splitting off from an Olmec prototype, or perhaps introduced through successive oceanic crossings."[137] Brian D. Stubbs has also marshalled substantial evidence of a Semitic influence on Uto-Aztecan languages.[138]

It has been observed that the past is, in a very real sense, "another country." Moreover, it is a foreign country that we cannot visit. We

---

134. Mary L. Foster, "Old World Language in the Americas: 1" (unpublished paper prepared for the George F. Carter honorary session, Pre-Columbian Transoceanic Transfers, Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers, San Diego, California, 20 April 1992), 1.

135. Mary L. Foster, "Old World Language in the Americas: 2" (unpublished paper delivered at the annual Meeting of the Language Origins Society, Cambridge University, England, September 1992), 2.

136. Ibid., 3. See also her article, "The Transoceanic Trail: The Proto-Pelagian Language Phylum," *Pre-Columbiana* 1/1–2 (1998): 88–113. The hypothesis that early America was populated entirely by migrations of prehistoric hunter-gatherers across a land bridge that once spanned the Bering Strait is itself coming under fire. See Michael W. Robbins and Jeffrey Winters, "Land Bridge Theory Tested," *Discover* 25/1 (2004): 32.

137. Foster, "Old World Language in the Americas: 2," 3.

138. See "Was There Hebrew Language in Ancient America? An Interview with Brian Stubbs," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9/2 (2000): 54–63; and Stubbs, "Looking Over vs. Overlooking Native American Languages: Let's Void the Void," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5/1 (1995): 1–49.

must rely, for our knowledge of it, on scattered surviving documents written by a tiny minority of those who lived there—in pre-Columbian America, by and large, we must do without even such meager documentary resources—as well as a more or less random collection of tangible but mute souvenirs. And we are all too prone to imagine that foreign country in terms mistakenly borrowed from our own. Clearly, attempts to reconstruct the past, and particularly the distant past, must be undertaken with considerable caution, circumspection, even humility. In historiography as in travel, dogmatism interferes with appreciation; openness to even surprising differences is vitally important.

If Thomas Stuart Ferguson really lost his faith in the Book of Mormon, even temporarily, he appears to have done so too hastily, on the basis of a small and inadequate collection of often fuzzy snapshots—some of which don't even pertain to the right country. Ferguson's doubts are not a reliable guide, and Stan Larson's biographical polemic, based on and seeking to amplify those doubts, is not a trustworthy guidebook.

On the New World Archaeological Foundation

Daniel C. Peterson

In their unfortunate book *Behind the Mask of Mormonism,* Dr. John Ankerberg and Dr. Dr. John Weldon[1] refer to "the Mormon New World Archaeological Foundation, which Brigham Young University supported with funds for several fruitless archaeological expeditions."[2] The insinuation that the New World Archaeological Foundation failed abjectly in its supposed mission to prove the Book of Mormon true has become a staple theme with some critics of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. "From 1948 to 1961," write Jerald and Sandra Tanner,

> the Department of Archaeology at Brigham Young University sent "five archaeological expeditions to Middle America," but no evidence for the Nephites was discovered. After these expeditions had failed, the church leaders gave "large appropriations" to support Mr. Ferguson's New World Archaeological

1. For an investigation into the deeply mysterious nature and number of Ankerberg and Weldon's doctoral degrees, see Daniel C. Peterson, "Constancy amid Change," *FARMS Review of Books* 8/2 (1996): 89–98.

2. John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Behind the Mask of Mormonism* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1996), 289; compare John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Mormonism* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1992), 289.

Foundation. This organization also failed to find evidence to prove the *Book of Mormon*.[3]

We are apparently intended to conclude that, since hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of dollars have been spent over the past few decades on "several fruitless archaeological expeditions" designed to confirm the Book of Mormon, the book must be false and ought to be jettisoned. "The interested reader," say Ankerberg and Weldon, "should purchase appropriate materials and prove to his own satisfaction that Mormon archaeological claims are without foundation and that therefore the *Book of Mormon* is not logically to be classified as a translation of ancient records."[4]

The facts need to be set indisputably straight on this topic. First of all, some historical information: "There may have been five 'expeditions' in name," reports John Sorenson, referring to the Tanners' claim of a quintet of demoralizing archaeological failures between 1948 and 1961, "but several were only nominally 'archaeological.'"[5] In 1948, the work consisted of "'test excavations' that yielded a mere 801 potsherds."[6] Ten years later, in 1958, Dr. Ross T. Christensen and several Brigham Young University students returned to the area in order to continue the efforts that Professor M. Wells Jakeman had initiated in 1948 "to test the site for cultural materials and to determine its size and composition."[7] In 1961, with the financial backing of "the

---

3. Jerald Tanner and Sandra Tanner, *The Changing World of Mormonism: "A Condensation and Revision of 'Mormonism: Shadow or Reality?'"* rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1981), 141, emphasis in original. It isn't clear from their text whom or what the Tanners are quoting.

4. Ankerberg and Weldon, *Behind the Mask of Mormonism,* 290.

5. John L. Sorenson, e-mail to Daniel C. Peterson, 16 April 2004. The history of the work is recapped in Ray T. Matheny, "The Ceramics of Aguacatal, Campeche, Mexico," Papers of the New World Archaeological Foundation 27, ed. Susanna Ekholm-Miller (Provo, UT: NWAF, 1970), v, 2. I am indebted to Professor Sorenson for the historical information in this paragraph and for the references. Quotations in the paragraph not otherwise attributed come from his e-mail.

6. Sorenson to Peterson, 16 April 2004. M. Wells Jakeman issued a report on this activity in "An Archaeological Reconnaissance of the Xicalango Area of Western Campeche, Mexico," *Bulletin of the University Archaeological Society* 3 (1952).

7. Both the 1948 and 1958 efforts were jointly financed by "Brigham Young University and the University Archaeological Society." See Matheny, "Ceramics of Aguacatal, Campeche, Mexico," v.

BYU–New World Archaeological Foundation,"[8] further fieldwork was conducted, yielding quantities of pottery. Subsequently, an analysis of that pottery was done by Ray T. Matheny, and the report was submitted as his doctoral dissertation to the Department of Anthropology at the University of Oregon. "No documentation associated with any of this work," says Professor Sorenson,

> mentioned The Book of Mormon in relation to any objectives. The work was invariably done with advance approval of the objectives and under official permits issued by archaeological authorities of the Mexican government. . . . The stated objectives—"to test the site for cultural materials and to determine its size and composition"—were accomplished to a reasonable degree. It is only the [Tanners'] subjective interpretation that "these expeditions had failed."[9]

The New World Archaeological Foundation (NWAF) was incorporated on 20 October 1952, in the state of California, as a nonprofit, scientific, fact-finding body.[10] It emerged out of discussions the previous year between Thomas Stuart Ferguson, Alfred V. Kidder of the Carnegie Institution, and Gordon Willey of Harvard University regarding "the status of archaeology in Mexico and Central America." In a published reminiscence of those discussions, Ferguson wrote that

---

8. Ibid. The NWAF was initially a private foundation, incorporated by Ferguson in California in October 1952. He persuaded the church to finance it in 1954. In 1961 it was incorporated into Brigham Young University. By the early seventies the foundation was administered by the dean of the College of Social Science. In 1990 the Department of Anthropology assumed responsibilities for its administration. See John L. Sorenson, "Brief History of the BYU New World Archaeological Foundation," paper delivered at the opening of an exhibition at Brigham Young University displaying the work of the NWAF on the occasion of the BYU Centennial in April 1975, pp. 2, 6, typescript in possession of Daniel C. Peterson.

9. Sorenson to Peterson, 16 April 2004. The history of the work is recapped in Matheny, "Ceramics of Aguacatal, Campeche, Mexico," v, 2.

10. For the history of the formative years of NWAF, I have drawn upon the fuller treatments in Bruce W. Warren and Thomas Stuart Ferguson, *The Messiah in Ancient America* (Provo, UT: Book of Mormon Research Foundation, 1987), 247–83, and Stan Larson, *Quest for the Gold Plates: Thomas Stuart Ferguson's Archaeological Search for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Freethinker Press, in association with Smith Research Associates, 1996), 41–84, but also upon conversations with John L. Sorenson, John E. Clark, and Fred W. Nelson.

it was agreed that it was unfortunate that so little work was being carried on in so important an area and that something should be done to increase explorations and excavations. . . .

Despite the amazing discoveries made between 1930 and 1950, work on the Pre-Classic was virtually at a standstill in 1951. The result of the discussion was that we agreed to set up a new organization to be devoted to the Pre-Classic civilizations of Mexico and Central America—the earliest known high cultures of the New World.[11]

In the beginning NWAF was financed by private donations, and it was Thomas Ferguson's responsibility to secure these funds. Devoted to his task, he traveled throughout California, Utah, and Idaho; wrote hundreds of letters; and spoke at firesides, Rotary Clubs, Kiwanis Clubs, and wherever else he could. After a tremendous amount of dedicated work, he was able to raise about twenty-two thousand dollars, which was enough for the first season of fieldwork in Mexico.

However, even before the Foundation was organized, Ferguson had attempted to persuade the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to support it. He sought an appointment with the First Presidency but did not succeed. He then asked his friend J. Willard Marriott for help, and the meeting was arranged. In April 1951, Ferguson and the non-Mormon archaeologist Alfred V. Kidder presented a plan to the First Presidency for archaeological work in Mesoamerica. The plan had been submitted through Elder John A. Widtsoe after it had been discussed with a number of the General Authorities. Ferguson and Kidder asked for $150,000 to support the work for five years, but, after several months of repeated inquiries from Ferguson and answering silence from the First Presidency, the request was declined. On 12 January 1952, Ferguson again wrote to the First Presidency and, this time, asked permission to organize the Foundation without church funds or endorsement. "If asked by members of the Church,"

---

11. Thomas Stuart Ferguson, "Introduction concerning the New World Archaeological Foundation," Papers of the New World Archaeological Foundation 1 (Orinda, CA: NWAF, 1956), 3.

he said, "if we know of the attitude of the Church toward the work of the Foundation, we will state that the organization has no connection with the Church other than that some members of the Church have participated in its activities—that there is no official connection with the Church."[12] On 18 January, the First Presidency responded, stating that they had no objection whatever to the organization of the non-profit corporation nor to the activities in which it would engage. And, they added, "[we] wish you well in your undertaking and will await with deep interest a report on the progress of your work and particularly on the result of your exploratory operations."[13]

Almost immediately after its incorporation in October 1952, the Foundation's first expedition did begin work on the Lower Grijalva, near the mouth of the river and close by Villahermosa in the state of Tabasco. Professor Pedro Armillas served as field director of the expedition. His assistants were William T. Sanders (a graduate student in archaeology from Harvard University who would subsequently teach at Pennsylvania State and complete major projects at Teotihuacán, Kaminaljuyú, and Copán, among other locations) and Román Piña Chan (who went on to earn a doctorate and thereafter, until his recent death, was widely accounted one of the top two or three Mexican archaeologists), both non-Mormons, and two Latter-day Saint graduate students in archaeology from Brigham Young University, John L. Sorenson and Gareth W. Lowe. The expedition labored from January until June 1953, exploring and test-pitting from Huimanguillo (west of Villahermosa) upstream to the south as well as in other nearby areas.[14] The focus of NWAF's subsequent work was significantly and helpfully narrowed by the exploratory efforts of this first season, since the team determined that there were no major Preclassic sites along the Lower Grijalva. Near the end of the 1953 field season, Thomas Stuart Ferguson himself

---

12. Warren and Ferguson, *Messiah in Ancient America,* 259.

13. Ibid., 60.

14. The work was eventually reported in Román Piña Chan and Carlos Navarrete, "Archeological Research in the Lower Grijalva River Region, Tabasco and Chiapas," Papers of the New World Archaeological Foundation 22, ed. J. Alden Mason (Provo, UT: NWAF, 1967).

joined the expedition, and he and Sorenson conducted a speedy reconnaissance, by jeep, of the west bank of the Grijalva, from Tuxtla Gutierrez southward toward Guatemala. Discovering numerous Preclassic sites along the way, including Chiapa de Corzo, they traveled as far as La Concordia (near Santa Rosa), which they reached just as the annual rains began. On the basis of potsherd and figurine collections that they procured, in less than two weeks they identified numerous sites of Preclassic (Book of Mormon period) age, visiting a total of twenty-three sites and obtaining information on an additional hundred.[15]

That first season of fieldwork, in 1953, was financed mostly by private donations Thomas Ferguson himself raised. On 9 April 1953, however, Ferguson made another presentation to the First Presidency. In this proposal, he asked for $15,000 to finish out the current season and for $30,000 annually for four additional years of fieldwork, or a total of $135,000. Slightly more than a week later, he was granted the $15,000 he had requested to complete ongoing work, but nothing more. And, a few months later, in September 1953, when he requested another $29,000 from the First Presidency, his request was denied.

No fieldwork was conducted in 1954 for lack of funds. However, thanks to various private donors, NWAF commenced work again in 1955. In April and May of that year, Ferguson and others accompanied the non-Mormon Edwin Shook, formerly Kidder's associate in the Carnegie Institution's fieldwork in Guatemala, for an examination of sites in central Chiapas which confirmed that excavation there would be highly productive for NWAF's aims. Armed with Shook's authoritative endorsement, Ferguson's persistence was at long last rewarded when a generous grant to span four to five years was finally authorized by the church in 1954.[16] A few years later, the non-Mormon J. Alden Mason, who was at the time the Foundation's editor and field

---

15. See John L. Sorenson, "An Archaeological Reconnaissance of West-Central Chiapas, Mexico," New World Archaeological Foundation Publication 1 (Orinda, CA: New World Archaeological Foundation, 1956), 7–19. For Ferguson's late arrival on the expedition, see page 5 of the same publication.

16. Warren and Ferguson, *Messiah in Ancient America,* 264–65, and Larson, *Quest for the Gold Plates,* 50–51, 73 n. 49, 74 n. 53, disagree on the timing of the First Presidency's decision to make the grant, with Warren and Ferguson identifying Shook's support following his visit to Chiapas as a crucial factor in gaining the approval of church leaders,

advisor and an emeritus professor of anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania, commented regarding the 1954 grant that "The world is much indebted to this Church for its outstanding contribution to the advancement of archeological research and the increase of scientific knowledge."[17]

Several relevant facts stand out from this bare-bones recital of the earliest history of the New World Archaeological Foundation. First, non–Latter-day Saint archaeologists were prominent—in fact, dominant—from the beginning, not only in choosing central Chiapas as the geographical focus of its excavations, but in making the pitch for support from the First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and in directing and carrying out NWAF's fieldwork. Second, far from betraying an eager zeal to back a hunt for Book of Mormon artifacts and "proofs," the leadership of the church was manifestly reluctant to fund NWAF. Third, the participation of the eminent non-Mormon archaeologists Alfred V. Kidder and Edwin Shook in proposals for financial support from the First Presidency ensured that those proposals did not focus at all on NWAF's potential usefulness in Book of Mormon apologetics. Fourth, church financial support first came in 1953 (and then on a much larger scale in 1955) and not, as the Tanners claim, only after a supposed string of failed BYU archaeological expeditions that ended in 1961.

As a matter of fact, the New World Archaeological Foundation has never worked directly on Book of Mormon questions, has always sought and received the collaboration of prominent non-Mormon researchers, and has by no stretch of the imagination been "fruitless" in its expeditions' findings.

In his foreword to one of the earliest NWAF publications, issued in 1959, Mason very briefly summarized the overall historical plot of the Book of Mormon and then correctly observed that

---

while Stan Larson says that it was the church's support, already promised, that encouraged Ferguson to invite Shook to Chiapas in the first place. Nothing significant hinges on this dispute, but, based on the personal recollections of John L. Sorenson, I have chosen to follow Warren's chronology.

17. J. Alden Mason, foreword of *Research in Chiapas, Mexico,* Papers of the New World Archaeological Foundation 1–4, ed. J. Alden Mason (Orinda, CA: NWAF, 1959), iii.

No statement respecting the landing places of these groups or the identification of any of the lands settled and cities established by them has ever been officially made by the Church. Nevertheless, some individual Mormons have made speculative deductions attempting to identify ethnic groups, archeological ruins, and geographical features of the New World with those described in the Book of Mormon. None of these interpretations to date has received either ecclesiastical or scientific approval.[18]

Mason recognized, of course, that Latter-day Saint commitment to the Book of Mormon was a principal motivation for the founding of the New World Archaeological Foundation. "As advocates of advanced education," he wrote,

Mormons always pride themselves for maintaining the doctrine that ignorance should be replaced by knowledge gained through intelligent research and study. Observing the lack of unanimity in professional opinions respecting the development of the early high civilizations in America as well as the dearth of scientific data, many Mormons hope that archeological research may be effective in filling this void in our knowledge. Support of the present New World Archaeological Foundation investigations is a demonstration of that attitude.

Nevertheless, he unequivocally declared:

The stated purpose of this Foundation is *not* to seek corroboration of the Book of Mormon account, but to help resolve the problem of whether civilization in Middle America developed autochthonously or as a result of diffused or migrated influence from some area of the Old World, and to shed light on the culture and way of life of the ancients during the formative period.

There should be no underestimation of the difficulty of this assignment to reconstruct through archeology the lost

---

18. Ibid.

history of the once great early Mesoamerican civilizations. The task is tremendous.[19]

In a brief unpublished history of NWAF dating to April 1975, Sorenson emphasized the religious neutrality that characterized the Foundation from its beginning:

> From the beginning the NWAF had held to a policy of objectivity. While an underlying Mormon hope for illuminating results in relation to the Book of Mormon was clear enough, the operational rule was always, impeccably down-the-line archaeology. Consequently a large majority of the staff were well-trained non-Mormon archaeologists from the beginning. Both because there were few competent LDS archaeologists and because of the overall policy of objectivity, the staff has continued to be weighted on the non-LDS side.[20]

> The response generally was that the work was admirable, but that some discomfort was felt in the profession about the possibility that objective results would be compromised by attempts to "prove" the Book of Mormon. Among the recommendations of this committee [formed to "consider future Church support of archaeological work"], therefore, was a strong one to the effect that strict objectivity ought to be maintained in any Church-supported work. That policy reiterated previous NWAF policy. That stance has characterized all Foundation work since.[21]

Stan Larson, Thomas Stuart Ferguson's biographer, who himself makes every effort to portray Ferguson's apparent eventual loss of faith as a failure for "LDS archaeology,"[22] agrees, saying that, despite Ferguson's own personal Book of Mormon enthusiasms, the policy set

---

19. Ibid., emphasis in original.
20. Sorenson, "Brief History," 3–4.
21. Ibid., 5.
22. See Daniel C. Peterson and Matthew Roper, "*Ein Heldenleben?* On Thomas Stuart Ferguson as an Elias for Cultural Mormons," in this number of the *FARMS Review,* pages 175–219.

out by the professional archaeologists who actually ran the Foundation was quite different:

> From its inception NWAF had a firm policy of objectivity. . . . [T]hat was the official position of NWAF. . . . [A]ll field directors and working archaeologists were explicitly instructed to do their work in a professional manner and make no reference to the Book of Mormon.[23]

In a 21 July 1952 letter to Arquitecto don Ignacio Marquina of the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia in Mexico City, Alfred V. Kidder clearly sought to allay any potential concern in the mind of his Mexican colleague that NWAF might pursue a theological agenda. He wrote:

> In discussing the Foundation with Mr. Ferguson, to whose interest and energy its organization has been due, he made it clear to me that he, and those of his friends who have contributed financial support, are primarily concerned with discovery of the truth and that the results of such fieldwork as may be done are to be published as purely factual reports.[24]

Likewise, Dee F. Green, in a thirty-five-year-old *Dialogue* article on archaeology and the Book of Mormon that remains a perennial favorite with critics of the Church of Jesus Christ—they typically cite it as representing the current state of research on the antiquity of the Book of Mormon—describes the leadership of the church as having instructed participants in NWAF research

> that interpretation should be an individual matter, that is, that any archaeology officially sponsored by the Church (*i.e.,* the monies for which are provided by tithing) should concern itself only with the culture history interpretations normally within the scope of archaeology, and any attempt at correlation or interpretation involving the Book of Mormon should

---

23. Larson, *Quest for the Gold Plates,* 46.
24. Kidder's letter is quoted in full in Ferguson, "Introduction," 4–5.

be eschewed. This enlightened policy, much to the gratification of the true professional archaeologist both in and outside the Church, has been scrupulously followed. It was made quite plain to me in 1963 when I was first employed by the BYU–NWAF that my opinions with regard to Book of Mormon archaeology were to be kept to myself, and my field report was to be kept entirely from any such references.[25]

Brant Gardner's experience was much the same. "I was actually in the employ of the NWAF for about three months in 1977," he recalls,

doing work on the linguistic history of southern Chiapas. I was hired because of my anthropology connections, not my connections to the church. Other graduate assistants were not LDS.

I can tell you from firsthand experience that there was absolutely nothing about the research that was done that was even remotely related to the Book of Mormon.[26]

Had the mission of the New World Archaeological Foundation been Book of Mormon apologetics, it is inconceivable that Mason and Shook, both non-Mormons, would have lent their names and efforts to the cause.[27] Nor would the early officers of NWAF have been a virtual who's-who of then-current Mesoamerican archaeology. The Foundation's five-member advisory committee, for instance, included only one Latter-day Saint, Professor M. Wells Jakeman, who had earned a degree in ancient history from the University of California at Berkeley with a dissertation on the pre-Columbian Yucatán. Also among its members were the prominent Mexican archaeologist Pedro Armillas, who would later become a professor of archaeology in Illinois; Gordon F. Eckholm, curator of American archaeology at the American Museum of Natural

---

25. Dee F. Green, "Book of Mormon Archaeology: The Myths and the Alternatives," *Dialogue* 4/2 (1969): 76.

26. Brant Gardner, e-mail to Daniel C. Peterson, 17 April 2004.

27. Professor Mason wrote one of the standard books of his generation on pre-Columbian America, *The Ancient Civilizations of Peru*, rev. ed. (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1968). The biographical sketch inside the cover cites his affiliation with NWAF.

History and a professor at New York City's Columbia University; and Gordon R. Willey, a professor at Harvard University and one of the most widely respected of all Americanist archaeologists. Alfred V. Kidder was the fifth member of the advisory committee, serving also as the Foundation's first vice president. As former director of archaeology for the Carnegie Institution in Washington, DC, which was, for ten years or more, the major research group devoted to Mesoamerica, Dr. Kidder worked for decades in Guatemala and established himself as the preeminent Americanist archaeologist of his era. (Even today, the most prestigious honor bestowed on archaeologists by the American Anthropological Association is the A. V. Kidder Award.)

It is also very doubtful that any of the professional archaeologists involved with the New World Archaeological Foundation from its beginning would agree with Ankerberg and Weldon's judgment that the NWAF—which continues its work in Chiapas still today—produced nothing but "several fruitless archaeological expeditions." Nor should they. For many years, the New World Archaeological Foundation has been the major player in work on the Mesoamerican Preclassic, and it still is. NWAF has sponsored five decades of valuable and highly praised archaeological research in Central America—averaging at least one major dig annually, including the well-known excavations at El Mirador in northern Guatemala[28]—and has been centrally involved in roughly seventy major field projects, very often in cooperation with other universities. NWAF publications are routinely cited in standard treatments of Mesoamerican subjects.[29] In fact, the Foundation's current director, Professor John E. Clark, estimates that NWAF has, to the time of this writing, generated roughly sixty-five scholarly monographs, several hundred academic articles, and scholarly presentations numbering perhaps in the thousands.[30] How much of this

---

28. See Ray T. Matheny, "El Mirador: An Early Maya Metropolis Uncovered," *National Geographic* 172/3 (1987): 316–39.

29. See, for example, the bibliographies in Michael D. Coe, Mexico (New York: Praeger, 1962); Michael D. Coe, *The Maya,* 3rd ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984).

30. A catalog of NWAF's own publications is available online, at fhss.byu.edu/anthro/NWAF/publication_list.htm (accessed 28 April 2004).

material did Ankerberg and Weldon evaluate before they brought in their verdict of "fruitlessness"?

"Just how much the foundation is doing to advance the cause of Book of Mormon archaeology," reflected Green in 1969,

> depends on one's point of view about Book of Mormon archaeology. There have been no spectacular finds . . ., no Zarahemlas discovered, no gold plates brought to light, no horses uncovered, and King Benjamin's tomb remains unexcavated. But the rewards to the Church of the foundation's work, while a little elusive to the layman and the "seekers after a sign," will prove to be considerable in the perspective of history.[31]

And that was thirty-five years ago.

---

31.   Green, "Book of Mormon Archaeology," 77.

Asked and Answered:
A Response to Grant H. Palmer

James B. Allen

Reviewing Grant Palmer's first published work, *An Insider's View of Mormon Origins,* became an unusual personal challenge to me. It was not that the book had any effect on my beliefs—I have seen nearly all the arguments before and long since dealt with them. It was because it touches on two things I hold dear. One is balanced scholarship and academic integrity, which I have spent a career trying to preach and practice. The other is something especially sacred to me—my personal belief in the reality of Joseph Smith's first vision, the authenticity of the Book of Mormon, and the restoration of priesthood authority. Reviews ordinarily center just on scholarly matters, but somehow I could not approach this particular one without intermixing the two. My commentary, therefore, is in first person and very personal.[1]

A shorter version of this review appears in the book review section of *BYU Studies* 42/2 (2004): 175–89.

    1. The reader is also urged to consult the reviews by Davis Bitton, Mark Ashurst-McGee, Steven C. Harper, and Louis Midgley in *FARMS Review* 15/2 (2003). Bitton, in "The Charge of a Man with a Broken Lance (But Look What He Doesn't Tell Us)," 257–71, identifies many sources, scholars, and issues that Palmer all too conveniently ignores. Harper's article, "Trustworthy History?" 273–307, focuses mainly on how Palmer "manipulates

Early in the book, Palmer admonishes historians to have a questioning attitude, honesty and integrity in their dealings with fellow church members, no fear of coercion to secure uniformity of thought, and a willingness to face difficult issues head-on (pp. xi, xiii). This is an ideal shared by historians, even though in their efforts to pursue it they do not always agree. Palmer is persuaded that the evidence does not support the foundational stories of the church, including the literal reality of the first vision, the Moroni visits and other spiritual manifestations, or the historical authenticity of the Book of Mormon. On the other hand, highly respected Latter-day Saint scholars have examined the same evidence and drawn different conclusions. I will not attempt here to answer all the problems raised by Palmer; a few examples will illustrate the kind of faulty speculation, incomplete evidence, and misleading "parallels" that plague his book. My intent is simply to summarize some of his assertions, show that nearly all of them have been dealt with in detail by well-qualified LDS scholars, and point the interested reader to some of their readily available writings. These scholars all have advanced degrees, usually doctoral degrees, with a wide variety of specialties, among them early American history, ancient civilizations, ancient languages, linguistics, anthropology, law, and philosophy. It is clear in their writings, moreover (though they avoid belaboring the point), that they are also believers.[2] I recognize

---

evidence" regarding the Book of Mormon witnesses, on his "exaggerated hermeneutic of suspicion" regarding the priesthood restoration accounts, and on his recycling of Wesley Walters's 1969 arguments regarding the first vision, which adds "nothing new." In "A One-Sided View of Mormon Origins," 309–64, Ashurst-McGee addresses the central thesis of each chapter of Palmer's book, responding to virtually each of his arguments and concluding that "an open-minded reader may find that, in most cases, interpretations favorable to the integrity of Joseph Smith and his revelations are as reasonable as or even more reasonable than those presented by Palmer. Midgley's article, "*Pry*ing into Palmer," 365–410, explores some details in the making of *An Insider's View,* the basic facts about Palmer's employment history in the Church Educational System, and the unconvincing parallels between E. T. A. Hoffmann's "The Golden Pot" and the Book of Mormon.

2. See, for example, the simple and inoffensive statement of Richard L. Bushman, winner of the prestigious Bancroft Prize for American History in 1968 and one of the best living authorities on Joseph Smith. In the introduction to his widely heralded *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 3, he announces that his "modest purpose" is to narrate what happened as Mormon-

that simply piling up names of authorities is not sufficient, but I would remind readers that in their search for truth they must read not only the naysayers but also the proven experts. "Asked and answered," we frequently hear lawyers say during trials on television crime shows when their opponents persist in bringing up old questions, and "asked and answered" is a good part of my response to many of the questions Palmer puts forth.

I believe that the evidence favoring the foundational stories is powerful and convincing, but I also believe that the literal reality of the first vision and other sacred experiences can be neither proved nor disproved by secular objectivity. Of course, Latter-day Saint scholars usually look at the evidence through the eyes of faith as well as through the eyes of scholarship, and most will tell you that, ultimately, their testimonies rest on the affirmation of the Spirit. On the other hand, church members who know of Palmer's background will be disappointed to find that he has no confidence in such spiritual confirmation for, he says, the Holy Ghost is an "unreliable means of proving truth" (p. 133). It may be that this lack of confidence in the Spirit helps account for his divergence from what he was presumably teaching when employed by the Church Educational System. Nevertheless, scholars who take it upon themselves to write about these foundational events should be held to common scholarly standards, and it is evident from the writings of those discussed below that their faith has not kept them from applying such standards to their research and

---

ism came into being and then says, simply and unobtrusively: "The problem of Joseph Smith's visions complicates even this simplified undertaking. Believing Mormons like myself understand the origins of the Book of Mormon quite differently from others. How can a description of Joseph Smith's revelations accommodate a Mormon's perception of events and still make sense to a general audience? My method has been to relate events as the participants themselves experienced them, using their own words where possible. Insofar as the revelations were a reality to them [and, by his own quiet admission, still a reality to Bushman], I have treated them as real in this narrative." Then, throughout the book, Bushman deals with many of the issues raised by Palmer (including such sensitive questions as the evidence for the restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood, where he takes a somewhat unorthodox stand on the question of when it occurred). He is only one example of the many fine scholars who have studied the same things Palmer has and yet maintain their faith in the integrity of the foundational stories.

writing. Palmer, however, seems to have allowed his desire to debunk traditional faith to blind him to some of those standards.

An Insider's View of Mormon Origins portrays Joseph Smith as a brilliant, though not formally educated, young man who made up the Book of Mormon, as well as other LDS scriptures, by drawing from various threads in his cultural environment. His early religious experiences (the first vision, the visits of Moroni, and priesthood restoration) were not real or physical, but only "spiritual." The stories evolved over time from "relatively simple experiences into more impressive spiritual manifestations, from metaphysical to physical events" and were "rewritten by Joseph and Oliver and other early church officials so that the church could survive and grow" (pp. 260–61). Even the witnesses of the gold plates never really saw them. They had only a spiritual experience. (Why Deity or gold plates seen with "spiritual eyes" could not also be physical realities is never satisfactorily explained.)

Despite such assertions, Palmer does not see himself either as an anti-Mormon or as someone bent on undermining the faith. He presents himself as a faithful Mormon whose "intent is to increase faith, not diminish it" (p. ix). He recently retired after a long career in the Church Educational System, and at the time he wrote the book he was a high priest group instructor in his ward in Sandy, Utah. His announced twofold purpose is (1) simply to introduce church members who have not kept up with the developments in church history over the last thirty years to "issues that are central to the topic of Mormon origins" and (2) to help church members "understand historians and religion teachers like myself" (p. x).

Palmer's readers may well wonder what kind of faith he is trying to increase, for nothing in the book generates confidence in Joseph Smith or modern scripture. He says that he wants church members to understand that the stories of the first vision, the angel Moroni, the Book of Mormon, and priesthood restoration are simply religious allegories (p. 261). Nevertheless, a certain inspiration went into the development of Joseph Smith's teachings, and Palmer says he cherishes many of them. He claims that the focus of his worship, and the object of the faith he wants to promote, is Jesus Christ. Mormon history

gives him "a great commitment to Christ's teachings," and he cites Joseph Smith to the effect that all other things are only appendages to the testimony of Christ. As Latter-day Saints, he says in his concluding paragraph, "our religious faith should be based and evaluated by how our spiritual and moral lives are centered on Jesus Christ, rather than in Joseph Smith's largely rewritten, materialist, idealized, and controversial accounts of the church's founding" (p. 263). As I read that statement, I could not help but wonder whether Palmer really knows the message of the Book of Mormon. Is he actually saying that telling the foundational stories undermines or takes precedence over the worship of Christ in his or other wards of the church? Leaving aside, for a moment, the question of whether those stories are accurate, it seems to me that in his pursuit of the "truth" about them he has seen only part of what really goes on in church—at least in the church I go to. I have attended wards in many parts of the United States, and invariably I find that the major focus in sacrament meetings and Sunday School is Christ. Of course we talk about the church's founding, but in the larger scheme of things, that always takes second place to the Savior and his teachings. Of course we regularly quote from the Book of Mormon, but the all-important, and most prominent, message of that book is Jesus Christ and his atonement. I could not agree more with Palmer's assertion that, as Latter-day Saints, our chief focus should be on Christ and his teachings, but Palmer is wrong if he is implying that we do otherwise.

Palmer says that he wants to help church members "understand historians and religion teachers like [himself]," but the reader may be confused, initially, as to who those historians and religion teachers are. He does not specifically identify them, but in his preface he gives high praise to "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" who have done painstaking work in all the primary sources, gathered data from the environment, studied the language of the revelations and scriptures and compared it with the language of the time, excavated and restored historical sites,

and "published, critiqued, and reevaluated a veritable mountain of evidence." However, he complains, "too much of this escapes the view of the rank-and-file in the church" (p. viii). Such a statement may mislead some into assuming that the Latter-day Saint scholars and teachers alluded to agree with his perceptions—or, at least, that he draws his conclusions from their works. For the record, nothing could be further from the truth.[3]

There seems also to be an implication that, over the years, Palmer has discussed these issues with other Latter-day Saint scholars and that some may agree with his analysis.[4] I have no personal knowledge of any such conversations, but it is important for the reader to understand that when scholars meet together they discuss candidly whatever issues may arise and whatever new information may have come to light. As new sources become available, or divergent insights are presented, scholars seldom write them off as unimportant or insignificant. They consider them straightforwardly and may well say something like "Hmm, that is really interesting, let's look into it," or "Yes, that raises some interesting and important questions." But such

---

3. See, for example, the "Statement regarding Grant Palmer's Book, *An Insider's View of Mormon Origins,*" *FARMS Review* 15/2 (2003): 255; also on the Web site of the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History at smithinstitute.byu.edu. The statement reads:

In the preface to his book, *An Insider's View of Mormon Origins,* Grant Palmer speaks approvingly of historical work done by the faculty of the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History (pp. vii–viii). To some readers, this has suggested that Smith Institute faculty are among Palmer's category of "historians and religion teachers like myself" who share his views of Latter-day Saint origins (p. x). In subsequent remarks to audiences Palmer has encouraged this view.

Smith Institute scholars are unified in rejecting Palmer's argument that Mormon foundational stories are largely inaccurate myths and fictional accounts.

Palmer writes of a "near-consensus on many of the details" (p. ix) regarding early church origins, as if most scholars see them in much the same way that he does. We and many other historians take issue with a substantial portion of Palmer's treatment of such details. We encourage and participate in rigorous scholarly investigation and discussion of the historical record, and from our perspective acceptance of Joseph Smith's foundational religious claims remains compatible with such investigation. Our publications, past and present, which are readily available to the public, speak for themselves on these matters.

4. Palmer does not say this in his book, but such ideas seem to be circulating on the Internet and in various private conversations.

responses hardly imply that they agree with whatever viewpoints they are discussing, though some observers may be misled into thinking so. Of course there are people who agree with Palmer, but those he seemingly alludes to in his preface are not among them.[5]

There is another implication, not stated by Palmer but apparently circulated in much of the discussion that goes on through the Internet and other places, that some people still in the employ of the church dare not come out with their "true" feelings because they are intimidated by fear of loss of employment and even loss of church membership. Palmer himself may have felt such fear, for he did not publish any of this before he left church employment. But "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). It amazes me, however, that some people (not Palmer, perhaps, but some of his disciples) can impute such hidden sentiments to scholars whom they do not know but who have continually published their own findings and interpretations for

---

5. Elsewhere in the book, Palmer enlists B. H. Roberts in his discussion of the Book of Mormon because of the numerous questions Roberts once raised about it. He does not make clear, however, that Roberts never lost faith in the Book of Mormon. Honest scholar that he was, Roberts recognized many of the issues Palmer deals with, wrote about them, and presented his questions to the church's Quorum of the Twelve. But they were questions, not answers, and John W. Welch and Truman G. Madsen have shown that rather than let the unanswered questions destroy his faith in the book, he continued to believe in it and to preach from it. In fact, even after he prepared his manuscript on the questions (which was never intended for publication), he continued to let the Book of Mormon guide much of what he had to say in *The Truth, the Way, the Life,* a work he thought of as his magnum opus. He even concluded his final testimony in the Salt Lake Tabernacle by affirming that God gave to Joseph Smith "power from on high to translate the *Book of Mormon*" and listing its translation as among the many events "and numerous revelations to the Prophet which brought forth a development of the truth, that surpasses all revealed truth of former dispensations." B. H. Roberts, *Discourses of B. H. Roberts of the First Council of the Seventy,* comp. Elsie Cook (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1948), 104, 105. See also John W. Welch, "B. H. Roberts: Seeker after Truth," *Ensign,* March 1986, 56–62; Truman G. Madsen and John W. Welch, "Did B. H. Roberts Lose Faith in the Book of Mormon?" (FARMS paper, 1985); Truman G. Madsen, "B. H. Roberts and the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 19/3 (1979): 427–45; Davis Bitton, "B. H. Roberts and Book of Mormon Scholarship," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8/1 (1999): 60–69. For a brief discussion of the Book of Mormon and its relationship to *The Truth, the Way, the Life,* see the appropriate section in James B. Allen, "The Story of *The Truth, the Way, the Life,*" *BYU Studies* 33/4 (1993): 691–741.

years. Moreover, many who are now retired, or who otherwise are not dependent upon the church for their livelihood (and are therefore "safe" from intimidation), still continue to publish and lecture on Mormon origins with no change at all in their perspectives. Such people include Richard L. Bushman, who serves part time as chairman of the board of the Smith Institute. The reader may be interested in going to the Institute's Web site for a list of the rest of the faculty as well as of the Institute's senior research fellows, including six BYU retirees, all of whom have published widely in LDS history and none of whom supports the conclusions reached by Palmer.[6] Other people who might be included among the "historians like myself" to whom Palmer alludes include the staff of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies,[7] other BYU faculty members, and other Latter-day Saint scholars. Palmer would no doubt say that he did not intend to imply that all these people agree with him, which still leaves us asking who are the "historians and religion teachers like myself" that need to be understood—and who, presumably, share his views? It would be amiss for me to speculate on an answer, but they are not among the groups mentioned above.

Palmer complains about the "Sunday school" type of history, claiming that his "demythologized" versions of the foundational stories "are in many cases more spiritual, less temporal, and more stirring" than what is generally taught (p. ix), though he spends little time trying to demonstrate this curious pronouncement. What we must do, he says, is address and ultimately correct the "disparity between historical narratives and the inspirational stories told in church" (p. xii). This, I think, tends to beg the issue. The leaders of the church are well aware of the various accounts of the first vision and other foundational stories, as well as the sometimes confusing reports by Joseph Smith's contemporaries. Latter-day Saint scholars have been writing about these matters for years. However, in Sunday School there is little time to go into all the details of church history, and especially not the controversies concerning those details. That is not the purpose of Sunday School. Neverthe-

---

6. See smithinstitute.byu.edu.

7. See farms.byu.edu for a list of this research institute's personnel and publications.

less, the scholars Palmer claims to admire have gone into great detail on nearly all the issues he brings up and have published significant books and articles about their findings. These publications frequently "demythologize" in the sense that they correct false impressions and tend to modify old ideas, bring to light various contextual considerations, and reveal a great deal of new information about Joseph Smith, his contemporaries, and the Book of Mormon. These writings usually do not find their way into "official" church literature—that is, the *Ensign,* the *New Era,* the *Church News,* the *Liahona* (the church's international magazine), and Sunday School, priesthood, and Relief Society manuals—and for good reason. Such publications are not intended to be a forum for academic discussion of controversial issues. Just the opposite, they are designed for the entire population of the church, from the "seasoned" member to the newest convert, so they deal primarily with basic gospel principles and gospel living. Nonetheless, Latter-day Saint scholars who do such cutting-edge research are encouraged by the church to find outlets for their work in church-supported scholarly publications such as *BYU Studies,* the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies,* the *FARMS Review,* several other journals that direct themselves to Latter-day Saint audiences, and various reputable publishing houses, including Deseret Book and various national book publishers. The work of these scholars, who, as Palmer says, have "published, critiqued, and reevaluated a veritable mountain of evidence," is out there to be read and is easily found by anyone who has the interest.

Palmer is right, unfortunately, in saying that not enough LDS historical scholarship has come to the attention of the "rank-and-file" in the church, but this is hardly the fault of either the church or its scholars. It illustrates the sad fact that the vast majority of the reading public seems less interested in history than in lively fiction (largely mysteries, adventure, romance novels, and historical novels) and books on health and diet.[8] History is almost at the bottom of the list,

---

8. On *USA Today*'s list of the 150 best sellers for the week ending 1 February 2004, for example, the best seller was a book on diet, next was a mystery novel, then came another diet book, another mystery novel, and then another diet book. The first nonfiction or nondiet book, *The Purpose-Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* appeared only in

and, though Latter-day Saints often gain certain historical insights from historical novels, they seldom seek out the scholarly literature that deals with complex issues and problems such as those discussed by Palmer. Again, this is not the fault of the church—it is just human nature. However, the material is out there for those who want to find it.[9] Given Palmer's high praise for all this work in his introduction, it seems ironic that he virtually ignores it in the rest of the book.

The Book of Mormon

In his first chapter, Palmer attempts to demonstrate that Joseph Smith did not have the power to translate anything and that therefore not just the Book of Mormon but also his Bible translations and the Book of Abraham were fabricated (albeit, Palmer seems to feel, in some kind of "inspired" way). The Book of Mormon, he argues, is neither a "translation" nor a direct dictation from God but, instead, "a nineteenth-century encounter with God rather than an ancient epic" (p. 36). In other words, it is inspired fiction. Among his arguments is the fact that there are so many passages in the Book of Mormon that are similar to, or the same as, passages from the King James Version of the Bible. In fact, he says, "scholars have determined that he [Joseph] consulted an open Bible, specifically a printing of the King James translation dating from 1769 or later, including its errors" (p. 10). Later in the book, Palmer suggests that Joseph Smith knew the Bible thoroughly—even, perhaps, having it memorized—thus accounting for his ability to insert Bible passages as he constructed the Book of Mormon (pp. 46–47). One problem here is that the writers he cites really have no way of knowing whether Joseph did or did not have a Bible in front of him, and there

---

eleventh place, and the next one, number eighteen, was a book on financial planning. Only a handful of books with historical substance appeared on the list, and all of them dealt with current issues. Church members, unfortunately, have similar habits, though they also read books on life and living written by church leaders and other inspirational writers.

9. A guide to the published historical literature on the church, including controversial works, is James B. Allen, Ronald W. Walker, and David J. Whittaker, *Studies in Mormon History, 1830–1997: An Indexed Bibliography* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000). This work is constantly being updated and will soon be available over the Internet. See also the Web sites of *BYU Studies* (byustudies.byu.edu) and FARMS for indexes to their publications.

is no evidence that any of his associates said such a thing. In fact, the statements usually cited are not always contemporary (some were made years after the fact), they do not always agree in detail, and some of those who made them were not actual witnesses to the translation, or dictation, process. LDS scholars have already dealt with the issue of biblical passages in the Book of Mormon many times, but Palmer chooses either to ignore or to brush too lightly over what they have to say. In a review of an earlier work casting doubt on Joseph Smith as the translator, Royal Skousen, who has spent years in painstaking study of the Book of Mormon text, shows from contemporary accounts that the youthful Joseph was not that great a Bible student (for one thing, he did not even know that there were walls around Jerusalem) and that contemporary witnesses affirm that he did not have a Bible with him while translating. Skousen also discusses numerous other points raised by earlier doubters and repeated by Palmer.[10] Another scholar, John W. Welch, explores in depth the section in 3 Nephi that is highly similar to the Sermon on the Mount as recorded in Matthew.[11] In comparing the two sermons he emphasizes not just the similarities but, more importantly, the differences, showing that "the relationship between these texts cannot be attributed to a superficial, thoughtless, blind, or careless plagiarism. On the contrary, the differences are systematic, consistent, methodological, and in several cases quite deft."[12] In his only allusion to Welch, Palmer faults his speculation that God brought the biblical text to Joseph's memory as he was translating, asserting that the Bible edition Joseph used contained mistakes and asking why, if God inspired Joseph, these mistakes were perpetuated in the Book of Mormon (pp. 135–36). Again, however, Welch has already dealt with that issue, in chapter 8 of the same book. Drawing on his own knowledge of Greek texts, he shows that there is no way to know that, in the edition Joseph may have used, the passages in question were, in fact, erroneous translations.

---

10. See Royal Skousen, "Critical Methodology and the Text of the Book of Mormon," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994): 5–12.

11. John W. Welch, *The Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), esp. chap. 5.

12. Ibid., 93.

Numerous other works by Latter-day Saint scholars deal with the authorship of the Book of Mormon and, as a group, consider nearly every issue raised by Palmer. The point, however, is not just that they present more sophisticated arguments, but that none of the questions raised by Palmer has been hidden by the church or ignored by its scholars and, as ingenious and seemingly overwhelming as the arguments of Palmer and others are, their readers must not presume that they can withstand the scrutiny of well-trained scholars and students of scripture who have spent their careers studying the same issues.

Palmer includes a discussion of the discredited Kinderhook plates, showing that they were a hoax and suggesting that Joseph Smith nevertheless claimed that he could translate them (pp. 1–38). What he does not say, however, is that all this information has been dealt with earlier, in church publications, so it is no secret. In his article on the Kinderhook plates,[13] Stanley B. Kimball tells the story in detail. Joseph may, at first, have thought these plates were authentic, and the *Times and Seasons* even published a statement to the effect that a translation was forthcoming. But the translation did not appear, according to Kimball, simply because Joseph Smith was not fooled for long and soon dropped the matter. The statement in Joseph Smith's *History* saying that "I have translated a portion of them" did not come from Joseph Smith. Rather, this statement stems from the diary of William Clayton, who wrote on 1 May 1843 that "I have seen 6 brass plates. . . . Prest J. [Joseph] has translated a portion of them." Whether Joseph Smith actually tried to translate the plates or was just speculating on their contents in Clayton's presence, or whether Clayton himself was just speculating, is unknown. The statement got into Joseph's history later, when Clayton's diary was used as a source and third-person references were transposed by the editors into first-person statements. The fact that the plates were a hoax was not revealed until many years after Joseph's death, but modern scholars have not been hesitant to discuss the issue and the church has not hidden the facts.

---

13. Stanley B. Kimball, "Kinderhook Plates Brought to Joseph Smith Appear to be a Nineteenth-Century Hoax," *Ensign,* August 1981, 66–74. See also the short entry by Stanley B. Kimball, "Kinderhook Plates," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism,* 2:789.

Palmer also attacks the authenticity of the Book of Abraham and Joseph Smith's interpretation of the other Egyptian papyri he possessed (pp. 12–30). Without going into detail here, let me simply refer the reader to the voluminous writings of Hugh Nibley, one of the church's most learned scholars of ancient civilizations and languages, who has dealt openly with all the major issues. Even he recognizes that there are various ways to interpret such ancient material and that all the answers are not in, but one would be amiss to doubt his integrity as a scholar.[14] Palmer, relying on the work of another doubter, criticizes Nibley for focusing primarily on Egyptian temple rituals (p. 16), but a careful reading of the *Improvement Era* series as well as *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri* will show that his work is broader than that.

Having satisfied himself that Joseph Smith must have concocted the Book of Mormon by drawing from his biblical knowledge as well as a variety of sources in his environment, Palmer proceeds to amass his evidence in four succeeding chapters. In chapter 2, "Authorship of the Book of Mormon," he comes up with what he considers a "plausible scenario" on how the book came to be. Perhaps, he hypothesizes, the idea began to form in Joseph's mind even before Martin Harris became his scribe in 1828, for he had already experimented with seer stones and thought that maybe God would open his mind to other things. After the loss of the first 116 pages of dictation, "an apprenticeship had been served," and Joseph had nine months before Oliver

---

14.   A list of many of his works appears on the FARMS Web site, but see especially those listed here: Hugh W. Nibley, "A New Look at the Pearl of Great Price," *Improvement Era,* January 1968–May 1970 (a twenty-seven–part series that appeared sometime after the rediscovery of the Joseph Smith Papyri and the resulting academic controversy over their meaning and their relation to the Book of Abraham began); some parts were reprinted in *Abraham in Egypt,* 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 2000). See also *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1975); "The Facsimiles of the Book of Abraham: A Response," *Sunstone,* December 1979, 49–51; and "The Meaning of the Kirtland Egyptian Papers," *BYU Studies* 11/4 (1971): 350–99. One of the church's most gifted scholars, Nibley graduated summa cum laude from the University of California at Los Angeles and completed his PhD as a university fellow at the University of California at Berkeley. He has been associated with BYU since 1946.

