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FOR ANCIENT  
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# THE FARMS REVIEW

VOLUME 18 · NUMBER 1 · 2006

# THE FARMS REVIEW

## The FARMS Review

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# THE FARMS REVIEW

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Editor's Introduction

KNOWING BROTHER JOSEPH AGAIN

Louis Midgley, associate editor

The truth you speak doth lack some gentleness.

William Shakespeare<sup>1</sup>

There have been times when I have been, as my former students might testify, obsessed with the words and deeds of James Madison and Alexis de Tocqueville, as well as various theologians and philosophers. I know these authors only by pondering texts written by or about them. But they have, despite my passion for their writings, been for me merely of secondary concern. There are a few others—Joseph Smith is an example—who are permanently in my thoughts, even more so than my own parents. Why am I haunted by him? Why should all of us come to know Brother Joseph? I will try to explain. I will also describe and then draw some preliminary conclusions from my own initial encounters with challenging explanations and jarring bits of information about Joseph.

More than those others about whom I have or once had an intellectual curiosity, for me Brother Joseph holds a key to something deep in my soul. His words and deeds ground my faith. From time to time I have revisited him in the hope of knowing him better. When a new essay or book appears, even—or especially—an attack on him, I am back at it again. I very much want to be aware of and reflect on all that

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1. *The Tempest*, 2.1.138 (Riverside ed.).

can be known of Joseph's life and times and on the Book of Mormon. Hence I am not displeased to encounter new textual sources, new bits of information, and new explanations.<sup>2</sup> For me this is an obedient way to enrich my faith in Jesus of Nazareth as the redeemer of lost souls, including my own. I thus long to know Brother Joseph again.

Since I was a child, I have known some things about Brother Joseph. I can still remember the gathering in which I first became aware of his encounters with the heavenly messenger that eventually resulted in the recovery of the Book of Mormon. I have even imagined that I knew him just as he was. I was, of course, wrong. Our portrait of Joseph is not, cannot, and should not be stagnant. I have discovered that each of us—friend or foe—fashions his or her own Joseph Smith. We tend to make him what we want him to be. Those who strive to tell his story, I have noticed, often seem to be in an adversarial relationship with him. Those coming to him with different preconceptions think they know him. To borrow the pithy language of C. S. Lewis, each of our experiences with Joseph “proves this, or that, or nothing, according to the preconceptions we bring to it.”<sup>3</sup> Others have, of

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2. I treasure a book I first encountered in 1951. It is the second of two volumes by Francis W. Kirkham (1877–1972), published in several editions under the title *A New Witness for Christ in America: The Book of Mormon* (Independence, MO: Zion's Printing and Publishing, 1951). (I met Francis Kirkham in 1950. He had been a missionary to New Zealand, and my father thought I should meet him prior to my own mission there. He had written what was called *Kirkham's Maori Grammar, or Lessons for Beginners in the Maori Language*, 2nd ed. [Auckland, New Zealand: New Zealand Mission, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1947].) I was delighted when I encountered his collection of essays and commentary. He had included some forty-five attacks on the Book of Mormon published while Joseph Smith was still alive, as well as many that were subsequently published. This book, though flawed by contemporary editorial standards, is still a useful collection of these materials. In the midnineties, I convinced those at FARMS to fund what I called “The Kirkham Project.” The goal was to collect and make available everything published on the Book of Mormon during Joseph Smith's lifetime. Matt Roper has been working on this project for years and, with the assistance of many others, has assembled in chronological order some 450 items, including even the title page to the original *Mother Goose*. These materials will appear under the tentative title *Recovery of the Book of Mormon: Early Published Documents* and will be made available in CD-ROM format.

3. C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), 26. The entire passage reads as follows: “For let us make no mistake. If the end of the world appeared in all the literal trappings of the

course, managed to fashion a different Joseph than the one I think I know. I have, however, learned much from the way both friend and foe have pictured him.

### Fortifying Faith

Elsewhere I have shown that even those who detest the very idea of divine things, however they are understood, and who are secular fundamentalists confident in their atheism necessarily rest their beliefs upon an intellectual history whose pages are to them often virtually blank. Their faith or unfaith, as it may be called, rests upon the opinions of an army of earlier writers whose names they may not even know. Since their atheism is not unique to them, they must hope that in the past others have already managed to demonstrate that faith in God, in whatever form, is an illusion or delusion.<sup>4</sup> Since my faith, as well as yours—even if you imagine that you have none, have a different one, or have one that you do not recognize as a faith—is dependent on accounts of the past, it is therefore, in this sense, historical and therefore vulnerable to skeptical historical inquiry. I fancy that I am engaged, on the margins and with whatever intellectual powers I possess, in just such an inquiry.

The faith of the Saints is primarily historical; it has clear historical content as well as grounding. It is more intimately rooted in events in the past than any faith with which I am familiar. Our way of setting forth this historical content—or understanding and explaining it—forms and shapes our faith. Or our encounter with this history provides the justification for not having or abandoning faith. This is as it should be; if those events did not take place or were radically unlike our understanding of them, then our preaching has been false and our faith in vain (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:14). However, the reverse is

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Apocalypse, if the modern materialist saw with his own eyes . . . , he would continue forever . . . to regard his experience as an illusion and to find the explanation of it in psychoanalysis, or cerebral pathology. . . . Experience proves this, or that, or nothing, according to the preconceptions we bring to it.”

4. See Louis Midgley, “The First Steps,” *FARMS Review* 17/1 (2005): xi–lv, at xxxii–xxxvi.

also true. This, I believe, explains my obsession with Brother Joseph and the Book of Mormon. Knowing more about Joseph enriches and fortifies our faith.

The Saints most vulnerable to having their faith despoiled by competing or different accounts of the restoration are those who have just begun to nurture the seed of faith. Some go missing when they encounter previously unknown details or bits of speculation—something they may insist they never were told in Sunday School—about Joseph Smith; others are troubled when they encounter some new or old criticism of the Book of Mormon. In addition, some of those for whom Joseph is a flawless, two-dimensional, cardboard figure may also find their faith fragile when they discover that there is both less and much more to him than they previously imagined. For one to become and then flourish as a Latter-day Saint, I believe that one must ceaselessly ponder Joseph Smith and his prophetic witness, as well as his divine special revelations, especially the Book of Mormon. The faith of the Saints is thereby sustained and nurtured by close attention to God's mighty acts in the past, many of which have clearly made use of flawed human beings not entirely unlike our associates and ourselves. We should not fear but long for further light and knowledge about the wonders of the past.

### **Some Differences and Resemblances**

Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant faith is grounded in the Bible, which proclaims, among other things, that Jesus was resurrected from the dead. In at least conservative circles within these faith communities, the resurrection of Jesus is still believed to be an actual historical event and not merely a metaphor or a symbol for something else. Likewise, the belief that Jesus is the Messiah or Christ is in this sense historical. In addition, there are many other claims that seem to me to be historical. For instance, the insistence that the great ecumenical creeds capture the essence of Christian faith seems to me to be historical and is therefore open to alternative explanations. The emergence of what is thought of as Christian orthodoxy is worked over by historians. Some may argue that what is now considered ortho-



doxy was winnowed from earlier heresies understood as different, and perhaps competing, ways of understanding Jesus of Nazareth. So it appears that faith that rests on, flows from, or involves stories such as those found in the Bible is historical and therefore open to both the scrutiny of historians, as well as manipulation by theologians. All faith that rests on purported divine special revelations or on theophanies is open to competing explanations or is vulnerable in various ways to assault from skeptics.

Unlike the community of Latter-day Saints, the founding and shaping events of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim faith took place long ago and far away. In each case the fateful stories were frozen in textual materials written, edited, and preserved by those within those communities. The resulting texts were clearly intended to describe and transmit the faith. In addition, the biblical stories and other related lore were long ago enshrined in stained glass and stone. Those stories and their veneration eventually became part of the intellectual and material culture of at least Europe. Churchmen and princes often worked hand in glove to bolster the authority of each other by preventing challenges to the Christian lore. These religions appeared, of course, long before the Enlightenment and the resulting contemporary culture of unbelief—that is, before the acids of modernity began to corrode all faith in divine things. None of this is true of the faith of the Saints. There has always been a battle for the control of the Mormon past.

Despite the remote, mostly biblical historical content of Protestant religiosity, little attention is paid to the fine details of sectarian history. There are several reasons for this. One does not become a Baptist by discovering how there came to be a Southern Baptist Convention. Likewise, one is not likely to cease being a Baptist by discovering quirks in some denominational history or flaws in the personality of some preacher. Something like this is true for all Protestants without regard to whether their faction has been taken over by conservatives or infiltrated by theological liberals. Other than providing an explanation for the sources of certain theological differences,<sup>5</sup> Protestant denominational

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5. These quarrels are not over history and thus not over the historicity of founding theophanies but over the niceties or fine points of dogmatic theology. An example of what

(or church) history is mostly of narrow, antiquarian interest—a mere curiosity that is mostly irrelevant to faith. In addition, in America, and elsewhere as well, the old denominational identities have begun to fade. Congregations may now lack discernible denominational attachments. Be that as it may, it turns out that for Protestants it is dogmatic theology, rather than denominational history, that is decisive. By contrast, both the content and ground of the faith of Latter-day Saints depends directly upon the reality of an array of founding revelations, theophanies, and other closely related shaping events. These, of course, focus directly on Joseph Smith and the scriptures he provided.

The faith of Protestants is still historical (or has historical content) precisely because it rests on accounts found in the Bible. This, of course, is also true for Latter-day Saints. Being historical in this sense makes the faith of both Protestants and Latter-day Saints, as well as other Christians, vulnerable to skeptical historical inquiries. This may explain the insistence of conservative Protestants on at least the infallibility and inerrancy of the Bible, if not on its sufficiency. This seems to me to be, in part, a way of shielding the historical elements in the Bible from historical criticism. If I am right, this may help explain why contemporary conservative Protestants insist on inerrancy despite its obvious ambiguity. However, there are other possible reasons why fundamentalists/evangelicals now typically insist on the inerrancy of the Bible. The putative infallibility of the Bible is easily transferred from the text to the interpretation of the text and hence to the ideological content of what is being preached. This can be seen when preachers insist that they speak for orthodox, historic, trinitarian, biblical Christianity. Infallibility shields the dogmas of a particular theology from criticism, but this is merely a corollary of a dogma meant to protect the historical ground of conservative Protestant faith.

The Saints have never enjoyed protection from skeptical, alternative, or otherwise critical accounts of the founding of their faith. Even

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I have in mind is the question of whether the atonement of Jesus Christ is *universal* in the sense that anyone who may come to believe can thereby be saved (an Arminian stance) or whether the atonement is strictly *limited* to those who were at the very moment of creation predestined by God to be saved (a radical Calvinist stance).

prior to the publication of the Book of Mormon, the story of its recovery was being mocked and garbled in small-town newspapers. Brother Joseph's activities were attacked by hostile pamphleteers, preachers, and politicians, as well as disparaged by affidavit collectors (or fabricators) and reviled by apostates. A vast array of textual materials was published or otherwise preserved. Mormon beginnings, though they have been contested from the very start, are not shrouded in obscurity. From the moment Brother Joseph began telling his story, nothing shielded him, the Book of Mormon, and his followers from mockery and enmity. There is simply no way that the Saints can hide much of anything in their past or shield themselves from attacks. In this regard, nothing much has changed other than the scope and intensity of the barrages, which seem to have increased. There have always been conflicting, alternative accounts of the beginnings of the community of Saints. The battle over the control of the Mormon past has never ceased or abated.

Being a Latter-day Saint involves knowing Brother Joseph. One problem is, as Davis Bitton has pointed out, that “many who staunchly accept him as a prophet know little of his biography.”<sup>6</sup> I agree. This is unfortunate since it encourages critics to pound away with sometimes tasteless or even scurrilous exposés and to complain about what they insist is a falsified history of the Mormon past.<sup>7</sup> From the moment that Joseph Smith began to tell of the things he experienced, both he and those who became Saints were confronted with calumny and withering ridicule. The faithful, it seems, must pass through a refiner's fire.

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6. Davis Bitton, *Images of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Aspen Books, 1996), 47.

7. For a sampling of books published 2001–2003 that contain charges of sinister conspiracies, deception, and distortion involving Joseph Smith and his followers, see Charles L. Wood, *The Mormon Conspiracy: A Review of Present Day and Historical Conspiracies to Mormonize America and the World* (Chula Vista, CA: Black Forest, 2001); Ethan E. Harris, *The Gospel according to Joseph Smith: A Christian Response to Mormon Teaching*, foreword by Bill McKeever (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2001); Richard Abanes, *One Nation under Gods: A History of the Mormon Church* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2002); Grant H. Palmer, *An Insider's View of Mormon Origins* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002); Martin Wishnatsky, *Mormonism: A Latter Day Deception* (Fargo, ND: Xulon, 2003); and Arza Evans, *The Keystone of Mormonism* (St. George, UT: Keystone Books, 2003).

To become and remain a Saint has always demanded that one make a decision on the authenticity of the Book of Mormon as well as on the veracity of the crucial elements in Brother Joseph's claims.

For various reasons, both then and now, some are only loosely attached to the faith of the Saints; some are merely cultural Mormons. I initially fashioned the expression *cultural Mormon* from the German *Kulturprotestantismus*,<sup>8</sup> which once identified a kind of "liberal" (or nominal) Protestant religiosity. What that label identified in German-speaking lands has become ubiquitous in Europe, though perhaps less so in America. There are now numerous cultural (or ethnic) Protestants and Roman Catholics and even Muslims and Jews. In each case there is little or no concern with or overt commitment to the historical authenticity of the founding theophanies. (There has also been, rather unfortunately from my perspective, a shedding of the basic ethos of these communities, which now may manifest merely nominal religiosity.) Attachment to embodiments of biblical faith, other than within a circle of primitive believers, has become blandly cultural, a matter of national or ethnic identity, or perhaps nostalgia. I believe that part of the reason for this trend is that within the various Christian traditions the crucial founding events have long been pictured as merely figurative, metaphorical, strictly symbolic or poetic; the crucial stories have thereby been reduced to the largely legendary, merely mythical, to matters of mere sentiment, to expressions of traditional piety, and so forth. As this has happened, the formal trappings remain, but the substance has melted away. The resulting vacuum has been filled, especially in Europe, with something else—often a blatant hedonism that hides from the terrible questions behind a casual atheism.<sup>9</sup>

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8. See Louis Midgley, "The Secular Relevance of the Gospel," *Dialogue* 4/4 (1969): 76–85, at 78, for the specific use of the *Kulturprotestantismus* as the source for my label *cultural Mormonism*. The expressions *cultural Mormonism* and *cultural Mormon* have subsequently become popular replacements for earlier fuzzy expressions like "liberal Mormon," which would seem to be an oxymoron like "hard softness" or "round square."

9. This is manifested in portions of what have become known as the current "culture wars." The passionate appeal for a militant, public atheism can be found in a spate of recent bestsellers. See, for example, Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (New York: Norton, 2004), and the review of this book by Michael D. Jibson, "Imagine," in this number of the *FARMS Review*, pages 233–64.