Cowdery came to help to "ponder the details" and flesh out the story. Then, before the book was published, he had eight more months to make textual refinements. In LDS-history-according-to-Palmer, Joseph actually had at least three years to "develop, write, and refine the book" (pp. 66–67), or six years, if one counts from when he first told his family about the project. This is conjecture, of course, and is clearly a challenge to what LDS scholars have written on the issue. John W. Welch, for example, has determined that, in fact, it took only about sixty-five to seventy-five days to complete the translation,[15] not several years to make up a story. Of course, Joseph made modifications and corrections during the time the book was in press, but these were not extensive and had no effect on its story line or basic substance. (Incidentally, Palmer makes a mistake when he uses Welch's *Ensign* article for his statement that Joseph Smith dictated the final manuscript in about ninety days [p. 66]. In the article cited, Welch says sixty-five days, though in a later revision of the article he says sixty-five to seventy-five.)

Palmer's estimate is based on his assumption that Joseph Smith somehow began plotting his publication very early, memorized it in detail, and then dictated it from memory over a short period of time. However, as LDS scholars have consistently pointed out, there is a singular internal consistency within the Book of Mormon, including recurring threads and patterns that would be most difficult if not impossible for Joseph Smith to keep in mind as he made up a story and then dictated it, without the use of notes, over a period of sixty-five to seventy-five days, always taking up exactly where he had left off the day before. Moreover, the central material in the Book of Mormon is not the story line but, rather, the powerful, often profound and beautiful, spiritual messages given throughout—most of them centering on Christ and his teachings. They are so abundant, and impress me so deeply, that it seems highly improbable to me that someone trying to perpetrate

---

15. See John W. Welch, "How Long Did It Take Joseph Smith to Translate the Book of Mormon?" *Ensign,* January 1988, 46; and "How Long Did It Take to Translate the Book of Mormon?" in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon,* ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 1–8.

a fraud could work all that, along with a consistent, highly complex narrative, into a book of fiction dictated in so short a time. With what we know about Joseph Smith's inherent lack of literary prowess, it becomes especially difficult to believe that he was the author.

There are better ways, I think, of looking at this. If one looks at the story through the eyes of faith and assumes that the gold plates were real, an equally or perhaps even more "plausible scenario" emerges. There can be little doubt that young Joseph was thinking about his future task and probably even had some good ideas about what was on the plates before he was actually given them and told to translate them. After all, he was visited and instructed by Moroni several times before he got them. The only authoritative statement on how the Book of Mormon was translated is Joseph Smith's own affirmation that he did it "by the gift and power of God," but we can still imagine several possible scenarios. Royal Skousen and others have argued that Joseph may have received the translation word for word, though not without previous prayerful thought and effort.[16] A similar possibility is that, being already familiar with some of the history of the Nephites and Lamanites (from Moroni's several visits), and also being familiar with the Bible, as Joseph studied prayerfully words came to his mind and he had the experience alluded to in the Doctrine and Covenants: "If it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right" (D&C 9:8). The words may have been his own words, in the language he best understood (though, as scholars have repeatedly shown, they were beyond his own limited linguistic talents, so there was clearly inspiration or revelation as the words came), but he also received spiritual confirmation that they accurately reflected what the Book of Mormon prophets meant to convey. So far as biblical passages are concerned, it is well known that different translators will not translate the same document in exactly the same words, but each of their translations may still be "correct" representations of what the original document said. Joseph used words that he

---

16. See, for example, Royal Skousen, "How Joseph Smith Translated the Book of Mormon: Evidence from the Original Manuscript," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 7/1 (1998): 22–31.

and the people he knew could best understand as scripture—words as close as he could come to the scriptural style they knew, the King James Version of the Bible. When it came to Isaiah passages and other passages that reflected ideas that were the same as those of the Book of Mormon prophets, it was only natural that he render them in the King James style—even word for word—if they still reflected the same ideas. (It does not bother me to think that, somehow, he had access to and used his Bible during that part of the translation process—hence the word-for-word rendition of Isaiah—but, if the process was inspired, this allows for the significant differences in wording that resulted.) Further, if Christ really did appear to the ancient Nephites, why would he not have delivered his message in almost the same words he employed in Jerusalem? Would this not help account for the similarities between the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon at the Temple? Nephi reminds us that "the Lord God giveth light unto the understanding; for he speaketh unto men according to their language, unto their understanding" (2 Nephi 31:3), and the Lord reminded the Saints with respect to modern revelation that "I am God and have spoken it; these commandments are of me, and were given unto my servants in their weakness, after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding" (D&C 1:24). We don't know what would happen if someone were to translate the same material today, even under inspiration, but it is conceivable that the words would be different, perhaps even in more modern English, such as that in the New International Version of the Bible, but the meaning would be the same and the translation would be "correct." To his credit, even though Palmer discusses some of the parallels between the Book of Mormon and Ethan Smith's *View of the Hebrews,* he does not claim, as some before him have, that *View of the Hebrews* is a direct source for parts of the Book of Mormon. Rather, he uses the parallels to show that in Joseph Smith's cultural setting there was a belief that American Indians were descended from Israelites and that this idea could have provided the inspiration for Joseph Smith to make the same claim in the Book of Mormon (pp. 58–64). Palmer is right about the perception of American antiquities held by many people at the time,

but that is not proof that it provided the idea for the Book of Mormon. Because A is similar to B is not necessarily a reason to assume that A was the source for B, especially, in this case, when Palmer himself recognizes that internally *View of the Hebrews* and the Book of Mormon are not similar. Interestingly enough, information about *View of the Hebrews* has been available through LDS sources for many years, and in 1996 BYU's Religious Studies Center republished, in its entirety, the 1825 edition.[17] Again, nothing about this issue has been hidden by the church or its scholars.

Palmer points to a statement in the introduction to the current edition of the Book of Mormon to the effect that Book of Mormon people are the "principal ancestors of the American Indians" (p. 57) and attempts to use linguistics as well as DNA evidence to show that *no* Native Americans could be of Hebrew descent. The linguistics argument is slippery for Latter-day Saint scholars, since as yet they have not found an abundance of evidence that there are traces of Hebrew in Native American languages, partly—John L. Sorenson and others believe—because there have not been enough interested and competent scholars working on the matter.[18] It is a painstaking and expensive process. There have been a few interesting discoveries, however, as noted by Sorenson. Some names associated with the Mayan calendar, for example, seem to be related to Hebrew. In addition, Sorenson refers to one unpublished study that has noted a degree of similarity in the basic vocabulary of the Hebrews and the language of native groups just north of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec (the area where most LDS scholars believe the Book of Mormon history took place).[19]

---

17.   See Andrew Hedges, review of *View of the Hebrews,* by Ethan Smith, *FARMS Review of Books* 9/1 (1997): 63–68. The reader may also be interested in looking at "View of the Hebrews: 'An Unparallel,'" in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon,* 83–87. See also Spencer J. Palmer and William L. Knecht, "View of the Hebrews: Substitute for Inspiration?" *BYU Studies* 5/2 (1964): 105–13.

18.   See, however, Brian D. Stubbs, "Looking Over vs. Overlooking Native American Languages," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5/1 (1996): 1–49.

19.   See John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1985), 79–80. See also John A. Tvedtnes, John Gee, and Matthew Roper, "Book of Mormon Names Attested in Ancient Hebrew Inscriptions," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9/1 (2000): 40–51.

On the DNA issue, knowledgeable LDS scholars have responded quickly and decisively to the argument that DNA studies show no connection between Israelites and Native Americans. DNA investigation is both extremely complex and tentative, but Michael Whiting, Sorenson, and others have shown that the evidence is still so tentative that no firm conclusions can be made, one way or the other. This is partly because we really don't know enough about the colonization patterns of ancient Americans.[20] One hypothesis is what Whiting calls the "local colonization hypothesis," but it presents especially complicated challenges for investigation. This hypothesis, as explained by Whiting,

> suggests that when the three colonizing parties came to the New World, the land was already occupied in whole or in part by people of an unknown genetic heritage. Thus the colonizers were not entirely isolated from genetic input from other individuals who were living there or who would arrive during or after the colonization period. The hypothesis presumes that there was gene flow between the colonizers and the prior inhabitants of the land, mixing the genetic signal that may have been originally present in the colonizers. It recognizes that by the time the Book of Mormon account ends, there had been such a mixing of genetic information that there was likely no clear genetic distinction between Nephites, Lama-

---

20. See the following articles appearing in *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12/1 (2003): John L. Sorenson and Matthew Roper, "Before DNA," 6–23; Michael F. Whiting, "DNA and the Book of Mormon: A Phylogenetic Perspective," 24–35; John M. Butler, "A Few Thoughts from a Believing DNA Scientist," 36–37; and D. Jeffrey Meldrum and Trent D. Stephens, "Who Are the Children of Lehi?" 38–51. See also "The Problematic Role of DNA Testing in Unraveling Human History," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9/2 (2000): 66–74. Further articles on DNA issues appear in the *FARMS Review* 15/2 (2003): Daniel C. Peterson, "Prolegomena to the DNA Articles," 25–34; David A. McClellan, "Detecting Lehi's Genetic Signature: Possible, Probable, or Not?" 35–90; Matthew Roper, "Nephi's Neighbors: Book of Mormon Peoples and Pre-Columbian Populations," 91–128; Matthew Roper, "Swimming in the Gene Pool: Israelite Kinship Relations, Genes, and Genealogy," 129–64; Brian D. Stubbs, "Elusive Israel and the Numerical Dynamics of Population Mixing," 165–82; and John A. Tvedtnes, "The Charge of 'Racism' in the Book of Mormon," 183–97.

nites, and other inhabitants of the continent. This distinction was further blurred by the time period from when the Book of Mormon ends until now, during which there was an influx of genes from multiple genetic sources. Moreover, the hypothesis suggests that the Nephite-Lamanite lineage occupied a limited geographic range. This would make the unique Middle Eastern genetic signature, if it existed in the colonizers at all, more susceptible to being swamped out with genetic information from other sources.[21]

Whiting's many observations in this long and fascinating article make clear how tentative DNA investigators must be in trying to determine the relationship between Lamanites and American Indians. Among these observations are the following: "The local colonization hypothesis is hard to test because of complications associated with the Lamanite lineage history, such as founder effect, genetic drift, and extensive introgression." "DNA evidence is not likely to unambiguously refute or corroborate this hypothesis." "This hypothesis has never been specifically tested." "DNA evidence does nothing to speak to the authenticity of the Book of Mormon text." "I would be just as critical of a claim that DNA evidence supports the Book of Mormon as I am of the claim that it does not."[22]

On the matter of the Book of Mormon people being the "principal ancestors" of the American Indians, Palmer (inadvertently?) sets up a kind of straw man. That introductory Book of Mormon statement itself suggests that there *were* other people on the continent. Beyond that, Latter-day Saints (including church leaders) have long recognized that the book is a history of only a relatively small group of people in a very limited region, and that there were other people on the continent when the Jaredites (the earliest group mentioned by the Book of Mormon) arrived. Given that fact, there is no necessity to assume that the Book of Mormon people were the *only* ancestors of the American Indians, or even that the majority of the current inhabitants of North, Central,

---

21. Whiting, "DNA and the Book of Mormon," 31.
22. Ibid., 33.

and South America are descended from the Nephites and Lamanites. In 1909, Elder B. H. Roberts suggested that the American continent was not empty when the Jaredites came, and a 1927 commentary on the Book of Mormon as well as a 1938 Book of Mormon study guide published by the Church Department of Education held the same view.[23] In 1960 Elder Richard L. Evans of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles clearly recognized the issue when he referred in writing to the Book of Mormon as "a sacred and secular record of prophets and people who were *among* the ancestors of the American 'Indians.'"[24] Sorenson has made the case even stronger, arguing in a noteworthy 1992 article not only that there were "others" on the continent but also that there is evidence within the Book of Mormon itself that the Nephites and Lamanites knew they were there and, to some degree, interacted with them.[25] All these issues, and others, are brought up in the chapter on authorship, and yet most of them have been "asked and answered" earlier by Latter-day Saint scholars whom Palmer, for some reason, generally ignores.[26]

In chapter 3, "The Bible and the Book of Mormon," Palmer fleshes out his previous argument that Joseph Smith drew upon his knowledge of the Bible while constructing the Book of Mormon narrative,

---

23. See B. H. Roberts, *New Witnesses for God* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1909), 2:356; Roper, "Nephi's Neighbors," 102; and James E. Smith, "Nephi's Descendants? Historical Demography and the Book of Mormon," review of *Multiply Exceedingly: Book of Mormon Population Sizes,* by John C. Kunich, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994): 255–96.

24. Richard L. Evans, "These Are the 'Mormons,'" *Christian Herald,* November 1960, 80, emphasis added.

25. See John L. Sorenson, "When Lehi's Party Arrived, Did They Find Others in the Land?" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1 (1992): 1–34.

26. In addition to the works by LDS scholars cited above, the reader is urged to consult the variety of approaches to authorship in the Book of Mormon in Noel B. Reynolds, ed., *Book of Mormon Authorship: New Light on Ancient Origins* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1982): C. Wilfred Griggs, "The Book of Mormon as an Ancient Book," 75–101; and Wayne A. Larsen and Alvin C. Rencher, "Who Wrote the Book of Mormon? An Analysis of Wordprints," 157–88. See also Noel B. Reynolds, ed., *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: Evidence for Ancient Origins* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997): Louis Midgley, "Who Really Wrote the Book of Mormon? Critics and Their Theories," 101–39; Daniel C. Peterson, "Is the Book of Mormon True? Notes on the Debate," 141–77; Melvin J. Thorne, "Complexity, Consistency, Ignorance, and Probabilities," 179–97; John L. Hilton, "On Verifying Wordprint Studies: Book of Mormon Authorship," 225–53.

as demonstrated by so many parallels. Among those parallels are the story of Lehi and his family journeying to the promised land in the Book of Mormon and that of the exodus of Moses and the Israelites in the Bible. This phenomenon has already been recognized and dealt with in great detail by S. Kent Brown.[27] Referring to questions raised earlier about the parallels, Brown observes that they are actually recognized by the Book of Mormon prophets and writers themselves and were deliberately used as a teaching tool:

> Such interest is reasonable because Nephite teachers themselves drew comparisons between Lehi's colony and their Israelite forbears. For instance, in an important speech, King Limhi referred to Israel's escape from Egypt and immediately drew a parallel to Lehi's departure from Jerusalem (Mosiah 7:19–20). Alma, in remarks addressed to his son Helaman, also consciously linked the Exodus from Egypt with Lehi's journey (Alma 36:28–29). More than once a prophet or teacher who wanted to prove to others that divine assistance could be relied on appealed to God's acts on behalf of the enslaved Israelites. This replication was the technique used by Nephi, for example, in his attempt to convince his recalcitrant brothers that God was leading their father, Lehi (1 Ne. 17:23–35).[28]

There are thus good reasons for the parallels, and there is no good reason to claim that they represent plagiarism by Joseph Smith.

Palmer points to other parallels. One example is his comparison between the book of Judith in the Apocrypha and the story of Nephi killing Laban in the Book of Mormon (p. 55). This and other apocryphal parallels are dealt with by John Tvedtnes and Matthew Roper in their extensive critique of the same charges originally made by Jerald and Sandra Tanner. They point out that Nephi's story "has much more in common with that of David and Goliath than that of Judith and Holofernes, but to cite from 1 Samuel 17 would have detracted

---

27. S. Kent Brown, "The Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 30/3 (1990): 111–26.

28. Ibid., 111.

from the Tanners' [and thus Palmer's] thesis that Joseph Smith got the idea from the book of Judith."[29] In reality, the story of Judith and Holofernes is so different from the story of Nephi that the so-called similarities are really superficial. In the Apocrypha, King Nebuchadnezzar sends his general, Holofernes, to conquer the rebellious Jews, but the city of Bethulia refuses to submit. Finally, however, after their water supply has been cut off, the people consider surrendering in five days if God does not rescue them. At that point Judith, a beautiful widow, declares that she will deliver them. Entering the camp of the Assyrians, she captivates Holofernes with her charms and finally, when he is lying on his bed drunk, cuts off his head with his own sword and takes it to her city to show what she has done. The Jews, thus encouraged, sally forth and scatter the invading army and plunder its camp. Palmer's supposed parallels are limited to such incidentals as the fact that an enemy wants to destroy the people of God (a frequent theme throughout the Bible, the Book of Mormon, and Christian history in general, but in this case it is not even a similar story: Nephi goes back to Jerusalem not because he knows Laban wants to kill his people but only to get the records); Judith, like Nephi, enters the city at night (but the purpose is different than that of Nephi: she goes into the city intending to kill the general while Nephi has no such intent and kills Laban only when the opportunity presents itself and then only after considerable soul-searching); Judith cuts off the general's head with his own sword (a kind of parallel, but the description of how she does it is quite different from the description of Nephi killing Laban, and Nephi is certainly not vengeful enough to carry the head away in triumph); then, according to Palmer, Judith takes some of Holofernes's possessions (the Apocrypha says nothing about Judith taking anything out of the general's tent except his head in a food bag, though her people later come in and plunder the enemy camp; in Nephi's case he does not take the head but does take Laban's clothes, sword, and armor as well as the records he initially came for); and both groups celebrate by burnt offerings to the Lord (well, what do you expect of a

---

29. John A. Tvedtnes and Matthew Roper, "Joseph Smith's Use of the Apocrypha: Shadow or Reality?" *FARMS Review of Books* 8/2 (1996): 338.

group of Israelites: were not burnt offerings the norm, and would not the story of Nephi be suspect if they had *not* offered burnt offerings?). Such strained parallels make Palmer's argument weak indeed—the stories are not at all identical, as he claims, and neither are the phrases and sentences.[30]

Surprisingly, Palmer does not discuss the numerous passages from Isaiah that are included in the Book of Mormon, yet this is one issue that critics of the Book of Mormon often bring up. The reader should know, however, that this issue also has been dealt with exhaustively by respected church scholars, at least as far back as 1939 when Sidney B. Sperry published an extensive two-part article in the church's *Improvement Era*.[31]

Palmer includes a chapter on the parallels between evangelical Protestantism and the Book of Mormon. He finds words and phrases in the Book of Mormon that are similar to words and phrases in the emotionally charged sermons of evangelical ministers and finds teachings that parallel evangelical doctrines. Some of this seems persuasive, though reading through the eyes of faith leads one to ask "why not?" If the same kinds of problems existed in Book of Mormon times, why not scold the people in language that, when translated into the English Joseph knew, sounds evangelical? Moreover, Palmer would be hard-pressed to put Joseph Smith at the camp meetings where Lorenzo Dow, Alfred Bennett, Eleazar Sherman, George Whitefield, or other

---

30.   One nearly "identical" phrase, italicized here, is in the description of the decapitation. Both refer to the hair of the head. The book of Judith says: "She came close to his bed and took hold of *the hair of his head,* and said, 'Give me strength this day, O Lord God of Israel!' And she struck his neck twice with all her might, and severed it from his body" (Judith 13:7–8). Nephi says: "Therefore I did obey the voice of the Spirit, and took Laban by *the hair of the head,* and I smote off his head with his own sword" (1 Nephi 4:18). But not even this small phrase is completely identical—Judith says "his head" and Nephi says "the head."

31.   Sidney B. Sperry, "The 'Isaiah Problem' in the Book of Mormon," *Improvement Era,* September 1939, 524–25, 564–69; October 1939, 594, 634, 636–37. This material was republished in Sperry, *The Book of Mormon Testifies* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1952), 348–406, and later in *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 4/1 (1995): 129–52; see H. Clay Gorton, *The Legacy of the Brass Plates of Laban: A Comparison of Biblical and Book of Mormon Isaiah Texts* (Bountiful, UT: Horizon, 1994).

evangelicals spoke or to show that Joseph had read their speeches. There is evidence from Joseph Smith himself, of course, that he did attend some revivals, and must have been acquainted with revivalist language, but even though some of that language appears in scattered places in the Book of Mormon, it is just that—scattered—and not a wholesale incorporation into Book of Mormon sermons.

One of the things Palmer asserts is that the Book of Mormon contains doctrines that are different from doctrines Joseph came up with later. One of these concerns the Godhead, and Palmer cites several passages that seem to make no distinction between the Father and the Son (as opposed to Joseph Smith's later teaching that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are three distinct beings; see Mosiah 15:1–4, for example). What Palmer fails to point out, however, is that there are numerous other passages that clearly distinguish between the persons of the Father and the Son. We read in 3 Nephi, for example:

> And behold, the third time they did understand the voice which they heard; and it said unto them:
> Behold my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, in whom I have glorified my name—hear ye him. (3 Nephi 11:6–7)

Then, a few verses later, the Son says:

> Behold, I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world.
> And behold I am the light and the life of the world: and I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me in taking upon me the sins of the world, in the which I have suffered the will of the Father in all things from the beginning. (3 Nephi 11:10–11)

There are other such passages in the Book of Mormon (1 Nephi 11:21 and 13:40, for example). Such seemingly contradictory statements exist not only there, however, but also in the Bible and the Doctrine and Covenants. In these books "proof-texters" can find support for any view of the Godhead they want, but to imply that the Book of Mormon portrays *only* one view is misleading. (It may even be that, at

the moment they wrote or spoke, some Book of Mormon prophets themselves did not fully comprehend the Godhead, thus accounting for some differences between them.) For the benefit of church members, however, the apparent contradictions were reconciled by the First Presidency and the Twelve in 1916.[32]

Actually, the only thing Palmer demonstrates effectively in this section is not that Book of Mormon doctrines are fundamentally different from current church teachings but simply that some things, such as temple work, are not there. This may present a dilemma to believers who are reminded in the Doctrine and Covenants that the Book of Mormon contains a "fulness of the gospel." The "fulness of the gospel" as taught consistently throughout the Book of Mormon has been amply documented from the text as a six-point formula that includes faith, repentance, baptism of water, baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost, enduring to the end, and receiving eternal life.[33] This matches exactly the formula presented repeatedly in the Doctrine and Covenants (D&C 10:67–69; 14:7, 10; 18:17–22; 20:25–29; 33:11–12; 39:6; 50:5; 53:3, 7). The answer, of course, is that in its testimony and explanation of the mission of Christ (which, in Palmer's mind, is the most essential thing), the book does contain a "fulness." In addition, part of the "fulness of the gospel" is the concept of continuing revelation, by which Saints in any period of time may receive additional light and knowledge as they are prepared for it.

As part of his effort to show that the Book of Mormon teaches doctrines that were later changed by the church, Palmer includes an interesting quotation from Brigham Young, who said in 1862 that "I will even venture to say that if the Book of Mormon were now to

---

32. It is true that the seeming inconsistency in scriptural references has sometimes confused Latter-day Saints. To deal with this problem, on 30 June 1916, the First Presidency and the Twelve issued a statement entitled "The Father and the Son: A Doctrinal Exposition by the First Presidency and the Twelve," which explained the various ways the terms *Father* and *Son* are used in the scriptures. See James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1833–1964* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1971), 5:26–34.

33. See Noel B. Reynolds, "The Gospel of Jesus Christ as Taught by the Nephite Prophets," *BYU Studies* 31/3 (1991): 31–50.

be re-written, in many instances it would materially differ from the present translation."[34] However, this quotation is taken out of context. President Young was not talking about doctrinal or other substantive differences. It was simply an aside in a much longer statement in which he was trying to show that God speaks to different people in different ways, "in a manner to suit their circumstances and their capacities." If the Bible were to be rewritten today, he said, it would "in many places be very different from what it is now," meaning that those who wrote the books of the Bible might very well be inspired to say some things differently if they were speaking to the circumstances and concerns of today. The same would be true of the Book of Mormon writers. Such isolated, out-of-context quotations should not be taken so literally, for no one can say that Brigham Young really meant that Joseph Smith would translate things differently in 1862 than he did in 1829. He only meant that if the Book of Mormon writers were writing in 1862 they might well have had a different message, or said things differently, than they did over fifteen hundred years before.

Perhaps the most strained "parallel" in Palmer's book is his appeal to the "Golden Pot," by E. T. A. Hoffmann. In a way, however, I owe Palmer a debt for introducing me to Hoffmann and at least one of his fantastic short stories. Hoffmann (1776–1822) was a brilliant German writer. He at first aspired to be a musician and even changed his middle name, Wilhelm, to Amadeus, in honor of Mozart. Later, he turned also to writing, becoming most famous for his fantasy and horror. His work had wide influence, including an effect on many composers and writers. One collection of his stories inspired Jacques Offenbach to write his opera *The Tales of Hoffmann.* His 1816 story, "The Nutcracker and the Mouse King," inspired Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker* ballet. In the United States, his writings directly affected the work of such luminaries as Washington Irving, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Edgar Allen Poe, and they even influenced Sigmund Freud and the psychia-

---

34. *Journal of Discourses,* 9:311.

trist Carl Jung's theory of archetypes.[35] It is Palmer's contention that "The Golden Pot" had a direct influence on Joseph Smith's story of how the Book of Mormon came to be.

Palmer believes that Joseph Smith's understanding of, or acquaintance with, the tale "The Golden Pot" "most likely" came through Luman Walters, a magician and necromancer who may have once studied in Europe and there have become acquainted with Hoffmann's work (p. 141). Palmer does not claim that Joseph Smith ever read "The Golden Pot" but only that he got ideas about it from hearing Walters. The problem with this assumption is that the evidence for a direct connection with Walters is tenuous, to say the least. Citing D. Michael Quinn, Palmer says that Brigham Young, Lorenzo Saunders, Abner Cole, and others "confirmed" the fact that the Smith family had contact with Walters in the 1820s. For the most part, however, such "confirmation" is based on secondhand information or on long-term memory, and it seems from reading the writings of Brigham Young that he himself was really not clear on the possible connection. In the 18 February 1855 speech cited by Palmer, for example, Young does not identify Walters by name, though it is evident that this is the man he described as "a fortune-teller, a necromancer, an astrologer, a soothsayer," who, he said, "possesses as much talent as any man that walked on the American soil, and was one of the wickedest men I ever saw."[36] How Brigham knew him is not clear, but the only story he tells is simply that Walters "rode over sixty miles three times the same season they [the gold plates] were obtained by Joseph" in an effort to get the plates for himself, and that he was sent for by some of Joseph's neighbors. Brigham told essentially the same story, with a few variations in detail, a little over two years later, noting that he did not even remember the name of "this fortune-teller."[37] The point Brigham was trying to make was that many people believed there was treasure, or gold, buried in the Hill Cumorah, and

---

35. See "E(rnst) T(heodor) A(madeus) Wilhelm Hoffmann (1776–1822)," online at www.kirjasto.sci.fi/hoffman.htm (accessed 22 June 2004). This short article provides a supporting bibliography.

36. *Journal of Discourses*, 2:180.

37. *Journal of Discourses*, 5:55.

that three different times they sent for a fortune-teller to help them find it. When he repeated the story to Elizabeth Kane in 1872, he finally remembered Walters's last name. None of this, however, provides evidence that Joseph Smith actually knew Walters, or, even if he did, that he knew him well enough to get the "Golden Pot" story from him, if Walters was at all familiar with Hoffmann's tale. Palmer also cites an obscure 1884 statement by Clark Braden, an anti-Mormon Congregational minister, to the effect that Joseph Smith had "made the acquaintance" of Walters, but it is not clear at all how Braden came to that conclusion.

More important, however, is the fact that Palmer's comparisons between Joseph Smith's story and "The Golden Pot" rely on carefully chosen, widely spaced examples that, when read in context, are not really what Palmer makes them out to be. Not even the general story line is recognizable in Palmer's selected references. "The Golden Pot" is a remarkable, complex fantasy told in twelve "vigils," or chapters. The edition I read covers one hundred pages.[38] Palmer's parallels are highly selective and do not reflect the whole story, either of Anselmus (the hero of "The Golden Pot") or Joseph Smith. What's more, Palmer finds it necessary to pull strands from four different accounts by Joseph Smith in order to make his case.

"The Golden Pot" is the story of the student Anselmus, who is introduced in the first vigil running madly through the city after having a horrifying experience with a witch that discourages him and convinces him he is a born loser. His self-detesting reverie goes on until it is interrupted by a strange rustling in the grass that soon moves up into an elder tree, or bush. He also hears whispering, lisping, and sounds like crystal bells. He then sees three little gold-green snakes and hears more whispering as the snakes glide up and down through the twigs as if the elder bush were "scattering a thousand glittering emeralds" through its leaves. Soon he sees some glorious dark-blue eyes looking at him in longing, hears the elder bush and then the Evening Wind speak to him, and finally watches a mysterious green flame

---

38. "The Golden Pot," in Thomas Carlyle, trans., *German Romance: Specimens of Its Chief Authors* (Boston: Munroe, 1841), 2:23–122.

vanish in the direction of the city. Does any of this sound like the Joseph Smith story?

Palmer sees a parallel between Anselmus's dwelling on his stupid bumbling as a student (he calls himself a "jolthead" in the translation I read) and Joseph Smith's lament, in 1838, that after his first vision he fell into foolish errors and displayed the foibles of human nature that were "not consistent with that character which ought to be maintained by one who was called of God" (JS—H 1:28). One who reads Hoffmann must immediately ask what makes Palmer think that Joseph Smith would draw on just this one, not necessarily essential, element of Anselmus's story when nothing else in the first vigil fits or parallels anything in Joseph Smith's story? Joseph was writing about sins for which he needed forgiveness (he was led "into divers temptations, offensive in the sight of God" [JS—H 1:28], he said in a passage not quoted by Palmer), not the kind of bumbling that plagued Anselmus. If one wishes to look for parallels, or sources for this kind of statement from Joseph Smith, they are more easily found in the personal and oft-told experiences of the revivalists of the day.

But Palmer goes on, reporting on "a shock, a vision of angels, and a message" (p. 147). Again, the parallel seems more contrived than real. The word *angel,* for example, appears nowhere in this vigil. What Anselmus sees are the three snakes (which Palmer evidently thinks Joseph Smith transformed into angels as he concocted his story) gliding up and down the twigs of an elder bush. He then hears the bells, receives a shock, and sees a blue-eyed snake looking at him. It is then that the elder bush—not a snake, or "being" as Palmer puts it—speaks to him (though it may have been speaking for the snake), and gives him a message of love. Palmer says that Anselmus does not fully understand the "being's" message, but the text of the story says that it is the Evening Wind (not the snake but perhaps speaking for the snake) that glides by, saying "I played round thy temples, but thou understoodst me not,"[39] and continued with a message of love. Then the "Sunbeam" breaks through the clouds and gives a similar message.

---

39. Ibid., 29.

Palmer also says that these strange "beings" are from the lost civilization of Atlantis—something that is not suggested in this particular vigil but is explained much later on in the story. It is another strain on credulity to figure out how Palmer parlays this into a source for Joseph Smith's 1835 statement that after he had retired to bed he received "a vision of angels in the night season" (p. 148), in which the room was illuminated and an angel sent from God appeared before him. Then, in 1842, he said that the light produced a shock in him, and Palmer further quotes a letter from Oliver Cowdery to the same effect. Anselmus had a vision? Well, if that's what you want to call it, but Hoffmann didn't. Angels? No. Snakes, bells, an elder bush, and the Evening Wind—hardly the kind of "beings" that would give Joseph the idea of reporting the visit of angels. A message? Yes. In Hoffmann, Palmer says, the "being" gave him a message that he did not fully understand, though Hoffmann makes it clear that the message was, in some way, one of love. Joseph Smith, on the other hand, received a very clear message, and even though he speaks of "marveling greatly" at what he was told and being "overwhelmed in astonishment" (JS—H 1:44, 46), he clearly understood what he was supposed to do. Again, the so-called parallels go wanting.

In the second vigil Anselmus is first perceived as mad, but he wakens from his stupor long enough to accept a ride across the river, offered by his friend and professor, Conrector Paulmann. However, partway across he again sees the three snakes and cries out, convincing his companions on the boat that he may, indeed, be mad. But Veronica, the lovely, dark-blue-eyed daughter of Paulmann, defends Anselmus, which immediately changes his demeanor. Later in the day he hears Veronica sing in a voice like a crystal bell (clearly, her blue eyes and the voice are reminiscent of Anselmus's experience with a snake). Still later he is told that Archivarius Lindhorst, who lives by himself in an "old sequestered house," possesses various manuscripts, written in ancient languages and strange characters, that he wishes to have copied—meticulously and with no mistakes—and he is willing to pay for it. Anselmus, who has a flair for both penmanship and calligraphy, is delighted and dreams that night of the fact that, at last, he is going to prosper financially. The next day he goes to apply for

the job but who should meet him at the door but the old witch who had frightened him before. Astonished, he reels back and grabs the bell-rope, which turns into a serpent that attacks and nearly kills him. He quickly loses consciousness and later awakens lying on his bed.

Where are the parallels? Presumably Lindhorst's strange manuscripts became the gold plates in Joseph Smith's reconstruction, and in Palmer's reconstruction of Hoffmann the desire to have them copied becomes a desire to have them also translated (p. 148). This is indeed a stretch, for nothing in the story suggests that Lindhorst hired Anselmus for any purpose but to copy. The only place that translation is even hinted at is much later in the story, in vigil eight, where Anselmus is copying some especially important records in a special gardenlike room. Suddenly, as if in answer to his own concerns, he feels "from his inmost soul" that the only thing the characters on the manuscript could denote are the words "Of the marriage of the Salamander with the green Snake."[40] Immediately Serpentina—the green snake with the blue eyes—comes winding down a palm tree, and Anselmus enjoys the rapture of knowing that his beloved snake loves him. Palmer's transforming this story into the idea that Anselmus was hired to translate the records for Lindhorst is the most far-fetched stretch yet.

Continuing, for a moment, with vigil eight, after Serpentina declares her love, she proceeds to tell Anselmus the wonderful story of her race. When she is finished, Anselmus realizes that during all this time he has not copied anything from the manuscript and yet, mysteriously, the copy is complete. He also realizes, on looking at it, that the writing must contain the story he has just been told. It is this that Palmer says parallels Joseph's claims to have translated by inspiration—a complete misreading of what Hoffmann's story is all about. In a subsequent statement, after being questioned on this matter, Palmer qualifies himself slightly by repeating the story and saying that thus "Anselmus is a kind of 'translator' (as well as a copyist), just as Joseph Smith claimed for himself."[41] But even being a "kind of 'translator'" in this one instance

---

40. Ibid., 85.

41. Palmer's statement was found online at www.signaturebooks.com/excerpts/insider's3.htm (accessed 19 April 2004).

is hardly the same as being hired, or assigned, to translate—something the wizardly Lindhorst hardly needed anyone to do.

From the second vigil, Palmer draws a parallel between Joseph Smith walking to the Hill Cumorah the day after Moroni's visit and Anselmus walking to Lindhorst's residence—both appointed places. Fine—as if this were the only time anyone walked somewhere he was told to go. But Palmer characteristically distorts the record in his reporting of the Hoffmann story. "As Anselmus walks to Lindhorst's house," he says, he "'saw nothing but clear speziesthalers [dollars], and heard nothing but their lovely clink . . . [F]or here, thought he, slapping his pocket, which was still empty, for here [dollars] will soon be clinking'" (p. 149). A problem here is the fact that Hoffmann wrote the first part of this passage as a description of what Anselmus was thinking about during the night, not while he was walking to the house the next morning, though the last part is chronologically correct. It is also true that Joseph reported in 1832 that at first he sought the plates to get riches. But is Anselmus's thought of getting paid to copy old manuscripts really a parallel with Joseph Smith's youthful temptation to somehow use the gold plates to get wealthy? Perhaps, but hardly enough of a parallel to be a source.

Such comparisons continue throughout Palmer's chapter, but there is no space here to deal with all of them. Suffice it to say that nearly all the parallels are equally forced, merely "proof-text" in nature—that is, they are presented in such a way that the context in "The Golden Pot" is distorted and the comparison with Joseph Smith's story is contrived, often depending not on what Joseph Smith himself said but on what someone else (Abner Cole, Oliver Cowdery, Lucy Mack Smith, Orson Pratt, and others) said he said. This is neither good history nor convincing evidence that "The Golden Pot" was the source for anything that Joseph Smith reported. There may be a few similarities between "The Golden Pot" and Joseph Smith, if the text is strained, but they are ripped out of a hundred-page story line that has no similarity at all to that of Joseph Smith. However, let me encourage the interested reader to go to Hoffmann's work itself and make his or her own comparisons. You will find the story so different in thrust from what is presented in

Palmer that you will wonder how and why he ferreted out such obscure parallels at all, when the whole story itself is one massive unparallel. But if you like Old World fantasy, you will have a delightful read.

The significance of all these parallels, many of them superficial, pales in comparison with things about the Book of Mormon that Palmer does *not* consider but that LDS scholars have studied and written about for years, and that provide powerful evidence of the book's authenticity. In addition to numerous noteworthy articles, for example, John L. Sorenson has published two particularly important books. In the first, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon,* he studies the geography and ancient life and culture of Mesoamerica and makes comparisons with the geography and culture described in the Book of Mormon. He does not set out to "prove" that the Book of Mormon is true. As a highly qualified anthropologist, he recognizes the limitations of his study, but he nevertheless provides what I find convincing evidence for Book of Mormon locations. "The geographical setting identified meets the criteria set out unintentionally by the Book of Mormon," according to Sorenson. "Dimensions, climate, topography, configuration of land and water, and cultural levels exhibited in scriptural statements were found to agree with characteristics of central and southern Mesoamerica. . . . The Book of Mormon shows so many striking similarities to the Mesoamerican setting that it seems to me impossible for rational people willing to examine the data to maintain any longer that the book is a mere romance or speculative history written in the third decade of the nineteenth century in New York State."[42] Those bothered by Palmer's much less well-founded conjectures should take note. Further, noting the complexity of the Book of Mormon, Sorenson deals with war, dissent, agriculture, secret societies, kinship, tribes, trade, conquest, migration, and missions, showing in every case a remarkable correlation with the culture of the region under study. In *Images of Ancient America: Visualizing Book of Mormon Life,* he deals with similar issues, though in a more "popular" format. This volume, a handsome, coffee-table book, is filled

---

42.   Sorenson, *Ancient American Setting,* 354.

with photographs that help elucidate the culture of both the Book of Mormon and ancient America. Again, Sorenson is careful not to say that he has "proven" the authenticity of the Book of Mormon, but the evidence, taken as a whole, is powerful and persuasive.[43]

Some of Sorenson's findings are summarized in a more recent essay, "How Could Joseph Smith Write So Accurately about Ancient American Civilization?"[44] Martin Raish, in a summary of various recent works on the Book of Mormon, calls attention to the impossibility of creating a fictional society that in some way parallels a real society that the author knows nothing about. He refers to a discussion of this point by the widely read LDS novelist, Orson Scott Card:

> My final recommendation is a short essay by Orson Scott Card, "The Book of Mormon: Artifact or Artifice?" in *A Storyteller in Zion.* Card examines whether the Book of Mormon could be a 19th-century hoax rather than an authentic ancient record. He approaches the question from the experience of an author who has tried to do similar things (that is, to create epic works of fiction) and who knows that "writing something that purports to be an artifact of another culture is the most complicated, difficult kind of science fiction" and that such "is almost never attempted under circumstances where the author actually tries to pass it off as a genuine document."
>
> If the book is fiction, Card writes, "we should find Joseph Smith's or someone else's influence there as *author.* In that case *all* of the ideas and events in the book should come out of the mind of an 1820s American." But this is not the case. Card searched for flaws and oversights but could not find them. Instead, he found examples of language, culture, and literature that demonstrate the improbability, if not the downright im-

---

43. John L. Sorenson, *Images of Ancient America: Visualizing Book of Mormon Life* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998). See also Sorenson's "The Book of Mormon as a Mesoamerican Record," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited,* 391–521.

44. John L. Sorenson, "How Could Joseph Smith Write So Accurately about Ancient American Civilization?" in *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon,* ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002), 261–306.

possibility, that Joseph Smith was the author rather than the translator of the Book of Mormon. These conclusions are not startling, but the way Card approached and presented them from the viewpoint of a writer rather than a scholar has left an indelible impression on me.[45]

Other areas of investigation not approached by Palmer, but which readers must consider, include the mounting evidence of Hebraisms and other literary forms in the Book of Mormon. John Welch has made a marked contribution to Book of Mormon studies with his work on a distinctive literary form known as chiasmus, which appears regularly in the Book of Mormon. According to Welch, chiasmus has appeared in Greek, Latin, English, and other languages, but it was more highly developed in Hebrew. It is prevalent in biblical texts but did not become well known among students of literature until long after the Book of Mormon was published.[46] John A. Tvedtnes shows that the Book of Mormon has many other characteristics of the Hebrew language and that "in many places the words that have been used and the ways in which the words have been put together are more typical of Hebrew than of English."[47] Since the Nephites seem to have been familiar with Hebrew, this is to be expected. Donald W. Parry also finds many ancient literary forms in the Book of Mormon, including simile curses, names, poetic forms, and the expression *and it came to pass*.[48] Most recently, James T. Duke brings together and discusses

---

45.   Martin Raish, "A Reader's Library," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 10/1 (2001): 74. The reader should consult Card's full essay, "The Book of Mormon—Artifact or Artifice?" in *A Storyteller in Zion* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1993), 13–45.

46.   See John W. Welch, "Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon," in *Book of Mormon Authorship,* 33–52; Welch, "What Does Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon Prove?" in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited,* 199–224; and Welch, "How Much Was Known about Chiasmus in 1829 When the Book of Mormon Was Translated?" *FARMS Review* 15/1 (2003): 47–80.

47.   See John A. Tvedtnes, "The Hebrew Background of the Book of Mormon," in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon,* ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 77.

48.   See Donald W. Parry, "Hebraisms and Other Ancient Peculiarities in the Book of Mormon," in *Echoes and Evidences,* 155–89; and Parry, *The Book of Mormon Reformatted According to Parallelistic Patterns* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1992).

in depth the numerous literary forms and devices found in the Book of Mormon—some biblical in nature, others unique but not found in the language of Joseph Smith's culture.[49] Such things could hardly be the creation of a young man with the limited literary talent of Joseph Smith, nor could they have come about by happenstance.

The interested reader may also want to consult the various Book of Mormon wordprint studies that seem to demonstrate a significant difference in authorship between various authors in the Book of Mormon, suggesting that even in translation the distinctive style of different writers shines through.[50] I could go on and on, especially with the variety of studies carried out and published under the auspices of FARMS, but enough has been said to establish the fact that an abundance of scholarly work is available for the benefit of anyone who wishes to find it. Four recent compilations provide valuable examples of studies relating to the authenticity of the Book of Mormon as well as new insights into the complexity and richness of the book itself.[51]

Palmer next attacks the testimonies of the witnesses to the gold plates, claiming, in part, that they were all visionaries who believed that it was possible, with something he calls "second sight," to see all kinds of hidden treasures. They saw the gold plates, he claims, through "spiritual eyes," but the plates were not real. He also asserts, however, that Joseph Smith may have manufactured "a plate-like object" in order to engender belief in some who later said they felt the plates through a cloth (p. 207)—which is not only pure speculation but also somewhat inconsistent with the idea that the witnesses actually saw or handled nothing. But again—asked and answered. Nearly everything he raises in this chapter has already been dealt with by Latter-day Saint scholars, a few of whom are referred to briefly, almost in passing, but none taken seriously.

---

49. See James T. Duke, *The Literary Masterpiece Called the Book of Mormon* (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2004). See, for example, his chapter on idiomatic expressions.

50. See, for example, Larsen and Rencher, "Who Wrote the Book of Mormon?" 157–88; and Hilton, "On Verifying Wordprint Studies," 225–53.

51. Sorenson and Thorne, eds., *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon;* Welch, ed., *Reexploring the Book of Mormon;* Reynolds, ed., *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited;* and Parry, Peterson, and Welch, eds., *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon.*

As part of his argument Palmer uses some questionable sources to establish the idea that Joseph Smith had a rather unsavory reputation, particularly with respect to his early money-digging. These include statements made many years after the fact, statements made by avowed enemies or apostates, and numerous statements collected by Philastus Hurlbut and published in 1834 by E. D. Howe in *Mormonism Unvailed*. (Curiously, Palmer cites Howe extensively in his footnotes but does not include this controversial book in his bibliography.) Richard Lloyd Anderson has shown, however, that the affidavits published by Howe are unreliable, not only because both Hurlbut and Howe were bitter anti-Mormons (and Howe, even, at one time called Hurlbut unreliable) but that internal evidence reveals that they were probably doctored by Howe. Anderson focuses on statements accusing Joseph and his family of lack of industriousness, but his observations apply equally as well to the rest of Joseph's reputation.[52]

Palmer's chief focus is on the testimonies of the witnesses to the gold plates, and here he takes a slightly different tack from that of most earlier naysayers. Though he implicitly raises questions about their character (an old approach that has been dealt with extensively by LDS scholars),[53] his main argument is that the witnesses were deeply immersed in the magical worldview of the times, believed in hidden treasures guarded by strange creatures, and were so susceptible to suggestions that they received "visions" with their "spiritual eyes" and that "such visions of the mind erased the boundaries that separate the spiritual and the physical worlds, a perspective consistent

---

52. See Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 142–44; Anderson, "The Mature Joseph Smith and Treasure Searching," *BYU Studies* 24/4 (1984): 489–560; Anderson, "Joseph Smith's New York Reputation Reappraised," *BYU Studies* 10/3 (1970): 283–314; Anderson, review of *Joseph Smith's New York Reputation Reexamined,* by Rodger I. Anderson, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 3/1 (1991): 52–80; and Hugh Nibley, "Digging in the Dark," in *The Myth Makers* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1961), 91–190; republished in *Tinkling Cymbals and Sounding Brass* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 193–303.

53. See Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses;* Larry E. Morris, "'The Private Character of the Man Who Bore That Testimony': Oliver Cowdery and His Critics," *FARMS Review* 15/1 (2003): 311–51.

with how a number of people of that day perceived reality" (p. 202). Their very cultural orientation, then, made them gullible enough to "see" whatever Joseph Smith wanted them to see. Interspersed in this line of reasoning is also the old argument that the witnesses were inconsistent and, at times, denied actually *seeing* the plates.

The question of the integrity of the witnesses' testimony is dealt with effectively by Richard Lloyd Anderson. In one instance, Palmer claims that Martin Harris testified publicly in 1838 that "none of the signatories to the Book of Mormon saw or handled the physical records" (p. 204). His source is a letter from Stephen Burnett to Lyman E. Johnson. However, Anderson shows that Burnett's statement is a highly interpretive "first-hand report of a half-truth" and that Burnett probably "bends words" to support his own theory that Mormonism was a "lying deception." The incident Burnett was reporting concerned Martin Harris standing up in a meeting in the Kirtland Temple to challenge charges made by Burnett and other apostates. Anderson's analysis of Burnett's statement shows that he was trying to ridicule Harris and therefore may not have been quoting him correctly but, rather, in derision, saying that he had seen the plates "only" in vision, and that he had seen them "only" four times. The term *only* seems to be Burnett's caustic addition to what Harris really said.[54] Anderson goes into much more detail, demonstrating the long-term integrity of all the witnesses, and the reader would do well to read Anderson's work before accepting uncritically what Palmer has to say.