Faith involving the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith's encounters with messengers from another world seems to have been initially attractive to some who were seeking similar modes of divine special revelation and thus were open to such possibilities. In addition, Brother Joseph began as a seeker and a visionary; he was at ease with fellow visionaries. But he was far more—he was a seer, as well as the prophet authorized to speak for God in the new dispensation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This kingdom was intended to be a prophetic community in which each of the Saints could know the divine for themselves. As Terryl Givens has recently shown, for the faithful the Book of Mormon and the account of its recovery has served as a sign that the heavens are once again open, that Joseph Smith is God's prophet, that the end time is approaching, and that the world is again pulsing with divine power.<sup>10</sup> The divine special revelations in the Book of Mormon are actual conversations or dialogues with deity; they are not mere momentary and ineffable flashes or ephemeral feelings.

The Book of Mormon, coupled with Joseph's own story, invited the Saints to enter for themselves into an enchanting and enchanted world. This notion of divine disclosure is radically different from traditional concepts of revelation found among sectarian Christians, including mystical intuitions, or much that typically takes place in Pentecostal circles. The revelatory process the Saints are encouraged to enter is exemplified by the way in which the Book of Mormon was recovered. In addition, the Book of Mormon urges those who receive it to begin to experience the manifestations of the divine for themselves in ways that radically diverge from the interiority and subjectivity of much religious discourse; it thus moves away from the nebulous substance of myth or mysticism. But a faith responding to encounters with the divine in the sensible world, though it clearly has its attractions and advantages, is also a double-edged sword because the founding theophanies and resulting texts, as well as the experiences of the Saints, are open to the scrutiny of a scholarship often grounded on entirely secular assumptions.

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

In addition, much sectarian theological discourse has tended to emphasize the radical otherness of God, who is supposed to be *ganz anders* (“wholly other”), utterly transcendent, beyond time and space, and so forth. In such a theology there is said to be an infinite qualitative difference between God and mere finite creatures. This way of seeing divine things stresses not merely the frailty of language, which all would concede, including Brother Joseph, but the essential inability of language to describe divine things with any concreteness. The most radical version of this tendency is found in mystical theology and is illustrated by most of those who are labeled mystics. Their intuitions are said to be strictly ineffable. This explains why those devoted to mystical theology have, as far as I have been able to discover, never included Brother Joseph in their ranks. Instead, those steeped in traditional theological perspectives, especially those caught up in meditation and mystical reveries, are offended because the Book of Mormon, the story of its recovery, and the artifacts or relics associated with it (the interpreters or seer stones, the metal plates, and so forth) cannot be explained away as merely figurative, allegorical, or mythical or as highly symbolic ways of talking about what is, for them, ultimately ineffable and entirely mysterious.

### **Brother Joseph’s Role in the Faith of the Saints**

Brother Joseph’s own remarkable encounters with the divine, sometimes with others as witnesses or active participants, invite the Saints to encounter a past that is both extended and deepened, one that also opens for us, through faith and obedience to God’s commands, an amazing future of genuine wonder and also a hope for a glory beyond the paltry parade of pride and power politics currently taking place here below. While we face the inevitable terrors of our probation, we do so with a hope of redemption from sin and death made possible by the Messiah or Christ. If we genuinely remember God’s mighty redemptive deeds, there is open to all of us a world pervaded with divine purpose and power. We are guided into this enchanted world by looking back to a vast array of encounters with the divine by prophets and seers and their associates, including those by Brother Joseph—the

seer of the dispensation of the fulness of times. What Joseph provided assists us to confront and overcome the consequences of forgetfulness and rebellion against God. Faith provides hope and should infuse us with love. But, when we covenant with God, we are promised blessings for faithfulness or cursings for our infidelities. Given the tremors of our probation, we must renew our covenants often.

As far back as I can remember, Joseph Smith and his world and the texts he recovered or otherwise provided have filled my imagination, challenged my conceits, formed my identity, and grounded my faith in the redemption made by Jesus of Nazareth from both sin and mortality. It was through Brother Joseph that I came to know of a world with grand assemblies, designs for our mortal probation, and heated deliberations and also of a war between competing factions for the destiny of all of us—a war that still goes on here below. My faith in Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah is thus grounded on Joseph’s prophetic witness. His legacy as a seer is a crucial element of my own identity. This is true of the Saints generally. It is so for those who have come into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints already familiar in some degree with the Bible and a sectarian version of Christian faith. Whatever they may have brought with them has been rectified, modified, and supplemented with what they receive from Brother Joseph.

Despite his highly unfavorable, lowly beginnings, Brother Joseph anticipated leaving his mark. He believed from the moment he first encountered heavenly messengers, especially when he learned from one of them of an ancient history inscribed on metal plates containing a prophetic account of God’s dealings with peoples who had migrated from the Near East to the Americas, that what he would gradually set in place would come to bless the peoples of every land.<sup>11</sup> Toward the end of his ministry, Joseph indicated that he had been warned at the very beginning of his vocation by a heavenly messenger that both “good and evil” would be spoken about him and that his “name should be had for good and evil among all nations, kindreds, and tongues”

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11. Zion, of course, would at first be gathered to particular places, but eventually the stakes of the tent of Israel would be planted everywhere and Zion’s banner would come to wave throughout the entire world.

(Joseph Smith—History 1:33). I was reminded during the various bicentennial celebrations of the birth of Joseph Smith of the closing line of “Praise to the Man”—one of my favorite hymns—which reads as follows: “Millions shall know ‘Brother Joseph’ again.”<sup>12</sup> Ironically our enemies cannot seem to prevent this, and their efforts even help make it happen.

Brother Joseph is very much present in the ideologies and demonologies of many who in diverse but related ways detest everything associated with him. Even perhaps providentially, disbelief and incredulity, if not outright hatred and hostility, have done much to keep him alive in the memories of the covenant people of God. Indeed, the Saints seem to have actually needed enemies who, without even knowing it, are dedicated to keeping them from slipping back into the fog of the currently fashionable world by forcing them to confront the content and grounds of their faith, thereby refining, testing, and proving them. For this we can thank Joseph’s many critics—both past and present.

As the bicentennial commemorative events for Brother Joseph took place during 2005, I was reminded that the memory of virtually all of his contemporaries, even of those much better situated and educated, has simply disappeared, often without leaving much of a trace.<sup>13</sup> If the names of some of his neighbors and some of his associates remain, it is in genealogies, somewhat ironically, now laboriously assembled and carefully preserved by those influenced by his legacy. Some, of course, are known merely because they in some way got involved with him. Many have become mere tiny fragments in some statistical abstraction or as nameless, faceless elements in generalizations about vague movements set out in accounts of the American past. Or, if they are still

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12. See W. W. Phelps, “Praise to the Man,” *Hymns*, no. 27, last line of the fourth verse.

13. Tiny exceptions include John C. Bennett, whose career smoldered prior to his encounter with the Saints in Nauvoo. See Andrew F. Smith, *The Sainly Scoundrel: The Life and Times of Dr. John Cook Bennett* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997). The author of this biography, being deeply interested in the tomato and its history, noticed that the notorious Bennett played a role in popularizing that vegetable (or fruit) and hence produced an account of his life. In addition, for Robert Matthias (aka the notorious phony Joshua the Jew), see Paul E. Johnson and Sean Wilentz, *Kingdom of Matthias* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).



remembered at all, they appear as bit players or spear carriers in Brother Joseph's story. Who would have even heard of Abner Cole (aka Obediah Dogberry), or Luman Walter (aka Walters the Magician) if their names had not been in some way associated with the Saints? But the memory of Brother Joseph lives on in the hearts and minds of millions of believers and a good many critics as well. This in itself is strange.

What initially set Joseph Smith apart from his contemporaries and generated much hostility toward him was gossip about his encounters with real messengers from another world. It was not, as some still insist, a brush in his youth with a bit of folk magic that generated both interest and hostility. Instead, animosity toward him in part resulted from his having parted company with those youthful associates mired in the world of treasure seeking. He was, as the first reports published in local newspapers make clear, being readied to recover what his enemies lampooned as a "Gold[en] Bible." Even prior to the publication of the Book of Mormon, news of his encounters with heavenly messengers outraged some of his secularized neighbors who were more or less in thrall to Enlightenment skepticism about divine things. And that news also provoked preachers of the then orthodox religion, who were eager to slam the door shut on any additional divine special revelations and who were also, despite protestations to the contrary, deeply enmeshed in theological quibbling and sectarian rivalry.

The first prattle in village newspapers provided garbled accounts of Joseph's conversations with beings from another world. The story he and his associates told clearly involved the recovery of the Book of Mormon. This is what initially got him into trouble with polite and not-so-polite society. Only later was he depicted by his enemies as deeply involved with magic and the occult. As mentioned, he was, much like others at the time, a seeker and a visionary. But he was far more. In addition to being assured by heavenly messengers that his sins were forgiven, he was a seer who eventually published a five-hundred-page book that he (and his close associates) affirmed had been made available to him by the gift and power of God. His message was not about magic circles or occult incantations or Captain Kidd's treasure, though he might have been familiar with such lore. Early

in his career, as Mark Ashurst-McGee argues, Joseph may have had to distinguish clearly between an occult and a fully prophetic way of telling his story.<sup>14</sup> His enemies, both then and now, strive to find in the often confused tales of magic and the occult and lore about buried treasures some way of discrediting the Book of Mormon and Joseph's prophetic messages.<sup>15</sup>

### Divine Amnesty and the Need for Anamnesis

Through baptism, the Saints witness to God, to the community of Saints, and to themselves that they desire to become the children or seed of Christ. We thereby declare that we seek the only possible remedy for our sins—the redemption made by Jesus of Nazareth, whom we accept as our Redeemer and Lord. Since we live in a world beset with temptations and are vulnerable, we fall from grace. We must therefore repent and renew the covenants we have made with the Lord. Therefore, “it is expedient that the church meet together often to partake of bread and wine in remembrance of the Lord Jesus” (D&C 20:75).

We partake of the emblems of the sacrifice of Jesus “in remembrance . . . and witness” thereby that we “are willing to take upon” ourselves “the name of [the] Son, and always remember him and keep his commandments” (D&C 20:77). Remembering and keeping are not discrete things; we cannot do the one without striving to do the other.<sup>16</sup> In all of

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14. See Mark Ashurst-McGee, “Moroni as Angel and as Treasure Guardian,” in this number of the *FARMS Review*, pages 35–100.

15. When Abner Cole, in January 1830, prior to the publication of the Book of Mormon, included in his tabloid—without authorization—three portions of the Book of Mormon, Joseph objected. Cole sought vengeance by spreading tales about Joseph's involvement in “magic” and “money digging.” Up to that point, what appeared in newspapers were garbled versions of the story of an angel and an ancient sacred text. Elsewhere I have told this story, stressing the crucial chronology of conflicting accounts. See Louis Midgley, “Who Really Wrote the Book of Mormon? The Critics and Their Theories,” in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997), 101–39, at 107–8.

16. For an elaboration of this point, see Louis Midgley, “‘To Remember and Keep’: On the Book of Mormon as an Ancient Book,” in *The Disciple as Scholar: Essays on Scripture and the Ancient World in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks, Donald W. Parry, and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000), 95–137, at 110–24.

this we follow the words of Jesus at the last supper: “Do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19 NIV, or 1 Corinthians 11:24–25; cf. Moroni 4 and 5; D&C 20:77, 79). We thereby give public witness that we wish to be numbered among the children of the Messiah or Christ. By offering our sacraments to the Lord in a communal memorial meal, we signify our desire to be forgiven and to be fully sanctified and return to the presence of the Lord; we also seek the companionship of the Holy Spirit to guide and chasten us in our sojourn here below. The remembrance enjoined upon the Saints thus focuses on our need for redemption from spiritual death and mortality. It is that alone which seals us to God, reconciles us to him, and makes possible a divine amnesty. We are commanded to participate often in remembrance of the mighty redeeming deeds of Jesus of Nazareth on our behalf.

But this is not all; the revelations also require remembrance of other portentous portions of the past to help us, among other things, to overcome the amnesia otherwise found among those who, while still having a form of godliness, tend to deny the actual power of God here and now. Brother Joseph enlarged and expanded our memories by recovering historical accounts in which the divine was active in human affairs, thereby bidding us to enter into a world not unlike the one portrayed in the Book of Mormon. The Lord thereby beckons all to sing the song of redeeming love by entering into the enchanted and enchanting world described in our scriptures.<sup>17</sup>

### **Struggling to Know Brother Joseph Better**

In an effort to supplement what I learned in conversations with my father and in church meetings, I read in my youth a biography of Joseph Smith written by John Henry Evans.<sup>18</sup> I was, if I remember correctly, disappointed by the lack of citations to sources and by the slim store of materials that Evans drew upon. He was, however, an engaging writer. I read this biography of Joseph Smith, which I

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17. For an elaboration of this point, see especially Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon*, 209–39.

18. See John Henry Evans, *Joseph Smith: An American Prophet* (New York: Macmillan, 1933). It was subsequently reprinted several times.

borrowed from my father's library, to learn something about what had taken place during those fourteen brief years from the publication of the Book of Mormon to the point where, while in a little jail, he was lynched by a mob. I was impressed by the claim made by Evans that Joseph had assembled around him men of considerable intellectual capacity. I liked that idea. But I now see this as quite unfounded. I have come to believe that Joseph was not an especially gifted judge of character. Be that as it may, he had to make do with those who turned up, whatever their qualifications, or even, as it sometimes turned out, their lack of moral rectitude.

I noticed that Evans insisted that Joseph Smith was a mystic. I found this puzzling. I consulted another book in my father's library<sup>19</sup> and eventually other books in other libraries. I discovered an extensive, confused, and confusing literature. I came to the conclusion that Joseph was not a mystic and that the Book of Mormon (and the story of its recovery) were not what one could find going on among those commonly considered Christian mystics. As I tried to sort out the claim that Joseph was a mystic, my understanding of him was deepened. I learned then when one is challenged by something written by friend or foe that this should be the impetus for further inquiry and reflection. So my advice to those troubled by something they find in any of the literature on Mormon origins is to look further into the things they find disquieting. They thereby may come to jettison some dogmatic ignorance and to understand Brother Joseph better. I learned at a very early age that my faith did not depend on some historical account, whether by friend or foe, but that I could learn from both.

What exactly did I learn about Joseph Smith when I found myself puzzled by Evans's opinion? He mentioned the surnames of several mystics, thus introducing me to some famous individuals. These included Meister Eckhart (ca. 1260–1327), a German mystic “who carried the idea of absorption in God almost into pantheism”;<sup>20</sup> Miguel

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19. I still possess this book. See John Wright Buckham, “Mysticism,” in *An Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Vergilius Ferm (New York: Philosophical Library, 1945), 513–14. It is a dreadful book, but I still consult it for basic information.

20. Evans, *Joseph Smith*, 219.

Molinos (1640–92), a Spanish mystic “who advised abstinence, torture of the body, and total self-renunciation as the road to inner peace”<sup>21</sup> (and who thereby got into trouble with the Spanish Inquisition); and Gerard Groot (1340–1380), a Dutch mystic “who put feeling above knowledge.”<sup>22</sup> Joseph Smith, I believed, was radically unlike each of these.<sup>23</sup> Evans had his own list of ways in which Joseph Smith differed from those traditionally known as mystics. “Nevertheless,” according to Evans, “Joseph Smith was a mystic.”<sup>24</sup>

Evans actually demonstrated how Joseph Smith differed from mystics and from devotional practices set out by mystics. Mystics typically describe brief, transitory experiences that follow long periods of meditation. By somehow blunting the consciousness of exterior events, mystics may experience a kind of union with that which is presumably timeless, immutable, changeless. The mystic thus seeks through intense meditative exercises (or with drugs) to reach an ecstatic union with what is beyond both time and space, as well as momentarily beyond the temporal flux of events. As Evans recognized, none of this describes Joseph Smith or the contents of the scriptures he made available. In addition, mystical experiences are ineffable—whatever they are, they simply cannot be described except through negations. “Joseph Smith, however, was a mystic,” Evans insisted, “though in a much deeper sense than the word implies.”<sup>25</sup> This is a strange sentence. What might constitute this deeper sense? “The heart of mysticism lies in the fact that the mystic sees the eternal in the temporal.”<sup>26</sup>

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21. Evans, *Joseph Smith*, 219; Evans mistakenly identified him as French.

22. Evans, *Joseph Smith*, 219. Groot may have written in his diary much of what was later to appear as *Of the Imitation of Christ*, a widely read devotional book, which was credited to Groot’s follower and biographer, Thomas à Kempis.

23. In addition to those mystics mentioned by Evans, I eventually consulted the studies of two famous Anglican advocates of Christian mysticism—W. R. Inge (1860–1954), and Evelyn Underhill (1875–1941), as well as Rufus M. Jones (1863–1948), an American Quaker scholar. I glanced at the writings of St. Teresa (1515–82) and St. John of the Cross (1542–91), both famous Spanish Discalced Carmelites, and Jacob Boehme (1575–1624), as well as Christian Platonists who seemed to be involved in one way or another in mysticism. I started collecting secondary literature on mysticism and mystical theology.

24. Evans, *Joseph Smith*, 219.

25. Evans, *Joseph Smith*, 220.

26. Evans, *Joseph Smith*, 220.

And, Evans added, “no matter whether the mystic be ancient or modern, Oriental or Western, this is true of him, if he be a true mystic and not a fraud.”<sup>27</sup> This is nonsense. Neither the Book of Mormon nor Joseph Smith provides instructions on how to achieve an absorption or union with a timeless eternal through meditative practices.

Now, looking back, I think I have figured out why Evans insisted on labeling Joseph Smith a mystic despite all the evidence he was aware of that this was sheer nonsense. It was for exactly the same reasons that others, including Leonard Arrington (1917–99), did the same thing.<sup>28</sup> Since mystics are quite typically respected or at least not reviled, it was hoped that a potentially hostile audience could somehow be charmed into giving Joseph a more respectful hearing by using language to describe him that the authors realized did not apply to him at all. This ploy seems laudable, even though it involved an essentially inaccurate portrayal of Joseph Smith. There is in principle nothing wrong with tacking to reach a desirable goal, although it involves the risk of confusing ourselves and others about what we really believe.

What I thought I had discovered about mystics and mysticism was reinforced by Hugh Nibley (1910–2005) in 1954.<sup>29</sup> He also made a radical distinction between prophets and mystics. In addition, he argued that mystical experiences—which can be found outside of Christian, Jewish, and Muslim lands—are probably real. But unlike the encounters of seers and prophets with heavenly messengers, what mystics experience is generated by disciplined meditation (or so-called spiritual exercises), or it may even be induced by drugs. Such explanations

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27. Evans, *Joseph Smith*, 220.

28. Until I could examine Leonard Arrington’s notes on mysticism (now available in his papers at Utah State University), I wondered if he might have wrongly believed that Joseph Smith was a mystic. He did not; there is evidence that he was familiar with at least some of the reasons this simply could not be true. He was, like others, struggling to find a way of reducing some of the hostility toward Joseph Smith common in intellectual and other circles. He wanted Joseph to get a more respectful hearing. Apparently he believed, much like John Henry Evans, that by labeling Joseph a mystic, some might be led to listen.

29. See Hugh Nibley, “Prophets and Mystics,” in *The World and the Prophets* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987), 98–107. The materials for this book were first published in 1954 and then in a slightly expanded version in 1962.

and experimentations have not, at least to this point, become popular with Latter-day Saints. We should keep in mind that the encounters of seers with the divine and whatever it is that mystics experience are poles apart.

What I believe to be the vital historical content of Christian faith in the past has been, in some instances, supplanted by subtle notions of ahistorical mystical intuition. A momentary feeling of ecstasy in which individual identity is thought to have disappeared has thus been made to replace the prophetic gifts, which clearly do not require a retreat from the sensible world. Something one can manage on one's own through rigorous meditative exercises is substituted for what are wrongly believed to be crude stories of encounters with heavenly messengers.<sup>30</sup> In Christian circles this has been going on for centuries.

Challenges to the possibility of genuine encounters with God have been around for a long time. Such understandings are consonant with the notion that charismatic gifts ceased with the death of the apostles. But the Book of Mormon clearly challenges that notion. The malaise I have in mind tends to impact all historically grounded faiths. I will focus on one account and therefore will not attempt to be exhaustive—merely suggestive.

### Outmoded Beliefs That “Belong to the Past”

According to John Macquarrie, “Moses and the elders are said to have seen God directly on the summit of Mount Sinai,” and those “primitives” actually expected to find signs of an active God, including even sensible demonstrations flowing from reception of (or in support of) the prophetic message.<sup>31</sup> How could this be? Macquarrie notes that

the great religions arose at a time when the world was still supposed to be filled with divine manifestations, and these could

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30. For one recent effort to explain and justify this, see Andrew Newberg, Eugene D'Aquili, and Vince Rause, *Why God Won't Go Away: Brain Science and the Biology of Belief* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2001). For additional details, see the book note in *FARMS Review* 15/1 (2003): 437–38.

31. See John Macquarrie, *God-Talk: An Examination of the Language and Logic of Theology* (New York: Seabury, 1979), 20.

be plainly pointed out. Theophanies took place—or so it was believed—and even when the gods did not appear in person, they might manifest themselves in sensible effects which, since they could not be understood in any other way, were assigned to divine agency.<sup>32</sup>

He reassures his readers that “these ways of arguing belong to the past. The world nowadays has become for *us* a non-religious secularized environment, a self-regulating cosmos in which *we* have learned to describe the events that take place within it in terms of other events that are equally immanent in the world.”<sup>33</sup>

The *us* and *we* mentioned by Macquarrie would seem to identify those Christians who have adopted some skeptical, secular ideology. The result is a disenchanting “secularized environment” from which older ways of apprehending the divine are excluded. Macquarrie struggles to find some way of preserving at least the rudiments of what he calls “God-talk.” He does not brush all of it aside as delusion or as a comforting illusion, but much of it is treated as a quaint mythology. The result, again according to Macquarrie, is that “we no longer look for sensible manifestations of the divine, whether they be theophanies, miracles, signs from heaven, or angelic interventions.”<sup>34</sup> From this perspective, it would not be the Bible that rules out the Book of Mormon but a way of reading it that ends up excluding what appear to be historical elements in the Bible as merely mythical or legendary. The *we* who “no longer” countenance such things find no need for comforting illusions since *we* have risen above such nonsense by learning to rely on reason and science both for explanations and to overcome the terrors of a hard, indifferent world. Critics mocked Joseph Smith in village newspapers from the perspective of a secular fundamentalism but also from a religious perspective not entirely unlike that set forth by Macquarrie. Joseph thus faced ridicule from those already influenced by an even then fashionable skepticism about divine things.

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32. Macquarrie, *God-Talk*, 19–20.

33. Macquarrie, *God-Talk*, 21, emphasis added.

34. Macquarrie, *God-Talk*, 21.



The *we* in Macquarrie's assertion includes those who have abandoned what they consider an outmoded, naive faith as the source of much misery and fear. As Macquarrie explains it,

the archaic naive ways of talking about the gods came to be criticized. Gradually the gods themselves were withdrawn from the realm of the sensible, though they might still be considered to produce sensible effects. However, it might happen, as *in mystical religion all over the world, that attention was directed away from sense-experience altogether*. In any case, new ways of talking were demanded, and as soon as men began to depart from the mythical mentality which thought that the gods and their doings showed themselves as sensible phenomena, religious teachers became aware of the difficulty of talking about the gods at all.<sup>35</sup>

Elsewhere, Macquarrie points out that when one jettisons what are, from his perspective, the mythological and legendary, then one may have “discovered the essential message of the New Testament, if only we can find the key to interpret it. The first step towards a right interpretation is to ask the right question. The question is not, ‘What happened?’ but ‘What does this mean for my existence?’” He adds that, for him, “a religious document is not primarily a history book, though of course it may contain some history.” Instead of providing access to anything like a genuine past where, for example, Jesus of Nazareth—the Messiah or Christ—suffered and then was killed as a sacrifice and later resurrected, the New Testament, according to Macquarrie, is “concerned . . . with the enhancement of life, with setting before the reader a new possibility of existence.”<sup>36</sup> Macquarrie, at the end of his career, invested two years of his life in reviewing much of the literature on mystical theology and mysticism. Though not himself a mystic, he is very sympathetic with mystical theology. One reason is that the experiences reported by mystics, since they are

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35. Macquarrie, *God-Talk*, 22, emphasis added.

36. See John Macquarrie, *On Being a Theologian: Reflections at Eighty*, ed. John H. Morgan (London: SCM Press, 1999), 135.

essentially ineffable, do not contain much in the way of content other than a feeling of union with the Infinite, Whole, or Absolute. Instead they involve self-knowledge or inwardness, or an internal journey. They are best expressed in negative theology, where one can say only what is not there, what the divine is not like, and so forth.<sup>37</sup>

Macquarrie works his way through an intellectual milieu heavily influenced by a version of Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment skepticism about divine things. At least in intellectual circles, this ideology has, as is well-known, managed to erode or shove aside all faith with historical content and grounding that rests on divine special revelations. But this so-called flight of the gods (or death of God) did not happen in an instant; it has taken place rather gradually. Increasingly, since World War II, it has moved from the margins to permeate the very fabric of European society. This is less true in America, except perhaps in intellectual circles where it is manifested in the denial that deity could possibly affect either history or nature and then in the disavowal that there have ever been (or ever could be) theophanies or genuine divine special revelations.

In Macquarrie's assertions one finds portions of the comforting illusions entertained by those former Saints who have somehow become entangled in fashionable, essentially secular modes of thought. The corrosive strands of modernity should not be ignored or minimized. In addition, they seem to me to be much more intellectually interesting than the onslaught by countercult critics or by somewhat more reasonable evangelical efforts to counter what they see as the challenge posed by the Church of Jesus Christ.

### Peeking at the Abyss of Myth

There is a long history of attempts by seemingly pious people to deliteralize (or, more recently, to demythologize) the scriptures. Beginning in Germany in the early 1800s, biblical scholars (as well as theologians) entered into what might be described as Myth Alley,

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37. See John Macquarrie, *Two Worlds Are Ours: An Introduction to Christian Mysticism* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2005).

where they set up residence. By the time Brother Joseph appeared on the scene, scholars were busy crafting ingenious and sophisticated theories in the hope of finding some way of salvaging what they presumed was a kernel of “truth” clothed in the garment of what appeared to be fantastic historical accounts. They claimed that the New Testament, for example, was written by those immersed in crude mythological ways of picturing divine things. Something like this seems to be behind Macquarrie’s observations. At the close of World War II, Rudolf Bultmann (1892–1976) began to purge (that is, demythologize) their habitation. But this was not the only or the first effort made to remove the divine from all historical events. Some of the most sophisticated literature of antiquity, as well as much contemporary theology, even in some rather strictly conservative Protestant circles, is an attempt to find ways of avoiding such presumably crude and unacceptable modes of speech when dealing with God.

Various ingenious ways have been sought to jettison or radically reinterpret the presumably scandalous language and narratives found in the Bible. Flying directly in the face of all this, Brother Joseph’s first public acts herald interviews with messengers from another world. Joseph was, in Charles Dickens’s mocking language, “seeing visions in the age of railways.”<sup>38</sup> Such a thing was simply incredible to those enamored of the modern world. And, as if this were not enough, Brother Joseph told a strange story about a history, inscribed upon metal plates, of previously unknown peoples. He then offered an English version of this record. The Book of Mormon tells of a people who moved from Palestine to somewhere in the New World who sometimes dealt with heavenly messengers and whose writings contain messages of crucial importance for all peoples. All such things had presumably been ruled out in the post-Enlightenment world. To accept those modern

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38. Charles Dickens, “In the Name of the Prophet—Smith!” *Household Words* 69 (19 July 1851): 385. Dickens’s remarks are a crucial indication of how the Saints were seen by educated people. As is well-known, he was very favorably impressed by the Mormons he saw in both America and England, but one thing about them he could not tolerate: “What the Mormons do,” he wrote in 1851, “seems to be excellent; what they *say* is mostly nonsense” because “it exhibits fanaticism in its newest garb,” namely “seeing visions in the age of railways.”

assumptions requires a flat rejection of the faith of the Saints. There is simply no way of getting around this. From the very beginning, Joseph's prophetic claims were unacceptable to secularized intellectuals as well as to Christians influenced by Enlightenment suspicions of superstitious, frenzied, overwrought fanaticism.

Brother Joseph's own manner of speaking of his divine special revelations, the scope and frequency of them, the claims made on their behalf, and the close involvement of others in his encounters with the divine all make his story a thing apart from the usual piety of sincere, well-meaning, and earnest believers. He gave accounts of his visits or interviews with messengers from another world, and he also provided an English translation of his angel-revealed ancient record (and eventually other ancient texts). In doing this, he outraged both skeptical and pious people. He was eventually silenced by a lynch mob. It is sometimes difficult for the naive or cloistered Saint to comprehend the obstacles Joseph's story faces when it confronts the tastes and prejudices of either the secularized or sectarian worlds. Skeptics find it difficult to put aside the lens through which they peer at the strangeness of Joseph's work. It should be noted that the preconceptions and background assumptions of his critics are often enshrined in hoary traditions, sustained by the weight of fashionable learning, while also serving powerful institutional interests.

From Macquarrie's perspective, theophanies, angelic visitations, visions, prophetic revelations, or other manifestations of the divine belong to the primitive and outmoded past. Thus, from the perspective of secularized modernity, the temporally remote mentality in which the "great religions arose" has been superseded by the speculation of scholars with carefully reasoned and coherently argued explanations that wipe away primitive beliefs about the possible presence of the divine in the world. Secular foot soldiers march forward with ideologies that yield or advance such conclusions. When confronted with dogmas that have become the touchstone of the modern world, the Saints face very difficult choices. It is no wonder that some can find no truly satisfactory solution to what may seem to be puzzling paradoxes and unanswered or unanswerable questions.

Some internal conflict and even bad faith is generated within the hearts and minds of those who begin to sense the charms and hear the siren summons of the dominant secular ideology. My experience tells me that there are few who have not had a brush with such allurements. Unfortunately, for some of the Saints the solution to these quandaries has been to assume that their traditional faith rests on the sand of false stories about revelations and is therefore merely at best a charming delusion—one not unlike other primitive or even sophisticated efforts to ascribe some measure of meaning to what is going on here below. But even if that is not the path taken, the troubled one must find a way to come to terms with what may seem to be conflicts between secular accounts she has encountered and the content of her faith. There are, of course, some attempts to deal with these crucial issues; these deserve careful scrutiny. We have made an effort to offer some of these in this number of the *FARMS Review*.