The magical worldview of the time has also been recognized by LDS scholars, who have described it in detail and have cautioned their readers not to be surprised at such revelations.[55] For a more detailed

---

54. See Anderson's full explanation in *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses,* 155–59.

55. See, for example, the entire issue of *BYU Studies* 24/4 (1984), which is devoted exclusively to this issue and contains essays by Dean C. Jessee, Ronald W. Walker, Marvin S. Hill, and Richard Lloyd Anderson. These articles were prepared as part of a concerted effort by LDS scholars to evaluate the implications of two letters that came into the church's hands through Mark Hofmann. Even before Hofmann's duplicity was revealed, these scholars had questions about the authenticity of the letters, but their writings, coming in part from new research stimulated by the letters, explored openly and honesty the implications of this magical worldview for Mormon history. Also relevant to this discussion are various reviews of D. Michael Quinn's *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View.*

discussion of the problems inherent in this part of Palmer's work, however, the reader is urged to consult Mark Ashurst-McGee's essay in the previous issue of the *FARMS Review*.[56]

Priesthood Restoration

Palmer also devotes a chapter to the restoration of the Aaronic and Mechizedek Priesthoods, calling the early accounts "more nuanced and fascinating than the simple, unified story that is told today" (p. 215). This is a bit misleading, for even though in Sunday School we may hear an abbreviated version, the complex and fascinating story examined by LDS scholars is readily available to church members. Years ago Anderson dealt with Oliver Cowdery and his various accounts of priesthood restoration in his "The Second Witness of Priesthood Restoration."[57] Bushman has looked at the complexities of the issue, raised questions about the date of the restoration of the apostleship, and opined in print that it came only after the organization of the church—a nontraditional view.[58] Larry C. Porter, on the other hand, supports the traditional view.[59] But Palmer's main thrust in this chapter seems not to be whether or when the priesthood was restored but, rather, whether it was done by the physical process of the laying on of hands by heavenly beings. At this point he does not seem to be arguing with the idea that Joseph Smith had priesthood authority, but simply with the current concept that it was given through a physical ordination rather than just some kind of spiritual manifestation. The earliest accounts, he claims, made no such references, and not until about 1835 did the story "evolve" to become one of a hands-on

---

See, in particular, intensive review essays by Stephen E. Robinson and William A. Wilson in *BYU Studies* 27/4 (1987): 88–104; and by John Gee, William J. Hamblin, and Rhett S. James in *FARMS Review of Books* 12/2 (2000): 185–414.

56. Ashurst-McGee, "A One-Sided View of Mormon Origins."

57. See Richard Lloyd Anderson, "The Second Witness of Priesthood Restoration," *Improvement Era,* September 1968, 15–24. See also Brian Q. Cannon and BYU Studies staff, "Priesthood Restoration Documents," *BYU Studies* 35/4 (1995–96): 162–207.

58. See Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism,* 162–63, 241n.

59. See Larry C. Porter, "The Restoration of the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods," *Ensign,* December 1996, 30–47.

bestowal of authority, or the receiving of authority through the minis-
tering of angels. As in the rest of the book, the sources Palmer quotes
can be interpreted variously, but even though they do not always say
"ministering of angels" or "laying on of hands," they are not inconsis-
tent with that perception. Further, Palmer fails to cite Joseph Smith's
earliest attempt, in 1832, to write his own history. He began this early
account by referring specifically to "the reception of the holy Priest-
hood by the ministring of Aangels."[60] This and other problems with
this chapter are also discussed in detail in Ashurst-McGee's review.[61]

The First Vision

Palmer also takes up Joseph Smith's first vision in his final chapter.
As he does with other foundational stories, Palmer takes the position
that current LDS interpretations "simplify and retrofit later accounts
to provide a seemingly authoritative, unambiguous recital" (p. 235).
He focuses on Joseph Smith's various accounts of the vision in an at-
tempt to show not only that they are inconsistent but also that in 1838
he rewrote the story in order to meet certain institutional needs. Like
other foundational stories, Palmer insists, it was transformed from a
"spiritual," or metaphysical, experience into one depicting a physical
reality. Exactly why this new kind of story was so essential is never
satisfactorily explained, though Palmer theorizes that, as a result of
troubling apostasies, Joseph found it necessary to embellish his story
to reassert his authority. Accordingly, he "then told a revised and
more impressive version of his epiphany" and announced for the first
time that "his initial calling had not come from an angel in 1823, as he
had said for over a decade, but from God the Father and Jesus Christ
in 1820" (pp. 248, 251). This is pure speculation and also distorts the
various accounts themselves.

In a way, however, Palmer's emphasis on the "spiritual" nature of
Joseph Smith's first vision is not inconsistent with LDS thought. Latter-

---

60. As reproduced in Dean C. Jesse, ed., *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith,* rev. ed.
(Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and BYU Press, 2002), 10.

61. Ashurst-McGee, "A One-Sided View of Mormon Origins."

day Saints have no trouble accepting the proposition that Joseph saw the Father and the Son with something other than his "natural eyes." He reported in 1838 that after the vision closed "I came to myself again, I found myself lying on my back, looking up into heaven" (JS—H 1:20). This suggests that he was having an experience something like that of Moses: "But now mine own eyes have beheld God; but not my natural, but my spiritual eyes, for my natural eyes could not have beheld" (Moses 1:11). But seeing through "spiritual eyes" does not preclude the possibility that what Joseph saw was real and physical. Palmer's reasoning to the contrary is not persuasive.

There are several contemporary accounts of Joseph Smith's first vision (i.e., accounts prepared by or under the direction of Joseph himself or accounts of someone who heard him recite his experience). Recorded at different times and places, under different circumstances, and in connection with different audiences, they naturally differ in some details. Four of these accounts were recorded directly by Joseph Smith or under his direction. The 1832 account represents his first effort to write the history of the church. Recorded partly in his own handwriting and partly in the handwriting of his scribe, Frederick G. Williams, it is grammatically unpolished but deeply moving, written in a style similar to that of the evangelical spirit of the times. The 1835 account was recorded by Joseph's scribe Warren Cowdery as Joseph was telling a visitor of the rise of the church. The 1838 account was prepared under Joseph Smith's direction and is now published in the Pearl of Great Price. It has become the "official" version of the story. The 1842 account is part of a letter written by Joseph Smith to John Wentworth and published in the church's *Times and Seasons* on 1 March. All of these accounts are readily available.[62] No one should expect Joseph Smith, or anyone else, to repeat a verbatim account each time he tells it.

Palmer goes to great lengths to try to show that the revival Joseph Smith discusses in his 1838 account did not occur in 1820, as that

---

62. The most convenient source is Milton V. Backman Jr., *Joseph Smith's First Vision: Confirming Evidence and Contemporary Accounts,* 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980).

account declares, but rather in 1824 (pp. 240–44), thus casting doubt on the accuracy of that account. This discussion is hardly new, for Mormon historians and anti-Mormon writers began arguing over that and related issues as early as the late 1960s, after Wesley P. Walters challenged the traditional account.[63] Walters averred that there was no revival in Palmyra in 1820, as supposedly claimed by Joseph Smith, and that if Joseph Smith's description of what went on that year cannot be trusted neither can his description of the first vision itself. I call his article "pseudoscholarly" because, as Marvin S. Hill observed in his thoughtful analysis of the scholarly debates over the first vision, "Walters' scholarship is one of sectarian advantage, not objectivity." Then, referring to Walters as well as to other anti-Mormon writers, he said that the sources they employ, "the conclusions they reach, the places where they publish, and their strong anti-Mormon missionary activities suggest that they have other than scholarly concerns." The real point, according to Hill, is not whether a revival occurred in 1820—some agree that it did not—but the fact that all the textual evidence shows that Joseph Smith had a vision between the ages of fourteen and fifteen.[64]

It would hardly be a blot on Joseph Smith's veracity to say that, when preparing his "official" history in 1838, he confused the date of the revival and somehow superimposed what he experienced in 1824 over his memory of what led to his great 1820 epiphany. Most LDS scholars have not done that, however, thanks, in part, to the work of Milton V. Backman Jr. Even before Walters produced his article, Backman was at work scouring the religious records of Palmyra and its vicinity, including records Walters neglected. Drawing first on a highly regarded study of religious fervor in western New York, Backman observed that between 1816 and 1821 "revivals were reported in more towns and a

---

63. Wesley P. Walters, "New Light on Mormon Origins from Palmyra (N.Y.) Revival," *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society* 10/4 (1967): 227–44, also published as a tract by the Utah Christian Tract Society, La Mesa, CA; reprinted in *Dialogue* 4/1 (1969): 60–81, in "Roundtable" as "The Question of the Palmyra Revival." See also the critique by Bushman, 82–93, with a response by Walters, 94–100, in the same roundtable.

64. Marvin S. Hill, "The First Vision Controversy: A Critique and Reconciliation," *Dialogue* 15/2 (1982): 43.

greater number of settlers joined churches than in any previous period of New York history."[65] But he went further than that, demonstrating that in the great revival of 1819–20 there were numerous reports of "unusual religious excitement" within such reasonable distance of Joseph Smith's home (up to about 15 miles) that young Joseph and his family could easily have known of, and even attended, some of them.[66] An interesting controversy followed, focusing at one point on a debate between Walters and Bushman over Joseph Smith's meaning when he described the revival. Interpreting narrowly Joseph Smith's words that there was "unusual excitement on the subject of religion" in "the place where we lived," Walters insisted that the revival had to have taken place in the village of Palmyra, in 1820, for it to fit Joseph Smith's story. Bushman looked more broadly at Joseph's complete statement, wherein he said that the religious excitement "soon became general among all sects in that region of country. Indeed, the whole district of country seemed affected by it," suggesting that Joseph was remembering revival activity that occurred over a broad, though accessible, area.[67] Two things should be obvious to those who read all that has been written on these issues: (1) that Walters and others like him clearly have an anti-Mormon ax to grind and are not always the careful scholars they claim to be and (2) that Backman, Bushman, and others are careful scholars who look at the documents not only with the benefit of their scholarly skills but also through the eyes of faith; they have a prochurch bias, of course, but it is well balanced by their careful scholarship and open recognition of the problems and issues involved.

Palmer seems overly concerned with two issues relating to the first vision: (1) was Joseph Smith called of God and Christ at that time to restore the fulness of the gospel or was he called only later by the angel? and (2) what was his purpose in praying in the first place?

---

65. 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): 302, citing Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-Over District* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1950), 13.

66. See, for example, the maps in Backman, "Awakenings in the Burned-over District," 312–13.

67. See Richard L. Bushman, "The First Vision Revisited," *Dialogue* 4/1 (1969): 82–93. This is followed by a rejoinder by Walters.

On the first question, Palmer concludes that Joseph Smith did not announce that it was in the first vision that he was "called of God" to restore the ancient gospel until he wrote the 1838 account, and then it was only to bolster "his authority during a time of crisis" (p. 251). One problem with this interpretation is that it does not take into account the natural development of Joseph Smith himself as his own understanding of the significance of the vision unfolded. Palmer's supposition that the differences between the accounts reflect Joseph Smith's deceptive effort to bolster his own authority is not the only possibility. Latter-day Saint scholars have already spent considerable time on this issue of multiple accounts and what they mean. The first such article was my own, which appeared in 1970 in the church's *Improvement Era.* It discussed eight contemporary accounts, observing that the differences may be explained by such factors as (1) Joseph Smith's age and experience at the time a particular account was prepared; (2) the particular circumstances surrounding each account, including the special purposes Joseph Smith may have had in mind at the time; (3) the possible literary influence of those who helped him write (or, in the case of the 1835 account, the one who recorded it as Joseph related his story to the visitor); and (4) in the case of versions recorded by others, the fact that "different points would impress different people, and therefore they would record the story somewhat differently. One would hardly expect to find every account to be precisely alike."[68] In a more direct response to the Palmer-type argument, Bushman has explained the differences between the 1832 and 1838 accounts in terms of a broadening of Joseph Smith's own understanding of what the vision really meant. As explained by Bushman:

> But to understand how Joseph Smith's life unfolded, it must be kept in mind that in 1820 he did not know this was the First Vision, nor could he be expected to grasp fully everything that was said to him. Like anyone else, he first understood a new experience in terms of his own needs and his own background.

---

68. James B. Allen, "Eight Contemporary Accounts of Joseph Smith's First Vision: What Do We Learn from Them?" *Improvement Era,* April 1970, 6.

By 1832, when he first wrote it down, Joseph knew that his vision in 1820 was one of the steps in "the rise of the church of Christ in the eve of time," along with Moroni's visit, the restoration of the Aaronic Priesthood, and the reception of the "high Priesthood." But even twelve years after the event the First Vision's personal significance for him still overshadowed its place in the divine plan for restoring the church. In 1832 he explained the vision as he must have first understood it in 1820—as a personal conversion. What he felt important to say in 1832 was that a "pillar of light" came down and rested on him, and he "was filld [*sic*] with the spirit of God." "The Lord opened the heavens upon me and I Saw the Lord and he Spake unto me Saying Joseph my Son thy Sins are forgiven thee, go thy way walk in my statutes and keep my commandments." It was the message of forgiveness and redemption he had longed to hear. . . .

That was half of it. He had also mourned the sins of the world. . . .

Like countless other revival subjects who had come under conviction, Joseph received assurance of forgiveness from the Lord, and, in the usual sequence, following the vision his "soul was filled with love and for many days I could rejoice with great joy and the Lord was with me. . . ." In actuality there was more in the vision than he first understood. Three years later in 1835, and again in another account recorded in 1838, experience had enlarged his perspective. The event's vast historical importance came to overshadow its strictly personal significance. He still remembered the anguish of the preceding years when the confusion of the churches puzzled and thwarted him, but in 1838 he saw the vision was more significant as the opening event in a new dispensation of the Gospel. In that light certain aspects took on an importance they did not possess at first.[69]

---

69. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism,* 56–57.

Bushman continues with this same tight reasoning in his lengthy discussion of the first vision, but enough is quoted here to illustrate that there are more reasonable explanations than Palmer's of the differences between the accounts. Other LDS scholars have also dealt with these differences in detail.

Though Palmer plays on the differences between the accounts, they are actually remarkably consistent—much more so than Palmer seems willing to admit. All four of Joseph Smith's personal accounts rehearse his disillusionment over the differences in the religions of the day, though the 1832 account also goes into great detail concerning his quest for forgiveness of personal sin. All four accounts refer to his anguished prayer. Though worded slightly differently, three of them (1835, 1838, and 1842) make it clear that trying to find out who was right or wrong was the reason he went into the grove to pray. This is not specific in the 1832 account, which focuses on Joseph's quest for forgiveness, but it may be implied in his comment that the churches of his day were in a state of apostasy and did not build on the gospel of Jesus Christ as recorded in the New Testament. It is certainly logical to assume that he had both concerns in mind—his own sins as well as his concerns for which church, if any, was right. All four accounts are consistent in their timing of Joseph's religious concerns. The 1832 account says that his concerns began at the age of twelve, and that he pondered them in his heart until the age of fifteen; in 1835 he said that he was "about 14 years old," the 1838 version says he was in his "fifteenth year," and in 1842 he said he was "about fourteen." A revival, or religious excitement, is mentioned specifically only in the 1838 account, but there are strong suggestions of it in all of the others—else why was Joseph's young mind so wrought up on the subject of religion and why, in the 1832 narration, did he write in language so reminiscent of the revivalists? It is significant, too, that after having discussed the revival explicitly in 1838 Joseph did not do so in 1842—the same year the 1838 account was actually published for the first time. Evidently that specific issue was not of as much concern to him as it is to some today whose time is devoted to ferreting out problems.

The major discrepancy between the various accounts is that in 1832 Joseph mentioned only the appearance of "the Lord," who forgave him of his sins. This may well be explained by the perspective presented by Bushman, that what Joseph Smith wrote later represented a more mature understanding of the importance of everything he saw. None of the accounts use the words "the Father and the Son," but three tell of two personages appearing to him and one of them delivering the important message(s). Palmer says that Joseph does not mention the appearance of God the Father in his 1835 account (p. 240), but this is certainly stretching the point—the fact that he tells of two personages appearing and that the "second was like unto the first" is certainly as direct a reference to the Father and the Son as the statements in the 1838 and 1842 accounts. The fact that Joseph was forgiven of his sins is stated in both the 1832 and 1835 accounts, and even though it is not stated in the 1838 account it was duly reported in the first account actually to be published. This was prepared by Orson Pratt (who obviously received his information from Joseph Smith) and published in Scotland in 1840. Even though Joseph did not repeat that part of the story in 1838, it is clear that it was in no way hidden from the Saints. The Book of Commandments, printed in 1833, contained an 1830 revelation that stated: "For after that it truly was manifested unto this first elder [Joseph Smith], that he had received a remission of his sins, he was entangled again in the vanities of the world; but after truly repenting, God ministered unto him by an holy angel."[70] That same statement continued in the Doctrine and Covenants after it was published (D&C 20:5–6). Just because Joseph Smith did not say in 1838 that he had been forgiven of his sins during the first vision is no evidence that he changed what he wanted the Saints to understand.

Palmer says that Joseph Smith did not say that he was "called of God" to restore the gospel until 1838, but the fact is that not even in that account is there a statement to that effect. What Joseph does say is that after his first vision he succumbed to various temptations and his actions were "not consistent with that character which ought to

---

70. *A Book of Commandments for the Governance of the Church of Christ* (Zion [Independence, MO]: Phelps, 1833), 24:6–7.

be maintained by one who was called of God as I had been" (JS—H 1:28). But called of God to do what? The account simply does not say. In 1840 Orson Pratt reported that during the vision Joseph Smith "received a promise that the true doctrine the fulness of the gospel, should, at some future time, be made known to him," and in 1842, in the Wentworth letter, Joseph said the same thing. Not even these statements, however, specifically said that he was "called" to do the restoring—only that he would eventually receive a full knowledge of the gospel. This could be a hint, of course, at the idea that he would be instrumental in restoring that gospel. But this is hardly inconsistent with earlier accounts—only another added detail.

Palmer's second "important question" concerns the reason Joseph Smith sought the Lord in 1820. The motive, says Palmer, differed between 1832 and 1838—the first being a quest for forgiveness of sins and the second being a desire to know which church was right. In view of the probability, already discussed above, that Joseph's accounts of the vision differed simply because of the differing circumstances under which each was given, as well as his maturing understanding of what the vision really meant, why should it be surprising that he should emphasize one motive at one time and another at a different time, especially when he probably had *both* motives in mind? Palmer avers that in 1832 Joseph "does not mention concern for doctrinal corruption" (p. 252). What in the world, then, does the following statement from that account mean? "And by searching the scriptures I found that mand <mankind> did not come unto the Lord but that they had apostatised from the true and liveing faith and there was no society or denomination that built upon the gospel of Jesus Christ as recorded in the new testament."[71] The statement differs from 1838, but certainly suggests that the question of doctrinal variance was on Joseph Smith's mind. In 1835 (not waiting until 1838, as Palmer suggests), Joseph Smith made his religious confusion abundantly clear when he said: "Being wrought up in my mind, respecting the subject of religion and looking at the different systems taught the children of men, I knew not who was right or who was wrong and I considered it

---

71. From the 1832 history as reproduced in Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith,* 11.

of the first importance that I should be right, in matters that involve eternal consequ[e]nces."[72] This is certainly the same concern as that expressed in 1838: "My object in going to enquire of the Lord was to know which of all the sects was right."

The reader who wants to ferret out for himself the facts about the first vision accounts, and to see what the LDS scholars have said about them, must go to the works of those scholars themselves. Some have already been discussed here, but a few more seem appropriate at this point. My own work includes the *Improvement Era* article cited above as well as two articles dealing with the growth of knowledge and understanding of the first vision within the church.[73] Anderson has dealt in detail with various circumstantial evidences from Joseph Smith's times, including comments on the setting for the vision as described by Lucy Mack Smith, Oliver Cowdery, and William Smith as well as by non-Mormons Orsamus Turner and Pomeroy Tucker.[74] In addition to his very important book on the first vision, which brings together much of his earlier research, and his article on "Awakenings in the Burned-Over District" referred to above, Backman has published various articles that explain and reconcile the first vision accounts.[75] Bushman, in a fine article on the visionary world in which Joseph Smith lived, looks at many of Joseph's contemporaries who had

---

72. From Joseph Smith's 1835 journal, as reproduced in ibid., 104.

73. See James B. Allen, "The Significance of Joseph Smith's First Vision in Mormon Thought," *Dialogue* 1/3 (1966): 29–45; and Allen, "Emergence of a Fundamental: The Expanding Role of Joseph Smith's First Vision in Mormon Religious Thought," *Journal of Mormon History* 7 (1980): 43–61.

74. See Richard Lloyd Anderson, "Circumstantial Confirmation of the First Vision through Reminiscences," *BYU Studies* 9/3 (1969): 373–404.

75. See Milton V. Backman Jr., "Joseph Smith's Recitals of the First Vision," *Ensign,* January 1985, 8–17; Backman, "Confirming Witnesses of the First Vision," *Ensign,* January 1986, 32–37 (a discussion of Orson Pratt and the first vision); Backman, "Joseph Smith's First Vision: Cornerstone of a Latter-day Faith," in *"To Be Learned Is Good If . . .,"* ed. Robert L. Millet (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987), 21–41; Backman, "Lo, Here! Lo, There! Early in the Spring of 1820," in *The Prophet Joseph: Essays on the Life and Mission of Joseph Smith,* ed. Larry C. Porter and Susan Easton Black (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 19–35; and Backman, "Verification of the 1838 Account of the First Vision," in *The Pearl of Great Price: Revelations from God,* ed. H. Donl Peterson and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1989), 237–48.

similar religious conversion experiences, showing, in part, that the language of Joseph Smith's 1832 account not only is reminiscent of the visionary language of the time but ought to be expected in the kind of account Joseph was trying to prepare that early in his career.[76] Neal E. Lambert and Richard H. Cracroft have also dealt effectively with the revivalistic language found in the 1832 account.[77] Peter Crawley, Marvin S. Hill, Dean C. Jessee, and Stanley B. Kimball have also made distinctive contributions.[78]

I do not say that Palmer is dishonest or deliberately deceptive. I believe, however, that in his enthusiasm to rationalize his own lack of faith in the foundational stories he misleads his readers by imputing motives to Joseph Smith that are not there and by emphasizing changes and inconsistencies that are either insignificant or nonexistent. In doing this he largely ignores the findings of the very LDS scholars he praises in his preface who have "published, critiqued, and reevaluated a veritable mountain of evidence," too much of which "escapes the view of the rank-and-file in the church." It still escapes their view, for Palmer does little to lead the "rank-and-file" to it—not even by using footnotes to show what the "other side" of his arguments might be. He lists some of these scholars in his bibliography, but cites them in his

---

76. See Richard L. Bushman, "The Visionary World of Joseph Smith," *BYU Studies* 37/1 (1997): 183–204.

77. See Neal E. Lambert and Richard H. Cracroft, "Literary Form and Historical Understanding: Joseph Smith's First Vision," *Journal of Mormon History* 7 (1980): 31–42; Richard H. Cracroft "The Ineffable Made Effable: Rendering Joseph Smith's First Vision as Literature," *Annual of the Association for Mormon Letters* (1995): 38–57; revised version published as "Rendering the Ineffable Effable: Treating Joseph Smith's First Vision in Imaginative Literature," *BYU Studies* 36/2 (1996–97): 93–116.

78. See Peter Crawley, "A Comment on Joseph Smith's Account of His First Vision and the 1820 Revival," *Dialogue* 6/1 (1971): 106–7; Marvin S. Hill, "The First Vision Controversy: A Critique and Reconciliation," *Dialogue* 15/2 (1982): 31–46, which goes into much greater depth on the debates over the vision than indicated previously in this article; Hill, "A Note on the First Vision and Its Import in the Shaping of Early Mormonism," *Dialogue* 12/1 (1979): 90–99; Dean C. Jessee, "The Early Accounts of Joseph Smith's First Vision," *BYU Studies* 9/3 (1969): 275–94; Jessee, "The Early Accounts of Joseph Smith's First Vision," in *The Pearl of Great Price,* Studies in Scripture, vol. 2, ed. Robert L. Millet and Kent P. Jackson (Salt Lake City: Randall Book, 1985), 303–14; Stanley B. Kimball, "A Footnote to the Problem of Dating the First Vision," *Dialogue* 5/4 (1970): 121–23.

text only sparsely and then only when they happen to have said something that he can use to support one of his arguments.

It is easy to find all kinds of anti-Mormon literature, both in print and on the Internet. It is also becoming disturbingly easy to find people, like Palmer, who claim to be faithful church members but who nevertheless take aim at our foundational stories, hoping that we will see them as inspiring myths but not true history. Some arguments, like those presented by Palmer, seem more sophisticated than others because they do not carry the bitter, polemic tone of anti-Mormon diatribe. Some attack the historicity of things discussed here while others attack doctrine, some even claiming that Mormons are not Christians (something also "asked and answered" not just by Latter-day Saint writers but by other scholars as well).[79] But believing Latter-day Saint scholars have also been busy and have answered their arguments—sometimes, as in the case of most of Palmer's book, long before they were made. Those who genuinely seek the truth will read not only the works of naysayers, who obviously look at the evidence through the eyes of disbelief, but also the works of LDS scholars who look at it through the eyes of faith and whose works are readily available to those who want to find them.[80]

---

79. For an interesting commentary of the techniques of anti-Mormons, see Daniel C. Peterson and Stephen D. Ricks, *Offenders for a Word: How Anti-Mormons Play Word Games to Attack the Latter-day Saints* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998).

80. Let me remind the reader that one good source for Book of Mormon studies is FARMS. For the price of one book such as Palmer's, you can purchase a one-year subscription to FARMS, which will give you not only the current journals and newsletters but also Internet access to the FARMS Web site; there you can read all the back issues of the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* and the *FARMS Review,* as well as many other FARMS publications.

Truth and Method: Reflections on Dan Vogel's Approach to the Book of Mormon

Kevin Christensen

Dan Vogel's *Indian Origins and the Book of Mormon* first appeared in 1986,[1] and I reviewed it in 1990.[2] Vogel responded to one admittedly weak point from that 1990 response with his 1993 article titled "Anti-Universalist Rhetoric in the Book of Mormon,"[3] and I further discussed these anti-Universalist arguments in an article published in 1995.[4] A condensed version of *Indian Origins and the Book of Mormon* is now available on the Web,[5] as is Vogel's latest response to my original review.[6]

The original publication of *Indian Origins* consisted of an introduction; four chapters titled "The Coming Forth of the Book of

---

1. Dan Vogel, *Indian Origins and the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1986).

2. Kevin Christensen, review of *Indian Origins and the Book of Mormon,* by Dan Vogel, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 2 (1990): 214–57.

3. Dan Vogel, "Anti-Universalist Rhetoric in the Book of Mormon," in *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology,* ed. Brent Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993), 21–52.

4. Kevin Christensen, "Paradigms Crossed," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 7/2 (1995): 201–8. *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994) contained reviews of Vogel's essay by John Tvedtnes (pp. 12–13) and Martin S. Tanner (pp. 418–33). Vogel's essay dismisses all these as "weakly reasoned" without explaining why.

5. See at www.xmission.com/~research/central/vogel1.htm (accessed 15 March 2004).

6. Vogel, "Dan Vogel's [2002] Reply to Kevin Christensen," at www.xmission.com/~research/central/reply.htm (accessed 15 March 2004).

Mormon," "New World Antiquities," "The Origin of the American Indians," and "Indians and Mound Builders"; a conclusion; endnotes; a bibliography; scriptural references; and an index. The Web edition tacitly excises references to items that turned out to be Mark Hofmann forgeries[7] and dispenses with the bibliography.

In *Indian Origins and the Book of Mormon,* Vogel explores the following questions:

> How did [the Book of Mormon] fit into the ongoing discussion about the origin and nature of ancient American cultures? The discovery of the New World had inspired a whole series of questions and debates. At what time and from what nation did the Indians originate? How and over what route did they travel to the Americas? How did they receive their skin color? Who were the builders of the many mounds and ruined buildings which the early colonists found? These and related questions were variously answered and hotly debated for three centuries prior to the publication of the Book of Mormon.[8]

After surveying the coming forth of the Book of Mormon (with a heavy emphasis on the money-digging stories) and providing chapters with useful information about the ongoing discussion of Indian origins from the sixteenth to twentieth centuries, Vogel argues against the historicity of the Book of Mormon, contending that contemporary sources provide "plentiful" and "striking" cultural and literary influences for Joseph Smith.[9] He asserts that "some of the major features of the Book of Mormon's history of ancient America originated centuries before in religiously motivated minds and subsequently proved inaccurate."[10] He concludes that scholars seeking to understand the Book

---

7. For Vogel's use of Mark Hofmann's forgeries in the printed edition, see Vogel, *Indian Origins,* 14. For details of the forgeries, see Linda Sillitoe and Allen D. Roberts, *Salamander: The Story of the Mormon Forgery Murders* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1988); and Richard E. Turley, *Victims: The LDS Church and the Mark Hofmann Case* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992).

8. Vogel, *Indian Origins,* 7.

9. Ibid., 71.

10. Ibid., 72.

of Mormon should focus on the pre-1830 environment and make useful investigations "instead of promulgating illusory and emotional speculations concerning the unknown."[11]

In my original 1990 review, I presented three basic arguments that Vogel's conclusions are weak: "First, Vogel fails to address the question of adequacy during paradigm debates as spelled out in Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions.* Second, Vogel's approach to the Book of Mormon text rests on questionable assumptions. Third, Vogel's prodigious research on the pre-1830 environment sharply contrasts with the superficiality of his grasp of the Book of Mormon."[12]

Vogel's most recent response attempts to dismiss my use of Kuhn. Yet Kuhn's observations have implications for all perspectives in the debates about Latter-day Saint scripture, and those who neglect them do so at their peril. Most of Vogel's current response confronts examples I have given of how his assumptions operate in contrast to other approaches to the same Book of Mormon. Vogel criticizes Kenneth Godfrey at length over the meaning of the various accounts of the Zelph incident during the Zion's Camp march,[13] and he skirmishes with John Sorenson on Book of Mormon geography and Mesoamerican culture.[14] He responds to some of my brief arguments but ignores my lengthy ones—for example, my discussion on the issue of alleged "anachronism" in the Book of Mormon. While I freely grant a few

---

11. Ibid., 73. Despite this conclusion, Vogel now insists: "I was not attempting a comprehensive response to Book of Mormon apologists, nor was I trying to resolve historicity issues with finality. Recognizing that there was an incompleteness in our knowledge of the pre-1830 literature, I jumped off the apologetic treadmill to gather the necessary material essential to conduct such discussions." However, he later asserts that "one purpose of *Indian Origins* was to remind Mormon apologists how well the Book of Mormon fits into Joseph Smith's world." "Vogel's Reply to Christensen." He also reports that his still unpublished critique of John L. Sorenson's *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1985) was originally intended to be an appendix to *Indian Origins.* In other words, while his survey does increase our knowledge of relevant pre-1830 literature, he never did jump off the apologetic treadmill.

12. Christensen, review of *Indian Origins,* 214.

13. Kenneth W. Godfrey, "What Is the Significance of Zelph in the Study of Book of Mormon Geography?" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8/2 (1999): 70–79.

14. See Sorenson, *Ancient American Setting.*

weak points in my arguments,[15] overall, the same kinds of assumptions I observed in 1990 still underlie and undermine his approach. For example, he still assumes that Joseph's environment plus Joseph's imagination equals everything in the Book of Mormon,[16] that Nephites are an imaginative take on the Mound Builders, and that early Latter-day Saint traditions for hemispheric geography take priority over later readings, however careful.

In analyzing my words, Vogel comments that "most of Christensen's objections are precariously balanced on the head of one apologetic needle called the Limited Geograph[y] Theory. This theory is not a paradigm, but rather an *ad hoc hypothesis* designed for no other reason than to rescue the Book of Mormon from the implications of adverse 'empirical' evidence."[17]

---

15. He observes that John L. Sorenson, "The Book of Mormon as a Mesoamerican Codex," *Newsletter and Proceedings of the Society for Early Historic Archaeology* 139 (December 1976): 1–9, contains sixty-eight Mesoamerican cultural traits, rather than ninety-three as I stated. See Christensen, "Review of *Indian Origins and the Book of Mormon,*" 220, compared to "Vogel's Reply to Christensen," n. 3. I have also updated my thoughts on Universalism from my 1990 review as outlined in "Paradigms Crossed," 201–8. With respect to the Book of Mormon translation, new information from Royal Skousen's work on the original manuscript and Margaret Barker's studies on preexilic Judaism would change some of my comments. Beyond this, most of his critique derives from his fundamentally different approach to the Book of Mormon. I do not concede anything to his approach. My readings are of possibilities, which is all the believing approach requires. His readings pretend to be proofs, which he cannot deliver.

16. Compare Dan Vogel, "Echoes of Anti-Masonry: A Rejoinder to Critics of the Anti-Masonic Thesis," in *American Apocrypha: Essays on the Book of Mormon,* ed. Dan Vogel and Brent Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), 291: "One should not push too hard for exact parallels; . . . one should view such elements as a reflection of Joseph Smith's imagination—his attempt to create for readers frightening images of what Masonry could become." Also in "Vogel's Reply to Christensen" he says, "Christensen's expectation that the Book of Mormon exactly duplicates the Mound Builder myth is too restrictive. One must allow that the Myth was adapted to the specifics of Smith's narrative." Again, for Vogel, environment accounts for similarities and imagination covers any differences.

17. "Vogel's Reply to Christensen." Compare Hugh Nibley, *The Ancient State: The Rulers and the Ruled* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 391: "*Claiming magisterial authority,* the Sophic acknowledges *no possibility of defeat or rivalry.* In principle it can never be wrong. *Its confidence is absolute,*" emphasis in original. Vogel's comment, by the way, fundamentally misrepresents the genesis of the limited geography theory, which actually arose out of a close reading of the Book of Mormon text itself.

I will discuss and define paradigms below. I will also explore the implications that the specific guarantee on prophets in the Doctrine and Covenants has for common critical claims (D&C 18:18). I will defend the limited geography theory with some welcome aid from Brant Gardner. My response to Vogel's essay necessarily spills into comments on the introduction to *American Apocrypha,* in which Vogel and Brent Metcalfe offer further objections to the limited geography theory.

Vogel's Response and My Reaction

Vogel begins by reciting what he calls "two important concessions" on my part. First, "Christensen twice admits that 'some defenders have claimed too much' with regard to what Joseph Smith could or could not have known about ancient American civilizations."[18] Specifically, he refers to my assessment that some Latter-day Saints have claimed that no one knew anything about Mesoamerican antiquities or the possibility of writing on metal plates. However, in 1994 William Hamblin showed that the most prominent Latter-day Saint commentators on the subject of metal plates have been more careful than Vogel claims or than I assumed.[19]

Second, according to Vogel, "Christensen twice allows that the Mound Builder myth may have had an influence on Joseph Smith's post-1830 descriptions of the Book of Mormon, especially in his 1842 letter to newspaper editor John Wentworth."[20] Actually, I made an explicit case that the Mound Builder myth influenced the summary of the Book of Mormon given in the Wentworth letter. In stating that "Christensen is careful to avoid the implications of this last admission,"[21] Vogel misses the point of my essay. We *differ* on the implications. Vogel believes that the Mound Builder myth influenced the content of the Book of Mormon; I believe that the Mound Builder

---

18. "Vogel's Reply to Christensen."

19. William J. Hamblin, "An Apologist for the Critics: Brent Lee Metcalfe's Assumptions and Methodologies," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994): 463–65.

20. "Vogel's Reply to Christensen."

21. Ibid.

myth influenced the interpretation of the Book of Mormon by early readers but that the content remains profoundly distinct.

Studies by John Sorenson demonstrate that until 1938 no one even tried to make a careful, systematic study of the Book of Mormon's internal geographic statements.[22] However, the view of Joseph Smith as a fraudulent author—who was able to keep over seven hundred geographic details straight[23] during the swift dictation[24] of the lengthy and complex narrative[25] (which contradicts the Mound Builder myth at several essential points),[26] but who nevertheless provides a misreading of the Book of Mormon in the Wentworth letter—demands coherent explanation.[27]

Striking and Significant? Or Not?

In his response Vogel claims that

The Limited Geography Theory has not borne fruit in the scientific sense because the Book of Mormon remains a useless guide to our understanding of ancient civilizations in the New

---

22. John L. Sorensen, *Geography of Book of Mormon Events* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1990), 34.

23. See John L. Sorenson, *Mormon's Map* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000); and Sorenson, *Ancient American Setting.*

24. See "How Long Did It Take to Translate the Book of Mormon?" in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon,* ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 1–8.

25. See, for example, Hugh Nibley, *Since Cumorah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 138–41. See also Alan Goff, "Historical Narrative, Literary Narrative—Expelling Poetics from the Republic of History," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5/1 (1996): 50–102.

26. See John W. Welch, "An Unparallel" and "Finding Answers to B. H. Roberts's Questions" (FARMS paper, 1986); and Andrew H. Hedges, review of *View of the Hebrews,* by Ethan Smith, *FARMS Review of Books* 9/1 (1997): 63–68.

27. See William J. Hamblin, "Basic Methodological Problems with the Anti-Mormon Approach to the Geography and Archaeology of the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2/1 (1993): 173–74. See also John L. Sorenson, "The Book of Mormon as a Mesoamerican Record," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins,* ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997), 394–99. Incidentally, Matthew Roper's "Nephi's Neighbors" in *FARMS Review* 15/2 (2004): 97–99, shows that the wording of the Wentworth letter regarding the Book of Mormon derives from an 1840 pamphlet by Orson Pratt.

World. Indeed, as I have already stated, apologists have found nothing in ancient Mesoamerica as striking as the similarities between the Book of Mormon and the Mound Builder myth.[28]

As part of this response, I report the similarities between the Book of Mormon and the Mound Builder myth, as specified in *Indian Origins.* For comparison, I shall include a recent summary by Brant Gardner of geographic similarities between Mesoamerica and the Book of Mormon.[29] Readers ought to be able to compare and judge for themselves which parallels are the most significant, remembering that a parallel may be striking, but not at all significant.[30] For example, Vogel compares the pre-1830 descriptions of Hopewell/Adena fortifications to the fortifications in the Book of Mormon.[31] The parallels are indeed striking, but in my review I cited John Sorenson's examples of exactly the same kinds of fortifications in Mesoamerica dating to the correct times in a plausible setting.[32] Which descriptions are more significant? Taken alone, neither. But if we add to the equation other observations—for example, an oppressively hot climate at the new year (Alma 51:33–37; 52:1), active volcanoes (3 Nephi 8–9), cultural requirements, distance constraints, and so forth—the balance tilts.[33]

Further, similarities may exist in one comparative context but not emerge in another. This includes the details that do not emerge as

---

28. "Vogel's Reply to Christensen." Compare Sorenson, "Book of Mormon as a Meso-american Record," 482–87. See also Brant Gardner quoted here in sections titled, "Science and the Book of Mormon," pages 309–12, and "A Mesoamerican Approach for Comparison," pages 346–53.

29. I quote Gardner at length in the section headed, "A Mesoamerican Approach for Comparison."

30. See, for a striking example, Jeff Lindsay's parody comparison of Whitman's 1855 *Leaves of Grass* with the 1830 Book of Mormon at www.jefflindsay.com/bomsource.shtml (accessed 1 April 2004).

31. Vogel, *Indian Origins,* 21–27.

32. Discussed by Christensen in review of *Indian Origins,* 219, citing Vogel, *Indian Origins,* 21–33; and John L. Sorenson, "Digging into the Book of Mormon: Our Changing Understanding of Ancient America and Its Scripture," *Ensign,* September 1984, 26–37, and October 1984, 12–23. For a more recent treatment, see John L. Sorenson, *Images of Ancient America: Visualizing Book of Mormon Life* (Provo, UT: Research Press, 1998), 132–33.

33. Sorenson, *Ancient American Setting,* 5–48.

striking or significant until they are seen as fitting an ancient context, such as the recent discoveries of candidates for the Valley of Lemuel, the 600 BC site for Nahom, or the details of the description of Wadi Sayq.[34]

Vogel and Kuhn's *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*

Vogel claims that I use a "loose reading" of Kuhn's *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* to characterize "debates over the Book of Mormon's historicity as 'paradigm debates,' where one paradigm has yet to prevail."[35] How is my reading of Kuhn "loose"? Vogel never quotes Kuhn nor confronts my quotations.[36] Indeed, we shall see that he uses precisely the arguments that Kuhn's book refutes.

Vogel also does not observe that I always supplement Kuhn's work with Ian Barbour's *Myths, Models and Paradigms: A Comparative Study in Science and Religion*.[37] It is Barbour who supplies the theoretical justification that I use to apply Kuhn's model to religion, and I do so keeping in mind Barbour's notice of the differences between applying these ideas to science and applying them to religion.[38] Barbour also provides modifications to Kuhn's original notions that I accept and apply in all my discussions.

Referring to a page in my review of *Indian Origins* that barely hints about this tension,[39] Vogel comments that "the major paradigm

---

34. S. Kent Brown, "New Light from Arabia on Lehi's Trail," in *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon,* ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002), 55–125.

35. "Vogel's Reply to Christensen."

36. My review of *Indian Origins* cites Kuhn directly five times and Barbour three times. My "Response to David Wright on Historical Criticism," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3/1 (1994): 74–93, cites Kuhn sixteen times and Barbour four times. My "Paradigms Crossed" cites Kuhn thirty-five times and Barbour fourteen times. Vogel never cites either author. In "Paradigms Crossed," I also cite James Burke's *The Day the Universe Changed* (London: British Broadcasting, 1985), the companion book to the PBS documentary on paradigm shifts in science.

37. See Ian G. Barbour, *Myths, Models and Paradigms: A Comparative Study in Science and Religion* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), which was nominated for a National Book Award in 1974. It is now out of print but is worth searching for. He does have other books in print that review most of the same material and carry his discussion further. Barbour's work on science and religion won him the prestigious Templeton Prize in 1999.

38. See Barbour, *Myths, Models and Paradigms,* 69–70.

39. Christensen, review of *Indian Origins,* 218.

debate is between naturalism and supernaturalism."[40] He should have referred to the essay "Paradigms Crossed"[41] for my extended discussion, and to Hugh Nibley's discussions of the Sophic and Mantic in *The Ancient State*.[42]

Vogel insinuates that I believe "the scientific community rejects Book of Mormon historicity because they are working from the wrong paradigm."[43] Again, no. I try not to carelessly overgeneralize. Many practicing scientists are Latter-day Saints, and therefore, many members of the scientific communities in various fields do not reject the Book of Mormon. Mormon culture has a long tradition of contributing a disproportionately high number of scientists per capita to the scientific community.[44] Had Vogel read Kuhn's descriptions of scientific communities[45] and contributed his own analysis of how they define themselves, behave, and interact, that might have been meaningful.

I agree with John Sorenson that most scientists and scholars who reject the Book of Mormon do so because their paradigms dissuade them from working with it at all—they don't bother doing science with the Book of Mormon. It lies outside the prescribed problem field. According to Kuhn's observation: "No part of the aim of normal science is to call forth new sorts of phenomena; indeed those that will not fit the box are often not seen at all. . . . Instead, normal-scientific research is directed to the articulation of those phenomena and theories that the paradigm already supplies."[46] Most scientists and scholars outside the Latter-day Saint tradition have neither the will nor the motivation nor the requisite knowledge of both the appropriate

---

40. "Vogel's Reply to Christensen."

41. Christensen, "Paradigms Crossed," 208–18.

42. Hugh Nibley, "Three Shrines: Mantic, Sophic, and Sophistic," and "Paths That Stray: Some Notes on the Sophic and Mantic," in *The Ancient State,* 311–79 and 380–456.

43. "Vogel's Reply to Christensen."

44. See E. L. Thorndike, "The Production, Retention and Attraction of American Men of Science," *Science* 92 (16 August 1940): 137–41; Kenneth R. Hardy, "Social Origins of American Scientists and Scholars," *Science* 185 (9 August 1974): 497–506; Robert L. Miller, "Science and Scientists," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism,* 3:1272–75.

45. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions,* 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 165, 176–86.

46. Ibid., 24.

ancient contexts and the claims of the text to make valid tests of the Book of Mormon's claims.

Paradigm Choice

Vogel maintains that I believe "that paradigm choice is arbitrary, that all paradigms rest on 'non-empirical assumptions,' and that a supernatural paradigm is just as valid as a naturalistic one."[47] No, no, and no. I never say that paradigm choice is arbitrary, which implies that any paradigm will do. Rather, I always insist that the questions to ask during a paradigm debate are, Which paradigm is better? Which problems are most significant to have solved? I follow Kuhn and Barbour in saying that paradigm choice is constrained by values rather than determined by rules. This is far from saying that paradigm choice is arbitrary.

Further, I never say that "all paradigms rest on 'non-empirical assumptions.'" (What does this even mean?) Rather, I quote Kuhn: "The proponents of competing paradigms are always at least slightly at cross-purposes. Neither side will grant all the non-empirical assumptions that the other needs in order to make its case. . . . The competition between paradigms is not the sort of battle that can be resolved by proofs."[48] For example, in the introduction to *American Apocrypha,* Vogel and Metcalfe assume that early Latter-day Saint traditions on Book of Mormon geography take priority, despite the fact that early Latter-day Saint readings were undeniably "pre-critical."[49] Sorenson, however, assumes that the text has priority, particularly since he can demonstrate that no one even tried to read the text carefully for geographic information until 1938.[50] I go on in my review of *Indian Origins,*[51] and subsequently in much

---

47. "Vogel's Reply to Christensen."

48. Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions,* 148, quoted in Christensen, review of *Indian Origins,* 215.

49. Dan Vogel and Brent Lee Metcalfe, "Editors' Introduction," in *American Apocrypha,* xiii.

50. Sorenson, *Geography of Book of Mormon Events,* 25.

51. Christensen, review of *Indian Origins,* 215–19.

more detail in "Paradigms Crossed,"[52] to explain in pragmatic and schematic terms the nature of paradigm debate and to show how a conscious recognition of the limits of verification and falsification and the recognition of a degree of self-reference on every side should moderate the truth claims of rival claimants. I always argue that both sides should frame their arguments in conscious recognition of the implications of their own assumptions and of the values that govern paradigm debates.

And I never say that a supernatural paradigm is just as valid as a naturalistic one. In "Paradigms Crossed," I argue (borrowing words from Ian Barbour): "Whether a person chooses to adopt a religious or irreligious view or a historicist or environmentalist view of the Book of Mormon 'makes a difference not only in one's attitudes and behavior but in the way one sees the world. One may notice and value features of individual and corporate life that otherwise might be overlooked.'"[53] I consider a supernatural approach—that is, a nonnaturalistic approach—superior on those grounds.[54]

According to Vogel's interpretation of my conclusion, the "Book of Mormon historicity issue cannot be 'adequately' resolved without making a 'paradigm shift,'"[55] but my actual conclusion states that "studies assuming historicity seriously challenge the *comprehensive* validity of Vogel's conclusion that 'The better that one understands the pre-1830 environment of Joseph Smith, the better he or she will understand the Book of Mormon,' as well as his dismissal of historical approaches as 'illusory.'"[56] I did say that Vogel's book was timely and useful, despite my caveats about some of his conclusions.

---

52. Christensen, "Paradigms Crossed," 148–87.

53. Ibid., 217–18, quoting Barbour, *Myths, Models and Paradigms,* 56.

54. See Christensen, "Paradigms Crossed," 208–18. For a description of some specific features of religious experience that a supernatural approach can notice and value and that a naturalist approach overlooks and therefore inherently devalues, see a draft paper of mine, "A Model of Mormon Spiritual Experience" at www2.ida.net/graphics/shirtail/spiritua.htm (accessed 15 March 2004).

55. "Vogel's Reply to Christensen."

56. Christensen, review of *Indian Origins,* 257, citing Vogel, *Indian Origins,* 73.

Pseudoscience or Critical Realism?

To explain how he believes some of us misuse Kuhn's work, Vogel writes:

> In applying Kuhn's work in this way, Christensen travels a well-worn path of the pseudo-scientist, pseudo-historian, and New Age religionists. . . . It is not uncommon for those who become frustrated when the scientific or scholarly community rejects their radical theories to draw on Kuhn's treatise and then to offer the following argument:
>> the scientific community sometimes resists radical yet valid changes to its received canon of knowledge;
>> the scientific community strongly resists my radical theories because it represents [*sic*] a new paradigm shift;
>> therefore my radical theories are valid.[57]

It is true that Kuhn observes that scientists "are often intolerant" of new theories.[58] Vogel's second point is also true generally but is more significant when new arguments meet resistance primarily because they conflict with the received opinion. James Burke, in a PBS series on paradigm shifts in the sciences, relates how Alfred Wegner's notion of "continental drift" was dismissed as crackpot pseudoscience until core samples from the mid-Atlantic rift and the discovery of plate tectonics proved that he was on the right track, *despite his failure to describe a plausible mechanism for the drift*.[59] Just because a scientist is wrong about some things and is opposed by a majority, it does not necessarily follow that he or she is wrong about everything.