One good place to examine the clash between the dominant secular ideology and the faith of the Saints is in the writings of Latter-day Saint historians. (A similar and related dynamic can be found in other academic disciplines.) These writings deserve close attention because we have the task of telling the story of Mormon things to Saint and Gentile alike. Much depends upon which explanations we employ and whose standards we invoke. Each of our various audiences has different expectations and standards and makes different and often conflicting demands. Consequently, we must make choices between sometimes competing ways in which to tell our story. These choices include the plot we advance and also the preconceptions, categories, vocabulary, assumptions, and explanations we choose to employ. At the same time we have a choice of the reference group or audience to which our work is addressed and whose standards it is intended to satisfy. The history manufactured by those caught in the confrontation between the glamorous secular world and the faith stemming from Joseph Smith will necessarily reflect the manner and degree in which that struggle has been resolved by the historian.

### A Fault or Weakness of the Faith?

During my lifetime there have been more and more dissidents and cultural Mormons who insist that the church should abandon the traditional historical ground and content of faith. Why, one might ask, would such a shift be desirable or even possible? The reason, according to my esteemed former teacher, the late Sterling McMurrin (1914–96), former professor of history, bureaucrat, and administrator at the University of Utah, is that an objective scrutiny of the foundations of the faith discloses “a good many unsavory things.”<sup>39</sup> What did McMurrin include in this category? Heading his list of “unseemly” features in Mormon history was the story Joseph Smith told about his visits with messengers from another world. The Book of Mormon, McMurrin insisted, is not an authentic ancient history and Joseph’s story is preposterous—he was not a genuine prophet and certainly not a seer.

McMurrin charged “that the Church has intentionally distorted its own history by dealing fast and loose with historical data and imposing theological and religious interpretations on those data that are entirely unwarranted.”<sup>40</sup> He insisted that

in the case of Mormonism, the faith is so mixed up with so many commitments to historical events—or to events that are purported to be historical—that a competent study of history can be very disillusioning. Mormonism is a historically oriented religion. To a remarkable degree, the Church has concealed much of its history from its people, while at the same time causing them to tie their religious faith to its own controlled interpretations of its history.<sup>41</sup>

The problem then, as McMurrin saw it, is a “fault of the weakness of the faith,” which he believed should not be tied at all to any purported

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39. “An Interview with Sterling McMurrin,” *Dialogue* 17/1 (1984): 18–43, at 21. This interview, conducted by Blake Ostler, was also published in *Free Inquiry* 4/1 (1983/84): 32–34. Pagination is from the *Dialogue* version.

40. “Interview with Sterling McMurrin,” 22.

41. “Interview with Sterling McMurrin,” 20.

historical events.<sup>42</sup> Faith should be, he insisted, in man (whatever that might mean)<sup>43</sup> and not in God and most certainly should not involve purported theophanies and divine special revelations.<sup>44</sup> McMurrin did little if any actual probing of the Mormon past. Without more than glancing at it, he rejected the Book of Mormon both as history and as prophetic witness.<sup>45</sup> When I was his student in the 1950s, McMurrin was captivated by Dale L. Morgan. It was from McMurrin that I heard tales of Morgan's mastery of Mormon history and that he was then busy sorting out what really happened. What McMurrin and others did not realize is that Morgan's mischievous project hit a series of snags and ended in misfortune.<sup>46</sup>

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42. "Interview with Sterling McMurrin," 20.

43. See Louis Midgley, "Atheists and Cultural Mormons Promote a Naturalistic Humanism," *FARMS Review* 7/1 (1995): 229–97, at 277–94. And see Ted Vaggalis, "The Gospel and the Captive Woman," in this number of the *FARMS Review*, pages 265–90.

44. See Sterling M. McMurrin and L. Jackson Newell, *Matters of Conscience: Conversations with Sterling M. McMurrin on Philosophy, Education, and Religion* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996). "Religion," McMurrin insisted, should "inspire men with faith in themselves." So it seems that he wanted us to place our faith in ourselves or perhaps in an idealized version of ourselves, and not in God. We presumably need not consider ourselves in need of the gifts that only God can possibly provide. We are, both individually and collectively, the masters of our destiny. Having reduced faith to concern rather than trust, McMurrin could then simply ignore the divine and focus his attention, instead, on how humans have either optimistically or pessimistically assessed their own excellence and worth. See Sterling M. McMurrin, *The Patterns of Our Religious Faiths* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1954), reprinted under the title "The Primary Forms of Religion in Judaeo-Christian Culture," in *Religion, Reason, and Truth: Historical Essays in the Philosophy of Religion* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1982), 83–112, at 112. Some, but not all, of McMurrin's papers were included in his *Religion, Reason, and Truth*, and others were published posthumously in McMurrin, *Lectures on Religion and Culture* (Salt Lake City: Tanner Humanities Center, 2004). See Vaggalis, "The Gospel and the Captive Woman," 265–90.

45. See L. Jackson Newell, "Remembering Sterling McMurrin," *Sunstone*, September 1996, 10–11.

46. See Gary F. Novak, "'The Most Convenient Form of Error': Dale Morgan on Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon," *FARMS Review of Books* 8/1 (1996): 122–67; and Craig L. Foster, "Madeline McQuown, Dale Morgan, and the Great Unfinished Brigham Young Biography," *Dialogue* 31/2 (1998): 111–23. Much less candid accounts of Morgan's career, perhaps intended to salvage something of his critical stance, have appeared. These border on hagiography. See, for example, Richard Saunders, "'The Strange Mixture of Intellect': A Social History of Dale L. Morgan, 1933–42," *Dialogue* 28/4 (1995): 39–58; and the glowing but cleansed account of Morgan in Gary Topping's *Utah Historians and*

A history of the Mormon past that followed the program set out by McMurrin would be a genuinely new kind of Mormon history; gone would be the angels, the plates, as well as all the divine special revelations. They might not exactly disappear; they are, after all, part of the textual record. It would be dishonest to leave them out simply because one happens not to believe them. Some way of handling them would have to be devised as well as a way to justify that procedure. Since the prophetic truth claims cannot be ignored and since they cannot be accepted as simply true by the historian, according to McMurrin, some method must be found to explain them away. All the presumably “unsavory things” would be radically reinterpreted through the employment of what McMurrin and many others describe as “naturalistic” explanations. The claim “that you don’t get books from angels and translate them by miracles”<sup>47</sup> flows from such preconceptions and the explanations they frame. Since the Book of Mormon purports to be an ancient history and the acceptance of that claim is the ground upon which the church stands, a radical reordering must follow a program such as McMurrin recommended.

### A “Great Divide”

I have argued elsewhere that, when we encounter Joseph Smith, we are faced with a clear choice—he either was or was not a genuine prophet; between these alternatives there is no middle ground.<sup>48</sup>

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*the Reconstruction of Western History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003), 113–73.

47. “Interview with Sterling McMurrin,” 25.

48. See Louis Midgley, “The Challenge of Historical Consciousness: Mormon History and the Encounter with Secular Modernity,” in *By Study and Also by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley*, ed. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 2:502–51; Midgley, “The Acids of Modernity and the Crisis in Mormon Historiography,” in *Faithful History: Essays on Writing Mormon History*, ed. George D. Smith (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), 189–225; Midgley, “The Current Battle over the Book of Mormon: Is Modernity Itself Somehow Canonical?” *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994): 200–254; Midgley, “No Middle Ground: The Debate over the Authenticity of the Book of Mormon,” in *Historicity and the Latter-day Saint Scriptures*, ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2001), 149–70; Midgley, “Faulty Topography,” *FARMS Review of Books* 14/1–2 (2002): 139–92, at 155–60.



(This does not exclude the possibility of there being a middle ground on numerous other issues.) The accounts fashioned on either side of this fundamental barrier range widely in quality in whatever way one measures such things. Some defenses of the faith are unsatisfactory, while others are much more coherently and competently done. And the same is true of efforts to deny that Joseph was a genuine prophet and to provide a naturalistic account for the Book of Mormon.

D. Michael Quinn also claims “that there is a ‘Great Divide’ in Mormon studies between historians who believe that Joseph Smith was ‘a genuine prophet’ (as Smith defined himself) and those who do not.”<sup>49</sup> I am pleased to have Quinn, who is celebrated for his caustic criticisms of those with whom he disagrees, indicate that, on the issue of whether the Book of Mormon is an authentic ancient text and Joseph Smith a genuine prophet, he agrees that the historian is confronted with an either-or decision. However, Quinn is too restrictive in identifying who must make this decision since it is faced not only by historians writing about Mormon origins but by everyone who encounters the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith. Quinn borrowed the label “Great Divide” from me, and I borrowed it from Dale L. Morgan, who flatly rejected Joseph Smith’s prophetic truth claims and thought that the Book of Mormon was merely “frontier fiction.”<sup>50</sup> Morgan made it clear that he was emphatically on the nonprophet side of what he described as a “Great Divide.” He opined as follows:

I believe I have about as great a reasonableness of spirit as anyone who has made inquiries in Mormon history. But I am aware also of a fatal defect in my objectivity. It is an objectivity on one side only of a philosophical Great Divide. With my point of view on God, I am incapable of accepting the claims of Joseph Smith and the Mormons, be they however

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49. See D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, rev. and enl. ed. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998), 352 n. 98.

50. Morgan uses this expression in a letter to Bernard DeVoto, dated 20 December 1945, which is reproduced in John Phillip Walker, ed., *Dale Morgan on Early Mormonism: Correspondence and a New History* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1986), 92–101, at 93.

so convincing. If God does not exist, how can Joseph Smith's story have any possible validity? I will look everywhere for explanations except to the ONE explanation that is the position of the church.<sup>51</sup>

Morgan ruled out in advance the possibility that Joseph Smith was a prophet because he had found no proof for the reality of God. (He wanted proof before faith, but we all should realize that we will never enjoy the fruit of the tree of life unless we nurture the seed of faith that eventually yields knowledge.) "Essentially my views are atheist," Morgan wrote, "but I call myself an agnostic because I regard professing atheists as being as much deluded as professing theists."<sup>52</sup> He boasted that he had "no personal belief in God and [could] see no necessity for the existence of such a being; I say further that I think that this is the only life we'll ever have, and that we'd better make the most of it."<sup>53</sup> He seems not to have discovered any necessary purpose or meaning for anything, other than his inchoate notion of making "the most of it," whatever that might mean. However, quite unlike some of the current critics, Morgan seems to me to have been rather irenic, as well as having been concerned about clarity and candor. These are virtues unfortunately not always present among dissidents and cultural Mormon critics of the church.

Faith understood as trust in God's mighty and merciful acts on our behalf, both in the past and in our own situation, is clearly not something inherited or merely cultural; it involves a decision, a fate-

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51. This language is found in a letter written by Morgan to Juanita Brooks on 15 December 1945. See Walker, *Dale Morgan on Early Mormonism*, 84–91, at 87. (Gary Novak deserves credit for noticing this candid confession.) Morgan thought that his atheism constituted a "fatal defect" in his objectivity as a historian. Quinn pictures himself as "functionally objective," whatever that might mean. He also wants to be seen as a believer. But, while insisting that he is an honest apologist, he flaunts his troubled relationship with the community of Saints. He is abrasive with those who do not celebrate his brand of revisionist history. His opinions on these matters are strewn throughout *Early Mormonism*. In addition, he does not seem to have worked out a coherent explanation of his history, personal or otherwise, that would constitute a defense rather than merely a slightly veiled attack on the faith of the Saints.

52. Walker, *Dale Morgan on Early Mormonism*, 87.

53. Walker, *Dale Morgan on Early Mormonism*, 87.

ful choice between alternatives. I am therefore fond of the idea that historians (as well as believers generally) face a “Great Divide”—an either-or decision—when they confront Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. This explains why the controversy over the Mormon past continues now as it has in the past.

### The Norms of a “New” History

It is often said that the historian should discover the plot—the facts should be allowed to speak their truth through them as detached, neutral, honest observers of the past. Those who crave the truth about the past should not begin with a theory, conclusions ought to flow from the evidence, one’s faith should not enter into the stories told, the historian should never be an advocate or partisan, and so forth. We also hear it said that the historian cannot, of course, ever actually achieve full objectivity. Instead, while historians continue to see objectivity as a worthy ideal—as desirable and necessary for arriving at an understanding of what really happened—they recognize that it is difficult and perhaps even impossible to rid oneself of all preconceptions, hopes and fears, biases, desires, and preferences. But this remains an end worthy of sacrifice and earnest striving. Complete objectivity is thus not possible in either the historian or in her history. It is, however, a goal of sophisticated, professional history.

With this powerful professional ethos in place, some Latter-day Saints have unfortunately been enticed into believing that by striving for objectivity, including a detachment from their own faith, they have managed to rise above a defective, defensive Old Mormon History and have thereby found a way to contribute to a superior, open, and honest New Mormon History. These labels, or surrogates, have taken their place in the way Mormon historiography is currently described and debated. Sometimes the battle is described as being between what is calumniated as a Faith-Promoting History (or, often, “faithful history”) and a heroic Revisionist History.

For twenty-five years I have argued that it is a grave mistake for Latter-day Saint historians to adopt the ideology of objectivity and to

assume that it grounds a proper historical methodology;<sup>54</sup> I also flatly reject the cozy, self-serving distinction between a retrograde traditional history and a fancy new history that either leaves out the divine because historians presumably cannot talk about such things<sup>55</sup> or that explains away the crucial founding theophanies and divine special revelations as mere instances of outright fraud or as delusion or illusion. I have remonstrated over what I believe is the confusion about the need for objectivity, detachment, or balance when one writes about the Mormon past. The notion of objective historians and objective history needs to be debunked because it is bunkum.

I recently described what it was that led me to reject the idea of objective history and objective historians. I explained that in the ignorance of youth I was fascinated and challenged by the writings of Bultmann, then an influential and highly controversial German student of the Bible who had undertaken to demythologize the legends and mythological worldview found in the New Testament. From Bultmann, I was soon led

to the literature on the interpretation of texts—that is, to what is often called hermeneutics. I came to see that the way we tell stories about the past depends upon how we read texts. I discovered that how we read (and hence understand or explain the meaning of what we find in texts), what we select in the texts we consult or for which we search, and also what we will allow within what we consider the realm of reality depend upon the assumptions and the interpretation we bring to that task or somehow eventually adopt. The historian provides the plot, and so the story always necessarily has a political motivation and setting. I also began to see that the categories and distinctions we frequently take for granted have their own

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54. Larry Morris, in “Joseph Smith and ‘Interpretive Biography,’” in this number of the *FARMS Review*, pages 321–74, has sorted out some of the more serious methodological mistakes made by Dan Vogel in his recent attempt to fashion a naturalistic (and essentially psychohistorical) explanation of Joseph Smith. Many of Vogel’s problems, as Morris shows, rest on an implicit and hence uncritically accepted historical objectivism.