Vogel's third assertion is not true if applied to me. I have never used this argument. Instead, I have consistently argued from my use of Kuhn and Barbour that during paradigm debates the validity of all theories should be evaluated by considering which paradigm solves

---

57. "Vogel's Reply to Christensen."
58. Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions,* 24.
59. See the nine-part BBC series and the companion book by Burke, *The Day the Universe Changed,* 328–30.

the most significant problems. When the key question is, Do you preach the orthodox religion? or Do you preach the orthodox science? the authority of the paradigm is assumed and the methods, problem field, and standards of solution for that paradigm come into play to settle the question. Orthodoxy, whether in science or religion, has its value to be sure (and Kuhn and Barbour have good discussions of this),[60] but an uncritical allegiance to a static orthodoxy can impede the search for further light and knowledge.[61] Hence, I cite Barbour's notion of critical realism, which I accept and endorse:

1.   Theory influences observation with the result that all data are to some degree theory-laden. Although proponents of rival theories inevitably talk through each other to a degree, adherents "of rival theories can seek a common core of overlap . . . to which both can retreat."

2.   Comprehensive theories are highly resistant to falsification, but observation does exert some control over theories.

3.   There are no rules for choice between paradigms but there are criteria of assessment independent of particular paradigms.[62]

For reasons that will become clear, Vogel bypasses comment on this topic.

---

60.   For example, "Commitment to a paradigm (understood, again, as a tradition transmitted through historical examplars) allows its potentialities to be systematically explored." Barbour, *Myths, Models and Paradigms,* 11. Also, Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions,* 150. See also Ephesians 4:11–14 on an institutional structure designed to maintain stability against being "children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine" while still retaining the institutional ability to change in light of new knowledge, as in Acts 15:7–29.

61.   See Doctrine and Covenants 1 and Joseph Smith's explanations of the problem with creeds: "creeds set up stakes" and say "hitherto shalt thou come, and no further." See *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith,* sel. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 327. There may be "orthodox" notions of Latter-day Saint doctrine, but there is no "static" orthodoxy. Because we have no set creeds and accept ongoing revelation we can always be open to further light and knowledge.

62.   Barbour, *Myths, Models and Paradigms,* 113, quoted in Christensen, "Paradigms Crossed," 159–60.

Relatively Speaking

According to Vogel, "Some misunderstand Kuhn to mean that since there are some subjective elements in a paradigm, everything in a paradigm is therefore subjective, relative, and untestable."[63] I, however, have never suggested any such thing. Vogel correctly observes that "Kuhn was not defending extreme relativism, nor was he proposing that all paradigms have equal validity."[64] But unlike Vogel, I reference Kuhn's and Barbour's discussions of how people rationally go about deciding why one paradigm is better than another.[65]

Vogel claims that "if Christensen understood Kuhn, he would not say: 'One man's distortion is another's paradigm.'"[66] He surprises me here because, in *Indian Origins,* Vogel himself remarked that the "same statement may have different meanings when considered within dissimilar environments."[67] I say the same thing for basically the same reason. I even have a section in "Paradigms Crossed" that gives examples of how context can change meaning.[68]

The Place of Subjectivity

Vogel allows that, "while there are subjective elements in all theories or paradigms, that does not mean that they are all equally useful or probable, or even have the same validity."[69] I have never said they did. But unlike Vogel, I do explain the limits of falsification and verification, how scientists evaluate competing paradigms, and how they decide which is better, not just in theory but in practice.

Continuing, Vogel comments that "science will always be a human endeavor, but the goal is to remove as far as possible subjective elements.

---

63. "Vogel's Reply to Christensen."

64. Ibid.

65. See Christensen, "Paradigms Crossed." On the rationality of paradigm choice, see Barbour, *Myths, Models and Paradigms,* 110–18. For Kuhn's defense of the rationality of paradigm choice, see Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions,* 205–6.

66. "Vogel's Reply to Christensen."

67. Vogel, *Indian Origins,* 6, quoted in Christensen, review of *Indian Origins,* 218.

68. Christensen, "Paradigms Crossed," 198–208. Not coincidentally, this section includes my response to Vogel on anti-Universalism.

69. "Vogel's Reply to Christensen."

Scientific method is an imperfect tool, but it is the best tool we have."[70] I agree on the value of the scientific method, as well as on its limitations. But had he understood Kuhn, he would understand that objective rules only exist within a paradigm. And even the presence of agreed-upon rules within a paradigm does not cancel the inherent human limitations of selectivity, context, subjectivity, and temporality.[71] During paradigm debates, the rules themselves are in question, and Kuhn and Barbour have shown that *our only rational recourse is to a value-based, tentative decision,* asking which of two paradigms better describes nature in light of current knowledge. Only that kind of comparison provides a check on the self-referential rules associated with particular paradigms. What Metcalfe and Vogel want to sell is a *rule-based final decision,* something that exists only within their rigid, empiricist paradigm. Hence, they show reluctance to admit the subjective, the tentative, and the self-referential aspects of their own paradigms. And Barbour makes the point that the subjective elements of paradigm decisions are more in evidence in religious decisions than in the hard sciences.[72] Had Vogel understood Kuhn, he would not talk about "removing" the subjective elements, but of confessing their inevitable contribution. Rather than adopt a corrupting pretense of objectivity, the important thing is to be perceptive, given one's perspective.

Vogel says, "Whether or not one accepts Kuhn's critique of science, Christensen misapplies Kuhn's work to Book of Mormon studies in several ways."[73] But Kuhn's work is not a critique of science as a method nor of science as a generally accepted body of knowledge (definitions which Vogel has not supplied), but of positivist-empiricist views of science, whose weakness and faulty assumptions are most exposed, as the title implies, when examining "the structure of scientific revolutions."

---

70. Ibid.

71. Christensen, "Paradigms Crossed," 187–208.

72. Indeed, Kuhn observes that fields of study that display chronic controversies over fundamentals cannot be said to have a dominant overall paradigm, but that within various schools of thought rival paradigms can and do exist. See Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions,* 11–13. History, archaeology, and scholarship are inherently less objective than physics. See also Barbour, *Myths, Models and Paradigms,* 144–45.

73. "Vogel's Reply to Christensen."

Kuhn and other philosophers of science have long since dismantled the positivism of previous theories of science, and, by implication, Vogel's own positivism-empiricism.

Paradigms Defined

Here is how Vogel tries to explain how I misapply Kuhn to Book of Mormon studies: "First, paradigm debates in science are one thing, but in Book of Mormon studies they are entirely different."[74] Indeed? This would be a good place for Vogel to define what a paradigm is and how paradigms become established, unless (as happens to be the case) providing a definition undercuts the argument he hopes to make. Barbour explains the essence of a paradigm:

> Kuhn maintained that the thought and activity of a given scientific community are dominated by its paradigms, which he described as "standard examples of scientific work that embody a set of conceptual, methodological and metaphysical assumptions." Newton's work in mechanics, for instance, was the central paradigm of the community of physicists for two centuries. In the second edition (1970) of Kuhn's book and in subsequent essays, he distinguished several features which he had previously lumped together: a research tradition, the key historical examples ("exemplars") through which the tradition is transmitted, and the set of metaphysical assumptions implicit in its fundamental conceptual categories. Adopting these distinctions, I will use the term paradigm to refer to *a tradition transmitted through historical exemplars.* The concept of paradigm is thus defined sociologically and historically, and its implications for epistemology (the structure and character of knowledge) must be explored.[75]

Another of Vogel's claims is that "Book of Mormon studies have yet to reach the point where they can be called scientific let alone form

---

74. Ibid.
75. Barbour, *Myths, Models and Paradigms,* 8–9.

competing paradigms."[76] Had he bothered to define the term *paradigm,* Vogel would have had to explain away the paradigmatic presence of standard examples of Book of Mormon study—Nibley's Old World approach and Sorenson's Mesoamerican approach—which embody a problem field, a set of methods, and standards of solution for an ongoing research tradition. Because this is the same exemplary function that Benjamin Franklin's *Electricity* or Albert Einstein's theories of special and general relativity have performed for scholars and students working in those fields, it should be clear that paradigm debates in Book of Mormon studies are exactly like paradigm debates in other fields.

The Rules According to Vogel and to Kuhn

Vogel explains the rules as he sees them:

Before questioning my methodology, Christensen should keep in mind that no matter how many correlations one perceives in a text, one negative evidence cancels them all. In other words, it is the apologists who are obliged to answer every negative evidence, while those who doubt only need present evidence for rejecting Book of Mormon historicity.[77]

As a statement of his own attitudes about the Book of Mormon, this is no doubt accurate, but as a guide to a working philosophy of science and scholarship in general, he couldn't be more wrong. Kuhn's observations include:

There are, I think, only two alternatives: either no scientific theory ever confronts a counterinstance, or all such theories confront counterinstances at all times.[78]

To be accepted as a paradigm, a theory must seem better than its competitors, but it need not, and in fact never does, explain all the facts with which it can be confronted.[79]

---

76. "Vogel's Reply to Christensen."

77. Ibid.

78. Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions,* 80.

79. Ibid., 17–18, quoted in "Paradigms Crossed," 208.

If any and every failure to fit were ground for theory rejection, all theories ought to be rejected at all times.[80]

Most anomalies are resolved by normal means; most proposals for new theories do prove to be wrong. If all members of a community responded to each anomaly as a source of crisis or embraced each new theory advanced by a colleague, science would cease. If, on the other hand, no one reacted to anomalies or to brand-new theories in high-risk ways, there would be few or no revolutions. In matters like these the resort to shared values rather than shared rules governing individual choice may be the community's way of distributing risk and assuring the long-term success of its enterprise.[81]

During periods of normal science, the object is to "solve a puzzle for whose very existence the validity of the paradigm must be assumed. Failure to achieve a solution discredits only the scientist and not the theory."[82]

Since the business of science is to solve puzzles that have not yet been solved and all science and scholarship confront problems that have not yet been solved, a general application of Vogel's attitude that "one negative evidence" suffices would demand the rejection of all science and scholarship. Vogel's empiricism overlooks the following points:

1. Theory influences observation. "The procedures for making observations, and the language in which data are reported" are "theory-laden."[83] For example, when Vogel offers up nineteenth-century descriptions of Native American fortifications, he sees them as direct evidence of his position rather than as data that any theory should acknowledge and explain. He ignores the issue of whether such descriptions would be present in an authentic text because of a combination of a common stimulus (similar fortifications being present in Book of Mormon times) and translator vocabulary. His theories permeate

---

80. Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions,* 146.
81. Ibid., 186; compare Ephesians 4:11–12 and Acts 15.
82. Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions,* 80.
83. Barbour, *Myths, Models and Paradigms,* 9.

the language in which he reports his data. For example, Vogel claims that "Lehi's blessing on his sons speaks of preserving America for his posterity and that the land would not be 'overrun' by other nations until after his seed should 'dwindle in unbelief' (2 Ne. 1[:10])."[84] The word *America* does not appear in the Book of Mormon, but Vogel's interpretive language remedies the lack.

2. Theories are assessed and replaced by alternatives rather than falsified. "The empiricists," Barbour explains, "had claimed that even though a theory cannot be verified by its agreement with data, it can be falsified by disagreement with data. [Note that this is Vogel's express position!] But critics showed that discordant data alone have seldom been taken to falsify an accepted theory in the absence of an alternative theory; instead, auxiliary assumptions have been modified, or the discrepancies have been set aside as anomalies."[85] Barbour demonstrates that in practice, theories are neither verified, nor falsified, but assessed by a variety of criteria. "Comprehensive theories are indeed resistant to falsification, but that observation does exert some control over theory; an accumulation of anomalies cannot be ignored indefinitely."[86]

So, how much control do we grant to any particular observation and interpretation? In practice, this relates both to how an investigator chooses to value that particular observation and to how it rests within a network of theories and observations.[87]

Counterinstances and Puzzles

Kuhn offers insights on how what seems a puzzle from one perspective (for example, where to place Book of Mormon geography) can change into a counterinstance (e.g., what about steel?). What makes

---

84. "Vogel's Reply to Christensen."
85. Barbour, *Myths, Models and Paradigms*, 9.
86. Ibid.
87. See Richard L. Anderson's thoughtful discussion of issues pertaining to valuing historical sources in "Christian Ethics in Joseph Smith Biography," in *Expressions of Faith: Testimonies of Latter-day Saint Scholars,* ed. Susan Easton Black (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1998), 162–67.

an anomaly "that normal science [or faith] sees as a puzzle" into what "can be seen, from another viewpoint, as a counterinstance and thus as a source of crisis"?[88] There is no comprehensive answer. But Kuhn does highlight three issues upon which Vogel opts for a discreet silence:

1. Issues for fundamental generalizations. "Sometimes an anomaly will clearly call into question explicit and fundamental generalizations of the paradigm."[89] In *American Apocrypha,* the point of Vogel and Metcalfe's introduction is to establish a set of generalizations about Book of Mormon geography (hemispheric) and populations (exclusive) that are particularly easy to call into question.

2. Anomaly related to specific practical applications. "An anomaly without apparent fundamental import may evoke crisis if the applications that it inhibits have a particular practical importance."[90] For example, David Wright's study of Isaiah in *American Apocrypha* fusses over "the appearance of 'yea' and the twice-occurring 'for,'"[91] neither of which is fundamental, but both of which relate to practical understandings of the translation.

3. Research puzzles that currently resist solution. "The development of normal science may transform an anomaly that had previously been only a vexation into a source of crisis."[92] The shift from the hemispheric model to the limited model flowed from an awareness of anomalies that the former model created, *both* with respect to the view of developing science and to the internal demands of the Book of Mormon text.[93]

Kuhn points out that a paradigm crisis closes in three ways.[94] First, normal science handles the crisis. Hence, we have things like Nibley's

---

88. Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions,* 79.

89. Ibid., 82.

90. Ibid.

91. David P. Wright, "Isaiah in the Book of Mormon: Or Joseph Smith in Isaiah," in *American Apocrypha,* 183.

92. Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions,* 82.

93. See Terryl L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 89–154.

94. Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions,* 84.

"Howlers in the Book of Mormon" and Matthew Roper's "Right on Target: Boomerang Hits and the Book of Mormon," showing how things that had formerly been put forth as evidence against the Book of Mormon have been transformed into evidence in its favor.[95]

Second, the problem is labeled and set aside for a future generation. This was the official response to the B. H. Roberts study in 1921.[96] And surprisingly, it was the correct response because his questions were premature in terms of working out a consistent internal geography of the Book of Mormon, relating it to a specific external site (the work had not been done), and correlating it to relevant information on ancient Mesoamerica (it was not available).

Third, a new paradigm emerges with the ensuing battle for acceptance. Kuhn remarks, "Since no paradigm ever solves all the problems it defines and since no two paradigms leave all the same problems unsolved, paradigm debates always involve the question: Which problems is it more significant to have solved?"[97] Our Book of Mormon critics always tell us exactly which problems they think are more significant to have solved. That is their privilege, but we don't have to agree with their valuations.

Ideology and the Process of Valuing Evidence

"The process that a scientist goes through in formulating theory," Vogel claims, "is vastly different than what an apologist does. The scientist seeks a theory that explains most of the evidence, whereas the apologist formulates one that explains most of it away."[98]

Let's see how scientists work in physics, the most objective of the hard sciences:

---

95.   Hugh Nibley, *The Prophetic Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1989), 243–58. Matthew Roper, "Right on Target: Boomerang Hits and the Book of Mormon," at www.fairlds.org/pubs/conf/2001RopM.html (accessed 15 March 2004).

96.   See George D. Smith, "B. H. Roberts: Book of Mormon Apologist and Skeptic," in *American Apocrypha,* 129–30.

97.   Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions,* 110.

98.   "Vogel's Reply to Christensen."

A classic instance was the beta-decay of the nucleus, in which experimental data seemed clearly to violate the law of conservation of energy. Rather than abandon this law, physicists postulated an unobservable particle, the neutrino, to account for the discrepancy. Only at a considerably later point was there any independent evidence for the existence of the neutrino.[99]

Until the existence of neutrinos was confirmed, Vogel would have to claim, in order to maintain the consistency of his own concept of science, that these scientists were "explaining away evidence" and resorting to an ad hoc hypothesis in the manner of New Age Religion. The evidence for neutrinos was eventually confirmed by scientists who were looking for them. As the technology and tools became available, they designed experiments and apparatus specifically to find them, and the effort was based on faith in the eventual successful outcome.

When he does confront evidence put forth by apologists in favor of the historicity of the Book of Mormon, Vogel's own primary concern involves explaining it away. For example, he claims that "even Welch and others at FARMS are beginning to admit that most of the evidence for chiasmus is contrived and ultimately does not prove a Hebrew origin for the Book of Mormon."[100] Though understandably enthusiastic, Welch has always been careful in his claims for the significance of chiasmus. He knows the difference between proof and evidence.[101] However, far from even beginning to admit that the evidence is "contrived," Welch affirms that, in his opinion, "the multiple phenomena of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon amount to a very strong complex of interlocking evidences that the book is an ancient record that originated just as its authors and its translator said it did."[102]

---

99. Barbour, *Myths, Models and Paradigms,* 100.

100. "Vogel's Reply to Christensen." Vogel cites John W. Welch, "What Does Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon Prove?" in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited,* 199–224.

101. John W. Welch, "The Power of Evidence in the Nurturing of Faith," in *Echoes and Evidences,* 17–53.

102. Welch, "What Does Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon Prove?" 221. See also John W. Welch, "How Much Was Known about Chiasmus in 1829 When the Book of Mormon Was Translated?" *FARMS Review* 15/1 (2003): 47–80.

Science and the Book of Mormon

"Because the Book of Mormon has yet to connect with ancient American history in any meaningful way," Vogel claims, Book of Mormon studies "are pre-scientific."[103] Meaningful to whom? And called scientific by whom? Again, Vogel's positivist ideology, never a well-kept secret, emerges with greater clarity the further we go.

Brant Gardner on the Proper Mesoamerican Approach

With respect to a meaningful Mesoamerican approach to the Book of Mormon, Brant Gardner's remarks (made in the course of an e-mail exchange with me) strike me as profoundly insightful on just how the Book of Mormon connects to Ancient America:

> Would I ever reconstruct Mesoamerican society in a way that appeared to represent Christianized Old World peoples? No. I wouldn't. I don't.
>
> The rather interesting discovery made just a few years back was that I, and many other Mesoamericanists, had simply made some incorrect assumptions about the [Book of Mormon] text. The attempts of LDS archaeological apologetics was for years focused on finding the Christian or the Hebrew—or who knows what—in Mesoamerican archaeology.
>
> The difference came when I started looking for Mesoamerica in the Book of Mormon instead of the Book of Mormon in Mesoamerica. Oddly enough, there is a huge difference, and the nature and the quality of the correlations has changed with that single shift in perspective.[104]

---

103. "Vogel's Reply to Christensen."

104. Contrast G. D. Smith, "B. H. Roberts," 150 n. 30: "The Book of Mormon tries to place an Old World Culture into a New World setting that does not fit." Also contrast with Michael Coe, "Mormons and Archaeology: An Outside View," *Dialogue* 8/2 (1973): 42: "The picture of this *hemisphere* between 2,000 B.C. and A.D. 421 presented in the book has little to do with the early Indian cultures as we know them, in spite of much wishful thinking" (emphasis added), cited in Thomas W. Murphy, "Lamanite Genesis, Genealogy, and Genetics," in *American Apocrypha,* 53.

One might read the Bible and assume that Hebrew culture was reasonably important or powerful at times and that the monotheistic religion kept all others at bay. Of course archaeology tells us otherwise. So does the text, when we know how to correlate the remarks about groves and high places to the surrounding religions. When one realizes that we get so much of the religion of Yahweh in the Old Testament because it is combating other religions, we can understand that the text took place in a context. Knowing the context helps explicate the text.

The same is holding true for the Book of Mormon. It is the context that is interesting. Would I ever suggest that this means I think the Nephites were influential in the great flow of Mesoamerican religion? Heavens no—no more so than the Hebrews [were in the Old World]. Perhaps even less.[105]

[Christensen] What evidence do *you* expect to find (or to be found) regarding the Book of Mormon civilization?

[Gardner] A very fair question. I'll answer by telling you where I started on my current examination and the conclusions I have made. I began with an examination of my assumptions and what can and cannot be done with ethnohistorical data. I base my current work on previous work with Mesoamerican history, trying to sort out the development of religious ideas in later Mesoamerica (quite apart from anything that has to do with Mormons).

Here are my assumptions:

1.   The Book of Mormon, if it is an ancient text, should behave like one.

---

105.   Contrast "Vogel's Reply to Christensen": "The limited theory, as we will see, is maintained by a series of other ad hoc hypotheses and specialized interpretations. The only fruit this theory produces is how well it functions to maintain the faith, not how well it explains ancient American history." Vogel's interpretive framework calls for refuting Sorenson by calling for the Book of Mormon to *explain all* ancient American history, whereas Sorenson and Gardner explain how the Book of Mormon people *fit into* ancient American history.

2.   The writers of the Book of Mormon should have an agenda that is their own, not one modeled after a modern concern.

3.   The text should demonstrate typical concerns for ancient societies—kin groups, out-group prejudice, etc.

4.   The text should reflect the major cultural trends and pressures of the time and place in which it took place. Even if it doesn't directly participate in the mainstream of history, it should not be ignorant of it.

5.   The text should be internally consistent.

6.   The text should describe some aspects of culture that are unexpected in the modern world but are compatible with its own time. As for the idea that a forgery can and should be falsifiable, I would expect a forger to be accurate according to knowledge available at the time the forgery was created. I would expect, however, that not only would better information call into question the important elements of the story, but that the forgery would completely fall apart upon investigation of the smaller nooks and crannies where a nonspecialist would not even know to pay attention. Really good forgeries tend to be caught in these small details, even when the large details conform to expectations.

When I started my examination, I had no expectation of what I would find. Some of the correlation I have found came not from attempting to find some specific thing, but in realizing that the text did not say what I had thought it said—and that it really didn't make any sense until I saw it in the context of Mesoamerican culture.

When people ask me about the most important correlation I have found, I have a hard time narrowing it to just one. The most important correlation isn't a singular finding; rather, it can be seen in the many facets of the discovery that the entire text of the Book of Mormon works better in a Mesoamerican context. Speeches suddenly have a context that makes them

relevant instead of just preachy.[106] The pressures leading to wars are understandable. The wars themselves have an explanation for their peculiar features.[107] All of these things happen within a single interpretive framework that puts them in the right place at the right time.[108]

Science in Summary

Notice that Gardner's arguments do not fit the pattern Vogel ascribes to apologists. Nor do they confirm Vogel's claim that "despite Christensen's discussion on shifting paradigms and scientific revolutions, the limited geography theory has not borne fruit in the scientific sense because the Book of Mormon remains a useless guide to our understanding of ancient civilizations in the New World."[109] Rather, Vogel's approach inherently blinds him to the relationship between the Book of Mormon and the ancient world.

Science and Religion, Sophic and Mantic

According to Vogel's definition, "The primary paradigm debate in Book of Mormon studies is not between scientific theories, but rather between naturalism and supernaturalism, science and pseudo-science, history and pseudo-history."[110] Here, ideology spills out in the rhetoric, showing that for Vogel, supernaturalism implies pseudoscience and pseudohistory. On the relationship between science and supernaturalism, remember the study that Nibley cites in *The World and the Prophets*:

---

106. For example, Gardner's explanation of the reasons for Jacob's discourse, including the specific quotations from Isaiah, strikes me as classic. See his "Interactions with Non-Israelite Populations in the Book of Mormon" at frontpage2000.nmia.com/~nahualli/ LDStopics/Interact.htm (accessed 15 March 2004).

107. See Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin, eds., *Warfare in the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990).

108. Quoted with permission from Brant Gardner, e-mail exchange.

109. "Vogel's Reply to Christensen." Compare Sorenson, "Book of Mormon as a Meso-american Record," 482–87.

110. "Vogel's Reply to Christensen."

Disturbed by the lack of real creativity in science, the British government recently sponsored an ambitious study of scientific creativity in the past. The result was a shocker, showing that the great original scientists have had a disturbing way of combining in their persons remarkable scientific skepticism with an equally remarkable religious gullibility. The creative scientist is a scientific heretic who "must refuse to acquiesce in certain previously accepted conclusions. This argues a kind of imperviousness to the opinions of others, notably of authorities"; the true scientist throws that sacred cow, Scientific Authority, out of the window, and this "sets him free to speculate and investigate." On the other hand he tends to display what our report calls "a curious credulity" in unscientific areas and to favor ideas which have "that touch of offending common sense which is the hallmark of every truly scientific discovery." Newton, the greatest genius of them all, is the classic example. . . . It does not seem to occur to anyone that Newton might have been the great scientist he was just *because* of his constant concern with the gospel, and not in spite of it, which is all the more likely, since many other great creative geniuses display the same peculiar and regrettable tendency to believe in the Other World.[111]

Nibley continues this theme in his "Paths That Stray: Notes on the Sophic and Mantic," observing that "those whom the Sophic claims for *its greatest representatives lean strongly towards the Mantic,* though the Sophic proposition condemns any such concessions."[112]

Vogel asserts that "despite one's views on the naturalism vs. supernaturalism debate, drawing on Kuhn's work to justify a paradigm shift that would include supernaturalism is to misunderstand Kuhn's intent."[113] But my theoretical justification for permitting supernaturalism in the discussion comes from Barbour, not Kuhn. I not only understand

---

111. Hugh Nibley, *The World and the Prophets* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987), 273–74.

112. Nibley, "Paths That Stray," 409, emphasis in original.

113. "Vogel's Reply to Christensen."

Kuhn's intent, I also understand Kuhn's wide applicability and how that circumstance leads directly to his wide influence.

Vogel continues to fire away: "One is therefore not surprised to find Christensen referencing Kuhn in a manner not unlike supporters of New Age religion: 'Gospel-related questions occasionally lead to what Kuhn calls a paradigm shift. . . . One [should do] science in a way that includes a spiritual dimension.'"[114] May I have some examples? And not examples that merely toss in the concept of a "paradigm shift" and drop Kuhn's name, but that show me some New Age advocates who explain the limits of verification and falsification, who adopt Barbour's "critical realism," and who explain the values used in paradigm choice with anywhere near the schematic precision that I use in "Paradigms Crossed"?

And what is unscientific about including a spiritual dimension? Responding to Freud's demonstrably bogus "scientific" speculations about the origins of religion, Ninian Smart observes that "it is not scientific simply to begin with assumptions that would make a rival theory false before the evidence is properly examined."[115] Science defined as a *method* can be applied to any subject. Why not religion? (See Alma 32.) Science defined as *a generally accepted body of knowledge* does run into difficulty in developing an overall consensus on particular religious traditions because "between competing religious traditions there seem to be few common assumptions and less clear-cut common data than there are between competing scientific traditions. . . . In particular, religion lacks the *lower-level laws* which are characteristic of science. The terms of such laws are relatively close to observations, their theoretical components are not in dispute, and they are relatively vulnerable to falsification by counter-instances."[116] In summary, Barbour explains:

---

114. Ibid.

115. Ninian Smart, *Worldviews: Crosscultural Explorations of Human Beliefs* (New York: Scribner's, 1983), 75.

116. Barbour, *Myths, Models and Paradigms,* 144, emphasis in original.

Each of the *"subjective"* features of science . . . is *more* evident in the case of religion: (1) the influence of interpretation on data, (2) the resistance of comprehensive theories to falsification, and (3) the absence of rules for choice among paradigms. Each of the corresponding *"objective"* features of science is less evident in the case of religion: (1) the presence of common data on which disputants can agree, (2) the cumulative effect of evidence for or against a theory, and (3) the existence of criteria which are not paradigm-dependent. It is clear that in all three respects religion is a more "subjective" enterprise than science. But in each case there is a difference of degree—not an absolute contrast between an "objective" science and a "subjective" religion.[117]

Vogel continues, "Neither is one surprised when Christensen attacks the naturalistic assumptions (i.e., positivism-empiricism) of Book of Mormon critics."[118] I compliment Vogel for not denying his positivism-empiricism and his dependence on naturalistic assumptions. But one would have expected Vogel to actually describe my attack, to therefore have a target in mind, and to show where I err.[119] However, Vogel does not do so, and the reason appears clear. To refute my criticism, Vogel should demonstrate that his view is not comparable to the positivist mind-set and is not limited temporally or by selectivity, subjectivity, or the contexts for his comparisons. Not surprisingly, he makes no attempt to do so. Massimo Introvigne, himself an outside observer, describes a surprising inversion of the Bible wars:

At this stage, an outside observer expecting conservative Latter-day Saints to adopt a fundamentalist view of truth, and liberal Latter-day Saints to adopt a postmodernist one, may easily claim that something should be wrong. The attitudes

---

117. Ibid, 144–45. For suggestions for "common data" upon which differing religions ought to be able to agree, see Barbour, *Myths, Models and Paradigms,* 53–56, emphasis in original.

118. "Vogel's Reply to Christensen."

119. Christensen, review of *Indian Origins,* 217.

are in fact almost reversed. Historical truth is regarded as a mere social product by Latter-day Saint conservatives, while a rather naive sociology of knowledge claiming that historical-critical methodologies may indeed achieve "truth" lies behind the liberals' attitude. The "love affair with Enlightenment science" of American fundamentalists described by [George] Marsden does not find a counterpart among Latter-day Saint conservatives; conversely, Enlightenment's claim for certainty and objectivity is still defended in the liberal camp. It is not surprising that liberals accuse "Mormon apologists" almost of cheating.[120]

Vogel provides no refutation of these points. Rather, he demonstrates that my criticism of his positivist-empiricist outlook of twelve years ago remains apt and to the point when he writes:

> Nevertheless, the struggle between apologists and critics is not accurately described as a paradigm debate, for the critics have long ago won their point. The traditional view of Book of Mormon history and geography collapsed with the advent of archaeology and anthropology, although most Mormons remain unaware of this event.[121]

According to Vogel, the game is over, based on his *assumption* that any compromise from the original impressions of the first readers of the Book of Mormon utterly refutes Book of Mormon historicity.[122]

Auxiliary Assumptions

Vogel's assumptions about the Book of Mormon and its early readers underlie his dismissive approach:

---

120. Massimo Introvigne, "The Book of Mormon Wars: A Non-Mormon Perspective," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5/2 (1996): 9.

121. "Vogel's Reply to Christensen."

122. Vogel and Metcalfe, "Editors' Introduction," xiii.

Discovering the futility of forcing scientific findings into a Book of Mormon mold, twentieth-century apologists reversed the procedure by forcing and contorting the Book of Mormon into a New World form. This was not a paradigm shift, but rather an attempt to save the old paradigm from demise.[123]

Vogel fails to grasp the concept of auxiliary assumptions. Barbour observes that paradigms resist falsification because "a network of theories and observations is always tested together. Any particular hypothesis can be maintained by rejecting or adjusting other auxiliary hypotheses."[124] The assumption of Book of Mormon historicity provides a motivation for developing a geographic model, first by defining and assessing the network of details within the text, and then fitting it to an appropriate external location. No single element of a detailed correlation is more fundamental than the overall conception that a correlation can be found.

The old story of the lost keys illustrates a clear and present danger:

Walking home on a dark night, a merchant sees his friend on his hands and knees, searching frantically in the pool of light under a street lamp. "What's wrong?" the merchant asks.

"I've lost my keys! Will you help me look for them?"

"Certainly, my friend. Where did you drop them?"

"Somewhere over there."

"Why are you looking here then?"

"Because the light is better."

Unless an investigator has done the preliminary work of determining where to look, even the best methods and authority and expertise and reputation and urgent motives count for nothing. After first determining where best to look, we still need to begin the search with realistic expectations of what we shall find. In the film *The Zero*

---

123. "Vogel's Reply to Christensen."

124. Barbour, *Myths, Models and Paradigms,* 99.

Effect, the Holmes-like character, Daryl Zero, explains his techniques of detection.

> Now, a few words on looking for things. When you go looking for something specific, your chances of finding it are very bad. Because of all the things in the world, you're only looking for one of them. When you go looking for anything at all, your chances of finding it are very good. Because of all the things in the world, you're sure to find some of them.[125]

John Sorenson reports that during a 1953 "archaeological reconnaissance of central Chiapas," Tom Ferguson's "concern was to ask if local people had found any figurines of 'horses,' rather than to document the scores of sites we discovered and put on record for the first time."[126] Because Ferguson was looking for specific things, rather than "anything at all," his list of "disappointments" (borrowed from Roberts, who in turn got them from Couch) continues to get passed from skeptic to skeptic like an Olympic torch, though with less and less investigation and perspective. William Hamblin's article on methodological assumptions treats the issue nicely, and I direct interested readers there.[127]

Because any exploration of the historicity of the Book of Mormon involves a network of assumptions, scholars should be explicit about the assumptions they choose and should be careful not to claim too much for the stress that any particular critical concern places on the overall network.

Checking the Guarantee on Prophets

In reviewing Sorenson's work, Vogel asserts that he "has been unable to overcome Mormon traditions regarding Book of Mormon events outside his limited area."[128] However, it is not the traditions that need

---

125. Screenplay by Jake Kasdan, quoted at us.imdb.com/Quotes?0120906 (accessed 15 March 2004).

126. John L. Sorenson, "Addendum," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 4 (1992): 118.

127. See Hamblin, "Basic Methodological Problems," 161–97.

128. Vogel, *Indian Origins,* 85 n. 68.

overcoming, but Vogel's assumptions about their priority. Sorenson's 1992 *Source Book* includes an appendix that lists all the traditions in question, and his essay in the new *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon* includes additional analysis of specifics.[129] Amazingly, few critics bother to ask how much a prophet should be expected to know. The Doctrine and Covenants guarantee on prophets is very explicit: "Ask the Father in my name, in faith believing that you shall receive, and you shall have the Holy Ghost, which manifesteth all things *which are expedient* unto the children of men" (D&C 18:18).[130]

Expedience provides practical and sufficient compensation for the human limitation. Consider the inverse. What if a prophet knew everything *except* what is expedient? (Or your surgeon, your airplane's pilot, his air traffic controller, your general, your stockbroker, and so forth.) Clearly, the lack of expedient knowledge would be a recipe for disaster. On the other hand, even a servant with limited and faulty knowledge can accomplish exactly what God intends (which may be different from what the prophet imagines) if he knows and acts upon that which is expedient.[131]

The Authority of First Readers

The arguments of Vogel and Metcalfe are based on broad assumptions concerning the understanding and insights of the earliest readers of the Book of Mormon. Sorenson's work, however, demonstrates just how "pre-critical" the early reading of the Book of Mormon was—until 1938, no one read the text carefully for geographic information.[132] Vogel and Metcalfe never discuss Doctrine and Covenants 1:24–26, 28: "These commandments are of me, and were given unto

---

129. See John L. Sorenson, "How Could Joseph Smith Write So Accurately about Ancient American Civilization?" in *Echoes and Evidences,* 267–69, for the tension between Joseph as translator and Joseph as commentator.

130. See also Doctrine and Covenants 75:10; 88:64–65, 127; and Moroni 7:33. The most expedient knowledge involves what Peter calls "great and precious promises: that by these ye may be partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4).

131. Ponder carefully Isaiah 55:8–12.

132. Sorenson, *Geography of Book of Mormon Events,* 7–29, 31.

my servants in their weakness, after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding. And inasmuch as they erred it might be made known; And inasmuch as they sought wisdom they might be instructed . . . and blessed from on high, and receive knowledge from time to time."

The Doctrine and Covenants provides direct statements regarding the potential for their errors to be made known and outlining the remedy—ongoing instruction and an increase in knowledge over time, all conditioned on our seeking wisdom. Vogel describes his belief that Joseph Smith is the author of the Book of Mormon, rather than a translator: "It would be pointless for me to refer to Joseph Smith if I did not also believe his views were consistent with the Book of Mormon. They were consistent because he wrote the book. I refer to the statements of Smith and other first readers to bring perspective and context to the text."[133]

Note the tightly looped self-reference exhibited here. Vogel's assumptions of authorship create his reading of the evidence to support his assumptions of authorship. But not only does Doctrine and Covenants 1 expressly declare the existence of weakness and error in the understanding of the Saints, other passages specify the ongoing remedy:

> Teach ye diligently and my grace shall attend you, that you may be *instructed more perfectly* [by implication, what they think then is *less than perfect*] in theory, in principle, in doctrine, in the law of the gospel, in all things that pertain unto the kingdom of God, that are *expedient* for you to understand;
>
> Of things both in heaven and in the earth, and under the earth; things which have been, things which are, things which must shortly come to pass; things which are at home, things which are abroad; the wars and the perplexities of the nations, and the judgments which are on the land; and a knowledge also of countries and of kingdoms—
>
> That ye may be prepared in all things when I shall send you again to magnify the calling whereunto I have called you,

---

133. "Vogel's Reply to Christensen."

and the mission with which I have commissioned you. (D&C 88:77–80)

Here again we have an explicit statement of human weakness, human error, imperfect knowledge on the part of the Saints, and a long-term pedagogical program for dealing with those weaknesses. The scriptures require preparation and appropriate study. Sorenson shows that before 1938 no one really studied out Book of Mormon geography: "You have supposed that I would give it unto you, when you took no thought save it was to ask me. But behold, you must study it out in your mind" (D&C 9:7–8). Nibley and Sorenson demonstrate that no one had prepared their minds on the cultural issues relevant to the Book of Mormon: "I perceive that ye are weak that ye cannot understand all my words . . . go ye . . . and ponder . . . and ask of the Father in my name, that ye may understand, and prepare your minds" (3 Nephi 17:1–3). "There is none other people that understand the things which were spoken unto the Jews like unto them, save it be that they are taught after the manner of the things of the Jews" (2 Nephi 25:5).

Nibley, Sorenson, and those inspired by their approaches have demonstrated that there is much we have not understood when reading from our own cultural background. The Lord's program takes no shortcuts but rather allows for further inspiration on condition that wisdom must be sought and that, in addition to revelation, extensive study "of countries and of kingdoms" is necessary. It should be implicit that the early Latter-day Saint readers could not benefit from information that was not yet available.

Metcalfe and Vogel versus Sorenson on Book of Mormon Geography

Vogel offers his explanation of Sorenson's work: "Discovering the futility of forcing scientific findings into a Book of Mormon mold, twentieth-century apologists reversed the procedure by forcing and contorting the Book of Mormon into a New World form."[134] Forcing

---

134. Ibid.

and contorting? Sorenson cites some seven hundred interlocking statements from over five hundred verses that involve geographic matters in the Book of Mormon.[135] He also discusses numerous cultural and geological issues such as written language, limited distances, the use of cement, fortifications, temples, seasonal wars, volcanoes, hydrology, weather, a city being suddenly immersed in the waters of Mormon, and so forth. Vogel and Metcalfe, in their critique of Sorenson's model, cite six verses, with most of their emphasis on a single verse, Alma 22:32.[136] Their summary of his arguments concerning that verse falls considerably short of what I find when I check Sorenson's texts.[137] And their reading of Alma 22:32 becomes terribly inadequate when that verse is consulted in the full Book of Mormon context. Indeed, one need only look at a map of Panama in comparison to the full requirements of the text. For example, in *American Apocrypha,* Vogel and Metcalfe breathe not a whisper about Limhi's party and other groups whose travel provides constraints on Book of Mormon geography models and correlations. In Vogel's response to me, he briefly comments about the travels of Limhi's group between Zarahemla and Nephi, but he fails to fully define, let alone solve, the problems.

Omni 1:27–30 describes how a group left Zarahemla to journey to the land of Nephi. Mosiah 8:7–8 and 21:25–27 describe how, two generations later, Limhi sent a small party from Nephi looking for Zarahemla. Alma's group of men, women, children, and flocks traveled from the waters of Mormon, near the land of Nephi, to Zarahemla in twenty-two or twenty-three days, which must have been close to the travel time that Limhi's group expected. Sorenson figures the beeline

---

135. Sorenson, "Book of Mormon as a Mesoamerican Record," 392. See Sorenson, *Geography of Book of Mormon Events,* 215–328; see also *Ancient American Setting,* 23: "Some of the text's scale requirements are quite specific. They are also tied together in intricate relationships. It is impossible to solve just part of the problem of locations and distances, for as in a jigsaw puzzle, *all* the features must interlock."

136. Vogel and Metcalfe, "Editors' Introduction," ix–xiii.

137. Compare especially their summary in Vogel and Metcalfe, "Editors' Introduction," ix–xii, with *Ancient American Setting,* 16–23, 42–44. See also Matthew Roper's discussion of the narrow neck in his review of *Answering Mormon Scholars: A Response to Criticism Raised by Mormon Defenders,* by Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *FARMS Review of Books* 9/1 (1997): 126–29.
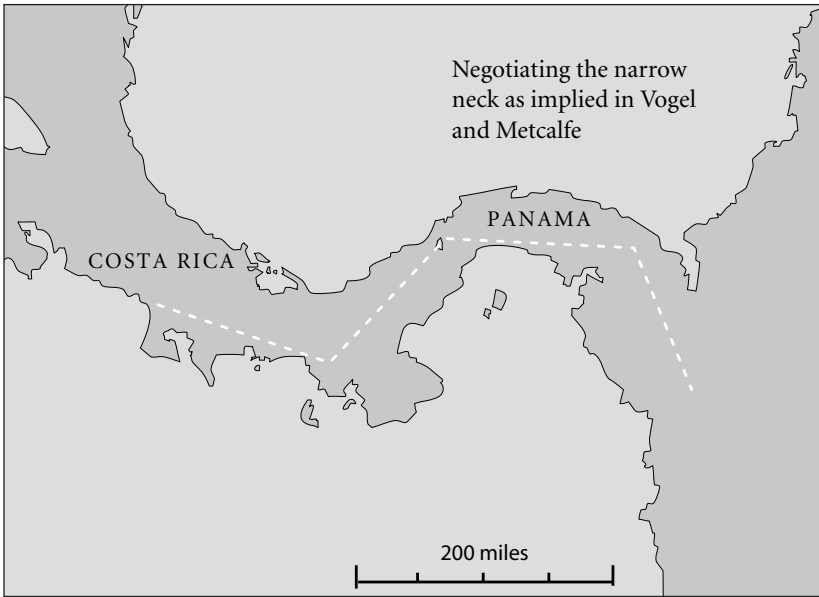
Figure 1. The Isthmus of Panama. Map by Andrew D. Livingston.

distance as around 180 miles.[138] Mosiah also sent a party from Zarahemla toward Nephi, and they "wandered" forty days before arriving in Nephi (Mosiah 7:4).

But in Vogel's model, just to negotiate the isthmus of Panama, a party of forty-three men must go northwest for over a hundred miles, west for about the same distance, southwest the same distance, and then northwest again. Remember also that the party must start in the land of Nephi, which Vogel would have us associate with the stories about Lehi landing in Chile (an assumption that would add another three thousand miles), or with stories of Inca ruins in Peru, or at best with some point around four hundred miles south of Darien, for the land south travel narratives to work (as if they would, even then). Just getting to Panama on foot involves a substantial journey. Vogel's version takes the journey blindly through Panama, forced by the terrain to make several dramatic changes in direction. The distance from Panama to the Tuxtla Mountains alone, where Sorenson's correlation places Cumorah and the Jaredite ruins, is four times as far as the Sorenson version of the total journey.

---

138. Sorenson, *Mormon's Map,* 56.
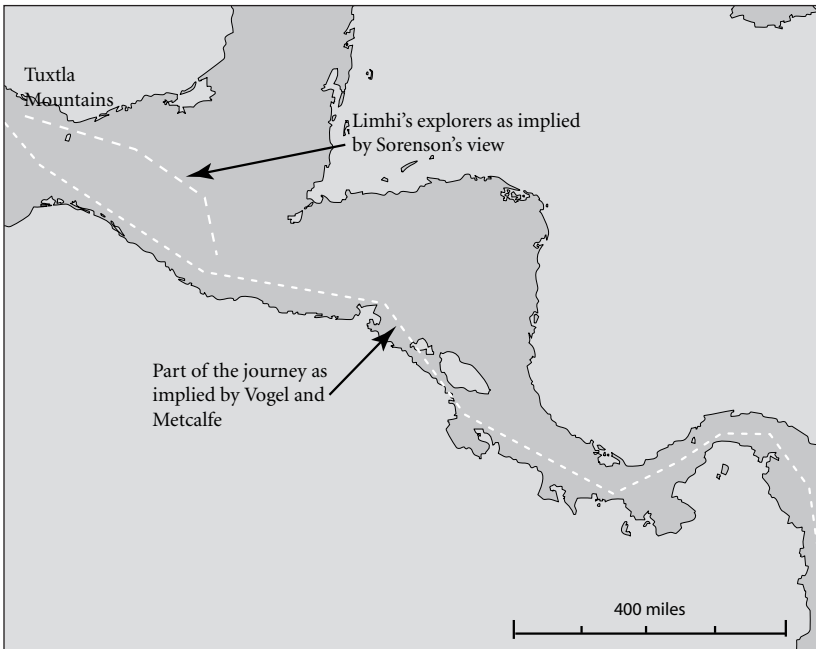
Figure 2. Central America. Map by Andrew D. Livingston.

Sorenson's model permits Limhi's explorers to miss Zarahemla, probably due to a single incorrect turn in the "narrow strip of wilderness" that puts them on the wrong side of the Sidon river basin, or perhaps even following the wrong river northward. They travel in a single direction through Tehuantepec to the Tuxtla Mountains, find the Jaredite ruins, suppose them to be Zarahemla (Mosiah 21:25–26), discover the twenty-four plates of Ether, and then return.

Sorenson reasons that Limhi's group would be unlikely to have traveled much more than twice the distance to Zarahemla, all the while traveling the same northward direction, before deciding to turn back. In Sorenson's Mesoamerican correlation, "diligent men," traveling somewhat faster than a mixed group with flocks, would have been able to make the trip to Cumorah and back in thirty to sixty days.

In contrast, Vogel and Metcalfe also insist on the New York location for Cumorah/Ramah rather than the narrow neck–proximate Cerro El Vigia correlation Sorenson offers. Their scenario means that Limhi's diligent men would need to wander through Tehuantepec, around the

Gulf another five hundred miles just to get to Texas, another two thousand miles to cross the Texas flatlands, and up the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers toward New York, with a detour to the Great Lakes so as to ensure justification for the description of "many waters," changing directions from east to west to northeast, leaving tropical climates for desert, plains, and temperate climates until they find what they suppose to be the ruins of Zarahemla in the south.

Sorenson tells of a shipwrecked sailor in the mid-sixteenth century who journeyed by foot from southern Mexico to the St. John River in eleven months, a distance of twenty-five hundred miles.[139] An

The Vogel and Metcalfe implied northern hemispheric leg of the journey

900 miles

Figure 3. Mexico to New York. Map by Andrew D. Livingston.

---

139.   Sorenson, *Ancient American Setting,* 45.

excursion from southern Mexico to a New York Cumorah and back calls for an almost two-year foot journey in North America, with an additional more than fifteen-hundred-mile journey each way across Panama and Mesoamerica, plus however long it would take to come from whichever point in the land south Vogel and Metcalfe want to start from. And Vogel and Metcalfe accuse Sorenson of doing violence to the Book of Mormon text?[140]

In Vogel's reply to me, he mentions Limhi's explorers but attempts to escape the implications of the foregoing situation by referring to Helaman 3:4, though not to Helaman 3:5–11, which provides several constraints that Vogel ignores, with respect to the lack of timber and building with cement at that particular time. I'll provide some of the context here:

> And it came to pass in the forty and sixth year . . . an exceedingly great many . . . departed out of the land of Zarahemla, and went forth unto the land northward to inherit the land.
>
> And they did travel to an exceedingly great distance, insomuch that they came to large bodies of water and many rivers.
>
> Yea, and even they did spread forth into all parts of the land,[141] into whatever parts it had not been rendered desolate and without timber, because of the many inhabitants who had before inherited the land.
>
> And now no part of the land was desolate, save it were for timber; but because of the greatness of the destruction of the people who had before inhabited the land it was called desolate.
>
> And there being but little timber upon the face of the land, nevertheless the people who went forth became exceedingly expert in the working of cement; therefore they did build houses of cement, in the which they did dwell. (Helaman 3:3–7)

---

140. Vogel and Metcalfe, "Editors' Introduction," ix.

141. See Russell H. Ball, "An Hypothesis concerning the Three Days of Darkness among the Nephites," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2/1 (1993): 113–19, for a demonstration of uses of the phrase *the land* in the scriptures.