55. See the essays listed in note 48 above.

often convoluted history. From that point on, all talk of balanced, neutral, detached, disinterested, objective historians and their vaunted histories became for me problematic.<sup>56</sup>

In 1980, when I began to examine how Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon were being dealt with by some (but certainly not all) Mormon historians, I noticed that there was an appeal, in one form or another, to objectivity. Talk about objective history, as well as some of what was being written, was disconcerting. I tried to figure out the role the idea of objectivity played in the history then being produced by a couple of historians. When I complained about what I surmised was going on in appeals for an objective history or the need for objective historians, I was lambasted by those who, in different ways, staunchly insisted on so-called objective accounts of the Mormon past—for an ordinary history written for tough-minded intellectuals that was contrasted with a sentimental “sacred history” intended for the tender-hearted Saints.

Quinn linked me with Elder Boyd K. Packer—who ranks right there next to those (even remotely) associated with FARMS—as one insisting on “faith promoting history.” Quinn interpreted my remarks as a call for a history that was not “fair and objective”<sup>57</sup> or, in other words, for dishonest, incompetent, sanitized, retrograde Old Mormon History. Quinn also insisted that Elder Packer had called for a history that evades or denies the truth about what really happened in the Mormon past.<sup>58</sup> In response to the argument that some historians writing about the Mormon past “have adopted the assumptions of secular scholarship”<sup>59</sup> and that, by doing so, they advance entirely naturalistic explanations of the crucial founding theophanies and revelations, including the Book of Mormon, Quinn insisted that “there is nothing subversive about interpreting these developments from different

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56. See Louis Midgley, “A Mighty Kauri Has Fallen: Hugh Winder Nibley (1910–2005),” *FARMS Review* 17/1 (2005): 337–54, at 346–47.

57. This is D. Michael Quinn’s language. See his “On Being a Mormon Historian (And Its Aftermath),” in *Faithful History*, 72, cf. 84, 88 (where Quinn attacks Elder Packer).

58. I have previously dealt with these matters in “Faulty Topography,” 174–77.

59. Quinn, “On Being a Mormon Historian,” 79.

points of view, even from perspectives of secular disciplines.”<sup>60</sup> It was easy, though, to demonstrate how this kind of history tended to explain away the historical grounds and content of Latter-day Saint faith as either an illusion or a delusion. Quinn did not deny that historians were advancing naturalistic explanations intended to explain away the presence of the divine in the Mormon past, nor did he seem to object to this being done. This may help explain why he does not growl when anti-Mormons cite his writings, which they regularly do, as justifications for their rejection of the faith of the Saints. In addition, to defend the faith would turn his efforts into what he thinks of as an unseemly polemic by compromising his vaunted “functional objectivity.”<sup>61</sup>

Here is another example of the kind of reaction I received:

A recent and spirited exchange on the alleged conflict between faith and history as it relates to Mormonism occurred at the 1981 meeting of the Western History Association in San Antonio, Texas. Louis Midgley, a political scientist at BYU, read a draft of the first chapter of his manuscript entitled “No Middle Ground,” in which he declared that LDS historians should not attempt to be detached or objective but should be “defenders of the faith.” Midgley maintains that one must either accept Joseph Smith as a prophet or reject him as a fraud. To explain any of Joseph Smith’s revelations or teachings as in part products of his culture “is an act of treason.”<sup>62</sup>

This account is rather garbled. I had argued that it is a mistake—even treason—for a faithful Saint to explain away the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith’s prophetic truth claims as mere products of a

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60. Quinn, “On Being a Mormon Historian,” 80.

61. Of course, Quinn is, when it suits his purposes, a partisan, and his writings are polemical and didactic. One particularly glaring instance is his notorious sex book, *Same-Sex Dynamics among Nineteenth-Century Americans: A Mormon Example* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), reviewed by Klaus J. Hansen in “Quinn speak,” *FARMS Review of Books* 10/1 (1998): 132–40; and by George L. Mitton and Rhett S. James in “A Response to D. Michael Quinn’s Homosexual Distortion of Latter-day Saint History,” *FARMS Review of Books* 10/1 (1998): 141–263.

62. James L. Clayton, “Does History Undermine Faith?” *Sunstone*, March–April 1982, 33.

superstitious village magician, as the work of a mythmaker (even if he is called a “genius”), or as a mere mystical intuition. I did not, however, argue that the one and only “not-prophet” explanation was that Brother Joseph was a conscious fraud—clearly there are several other possible explanations that critics have advanced. Those who deny that Brother Joseph was a genuine prophet have, for example, striven to picture him as driven by primitive illusions or delusions, as deeply superstitious, or as mad. They have also mixed and matched these explanations into several convoluted combinations. Fraud is thus only one possible counterexplanation. I had, of course, also urged faithful Latter-day Saint historians to defend their faith as well as they can against these attacks. In addition, I had offered a spirited criticism of the deeply flawed historical objectivism upon which not-prophet explanations are made to rest.

Jan Shippo responded to my remonstrances by defending her friends—whom she described as “professional historians—to whom sophisticated methodology and objective history are not dirty words.”<sup>63</sup> In subsequent conversations with her, she has indicated that she is no longer committed to talking about objective historians and objective history. Since I doubt that I persuaded her, what exactly might it have been that led her to turn against the tide and reject the idea that historians either can or should be objective? It was probably the publication of a remarkable book and the conversation it incited.

### The “Myth of Objectivity” Revisited—and Demythologized

In 1988, Peter Novick, a history professor at the University of Chicago, published a full-scale examination of the idea of objectivity among American historians.<sup>64</sup> Attentive readers will have noticed that Novick’s remarkable survey of the objectivist consciousness has

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63. Jan Shippo, “The Mormon Past: Revealed or Revisited?” *Sunstone*, November–December 1981, 55–57, at 57. Additional remarks given in her presentation at the Western History conference in San Antonio (15–17 October 1981) were aimed at me but were not included in the published version.

64. See Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

often been cited in the *FARMS Review*. There are many reasons for this. Among other things, Novick removes the crippling notion that, when the Saints write about the Mormon past, they should not defend the faith, that faith somehow gets in the way of doing sound history, or that they should not write as advocates for the community of Saints. Novick casts his examination of the flawed logic of what he calls the “myth of objectivity” in the form of an account of the ups and downs of that idea among those who have for the past hundred years written history in America. His story begins with the first professional historians and ends in the 1980s.

Novick has published three books. The first, *The Resistance versus Vichy*,<sup>65</sup> was drawn from his doctoral dissertation. I have not read this book. But I have read his other two, both of which are exceptional. In his latest book, which I highly recommend, Novick examines the radical shifts that have taken place among Jewish Americans in their understanding of the killing of Jews under the Hitler regime during World War II (which events have come to be known as the Holocaust).<sup>66</sup> This remarkable book is well worth serious attention. Just over a decade earlier, Novick published *That Noble Dream*. It is, among other things, by far the best account currently available of the American history profession.<sup>67</sup> Novick tells a story, and he has a plot, which focuses on what led historians to believe, and then to insist, that they could or should write objective history—or, in the words of Leopold von Ranke (as misunderstood by Americans) that they could somehow tell the story of the past “*wie es eigentlich gewesen [war]*” (“as it really was”) if and only if they were objective. Novick surveys the appeals to and the controversy over objectivity among historians; he focuses on the place in the hearts and minds of historians of the demand for objectivity, which, he shows, has been, in its various con-

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65. Peter Novick, *The Resistance versus Vichy: The Purge of Collaborators in Liberated France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968).

66. See Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999).

67. For an earlier and more conventional account not focused on the objectivity question, see John Higham, *History: Professional Scholarship in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983).



figurations and with ups and downs, the myth controlling the rhetoric, if not the actual practice, of the bulk of professional historians. *That Noble Dream* is a richly detailed, cogently reasoned investigation into what was, until recently, the controlling ideology of most professional historians.

Notwithstanding the seeming plausibility of the master image at work in the minds of historians, Novick shows that they cannot possibly achieve objectivity either in themselves or in the history they produce; objectivity is simply an impossible dream. He exposes the underlying conceptual confusion in what he insists is a mischievous myth. In addition, whatever heroic endeavors the myth inspires, it also generates much self-deception and blatant hypocrisy as historians muddle along under various versions of a professional mystique. He also demonstrates that, at times, while parading under the banner of objectivity, historians have been partisan ideologues.

Both Novick's book and various commentaries on it are readily available.<sup>68</sup> I will therefore not summarize the argument set out in *That Noble Dream*. Instead, I will quote and summarize portions of a paper Novick read at a Sunstone conference in Salt Lake City a year following the publication of *That Noble Dream*. In that address he examined the place of the myth of objectivity in the fledgling Mormon history profession.<sup>69</sup> How did Novick end up in Salt Lake? Signature Books operated a book club in 1988 and offered Novick's book for sale. Since the objectivist consciousness that has charmed some Mormon historians has sometimes ended up cutting out the heart of their faith,

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68. For example, see Louis Midgley, "The Myth of Objectivity: Some Lessons for Latter-day Saints," *Sunstone*, August 1990, 54–56; and Midgley, review of *That Noble Dream*, by Peter Novick, *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 10 (1990): 102–4. For a criticism (consistent with Novick's findings) of D. Michael Quinn's thin version of the myth (which Quinn labels "functional objectivity"), see Midgley, review of *The New Mormon History: Revisionist Essays on the Past*, ed. D. Michael Quinn, *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 13 (1993): 118–21, at 119.

69. See Peter Novick, "Why the Old Mormon Historians Are More Objective Than the New," a talk delivered at the 1989 Sunstone Symposium held at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City. FARMS purchased a tape of this talk (SL89096), which is still available from the Sunstone Web site, [www.sunstoneonline.com](http://www.sunstoneonline.com) (accessed 26 June 2006). One can also download a free MP3 version from the same site.

someone at Signature Books may have thought that Novick's book provided a vindication of objectivity. Those then running Sunstone may have thought the same thing. Be that as it may, they invited him to examine recent Mormon historiography and then to apply his views on objectivity to the Latter-day Saint scene. Someone from Sunstone sent Novick a packet of essays to assist him in preparing his paper. What Novick consulted demonstrated that Mormon historians were not immune to either the charms or the confusion embedded in the myth of objectivity.

When I heard that Novick had been invited to read a paper at the Sunstone convention, I also sent him some essays, one in which the idea of objectivity was challenged and also one in which striving for objectivity was shown to result in a history that undercuts the faith of the Saints or that was used to justify such endeavors. His talk went unmentioned in *Sunstone*. A recording of his talk has circulated, as have two transcripts of his remarks.

During his address, Novick announced what he called his full title: "Why the Old Mormon Historians (according to a definition of objectivity, which is not the one you are used to, but which is much more coherent than the customary one) Are More Objective Than the New (then here comes a semicolon); and Why That Fact Reflects No Credit on the Old Historians or Discredit on the New Historians."<sup>70</sup> Novick explained that his way of understanding the past "is thoroughly contextual." He was therefore eager to figure out what battles were being fought, why they were taking place, and what the possible future outcomes were thought to be. He commented on the context in which contemporary struggles over Mormon historiography take place. He indicated that he had "been repeatedly amazed at the high incidence of opaque circumlocutions, fudging formuli, and a general air of what I hesitate to call, but cannot forbear from calling, a certain inauthenticity." All of this is involved in the question of objectivity. He noticed that Mormon history is linked to Mormon identity. Controversies over the Mormon past have much to do with concern over what Mormonism is and will be in the future. For Novick, a con-

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70. The following quotations are from Novick's Sunstone Symposium talk.

cern with history is an indication of anxiety about identity.<sup>71</sup> I strongly agree; this is true for both unbelievers and believers. Put another way, the writing of history, I believe, is necessarily an effort, among other things, to manage the future. This makes it what I like to call political. Be that as it may, “in Mormon agonizing over history,” according to Novick, “the question of historical objectivity has become central.” With this I also fully agree.

### “Old” and “New” Mormon History and the “Objectivity Question”

Why would Novick, as his title asserts, suggest that what he calls an Old Mormon History is more objective than a New Mormon History since he argues that there is no such thing as “objectivity”? He makes a case that the old way the Saints have told the story of their past has a kind of “objectivity” that is *imposed* by the conventions of the Latter-day Saint community and not one that is somehow *discovered*. Novick argues that history, like other human endeavors, including the sciences, is a social construction that is governed by formal and informal rules. Following the appropriate methods, rules, or dogmas of a science yields what can be thought of as “objectivity” in the only way that Novick thinks it makes sense to talk about objectivity. In somewhat the same sense, he claims that the business of telling the story of the Mormon past is the concern and crucial business of Latter-day Saints. Having that history told in a certain way furthers the vital interest of believing Latter-day Saints. The Saints are, he maintains, fully justified in insisting that their history be told from their perspective—that is, it ought to be faith promoting, and it ought to manifest and support the faith of the Saints. To do this, according to Novick, would be to write “objective” history.

Novick advances an intriguing argument. He indicates that there is a way in which a historical account, or indeed any explanation, can be said to be objective.

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71. Novick demonstrates in his book on the Holocaust that the recent massive attention to those dreadful death camps is a product of a deep desire to preserve some semblance of Jewish identity.

It is a different sense, indeed, than the traditional one. It is a social, contextual definition, inextricably tied to the community in which it arises and flourishes. Just as older notions of historical objectivity were frequently grounded in models of science, so the new notion arose from new conceptions of science, new ideas about what made scientific findings objectively true.

Novick argues that, from within the categories of faith, the Saints have available to them something like the norms that govern the activities of various mature scientific communities and, by analogy, other communities in general. These categories, understandings, and explanations rigidly exclude competing accounts. Therefore, within the LDS vocabulary—he offers as examples the Latter-day Saint understanding of *prophet* and *revelation*, which he indicates “have clear and unambiguous meanings”—are the makings of a kind of scientific vocabulary that are properly used by the Saints to exclude those who challenge the understanding of believers. In addition, he indicates that he thought that the Saints, following the pattern of the Old Mormon History,

have the strength of will, the requisite certitude to insist that discrepant or anomalous findings that contradict the governing paradigm be swept aside. They also have the strength of will, and certainly the temperament, to insist, as a condition of entry to the legitimate community of discourse, on conformity to the dictates of the paradigm. All of these . . . are the preconditions for establishing a paradigmatic discipline of Mormon history capable of generating objective findings.

Novick then points out that he feels that

New [Mormon] Historians, by contrast, fare very badly in all of these crucial respects. In every one they equivocate when what is called for is certitude and clarity. On the crucial questions of the privileging of naturalistic or faithful explanation and the status of sacred texts, they are particularly wobbly. Time and again, in going through their works, I have tried

to get a clear fix on where they stood on these questions and found myself lost in fog. The purpose of their scholarship, their research program, if you will, is very ambiguous.

So it turns out that, from Novick's perspective, the "consistent and coherent dogmatism of the Old Historians provides at least a sketch of a paradigmatic historical discipline," and "they have a consensual research agenda—producing work that is faith promoting. They have a consistent metatheoretical and ontological standpoint based on neoorthodox, literal, correlated Mormon doctrine."<sup>72</sup> Furthermore "they have relatively clear criteria for evaluating evidence, privileging accounts and sacred texts (revelations by those authorized to receive them, and testimony in the Mormon sense), disregarding, in good conscience, evidence that contradicted these, disregarding, in particular, reports from anti-Mormon sources."