John Welch notes that "the Book of Mormon dates this significant technological advance to the year 46 b.c." and cites research "that cement was in fact extensively used in Mesoamerica beginning largely at this time." In addition, "It is also a significant factor in locating the Book of Mormon lands of Zarahemla and Desolation; . . . one may reasonably assume that Book of Mormon lands were not far south of the sites where ancient cement is found."[142]

Here is Vogel's reading, which he takes care not to complicate with side issues like evidence for cement existing only far south of where he wants the Great Lakes version to be:

> This area became known to the Nephites as Cumorah, which Mormon describes as "a land of many waters, rivers, and fountains" (Morm. 6:4). Because the [Jaredite] record had been found by a Nephite expedition party searching for the relatively close city of Zarahemla, the new theorists postulate the Jaredite destruction occurred a short distance northwest of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in Southern Mexico, perhaps near Tres Zapotes. However, Helaman 3:4 says that the migrants traveled "an exceeding great distance" into the land northward until they came to "large bodies of water and many rivers." This creates a problem for the new geographers, for, if the Book of Mormon says Cumorah is "an exceeding great distance" into the land northward, then it must be admitted that the expedition party had missed Zarahemla by a very great distance.[143]

This is as close as Vogel comes to admitting the horrendous distance problems that his own reading imposes on the text. The "problem" is not with the new limited geography but with two artifacts of Vogel's misreading. First, we read that a foot journey from Zarahemla in the Nephite heartland northward through the narrow neck, and beyond the Cumorah area (and *not,* as Vogel misreads, to Cumorah) into the area of "large bodies of water and many rivers" in the highlands

---

142. "Concrete Evidence for the Book of Mormon," in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon,* 212–13.

143. "Vogel's Reply to Christensen."

toward present-day Mexico City, *can be described* as an "exceeding great distance." What does that description imply? This is the only time the imprecise phrase appears in the text. Never does the word exceeding appear to describe the order of magnitude that Vogel's reading demands but rather that a circumstance exceeds normal measures or efforts.[144] It is not unreasonable to suppose that a foot journey of three or four hundred miles (neglecting terrain-imposed detours) would be called an exceeding great distance, particularly when undertaken by a mixed group of migrants with flocks (see Helaman 3:3–4). Limhi's explorers, traveling without flocks or children, would be guided by oral traditions that gave a reasonable idea of the direction they should travel and a travel time estimate measured in days. However, I find it unreasonable to suppose that after a one-way foot journey of four to seven thousand miles—and the repeated changes of direction and climate that Vogel's reading requires—Limhi's party would mistake the Jaredite ruins for Zarahemla in the south (Mosiah 21:26).

Vogel sees the "many waters" description as an opportunity to wave the ad hoc epithet:

> The new theorists therefore have attempted to escape the implications of Helaman 3:4 by proposing two lands of many waters and lakes: one in the land of Cumorah—which they

---

144. Other uses of *exceeding* do not exhibit either the precision or the orders of magnitude that Vogel requires: "And it came to pass that I, Nephi, being exceedingly young" (1 Nephi 2:16). "And it came to pass that when Laban saw our property [carried in by Nephi, Laman, Lemuel, and Sam], and that it was exceedingly great" (1 Nephi 3:25). "They came unto me, and loosed the bands which were upon my wrists, and behold they had swollen exceedingly" (1 Nephi 18:15). "And upon the wings of his Spirit hath my body been carried away upon exceedingly high mountains" (2 Nephi 4:25). "Now the number of their dead was not numbered because of the greatness of the number; yea, the number of their dead was exceedingly great, both on the Nephites and on the Lamanites" (Alma 44:21). Also, "They had encircled the city of Bountiful round about with a strong wall of timbers and earth, to an exceeding height" (Alma 53:4). Compare, "And upon the top of these ridges of earth he caused that there should be timbers, yea, works of timbers built up to the height of a man, round about the cities" (Alma 50:2). How high must the earth and timbers be? Also compare, "And it came to pass that the brother of Jared . . . went forth unto the mount, which they called the mount Shelem, because of its exceeding height" (Ether 3:1). How high must the mountain be?

say is the Papaloapan Lagoon System just west of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec—and another farther west and north in the Valley of Mexico. If there were two lands of many waters, one would expect Mormon to distinguish the area of many waters in Helaman 3:4 from the more famous "land of many waters" of Cumorah. The creation of two lands of many waters is entirely ad hoc.[145]

But notice that the Cumorah location specifies "a land of many waters, rivers, and fountains" (Mormon 6:4) and the Helaman location specifies "large bodies of water and many rivers." Mormon's descriptions are indeed distinct, with "large bodies of water" characteristic of only the Helaman description and fitting only Teotihuacán. Vogel creates confusion by conflating the two descriptions of waters and by neglecting the other elements specific to each location (such as deforestation and cement). He combines the two locations so that he can apply the description "exceeding great distance" to the journey to Cumorah rather than to Teotihuacán. His version requires the migrants in Helaman 3:4 to march through many locations, apparently deciding that the water they found in the form of large lakes and rivers couldn't really be called "many waters." But even Vogel's report admits that the water was there.

Vogel and Metcalfe expect us to believe that there are "distance problems" in the Book of Mormon. "Long distances and rapid population growth are not the only problems the new apologists have to address."[146] Yet Sorenson's work *Mormon's Map* shows an internally consistent map. All the travel, all the distances, all the geographical ups and downs, the Sidon river basin, all the city placements, and all the military

---

145. "Vogel's Reply to Christensen."

146. Vogel and Metcalfe, "Editors' Introduction," xiii. These issues have been successfully addressed. See, for example, Sorenson's book *Mormon's Map* for the internal requirements and his *Ancient American Setting* for plausible external correlation. For population issues, see James E. Smith, "Nephi's Descendants? Historical Demography and the Book of Mormon," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994): 255–96; James E. Smith, "How Many Nephites? The Book of Mormon at the Bar of Demography," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited,* 255–93; and John L. Sorenson, "When Lehi's Party Arrived in the Land, Did They Find Others There?" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1 (1992): 1–34.

situations work out plausibly. The distance problems exist only in the two-continent external correlation that Vogel and Metcalfe favor.

Their claim that Panama is a good solution for the distance across the narrow neck complicates matters when the overall demands of the narrative are considered. They criticize Sorenson's reading of the "day and a half's journey for a Nephite" in Alma 22:32 in *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon.* But they do so not only without reference to the Limhi story, as we have seen, but also without reference to Sorenson's recent acknowledgment that "several researchers have observed that the phrase in Alma 22:32, 'from the east to the west sea,' allows the interpretation that the journey was measured some point short of the actual east sea shore."[147] Furthermore, this placement confuses the military situation in terms of distances and causes utter chaos for directions.[148] Much of the South American coast that is east of and within reasonable distance of Panama, the "land south" is north of the narrow neck, and the Caribbean becomes a "sea west" in relation to much of what they must suppose for the Nephite east coast. For example, Sorenson discusses marches during military operations along the east coast in Alma 51–52 and 62.[149] "Adding the numbers together we conclude that the southward limit of Nephite possessions along the east sea was only about eighty miles from the land northward."[150] To even have an east coast south of Panama raises problems of all kinds. Sorenson's analysis in *Mormon's Map* calls for "the southward limit of Nephite possessions along the east sea" to be "only about eight miles from the land northward."[151] This raises many directional problems in having the land south extending to the north, with a coast being east of the east sea. Not only does this require a much more bizarre directional scheme than Sorenson's, but it leads to

---

147. Sorenson, *Mormon's Map,* 70–71.

148. Sorenson's directions are internally consistent, and, I think, not unreasonable given the prevalence of "northward" in the text, and the "northward" orientation of the Grijalva/Sidon basin. We should place ourselves in that river basin on the ground with Mormon rather than gazing down at contemporary maps of Mesoamerica.

149. See Sorenson, *Mormon's Map,* 65–67.

150. Ibid., 68.

151. Ibid.

another problem. Sorenson next explores the question "How wide was the land southward?"[152] By considering the positions of four lands—Moroni, Nephihah, Aaron, and Ammonihah—"the total width from coast to coast across the land southward comes out to be on the order of two hundred miles."[153] But the South American coastline around Panama widens much too abruptly for this to work at all.

Vogel and Metcalfe claim that their suggested geography bottles up the Lamanites in the south in a more satisfactory fashion. However, they do not presume to show how the details of Amalickiah's campaign might play out in Colombia according to the text descriptions of the "borders by the east sea" (Alma 52:13)[154]—in particular, the effect that the horseshoe shape of the Golfo de Uraba ought to have on the tactical situation. They conclude, "It is hard to imagine why the ridge would be strategic enough to head off the Lamanites in view of the wider, more accessible route frequented by traders along the southern coast."[155] Vogel and Metcalfe provide some information but are not completely forthcoming on the ridge and its importance. Sorenson, however, explained that:

> An irregular sandstone and gravel formation appears as a ridge averaging a couple of miles wide and rising 150 to 200 feet above the surrounding country running west from the lower Coatzacoalcos River. It provides the only reliable year-round route from the isthmian/east coast area "northward" into central Veracruz. A great deal of the land on either side of this ridge is flooded periodically, as much as 12 feet deep in the rainy season. At times during that season the ridge would indeed lead "by the sea, on the west and on the east" (Alma 50:34) . . . and would have barred travel as effectively as the sea, with which the floodwaters were continuous.[156]

152. Ibid.

153. Ibid., 69.

154. Compare ibid., map 3, "Amalickiah's Attack by the East Seashore," 40.

155. Vogel and Metcalfe, "Editors' Introduction," x–xi. In making this conclusion, they ignore the practical military problems of highlands and lowlands, which the Book of Mormon describes, Sorenson illustrates, and Mesoamerica fits.

156. Sorenson, *Ancient American Setting,* 43.

Even if Amalickiah had taken the southern route, he would still have had to go through the pass in the mountains at the narrowest point of the isthmus. If geographic factors are considered, the point at which the adjoining mountains and highlands descend to a relatively low 750-foot elevation is the only plausible location for crossing the isthmus. He must then have followed the Coatzacoalcos River (Sorenson's "line" dividing the lands north and south) until he made it to the narrow pass leading into the north. Sorenson offers this help to those who have a hard time with the military implications:

> Adding the numbers together we conclude that the southward limit of Nephite possessions along the east sea was only about eighty miles from the land northward. No wonder Amalickiah, in his plan to capture the narrow neck (see Alma 51:30), chose this east shore as his prime point of attack (the distance he would have to drive along the west coast was over 250 miles).[157]

This fits Mesoamerica but not at all with the Panama correlation. So, Vogel and Metcalfe assert that the "hemispheric geography" of early readers of the Book of Mormon is "astute—albeit pre-critical." By contrast, it seems to me that "astute—albeit pre-critical" is an oxymoron. Of course "the hemispheric reach . . . made perfect sense to those steeped in the mound builder myth,"[158] but that is because they were *both* "steeped in the mound builder myth" *and* "pre-critical."

Some Thoughts on What Is and Is Not Ad Hoc

Vogel and Metcalfe claim that Latter-day Saint apologists have had to shore up a collapsing structure of argument by means of ad hoc hypotheses. For example, recall Vogel's statement quoted earlier:

---

157. Sorenson, *Mormon's Map,* 68. Compare Nathan B. Forest's dictum, "Get there first with the most." It is difficult to get there first with the most if you have to go three times as far on foot. Moreover, trebling the distance trebles the logistics problems.

158. Vogel and Metcalfe, "Editors' Introduction," xiii.

Most of Christensen's objections are precariously balanced on the head of one apologetic needle called the Limited Geographic Theory. This theory is not a paradigm, but rather an *ad hoc hypothesis* designed for no other reason than to rescue the Book of Mormon from the implications of adverse "empirical" evidence. The limited theory, as we will see, is maintained by a series of other ad hoc hypotheses and specialized interpretations.[159]

In their introduction to *American Apocrypha,* Metcalfe and Vogel flourish the ad hoc label like a magic bullet. But I discussed the difference between an ad hoc hypothesis and a general hypothesis in "Paradigms Crossed."

In practice, as Ian Barbour observes, paradigms resist falsification because "a network of theories and observations is always tested together. Any particular hypothesis can be maintained by rejecting or adjusting other auxiliary hypotheses." Some adjustments to such auxiliary hypotheses strengthen the overall paradigm. For example, Kepler adjusted the assumptions of the Copernican theory of planetary motion by arguing for elliptical orbits rather than circular orbits. The rival Ptolemaic theory explained otherwise anomalous planetary motions by surmising epicycles. While the assumption of epicycles preserved the usefulness of the Ptolemaic theory for several generations, comparison with Kepler's assumptions makes it plain that not all adjustments are created equal. Whereas Kepler's adjustments led to his generally applicable laws of motion, the *ad hoc* notion of epicycles applied only to particular problems and had little justification other than necessity. The course of the Copernican Revolution shows that the "accumulation of anomalies" or of "ad hoc modifications having no independent theoretical basis cannot be tolerated

---

159. "Vogel's Reply to Christensen."

indefinitely. An accepted theory is overthrown not primarily by discordant data but by an alternative theory."[160]

The question is, do the kinds of adjustments we make to auxiliary hypotheses about geography and direction labels, the nature and extent of Joseph's knowledge, and the various names for things, have general implications and a valid theoretical basis, or are they only for particular problems? Vogel and Metcalfe see any deviation from what they describe as "the plain meaning of the words" as ad hoc:

> Historical anachronisms are plentiful. For instance, such things as steel, horses, and wheat were first imported to the Americas by the Spaniards. Apologists counter with *ad hoc* hypotheses: steel is actually iron; horses are deer; wheat is amaranth; goats are brockets; cows are deer, brockets, camelidae, or bison; and tents are makeshift huts. In short, things are not what they appear. . . . Only with increasing difficulty do apologists accept the Book of Mormon at face value.[161]

It happens that translation by inspiration and interpretation of scripture necessarily involve a higher degree of subjective interpretation than does physics. But can we honestly say that the kinds of adjustments that apologists like Sorenson make have general implications? Yes. The Book of Mormon emphasizes that we can understand the writings of the Jews as they understand them only if we learn their culture (see 2 Nephi 25:1–5). By implication, the same is true of the Mesoamerican context.

Is it possible to tie the meaning of words, particularly translated words, to a single cultural background? Frankly, no. When I went to England in 1973, I quickly learned that while many things are what they appear to be, the words for those things were sometimes not what I first thought. The roads looked the same, but I had to look a different direction when crossing them. Cars were much smaller and not only had the steering wheel on the opposite

---

160. Christensen, "Paradigms Crossed," 153–54.
161. Vogel and Metcalfe, "Editors' Introduction," xiii.

side but had boots and bonnets instead of trunks and hoods. There were no trucks, but there were lorries, no elevators but lifts. There were no french fries, but there were chips (which were also similar to fried potatoes). They had something like potato chips, but only if I asked for crisps. There were no cookies; what they called biscuits resembled cookies but were different from what I thought of as biscuits. And what was it to be cheeky? That sticks in my mind because I had to learn the concept of cheeky from within the culture because it could not be translated precisely from their English to mine.

The point is that what Vogel and Metcalfe call "ad hoc," Sorenson and Gardner base on a general principle that cultural contexts can make a difference in meaning.[162] Some concepts travel across cultures more easily than others, but cultural context raises issues that apply to all translations across all cultures. Their insistence that a nineteenth-century context suffices, and that an appeal to the "plain meaning" is all that is necessary to understand the text, is itself an ad hoc defense *because it cannot be generally applied to critical study of any translation of any purported ancient document* or, for that matter, to the study of any culture by any outsider.

Vogel as an Authority on Nephite Temples

In the final section of my 1990 essay, I challenged Vogel's claim that the Book of Mormon contains nothing about temple ceremonies. Since I wrote, several other essays have appeared that further illuminate temple themes and ideas in the Book of Mormon.[163] Rather than explain the evidence, Vogel merely explains it away:

---

162.   Smart, *Worldviews,* 22, notes that the modern study of religion "treats worldviews both historically and systematically and attempts to enter, through structured empathy, into the viewpoint of the believers."

163.   See, for example, John W. Welch, "The Temple in the Book of Mormon: The Temples at the Cities of Nephi, Zarahemla, and Bountiful," in *Temples of the Ancient World,* ed. Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1994), 297–387. Several essays in John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks, eds., *King Benjamin's Speech: "That Ye*

Christensen is particularly bothered by my comment: "The Book of Mormon actually gives few details of the observance of the law. It mentions temples but not the ceremonies, priests but not their robes or temple duties." Despite Christensen's reference to the works of various apologists, there is no explicit mention of specific points in the Mosaic law.[164]

For the record, the apologists in question describe passages that show implicit awareness of specific elements of Mosaic law and a particular affinity for Deuteronomy. Cyrus Gordon and Gary Rendsburg note that, "throughout the ancient Near East, law codes were disregarded in actual life. . . . The judges regularly omit any reference to codes in their court decisions in Mesopotamia. They are instead guided by tradition, public opinions, and common sense."[165] Hence, from the perspective of these scholars, the dearth of references to the law before the exile reflects the tendencies of the culture. Further, they argue that, "aside from cultic matters, the actual enforcement of the Law came as a result of the Exile, and we find it in effect only after the Exile when it becomes an integral part of Judaism down to modern times."[166] The Book of Mormon emphasizes the exodus and cultic matters rather than the details of the law, which means, contrary to Vogel's assertion, that things are as they should be in a text rooted in preexilic understandings, yet influenced by Josiah's rediscovery of the law.

May Learn Wisdom" (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998) discuss the temple, including Hugh W. Nibley, "Assembly and Atonement," 119–45; Terrence L. Szink and John W. Welch, "King Benjamin's Speech in the Context of Ancient Israelite Festivals," 147–223; Stephen D. Ricks, "Kingship, Coronation, and Covenant in Mosiah 1–6," 233–75; and M. Catherine Thomas, "Benjamin and the Mysteries of God," 277–94. See also Kevin Christensen, "The Temple, the Monarchy, and Wisdom: Lehi's World and the Scholarship of Margaret Barker," in *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem,* ed. John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely, and Jo Ann H. Seely (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004), 449–522.

   164.   "Vogel's Reply to Christensen."

   165.   Cyrus H. Gordon and Gary A. Rendsburg, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East* (New York: Norton, 1997), 269.

   166.   Ibid., 272.

Identifying the Great and Abominable: A Case for Method and Context

Vogel disputes my use of Stephen E. Robinson's excellent article "Early Christianity and 1 Nephi 13–14," which shows that the "great and abominable church," or the "whore of all the earth," in 1 Nephi 13–14 cannot be the Catholic Church.[167] According to Vogel, "Nephi's description is based on Revelation 17–18, which many Protestants in Smith's day interpreted as a reference to the Latin or Roman church and its successor the Roman Catholic Church."[168] But where did the image in Revelation come from? If we look at the preexilic temple traditions, which John knew, we find the "people as harlot" image conveniently available to Nephi.[169]

Lamanites in the Book of Mormon

Vogel says I am completely wrong about his treatment of Lamanites:

Regarding my reference to Enos's description of the Lamanites as half-naked savages (1:20), Christensen accuses me of implying that "all Lamanites of all periods and lineages and political affiliations fit that description." This is completely false. I limited my comments to that specific passage, introducing it as follows: "The Book of Mormon's description of the Lamanites *sometimes* sounds like an exaggerated

---

167. Stephen E. Robinson, "Early Christianity and 1 Nephi 13–14," in *The Book of Mormon: First Nephi, The Doctrinal Foundation,* ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1988), 177–91, referred to by Christensen in his review of *Indian Origins,* 223 n. 19.

168. "Vogel's Reply to Christensen."

169. For example, Jeremiah 2:20; 3:1, 6; 13:27; Proverbs 2:16–19; 6:24–26; Ezekiel 16:15, 22–36. Compare Margaret Barker, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ: Which God Gave to Him to Show to His Servants What Soon Must Take Place (Revelation 1.1)* (Edinburgh: Clark, 2000), 67, explaining that Ezekiel and Revelation both come from temple priests standing in the same tradition.

version of contemporary stereotypes about North American Indians." Christensen's reference to Sorenson's opinion that Nephite epithets "sound like Near Eastern epithets and 'probably should be considered a literary formula rather than an objective description'" is irrelevant.[170]

If Vogel wants to rely on "sometimes," he is welcome. I concede. However, my point was and remains that the Book of Mormon contradicts such stereotypes in the narratives of the sons of Mosiah—who provide the only extended look at Lamanite culture from the inside—and in the accounts of the righteous Lamanite cultures in Helaman, in the Samuel and Gadianton narratives, and in 3 Nephi and 4 Nephi. Vogel neglects to mention these, and that neglect is relevant.

Blake Ostler's Expansion Theory and Vogel's Shrinking Plates

Back in 1987, Blake Ostler proposed a theory of Book of Mormon translation that suggested Midrashic expansion and interpretation as part of the translation.[171] Controversial though it has been, a number of committed Saints find it helpful. Writing in 1990, I offered Ostler's theory as a model of a comprehensive approach because it provided a serious attempt to account for comparisons to both the ancient world and the world of the nineteenth century. Yet what was a cutting-edge theory in 1987 had already begun to be dated when I wrote. Vogel responds to Ostler thusly:

> Ostler admits the presence of nineteenth-century ideas and sources in the Book of Mormon but attempts to explain them away by suggesting that they are Joseph Smith's inspired "expansion" of an ancient source. Ostler has only taken B. H. Roberts's conceptual translation theory a step further to include non-biblical sources. However, both theories are nothing more than an ad hoc hypothesis designed to save the Book of

---

170. "Vogel's Reply to Christensen."

171. Blake T. Ostler, "The Book of Mormon as a Modern Expansion of an Ancient Source," *Dialogue* 20/1 (1987): 66–124.

Mormon from adverse evidence. Ostler has introduced what I call the "shrinking plates" hypothesis, meaning the more we learn about Joseph Smith's environment, the smaller the plates have to be to contain the original source upon which Smith expanded. I am not sure how Ostler's theory can accommodate the Mound Builder myth, however. Needless to say, neither Ostler nor Christensen broach that subject.[172]

Most of Ostler's "expansions" respond to the same kinds of anomalies that Alexander Campbell brought up in 1831. The Book of Mormon seemed too Christian before Christ, a circumstance that critically violates the Mound Builder myth. I expect that if Ostler were to update his paper in light of Royal Skousen's work on the translation[173] and with respect to Margaret Barker's picture of preexilic Judaism,[174] Vogel would find the plates expanding toward their original size. Indeed, Ostler states his current view as follows:

> As new evidence surfaces indicating that primary ideas previously thought to be Christian were in fact excised from the preexilic text, the content of the plates rather than Joseph Smith's midrashic expansion should grow. In my original article, I suggested, for example, that the phraseology of secret societies in the Book of Mormon seemed to be nineteenth century—it turns out that a lot of what I suggested was nineteenth century may well be explainable in terms of ancient counterparts. By the way, I don't credit Vogel's theory with any explanatory ability at all—the Book of Mormon does not discuss a Mound-Building culture, and nothing that Vogel

---

172. "Vogel's Reply to Christensen."

173. See Royal Skousen, "Translating the Book of Mormon: Evidence from the Original Manuscript," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited,* 61–93, and Skousen's essays in *Uncovering the Original Text of the Book of Mormon,* ed. M. Gerald Bradford and Alison V. P. Coutts (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002).

174. See, for example, Margaret Barker, "What King Josiah Reformed," in *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem,* 523–42; and Barker, *The Great Angel: A Study of Israel's Second God* (London: SPCK, 1992), 12–27.

has said, even at great length and verbosity, persuades me in the least that the Book of Mormon was addressing the Mound Builders in any way—not even in the sense that they were discussed in the nineteenth century. He's just off the mark in my view.[175]

I wanted to comment on Vogel's potshot that the expansion theory of the Book of Mormon is ad hoc. A theory is ad hoc if it is not indicated or supported by any evidence but is merely an explanatory device to save a theory from its own problems. However, Vogel hasn't made any attempt to account for the evidence of an ancient source that I discussed. He hasn't provided anything like an adequate explanation of the covenant renewal festivals that are rather clearly present in the Book of Mormon. He hasn't even discussed the Hebrew judicial procedures that are accurately presented in Abinadi's trial and in Samuel the Lamanite's prophetic lawsuit against the Nephites. He has failed altogether to discuss the prophetic call form that I identified. It is easy to call a theory ad hoc if one simply ignores all the evidence that disagrees with one's own position, as Vogel does. His own theory—that Joseph Smith drew on the nineteenth-century culture for Primitivist Christian elements and on Mound-Building theories in particular—is extremely weak and doesn't even begin to account for the contrary evidence that others and I have discussed. His judgments are based on his own blinders. I arrived at my theory after taking a look at the evidence and asking what kind of explanation is necessary to explain what I see. In my view, that is how theories are developed. Vogel, on the other hand, started from the commitment that the Book of Mormon had to be a nineteenth-century work and simply went looking for anything that would support his prejudices (that is also a problem with eisegesis).[176]

---

175. Blake Ostler, e-mail correspondence to Kevin Christensen, 20 October 2002.

176. Blake Ostler, second e-mail correspondence to Kevin Christensen, 20 October 2002.

Despite Vogel's claims in *Indian Origins* and Vogel and Metcalfe's claims in their introduction to *American Apocrypha,* those American divines who approved of the Mound Builder myth's notion of a lost ten tribes origin for indigenous populations typically did not see remnants of Christianity among the natives. For example, *View of the Hebrews* reports an 1824 interview with an "old and venerable [Delaware] chief":

> He was asked to state what he knew of Jesus Christ,[177] the Son of God. He replied that "he knew but little about him. For his part, he knew there was one God. He did not know about two Gods." This evidence needs no comment to show that it appears to be Israelitish tradition, in relation to the one God, to heaven, hell, the devil, and to marriage, as taught in the Old Testament, as well as God's estimation of the proud, rich, and the poor. These things he assures us came down from their ancestors, before ever any white man appeared in America. But the great peculiarity which white men would naturally teach them (if they taught any thing,) that Jesus Christ the Son of God is the Saviour of the world, he honestly confesses he knew not this part of the subject.[178]

Vogel attempts to slip past the obstacle that pre-Christian knowledge in the Book of Mormon presents to the Mound Builder myth by relating some speculations about St. Thomas having taught the gospel in the New World. He also suggests that the Quetzalcoatl figure that Ethan Smith identified with Moses could become the Christ figure in 3 Nephi.[179] However, the reason that Ethan Smith identified Quetzalcoatl with Moses was that identifying him with Christ was unthinkable, given the parameters of the Mound Builder myth. However much Alexander Campbell saw the Book of Mormon as a reaction to the discussions of the times, on the point of Christian knowledge before Christ he

---

177. Notice that Smith, in "B. H. Roberts," 139, cites a discussion of this passage as suggesting "the possibility of the Indians knowing something of the Christ." It seems to be strange logic to use a denial by a knowledgeable source to suggest a possibility.

178. Ethan Smith, *View of the Hebrews* (Poultney, VT: Smith and Shute, 1825), 104–5.

179. Vogel, *Indian Origins,* 59–61.

merely rants against it as absurd.[180] But in light of very recent research and discovery, Joseph Smith looks inspired.[181]

On Translation: Vogel and the Either-or Fallacy

After discussing my 1990 comments on translation issues, Vogel says:

> This touches on a current problem in Book of Mormon apologetics: attempting to use the conceptual translation theory to explain the Book of Mormon's anachronistic use of the Bible, while at the same time employing proofs that require a literal

---

180. Alexander Campbell, *Delusions: An Analysis of the Book of Mormon* (Boston: Greene, 1832). Compare D. Michael Quinn's remark: "Another common criticism of the *Book of Mormon* relates to its unusually extensive pre-Christian knowledge of Jesus Christ. . . . However, such details were consistent with previously published occult content in pseudepigraphic writings. Ten years before Smith published his translation of the *Book of Mormon,* Richard Laurence published his translation of the *Ascent of Isaiah.*" D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View,* 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998), 210. Quinn's endnote specifies that the text in question was published in England in 1819; it was referred to in an 1825 volume called *Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures* (Quinn, *Early Mormonism,* 211). Quinn claims that "various Book of Mormon details therefore were not unusual within the preexisting literature about heavenly ascent and about Enoch" (Quinn, *Early Mormonism,* 211). Quinn does not discuss the complexities of the ritual and historical context in which the details appear—that is, the Book of Mormon does not just describe the details that he lists, and many more besides, but it also accounts for those details via a specific view of history, places them in a specific historical tradition rooted in a crucial time and place, offers them within a complex ritual context, and describes both the loss and recovery of those plain and precious things in prophetic passages. See my "Paradigms Regained," *FARMS Occasional Papers* 2 (2001): 15–25. Quinn does not specify whether or not Joseph Smith obtained or was influenced by a knowledge of the *Ascension of Isaiah* or by access to an American Bible commentary, being content to publicly face the remote possibility—the mark of a real scholar (see Quinn, *Early Mormonism,* xi). Quinn also gives no examples of any Book of Mormon critics or defenders in the first generations ever calling attention to such potential sources. Compared to Joseph Smith, Abner Cole the newspaper editor, John Gilbert the printer, or Alexander Campbell the second-generation religious leader seems far more likely to have encountered such materials, in terms of educational background and financial capability. Nor did any of Joseph's neighbors, nor his family, who presumably would have had equivalent access, ever suggest such sources. The rise of the Spalding theory shows that Joseph's critics had the will to track down any promising rumor and to expose any potential source.

181. See Christensen, "Paradigms Regained," esp. 35–50.

translation. Christensen's resolution is to side with the literal translation and assert that all anachronisms can be explained by a missing ancient document common to both the Book of Mormon and New Testament. This is simply ad hoc hypothesizing at its worst.[182]

Part of the problem is that translation as literal versus conceptual cannot be an either-or proposition. It is more a matter of balancing how literal and how conceptual a translation should be given the need to express the original in a different language and culture, and the need to rely upon translator vocabulary and understanding. I must also wonder where in my writing Vogel is looking when he describes my "resolution." For the record, I do not believe that all anachronisms can be explained by reference to "a missing ancient document" common to the Book of Mormon and New Testament, although evidence of such possibilities has come forth.[183] In my 1990 response to Vogel, I refuted George D. Smith's favorite anachronisms and one of Blake Ostler's examples by demonstrating that they had both overlooked a number of existing (not missing) ancient documents.[184] More recently, I encountered the work of Margaret Barker. Unexpectedly, and independent of Mormon apologetics, she cuts a wide swath though the literature that alleges anachronism in the Book of Mormon.[185]

More Vogel versus Sorenson

Vogel shows disfavor with Sorenson's 1973 article "The Book of Mormon as a Mesoamerican Codex" by means of a most revealing display of technique. He lowers the bar for himself, while raising the bar for Sorenson. With respect to his own parallels, he claims that "the historical and literary critic seeks evidence of environmental influence, not exact replication,"[186] and further that "one should not push

---

182. "Vogel's Reply to Christensen."

183. John Tvedtnes, *The Most Correct Book* (Salt Lake City: Cornerstone, 1999), 328–43.

184. Christensen, review of *Indian Origins,* 237–46.

185. See Christensen, "Paradigms Regained," 35–50.

186. Vogel, "Echoes of Anti-Masonry," 279–80.

too hard for exact parallels," and "one must allow that the Myth was adapted."[187] But in looking at Sorenson's parallels, up the bar goes, and he allows no such flexibility:

> To show a belief in the "underworlds," Sorenson refers to the Book of Mormon's use of "depths of hell" and "down to hell," both of which have parallel phrases in the Bible (compare 1 Ne. 12:16, 14:3 with Prov. 9:18; Job 11:8). While such Book of Mormon passages have links to the Near East through the Bible, neither the Bible nor the Book of Mormon can be linked to the Mayan religion, which is more complex than Sorenson lets on. The Maya believed the earth rests on the back of a huge alligator, that there are thirteen horizontal levels of the heavens, each one of which has a certain god residing, and nine underworlds ruled by nine lords of the night. Of course, these ideas are foreign to the Book of Mormon, which is better understood in the context of early American Protestant theology.[188]

One wonders why Vogel would expect that the teachings of migrants from Jerusalem should not have links to the Near East through the Bible, or that they should agree with the later Mayan view on all points any more than the Jews would agree on all points with the Canaanites or the Egyptians.

However, far from ignoring such differences between nineteenth-century conceptions and ancient Mesoamerican conceptions of the underworld, Sorenson explains that "a monster (earth monster, leviathan) inhabited these [subterranean] waters. The back of the monster supported or was the earth layer."[189] Sorenson finds a comparable image in this passage.

---

187. Ibid., 291; "Vogel's Reply to Christensen." Compare this sentence: "One should view such elements as a reflection of Joseph Smith's imagination—his attempt to create for readers frightening images of what Masonry could become." Ibid. Consider also, "the apologetic demand for an exact correspondence between Masonry and Gadianton bands is unnecessary and irrelevant." Vogel, "Echoes of Anti-Masonry," 312.

188. "Vogel's Reply to Christensen."

189. "Book of Mormon as a Mesoamerican Codex," 4.

> O how great the goodness of our God, who prepareth a way for our escape from the grasp of this awful monster; yea, that monster, death and hell, which I call the death of the body, and also the death of the spirit.
>
> And because of the way of deliverance of our God, the Holy One of Israel, this death, of which I have spoken, which is the temporal, shall deliver up its dead; which death is the grave.
>
> And this death of which I have spoken, which is the spiritual death, shall deliver up its dead; which spiritual death is hell; wherefore, death and hell must deliver up their dead, and hell must deliver up its captive spirits, and the grave must deliver up its captive bodies, and the bodies and the spirits of men will be restored one to the other; and it is by the power of the resurrection of the Holy One of Israel. (2 Nephi 9:10–12)

So we have Sorenson showing that the Book of Mormon imagery in this instance actually fits nicely, not necessarily in the later Mayan particulars, but in Mesoamerican generalities.

Further, rather than seeing Jacob's teachings as merely reflecting nineteenth-century Protestant thought, one would expect Vogel to claim that such thinking was out of place in preexilic Judaism. Alexander Campbell, writing in 1831, condemned the Book of Mormon prophets as having too much Christian knowledge before Christ. Yet Jacob's discourse turns out to fit the picture that Margaret Barker paints of the First Temple tradition[190]—as it should, since Jacob was a temple priest. John Tvedtnes cites a passage from Justin Martyr: "And again, from the sayings of the same Jeremiah these have been cut out [by the Jews]: 'The Lord God remembered His dead people of Israel who lay in the graves; and He descended to preach to them His own salvation.'"[191] Jeremiah was a contemporary of Lehi, and all this goes to show that Sorenson's case is stronger than Vogel thinks. It would also help if Vogel acknowledged that Sorenson labors not to "prove"

---

190.   See, for example, Margaret Barker, *The Great High Priest* (London: Clark, 2003), 47, compared to 2 Nephi 9:5–7; and Barker, *The Older Testament* (London: SPCK, 1987), 119–21, compared to 2 Nephi 9 and Jacob's use of the title "the Holy One of Israel."

191.   Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 72, quoted in Tvedtnes, *Most Correct Book,* 101.

historicity, but rather to understand the Book of Mormon in its context.[192] Vogel generalizes his criticisms from what he deems Sorenson's weakest arguments without ever admitting or confronting Sorenson's strongest arguments, both describing Sorenson's comparisons as "a mixture of things that may be important as evidence and others that are not important" and dismissing his arguments, for "there is nothing compelling about Sorenson's evidence."[193] Since it would be hard to explain in terms of Protestant theology, Vogel gives no notice to Sorenson's observation that in Mesoamerica "just seven lineages were considered primary in the origin story of the people."[194] Obviously nothing in Sorenson's work seems to compel Vogel, but Kuhn observes that "the transfer of allegiance from paradigm to paradigm is a conversion experience that cannot be forced."[195]

A Mesoamerican Approach for Comparison

Vogel continues to claim that "the Mound Builder myth is real and any impartial reader can see the similarity it has to the Book of Mormon's historical premise. Moreover, there is nothing the apologists can bring forward from Mesoamerica as striking as the Mound Builder myth."[196] Let's test these claims. To assert that we have nothing "as striking" implies a comparison. Vogel does not supply one, but I will here quote some insightful comments from Brant Gardner on the Book of Mormon in its Old World and Mesoamerican settings.[197] I invite readers to compare these observations with Vogel's nineteenth-century parallels and decide for themselves which are most striking. Opinions may differ since a determination of "nothing . . . as striking" must necessarily involve subjective valuation. Gardner argues:

---

192. See Sorenson, *Ancient American Setting,* xviii–xxi.

193. "Vogel's Reply to Christensen."

194. Sorenson, "Book of Mormon as a Mesoamerican Codex," 5.

195. Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions,* 151.

196. "Vogel's Reply to Christensen."

197. Brant Gardner, originally on Zion's Lighthouse Message Board, 8 June 2002. Quoted by permission. For his supporting documentation, see his Web site at frontpage2000.nmia.com/~nahualli/ (accessed 12 April 2004).

Geography

A discussion of geography is critical because there is so much geographical description in the Book of Mormon that a failure to locate its settings anywhere in the world would be a serious problem. There are two general locations in the Book of Mormon, the Old World and the New.

The Old World description concerns the journey from Jerusalem to Bountiful, and three major geographic markers have been correlated to this part of the narration. The first is the river that continually runs to the sea. A plausible location for the river that fits both the travel distance from Jerusalem and the requirement that it continually flow to the sea has been found.[198]

The second geographic marker, Nahom, also fits into the travel parameters of Lehi's group. A location called NHM belongs to the correct time period, and all indications point to its being located in the right place.[199]

The third location to be identified is Bountiful. Several characteristics are required of this location, and a plausible site has been identified. In addition, the descriptions of the travel fit. For example, S. Kent Brown sees evidence of night travel in the Book of Mormon text, which is the preferred time to travel in that area.[200]

The Old World geography places these key geographic markers in the correct locations to match the descriptions of travel given in the text. The geographical descriptions form an interrelated set of conditions that must all be met, and they are. Troy was found with such a set.

A discussion of New World geography, however, must begin with less surety because we don't have the beginning

---

198. See George D. Potter, "A New Candidate in Arabia for the Valley of Lemuel," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8/1 (1999): 54–63.

199. Warren P. Aston, "The Arabian Bountiful Discovered?" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 7/1 (1998): 5–11.

200. Brown, "New Light from Arabia," 55–125.

point, such as Jerusalem, to tie the geography to the text. However, the text provides a rather consistent internal map. I defer to John Sorenson here, as his geographic analysis is extensive, and I have never seen it seriously assailed.[201] The typical disagreement is the location of Cumorah, and that is minor in the total assessment of the geographic correlations.

The Sorenson summary discusses the following points:

1.   Consistent determinable distances
2.   Consistent topographical descriptions
3.   Correlation to a known geography, including mountains, valleys, and rivers
4.   Plausible correlation to known topographical relationships ("up" and "down" are consistent with physical directional movement and fit with the topography of the area)
5.   Plausible archaeological remains for many of the named cities that C-14 tests (and sometimes Maya Long Count) date to Book of Mormon times
6.   Parallels to the known distribution of cultural groups, particularly linguistic groups (and regions of interaction)

Cultural Correlation

Having a plausible location now requires the examination of the text of the Book of Mormon to see whether or not it fits into that cultural area. In this instance a few more operating assumptions need to be specified:

1.   Based on known history of the New World and known modes of cultural interaction, it is expected that the Book of Mormon people (who entered with relatively few numbers) would have been absorbed into the material culture that already existed. What is more, they also would have absorbed the local languages as the common spoken language.
2.   "Nephite" and "Lamanite" are polity designations, not lineage designations (there is ample textual evidence for this as people move from one group to the other).

---

201.   Sorenson, *Ancient American Setting.*

3.   While the Nephites attempted to preserve a Mosaic religion, that was not the case for the surrounding cultures. It is in the conflicts with those outside cultures that we have the opportunity for the best information about the nature of the majority culture of the New World.

Beginning with that foundation, here is a set of cultural correspondences and explanations that come from the Mesoamerican cultural context in which the Book of Mormon may be plausibly placed:

1.   The Lehites entered the area during the middle of the Preclassic period, a time of broad changes in the Maya civilization. City size was increasing and society was growing more complex. The general trend was toward greater social differentiation and the beginnings of kingship in Maya city-states. This trend is mirrored in the conflicts witnessed as early as the book of Jacob. The twin evils against which Jacob preaches—polygamy and acquisition of wealth (when it leads to social differentiation)—have both been identified in this time period in Mesoamerica. (Interestingly, polygamy is directly linked to one of the mechanisms of accumulation of wealth at this time, and the function of wealth is to create social differentiation.)

2.   The early description of economic matters is enigmatic in the Book of Mormon unless we have the Mesoamerican background. In particular, Jacob speaks against costly apparel (Jacob 2:13). This is a situation that should not exist in a society where everyone makes their own clothing from local materials and dyes. However, it fits into the trade context of Mesoamerica, where clothing was one of the most obvious modes of displaying wealth and social differentiation. Thus this Book of Mormon emphasis on the evils of costly apparel has a direct explanation in the cultural pressures of Mesoamerica at this time.

3.   In multiple instances, a Nephite describes the Lamanites as lazy and uncivilized. These negative portrayals occur

along with descriptions of Lamanite cities that appear more powerful than Nephite cities. This pejorative catalog even gets repeated by Mormon in his abridgment, when it is obviously incorrect. However, the presence of the pejorative characterization is anthropologically accurate for time and place. Rather than attributing it to authorial error, it can be viewed as an accurate replication of typical in-group prejudices that occur in most human populations.

4. The Book of Mormon describes a political situation that fits Mesoamerica but is not universal to other areas of the world (though it is not completely unknown). Mesoamerican cities had their own governments, but they were typically grouped into spheres of influence. In particular, we have descriptions of kings ruling over kings among the Lamanites. This is precisely the relationship of Mesoamerican cities as the king-forms were developing. The various fissions and fusions of the Book of Mormon hegemonies accurately reflect the nature of Mesoamerican politics.

5. The shift from king to judges in Zarahemla reflects an institutional implementation of a political structure that already existed in those kingships that did continue. Even in the king-led polities, there were kin-group leaders who served as the judges and intermediate rulers. These appear to function as do the judges in Zarahemla and in some later cultures did replace the kings. Thus the process and presence of judges in Zarahemla is a parallel of known culture. To this it should be added that the mechanism described in the Book of Mormon reflects the more Mesoamerican mode of "judges" in that the position was hereditary. In spite of the critics' occasional assertions of a voting democracy in the Book of Mormon, it did not exist.

6. The nature of economics in the Book of Mormon fits the Mesoamerican cultural setting. The lack of a monetary system shifted the nature of wealth accumulation. This is apparent in the constant problem in the Book of Mormon of

wealth directly leading to social hierarchies—this is because wealth was defined in terms of displayable goods, not monetary accumulation. In addition, the relationships between conquered cities fit the Mesoamerican model of the establishment of tribute payment rather than political domination. When a city is conquered, there is no real effort to acquire territory, but rather to secure the tribute. Thus the Book of Mormon emphasizes the nature of the taxation—which again is the relinquishing of material, not money.

7.   Descriptions of warfare in the Book of Mormon fit the Mesoamerican model. This includes seasonality of fighting, weaponry, tactics, defensive structures, body armament, and the nature of the conclusion of the warfare.[202]

8.   The descriptions of daily life fit a Mesoamerican context. Amulek's description of his household (Alma 10:11) corresponds nicely with a Mesoamerican home compound. And when Nephi's compound is described (Helaman 7:11), it fits the description of the home of a powerful person living in the city center—including a personal pyramid ("tower"), a walled court, and a location near the highway leading to a main market (multiple markets were known to exist in single cities).

9.   The description of the events of Benjamin's speech fits not only the cultural climate but explains the anomalous base of a temple built in the plausible city of Zarahemla at the time of the speech.

10.   Mormon's description of a land north of Nephite lands that is devoid of trees, has buildings of cement, and is in a land of large lakes and many rivers points directly to Teotihuacán, which fits all of those qualifications during the required time period.

11.   The particular destructions described at the time of Jesus's death fit the description of a highly explosive volcano (and no other phenomenon). Correlations include the length

---

202.   See Ricks and Hamblin, eds., *Warfare in the Book of Mormon.*

of time of the tremors and the thickness and duration of the darkness. Mesoamerica is along the ring of fire, one of the most volatile volcanic areas in the world, and we know of at least two major volcanic explosions at the time of Christ. Dating volcanic explosions that far back can be difficult, so there might have been more. The fact does exist, however, that the descriptions in the Book of Mormon fit volcanic activity, and volcanic activity is known for that area of the world and for that time.[203]

12. The incident of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies has a direct and complete explanation in a Mesoamerican context, a cultural explanation that even explains the lightning raid that destroyed Ammonihah (Alma 16:1–3)—otherwise an anomalous event in the Book of Mormon.[204]

13. The location of Zarahemla in the Grijalva River valley not only fits the geography and topography, but it links the major linguistic groups. The Nephites entered a Mayan-speaking area. The Mulekites entered a Mixe-Zoque speaking area. The movement of the Mulekites/Zarahemlaites up the Grijalva valley parallels the known movement of Zoque (a daughter language of Mixe-Zoque) up that valley. This explains why the Nephites and the Zarahemlaites spoke different languages when there was insufficient time for an unintelligible divergence from Hebrew to have occurred. (In only four hundred years some vocabulary would change, but the languages would still have been mutually intelligible.)

14. The Book of Mormon places the Jaredite civilization north of Nephite territories and earlier in time. The geography and time-depth match the geographic and time distribution

---

203. See Sorenson, *Ancient American Setting,* 318–23; and Bart J. Kowallis, "In the Thirty and Fourth Year: A Geologist's View of the Great Destruction in 3 Nephi," *BYU Studies* 37/3 (1997–98): 137–90.

204. For the cultural explanation, see Brant Gardner, "A Social History of the Early Nephites," at www.fairlds.org/pubs/conf/2001GarB.html (accessed 8 June 2004).

of the Olmec. The Jaredites would have participated in Olmec culture just as the Nephites participated in later culture.

15. The rapid increase in militarism noted at the end of the Book of Mormon parallels the known historical rise in militarism in all of Mesoamerica at the same time period.

As I have noted before, the important facet of all of these key points is that they all stem from a single explanatory model. Each of them is dependent on a single geographic area and a particular time period.

Against these correspondences, what do we have that might be counterindications? We have the specific descriptive problems of swords, silk, horses, chariots, etc.[205] I find it much easier to explain these as labeling problems than to find an alternate explanation for the type of detailed correlation listed above.[206]

Current Conclusions

Vogel's Mound Builder approach neither predicts nor accounts for any of this. Given that knowledge of Central America and the Ancient Near East was meager in Joseph Smith's day, why does present-day understanding offer so much? Why do aspects of the Book of Mormon that especially outraged Joseph's educated contemporaries like Alexander Campbell turn out in light of recent research and discoveries to fit so well into the ancient world?

---

205. See William J. Hamblin and A. Brent Merrill, "Swords in the Book of Mormon," in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon,* 329–51; "Possible 'Silk' and 'Linen' in the Book of Mormon," in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon,* 162–64; "Once More: The Horse," in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon,* 98–100; "Were Ancient Americans Familiar with Real Horses?" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 10/1 (2001): 76–77; Daniel C. Peterson and Matthew Roper, "*Ein Heldenleben?* On Thomas Stuart Ferguson as an Elias for Cultural Mormons," in this number of the *FARMS Review,* pages 175–219; and John L. Sorenson, "Wheeled Figurines in the Ancient World" (FARMS paper, 1981).

206. End of Brant Gardner quotation. My thanks for his permission to use it. Notice that Gardner deals with "puzzles" the way Kuhn and Barbour would, assessing them within a network of assumptions and evidences, and not in Vogel's positivist-empiricist manner.

Latter-day Saint scholarship does progress by investigating and responding to criticisms, sometimes correcting the misperceptions of our critics, sometimes learning by examining our own preconceptions in light of criticisms and making adjustments. Sometimes it is healthy to be reminded that not everyone sees things the same way, that we make mistakes too, and that both parties can be surprised by new information. Do I accept my critics' perspectives? No. My own studies over the past thirty years teach me more and more that I can trust my testimony.

Spotting an Anti-Mormon Book

Davis Bitton

It would be more than a little ridiculous to think of all who are not members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as anti-Mormons. It might induce some needed humility to discover how many throughout the world's population don't even know we exist, or if they know, think of us on a superficial, inaccurate level. Those good folks are not anti-Mormons.

On the other hand, the "street preachers," as they identify themselves, who have decided to devote their lives to disrupting the peace of Latter-day Saints as they gather for pageants, dedications of buildings, and even temple worship—these people I do not mind calling anti-Mormons. Many of us have in our minds an indelible picture of one of these preachers, standing outside the entrance to the Salt Lake Temple, shouting insults through a bullhorn at the worshippers, and refusing a polite request to desist out of "common decency" while a young bride emerged from the temple on her wedding day.

But what about books, pamphlets, and articles that discuss the church, its people today, its history, its doctrines, its scriptures? Do any of these deserve the title of anti-Mormon? The answer is an emphatic yes.

Even before looking at a specific work, we have some preliminary indications based on the publisher. I shall return to a closer evaluation of a book's content, but many busy people appreciate a broad indication to guide their choices.

Books published by faithful Latter-day Saint publishers such as Deseret Book, Horizon, and Covenant Communications, as well as articles appearing in *BYU Studies*, church magazines, and the online *Meridian Magazine* can safely be assumed not to be anti-Mormon. The explanation is quite simple: the editors who make decisions of what to publish in these venues reject manuscripts that trash the church. This list of friendly publishers and periodicals is by no means complete.

"Oh, sure, what you get from these sources is a lot of syrupy pro-Mormon drivel." Was it my imagination or did I hear that statement come from someone? My answer includes a concession and a proclamation, both based on extensive sampling. Not everything published in Latter-day Saint books and periodicals is of the same quality nor is it intended for the same age level. But anyone who refuses to read any such material is depriving himself of some excellent, important work of very high quality.

When someone tells me that she never reads material put out by FARMS (the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies), I conclude that she is less interested in Mormons than in cultivating her prejudice. Occasionally I have been disappointed, but on certain subjects FARMS has published the only articles available or the best produced to this time. To read the attack literature and refuse to examine the responses in the FARMS publications betrays a closed mind.

Am I suggesting that works produced by other publishers or appearing in other periodicals are necessarily anti-Mormon? No. They may or may not be. Several university presses and nonchurch publishers have brought out important works that deserve a respectful reading. Some of their books are the best treatment of their subject. Examples from a long list of publishers could be cited. Some presses have a very good record of publishing solid, reliable treatments of

Mormon subjects. Others have a mixed record or lean strongly toward the negative.

To be sure, the identity of the publisher is not the final determinant of whether a book is anti-Mormon, but it can be a preliminary indicator. We can assume that publications of the Utah Gospel Mission and the Utah Lighthouse Ministry, for example, are anti-Mormon, at least in intent. When individuals see it as their life's mission to tear down and destroy the Church of Jesus Christ, either in speech or in writing, their words are, in whole or in part, predictably anti-Mormon.

Moving past the publisher, here are some things to look for in books about the Latter-day Saints.

Inaccuracy

Start reading at the beginning. Or turn to a chapter on a subject about which you already know something. If you come across statements that are simply inaccurate or leave a misleading impression, start counting. One or two of these on nonessential matters can perhaps be overlooked. But if they accumulate, if you find yourself saying "Oh, no" or "What?" time after time, the chances are that the book is anti-Mormon. It is amazing how some of these writers think they can get away with falsehood and inaccuracy. Preferring to believe them sincere, we are left with the explanation that they are careless and have not bothered to have their facts and arguments checked by someone who is knowledgeable.

Telling Us What We Believe

The ground rule here should be to let each person say for himself what he believes. You may speak for yourself. I will speak for myself. All too often our enemies like to state our beliefs for us. If they quote from past sermons or writings, they do so without regard for context. They find a quotation of the 1870s, the 1850s, or the 1830s and try to hang it around the neck of people who have never heard of it. To suggest that something is part of the fabric of current Mormonism when it is never mentioned and never advocated is a deliberate

smear. Yet these charming critics are eager to tell us what we think. How often have we heard that we don't believe in salvation by grace? Or that we don't believe in the Jesus of the Bible? Excuse me, but such people are not interested in a conversation or in accuracy. They are anti-Mormon.

Principle of Selection

Since it is impossible to include everything, any author selects what he wishes to include. If a book about Latter-day Saints shows a strong preference for negative information, I don't mind considering it anti-Mormon. This does not mean that only positive narratives are allowed. The best histories are true to the complexity of life. While not excluding problems and misbehavior, they do not try to impugn a whole people by examples that are rare and unrepresentative. Is the reported incident typical or is it unusual and exceptional? One who wanders down the street of Mormon history picking up an empty beer can here, a piece of decaying garbage there, whose whole interest is in such things, who shows no interest in goodness or dedication or courage or achievement—this is your typical anti-Mormon writer. Muslims, Jews, Catholics, Protestant evangelicals, Hindus—many groups have reason to be concerned about how they are portrayed. Latter-day Saints are no different and can fairly raise the same questions.

Interpretation

After deciding what to include, writers explain what it means. Or by the way they tell the story, they imply an interpretation. I am not so tender-eared that the church must always be presented pure as the driven snow. Situations can be complicated. Individuals with tempers and poor judgment sometimes say things or do things we are not proud of. The point of view of outsiders, even if skewed, becomes part of the historical reality and should be recognized and, if possible, understood. But if a book misses no opportunity to cast Mormons as villains, if it always shows the church, its leaders, its people, and its beliefs in the worst possible light, it deserves the anti-Mormon label.

What We Know of the Author

Since good books can be written by bad people and bad books by good people, I prefer to evaluate a book on its own terms. But if the author participates in anti-Mormon activities, denounces the church, or engages in behavior defiantly contrary to church standards, his portrayal of the Saints and their history will probably not be scrupulously accurate, much less fair or sympathetic. If he presents himself as a Latter-day Saint when in fact he has not set foot inside a sacrament meeting for twenty-five years, we have a right to be suspicious. If he indulges in snide, disrespectful, cruel comments about the Saints and those they sustain as prophets, we should not be surprised if his book is anti-Mormon. I am always happy to be proved wrong in such expectations, but when an author makes no effort to hide his contempt of the Saints and what they stand for, his predisposition is hard to ignore.

I have learned much from conscientious scholars who are not Latter-day Saints. Many of their works are friendly, neutral, or probing—willing to recognize complexity, willing to grant sincerity even when they might disagree with the religious faith of their subjects. Such publications are not anti-Mormon. I thank many of these good people who have a sincere interest in Latter-day Saints as a subject of historical or sociological investigation and who have made important contributions. Others of like mind are always welcome. The outside perspective can be illuminating.

But illumination is not the word for the deceit and distortions of the anti-Mormon. A book that is clearly anti-Mormon should have a sticker on the dust jacket: *Caveat lector*—let the reader beware. I say this not because I wish for only simple, saccharine works about the church but because it is always regrettable when people are misinformed. Anti-Mormon works demonize their subjects. They leave a flawed, tainted picture. They mislead.

Some people find it difficult to believe there is such a thing as an anti-Mormon book. Others think that only anti-Mormon literature can be relied upon. After all, if this material tells them what they want to hear and tears down the church they wish to tear down, why would they not read it and recommend it? I wonder if they turn to the abhorrent

anti-Semitism in such works as the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* for their information about Jews.

My remarks here are tentative and preliminary. Each of the suggested earmarks is worthy of discussion. Other indicators could no doubt be added. In the meantime, if you haven't done so or if it has faded from your memory, give yourself the pleasure of reading Hugh Nibley's "How to Write an Anti-Mormon Book."[1]

---

1. Hugh W. Nibley, "How to Write an Anti-Mormon Book (A Handbook for Beginners)," in *Tinkling Cymbals and Sounding Brass: The Art of Telling Tales about Joseph Smith and Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 474–580.

The Signature Books Saga

Louis Midgley

And oftentimes, to win us to our harm,
The instruments of darkness tell us truths,
Win us with honest trifles, to betray's
In deepest consequence.

Shakespeare[1]

At the end of his career, the late Sterling McMurrin, one of my esteemed former teachers, as well as a celebrated cultural Mormon polymath,[2] mentioned his friendship with George D. Smith, the wealthy president, publisher, and now full owner of Signature Books. McMurrin generously described his close friend as "a historian and writer of considerable capabilities, and a publisher of books."[3] Since 1981, Signature Books has issued over two hundred titles, with the target being one new title a month, "or about 4,000 pages annually."[4] In addition, Smith has published a number of often controversial essays on the Latter-day Saint past under his own name.

---

1. *Macbeth,* act 1, scene 3, lines 123–26.

2. For details, see L. Jackson Newell's preface and introduction to *Matters of Conscience: Conversations with Sterling M. McMurrin on Philosophy, Education, and Religion* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996), xiii–xxxii.

3. Ibid., 361.

4. Quoted from "About Signature Books," www.signaturebooks.com/about.htm (accessed 12 April 2004).

A Secular Ideology and Anti-Mormon Agenda

Both George Smith and Signature Books have acquired a rather solid, singular reputation. For example, from the Protestant evangelical camp, journalists Richard and Joan Ostling have noted that "George D. Smith's Signature Books . . . continually publishes quality *liberal thinking* on controversial LDS topics."[5] And from the perspective of what might be called militant, fundamentalist, evangelizing, creedal atheism, Thomas W. Flynn has described Signature Books as "the leading *dissenting* imprint in the Mormon community."[6] Terryl Givens, from within the Latter-day Saint scholarly community, but far from the sometimes highly corrosive Utah intellectual environment, has observed that "Signature Books is the main vehicle for publications that *challenge the borders of Mormon orthodoxy.*"[7] Speaking for the Mormon history establishment, and as part of their effort to characterize various venues that publish essays on topics related to the Latter-day Saint past, Ronald W. Walker, David J. Whittaker, and James B. Allen include the following in their commentary on their own massive bibliographic survey:[8] "Another publisher was Signature Books, owned by George D. Smith, an LDS *liberal activist* who published material largely *in his ideological image.*"[9] And, in an item

---

5. Richard N. Ostling and Joan K. Ostling in their *Mormon America: The Power and the Promise* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999), 353, emphasis added. The Ostlings make much of this "liberal thinking" in their own conservative Protestant critique of the faith of the Saints.

6. Thomas W. Flynn, introduction to a conference that was held on 4–7 May 2000 in Los Angeles, California. Council for Secular Humanism Conference Tape #18 on "The Mormon Challenge" was available from *Free Inquiry* or the Council for Secular Humanism in May 2002. I quote from a partial transcript that I made of the tape recording of the proceedings of this conference.

7. Terryl L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 296 n. 123, emphasis added.

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

9. Ronald W. Walker, David J. Whittaker, and James B. Allen, *Mormon History* (Urbana: Illinois University Press, 2001), 91, emphasis added.

featured on the Web site belonging to Signature Books, Bryan Waterman, whose work has been published by Signature Books and who is clearly sympathetic with its agenda,[10] describes it as "a sometimes *renegade* Mormon publishing company."[11]

After noting that the Association for Mormon Letters had once "presented Signature Books with a Special Recognition award for providing a much-needed venue for more literary sorts of LDS publishing," Gideon Burton and Neal Kramer indicate that

> as an "alternative" press, Signature has dared to publish what the official and quasi-official presses could not. Its more liberal editorial policies have made possible publication of works of high literary quality, but such policies by no means guarantee literary quality, and can, in fact *prove very narrowly liberal.* . . . The publisher's *liberal reputation has estranged not only mainstream LDS audiences but many authors and academics.* . . . Signature has thus both filled a gap and created another.[12]

This criticism annoyed Gary Bergera, then managing director of Signature. "I know," he admits, "that some Signature titles *bring a critical eye to bear on certain aspects of LDS history and culture.*"[13] But, he also insists, "such works comprise the very essence of freedom of choice and conscience."[14] He then indicates that, "in fact, Signature has probably had a relatively minor impact on mainstream LDS audiences" since it is a "small publisher."[15] Bergera, it should be noted, does not deny that Signature's "liberal reputation has," as its critics claim, "estranged

---

10. See, for example, Bryan Waterman, "Editor's Introduction," *The Prophet Puzzle: Interpretative Essays on Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1999), vii–xiii.

11. Bryan Waterman, "Signature Books: A Little Something for Everyone," *Student Review,* 16 February 1994, 4; also at www.signaturebooks.com/sigstories.htm#something (accessed 12 April 2004), emphasis added. (This is the first of fourteen similar news items posted on a Signature Books Web page to signal how those at Signature Books want to be seen by their clientele.)

12. Gideon Burton and Neal Kramer, "The State of Mormon Literature and Criticism," *Dialogue* 32/3 (1999): 7, emphasis added.

13. Gary J. Bergera, "Feint Praise," *Dialogue* 33/1 (2000): vi, emphasis added.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

not only mainstream LDS audiences but many authors and academics." Instead, he describes Burton and Kramer as having chosen to "clothe a straw man" and characterizes their remarks as "unfortunate" because they neglected to provide what he considers "documentation." Rather, he complains, they "allude to a seven-year-old disagreement with one or two book reviewers at FARMS over a review of one of Signature's titles."[16] But has Signature Books indeed managed, as these critics claim, to estrange "many authors and academics"?

Orson Scott Card—described by Signature Books as a member of its original "impressive editorial board"[17]—has, like many others, become, if not deeply disillusioned, at least skeptical of the Signature agenda. He argues that "Signature is *an anti-Mormon publisher* that covers itself the way *Playboy* has traditionally covered its pornography, by publishing a few articles by serious writers in every issue."[18] He adds:

> By publishing a few books that meet standards of respectable scholarship on LDS topics, Signature gives the false impression that they are a "balanced" publisher, when in fact their unrelenting *agenda* is to publish books designed to shake the foundations of the Mormon religion. Their prey is the budding Mormon intellectual who takes pride in being smart and educated but does not yet have the critical skills to recognize manipulation and deception when they are masked in the forms of scholarship.[19]

---

16. Ibid., v. It was more than a mere disagreement by Signature with "one or two book reviewers at FARMS." For details, see Daniel C. Peterson's introduction, "Questions to Legal Answers," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 4 (1992): ix–xi.

17. Quoted from the Signature Books Web site at www.signaturebooks.com/about .htm (accessed 14 April 2004).

18. Orson Scott Card to Louis Midgley, 14 April 2004, emphasis added. A copy of this letter can be found in the Papers of Louis C. Midgley (MSS 2806), in the L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

19. Ibid., emphasis added. Similar remarks were made by Orson Scott Card on 27 November 2001 as part of the Harold B. Library Author Lecture Series called "Stories Filled with Truth: How to Read Fiction, Scripture, and History," www.lib.byu.edu/friends/lectures/card .html (12 April 2004). A portion of these remarks is quoted in an item found on the Sunstone Web site under the "message board" link at www.sunstoneonline.com/whatsnew/ whatsnew-event.asp# (accessed 23 April 2004).

These observers have not felt the need to elaborate or to explain the meaning of the language they employed, perhaps because they all recognize that their readers will correctly understand what they seek to convey. It is likely that all these observers have correctly assumed that by describing Signature Books as "an anti-Mormon publisher" or a "renegade" publisher, or as being "liberal," or as a "dissenting imprint," or as "challeng[ing] . . . orthodoxy," their meaning would be easily and correctly understood. In addition, these writers do not seem to have believed that, in the Latter-day Saint context, by using labels such as *liberal* to describe Signature Books or its owner's ideology, they would imply some political rather than strictly religious orientation, or that the word *activist* would imply an engagement in partisan politics. It is also likely that these authors had in mind, among other things, something like the numerous books published by Signature Books that are either implicitly or explicitly critical of Joseph Smith's prophetic truth claims, including those that attack the historical authenticity of the Book of Mormon[20] or set out radically revisionist accounts of the crucial historical foundations of the faith of the Saints.[21]

In addition to Signature Books, George Smith also owns and disburses funds through the Smith Research Associates and the Smith-Pettit Foundation. The Smith-Pettit Foundation and Signature Books

---

20.   See, for example, the following publications by Signature Books: Dan Vogel, *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet* (2004); Dan Vogel and Brent Lee Metcalfe, eds., *American Apocrypha: Essays on the Book of Mormon* (2002); Robert D. Anderson, *Inside the Mind of Joseph Smith: Psychobiography and the Book of Mormon* (1999); Stan Larson, *Quest for the Gold Plates: Thomas Stuart Ferguson's Archaeological Search for the Book of Mormon* (1996); Brent Lee Metcalfe, ed., *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology* (1993); and also most but not all of the essays in Dan Vogel, ed., *The Word of God: Essays on Mormon Scripture* (1990). See also Robert N. Hullinger, *Joseph Smith's Response to Skepticism* (1992), which is a revised edition of Hullinger's *Mormon Answer to Skepticism: Why Joseph Smith Wrote the Book of Mormon* (St. Louis: Clayton, 1980); Marvin S. Hill, *Quest for Refuge: The Mormon Flight from American Pluralism* (1989); and Dan Vogel, *Religious Seekers and the Advent of Mormonism* (1988).

21.   See, for example, the following publications by Signature Books: Grant H. Palmer, *An Insider's View of Mormon Origins* (2002); Mark D. Thomas, *Digging in Cumorah: Reclaiming Book of Mormon Narratives* (1999); and H. Michael Marquardt and Wesley P. Walters, *Inventing Mormonism: Tradition and the Historical Record* (1994).

are said to "share two common officers: our president and our acqui-sitions editor."[22] These two foundations "sometimes sponsor histori-cal research, among other projects, and when they do, this sometimes materializes into a manuscript," which Signature Books tends to pub-lish.[23] George Smith thus advances his own ideology and exerts influ-ence in ways other than by merely contributing financially to various institutions and causes or by being the president and publisher of Sig-nature Books.[24]

An example of what gets funded and then published with the Smith Research Associates imprimatur can be seen in an item entitled *New Mormon Studies CD-ROM*.[25] In a careful review of this useful searchable database, BYU historian Grant Underwood points out it "includes virtually the entire inventory of works published by Signa-ture Books, as well an almost full run of the two independent journals focused on Mormonism—*Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* and *Sunstone*."[26] It "is a valuable collection as far as it goes."[27] However, it is not, as it is advertised, a "comprehensive resource library," since it provides access to only "a fraction" of the relevant textual materials.[28] To get a sense of the ideology behind even this database, it should be noted that one consulting it will not find in it the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies, BYU Studies,* or the *FARMS Review*. Underwood cor-rectly indicates that, "for the scholar who approaches the collection" of materials "with a bit of care and *a sense of the politics involved,* there

---

22. See www.signaturebooks.com/faq.htm (accessed 23 April 2004) for this language and also some of the other relevant details.

23. Ibid.

24. For details, see "About Signature Books," www.signaturebooks.com/about.htm (accessed 12 April 2004).

25. See the searchable database put out by Smith Research Associates entitled *New Mormon Studies CD-ROM: A Comprehensive Resource Library* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998).

26. See Grant Underwood, review of *New Mormon Studies,* in *Church History* 68/3 (1999): 748. Underwood's essay was published a second time in *Church History* 69/4 (2000): 928–30. I cite the 1999 version of Underwood's review.

27. Ibid., 747.

28. Ibid.

is much that is useful and that is not available elsewhere in machine-readable form."[29] He argues that those who consult this database

> should also know that in response, and sometime[s] in over-reaction, to what Signature Books appears to consider the protective, even paranoid, posture of the LDS Church toward its history, the company [that is, Smith Research Associates and Signature Books] has tended to promote a "tell all, hold nothing sacred" *publishing agenda.* As a result, it has not always successfully separated the wheat from the chaff. Over the years a number of the included books *have been panned in scholarly reviews for being too ideologically driven and lacking in sound scholarly methodology.*[30]

Underwood is correct, of course—one needs to approach all of what Signature Books publishes with "a sense of the politics involved"—that is, with an awareness that what Signature Books publishes is at times "too ideologically driven."

While perhaps even relishing being seen as a renegade publishing house, which is the language posted on their own Web site, those at Signature Books also seem eager to avoid having attention drawn within the Latter-day Saint community to their owner as being "a LDS liberal activist" or to his press as publishing "material largely in his ideological image."[31] John Sillito, special collections archivist at Weber State University, thinks that Walker, Whittaker, and Allen "are wrong in their assessment not only of Smith personally and his role in the internal editorial process itself, but also of the nature of Signature Books' list generally, or even only its historical titles."[32] He adds the following: "Of course, truth in disclosure would have me admit that I

---

29. Ibid., 748, emphasis added. Those at Signature Books should not complain about having Underwood's reflections thrown in their faces, since they have posted his remarks at www.signaturebooks.com/reviews/cd.htm (accessed 12 April 2004).

30. Underwood, review of *New Mormon Studies,* 748, emphasis added.

31. Walker, Whittaker, and Allen, *Mormon History,* 91.

32. John Sillito, "Navigating the Difficult Terrain of Mormon Experience," *Dialogue* 36/3 (2003): 269.

am a member of Signature's editorial advisory committee."[33] However, even though Sillito wonders about the accuracy of the "characterization of Signature Books" by Walker, Whittaker, and Allen, he makes a good point when he observes that "every press has its mission and audience, every press has a broader list than one might imagine, and over-personalization is always problematic."[34] Sillito, of course, correctly notes that Signature Books issues a very wide variety of titles, most of which are not, from my or Orson Scott Card's perspective, explicitly anti-Mormon. Some of the titles issued by Signature Books seem to be at least harmless, while some are even quite useful. It is obviously not true that every title published under the Signature Books and Smith Research Associates imprints is overtly critical of the faith of the Saints and therefore in that sense anti-Mormon or otherwise critical of the Latter-day Saint faith. (And, of course, not all of the books published by Signature Books turn out to be either badly written or lack scholarly merit.[35] Some of the more autobiographical items published by Signature Books have, perhaps inadvertently, exposed what seems to be the soft underbelly of cultural Mormonism.)[36] However, this is easily explained, if one keeps in mind Card's apt comparison of the similarities in the publishing strategies of Signature Books and *Playboy* magazine. In his apologia, Sillito ignores the historical titles published by Signature Books that target Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon.

---

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid., 270. Those at Signature Books should keep this proviso in mind and cease the name-calling and personal attacks on authors who publish under the FARMS imprint. They should stop the parade of crude diversionary ad hominem attacks on essays published in this *Review* when we address issues raised in the books they publish. They attack the messenger and ignore the message.

35. However, from my perspective, some of what Signature Books publishes seems to be at least tasteless, if not obscene or absurd. Examples in this genre include Paul Toscano, *Music and the Broken Word: Songs for Alternate Voices* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1991); Janice Allred, *God the Mother and Other Theological Essays* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997); and Paul Swenson, *Iced at the Ward, Burned at the Stake: And Other Poems* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2003).

36. Examples in this genre include McMurrin, *Matters of Conscience;* and Brigham D. Madsen, *Against the Grain: Memoirs of a Western Historian* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998).

Some items published by Signature Books have been nicely edited,[37] and some have, of course, also been solid scholarly collections or studies. However, a word of caution is needed: at the end of the day the excellent materials published by Signature Books might be explained by a line from the Disney musical *Mary Poppins:* "Just a spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down."[38] This *pharmakon* (medicine) turns out to be an opiate—a secular religion intended to charm the Saints away from a genuine faith in God.

Signature Books does not seem situated on Olympian heights above the struggles going on below; its owner and employees do not seem detached from the religious and ideological storms raging around them. They are, instead, in the thick of the fray. This publishing activity, as some might imagine or assume, has not been a series of random events. Books do not just happen—just as authors are motivated to write, publishers are motivated to publish.

With "A Common Humanist Perspective"

Those speaking for Signature Books, of course, deny that their publishing venture is driven by an ideology or that they have an agenda. They also insist that their wealthy employer and his press are not "activist."[39] Apparently no one has pictured either George Smith

---

37.   It must also be granted that some of the editing provided by Signature Books is inept. For example, botany is obviously the study of plants and not animals. Yet one amusing bit of garbling by editors at Signature Books made one author, probably without his knowledge or against his will, complain about "botanically unverifiable animals" in the Book of Mormon. Edward H. Ashment, "Historiography of the Canon," in *Faithful History: Essays on Writing Mormon History,* ed. George D. Smith (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), 284.

38.   Much earlier, the Roman poet Lucretius (ca. 99–55 BC), *De Rerum Natura* (On the Nature of Things) 4.662–70, hinted at what might be behind his own poetic endeavors when he mentioned that a clever physician will place some honey on the rim of the cup so that it will be easier to get a reluctant patient to swallow hellebore. What might his nasty medicine have been? The gifted author of this powerful didactic poem set out in subtle ways the bleak message entailed in Epicurean atheism. This famous text by Lucretius is readily available in various translations and editions.

39.   These remarks were made by Ron Priddis, formerly Signature Books marketing director and now managing director, when speaking on 17 March 2002 in the Gould

or his press as manifesting an "activist" political disposition. In at least this sense Signature Books apologists are correct. However, in rebutting such a charge, Signature Books apologists are clearly thrashing a straw man. They also claim that their publishing and marketing activities are merely intended to let some fresh air into what they depict as a stale Latter-day Saint environment.[40] They are not, they insist, concerned with the faith as such but only want the Saints to know more about their past, and so forth. Such disclaimers do not, however, explain all those books attacking Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon, the unusual Signature Books marketing techniques, or the way in which they package some of their books.[41]

When engaged in public relations, Signature Books spokespersons neglect to mention their employer's ideology or the thrust of his own publishing endeavors. Instead, they prefer to steer away from discussions of these matters. Occasionally, however, they call attention to their controlling ideology. For example, Ron Priddis, the managing director of Signature Books, has acknowledged what he called "*a common humanist perspective in all our books.*"[42] Such assertions seem to

---

Auditorium of the Marriott Library at the University of Utah, at a meeting of the Friends of the Marriott Library, "Signature Books: Celebrating 20 Years of Publishing"; a copy of this can be found in the Papers of Louis C. Midgley.

40. George D. Smith, also speaking at "Signature Books: Celebrating 20 Years of Publishing." Ron Priddis and Gary Bergera, managing director of Signature Books for sixteen years and currently the managing director of Smith-Pettit as well as Signature Books acquisitions editor, also addressed this celebration.

41. A recent example of deceptive marketing can be seen in the case of Palmer's *An Insider's View of Mormon Origins*—particularly in its title and in the publicity provided for it by Signature Books. For some of the details, see Davis Bitton, "The Charge of a Man with a Broken Lance (But Look What He Doesn't Tell Us)," *FARMS Review* 15/2 (2003): 257–71; and also Louis Midgley, "*Pry*ing into Palmer," *FARMS Review* 15/2 (2003): 365–410, which should be compared with the "Statement Regarding Grant Palmer's Book *An Insider's View of Mormon Origins,*" issued in January 2004 by the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History, *FARMS Review* 15/2 (2003): 255.

42. Priddis, "Signature Books: Celebrating 20 Years of Publishing." Signature Books spokespersons insist that they "never talk about ultimate explanations" because they deny that they believe that there is "one true explanation" of the faith of the Saints. Ibid. Those employed at Signature Books have not worked out for themselves a single, final secular explanation for Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. Instead, they appear to brush aside and mock what they describe as the silly things they were taught in Sunday

concede both that there is a guiding "philosophy" behind Signature Books and also what its substance might be. There is, however, more to the story than merely this revealing label. It involves links between George Smith's publishing career to the American atheist/humanist movement.

"The Prometheus Books of Utah"

In 1969 Paul Kurtz started a publishing house called Prometheus Books, which eventually became the leading English-language publisher of atheist literature. Something similar to the ideology currently advanced by Kurtz was initially canonized in 1933 in a well-known creedal statement entitled "A Humanist Manifesto."[43] This manifesto was drafted by Roy Wood Sellars, a philosopher, and then worked over by others, including a number of Unitarian ministers,[44] among them Edwin H. Wilson.[45] Since Unitarians have an unusually deep hostility to creeds or formal affirmations of faith, they seem to have favored setting forth their beliefs in the form of manifestos. There is, it should be noted, a clear Marxist element in the original manifesto, which can be seen in both its atheist and socialist biases. Subsequent manifestos have tended to downplay the original socialist bias and also to move away from characterizing humanism as a religion. But the original supporters of humanism were not at all shy about describing themselves as religious. They thought of their humanist version of atheism as a "religion" and also as the ground for a "church" capable

---

School, and, they conveniently neglect to mention, the very teachings to which they once bore solemn witness as Latter-day Saint missionaries.

43. See "A Humanist Manifesto," *New Humanist* 6/3 (May–June 1933): 1–5; and Paul Kurtz, ed., *Humanist Manifestos I and II* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1993).

44. See Edwin H. Wilson, *The Genesis of a Humanist Manifesto* (Amherst, NY: Humanist Press, 1995); and William F. Schulz, *Making the Manifesto: The Birth of Religious Humanism* (Boston: Skinner House Books, 2002).

45. Edwin H. Wilson began his humanist career in 1929 as a regular contributor to *The New Humanist,* then a mimeographed newsletter; by 1930 it was published under his direction. This little magazine ceased publication in 1936 but was revived in 1941 under the title *The Humanist,* again edited by Wilson (from 1941 until 1956). See Teresa Maciocha, "Edwin H. Wilson: Unitarian Humanist Leader, 1899–1993," at www.harvardsquarelibrary .org/unitarians/wilson.html (accessed 4 May 2004).

of competing with Christian denominations. When Wilson, for example, was once described as an atheist who had not "quit the habit of going to church," he responded that churchgoing "was a good habit. It organizes one's life. It's where your friends are."[46]

But Kurtz and his close associates like to deny that their ideology is a religion, and they do not see themselves as "churched." Be that as it may, Kurtz seems not to have been entirely satisfied with this original Humanist Manifesto, since in 1973 he and Wilson drafted a Humanist Manifesto II.[47] When Kurtz launched the atheist magazine *Free Inquiry* in 1980, his fondness for creedal atheism led him to include in the first issue of his magazine "A Secular Humanist Declaration."[48] He and his associates have also established or supported a number of atheist front organizations closely linked to Prometheus Books and *Free Inquiry*.[49] The best known of these was called the Council for Democratic and Secular Humanism (CODESH) until the name was changed in 1996 to Council for Secular Humanism.

In 2003, the Humanist Manifesto III was published,[50] this time without the long list of specifics set out in 1973, in an effort to get an even more boldly stated atheism more fully in line with trendy new social concerns. Instead of specifics, it is larded with banal slogans and glittering generalities, as humanists welcome future challenges fully committed to freedom and responsibility. Earlier Kurtz and his close associates issued "Humanist Manifesto 2000: A Plan for Peace, Dignity, and Freedom in the Global Human Family,"[51] in which Kurtz urged "that humans not look beyond themselves for salvation." Echoing William Ernest Henley's claim in his poem "Invictus" that he is

---

46. Maciocha, "Edwin H. Wilson."

47. See Kurtz, *Humanist Manifestos I and II.*

48. See *Free Inquiry* 1/1 (1980–81): 3–7.

49. In addition to *Free Inquiry,* which is currently the flagship atheist periodical publication in the United States, Kurtz and company also publish or sponsor more than a dozen other newsletters, magazines, or other periodical publications, including various series of pamphlets. See www.centerforinquiry.net/publications.html for a listing of these items (accessed 24 April 2004).

50. See the *Humanist* 63 (May/June 2003): 10–14.

51. See "Humanist Manifesto 2000," *Free Inquiry* 19/4 (1999): 4–20.

the master of his fate and captain of his soul, Kurtz insisted that "we alone are responsible for our own destiny."[52]

Twenty years ago, soon after having launched Signature Books in 1980, George Smith became a collaborator and associate of Kurtz. Much of the product of this partnership has not been especially visible within the Latter-day Saint intellectual community, but it is possible to identify some of the fruits of this friendship. For example, as recently as May 2000 Kurtz convened a gathering of atheists to deliberate on their concern about what they described as "The Mormon Challenge."[53] In addition to George Smith, speakers included Todd Compton, a Latter-day Saint whom Smith seems to have brought on board to tell tales of the evils of plural marriage, especially of what he considers the suffering it allowed or encouraged men to inflict on hapless pioneer women,[54] and Vern Bullough, who was raised as a Latter-day Saint but has had nothing to do with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints since his teens in the 1940s and whose understanding of Latter-day Saints and their faith seems to have been arrested at that point.

Thomas Flynn, who has recently replaced the aging Kurtz as the senior editor of *Free Inquiry,* introduced these speakers.[55] To those assembled to hear why the Church of Jesus Christ is a threat to secular

---

52. Ibid., 18. More and more specifics were included by Kurtz in his programmatic statement of how, since in his world there are no divine things, we can somehow live an enhanced life and thereby save ourselves, whatever that might mean. These include "a new planetary income tax, the regulation of global conglomerates, open access to the media, population stability, environmental protection, an effective security system, development of a system of World Law, and a new World Parliament. The *Manifesto* urges us to rise above parochial ethnic nationalism and divisive multiculturalism." Paul Kurtz, "The Promise of Manifesto 2000," *Free Inquiry* 20/1 (1999–2000): 5.

53. This conference, "The Mormon Challenge," was held on 4–7 May 2000 in Los Angeles, California.

54. While pointing out that his understanding of Latter-day Saint history and faith differs somewhat from what is common among the Saints, Compton affirmed his own belief in God. He did not go into detail and seemed uncomfortable addressing an atheist audience. He may not have known exactly what he was getting into.

55. I would recommend having a transcript of this conference published since it would provide a good illustration of both the level of understanding and the controlling ideology of some eminent secular anti-Mormons.

humanism, Flynn claimed that George Smith "is a historian of Mormonism. He has been published several times in *Free Inquiry* and in various liberal Mormon publications."[56] Flynn boasted of the ideological links between Paul Kurtz and George Smith and their publishing ventures. He explained that "George Smith is president of Signature Books," which he then correctly described as "the leading dissenting imprint in the Mormon community. Sometimes," he added, "*we call it the Prometheus Books of Utah.*"[57]

"Faithful Disbelief"

George Smith's first contribution to Mormon literature seems to have been a brief comment on Blacks and the priesthood,[58] which was soon followed by the publication of a paper he had read earlier at a Sunstone conference, in which he offered criticisms of the Book of Mormon.[59] Around the same time, he recorded and transcribed the funeral services for Fawn Brodie.[60] In a letter published in a student newspaper, George Smith claimed that "Dr. [Sterling] McMurrin's *faithful disbelief* may offer hope to the 'closet doubters' who might agree [with McMurrin] that 'you don't get books from angels and translate them by miracles.'"[61] "Faithful disbelief" seems to be an oblique way of describing a persistent lack of faith. Unfortunately, Smith made no direct effort to explain the meaning of this rather odd expression. By "faithful" he seems to have meant something like constant, determined, dogmatic, or persistent. Whatever he meant, Smith

---

56. Flynn, introduction to a conference entitled "The Mormon Challenge."

57. Ibid., emphasis added.

58. See George D. Smith Jr., "The Negro Doctrine—An Afterview," *Dialogue* 12/2 (1979): 64–67.

59. See George D. Smith, "Defending the Keystone: Book of Mormon Difficulties," *Sunstone,* May–June 1981, 45–50.

60. See "Memorial Services for Dr. [*sic*] Fawn M. Brodie, January 17, 1981," recorded and transcribed by George D. Smith Jr., available in the Brodie Papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah. This was accompanied by a five-page typed item apparently written by George D. Smith entitled "Dr. [*sic*] Fawn McKay Brodie—A Personal View." See also George D. Smith, "Memories of Brodie," *Dialogue* 14/4 (1981): 7–8.

61. George D. Smith, letter to the editor, *7th East Press,* 8 February 1983, 11, emphasis added.

was pleased that this student newspaper had published an interview in which McMurrin set forth his now famous dogmatism. Smith soon published his own attack on Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon in *Free Inquiry*,[62] along with a slightly modified version of the interview given by McMurrin, which contains that now rather notorious remark about the Book of Mormon.[63]

On Shaking the Tree of Life

On 22 July 1991, George Smith explained and defended his publishing ventures.[64] The *Salt Lake Tribune* article in which his explanation and defense appeared described him as a "shy man," "a shadowy figure of considerable wealth bent on reshaping Mormonism by digging through its past," and a "Stanford-educated son of a cigar-smoking United Parcel Service executive." The *Tribune* depicted Smith, whom it identified as "Signature's president and longtime benefactor," as someone "committed to unfettered historical inquiry," who was therefore "the darling of like-minded scholars, but the scourge of Mormon traditionalists whose mandate is to write 'faithful history'—defined

---

62. See George D. Smith, "Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon," *Free Inquiry* 4/1 (1983–84): 21–31; eventually reprinted without illustrations in *On the Barricades: Religion and Free Inquiry in Conflict,* ed. Robert Basil, Mary Beth Gehrman, and Tim Madigan (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1989), 137–56.

63. See George D. Smith, "The History of Mormonism and Church Authorities: An Interview with Sterling M. McMurrin," *Free Inquiry* 4/1 (1983–84): 32–34, which is a shortened version of "An Interview with Sterling M. McMurrin by Blake Ostler," *Dialogue* 17/1 (1984): 18–43, which originally appeared in the *7th East Press* on 11 January 1983. McMurrin, it should be noted, liked to report that he had "never read the entire Book of Mormon." McMurrin, *Matters of Conscience,* 114. He was not the least bit uncomfortable in boasting about this lacuna in his literary endeavors, despite Thomas F. O'Dea's pungent observation back in 1957 that "the Book of Mormon has not been universally considered by its critics as one of those books that must be read in order to have an opinion of it." Thomas F. O'Dea, *The Mormons* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 26.

64. See Vern Anderson, "Revisionist or Truth Seeker? Publisher Defends Research of LDS Church's Past," *Salt Lake Tribune,* 22 July 1991, D1. The version of this article posted on the Signature Books Web site at www.signaturebooks.com/sigstories.htm#/controversy (accessed 10 June 2004) as "Publisher Adds Controversy to the Pages of Mormon History" has been condensed.

by Apostle Boyd K. Packer . . . as history that bolsters belief and avoids awkward or embarrassing detail." In this context, the word *benefactor* suggests patron or financial backer. Allen Roberts, then a member of the Signature board of directors, is quoted as saying that "there's an impression out there that he's running a one-man show." Roberts explained that this is partly true—"it is on the financial side, but on the editorial side it's not."[65]

Anderson quoted Smith as saying that he is "willing to shake the tree, and perhaps others don't like to shake the tree because it is sacred."[66] What "tree"? In a Latter-day Saint context, this remark would seem to make sense if one had in mind Alma's comparison of the word of God to a seed, which if properly nourished will grow into a tree of life from which eventually a most precious fruit—the fruit of the tree of life, or eternal life—can be harvested (Alma 32:28–43). Understood in this way, the tree is, of course, sacred to the faithful, just as Smith said, but not to those who mock from the sidelines—in George Smith's words, those eager to "shake the tree."[67]

Mocking Marriage; Leveraging Laxity

In essays he has published in *Free Inquiry,* George Smith has discoursed about humanist slogans,[68] although he has focused most of his attention on polygamy, a topic with which he seems somewhat obsessed.[69] He tends to focus on what he clearly believes were the dis-

---

65. All quotations in this paragraph are from Anderson, "Revisionist or Truth Seeker?"

66. Ibid.

67. Smith indicated that he was "not trying to hide anything." He is also quoted as having said, "I have no hidden agendas. I stand for historical integrity and free inquiry on all subjects, religious and otherwise." Anderson, "Revisionist or Truth Seeker?" If this is genuinely the case, then he and his employees at Signature Books should welcome an unfettered, let-the-chips-fall-where-they-may, warts-and-all look at George Smith's publications for indications of both his motivations and ideology.

68. See, for example, George D. Smith, "The Freedom of Inquiry: Introduction," *Free Inquiry* 17/2 (1997): 14–16.

69. George D. Smith, "Polygamy and the Mormon Church," *Free Inquiry* 7/1 (1986–87): 55–57; Smith, "Mormon Plural Marriage," *Free Inquiry* 12/3 (1992): 32–37, 60; Smith, "Strange Bedfellows: Mormon Polygamy and Baptist History," *Free Inquiry* 16/2 (1996):

gusting motives and evil consequences of that practice in the early church. But there is a paradox in this.

In what comes close to being an official Signature Books account of a rather instructive incident that took place early in 1990, Bergera reports that "since 1989" Elbert Peck "had been running an occasional column [in *Sunstone*], entitled 'A Changed Man,' by former Sunstone staffer Orson Scott Card."[70] Peck is said to have

> felt that Card, a nationally award-winning science fiction writer, brought a thought-provoking conservative voice to the magazine. Card's fourth column, which appeared in the February 1990 issue, was called "The Hypocrites of Homosexuality." In it, Card declared that "the Church has no room for those who, instead of repenting of homosexuality, wish it to become an acceptable behavior in the society of the Saints. They are wolves in sheep's clothing, preaching meekness while attempting to devour the flock." He continued, "If we accept the argument of the hypocrites of homosexuality that their sin is not a sin, we have destroyed ourselves."[71]

Bergera indicates that "Signature Books, which distributes the magazine to bookstores and other retailers, informed Sunstone that if it continued to publish, in Signature's view, such irresponsible opinions, it might need to find another distributor."[72] This might be seen as an instance of a threat to use economic power to leverage others into following what

---

41–45; reprinted in *Freedom of Conscience: A Baptist/Humanist Dialogue,* ed. Paul D. Simmons (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2000), 207–16. In this essay he suggests that Joseph Smith might have gotten the idea for polygamy from John Milton, who wanted to remarry when his wife deserted him, or that he might have heard about Anne Boleyn and King Henry, or he might have heard something about Anabaptist marriage practices. At the Mormon History Association meetings in Tucson, Arizona, on 17 May 2002, he presented a paper entitled "Counting Joseph Smith's Wives." Then Bergera responded with support for his employer with "A Review of George Smith's Identification of the Earliest Mormon Polygamists."

70. Gary J. Bergera, "'Only Our Hearts Know'—Part I: Sunstone during the Daniel Rector, Elbert Peck, and Linda Jean Stephenson Years, 1986–92," *Sunstone,* March 2003, 46.

71. Ibid.

72. Ibid.

appears to be the Signature party line on homosexuality. While Signature seems obsessed by what they see as the evils of the plural marriage once practiced by the Saints, they condemn as "irresponsible opinions" objections to homosexual behavior.

Appearing Balanced; Privileging Revisionist History

Card points out that Signature publishes some solid essays for the same reasons that Peck seems to have published a column by Card—that is, as part of an effort to market its product to the faithful. This has resulted in some anomalies. At approximately the same time that Signature had its attorney protest about what he termed libel in three essays critical of books issued by Signature, George Smith had Bergera put together an anthology assessing various ways of writing about Joseph Smith, the Book of Mormon, and the Mormon past generally. The end result was a book consisting of sixteen rather diverse essays.[73]

Bergera assembled some previously published essays setting out opinions more or less supporting the Signature ideology,[74] as well as essays by Martin E. Marty and Edwin S. Gaustad, both prominent American church historians. Bergera had difficulty getting Richard L. Bushman—whose essay entitled "Faithful History" (first published in 1969) provided the title for the anthology—as well as Neal Kramer, David Bohn, and me to agree to participate in the undertaking. I insisted that we must know in advance the parameters of the project and that page proofs be provided prior to publication. No changes were made in Bushman's essay, but other authors were hassled by Signature editors seeking to manipulate the published form of their essays. Since the essays by Marty and Gaustad also did not support the Signature agenda, two revisionist essays not in the original table of contents were added to the anthology.[75]

---

73. See George D. Smith, ed., *Faithful History: Essays on Writing Mormon History* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992).

74. Among others, these included D. Michael Quinn, Melvin T. Smith, Lawrence Foster, Paul M. Edwards, and C. Robert Mesle.

75. See the essays by Malcolm R. Thorp, "Some Reflections on New Mormon History and the Possibilities of a 'New' Traditional History," 263–80, and Edward H. Ashment, "Historiography of the Canon," 281–302.

The end result, despite the editorial mischief, was a reasonably good collection of essays dealing with important issues. But one would not know this from Smith's introduction.[76] Unlike his previous claim that, among other weaknesses, the traditional history written by faithful Saints "avoids awkward or embarrassing detail," George Smith distinguished two meanings that can be attached to the expression "faithful history": the "history written to express and support religious faith," which he mocks, "and history that attempts to be faithful to the past."[77] He neglected to mention that neither Bushman, who gave us the expression "faithful history," nor any of the others whom Smith describes as "traditional Mormon historians," believes that one of these is possible in the absence of the other.[78] Instead, Smith denigrates what Bushman calls "faithful history" by linking it with "traditional narratives of the supernatural [that] have usually been taught as factual events"[79] and by insisting that the brand of history he favors strives to see "Mormonism as part of American religious experience"[80]—that is, as a mere manifestation of some larger flux of secular forces and consequently not what the faithful have always believed it to be. For Smith, the work of those he labels "professional Mormon historians" has produced what he describes as a "New Mormon History,"[81] which clearly includes *for him* efforts to argue that the Book of Mormon is frontier fiction and not an authentic ancient text, with all that implies for the faith of the Saints.

George Smith asserts that "traditional Mormon historians" "typically reject compromises, such as the view that a mythical Book of Mormon can evince religious authenticity as 'inspired redaction.'"[82] Thus he seems willing to allow the possibility that Joseph Smith might

---

76. George Smith, "Editor's Introduction," *Faithful History,* vii–x.

77. Ibid., vii.

78. Ibid., ix.

79. Ibid., viii.

80. Ibid., ix.

81. Ibid., viii.

82. Ibid., ix. Signature has on its Web page at www.signature books.com/reviews/faithful.htm (accessed 18 May 2004) what purports to be a review of *Faithful History* by Bryan Waterman that first appeared under the title "In Search of Faithful History," *Student Review,* 30 September 1992, 5. Waterman was then an undergraduate student in English at Brigham Young University. On 6 November 1992, I phoned Waterman, and

have produced frontier fiction that could simultaneously contain some inspiring passages. Unfortunately, from his perspective, the Saints have wrongly believed that this book is an authentic ancient history and also a divine special revelation. Joseph Smith simply could not possibly have made available to us a genuine ancient history.

When the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* appeared in 1992, Sterling McMurrin objected that "the authenticity of the Book of Mormon is taken for granted."[83] In addition, "The *Encyclopedia* is saturated with references to the Book of Mormon, reflecting" what McMurrin took as "the recent church movement to give that work greater attention."[84] McMurrin then added the following:

> In his excellent Sunstone lecture, "The Book of Mormon as Seen in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*," which should be read by anyone interested in the nature of the *Encyclopedia*, George D. Smith has indicated that the *Encyclopedia* contains about 200 articles dealing with the Book of Mormon. In his treatment of this subject, Smith writes that "editorial selectivity favoring orthodoxy prevails throughout the encyclopedia."[85]

The essay to which McMurrin referred was soon published in *Sunstone*.[86] Because the *Encyclopedia* does not offer revisionist explanations of the Book of Mormon, Smith claims that it "is not the

---

he indicated that he had lifted most of the review directly from a press release written by Ron Priddis, then publicist for Signature, and issued as "Mormons Clash over History," *Signature Books News,* 4 September 1992. He sent me a photocopy of this item with the following notation: "Brother Midgley—The editorial marks are mine. You'll see that the version in SR [*Student Review*] is close to this. I had a few personal [paragraphs] that were omitted for space reasons." Priddis then posted what had originated as his own press release on the Signature Web page, but under Waterman's name. Needless to say, the assessment of *Faithful History* by publicist-Priddis/reviewer-Waterman is tendentious, as well as garbled.

83.   Sterling M. McMurrin, "Toward Intellectual Anarchy," review of *Encyclopedia of Mormonism, Dialogue* 26/2 (1993): 212.

84.   Ibid.

85.   Ibid.

86.   See George D. Smith, "Orthodoxy and Encyclopedia: The Book of Mormon in the Encyclopedia," *Sunstone,* November 1993, 48–53.

promised comprehensive treatment of Book of Mormon scholarship; it is a statement of LDS orthodoxy."[87] Instead, according to Smith, "it consciously omits important scholarship, but does comprehensively present orthodox views of the Book of Mormon."[88] What follows in Smith's essay is a kind of litany of secular anti-Mormon objections to the Book of Mormon, many of which repeat the objections Smith had previously published in *Free Inquiry* and elsewhere.[89] He seems to have wanted the *Encyclopedia* to detail and extol objections to the Book of Mormon.