One might ask, must the Church of Jesus Christ surrender to those few who insist it become a community in which one can believe or not believe just about what one wants? Novick's answer is instructive: "Any community that is entered into voluntarily and can be departed from peacefully is surely entitled to proclaim and live by its own values, to establish its own membership requirements, institutional norms, and conditions of continued membership."

The most crippling element in the ideology of New Mormon Historians is, according to Novick, their endorsement of tolerant norms that are quite incompatible with what is needed to sustain the kind of autocratic "community of inquiry that alone can generate objective findings." Why is such a dogmatic community of discourse desirable? Novick has an answer well worth considering. First, he surmises, as I have often done, that some of the drive for revisionist accounts of the Mormon past "comes from the general influence of secular modernity."<sup>73</sup> He also claims, and I agree, that there is precious "little protection for Mormon sacredness. There is vulnerability to external

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72. Those doing what they call New Mormon History, Novick observes, "repeatedly distance themselves from the Old Historians' faith-promoting agenda."

73. This is a point I have repeatedly emphasized. See, for example, Louis Midgley, "A Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy Challenges Cultural Mormon Neglect of the Book of Mormon:

challenge, primarily the diffuse challenge posed by a skeptical secular worldview from which Mormons in the late twentieth century can hardly isolate themselves.” Finally, he insists, and I believe correctly, that “the specifically historical challenge is not . . . primarily external from so-called anti-Mormons.” There are, of course, challenges posed by both sectarian and secular anti-Mormons, but Novick identifies what he considers “a much more dangerous challenge” that he saw coming “from inside the church, from Mormon historians who have been in the forefront of threats to received tradition.”<sup>74</sup>

Novick sets out the characteristics that an objective New Mormon Historian presumably ought to manifest. She must be neutral and have no stake in what she writes. Nor should she be an advocate. The historian working fully within the norms of the profession must be insulated from religious, political, and social pressures. The historian must avoid partisanship and should not have an investment in arriving at conclusions. She is to let the chips fall where they may as she lets the facts speak their truth through her as a kind of neutral observer of the past. One of the hallmarks of the objectivist consciousness is the fetishizing of what are believed to be “facts.” Objectivity is compromised when history is written for utilitarian purposes.

But all of this is, according to Novick, utter nonsense. It is neither possible nor desirable. Novick shows that what is behind this illusion or “noble dream” is the notion that the historian should approach the past without preconceptions, the idea that observation is prior to theory. Novick argues that there is no such thing as a “neutral observation language” and that there is “no set of terms not themselves saturated” in a theory “by which rival claims could be measured against each other in any straightforward fashion.” Radically competing claims are hence incommensurable. They begin with fundamentally different preconceptions. The faith of the Saints provides a lens through which at least a portion of the past is viewed. And this provides them

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Some Reflections on the ‘Impact of Modernity,’” *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/2 (1994): 283–334.

74. I am not sure I would describe these folks as inside the faith. Instead, they seem to be former Saints, nominal or cultural Mormons, and in some instances unruly dissidents.

with something roughly analogous to what one can find in the mature sciences and in the “community-grounded objectivity” found there. It suggests “that we have here a model situation in which a coherent sense of objectivity is approachable. This is what historians thought they had in previous, less-sophisticated models of science, and the original misconceived quest for mirrorlike objectivity was based on that.” “There is no doubt that it is, in principle, not just a model of dogma but a totalitarian model. The scientific community is not experienced as tyrannical by scientists because their socialization into its assumptions and rules is so complete that the prisoners dance in their chains. They no more regard it as tyrannical than we do the dictionary that tells us how we must spell words” nor the formal or informal rules of grammar or the alphabet to which we are enslaved in order to be free to communicate.

As Novick demonstrated in *That Noble Dream*, historians were once quite confident that they could eventually achieve historical objectivity. But later they were not quite so sure. Objectivity might not be attainable, but it still could function as an ideal. The goal of having one’s writing mirror the past remained. In addition, the historian ought to account for all the evidence or at least attempt to do so. And one ought to allow as few preconceptions as possible. One of the things that renders the lust for objectivity incoherent, according to Novick, is the problem of selecting from the mass of

historical data . . . the handful that we can fit in even the largest book, and the associated problem of how we arrange those bits that we choose. The criterion of selection and the way we arrange the bits we choose are not given out there in the historical record. Neutrality, value-freedom, and absence of preconceptions on the part of the historian would not result in a neutral account, it would result in no account at all because any historian, precisely to the extent that she was neutral, without values, free of preconceptions, would be paralyzed, would not have the foggiest notion of how to go about choosing from the vast, unbelievably messy chaos of stuff out there.

Novick points out that when historians sense these kinds of problems with the idea of objectivity, they shift to other terms that are “makeshift, functional equivalents. They say that while perhaps an account should not aim at objectivity, it should aim at being fair or balanced.” He then demonstrates how vacuous the notion of balance is in dealing with any substantive issue. What would be, Novick asks, a balanced or fair account of the crimes or accomplishments of the USSR? Likewise, sometimes New Mormon Historians claim that one ought to tell a story from the way it appeared to the participants. That would seem reasonable. Novick notices that “almost every account of Mormon origins that I have read by members of this group brackets questions of the historicity of the Book of Mormon and of its authorship and says, ‘Let’s look at things from the point of view of believers without evaluating those beliefs.’” He doubts that this ploy is appropriate. Why? One would come up with odd conclusions “if you privileged the standpoint of the Politburo in the case of the history of the Soviet Union.” Another big issue in Mormon historiography has been concern over what is considered the suppression of evidence that goes contrary to one’s viewpoint. Any well-informed account of the Soviet Union would necessarily be suppressing many positive facts about that regime if the historian’s conclusion was negative. Selection of information simply must be made. And everything else is suppressed.

For these and numerous other reasons set out in *That Noble Dream*, Novick concludes that “the traditional idea of historical objectivity seems . . . an incoherent and vacuous ideal.” He also realizes that it is difficult to convince those with commitments to the myth of objectivity to give it up. The reason is that it “performs important professional functions. It has inspired heroic scholarly labors by historians who have made it clear that if they did not believe they were producing or contributing to an objective account of the past, they would abandon their work.” Though Novick’s views on the objectivity question are increasingly shared by those who have pondered the question, they are far from universal in the historical profession. If historical objectivity is not just unachievable but incoherent, one can “make no judgment about the relative objectivity of Old and New Mormon Historians.



The application of the term, in this sense, to historians or historical writing is a category mistake, like saying, “This theory is purple or more purple than that theory.”

Novick grants that “New Mormon Historians in their presentations more closely approximate the style and folkways of secular objectivist historians than the Old Mormon Historians have. This is clearly the case, but it only shows that they share a common delusion about what that style and those folkways signify.” New Mormon Historians, according to Novick, “want to go to a place called *objectivity* that they have heard a lot about in graduate school and elsewhere.” He finds it necessary to inform them, since he “knows a good deal about the territory, . . . that it is mythical, Shangri-la. It doesn’t exist. But they say, ‘Of course it exists. It has been described repeatedly; indeed, people have written instructions on how to get there, people have even claimed to reside in the suburbs, if not the central city.’ They have said, in words with great resonance . . . , ‘This is the place’—or at least ‘nearby the place.’” The “place called *objectivity*,” Novick explains, simply “doesn’t exist.” There is, however,

another place called *objectivity*, but it’s not at all like the first one. The climate probably is not to your taste; indeed, the climate is just like that of the place you are trying to get away from, the reason you started on this new historical journey in the first place. If you insist, I will point you in that direction, but do think about it. There are lots of other places besides *objectivity* you might want to settle in—. . . places where you can freely explore your past, think about it, and negotiate its shape and meaning, . . . [where] you can set about doing what we all in truth do; construct a past appropriate to your sense of where you are now and where you want to be tomorrow.

Those who strive for objectivity wrongly believe that, by attempting to avoid bias and preconceptions, they will be more or less able to reach the goal of mirroring how the past really was in what they write. To accomplish this, the historians must “purge themselves of external loyalties.” Why? The reason is that their allegiance is to professional

colleagues who share a commitment to the norms of their craft, including the myth of objectivity. The assumption is that, if and only if the historian approaches the past without loyalties to any community other than the history profession and its norms; without theories, longings, wishes, hopes, desires; without preconceptions and without faith, then the facts will speak their truth through them as neutral observers.<sup>75</sup> But this mythology has recently collapsed. Novick insists that to

an ever-increasing number of historians in recent decades it has not just seemed unapproachable, but an incoherent ideal; not impossible, in the sense of unachievable . . . , but meaningless. This is not because of human frailty on the part of the historian . . . , not because of irresistible outside pressures.

If Novick is right, then there is nothing in principle that is problematic or questionable about writing with the conscious intention of building and defending the faith. What seems to keep the Saints from doing this is fear of rejection by the history profession. But, again, if Novick is right on the objectivity question, then much of what passes as sophisticated methodology is bunk—a confused and confusing, as well as debilitating, ideology.

Novick also appears to agree with me “that there is no middle ground—meaning that there is no middle ground between Joseph Smith as prophet and Joseph Smith as not prophet” and that ultimately one has “to choose which side are you on,” invoking some colorful language from William Shakespeare: “Under which king, besonian? Speak, or die.”<sup>76</sup>

## Historical Objectivism and the New Mormon History

I have often indicated that I have no interest in a history in which the Saints, including Latter-day Saint historians, are pictured as fault-

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75. Novick pointed out that, “while historians in recent years have been increasingly loath to call themselves scientific, the natural sciences have always been an important model or benchmark for objectivity in history.” They often have a faulty understanding of the sciences, which appear not to be inductive but deductive. The simple reason is that, without a theory or conjecture, there is nothing evident. Evidence is necessarily theory-dependent.

76. *Henry IV, Part II*, 5.3.113 (Riverside ed.).

less heroes, nor do I desire to have textual materials suppressed or ignored by (or about) historians. I am not urging what is now sometimes called, often for polemical purposes, a sanitized history of anything or anyone. I also want my historians, like the Saints generally, to be pictured without halos. But I also expect Latter-day Saints, including historians, whatever their limitations and foibles, to defend their faith as best they can.

In 1980, when I started an inquiry into recent Latter-day Saint historiography, I was led to do so by two distressing things: (1) what seemed to me to be a rather common obsession with an objective, balanced, neutral, detached, disinterested style of history and (2) an appeal to magic, myth, and mysticism as explanations of Joseph Smith and the recovery of the Book of Mormon. I was also baffled when I discovered that those who were staunch believers seemed quite indifferent to several rudimentary efforts then being advanced to explain away the Book of Mormon and the founding theophanies. My arguments were seen and then brushed aside as mirroring the concerns expressed by some of the Brethren about the work of some writers. I was immediately pictured as a Neanderthal traditionalist (or neo-traditionalist) and consequently as one opposed to the so-called New Mormon History, however that amorphous label was understood. I was also lumped with those among the Brethren who were troubled by some of the more secular history that seemed to them to explain away the faith or that was at least indifferent to its veracity. I do not believe that I fit the polemical stereotype attributed to the Brethren, but they probably do not easily fit that stereotype either. It must be remembered that Mark Hofmann's mischief was generating much confusion and had thrown the whole enterprise of writing about the Mormon past into question. The fact is that Hofmann's forgeries and the rumors that he got Brent Metcalfe to spread led some Mormon historians to question their faith or to turn against it.<sup>77</sup>

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77. Grant Palmer provides a striking example of this, but there are others who might be mentioned who in one way or another fit this pattern. For the details about Palmer's enthrallment with Mark Hofmann's forgeries, especially with the so-called salamander letter, see Louis Midgley, "Prying into Palmer," *FARMS Review* 15/2 (2003): 365–410.

Borrowing the nebulous label “New Mormon History” from various Latter-day Saint and RLDS writers,<sup>78</sup> Novick links those easily subsumed under this loaded label directly to the myth of objective history—that is, to the belief that historians are presumably able to let the facts speak their truth through them as neutral observers of the past and are thereby able to identify what really happened. Is Novick right about this? Is the myth of objectivity still alive and well among those writing about the Mormon past who tend to see themselves as New Mormon Historians? Have there been and are there still those enchanted by such an ideology? The answer, even if we ignore historians like Quinn (who insists on what he calls “functional” if not full objectivity), is an emphatic yes.

Some historians—perhaps embarrassed by the serious decline in the popularity of the ideology associated with the earlier demand for modeling history on a confused and long-abandoned notion of what goes on in the natural sciences, though still anxious to boast of borrowing what they imagine are powerful tools or explanations from the social sciences—flatly deny that those they label New Mormon Historians believe that an objective account of the past is possible.<sup>79</sup> Apologists

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78. I have traced the rise and use of the label “New Mormon History” by those writing about the Mormon past in “The Acids of Modernity and the Crisis in Mormon Historiography,” in *Faithful History*, 190–92, and 216–19 nn. 4–23. Those fond of the label cannot seem to agree on who founded the movement. Some point to Fawn Brodie or Juanita Brooks, but often Leonard Arrington is seen as at least the bellwether of the movement. If this is so, it is odd that he never seems to have mentioned a New Mormon History in his many publications. In addition, I have been unable to discover any mention of a New Mormon History in his personal writings now housed at Utah State University. Brooks and Brodie, of course, flourished before there was any talk of a New Mormon History and can only be pictured as precursors of that movement, but Arrington cannot be seen as a mere precursor of a movement that was to look to him as its leader and founding father. He was active during the heyday of that movement. Is it plausible that Arrington was the leader of a movement, the name of which he neglected to mention in his published work or private papers? Or has an effort been made by others, with their own agendas, to turn him into an ideological icon? After going through his papers, I am tempted to try to rescue Arrington from his idolaters. For a modest beginning to such a project, see my essay entitled “Naturalistic Terms: Some Reflections on a Motto and Type of Historical Explanation.” This is accessible at [www.fairlds.org/pubs/conf/2001MidL.html](http://www.fairlds.org/pubs/conf/2001MidL.html) (accessed 28 June 2006).

79. They most often qualify their attachment to the myth of objectivity by denying that they believe that full objectivity is possible. In this way the ideology they acquired in

for the so-called New Mormon History sometimes claim that most of their tribe are not in thrall to the myth of an objective history, which they declare to have been “a nineteenth- and early twentieth-century chimera long abandoned by the profession.”<sup>80</sup> This assertion flies in the face of what Novick set out in *That Noble Dream*. Those making it have to ignore much of the history of the objectivity question, as well as considerable evidence of appeals to objectivity among New Mormon Historians. They also fail to notice the shift from appeals to objectivity to talk about the necessity of balance, detachment, and neutrality. The problem is not the word *objectivity*; if Novick is even close to being right, it is the larger myth about the methods and goals of historians that has served as the foundation of the professional historical enterprise from the start. This has, unfortunately, been partially replicated with the emergence of a professional Mormon history.<sup>81</sup>

New Mormon History is often contrasted with an Old Mormon History, which is disparaged as “largely devotional, popular, or polemical in nature.”<sup>82</sup> The New Mormon History is properly professional and so no longer apologetic or defensive—except when defending itself from its critics—but is, instead, a noble effort at self understanding. “Instead of defending or attacking LDS faith claims . . . the new historians were more interested in examining the Mormon past in the hope of understanding it—and understanding themselves.”<sup>83</sup> “The New Mormon History,” according to one of its apologists, “of course had many variations, but it was characterized by a restrained voice, an academic style of writing, and a search for understanding the Mormon past for its own sake and indirectly the understanding of self.”<sup>84</sup> The New Mormon

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graduate school remains in place—objectivity thus remains the ultimate goal or at least a worthy ideal.

80. Ronald W. Walker, “Mormonism’s ‘Happy Warrior’: Appreciating Leonard J. Arrington,” *Journal of Mormon History* 25/1 (1999): 113–30, at 127 n. 35. This essay is substantially what eventually appeared as chapter 3 (“The New Mormon History: Historical Writing since 1950”) in Ronald W. Walker, David J. Whittaker, and James B. Allen, *Mormon History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 60–112, at 111 n. 184.

81. See Midgley, “The Acids of Modernity,” 224 n. 82 for some illustrations of this move.

82. Walker, Whittaker, and Allen, *Mormon History*, 92.

83. Walker, Whittaker, and Allen, *Mormon History*, 61.

84. Walker, “Mormonism’s ‘Happy Warrior,’” 116.

Historians have tended to steer away from controversy over the historical grounds and contents of their own faith. However, when challenged, the New Mormon Historians have been feisty, apologetic, and even polemical.

The lingering commitment to vestiges of historical objectivism seems to have blunted some of the urge that certain pious LDS historians may have to defend their faith. This is unfortunate. However, borrowing from something Alexis de Tocqueville once said about the typical American tendency to insist that they act solely out of self-interest narrowly conceived, I respect these folks too much to actually believe what they say. They will, when sufficiently irritated by attacks, rise up and defend their faith in spite of the indoctrination that tells them that, for professional reasons, they should avoid such apparently unseemly behavior. Be that as it may, the defense of the faith and the Saints is seen by those enthralled with historical objectivism as an embarrassing slip from professional norms. So defending the faith has shifted away from those normally known as professional Latter-day Saint historians. Terryl Givens, who was not socialized into the professional history club, provides a remarkable example of one both willing and able to provide a carefully crafted response to literary anti-Mormonism and then to defend the Book of Mormon from criticisms.<sup>85</sup>

### Mysticism—A Way of Sidestepping the Question of Truth

A commitment to historical objectivity does not restrain but emboldens critics of the faith of the Saints. At one important level critics insist that even believing historians must be detached from their faith when they write about the Mormon past. Why? Historians, it is said, “cannot prove historically” that their

beliefs are true and certainly cannot apply these beliefs to [their] scholarly research because there is no historically acceptable evi-

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85. See Terryl L. Givens, *Viper on the Hearth: Mormons, Myths, and the Construction of Heresy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), as well as his *By the Hand of Mormon*. Davis Bitton, James B. Allen, Richard L. Bushman, and others within the club provide instructive examples of Latter-day Saint historians who will defend the faith.

dence of God, divine intervention, or life after death. Historians have no way to discern the hand of God or to measure the validity of inspiration because historians have no tools to deal with the supernatural. They can neither confirm nor disconfirm mystical experiences.<sup>86</sup>

Here we have all the telltale signs of the debilitating impact of historical objectivism on those writing about the Mormon past. Notice the demand for proof, whatever that might mean. And this writer also insists on reducing encounters of seers or prophets with the divine to merely “mystical experiences.” But what typically falls under that category has exactly no substantial or cognitive content. These experiences are most often said to take place only after disciplined meditation or with the help of drugs—when the exterior world has been blotted out. The intense, entirely inner experience is most often described as ineffable.

I agree that what seems to be going on in the consciousness of the typical mystic cannot possibly be confirmed or disconfirmed by a historian. Why? If the experience is ineffable, then exactly nothing can be said about it and it cannot contain a message. However, Brother Joseph’s encounters with the divine were of an entirely different order. He talked about metal plates containing engravings, which he showed to others, and about other artifacts from antiquity such as the interpreters. He recovered a five-hundred-page book claiming to be an authentic ancient history. Historians can and do deal with this kind of thing, though they are, of course, not likely to come up with proof or certainty. It is, obviously, absurd to insist on proof when the issue is faith—that is, whether one has made, for whatever reasons, a decision to trust God rather than some merely human nostrum. What Joseph Smith provided is not the indescribable, ineffable stuff of mysticism. Unlike mystical intuition, it is grist for the historian’s mill. I have tried to show why Latter-day Saint historians should not be charmed into talking about magic, myth, and mysticism when they confront Joseph

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86. Clayton, “Does History Undermine Faith?” 38.

Smith. The case against seeing Joseph as a typical mystic and the Book of Mormon as a typical mystical text seems overwhelming.

Our critics can see where those who now try to picture Brother Joseph as a mystic are heading. For example, Richard and Joan Ostling claim that there are writers who, “not wanting to call Smith’s mind diseased, call him a mystic.” What the Ostlings think this means is that his experiences were merely a “subjective experience. With this perspective, the question of truth content is sidestepped.”<sup>87</sup> But the Ostlings are confused on this issue. By labeling Brother Joseph’s experiences as mystical, such critics effectively denied that they had substantive contents or that they were true. Labeling them mystical is merely a way of asserting that they did not take place outside of Joseph’s mind. If he was a typical mystic, there were no metal plates, no real messengers from the ancient world, no Lehi colony—just an experience of having his identity disappear in a momentary intense blur in consciousness. This is merely another way of explaining away his prophetic truth claims.

### Mysticism—An Open Door to Atheism

D. Michael Quinn is currently the most persistent advocate of the wisdom of describing Joseph Smith as a mystic.<sup>88</sup> I will grant that there are different kinds of experiences that have been described as mystical. Some might even be authentic visions of real heavenly messengers; some of those described as mystics could even have been genuine prophets or seers. But the confused and convoluted literature on mystics and mystical theology does not help to sort out the genuine from the spurious or New Age nonsense from genuine encounters with messengers from the heavens or to classify the efforts of those striving to shed their identity through drugs or meditation (an inner journey). Quinn only offers confusion on these issues. In addition, it turns out that, since the typical mystical experience has no content and is therefore ineffable, it is also entirely consistent with the most radical atheism.

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87. Richard N. Ostling and Joan K. Ostling, *Mormon America: The Power and the Promise* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999), 264.

88. Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 486–87 n. 368.



Sam Harris, as Michael Jibson demonstrates,<sup>89</sup> pushes a dogmatic, militant atheism, opposing all “faith-based religions”—that is, religion that has any content or that is not merely the product of drugs or meditation routines or is not merely self-generated. Though an atheist himself, Harris is fond of mysticism and loves mushy talk about “spiritual experience.” He boasts of his deep “debt to a variety of contemplative traditions that have their origin in India.”<sup>90</sup> He describes his own passion for strands of Buddhism and Hinduism, even boasting of having spent “many years . . . practicing various techniques of meditation” presumably borrowed from those religious traditions.<sup>91</sup> Harris longs for “the intrinsic freedom of consciousness, unencumbered by any dogma.”<sup>92</sup> He claims that “the many distinguished contemplatives who have graced the sordid history of Christianity—Meister Eckhart, Saint John of the Cross, Saint Teresa of Avila, Saint Seraphim of Sarov, the venerable desert fathers, et al.—these were certainly extraordinary men and women: but their mystical insights, for the most part, remained shackled . . . and accordingly failed to fly.”<sup>93</sup> Why? They were unfortunately trapped in a religion with substantive contents. In addition, Harris is fully engrossed in the kind of human experiences generated by meditative exercises that he thinks “can be appropriately described as ‘spiritual’ or ‘mystical’—experiences of meaningfulness, selflessness, and heightened emotion that surpass our narrow identity as ‘selves’ and escape our current understanding of the mind and brain.”<sup>94</sup> Harris recommends the use of “a variety of techniques, ranging from the practice of meditation to the use of psychedelic drugs.”<sup>95</sup> He insists that, if we all would just take up some meditative technique or take a drug-induced trip, we would no longer fear death or kill each other. Our hostilities would melt away, and the world would be a fine place in which to vegetate. His models

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89. Jibson, “Imagine,” in this number of the *FARMS Review*, 233–64.

90. Harris, *End of Faith*, 293 n. 12.

91. Harris, *End of Faith*, 293 n. 12.

92. Harris, *End of Faith*, 294 n. 12.

93. Harris, *End of Faith*, 294 n. 12.

94. Harris, *End of Faith*, 40–41.

95. Harris, *End of Faith*, 40.

are the gurus of India, who long ago learned the secret of passivity and peaceful living.

Harris is, in addition, passionate about his commitment to science, though he is troubled by talk from the likes of Thomas Kuhn or Karl Popper about the limits of science. He brushes all that aside and proclaims the hope that science will soon somehow have the answer to how the brain can be manipulated (by drugs or otherwise) to yield a spiritual or mystical experience that he believes “will suffuse our lives with love, compassion, ecstasy and awe.” He is also confident that such a spirituality or mysticism will be consonant with reason and science and human well-being. “Even now,” he surmises, “we can see the first stirrings among psychologists and neuroscientists of what may one day become a genuine rational approach to these matters.” Notice the words *hope* and *may*. Apparently we have not reached the promised land yet, but we are now beginning a wondrous atheist journey. We need not, he is confident, “renounce all forms of spirituality or mysticism to be on good terms with reason.”<sup>96</sup> His naive scientism is clearly a dogma; his own bizarre brand of faith-based religion begins with a longing for an escape from a sense of self, whatever that means. He does not, though, recognize this as his own merely secular dogmatism.

Given this kind of confusing and confused appeal to mysticism, where a fulminating atheist is groping for an encounter with nothing, is there any point in Latter-day Saints trying to carve out a place in that world for Joseph Smith? Is it not better to explain to ourselves (and to anyone else who cares to listen) how we understand our own faith in our own vocabulary and in our own way? Do we need to borrow this kind of rubbish from religious studies or pop psychology or New Age nonsense as a way of presenting our faith to others or of better understanding our own faith?

### Scholarly Endeavor as Sacrifice and Sacrament

Joseph Smith made his mark. His most significant achievement seems to have come right at the start, when he had virtually no for-

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96. Harris, *End of Faith*, 43.

mal education and no experience. The Book of Mormon started it all. Then, in fourteen short years, he went on to accomplish additional wonders, however one understands him. Now, there is a habit among gentile skeptics and critics to downplay all this. He was, so it is commonly claimed, a typical American, or he produced something that was typically American. But this is sheer nonsense. There are a host of reasons for not seeing Joseph as having provided us with something typically American, even if American Latter-day Saints now have a hankering to be part of some larger ethos.

I am at a loss to understand why Latter-day Saint historians would not want to write, as best they can, faith-promoting history. Do we not all covenant with God to build and defend his kingdom? Why then object to trying one's best to advance the faith? When writing about the Mormon past, why would Latter-day Saints yield to the urge to bow down to the conventions and folkways of the history profession? Is not being a historian (or anything else) always necessarily secondary and subordinate to being a faithful Saint? Those who have simply ceased to believe or never did believe are in a radically different category. All our efforts should honor God. In the deepest and most profound sense we should be producing devotional history. All that we do, everything that we write, should be our offering placed on the altar as our sacrifice to God. Nothing less than this is a truly worthy endeavor.

### The DNA Donnybrook

In 2002 Signature Books launched another of its attacks on the Book of Mormon by publishing a book that, among other things, argued that recent studies of DNA markers among Amerindian populations demonstrate what appears to be an Asian rather than a Near Eastern origin and that this thereby proves that the Book of Mormon is fiction.<sup>97</sup> Put this way, though, the argument seems flawed. Why?

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97. See Thomas W. Murphy, "Lamanite Genesis, Genealogy, and Genetics," in *American Apocrypha: Essays on the Book of Mormon*, ed. Dan Vogel and Brent Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), 47–77. Murphy teaches anthropology at a community college near Seattle, Washington. He has effectively excommunicated himself

There are perfectly reasonable explanations for why DNA markers from colonists from the Near East, if those could be determined, might not turn up in DNA samples. One author has explained it in this way: “In 600 BC there were probably several million American Indians living in the Americas. If a small group of Israelites, say less than thirty, entered such a massive native population, it would be very hard to detect their genes today.” If this is true, and I can see no reason why it is not, then it is simply pointless to claim, as this same author does, that the results of DNA sampling will cast light on the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon. I am not quoting a Latter-day Saint apologist attempting to blunt some powerful argument from a critic of the Book of Mormon. I am, instead, quoting Simon Southerton, an Australian plant geneticist and recently excommunicated Latter-day Saint who also happens to be a persistent critic of the Book of Mormon.<sup>98</sup>

The language I quoted in the previous paragraph responds to the argument that “the bottleneck effect, genetic drift, and other technical problems would prevent us from detecting Israelite genes.”<sup>99</sup> Southerton’s response to this issue was placed on the Signature Books Web page by Tom Kimball, the publicist for Signature Books. But this March 2005 statement seems to have been counterproductive and has now been replaced by other language that skirts the real issues. As of March 2006, the title of Southerton’s apology reads as follows: “Answers to Apologetic Claims about DNA and the Book of Mormon.” Southerton is clearly on the defensive. Nothing is now said about bottlenecks, genetic drift, and so forth. Southerton’s 2005 statement

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with a series of attacks on the faith of the Saints and especially by assisting Protestant critics in their war against the Book of Mormon.

98. Simon Southerton, “Dr. Southerton Responds to Misinformation Disseminated by Apologists about DNA,” taken from the Signature Books Web page on 10 March 2005. A copy of this item, which is no longer available, has been placed in my papers in the BYU Special Collections.

99. Southerton’s original response, “Answering the DNA Apologetics,” appeared on an anti-Mormon message board, 15 February 2005. His primary answer to the argument about the bottleneck effect, etc., was that he agreed entirely. “In 600 BC there were probably several million American Indians living in the Americas. If a small group of Israelites entered such a massive native population it would be very, very hard to detect their genes 200, 2,000, or even 20,000 years later.” There he made the issue not genetics, but rather the interpretation of the Book of Mormon, something on which he is not an expert.

has now been replaced by the following: “The argument that Lamanite DNA may have gone extinct strains reinterpretations of the Book of Mormon to [the] breaking point.”<sup>100</sup> So the real issue is not genetic science but how one reads the Book of Mormon. Southerton wants to force the Saints to adopt his partisan (mis)reading of the Book of Mormon, which ignores at least fifty years of careful examination of the text, in an effort to save his attack on its historical authenticity and to convince the Saints to abandon the book, as he has done.

In addition, Southerton has, among other things, launched an attack on the essay by John Butler that appears in this number of the *FARMS Review*.<sup>101</sup> Southerton is especially concerned to explain away a DNA study done in Iceland, which is cited by Butler and which demonstrates that the bulk of historical people no longer show up in genetic samples even when their existence can be identified in genealogical records.<sup>102</sup> Southerton offers a list of plausible reasons for this, most of which, in addition to many others, apply with equal force to the Lehi colony (e.g., wars, natural disasters, and in-and-out migrations). And these most certainly are found among pre-Columbian peoples generally. From my perspective, Southerton may have come close to explaining what happened to all that missing DNA in Iceland. He now needs to apply this same kind of analysis to the pre-Columbian Amerindians and then to the text of the Book of Mormon. This would, however, take him back to his original statement that the DNA markers from a small group from Palestine would probably disappear entirely when inserted into a much larger indigenous population.