Some "Strange Bedfellows"

In addition to his writings in *Free Inquiry,* there are several other indications of personal and ideological links between Paul Kurtz and George Smith. For example, Kurtz celebrated the twentieth anniversary of *Free Inquiry* by describing some of the great moments in his

---

87. Ibid., 48.

88. Ibid., 49.

89. George Smith has contributed essays to *Sunstone, Dialogue,* the *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal,* and the *Journal of Mormon History.* See George D. Smith, "William Clayton: Joseph Smith's 'Private Clerk' and Eyewitness to Mormon Polygamy in Nauvoo," *Sunstone,* December 1991, 32–35; Smith, "Is There Any Way to Escape These Difficulties? The Book of Mormon Studies of B. H. Roberts," *Dialogue* 17/2 (1984): 94–111; Smith, "Indians Not Lamanites," *Dialogue* 18/2 (1985): 5–6; and Smith, "Nauvoo Roots of Mormon Polygamy, 1841–46: A Preliminary Demographic Report," *Dialogue* 27/1 (1994): 1–72; reprinted in *Dialogue* 34/1&2 (2001): 123–58. In addition, he edited and published *An Intimate Chronicle: The Journals of William Clayton* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books/Smith Research Associates, 1991 & 1995). When James B. Allen reviewed *An Intimate Chronicle* in *BYU Studies* 35/2 (1995): 165–75, a tussle ensued in the pages of *Dialogue* 30/2 (1997). See James B. Allen, "Editing William Clayton," 129–38; George D. Smith, "A Response: The Politics of Mormon History," 138–48; and then Allen's "A Reply," 148–55; and Smith's "A Rejoinder," 155–56. Early in Smith's publishing career he got into a quarrel with William Hamblin over how to read Isaiah. See George D. Smith, "Isaiah Updated," *Dialogue* 16/2 (1983): 37–51, reprinted in *The Word of God,* 113–30; William Hamblin, "'Isaiah Update' Challenged," *Dialogue* 17/1 (1984): 4–7; and "Smith Responds," *Dialogue* 17/1 (1984): 7. See also George D. Smith, "Concepts of Deity; A Brief Overview from Yahwist Writings to the Mormon Jehovah-Is-Jesus Doctrine," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 7 (1987): 28–34; and Smith, "William Clayton: In the Shadow of Power," *Journal of Mormon History* 19/2 (1993): 126–40.

career as an atheist activist,[90] several of which even involved George Smith and Signature Books. On that occasion, Kurtz reported that "George D. Smith wrote a series of important articles on the Mormon Church" for *Free Inquiry*.[91] As already indicated, he had published a special feature in *Free Inquiry* in 1984. This consisted of his brief introduction, followed by his own essay and then one by Sterling McMurrin, both of which were highly negative about the Church of Jesus Christ and were especially disparaging toward Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon.

Kurtz described George Smith as "a lifelong member of the church" but more accurately as one who "provides a detailed critical examination of Joseph Smith and his claim that the Book of Mormon was divinely inspired."[92] He described McMurrin "as one of the leading Mormons in America"[93] and as "a Mormon since birth, who questions the treatment of the history of the church by Mormon authorities."[94]

On 6–8 July 2001 the editors of *Free Inquiry* sponsored another conference on Mormonism entitled "Mormon Origins in Ingersoll Land."[95] They combined a celebration at the Robert Ingersoll Birthplace Museum, which is located at "the birthplace of freethought firebrand Robert Green Ingersoll," with the musings of "an expert panel" on "the founding of the Mormon religion and the publication of the

---

90. See Paul Kurtz, "On Entering the Third Decade: Personal Reminiscences: A Humanistic Journey," *Free Inquiry* 20/2 (2000): 29–38.

91. Ibid., 32. These have previously been identified.

92. Paul Kurtz, "The Mormon Church," *Free Inquiry* 4/1 (1983–84): 20. George Smith was married in a Latter-day Saint temple in July 1970, with all that this implies. However, it seems rather unlikely, if not entirely impossible (given his public stance on the church and its historical foundations), that he wishes to be known as a Latter-day Saint or that his name is still on the membership records.

93. Editorial note introducing McMurrin's essay, *Free Inquiry* 4/1 (1983–84): 32.

94. Kurtz, "Mormon Church," 20. McMurrin was also married in a Latter-day Saint temple in June 1938. He was never excommunicated nor did he have his name removed from the church records, though he loved to boast of being a heretic and for much of his adult life he chose not to be part of the community of Saints. He was, instead, an observer of the faithful from the margins of the Latter-day Saint academic community.

95. This and other references to this conference have been taken from materials posted on the *Free Inquiry* Web site at www.secularhumanism.org/ingersoll/mormon .htm (accessed 12 April 2004). I quote from a printed copy of these materials.

Book of Mormon, which took place in nearby Palmyra, New York, in 1830." They also attended the Hill Cumorah Pageant. "No freethought event," they reported, "has offered so immediate an experience of Mormonism in action." In the language one expects to find in the hype of a travel brochure, the atheists who attended this event were encouraged to "rub shoulders with Mormons from all across America" and to be "affable when you turn . . . down" efforts at conversion. They were also instructed to "marvel at Christian missionaries who throng pageant gates struggling to 'deconvert' passing Mormons."

Those who reflected on Mormon origins at this "once-in-a-lifetime experience" included Flynn, who, in addition to being the senior editor of *Free Inquiry,* is also the director of the Robert Green Ingersoll Birthplace Museum. Flynn's remarks were entitled "A New Religion under History's Microscope," and he was immediately followed by George Smith, who lectured on "The Mormons: Pathology, Prognosis, and Why They Are Going to Eat Our Lunch." Smith's remarks were followed by a lecture entitled "Scrying for the Lord: Magic, Mysticism, and the Origins of the Book of Mormon," by Clay Chandler,[96] who was at that time managing the Web site for *Dialogue.* His brother Neal Chandler—then coeditor (along with his wife) of *Dialogue*—followed with his own comments on "Recent Scholarship on Mormon Origins."

The final talk at this conference on "Mormon Origins" was given by Robert M. Price, who read a paper entitled "Nephites and Neophytes: The Book of Mormon as a 'New' New Testament." It should come as no surprise that those at Signature Books recruited Price from among the stable of secular humanist speakers assembled by Kurtz to assist them in their most recent attack on the Book of Mormon.[97]

---

96. An essay by Clay Chandler, "Scrying for the Lord: Magic, Mysticism, and the Origins of the Book of Mormon," can be found in *Dialogue* 36/4 (2003): 43–78. (There is no indication in *Dialogue* that a version of this essay was read to a gathering of atheists assembled by George Smith and Paul Kurtz.)

97. See Robert M. Price, "Joseph Smith: Inspired Author of the Book of Mormon," in *American Apocrypha,* 321–66. Compare this essay with Price, "Joseph Smith in the Book of Mormon," *Dialogue* 36/4 (2003): 89–96. See William J. Hamblin's "'There Really Is a God, and He Dwells in the Temporal Parietal Lobe of Joseph Smith's Brain,'" *Dialogue* 36/4 (2003): 79–87; also found in a slightly revised version as "Priced to Sell" in this number of the *FARMS Review,* pages 37–47.

Price began his career as a born-again fundamentalist, but then he did a radical flip-flop[98] and is now a fellow of the Weststar Institute, which sponsors, among other things, the controversial Jesus Seminar mode of explanation of Christian origins. He edits the *Journal of Higher Criticism* and is a fellow at the Center for Inquiry, which is a Council for Secular Humanism front organization operating in the New Jersey/New York City area. He was also once the pastor of the First Baptist Church in Montclair, New Jersey, which must be a rather "liberal" congregation, given his essentially atheist ideology.

Some Strange "Dialogues"

According to Paul Kurtz, the Council for Secular Humanism has "convened two important dialogues—between Mormons and humanists in Salt Lake City, and Baptists and humanists in Richmond, Virginia. They were the first such dialogues ever held."[99] Both of these events have included George Smith speaking *for the humanists.* If one were to grant that both Baptists and secular humanists have their own faith and were also inclined to employ a trendy new terminology, then these events might be seen as *interfaith dialogues.* However, the dialogue between atheists and Baptists was clearly not between feisty, evangelizing, "born-again" Baptists and competent naturalistic humanists. Instead, it involved a few "humanists" assembled by Kurtz to console some dissident Baptists who had come to deplore the direction their

---

98.   See Robert M. Price, "From Fundamentalist to Humanist" (1997) found at www .infidels.org/library/modern/robert_price/humanist.html (accessed 24 April 2004). He describes his odyssey from what he flippantly brushes aside as a crude fundamentalist ideology to his current atheist stance. Price is a favorite of Internet Infidels; they have five of his essays listed on one of their Web pages. See www.infidels.org/secular_web/ new/1997/june.shtml (accessed 24 April 2004). Price, who was said in 2002 to be the "author of six books, three awaiting release, and hundreds of articles, is a fellow of the Jesus Seminar and Professor of Biblical Criticism at the Center for Inquiry." He is also on the editorial staff of *Secular Nation* magazine, which is a publication of the Atheist Alliance International, www.atheistalliance.org/library/news_082602.html (accessed 24 April 2004). Price seems recently to have come to believe that there was no historical Jesus of Nazareth—Jesus is simply, for him, a myth invented by others.

99.   Kurtz, "Personal Reminiscences," 36.

Baptist denomination had recently taken and who were willing to accept the assistance of atheists in voicing their resentments.[100]

It is, however, unlikely that a few disheartened seminarians, even with the help of some humanists, will be able to challenge the aggressive fundamentalist faction that gained control of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) in 1985 "through virtual civil war"[101] against somewhat more moderate fellow Baptists. The diaphanous Harold Bloom, in his typically interesting, oracular, and assertive way, has commiserated over what he thinks is a dismal decline in traditional Baptist religiosity, as those caught up in what he denigrates as a new "Know-Nothing" brand of fundamentalism have captured control of the SBC from an older, somewhat more moderate and less unreasonable faction. Bloom claims that what has taken place is an "analogue of a hostile takeover in the corporate world."[102]

Could Kurtz, his associates, and a few disaffected seminarians possibly imagine that this "dialogue" could change the direction being taken by the SBC? Such does not seem likely. At best, some disgruntled Baptists vented their spleen and sought some sympathy for their plight. It appears that some eccentrics among those marginalized by the takeover of the SBC by a fundamentalist faction sought at least some consolation from Kurtz and company, if not a full alliance. With the aid of Joe E. Barnhart and Robert S. Alley, two of his close associates, Kurtz drafted a statement entitled "In Defense of Freedom of Conscience: A

---

100. This "dialogue," heavily augmented by a miscellany of sermons and previously published essays, was issued in 2000 as *Freedom of Conscience: A Baptist/Humanist Dialogue* by Prometheus Books. Robert Price contributed a sermon entitled "Bootleg Baptists?" (pp. 80–84) and a previously published essay entitled "Inerrancy: The New Catholicism? Biblical Authority vs. Creedal Authority" (pp. 175–81), which helped to flesh out what originally took place.

101. See the Ostlings in *Mormon America,* 384. A fundamentalist faction within the Southern Baptist Convention won a decisive victory in what has been described as the "Baptist Battles." For details, see Nancy Ammerman's *Baptist Battles: Social Change and Religious Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990).

102. Harold Bloom, *The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 231. He may have borrowed the expression from Ammerman, *Baptist Battles,* 14.

Cooperative Baptist/Secular Humanist Declaration."[103] Kurtz predictably supported the complaints of these former Baptists by appealing to some trendy slogans. Kurtz, Barnhart, Alley, and nineteen others, *including George Smith,* endorsed this pronouncement.[104]

The dialogue between humanists and "Mormons" actually involved some marginal or former Latter-day Saints or cultural Mormons including Lavina F. Anderson, Brent Lee Metcalfe, L. Jackson Newell, Cecilia Konchar Farr, Gary James Bergera, Alan Dale Roberts, Fred Buchanan, Martha S. Bradley, F. Ross Peterson, and, of course, George Smith. Kurtz, Bonnie Bullough, Gerald A. Larue, Robert S. Alley, and Vern Bullough set out a version of atheist/humanist ideology, while supporting the grievances of the dissidents. This dialogue was *jointly published* by Prometheus Books and Signature Books, with George Smith serving as editor.[105] Since I have elsewhere dealt at length with this dialogue, I will not comment further, other than to point out again that George Smith was behind that venture, and that McMurrin, the leading Mormon humanist, unlike Newell, did not speak at the conference.[106]

Discontented Baptist seminarians or disaffected Latter-day Saints are, of course, perfectly free to break away from the Southern Baptist Convention or the Church of Jesus Christ; they are free, if they so desire—that is, if their conscience so dictates—either to move to some more congenial secular "religious community" or to cease being Christians at all. Hence, without wishing to defend the bloodletting that took place nearly twenty years ago in the Southern Baptist Con-

---

103. Joe E. Barnhart, Robert S. Alley, and Paul Kurtz, "In Defense of Freedom of Conscience: A Cooperative Baptist/Secular Humanist Declaration," *Free Inquiry* 16/1 (1995–96): 4–7.

104. Ibid. For the full text of "In Defense of Freedom of Conscience: A Cooperative Baptist/Secular Humanist Declaration; Joint Statement," see *Freedom of Conscience,* 263–70.

105. See George Smith, *Religion, Feminism, and Freedom of Conscience* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus and Signature Books, 1994). Metcalfe's talk was not included in this book.

106. For a commentary on *A Mormon/Humanist Dialogue,* see Louis Midgley, "Atheists and Cultural Mormons Promote a Naturalistic Humanism," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 7/1 (1995): 229–97. For a glowing review of this volume, see Thomas W. Flynn, "The Humanist/Mormon Dialogue," *Free Inquiry* 15/1 (1994–95): 55–57. See "Atheists and Cultural Mormons," 257–67, where I dealt extensively with Newell's ideology.

vention, it is difficult to determine who or what is supposed to have challenged or violated the freedom of conscience of the now displaced or marginalized Baptists. Disgruntled Baptist preachers, as well as former Latter-day Saints or cultural Mormons who have for whatever reasons never really believed or have ceased to believe and who may have even adopted an atheist ideology, have full freedom of conscience. No one has taken or can take away their moral agency.

But slogans about a presumably unfettered search for truth, about freedom of conscience and "free agency," are used by dissidents to insist that they be allowed to teach or be given power to control the destiny of religious communities. It is even argued that the "liberty" the framers of the American Constitution sought to guarantee to American citizens and that was incorporated into the First Amendment somehow ought to be grounds for such a right.[107] But this is just silly slogan thinking; nothing more can be said about it. No one has or can prevent cultural Mormons or humanist Baptists from being responsible moral agents. All, unless intellectually defective, are responsible moral agents faced with the consequences of their choices. Recognition of this fact does not thereby require that others with whom they chose to disagree must celebrate, encourage, or finance their heresies and apostasy. The harsh realities of recent denominational politics such as found in the Southern Baptist Convention do not conflict with freedom of conscience but are actually a sign of its vigorous exercise.

No one is or can be forced to engage in practices they abhor, at least in lands where regimes prevail that do not strive to force ideological conformity. Even in the most repressive regimes, no one can be forced to believe things they simply do not believe. That we are moral agents does not somehow mean that others must acquiesce to our demands. This is at least part of what is meant by moral agency. However, in matters of conscience there is simply no requirement that the views of those who believe something fundamentally at odds with a community in which they find themselves must be tolerated or encouraged.

---

107.   See George D. Smith's "Editor's Introduction" to *A Mormon/Humanist Dialogue*, vii–viii.

And this is well understood. Do atheist propaganda fronts open their publishing venues to vigorous critical assessment of their own secular creeds? Should they? Should they be demonized if they choose not to do so? Do atheists put in charge of their institutions those who abhor atheism? By not doing so, have they violated anyone's freedom of conscience? Is there an indication that those in control of the Council for Secular Humanism are willing to authorize the use of their resources and publishing venues by those who believe in God and who are prepared to defend their beliefs? Or who are prepared to sponsor and finance and celebrate vigorous critiques of atheism? Are they somehow morally defective for not doing so?

If something labeled "freedom of conscience" or the search for truth through what is labeled "free inquiry" demands that everyone, whatever they may or may not believe, must finance or give equal time to unbelievers or others with radically different beliefs, or provide a protest pulpit for dissidents and unbelievers or others with competing or radically different beliefs, then Kurtz and company betray such freedom, as do secular and sectarian anti-Mormons generally. But atheists have not to this point made a plausible case for such a moral requirement, though they work hard to convince others that their ideology ought to officially dominate or otherwise be controlling.

And the Rest of the Story

One might grant that George Smith seems to have personal and ideological ties to Paul Kurtz and his brand of secular humanism and yet not see this as necessarily controlling or coloring the operation of Signature Books and his Smith Research Associates. But this would be a mistake, as well as naïve, since a significant number of the books issued by Signature Books are anti-Mormon in the sense that they overtly attack Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. It is that literature that reflects his ideology and agenda. There clearly is an ideology determining what is being published. Signature Books follows closely what seems to be the line advanced by its wealthy owner.

George Smith recently set up Smith-Pettit Foundation. The purpose of this private foundation appears to be a way of both owning

and financing Signature Books, perhaps to provide a source of income to help regularize the support for that publishing venture. The Smith-Pettit tax return shows that it had $8,767,866 in total assets at the beginning of 2002 and $9,291,019 at the end of the year.[108] The management of this foundation has been turned over to Bergera, who also continues to function as acquisitions editor for Signature Books. The day-to-day operations at Signature Books do not appear to be directed by George Smith; he does not seem involved in the routine operations of the press or the foundations he owns. And it is possible, perhaps even likely, that his employees occasionally do things that annoy him. But there are, in addition to personal (if not financial) links, also ideological connections between George Smith (and Signature Books) and militant, evangelizing atheist propaganda agencies, including Prometheus Books. This seems significant and should be known in the Latter-day Saint community and also by evangelical critics of the Church of Jesus Christ.[109] And these ideological links help to explain the books attacking Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon that flow from Signature Books.

Signature Books employees have neglected to mention to their Latter-day Saint clientele the links their employer has to Prometheus Books, or to what is currently known as the Council for Secular Humanism, and

---

108. The Smith-Pettit Foundation (which does not function as a tax-exempt entity) owns 67 percent of Signature Books, which seems to have had a book value of $768,150 in 2002; other investments of the foundation that year included mutual funds with a book value of $2,536,569. One can get some idea of the size of this investment by examining the Smith-Pettit Foundation tax returns, which are available for 2002 at tfc990.fdncenter.org/black_pdfs/870641442/200212.pdf and for 2001 at tfc990.fdncenter.org/black_pdfs/870641442/200112.pdf (both accessed 24 April 2004). The other third of Signature Books seems to be owned by George Smith through a holding company that also owns and renovates properties in Salt Lake City.

109. "Dr." John Weldon, a countercult anti-Mormon, believes that "Signature Books offers a wide variety of books documenting problems in Mormonism that refute FARMS claims. What FARMS will not do, because it cannot, is to fairly evaluate these Mormon writings because they disprove their claims re: Mormonism." This assertion, which shows how countercult critics of the Church of Jesus Christ understand the literature published by Signature Books, is quoted from the encyclopedic collection of over 8,500 pages of material in what is called "Apologetic Index," assembled by Anton Hein, a pugnacious Dutch countercultist, at www.apologeticsindex.org/cpoint10–9.html (accessed 24 April 2004).

to other related atheist front organizations servicing the wider community of militant, evangelizing atheists. It is also noteworthy that those at Signature Books have been neither forthcoming about their somewhat reclusive, very wealthy owner, nor about his and their motivations and ideology. By giving close attention to the ideological nexus between Signature Books and Prometheus Books, it is possible to understand what constitutes the "common humanist perspective" found in the titles issued by Signature Books and also what is meant when prominent Latter-day Saint historians—each known for their moderation—indicate that Signature Books publishes material largely in George Smith's "*ideological image.*"

Those at Signature Books seem to want to be known as a "dissenting imprint" and a "renegade publisher." This proclivity can clearly be seen in the "News Stories about Signature Books and Its Authors" posted on a Web page it maintains.[110] This collection of news items, ranging back well over a decade, provides a good indication of what constitutes "the common humanist perspective" in the books published by Signature Books and also how those at Signature Books both understand and promote their publishing endeavors among those on the margins of the Latter-day Saint intellectual community. In those items there is much reveling in reports of conflict with the Brethren and with faithful Latter-day Saints generally, especially with those who publish under the FARMS imprint.

Skirmishes on the "Wasatch Front"

Why the passion on the part of Signature Books to demonize FARMS? Or why do Signature Books spokespersons lionize authors who have public squabbles with the church? The answer to these and related questions requires a little historical background. Prior to 1989 (though there has been a constant parade of anti-Mormon books and

---

110. At www.signaturebooks.com/sigstories.htm#something (accessed 24 April 2004), see "News Stories about Signature Books and Its Authors." This can also be accessed from the Signature Books home page through the "News and Events" link, and then through "News Stories about Signature Books" link.

pamphlets), other than Hugh Nibley's early apologetic essays and a few other items, there were few, if any, genuinely scholarly or even nonscholarly responses to either sectarian or secular critics. Instead, there was, as there continues to be now, both a large and often lackluster devotional literature and also a thriving and sometimes impressive Latter-day Saint historiography, the quality of which seems to be improving. However, if we can believe one report, little of what has been written since 1950 by Latter-day Saint historians has been focused on defending the faith and the Saints.[111] There are several reasons for this lacuna in recent LDS historiography.

First, LDS historians have rightly tended to view the sectarian brand of anti-Mormonism as thoroughly contemptible. They have also tended to see this literature and the movement behind it as entirely unworthy of any of their critical attention despite whatever damage it might be doing to the faith of the Saints and despite or because of the quirky personalities involved. However, historians thrive on little known or archival materials, and there is a wealth of such sectarian anti-Mormon literature. And yet, despite the abundance of textual materials upon which to draw in telling its story, virtually no attention has been given to this literature and consequently to the individuals and agencies that produce and market such material. It would, on this assessment, be a step backward to give attention to sectarian anti-Mormons or the literature they generate. In addition, until 1989 there was no venue in which scholars, even when so disposed, could publish responses to either sectarian or secular anti-Mormonism.

Second, it seems that an entire generation of Latter-day Saint historians has been taught to eschew controversy, and accordingly they tend to avoid polemics even in defense of the faith. Walker, Whittaker, and Allen have argued that "instead of defending or attacking LDS faith claims—one of the major characteristics of nineteenth-century Mormon historiography—the new historians [that is, those who began to publish after 1950] were more interested in examining the Mormon past in the hope of understanding it—and understanding

---

111. Walker, Whittaker, and Allen, *Mormon History,* 61.

themselves."[112] This opinion may be extreme, but something like it seems to still be at work among historians.

Third, since Latter-day Saint historians belong to a kind of club that includes those outside or on the fringes of the circle of faith, responding to the secular variety of anti-Mormonism seems to have posed a special problem for them, since to do so would likely have led to criticism of colleagues or associates with whom they desire to maintain friendships. In addition, to do so would have involved unwanted, uncomfortable confrontations with those who entertain revisionist ideology and who often have been in control or heavily involved in publishing venues such as *Dialogue, Sunstone,* and Signature Books.[113]

But events beyond the control of Latter-day Saint historians made their situation somewhat awkward. Mark Hofmann's sensational "discoveries" in the 1980s, which eventually turned out to be forgeries, spawned a literature highly critical of Joseph Smith and the crucial founding theophanies, as well as of the Book of Mormon. When Hofmann was eventually exposed as a forger who was covertly pursuing a secular anti-Mormon agenda, critics on the margins of the Mormon intellectual community merely made some adjustments and continued their attacks as if nothing much had happened. Some venues, of course, were keen to publish such literature. Signature Books was and continues to be preeminent among these publishing houses.[114]

Shortly after the *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* was launched in 1989, Daniel C. Peterson expressed his willingness to facilitate the publication of a literature that would be "at once genuinely scholarly and authentically Latter-day Saint."[115] In addition, he also

---

112.   Ibid.

113.   Critics of the church seem to recognize and exploit for their own purposes the overall ideological orientation of these publishing venues. See, for example, the remarks about *Sunstone* and *Dialogue* by the Ostlings in their *Mormon America,* especially 352–63.

114.   An instructive example is the recent publication by Signature Books of Palmer's tendentious *An Insider's View of Mormon Origins.* For twenty years, Palmer, while employed by CES, had been covertly working on the manuscript for a book that was initially spawned by the confusion generated by Mark Hofmann's forgeries and his phony tales of a secret history hidden in the vault of the First Presidency. For the details, see Midgley, "*Pry*ing into Palmer," 368–76, 378–79.

115.   Peterson, "Questions to Legal Answers," vii.

opened the pages of this *Review* to competent responses to both sectarian and secular anti-Mormon literature. Thus the primary difference between the 1980s and now is that for fifteen years there has been a venue willing to publish competent, scholarly responses to attacks on the Church of Jesus Christ. In both word and deed Peterson indicated that scholars interested in providing genuinely competent responses to the full range of anti-Mormon literature would henceforth have a venue in which to publish. This development has not pleased dissidents or cultural Mormons and former Saints—and least of all those at Signature Books; nor has it thrilled those few sectarian critics of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon who have bothered to acquaint themselves with recent scholarly LDS literature. To this point, anti-Mormons have responded to this unanticipated development primarily by ignoring the relevant literature.

Prior to the advent of the *Review,* critics may have anticipated pounding away with impunity at the foundations of the faith of the Saints. This may have been true of Signature Books, which got started nearly a decade earlier than this periodical. The publication of the *Review* changed all of that. By 1991, those at Signature Books could see that the books they published would receive much unwanted attention in its pages. In an effort to thwart the open and honest discussion of books containing, among other things, attacks on the Book of Mormon, George Smith had his attorney threaten FARMS[116] over review essays that had appeared that were critical of a collection of essays edited by Dan Vogel.[117] Waterman, an apologist for Signature Books, then claimed that "Signature was accused of being . . . 'Korihor Press,' a label originally applied to the publishing firm by a BYU religion professor in a book review."[118] What Stephen Robinson actually wrote is that "Korihor's back, and this time he's got a printing

---

116. See ibid., ix–xi, for the relevant details.

117. See Stephen E. Robinson, review of *The Word of God,* ed. Dan Vogel, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 3 (1991): 312–18; and perhaps also Louis Midgley, "More Revisionist Legerdemain and the Book of Mormon," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 3 (1991): 261–311.

118. Waterman, "A Little Something for Everyone," 4.

press."[119] According to Waterman, this "incident sparked rumors of a lawsuit; according to Signature staff their attorney merely asked for an apology."[120]

Apparently a bit embarrassed by their effort at legal intimidation, the Signature Books staff downplay the ploy. Why was an apology necessary, since what Robinson said, in his pithy way, was simply true? An apology for what? Robinson demonstrated parallels between the assumptions at work in many of the essays included in Vogel's collection and the program advanced anciently by Korihor. Are we now to be forbidden from employing the powerful symbols found in the Book of Mormon (for example, Korihor, the other anti-Christs, or even that expression itself) when we confront the world in which we currently live? This episode ended in a slight clarification of the language used in advertising the issue of the *Review* in which Robinson's essay appeared, but no apology for what Robinson or other reviewers had written.

In one of his more memorable introductions to this *Review,* Peterson described this effort to silence criticism of attacks being published by Signature Books on Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon.[121] Subsequently, there have been a number of similar and related skirmishes between secular critics of the Church of Jesus Christ and those who publish under the FARMS imprint.

One instructive instance of what amounts to censorship involved Orson Scott Card, who previously published with Signature Books and had, in better times, even served on its editorial board. He had published an essay in *Sunstone* in which he defended "the prophet's sole authority to determine whether homosexuality is or is not a sin in the eyes of the Church. Signature's reaction was to threaten to withdraw from distributing *Sunstone* unless they stopped publishing me."[122] "Their agenda was clear. You can attack the church under Signature's aegis, but heaven help you if you dare to defend the Church."[123]

---

119. Robinson, review of *The Word of God,* 312.

120. Waterman, "A Little Something for Everyone," 4.

121. Peterson, "Questions to Legal Answers," viii–lxxvi.

122. Card to Midgley, 14 April 2004, 2.

123. Ibid. Though many at Signature Books seem appalled by plural marriage, they seem especially sensitive to criticisms of homosexuality.

It is, of course, unnecessary to review all the details of these earlier untoward efforts at intimidation and censorship other than to indicate that there has been an ongoing campaign by the Signature Books staff to marginalize or otherwise discredit those who publish with FARMS.[124] And the fact is that we are once again faced with a spate of essays and books, many of which are written by those who were once Latter-day Saints but who have come to reject and attack Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. These books are often published by or linked in some way to Signature Books.[125]

Signature Books is hostile in several ways to those who are at all critical of the things they publish. This can be seen not only in some of the books they publish,[126] but also in the unseemly attack posted on the Signature Books Web site entitled "Why I No Longer Trust the *FARMS Review of Books.*"[127] This essay was originally read at a Sunstone conference in Salt Lake City. John Hatch, its author, was partway through undergraduate work in history at the University of Utah when he launched his attack on FARMS.[128] He was soon rewarded (1) by having his essay posted on the Signature Books Web site and (2) by then being employed by Signature Books to put together an anthology of essays on the Book of Mormon. But when that project failed, he was shifted to editing the diaries of Anthon H. Lund,[129] and

---

124.   Let me repeat again, so that I will not be misunderstood: no one that I am aware of has claimed or implied that everything published by Signature Books lacks merit or that all the titles they publish are overtly critical of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon, or paint the Church of Jesus Christ, either blatantly or covertly, in dark colors.

125.   Smith Research Associates is one of George Smith's foundations through which he funds anti-Mormon research. Occasionally a book is released collaboratively by both Smith Research Associates and Signature Books. Works published by Smith Research Associates are marketed though Signature Books. For details, see www.signaturebooks .com/faq.htm (accessed 24 April 2004).

126.   See especially D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View,* rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998), passim.

127.   See John Hatch, "Why I No Longer Trust the *FARMS Review of Books,*" posted at www.signaturebooks.com/sigstories2.htm#Farms (accessed 24 April 2004).

128.   Every item in Hatch's criticism was answered by Daniel Peterson in "QnA," the editor's introduction to the *FARMS Review of Books* 13/2 (2001): xi–xxi.

129.   John P. Hatch, ed., *Danish Apostle: The Diaries of Anthon H. Lund,* forthcoming in October 2004 from Signature Books. See www.signaturebooks.com/danish.htm (accessed 24 April 2004).

(3) he was hired as managing editor of *Sunstone* and also assigned to coordinate their symposia.[130]

A "Great Debt"?

Elsewhere I have argued that at least some criticisms of the Church of Jesus Christ seem providential, if one is of a pious disposition.[131] Critics may even do the Saints a service.

For example, Fawn Brodie's criticisms of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon sent a generation of historians back to the sources and also stimulated a massive and continuing rediscovery of the Book of Mormon by the Saints. This sort of thing is the desirable, though unintended, consequence of various efforts to pull the Church of Jesus Christ from its crucial historical foundations. By attacking the faith, critics may actually help direct our attention back to those foundations and away from the charming fads and fashions floating around in the dominant culture. Also, despite the tragic losses caused by such assaults—and they are real losses— some anti-Mormon literature ends up focusing and strengthening the faith of the Saints and thereby inadvertently assists in building the kingdom.

Our critics may thus help remind the Saints that the genuine work of the Holy Spirit takes us into a world pulsing with divine power— one in which the heavens are not closed, one in which signs and wonders are still present, and one not unlike that found in our scriptures and also in the founding events upon which our faith ultimately rests. Critics thus help force the Saints to take seriously the crucial founding events and texts, which unfortunately we otherwise may trivialize or neglect. Our critics oblige us to face matters that, given our highly secularized world, we tend to downplay, ignore, or turn into conventional sentimentalities.

---

130.   He is reported to be continuing his education in history at the University of Utah and "at the moment researching the life of LDS president George Albert Smith." See www.signaturebooks.com/danish.htm#Hatch (accessed 24 April 2004).

131.   See, for example, Louis Midgley, "The Legend and Legacy of Fawn Brodie," *FARMS Review of Books* 13/1 (2001): 69–70.

Sterling McMurrin liked what he saw being published by his friend, George D. Smith. He thought that "through his company, Signature Books, he and others have made great contributions to the understanding of Mormon history and sociology. The Mormon church really owes them a great debt of gratitude for what they have done and are doing, but it's a debt," he guessed, "that will probably never be acknowledged."[132] Should we be indebted to George Smith and Signature Books for the publication of attacks on the crucial historical foundations of the faith of the Saints? I cannot, of course, speak for the church or its leaders, but it seems appropriate to acknowledge what McMurrin called a "great debt." Some of the literature published by Signature Books may have some unintended desirable consequences. McMurrin was probably right about George Smith and Signature Books, but in a way that he probably did not have in mind. We can thank at least some of our critics, both sectarian and secular, for helping to maintain the faith.

In addition, we also thereby have an explanation for the shape and contour of the battles that have been raging for at least the last few decades along the Wasatch Front. This expression is, of course, a common designation for the area in Utah on the west flank of the Wasatch Mountains along which there is now virtually a solid array of subdivisions and shopping malls stretching from Brigham City on the north to Santaquin on the south, with Salt Lake City at its center. The term also appears to signal something more ominous—a kind of war zone in which the faith and practice of Latter-day Saints is contested by both secular and sectarian anti-Mormons. Recently, from the sectarian side, the focus has been on Main Street Plaza in Salt Lake City, where so-called street preachers, as well as those representing the Utah Gospel Ministries and Alpha and Omega Ministries, have carried on leafleting and protesting, in sometimes rowdy and obscene ways, sometimes on church property and even directly in front of the Salt Lake Temple. The protests have not been limited to preachers but have included one book publisher.

---

132. McMurrin, *Matters of Conscience,* 361.

Servicing a Client

One can get an idea of the extent and dimensions of the secular side of this battle going on along the Wasatch Front by consulting the public relations materials posted by Signature Books on its own Web site.[133] The news items recorded there give an indication of the motivations and agenda of those at Signature Books. They are also part of a war waged against the faith of the Saints. Those materials seem calculated to signal what potential buyers can expect to find in at least some of those books. Signature Books likes to celebrate the fact that a number of the authors they publish are dissidents, have been in battles with the Brethren, and have been excommunicated or had their memberships canceled. In addition, in an effort to sell the books they publish, Signature Books not only takes advantage of controversy surrounding the authors they publish, but also at times takes steps to generate such scandals. The recent marketing of *American Apocrypha,* an anthology of essays highly critical of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon, illustrates this tactic. This sales campaign involved Priddis and Tom Murphy, one of the authors recently published by Signature Books.

Murphy has explained what led to widespread publicity over possible church discipline for his attack on the Book of Mormon that appears in *American Apocrypha.* Instead of treating his encounter with his stake president as confidential, he consciously made a decision to "go public" and thereby generate as much adverse publicity for the church as he possibly could. His intention was to use widespread adverse publicity to force his stake president to back down. This is his version of these events:

> After I had expressed my intention to *go public,* Ron Priddis of Signature Books forwarded my letter to Richard Ostling of the Associated Press who forwarded it to Patty Henetz [a reporter eager for a juicy story]. Ultimately, I must take full

---

133. At www.signaturebooks.com/sigstories.htm#something (accessed 24 April 2004), see "News Stories about Signature Books and Its Authors."

responsibility for my desire to *go public* and for agreeing to the interview [with Henetz]. I did so because I believe that the best way to deal with *ecclesiastical abuse* is to expose it.[134]

The expression *ecclesiastical abuse* was apparently coined by Lavina Anderson, herself a former Latter-day Saint, to describe efforts by church leaders at any level to counsel, admonish, correct, or discipline dissidents or apostates of whatever variety. Her complaints about the Brethren and about various instances of church disciplinary actions eventually led in 1993 to considerable publicity over the so-called September Six. Five of the six, some of whom were marginal at best in the Latter-day Saint intellectual community, were supported by well-organized public protests staged at stake centers or at Latter-day Saint temples. At least a few of these protests involved "candlelight vigils." The whole point of such antics was to draw the local TV stations and the press, who would be given carefully prepared press releases so that they could easily file their stories.

Steven Clark, a well-known former Latter-day Saint as well as anti-Mormon agitator, was not, as had been rumored, the one who launched the protests supporting Tom Murphy. It was Murphy himself, through his publisher, who "leaked" his story to the press. His actions generated widespread publicity about his problem with his stake president. It is true that, in his own words, he

> spoke with Steven Clark and many other people before my interview with my stake president. Steven Clark played a role in organizing the candlelight vigils in Salt Lake City and elsewhere but Kathy Worthington, who[m] I've never met, played an even larger role. My students at Edmonds Community College, though, were the first to suggest a candlelight vigil. When Steven Clark suggested the idea to me later I put him in contact with my students.[135]

---

134.   Thomas W. Murphy, open letter dated 9 January 2003, emphasis added. This letter can be found at www.tungate.com/murphy.htm (accessed 24 April 2004). The letter is item #23 in the collections of materials assembled in support of Murphy by Mel Tungate.

135.   Ibid.

Priddis and his associates at Signature Books, it seems, actually launched their Murphy publicity through a number of press releases intended to help sell their recently released book critical of the Book of Mormon[136] by generating or capitalizing on controversy about one of the book's essayists, Murphy. With the help of those at Signature Books, Murphy provided the stuffing for sensational and often distorted news items appearing in the popular press around the world. Priddis and his fellow employees assisted in organizing protests against the Church of Jesus Christ, one of which actually took place in front of the Salt Lake Temple on Main Street Plaza.

Much of the publicity given to what should have been an entirely confidential matter was generated by Signature Books to sell a book critical of the church. But there is more—Priddis paraded on Main Street Plaza in front of the Salt Lake Temple. He was there to protest an essentially confidential matter of church discipline; he was photographed carrying two signs at this protest: one read, "Thomas Murphy Burned at the Stake Center," and the other, "And it came to pass that no Lamanite DNA was found throughout all the Land."[137]

The use by Signature Books of widespread publicity about what should be confidential matters, and the staged candlelight vigils, began a decade earlier with well-orchestrated and publicized protests over church discipline of the so-called September Six. This is the mythology being paraded by dissidents who hope that they can force the church to cave in by protests and other adverse publicity. In addition, Murphy's students may have spontaneously invented the idea of candlelight protests at Latter-day Saint temples by those hostile to the church. They

---

136. See Vogel and Metcalfe, eds., *American Apocrypha.*

137. See twelve photos in "Murphy Supporters Rally on Main Street in Downtown Salt Lake City, December 8, 2002," part of a larger item entitled "Thomas Murphy—Lamanite DNA News," www.salamandersociety.org/news/ (accessed 27 December 2003; apparently this Web page is no longer available). Ron Priddis was featured in several of the photos. The caption on one photo indicates that Priddis "rallies on his clients [*sic*] behalf." Priddis is described as the "Signature Books publisher of Thomas Murphy's 'Lamanite Genesis, Genealogy, and Genetics,'" which is found in *American Apocrypha,* 47–77. One of these photos was also published in "Murphy Supporters Protest on Main Street Plaza," *Sunstone,* December 2002, 73.

also may have been coached by Murphy about the September Six and the associated protests, as well as about the alleged "ecclesiastical abuse" by church leaders presumably intended to frustrate free inquiry in the untrammeled search for truth and so forth.

It would be nice to view things from the point of view of Murphy's stake president, Mathew Latimer. In an unusual move—which I applaud for various reasons, one of which is that it clears me of the lie being circulated by Murphy's supporters that I "turned him in"—Latimer has written to Murphy to explain exactly what his concern was in his case:

> As you know, your papers are publicly available, and you have openly discussed these matters in several venues. While it may be intriguing to think that a member of the so-called "intellectual community" turned you in, I can assure you my involvement in this matter arose out of much more mundane circumstances. In the end, our discussions were *never about suppressing academic freedom or honest inquiry*—despite what you and your supporters may believe. It was about encouraging repentance, correcting error, and, hopefully, rekindling faith in Christ. For me, it remains so.[138]

Anti-Mormonism

In English, following a pattern initially set down in Greek, the commonly accepted way of indicating that one is against or in opposition to something, or that one is speaking or writing against something, hence contradicting, disputing, rivaling, and so forth, is by adding the prefix *anti-* to a word. To see just how common this linguistic habit is in English and how ordinary and useful the words are that are formed in this way, one should consult the *Oxford English Dictionary.* There one finds listed and explained an enormous number of English words apparently

---

138. Mathew Latimer to Thomas Murphy, "Re: Dispelling Rumors," e-mail, 21 March 2004. Murphy has reproduced this letter in his "Inventing Galileo," *Sunstone,* March 2004, 60 n. 4. Murphy still seems to believe that someone must have turned him in. Those caught up in the mythology of September Six must find some evil agent out there whose goal is to get "intellectuals" and put an end to free inquiry.

formed after about 1600 by adding the prefix *anti-* to various words to express opposition or rivalry, to identify a process of the opposite or contrary kind, to recognize a party or an individual as being against or opposed to something, or to point out a product or agent that strives to inhibit, limit, or counteract something.[139]

While the designations *Mormon, Mormonites,* and *Mormonism* were widespread in the early 1830s, the expression *anti-Mormon* was initially used as a part of the self-identification of those opposed to the faith of the Saints. The first published instance in which the prefix *anti-* was attached to the word *Mormon* seems to be the *Anti-Mormon Almanac, for 1842,* an obscure twenty-two-page pamphlet published in 1841.[140] What is a bit surprising is how long it took for those opposed to the faith of the Saints to use the expression *anti-Mormon* to identify their opposition to the faith of the Saints.

It should be noted that there is nothing unusual about the labels *anti-Mormon* or *anti-Mormonism.* Nothing in the prefix *anti-* implies that those individuals or agencies linked to this compound word advocate or participate in violence or are mean-spirited, unsophisticated, evil, irrational, and so forth. When an individual or agency either self-identifies or is identified by the Saints as anti-Mormon, what is meant is merely that they oppose, dispute, or are against the well-established beliefs of the Saints. Hence it is amusing to see people scrambling to avoid the label, especially when they publish essays and books in which they clearly oppose the crucial core beliefs of the Saints. There is nothing in the prefix *anti-* that would justify limiting the use of the labels *anti-Mormon* or *anti-Mormonism* to the antics of street preachers, while exempting those peacefully leafleting or otherwise protesting the faith of the Saints or those who operate sectarian outreaches or ministries in opposition to the faith of the Saints. And, likewise, nothing in the prefix would exempt secular opposition to the faith of the Saints, such as is occasionally published by Signature Books, from inclusion under those labels.

---

139.   *Oxford English Dictionary Online,* 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press, 2004 [1989]), s.v. prefix *anti-.*

140.   *Anti-Mormon Almanac, for 1842* (New York: Health Book Store, [1841]).

No matter how mild or blatant their attacks on the Church of Jesus Christ, some critics are inclined to express surprise and alarm, even to be deeply offended, when they and their essays are identified as anti-Mormon. For example, in the paperback edition of his *One Nation under Gods,* Richard Abanes, even with his sense of decency and decorum and despite his obvious indifferent preparation for expressing a genuinely informed opinion on the Mormon past, continues to insist that "the history of Mormonism is rife with nefarious deeds, corruption, vice, and intolerance. So far the fruits of Mormonism have included lust, greed, theft, fraud, violence, murder, religious fanaticism, bribery, and racism."[141] Are these anti-Mormon sentiments? When we recall that the prefix *anti-* simply means "against" or "opposite" in opinion, practice, or sentiment, then the label *anti-Mormon* seems appropriate. The conclusions reached and sentiments expressed by both Abanes and the author of the *Anti-Mormon Almanac* are clearly in opposition to the faith of the Saints. One need not intend physical violence against the Saints or their property to be staunchly anti-Mormon.

It should not be difficult for secular, as well as evangelical, critics of Latter-day Saints and their faith to figure out why the Saints consider their writings—and in some instances their tapes, videos, and other public and private activities (including costly nuisance litigation)—stridently anti-Mormon.[142] On the facing page of the postscript added to the paperback edition of his book, with his ebullience

---

141. See Richard Abanes, *One Nation under Gods: A History of the Mormon Church* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2003), 436. It is noteworthy that the subtitle to the *Anti-Mormon Almanac, for 1842,* reads as follows: *Containing, besides the usual astronomical calculations a variety of interesting and important facts, showing the treasonable tendency, and the wicked imposture of that great delusion, advocated by a sect, lately risen up in the United States, calling themselves Mormons, or Latter Day Saints; with quotations from their writings and from public document no. 189, published by order of Congress, February 15, 1841, showing that Mormonism authorizes the crimes of theft, robbery, high treason, and murder; together with the number of the sect, their views, character of their leaders, &c., &c.* It seems that the conclusions set out by Abanes in 2003 are not all that different from those set out in 1841, when the label *anti-Mormon* seems to have been coined.

142. Abanes has been the target of such legal threats over plagiarism by a fellow anti-Mormon agitator. See cultlink.com/ar/abanes-frost.htm, cultlink.com/sentinel/Vangorden .htm, and cultlink.com/news/apr_2003_sentinel_eupdate.htm, for some of the details (accessed 27 April 2004).

showing, Abanes expressed amazement that some "faithful members of the LDS church" have characterized him as "an 'anti-Mormon.'"[143] However, if his book is not anti-Mormon, then the label simply has no meaning whatsoever—there are not now and never have been anti-Mormons or anti-Mormonism, notwithstanding all the books and essays opposed to the faith of the Saints, and also the more flagrant persecution, protests, picketing, publishing of religious pornography, leafleting, legal action, mobs, and expulsions.

Evangelical critics who publish essays and books attacking the foundations of the faith of the Saints sometimes also pass out leaflets or protest when Latter-day Saint temples are dedicated. Recently, as previously noted, Main Street Plaza in Salt Lake City has been the focus for some of these protests—even on church property and directly in front of the Salt Lake Temple—by preachers who, among other things, sometimes file lawsuits against the Saints and the church. These people also regularly insist that they are not anti-Mormon.[144]

Secular anti-Mormons are far more subtle than the sectarian variety. George Smith and his associates and employees may resent having their activities and some of the titles they publish viewed by the faithful as anti-Mormon. For personal, if not merely business purposes, they may not appreciate being themselves so labeled. But here is an irony. Priddis demonstrated on Main Street Plaza, presumably to sell one of the books just published by the press for which he works.

Is it then any wonder that Jan Shipps observes, "because Signature Books includes on its list *many works* that call parts of the canonized version of the LDS story into question, *some Latter-day Saints regard it as an anti-Mormon press*"?[145] It is, of course, also true that she thinks

---

143. Abanes, *One Nation under Gods,* 437.

144. See, for example, Kurt Van Gorden, "Missionaries Not 'Anti-Mormon,'" *Christianity Today* 41/1 (1997): 15; and Alan W. Gomes, foreword to *Is the Mormon My Brother? Discerning the Differences between Mormonism and Christianity,* by James R. White (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1997), 12. Gomes claims that "contrary to what some anti-evangelical Mormon critics may charge, Prof. White is no 'anti-Mormon,'" adding that "if White truly were 'anti-Mormon' he would let them perish in their error."

145. Jan Shipps, "Surveying the Mormon Image Since 1960," in *Sojourner in the Promised Land: Forty Years among the Mormons* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 119–20 n. 30, emphasis added.

that "this is a mistake," since Signature Books, in her words, manifests a "willingness to publish alternative interpretations of the Mormon experience" that she thinks have "provided a richer picture of the LDS past than would otherwise be available."[146]

But the mistake seems to be hers. She is right about the disposition of those at Signature Books, but wrong in the conclusion she draws. One can, along with others in the Latter-day Saint scholarly community, desire better written, more accurate, more imaginative, more richly detailed accounts of the Latter-day Saint past. And one can applaud the significant steps that have been taken in this direction. And, of course, Signature Books, whatever its ideology, has played a modest but not crucial role in this. It is not every item on its list but the constant pounding away at the crucial founding events—that is, the attacks on Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon—that has led to its being described as a dissenting, renegade press and being made a pariah. For the ideology it espouses, it has justifiably garnered the label *anti-Mormon.*

A Necessary Personal Disclaimer

By identifying the personal and ideological links between Signature Books and Prometheus Books—that is, between George Smith and Paul Kurtz and his humanist operations—the "common humanist perspective" found in many of the books published by Signature Books has been identified. This, of course, has not constituted a refutation of the ideology of the owner of Signature Book or the contents of the books published by the press he owns. My intent has not been to offer a refutation. Instead, I have told a story. My historical account is, as any sound history ought to be, grounded in textual evidences. These evidences are easily available but unfortunately little known. My account differs from both fiction and gossip by being supported by textual sources, which thereby constitute the evidence for its veracity. And what I have written is not an evasion of some intellectual issue; it

---

146. Ibid.

is not ad hominem since the motivations behind deeds, ideological or otherwise, are at the heart of intellectual history.

The Savior's Final Hours

M. Gerald Bradford

When members of the church go to their local bookstore and browse the section containing Latter-day Saint titles, they may see a new book, *From the Last Supper through the Resurrection.* They may notice it is published by Deseret Book and put it back on the shelf, assuming it is just another book on the New Testament by and for Latter-day Saints. If they do this, they will have made a mistake. Those in the church who are serious about their study of the scriptures should own and read this book. It focuses on key events in the last two days of the Savior's mortal ministry and may well prove to be the most important scholarly book on the New Testament written by faithful Latter-day Saints in more than a generation.

In part this is because the contributors critically evaluate and incorporate into their work the latest developments and insights in biblical studies to the extent that they shed new light on our knowledge of crucial events leading up to the Savior's crucifixion and resurrection. As a result, others not of our faith may also be interested in the book for what it can add to their understanding and appreciation of Jesus of

Nazareth and because they might well want to know what Latter-day Saints think about the subject.

Richard Neitzel Holzapfel[1] teamed up with Thomas A. Wayment[2] to edit this collection of studies. In addition, the editors wrote three of the fourteen articles in the anthology.[3] Chapters include a study of Jesus's prophecies of his own pending death and resurrection and a retelling and evaluation of key episodes leading up to the Savior's final hours (both of which set the historical and theological context for the other studies in the collection), two in-depth studies of the Last Supper, reflections on the significance of what happened in the Garden of Gethsemane, three studies on the arrest and so-called "trial of Jesus," one study on the crucifixion, and one on the resurrection, along with a study of earlier accounts of the Passion found in the writings of Paul, thoughts on who was responsible for the Savior's death, and remarks on false teachings that have persisted, from that time to the present, aimed at debunking the reality of the physical resurrection.

All the entries in the book are well written. The contributors identify and deal with salient features associated with each of the events

---

1. Holzapfel took his PhD in ancient history from the University of California, Irvine, with an emphasis on early Christianity, particularly the emergence of Pauline Christianity. He is on the faculty of the Department of Church History and Doctrine at Brigham Young University. With S. Kent Brown, he recently published an important work on the intertestamental period entitled, *Between the Testaments: From Malachi to Matthew* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002). Brown, who contributed the article on "The Arrest" of Jesus in *From the Last Supper through the Resurrection,* is professor of ancient scripture and director of the Ancient Studies Program at BYU. He did his PhD work at Brown University where he studied early Christianity, with a focus on the New Testament and traditions about the James the Just.

2. Wayment recently completed his PhD in New Testament studies at Claremont Graduate School in California. His dissertation was on the Gospel of John. He is on the faculty of BYU's Department of Ancient Scripture.

3. Other contributors include Richard D. Draper, Jo Ann H. Seely, David Rolph Seely, C. Wilfred Griggs, Terry B. Ball, S. Kent Brown, Dana M. Pike, Kent P. Jackson, and M. Catherine Thomas, all of whom are (or have been) in BYU's Department of Ancient Scripture and are authorities on the New Testament, many having done their training directly in this field of study. They were joined by Cecilia M. Peek and Eric D. Huntsman, both classicists from the university's Department of Humanities, Classics, and Comparative Literature and both experts in the ancient world of Palestine at the time of the Savior's mortal ministry. Huntsman has subsequently moved to the Department of Ancient Scripture.

and issues covered. They help the reader better understand the nature of scholarly debates surrounding each subject while, at the same time, acknowledging what can and cannot be known given existing textual records and the current state of scholarship. For the most part, they present their findings in well-reasoned, fully documented, and convincing ways.

Many of the subjects dealt with in the book are complicated and may prove to be a bit demanding for some readers. Those who persist will find the effort rewarding. Readers will often discover new insights and may find that their thinking has changed as a result of how the authors painstakingly lay out and analyze each subject. They will come away with an added appreciation for the meaning and significance of these key events in the final days of the mortal life of the Savior because of how the contributors weave together the results of their scholarship with their personal testimonies of the Savior.

Herein lies what is distinctive about the book. These faithful scholars have made a concerted effort not to rework old scholarship on the New Testament but rather to fully engage the latest developments in biblical studies resulting from recent archaeological discoveries, newly discovered ancient documents, and improved access to such material, all of which greatly enhance our knowledge of the ancient world of the Middle East at the time of the Savior.

What's more, their studies are judiciously informed by recent developments and refinements in New Testament critical studies. In this regard they are entering into dialogue with other New Testament scholars in a common quest for truths that can be discerned in this manner. Such text-critical studies can help scholars sort through a host of issues centering on what often appear to be interpolations, changes, or editing of the biblical text that have taken place over time and can assist them in coming to some tentative conclusions as to what might have been in earlier versions of the texts. They can also be a means of systematically dealing with differing witnesses of a common event, as often happens in the four Gospels.

Contemporary New Testament critical studies is a pluralism of competing claims and positions.[4] At one end are those who, like the contributors to this anthology, acknowledge Jesus of Nazareth as the Savior, view the writings of the New Testament as authentic and reliable witnesses of him, and believe not only in his many teachings and miracles but wholly accept his greatest miracle of all, the resurrection. At the other end of the spectrum are scholars who profess doubts about who Jesus really was; reject most of the sayings, teachings, and deeds traditionally attributed to him; dismiss the New Testament record as an unreliable historical account; and, in some instances, openly deny that Jesus ever existed. Successfully negotiating this diverse field is difficult and has been accomplished in this instance because of the particular scholarly training each of the contributors brings to the task and, more importantly, because each of them acknowledges that they come to their reading and study of the New Testament informed by and convinced of the truths of the restored gospel as found in this sacred text and other restoration scripture. They have demonstrated, in other words, what it means for them and others to speak what President Kimball calls "the language of scholarship and faith" (p. vii).

This book amply demonstrates that relying on these recent developments and employing these refined methodological approaches

---

4. In his introduction, Andrew C. Skinner, dean of Religious Education at BYU, deals with this issue and briefly calls attention to some of the pitfalls that can result from uncritically relying on positions taken by some scholars who begin and end their study of the New Testament and of Jesus from a decidedly naturalistic perspective. Those interested in pursuing this subject further may profit from reading Raymond Martin's *The Elusive Messiah: A Philosophical Overview of the Quest for the Historical Jesus* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1999). Martin is a philosopher at the University of Maryland. He is interested in the age-old question of faith and reason and how this is played out in terms of how Christian belief can properly respond to the challenge of secular historical scholarship, particularly as it is expressed in the form of much of what currently goes on in New Testament critical studies. The value of his book lies not so much in his advice on how Christians should position themselves in regard to their secular critics, but in his helpful retelling of the history of biblical criticism, his insightful summaries of positions taken by a number of prominent New Testament scholars writing today, and, in particular, his careful ferreting out of key presuppositions that influence and govern the way these scholars arrive at the various positions they have taken. Knowledge of where leading New Testament scholars are coming from is indispensable to those intent on making proper use of their work.

in careful and balanced ways has enabled many of the contributors to gain new and important insights into the Savior's final hours that otherwise would not have been possible. As a consequence, they have immeasurably enhanced our understanding and appreciation of the Savior and the New Testament.

This is the first of three companion volumes. The editors hope to be able to assemble two additional comparable collections dealing with other salient events in the life of the Savior as recounted in the New Testament. The next volume will treat the nativity narratives up to and including the Sermon on the Mount. This will be followed by a collection that will cover subsequent events in the Savior's life up to his triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

From the Last Supper through the Resurrection has significantly raised the bar in terms of the quality of scripture studies that can and should be produced by Latter-day Saint scholars. It represents some of the best thinking and expressions of faith on the subject. And it is timely, appearing as it does when there is an increasing interest in this country and abroad in the subject of Jesus, particularly in the manner and meaning of his death. The question is, how many outside the church know our position on the Savior in anything like the detail provided in this book? And herein lies a challenge.

How can we get books like *From the Last Supper through the Resurrection* into the academic scholarly market? As a result of the worldwide growth of the church, universities in this country and abroad are establishing Mormon Studies programs. The best way to insure that books like Holzapfel and Wayment's are known and selected for use in such curriculum is to make sure that such titles are distributed within the academic market by publishers with reputations for producing top-quality scholarly work.

I began by noting that Deseret Book published this book.[5] They should be applauded for this and for insuring that it is distributed

---

5. They did a fine job with this book. It is reader friendly in that it includes footnotes rather than endnotes, a departure from virtually all of their other titles. It would, however, have been helpful if each entry included a bibliography and a list of related recommended readings for those who want to pursue their studies further. And unfortunately, they used a painting by Simon Dewey called "The Last Supper" to adorn the dust jacket. The artist

widely among interested members of the church. If they are success-
ful with this title, they might consider venturing into the academic
publishing field, following the lead of other comparable publishers
who have made such a transition, thereby insuring that such scholarly
titles get into the hands of others as well as Latter-day Saints. At one
point, Deseret Book moved into other niche markets, using various
imprints. If they were to do this again and made a concerted effort to
supply a limited number of high-quality scholarly titles in this admit-
tedly narrow but important market, they would make a major contri-
bution to a growing need within the church.[6]

---

portrays the Savior sitting at a table alone, his head covered, breaking a piece of unleavened
bread. A friend called my attention to this and pointed out how regrettable it was that a
book like this, one in which the contributors have striven as hard as they have to make the
ancient world of the Savior come alive for us, should have a cover that is so inaccurate—
depicting as it does the Savior at the Last Supper, alone and in a decidedly contemporary
pose. Much of what the Last Supper was and is all about is reflected in the fact that it was
and is a communal meal. Most assuredly, the Savior was not alone at that fateful event. And
when he and his followers partook of the meal, they would have been reclining, as was their
custom, not seated.

6. Getting a commercial publisher such as Deseret Book to do its part in filling
this need is only part of the challenge, however. Brigham Young University really needs
to take the lead in such an effort. This would mean reviving Brigham Young University
Press, which, at present, exists in name only. It would mean adequately funding such an
operation. If this could be done, and if partnerships in such ventures could be established
with Deseret Book and others, it would insure that the very best in LDS scholarship,
on an array of subjects by a number of contributors, would be produced and properly
distributed within the field of academic publishing. The recent appearance of Holzapfel
and Wayment's book and the promise of companion volumes to come; the fact that an
increasing number of publications, produced and paid for by various units on campus,
are using the BYU Press imprint; and the fact that a number of comparable high-quality
scholarly works are presently in the works by scholars at BYU and elsewhere may well
signal that the time has come to rethink the need for such a commitment on the part of
the university. At least part of what BYU is mandated to do is to build bridges with schol-
ars and others, in several disciplines, throughout the world. Books such as *From the Last
Supper through the Resurrection,* provided they are known within the academic world,
are a powerful means of doing just that.

Enoch Translated

John W. Welch

Several important volumes have been added recently to the Herme-neia series published by Fortress Press. One of these is George W. E. Nickelsburg's work on *1 Enoch,* a commentary on the book of *1 Enoch,* chapters 1–36 and 81–108. This book will be of considerable assistance to Latter-day Saint scholars and should spare them time and effort. Because no early Jewish or Christian nonbiblical texts have been of greater interest to Hugh Nibley and the Latter-day Saint academic community than those in the body of Enoch literature have been, it is with great excitement that I celebrate George Nickelsburg's superb work on Enoch. He has done us and all people interested in the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha an enormous service, for which we should be deeply grateful.

This book comes highly recommended, and a glance at its table of contents shows its breadth. Nickelsburg begins with some interpretive and theological observations. He positions the text in its historical context; gives a short account of *1 Enoch,* including the chapters not covered

in this commentary; describes the manuscripts; analyzes the text as a literary composition; places it in its apocalyptic setting and worldview; relates it to the treatment of the Enoch figure in other ancient settings; and identifies the main currents in the modern study of this fascinating text. For example, Nickelsburg gives a good survey of the publications of *1 Enoch* in the nineteenth century (pp. 109–11).[1] Latter-day Saint scholars will find all of this very interesting. Nickelsburg also notes Nibley's *Enoch the Prophet* (p. 82 n. 60),[2] although "a discussion of the Mormon tradition lies beyond the scope of this commentary."

Pending future treatment, of course, are the Enochic Book of Parables and Book of Luminaries, which he treats here only in an introductory fashion (pp. 7–8). Treating those segments separately is justifiable since they were possibly of independent origin. Several writings in antiquity were related to each other only by association with Enoch; some of them were brought together in the composite book of *1 Enoch*. This leaves open to considerable debate questions about the character of these texts and about their relationship to each other, to various Jewish sects, to interest groups, and to traditions, as well as to various kinds of religious writing (testamentary, apocalyptic, legal, wisdom, and others), to say nothing about issues regarding when and why *1 Enoch* took its final form and where its underlying traditions and sources came from. Nickelsburg provides an excellent point of entry into this field of research and ongoing discussion.

After 125 pages of introduction, Nickelsburg proceeds line by line, word by word through the text of *1 Enoch*. Each unit is beautifully translated, heavily annotated, and expertly explained. The careful reader will be rewarded at almost every turn with interesting parallels to scriptural texts, allusions to ancient Israelite concepts and practices, and expressions that are rich with spiritual significance. For example, this book covers Enoch's calling as a prophet (*1 Enoch* 14:8–16:4); a vision of the tree of life (24:2–25:7); a revelation of heavenly

---

1. On which, see Jed L. Woodworth, "Extra-Biblical Enoch Texts in Early American Culture," in *Archive of Restoration Culture: Summer Fellows' Papers 1997–99* (Provo, Utah: Joseph Fielding Smith Institute, 2000), 185–93.

2. Hugh Nibley, *Enoch the Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1986).

tablets (81:1); a history of the world from the time of Adam down to the destruction of Jerusalem (85–89); and an overview of the history of Israel from 587 BC to the end of time (89–90), placing blame especially on the wicked "shepherds" and their subordinates, who handed over their sheep to wild beasts to devour them (89:65–67). On this last point, readers may think of 1 Nephi 21:1, a verse restored at the beginning of Isaiah 49: "Hearken, O ye house of Israel, all ye that are broken off and are driven out because of the wickedness of the pastors [shepherds] of my people."

Nickelsburg carefully explains the meanings of the names of the twenty evil watchers who rebel against God (pp. 179–81). These names appear to have the following literal meanings:

1. "My name has seen," i.e., God has seen the wicked
2. "Earth is power"
3. "Evening of God" or "burning ashes of God," referring to "volcanic activities"
4. "Star of God"
5. "God is their light (?)" or "God is prudence (?)"
6. "Thunder of God"
7. "God is my judge"
8. "Shooting star of God"
9. "Lightning of God"
10. "God has made," i.e., God's creative activities
11. "The one of [Mount] Hermon"
12. "Rain of God"
13. "Cloud of God"
14. "Winter of God"
15. "Sun of God"
16. "Moon of God"
17. "Perfection of God"
18. "Mountain of God"
19. "Sea of God" or "Day of God"
20. "God will guide"

I found it interesting that this list names the leaders of the rebellious forces that all banded together and "swore together and bound

one another with a curse" (*1 Enoch* 6:5) to shake God's creation according to their own will. These key figures are main powers in the Enochic heavenly panoply. Thus, it seems significant that when "the prophet" (Zenos) spoke of the Lord God visiting the house of Israel in the day of destruction that would accompany the cataclysmic death of the Son of God, the Book of Mormon text in 1 Nephi 19 includes most of these heavenly elements as the instruments that will implement the visitation of the Lord. In other words, the Book of Mormon text assumes that these rebellious forces are again (or perhaps were actually always) in line under the dominion of the Lord God of Israel. The Enochic elements directly or arguably present in this prophecy include:

1. "God surely shall visit" (1 Nephi 19:11)
2. "opening of the earth," "power" (1 Nephi 19:11)
3. "vapor," understandable as volcanic clouds (1 Nephi 19:11; compare 3 Nephi 8:20)
5. "righteousness" (1 Nephi 19:11)
6. "thunderings" (1 Nephi 19:11)
7. "they shall be scourged" (1 Nephi 19:13)
8. "fire" (1 Nephi 19:11)
9. "lightnings" (1 Nephi 19:11)
10. "God of nature" (1 Nephi 19:12)
12. "tempest" (1 Nephi 19:11)
13. "smoke" (1 Nephi 19:11)
14. "darkness" (1 Nephi 19:11)
17. "salvation of the Lord" (1 Nephi 19:17)
18. "mountains" (1 Nephi 19:11)
19. "isles of the sea" (1 Nephi 19:12, 16) or "at that day" (1 Nephi 19:11)
20. "I [will] gather in" (1 Nephi 19:16)

Absent here, for some reason, are references to the potentates related to the sun (#15), moon (#16), stars (#4), and Hermon (#11); but more than three-quarters of the twenty heavenly chiefs named in *1 Enoch* 6:7 seem to stand in the background of the ancient Israelite prophecies used by Nephi in 1 Nephi 19. This would indeed suggest some significant linkage between Nephi's explanation of the "sign"

that should be given "unto those who should inhabit the isles of the sea" (1 Nephi 19:10) and these beings in the Enochic heavenly host, whose main activity, as is clear from *1 Enoch* 8:3, also involved the dispensing of "signs." Although in *1 Enoch* these rebellious watchers acted in defiance of the plan of God and outside the scope of their authority, both the cosmic view of *1 Enoch* and the worldview of Zenos and the prophets cited by Nephi would seem to see these principalities operating in or around the assembly of God with power to communicate signs from the heavenly sphere to mortals abroad on the earth.

The book ends with an extensive bibliography (pp. 561–71), citation index (pp. 573–608), and name register (pp. 609–16), but no subject index. Mining this text for a comprehensive list of its topics and passages of interest to Latter-day Saints remains to be accomplished. Nickelsburg has provided Latter-day Saint scholars with a remarkable tool. We welcome and appreciate his thorough work.

Did the Early Christian Church Seek Salvation for the Dead?

Gaye Strathearn

Jeffrey Trumbower has produced a volume discussing the concept of salvation for the dead in early Christianity that will be of great interest to many Latter-day Saint scholars and informed readers. In October 1840 the Prophet Joseph Smith wrote to the Twelve Apostles, introducing them to baptism for the dead: "I cannot in this letter give you all the information you may desire on the subject; but aside from knowledge *independent of the Bible,* I would say that it was certainly practiced by the ancient churches."[1] Although the prophet's "knowledge independent of the Bible" was revelatory in nature, Latter-day Saint scholars such as Hugh Nibley and John Tvedtnes have found extracanonical texts indicating that the early church performed baptisms for the dead.[2] Trumbower, not a Latter-day Saint, has added to

---

1. *History of the Church,* 4:231, emphasis added.
2. Hugh Nibley, "Baptism for the Dead in Ancient Times," in *Mormonism and Early Christianity* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987), 100–167; John A. Tvedtnes, "Baptism for the Dead in Early Christianity," in *The Temple in Time and Eternity,* ed. Donald W. Parry and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 55–78.

Review of Jeffrey A. Trumbower. *Rescue for the Dead: The Posthumous Salvation of Non-Christians in Early Christianity.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. xv + 206 pp., with bibliography and indexes of ancient sources, modern authors, and general subjects. $49.95.

this corpus, although he has taken a broader approach that examines both vicarious baptism and prayers on behalf of the dead.

The author identifies two stories in particular that were very influential in antiquity in the discussion of posthumous salvation. These stories fascinated him, were the catalyst for his research, and became important threads that he wove throughout his discussion. The first is the story of Thecla (found in the *Acts of Paul*), wherein she offers a prayer on behalf of Falconilla, the deceased pagan daughter of her friend and protector, Tryphaena. Falconilla appears in a dream to her mother, Tryphaena, and says, "Mother, thou shalt have in my place the stranger, the desolate Thecla, that she may pray for me and I be translated to the place of the just."[3] The second story involves a third-century AD woman by the name of Perpetua, a Christian convert who eventually becomes a martyr. While she is in prison she sees a vision of her younger brother Dinocrates, who had died at the age of seven from some form of facial tumor. In the vision he is separated from his sister by a huge gulf. Perpetua sees him coming out of a dark hole. He is very thirsty, pale, and dirty. Although she sees a pool of water nearby, her brother is too small to reach it. As a result Perpetua prays day and night for her brother until she receives a second vision. This time she sees that the tumor on her brother's face has healed and that he is able to drink from the pool of water. Both of these stories support the belief that the prayer of a righteous person can influence the status of people in the afterlife.

Trumbower began his research by asking when and why the Christian Church, primarily in the West, began to see death as such a "sharp boundary" that precluded the dead from participating in salvation. His approach analyzes the "exceptions to this general principle from ancient Christianity," such as the stories of Thecla and Perpetua, and he concludes that "the principle itself was slow to develop and not universally accepted in the Christian movement's first four hundred

---

3. *Acts of Paul* 23.27, in *New Testament Apocrypha*, ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher and trans. R. McL. Wilson (Cambridge, England: Clarke, 1992), 2:244.

years. In fact, only in the West was this principle definitively articulated, due in large part to the work and influence of Augustine" (p. 3).

Rescue for the Dead is divided into eight chapters that discuss the major relevant sources in antiquity: "Greek, Roman, and Jewish Succor for the Dead," "The New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature," "Thecla's Prayer for Falconilla," "Perpetua's Prayer for Dinocrates," "Jesus' Descent to the Underworld," "Posthumous Progress and Universal Salvation," "Augustine's Rejection of Posthumous Salvation for Non-Christians," and "Gregory the Great's Prayer for Trajan."

After examining the relevant texts, Trumbower concludes that the motivations for those who supported posthumous salvation were diverse. They included creating "an alternative 'family' of supporters among the dead," "making sure that Christianity had an ancient pedigree by rescuing long-dead culture heroes," and being "concerned about theological and philosophical issues surrounding the justice and mercy of God" (p. 154). In contrast, the common thread among those who rejected salvation for the dead "was their conviction that if God were to show mercy to non-Christians after death, or if a non-Christian were able to repent after death, then there would be no urgent need to set things right in this life. The church on earth would not be the sole locus of salvation, and moral seriousness might go into decline. . . . The relevance, power, and authority of the church on earth were at stake" (p. 155).

Throughout the book Trumbower does a very nice job of tracing "the history of theological ideas" (p. 9). Both scholars and lay readers can benefit from his collection of the relevant texts and his careful analysis. Perhaps Trumbower's greatest contribution is his discussion of the sociological contexts for the texts. As he notes, "beliefs and practices concerning salvation of the dead can disclose a great deal about the world of the living" (p. 9). For example, Trumbower shows that before he was a bishop, Augustine, when discussing Matthew 5:26, "holds out the possibility . . . for a change of fate after death, an escape from punishment" (p. 129). However, it was during his debate with a young convert named Vincentius Victor that Augustine, now a bishop, solidified his rejection of any posthumous salvation (pp. 133–37). Trumbower argues

that Vincentius Victor's desire for the church to extend its salvation to nonmembers after their deaths "makes perfect sense in a historical context of the transition from a largely pagan culture to a largely Christian one. Divided families [meaning families consisting of both pagans and Christians] . . . and religious ruptures between the generations were the norm. In advocating their merciful position, however, in Augustine's view these people diminished the role and authority of the church on earth" (pp. 139–40).

The author is well aware of the Latter-day Saint practice of performing baptisms for the dead.[4] In his introduction he describes the Shakers and Mormons as "two examples from American history" that "illustrate what it can mean when a Christian community envisions the possibility of posthumous salvation for non-Christians." He incorporates these examples to "help to define some of the issues at stake in the ancient sources" (p. 3). Trumbower gives a fair description of the Latter-day Saint practice, although he does sensationalize it a little when he begins the discussion with the 1995 controversy over whether members should do vicarious baptisms for victims of the Holocaust.[5] He mentions the church's "95-year rule" on doing baptisms for those not in a member's direct line and quotes Elder Monte Brough to the effect that "church officials had directed members to stop baptizing Holocaust victims in 1991, 'but the ban was violated by some

---

4.   Trumbower has a neighbor who is a member of the church and provided him with "some of the resources on Mormon theology found in the introduction" (p. viii). These sources include Doctrine and Covenants 137 (although he knows it from when it was an appendix to the Pearl of Great Price); Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954–56); M. Guy Bishop, "'What Has Become of Our Fathers?' Baptism for the Dead at Nauvoo," *Dialogue* 23/2 (1990): 85–97; and Grant Underwood, "Baptism for the Dead: Comparing RLDS and LDS Perspectives," *Dialogue* 23/2 (1990): 99–105. He does not seem to be aware of Doctrine and Covenants 138 or of President Wilford Woodruff's 1894 revelation encouraging members to be sealed to their parents: "We want the Latter-day Saints from this time to trace their genealogies as far as they can, and to be sealed to their fathers and mothers. Have children sealed to their parents, and run this chain through as far as you can get it." *The Discourses of Wilford Woodruff,* ed. G. Homer Durham (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1969), 157.

5.   See Gustav Niebuhr, "Mormons to End Holocaust Victim Baptism," *New York Times,* 29 April 1995, national edition. Cf. the First Presidency statement on the matter published in the *Church News,* 8 July 1995, 3.

over-zealous record gatherers who were motivated by love and compassion after visiting Holocaust museums and memorials'" (p. 5).

Trumbower also gives a brief account of the introduction of the practice of vicarious baptism, including the Prophet Joseph Smith's vision about his brother Alvin, Elijah's bestowal of the sealing keys on Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, and references to Malachi 4:6 and 1 Corinthians 15:29. He then notes the contrasts between the baptisms that were performed for "the dead American heroes John Adams, George and Martha Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and most of the signers of the Declaration of Independence" and the fact that the sons of perdition are not eligible for any posthumous salvation (D&C 76:31–36, although he cites it as D&C 71:31–36; p. 5). He also acknowledges that "everyone in the world who is interested in family history and genealogy has benefited from the enormous resources the Latter-day Saints have put into research for saving the dead" (p. 6).

With this background laid, Trumbower makes five references to the Latter-day Saint practice throughout the remainder of his book. First, in his discussion of 1 Corinthians 15:29 he agrees "with Mormon prophet Joseph Smith" that "the grammar and logic of the passage point to a practice of vicarious baptism of a living person for the benefit of a dead person," although he uses the Marcionite model to argue that such baptisms were only performed for those "who had indicated a clear desire to be baptized while still alive" (pp. 35, 36). Second, when discussing the Shepherd of Hermas 9.16 and *Epistula Apostolorum* 27, he draws an analogy between some early Christians' desire to co-opt ancient dead heroes into their new religion with the "early Mormon baptism of George Washington" (p. 49). Third, Trumbower interprets the "nineteenth-century Mormon practice" (p. 86) as a response to the persecutions and family rejection that resulted from the creation of a new religion. He compares it to Thecla's and Perpetua's prayers as a means of "creating a new family among the dead, in part replacing their living families who have rejected them" (p. 86). Fourth, he compares Latter-day Saint practices with the Nag Hammadi text, the *Apocryphon of John,* where there is a clear statement that certain people will have no opportunity to repent in the next life. These are people who "have

turned away" (*Apocryphon of John,* II, 27, 23).[6] Then Trumbower writes, "It is significant that the only souls without hope are those of apostates, strikingly similar to Mormon theology. . . . Leaving the elect group is the only unforgivable sin, quite an effective strategy to maintain group identity, cohesiveness, and control" (p. 112). The fifth and last reference is part of the conclusion.

> Latter-day Saints and Shakers of the nineteenth century revived certain types of posthumous salvation, without necessarily being aware of the earlier history, save the one Pauline passage about baptism on behalf of the dead, 1 Cor. 15:29. This shows that the religious impulse to rescue the dead can arise any time there is enthusiasm for the new activity of God in the world. If the living can share in the new blessings bestowed by God, why should the dead be excluded? If the living can reorient themselves, repent, and/or benefit from the prayers of the living, why not the dead? For the Shakers, Mormons, and Universalists of the nineteenth century, reinterpreting traditional Christianity also meant throwing off traditional Christian restrictions on salvation for the dead. (p. 155)

One place in which Trumbower could have interjected another reference to the Latter-day Saints is in his discussion in chapter 5 of 1 Peter 3:18–20; 4:6 and of Christ's descent to the underworld, but he does not seem to be aware of Doctrine and Covenants 138 or the importance of these Petrine passages for Latter-day Saint understanding of vicarious baptisms.

On the whole I think that both Latter-day Saint scholars and informed readers will enjoy *Rescue for the Dead.* It does a very nice job of bringing together most of the relevant documents from antiquity.[7] Readers should, however, realize that the author's approach to the

---

6. Frederik Wisse, trans., *The Apocryphon of John* (II, 1; III, 1; IV, 1; and BG 8502, 2), in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English,* ed. James M. Robinson and Richard Smith, 3rd ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990), 120.

7. Some omissions include the Ethiopic materials mentioned in Tvedtnes, "Baptism for the Dead," 55–78.

Latter-day Saints is sociological rather than theological. That has two main consequences for his work: it allows him to give a fair description of our practices, but it also means that his interpretation of those practices comes from the realm of the social sciences rather than from the realm of faith. This colors the interpretation. I think, however, that Trumbower's concluding sentiments are worth noting: "Although I have much sympathy for those in every age who have wished to rescue the dead, it is not the goal of this volume to take sides or to chart a course for Christian theology. Those who take on such a task, however, should be informed of the early history of the question in all its facets, and if this book has shed some light on that history, then it will have achieved its goals" (p. 155). In that aspect, I think Trumbower has produced a very fine volume.

Can Early Chinese Maritime Expeditions Shed Light on Lehi's Voyage to the New World?

John A. Tvedtnes

Various ancient Chinese texts suggest that small groups of explorers may have reached the New World. The most well-known such voyage is that of the Buddhist monk Hwui Shan, in the mid-fifth century AD. But it is a series of fifteenth-century voyages that has more recently become an object of investigation.

From 1405 to 1433, a Chinese admiral named Zheng He led seven expeditions of maritime explorers to various parts of the world. Based on maps and contemporary documents, it seems that Zheng's fleet of eight hundred vessels may have circumnavigated the globe and even discovered America seven decades before Christopher Columbus. In his controversial book, *1421, the Year China Discovered America,* Gavin Menzies describes not only the Chinese records of Zheng's voyage of discovery but notes that maps created before and just after the 1492 voyage of Columbus show extensive mapping of distant coastlines using data not yet gathered by Europeans. Menzies supports his contentions with an examination of medieval shipwrecks (including a Chinese junk and other artifacts of Chinese origin found in the New World). A television documentary

based on the book's theory was recently aired on PBS. Some elements of the book have been criticized by Louise Levathes, author of *When China Ruled the Seas: The Treasure Fleet of the Dragon Throne 1405–1433.*[1]

Zhu Di, emperor of China (Ming dynasty) ordered the construction of a huge fleet of large wooden vessels (up to three hundred feet in length) and ordered Admiral Zheng to sail to other lands in order to establish diplomatic and trade relations. Four people who accompanied Admiral Zheng's expeditions wrote books about their experiences. The most detailed account is *Ying-yai Sheng-lan,* written by Ma Huan, an interpreter who sailed on three of the voyages.[2] In 1405, the Chinese fleet departed with twenty-eight thousand men from Nanjing, China. The sixteen-foot-long Mao K'un map, which is still extant, indicates sailing directions for the different parts of the voyage.

Retracing the 1405 voyage are the crew of a Chinese junk named *Precious Dragon,* led by explorer Rex Warner, accompanied by three other men and a woman. Sailing from China in November 1999, the group followed the route described by Ma Huan, putting ashore at various places in Vietnam, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives. On 8 March 2001, the junk docked at the southern Omani port of Salalah, in the region where Lehi and his family were thought to have lived while building a boat to sail to the New World. Members of the expedition filmed the voyage and Warner is preparing a book entitled *Voyage of the Dragon Kings.*

Zheng's expeditions, it seems, would have taken him over seas earlier crossed by Lehi on his voyage to a promised land. Even if Zheng did not arrive in the New World, his exploration of parts of the Indian and Pacific Oceans may provide useful information for future Book of Mormon research.

---

1. Louise Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas: The Treasure Fleet of the Dragon Throne 1405–1433* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994).

2. Ma Huan, *Ying-yai Sheng-lan: The Overall Survey of the Ocean's Shores (1433),* ed. J. V. G. Mills (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

BOOK NOTES

Larry Anderson. *2 Hour Book of Mormon: A Book of Mormon Primer.* **Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2000. 197 pp. $12.95.**

This condensed version of the Book of Mormon has greatly simplified the Book of Mormon text to help early readers become acquainted with Book of Mormon stories before they advance to the actual book. The author has chosen not to include some violence and some difficult passages, such as those from Isaiah. He has tried to avoid changing or diminishing Book of Mormon teachings. An example of the simple vocabulary and sentences follows: "This book is not the Book of Mormon. This book tells many stories and ideas that are in the Book of Mormon."

K. Douglas Bassett, comp. *Commentaries on Isaiah in the Book of Mormon.* **American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2003. iii + 298 pp. $29.95.**

Teachers and students of the Book of Mormon will find *Commentaries on Isaiah in the Book of Mormon,* compiled by K. Douglas Bassett, to be a useful collection of insights, facts, stories, and exegeses offered by scholars and General Authorities of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints concerning passages of Isaiah quoted in the Book of Mormon. Bassett draws quotations from a wide variety of publications in making this compilation, paying particular attention to commentaries

on difficult phrases in the text in order to provide the reader with doctrinal, historical, and cultural insights to enhance his or her study. He mixes in a "good dose" of commentary, offering modern-day application and illustration of Isaiah's teachings as well. While some may find the work to be somewhat terse or remedial for in-depth study, even advanced scholars will appreciate the effort of collecting all this material into a single, easy-to-use volume. [Terry B. Ball]

Book of Mormon Family Heritage Edition. **Salt Lake City: Covenant Communications, 2003. 552 pp. $79.95.**

Reminiscent of family Bibles in earlier generations, this attractive book is meant to fulfill a similar function—as a treasured possession and a place to record information to be preserved through the generations. The first pages of this large volume feature places to record births, blessings, baptisms and confirmations, marriages, and other important family events. Constructed with a bonded-leather cover, sewn binding, a ribbon marker, and acid-neutral pages with gilded edges, the book contains over seventy illustrations from numerous Latter-day Saint artists. This large-print edition, featuring illuminated initial letters, contains the full text of the Book of Mormon; it does not, however, include any notes, indexes, or other study helps.

S. Kent Brown. ***Voices from the Dust: Book of Mormon Insights.*** **American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2004. xvi + 219 pp. $18.95.**

Voices from the Dust provides a finely nuanced, cautious corrective to the careless devotional treatments of the stories found in the Book of Mormon; it also indirectly contains a thoroughly nonpolemical response to the literature produced by secular and sectarian critics who tend not to take the text or the most recent scholarship seriously. *Voices* thus makes a fine addition to the literature on the Book of Mormon. Kent Brown has provided a judicious and clearly written examination of various historical elements in the text. Taking up familiar stories, Brown, in his usual thoughtful, careful, insightful way, has assembled the latest research on a host of important issues. The fruit

of this research is presented in a way that is accessible even to beginning students of the Book of Mormon.

Richard Lyman Bushman. *Believing History: Latter-day Saint Essays.* **Edited by Reid L. Neilson and Jed Woodworth. New York City: Columbia University Press, 2004. xviii + 291 pp., with index. $40.00.**

A convenient collection of shorter materials written over roughly thirty-five years by one of America's leading historians, this volume includes such important essays as "Faithful History," "The Book of Mormon and the American Revolution," "The Social Dimensions of Rationality," "The Lamanite View of Book of Mormon History," "Joseph Smith and Skepticism," "The Book of Mormon and Its Critics," and "The Visionary World of Joseph Smith." Readers interested in the reflections of a prominent, prize-winning scholar (Gouverneur Morris Professor of History emeritus at Columbia University in New York City) who is also a committed Latter-day Saint will find much to ponder in these pages. Professor Bushman is in the final stages of writing what promises to be a landmark biography of the Prophet Joseph Smith.

Jack Christianson and K. Douglas Bassett. *Life Lessons from the Book of Mormon.* **Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003. vii + 280 pp., with works cited and index. $21.95.**

Coauthors Christianson and Bassett have each written several chapters of doctrinal insights, inspirational stories, and humble testimony that enable us to apply Book of Mormon principles and teachings in our modern day. Representative topics include our need for the Book of Mormon, the plan of happiness, Satan's chains, pride, turning weaknesses to strength, adversity, supporting church leaders, and coming closer to God through the Book of Mormon. The first chapter draws the reader in by telling the story of a young man with a terribly deformed body who was thrilled to receive a set of Book of Mormon tapes. He said he would play them all day long no matter who was there so he could be a missionary. He was indeed instrumental in the conversion of his parents, who

joined the church after his death. The purpose of this book is to encourage us to turn to the Book of Mormon for answers to life's problems.

Arza Evans. *The Keystone of Mormonism*. St. George, UT: Keystone Books, 2003. 331 pp., with index. $18.95.

Arza Evans describes himself as "a retired college professor who grew up thoroughly indoctrinated with Mormonism." He has subsequently turned against both his family and his faith. *The Keystone* appears to be self-published through his own Keystone Books, Inc., and then marketed through a "book distributor." *The Keystone* seems to be his way of settling accounts with his estranged family. The arguments presented in the book are not original; Evans makes few additions to the common store of arguments found in the literature produced by other secular and sectarian anti-Mormon writers.

Camille Fronk, Brian M. Hauglid, Patty A. Smith, Thomas A. Wayment, eds. *The Fulness of the Gospel: Foundational Teachings from the Book of Mormon*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and BYU Religious Studies Center, 2003. ix + 293 pp., with index. $25.95.

This volume, the proceedings of the Thirty-Second Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium, contains nineteen essays. Like most anthologies, these essays are a bit uneven. However, of the more thoughtful items in this anthology, several deserve a careful reading. Among the essays that are timely is Robert L. Millet's astute reflections on the work of grace as taught in the Book of Mormon and received by Latter-day Saint prophets. Likewise, by examining the way in which Isaiah was understood by prophets in the Lehi colony, John Gee and Matthew Roper have been able to cast light on the issue of whether the promised land given to Lehi was already inhabited by others. The essay by John A. Tvedtnes on captivity and liberty in the Book of Mormon and the one by Victor L. Ludlow on covenants are solid contributions.

Robert C. Fuller. *Religious Revolutionaries: The Rebels Who Reshaped American Religion.* **New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004. xi + 226 pp., with index. $27.95.**

Professor Fuller, who teaches religious studies at Bradley University, has included Joseph Smith (1805–1844) among those "revolutionaries" who have "reshaped" the American religious horizon. He also treats other so-called "revolutionaries," including Paul Tillich (1886–1965), William James (1842–1910), Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882), and Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826). As slight as Fuller's treatment of individual authors is, it is nice to have Joseph Smith included among those who get respectful attention. As his brief remarks about Joseph Smith (pp. 75–85) illustrate, the treatments afforded by Fuller of a host of "revolutionaries" tend to be brief, sketchy, and not overly critical. He borrows his brief narrative on Joseph Smith from a few of the better secondary sources, for example, R. Lawrence Moore, Jan Shipps, Thomas F. O'Dea, Leonard J. Arrington, and Davis Bitton. Little is original in *Religious Revolutionaries,* especially in Fuller's treatment of Joseph Smith or the others he labels "religious revolutionaries."

Brian D. Garner. *Search These Things Diligently: A Personal Study Guide to the Book of Mormon.* **Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003. x + 341 pp., with bibliography. $17.95.**

Garner, a teacher and student of the gospel for over twenty years, focuses on commonly asked questions in this mini-commentary, which is arranged to correspond to chapter and verse of the Book of Mormon. He particularly "worked to emphasize the teachings of the Book of Mormon that focus on Jesus Christ and the foundational doctrines of His gospel" (p. ix). For example, questions from Mosiah 27 include Why do we experience persecutions? How important is freedom of religion? How effective are the prayers of others on our behalf? What benefits come to those who fast and pray? Does serious sin take away all opportunity for the Lord's mercy? (pp. 163–65). Responses to the questions are usually concise quotations from others with occasional insights from the author; cross-references direct the reader

to pertinent discussions in other parts of the book. Occasional charts and maps enhance this user-friendly study guide.

Kristin Hahn. *In Search of Grace: A Journey across America's Landscape of Faith.* New York: Quill (an imprint of HarperCollins), 2003. xvi + 302 pp. $12.95.

In her midthirties, Hahn had had a ten-year career as a Hollywood writer, working in television and theater. Her career was exacting, but she was rootless. She sought some deeper meaning in her then unmarried life. Without traditional religious roots, she had her "aura, chart, palm, and coffee grounds read," she was "acupunctured, acupressured, and hypnotically regressed," as well as "regrouped by way of the occasional 'spiritual' workshop, and was always reassured by New Age bestsellers that [her] life was happening this way for a *reason*" (p. xiv). Eventually she resigned her writing job and set out on a three-year quest for spirituality that she believed could be found in rituals. Hahn is an engaging writer. She describes a vast host of stops on her "spiritual" journey—"communing with a Medicine Man," "fasting with Muslims," "stretching with Yogis," and a host of other firsthand experiences in meditating, praying, and so forth. Her sole encounter with Latter-day Saints consisted of contacting "the Latter-day Saints' headquarters in Salt Lake City, which in turn put [her] in touch with six young female missionaries sharing an apartment in the Boston area, near where [she] was living at the time" (p. 69). Without giving attention to what Latter-day Saints believe, she participated for a short time "testifying with Mormon missionaries" (pp. 70–81). In this and eighteen other chapters, Hahn tells of meditating, casting spells, chanting, and so forth. Her interest, she explains, was not in belief in doctrines, which she pictures as "the passive compliance of religious belief" (p. xvi), but in what she calls the "spiritual"—that is, in "the doing" (practice) that somehow helps people "lessen affliction" or otherwise feel that their lives are meaningful. Her

descriptions are vivid but intellectually barren, as is her own current resolute Yuppie spirituality (pp. 291–96).

Alan Keele. *In Search of the Supernal: Pre-Existence, Eternal Marriage, and Apotheosis in German Literary, Operatic, and Cinematic Texts*. Münster: Agenda Verlag, 2003. 347 pp., with index. $30.00.

In this unusual volume, the author, a professor of German at Brigham Young University, offers "a dual homage, on the one hand to Theodore Ziolkowski and to my other teachers at Princeton, and on the other hand to my faculty colleagues and students at Brigham Young, with whom I have been blessed to associate for nearly forty years" (p. 8). Ranging through such works as Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte (The Magic Flute)* and Beethoven's *Fidelio,* Wolfram von Eschenbach's medieval poem and Richard Wagner's controversial opera dealing with the Parzival legend, and the films of Wim Wenders, Keele reflects on themes of human deification, the need for a divine Savior, "our blissfully arduous path to Godhood best negotiated by a monad of man and woman blessed with eternal increase" (p. 7), "the temple as microcosmic heaven and blueprint for attaining the celestial life" (p. 8), and the emptiness of an existence void of transcendent meaning.

Dennis H. Leavitt, Richard O. Christensen, et al. *Scripture Study for Latter-day Saint Families: The Book of Mormon*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003. ix + 374 pp., with bibliography and index. $19.95.

This resource provides options for family scripture study beyond the mere reading of verses and chapters. Activities, object lessons, stories, quotations, and insights—identified by icons—help families to become students of the scriptures. For nearly every verse of the Book of Mormon, this book offers creative teaching ideas. *Scripture Study* is designed to be simple to use, even for children, and follows the Book of Mormon sequentially. Families can select those activities that will best enhance and enrich their study of the Book of Mormon.

Richard E. Turley Jr., ed. and prod. *Selected Collections from the Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.* **Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2002. 2 vols., 74 DVDs. $1,299.**

Selected Collections contains high-quality images of more than four hundred thousand manuscript pages from the archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The two-volume, forty-seven–DVD set includes documents such as journals, histories, and minutes from the Church Historian's Office; architectural drawings of the Salt Lake and Nauvoo Temples; minutes of various conferences and Relief Society, council, and quorum meetings; and letter books, papers, and journals of prophets and other prominent church members up to the early twentieth century. Now anyone with access to a DVD drive and Web browser can view these documents in full color, at high resolution, rather than pore over microfilm. This is a tremendous contribution to personal and scholarly research in the field of Latter-day Saint history.

Drew Williams. *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Understanding Mormonism.* **New York: Alpha Books, 2003. xxi +313 pp., with appendixes and index. $18.95.**

Williams presents a basic, sometimes very simplified, overview of the beliefs and history of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He does so without giving it a "missionary" feel, which makes the book more approachable by merely curious readers. However, in the spirit of "Idiot's Guide," Williams's tone is lighthearted and humorous, which can become slightly offensive when he deals with serious doctrine. On the whole, though, the book invites readers to transform any feelings of apprehension that they may have toward the Church of Jesus Christ into feelings of trust and understanding.

Index

The FARMS Review 2003

By Author

The entries in this section are listed by author, title, reviewer (in parentheses), volume number, and beginning page number.

By Title

The entries in this section are listed by title, author, reviewer (in parentheses), volume number, and beginning page number.

Historicity and the Latter-day Saint Scriptures, edited by Paul Y. Hoskisson (Keith H. Lane), 15/2:1.

How Greek Philosophy Corrupted the Christian Concept of God, by Richard R. Hopkins (Benjamin I. Huff), 15/1:273.

Hugh Nibley: A Consecrated Life, by Boyd Petersen (Don Norton), 15/2:411.

An Insider's View of Mormon Origins, by Grant H. Palmer (Mark Ashurst-McGee), 15/2:309; (Davis Bitton), 15/2:257; (Steven C. Harper), 15/2:273; (Louis Midgley), 15/2:365.

Inside the Mind of Joseph Smith: Psychobiography and the Book of Mormon, by Robert D. Anderson (Larry E. Morris), 15/1:311.

The Jewish Messiahs: From the Galilee to Crown Heights, by Harris Lenowitz (Jeffrey R. Chadwick), 15/1:403.

Jews and Mormons: Two Houses of Israel, by Frank J. Johnson and Rabbi William J. Leffler (Jeffrey R. Chadwick), 15/1:403.

Joseph Smith, by Robert V. Remini (Jan Shipps), 15/2:443.

Mapping the Book of Mormon: A Comprehensive Geography of Nephite America, by Robert A. Pate (Brant Gardner), 15/2:15.

"Monotheism, Mormonism, and the New Testament Witness," by Paul Owen, in *The New Mormon Challenge,* 271–314 (Barry R. Bickmore), 15/1:215.

Mormon's Map, by John L. Sorenson (Randall P. Spackman), 15/1:19.

Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God's Openness, by Clark H. Pinnock (David L. Paulsen and Matthew G. Fisher), 15/2:415.

Muhammad, Judah, and Joseph Smith, by C. Reynolds Mackay (Brian M. Hauglid), 15/1:421.

The New Testament for Latter-day Saint Families, edited by Thomas R. Valletta (Rebecca M. Flinders and Anne B. Fairchild), 15/1:431.

One Nation under Gods: A History of the Mormon Church, by Richard Abanes (Rockwell D. Porter), 15/1:259.

By Reviewer

About the Reviewers

James B. Allen (PhD, University of Southern California) is professor of history emeritus, senior research fellow, Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-Day Saint History at Brigham Young University, and former assistant church historian for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Terry B. Ball (PhD, Brigham Young University) is associate dean of religious education at Brigham Young University.

Kevin L. Barney (JD, University of Illinois) is a partner with Kutak Rock LLP, Chicago.

Davis Bitton (PhD, Princeton University) is professor emeritus of history at the University of Utah and former assistant church historian for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

M. Gerald Bradford (PhD, University of California, Santa Barbara) is associate executive director of the Institute for the Study and Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts at Brigham Young University.

Robert H. Briggs (JD, Pepperdine University Law School) is a partner with Booth, Mitchell & Strange in Orange County, California.

Kevin Christensen (BA, San Jose State University) is a freelance technical writer based in Lawrence, Kansas.

Robert D. Crockett (JD, Brigham Young University) is a partner at Latham & Watkins, Los Angeles.

Craig L. Foster (MA and MLIS, Brigham Young University) is a research specialist at the Family History Library in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Alan Goff (DA, University at Albany, State University of New York) is professor of general education at DeVry University in Phoenix, Arizona, where he teaches English and humanities.

William J. Hamblin (PhD, University of Michigan) is associate professor of history at Brigham Young University.

Benjamin N. Judkins (PhD, Columbia University) is assistant professor of political science at the University of Utah.

Louis Midgley (PhD, Brown University) is professor emeritus of political science at Brigham Young University.

George L. Mitton (MS, Utah State University) is retired from a career in education and public administration.

Nathan Oman (JD, Harvard Law School) is a law clerk for the Honorable Morris Sheppard Arnold, United States Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals in Little Rock, Arkansas.

Daniel C. Peterson (PhD, University of California, Los Angeles) is professor of Islamic studies and Arabic at Brigham Young University.

Michael G. Reed (BA, California State University, Sacramento) is currently a student at Brigham Young University.

Matthew Roper (MS, Brigham Young University) is a resident scholar at the Institute for the Study and Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts at Brigham Young University.

Gaye Strathearn (PhD, Claremont Graduate University) is assistant professor of ancient scripture at Brigham Young University.

John A. Tvedtnes (two MAs, University of Utah) is senior resident scholar with the Institute for the Study and Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts at Brigham Young University.

John W. Welch (JD, Duke University) is the Robert K. Thomas Professor of Law at the J. Reuben Clark Law School at Brigham Young University, editor in chief of *BYU Studies,* and publisher for the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History.

EDITOR'S PICKS

Grant Hardy, ed., *The Book of Mormon: A Reader's Edition*

Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Thomas A. Wayment, eds., *From the Last Supper through the Resurrection: The Savior's Final Hours*

George W. E. Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch, Chapters 1-36; 81-108*

Jeffrey A. Trumbower, *Rescue for the Dead: The Posthumous Salvation of Non-Christians in Early Christianity*

Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies
Brigham Young University