Thus it turns out that the debate over DNA and the Book of Mormon has increasingly shifted from genetic issues to how one reads the Book of Mormon. Staunch critics like Southerton, Murphy,

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100. Simon G. Southerton “Answers to Apologetic Claims about DNA and the Book of Mormon,” last updated March 2006; see [www.signaturebooks.com/excerpts/Losing2.htm](http://www.signaturebooks.com/excerpts/Losing2.htm) (accessed 26 June 2006).

101. See John M. Butler, “Addressing Questions surrounding the Book of Mormon and DNA Research,” in this number of the *FARMS Review*, pages 101–8. This essay appeared earlier on the FARMS Web site. In addition to Butler’s article, we have also included in this number of the *FARMS Review* an essay by David G. Stewart Jr., entitled “DNA and the Book of Mormon,” pages 109–38.

102. See Butler, “Addressing Questions,” 104–6.

and Kimball end up insisting that the Book of Mormon must be read in the most wooden, narrow, mindless possible way so that they can milk whatever they can from current DNA research. Those associated with Signature Books have now shifted from gloating about DNA evidence to quarreling about the contents of the Book of Mormon and how it has been understood by the Saints. But even in the early stages of their polemic against the Book of Mormon, one could see signs of this shift taking place. Hence the following revealing remark by Southerton: “However, such a scenario does not square with what the Book of Mormon plainly states and with what the prophets have taught for 175 years.”<sup>103</sup> What this indicates is that his argument ultimately rests on his insistence that the Book of Mormon must be read as a history of all pre-Columbian Amerindians from Alaska on the west to Newfoundland on the east and then all the way south to Tierra del Fuego and going back as far as one can imagine. Really? Other than a few anti-Mormons, I have never met anyone who believed such a thing. And certainly this has not been the received understanding among informed Latter-day Saints during my lifetime.

I can understand how Southerton might, for moral or other reasons, leave the church. What seems odd is the passion with which he now wants to settle accounts with the Saints. The tone of his remarks is at times irritating and his reasoning a bit too sophistic. In addition, he has the habit of stooping to an occasional gratuitous insult. One of these involves me. In a response to an essay by Ryan Parr that appeared in a recent issue of the *FARMS Review*, Southerton inserted the following footnote:

Louis Midgley, in the editor’s introduction (“The First Steps,” *FARMS Review* 17/1 [2005]), introduces Parr’s review of *Losing a Lost Tribe* under the heading “Secular Anti-Mormon Mockery Exposed.” According to Midgley, what the *FARMS Review* has “provided and promoted are more richly detailed, carefully written, fully documented accounts of the crucial texts and events in the Mormon past (xvii).” “The growth of an obviously

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103. See “Dr. Southerton Responds” for this language.

faithful and sophisticated literature on Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon, much of it published in this *Review* or elsewhere under the FARMS imprint, has led to considerable dissonance among dissidents, cultural Mormons, and anti-Mormon zealots. Critics respond to this scholarly literature with vilification, animosity, and acrimony, with slurs, name-calling, and unseemly personal attacks.” But as anyone familiar with the discussion knows, it is precisely in the *FARMS Review*, most notoriously from Midgley himself, that one can most reliably expect to find name-calling and personal attacks.<sup>104</sup>

My one tiny little mention of Southerton consists of the following: “and Ryan Parr has examined Simon Southerton’s attack on the Book of Mormon.”<sup>105</sup> That is it. No personal attack; no name-calling. The other language that Southerton quoted is separated by over thirty pages of argumentation from my brief mention of his name. But, from his jaded perspective, “anyone familiar with the discussion knows” that I am the one from whom “one can most reliably expect to find name-calling and personal attacks.” Really? *Anyone*? Is it that obvious? What discussion is he talking about? DNA? I have published a few things about the unseemly Donnybrook incited by Signature Books in an effort to embarrass the church and sell some books.<sup>106</sup> But not one word in that essay, or anything else I have published, can be read as name-calling or as a personal attack on anyone—that is, unless one is determined to dismiss all intellectual history as merely personal attacks and name-calling. Intellectual history could not be done at all if the motivations and influences on the authors were somehow off-limits. This is what constitutes contextualizing our understanding of the past. If we could not struggle to do this sort of thing, we would be reduced to silence.

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104. Simon G. Southerton, “An Apologetics Shipwreck: Response to Dr. Ryan Parr,” n. 20 at [www.signaturebooks.com/excerpts/Losing3.htm](http://www.signaturebooks.com/excerpts/Losing3.htm) (accessed 13 July 2006).

105. See Midgley, “First Steps,” lii.

106. See Louis Midgley, “The Signature Books Saga,” *FARMS Review* 16/1 (2004): 361–406.

## More on the Caliban

A countercult agency called Living Hope Ministries (operating out of Brigham City, Utah) has produced a series of slick anti-Mormon videos.<sup>107</sup> We have previously examined the video entitled *The Bible vs. the Book of Mormon*.<sup>108</sup> In this issue of the *FARMS Review* we have included David Bokovoy's additional critical commentary on this film.<sup>109</sup> As he did with an earlier video on DNA and the Book of Mormon, once again Murphy, an anthropologist teaching at a community college near Seattle, appears as an "expert" witness in this countercult propaganda film. This time Murphy appears as an authority on Mesoamerican archaeology. He continues to refer to himself as a "Mormon," though in both word and deed he has effectively severed whatever relationship he once may have had with the Church of Jesus Christ.

## Some Concluding Remarks

Though we have not often ventured into an area that might be called Mormon theology, we have included in this number of the *FARMS*

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107. One of these videos is entitled *Called to be Free* (Brigham City, UT: Living Hope Ministries, 2004). The subtitle is as follows: "The inspiring story of one religious movement's miraculous journey from the bondage of heresy to freedom in Jesus Christ," found at [www.lhvm.org/videos.htm](http://www.lhvm.org/videos.htm) (accessed 13 July 2006). Latter-day Saints constitute a major portion of the intended audience for this partisan appraisal of the shifts that took place in the Worldwide Church of God following the death of Herbert W. Armstrong, who, more than anyone else on the old Protestant fundamentalist horizon, began the lucrative business of selling God over the radio. Those closely allied with Herbert W. Armstrong during the palmy days of his radio "ministry" soon discovered, when he passed away (and with the alienation from the movement of Herbert's theatrically gifted though bizarre son, Garner Ted Armstrong), that the income soon began to dry up. Those remaining at the top of the Worldwide Church of God started downsizing to save what remained of the Armstrong empire, and they also made some "theological" adjustments that eventually won the approval of evangelical gatekeepers, including Reverend Kurt Van Gorden, allowing the remnants of the old and now deeply fractured Armstrong movement to gain admittance to the National Association of Evangelicals. Some evangelicals have seen in these weird events a kind of model for what they hope to make happen with Latter-day Saints.

108. See Brant A. Gardner, "Behind the Mask, Behind the Curtain: Uncovering the Illusion," *FARMS Review* 17/2 (2005): 145–95.

109. See David E. Bokovoy, "*The Bible vs. the Book of Mormon: Still Losing the Battle*," in this number of the *FARMS Review*, pages 3–19.



*Review* an essay by Richard Sherlock on the first two volumes of Blake Ostler's imposing series on Mormon theology.<sup>110</sup> We also offer an essay by Royal Skousen—whose expertise on the text of the Book of Mormon is well-known—explaining the process of proposing conjectural emendations to that text.<sup>111</sup> Frank Salisbury has reviewed for us two recent publications that address questions posed by the theory of organic evolution.<sup>112</sup> The Saints, we believe, should be wary of those who insist that we must adopt a sectarian young-earth creationist ideology and hence abandon serious science. We need also, of course, to guard against the notion that science relegates God to the rubbish bin. There is, on this issue, a broad promising middle ground that has been both sketched by Latter-day Saint scholars and suggested by the Brethren.

We have reprinted a version of Paul Hoskisson's study on the golden-calf motif,<sup>113</sup> as well as an interesting brief essay by Stephen Ricks on the sacred handclasp found in both early Christian and classical sources.<sup>114</sup> In addition to those essays already mentioned, Shirley Ricks has reviewed an annotated selection of Book of Mormon passages by Jana Riess.<sup>115</sup> Brian Hauglid takes a look at a recent Latter-day Saint book on Abraham.<sup>116</sup> Thomas Draper and Lindsey Kenny briefly examine a book attempting to draw lessons for parenting from the Book of Mormon.<sup>117</sup> (On such a project, I must admit to being a

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110. Richard Sherlock, "Blake Ostler's Mormon Theology," in this number of the *FARMS Review*, pages 291–305.

111. Royal Skousen, "Conjectural Emendation in the Book of Mormon," in this number of the *FARMS Review*, pages 187–231. He has also provided a useful list of such items.

112. Frank B. Salisbury, "The Church and Evolution: A Brief History of Official Statements," and also Salisbury, "Creation by Evolution?" both in this number of the *FARMS Review*, pages 307–11, 313–19.

113. Paul Y. Hoskinson, "Aaron's Golden Calf," in this number of the *FARMS Review*, pages 375–87.

114. Stephen D. Ricks, "*Dexiosis and Dextrarum Iunctio*: The Sacred Handclasp in the Classical and Early Christian World," in this number of the *FARMS Review*, pages 431–36.

115. Shirley S. Ricks, "The Book of Mormon Abridged Anew," in this number of the *FARMS Review*, pages 21–33.

116. Brian M. Hauglid, "Look unto Abraham Your Father," in this number of the *FARMS Review*, pages 419–23.

117. Thomas W. Draper and Lindsey Kenny, "Book of Mormon Parenting," in this number of the *FARMS Review*, pages 1–2.

bit skeptical. I am not sure that one can learn directly about parenting, for instance, by examining how Lehi dealt with his boys.) John S. Welch has visited the question of whether the bar of God is “pleasing” or, instead, a place for “pleading.”<sup>118</sup> And for those who may wonder about the basic historical accuracy of the Old Testament, John Gee has provided a sketch of a worthwhile study by Kenneth Kitchen.<sup>119</sup>

I must, I confess, sympathize with those who groan when they see an introduction from me and not one from Daniel Peterson. But as compensation, we have included in this number of the *FARMS Review* two of his essays. One is an effort on his part to respond to a theory advanced by a fellow eager to undercut the authority of the Brethren to preside over the Church of Jesus Christ.<sup>120</sup> The other essay, which I find delightful, is a more recently crafted essay in the style that readers of the *FARMS Review* have come to expect from Peterson.<sup>121</sup>

### Editor’s Picks, by Daniel C. Peterson

And now, again, I shall list some of the items treated in the present number of the *FARMS Review* (not including the book notes) and append my personal ratings to them. As always, these ratings were determined in consultation with the two associate editors and the production editor of the *Review*, and after reading what our reviewers have had to say. But the final responsibility for them is mine. Reviewed items that fail to appear in this list were omitted because we simply could not recommend them (which, in certain cases, is putting it very mildly).

This is the scale, inescapably rather subjective, that we use in our rating system:

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118. John S. Welch, “Keep the Old Wine in Old Wineskins: The Pleasing (Not Pleading) Bar of God,” in this number of the *FARMS Review*, pages 139–47.

119. See John Gee, “The Old Testament as Reliable History,” in this number of the *FARMS Review*, pages 425–30.

120. See Daniel C. Peterson, “Authority in the Book of Mosiah,” in this number of the *FARMS Review*, pages 149–85.

121. See Daniel C. Peterson, “Mormonism as a Restoration,” in this number of the *FARMS Review*, pages 389–417.

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

From among the items considered, these are the books that we are willing to endorse:

- \*\*\*\* Blake Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought: The Attributes of God*
- \*\*\*\* Blake Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought: The Problems of Theism and the Love of God*
- \*\*\* Kenneth A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*
- \*\* E. Douglas Clark, *The Blessings of Abraham: Becoming a Zion People*
- \*\* William E. Evenson and Duane E. Jeffery, *Mormonism and Evolution: The Authoritative LDS Statements*
- \*\* Jana Riess, annotator, *The Book of Mormon: Selections Annotated and Explained*
- \*\* Trent D. Stephens and D. Jeffrey Meldrum, with Forrest B. Peterson, *Evolution and Mormonism: A Quest for Understanding*
- \* Geri Brinley, *The Book of Mormon: A Pattern for Parenting*

Finally, I'm happy to thank those who have made possible this number of the *FARMS Review*. First, obviously, I wish to thank the reviewers, who receive no compensation for their work beyond a free copy of the item they are reviewing—and, frequently, not even that—and a free copy of the *Review* when it appears. Louis Midgley and George Mitton, the *Review's* associate editors, shared generously of their wisdom, knowledge, and experience, as well as of their time and energy. Shirley Ricks, the *Review's* omniscient production editor, is held in awe by those familiar with our production process. Alison Coutts reads each review and article and offers useful suggestions and comments. Paula Hicken does an outstanding job of overseeing

the source checking and proofreading, and was aided in these tasks, this time, by Jaime Alley, Angela Barrionuevo, Megan Johnson, Lia Madsen, Linda Sheffield, and Sandra Thorne (who also helped us in securing some of the illustrations used in this number). Jacob Rawlins, in his quietly proficient manner, put the reviews and articles into their final typeset format. A great deal of work goes into producing each number of the *FARMS Review*. I'm delighted that others do most of it.

# BOOK OF MORMON PARENTING

Thomas W. Draper and Lindsey Kenny

In the world of advice books for parents, there are two broad types: those that attend to the research in the fields of parenting, child development, developmental psychology, and family studies and those that rely on traditional, religious, and anecdotal wisdom. Each addresses problems with a different set of assumptions. Both have value when seen for what they are. *The Book of Mormon: A Pattern for Parenting* is a resource for those who are looking for a Latter-day Saint parenting book of the latter type. Useful ideas from scripture, general conference talks, and some of the older theoretical models of parenting are presented but not critiqued. The author faithfully lays out topics and ideas that can be usefully discussed and mentioned within the family. Such topics include prayer, privileges, love, responsibility, and trust. Those who are short of ideas about how to use Book of Mormon stories to teach moral principles in their families will likely find this book helpful. The book may also be a useful resource for parents-to-be, giving them some ideas for a general framework for raising their future children.

An example of how principles are illustrated comes from the eighth principle in the book: “Allow Natural and Logical Consequences to

Review of Geri Brinley. *The Book of Mormon: A Pattern for Parenting*. American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2006. 293 pp., with appendixes. \$19.95.

Teach.” Brinley uses a common story to demonstrate the idea of applying logical consequences: A child left his bike out on the driveway after having been told that there would be consequences if he did. His father was at a crossroads as to what he should do with both the bike and his son. Eventually, after praying for guidance, the father decided to lock the bike and have a discussion with his son about what he did and how long the bike should remain locked up (pp. 163–64). In connecting this story to the Book of Mormon, Brinley refers to Alma 46:35, where Moroni gave the prisoners of war a choice: to make a covenant of peace or be destroyed. Those who would not make the covenant suffered the consequences that were in place. The pairing of teaching children and managing prisoners of war is “smile-worthy,” but the general principle of offering appropriate choices is sound. Such pairings are used repeatedly to build the examples that make up the book. Like all books of this genre, *The Book of Mormon: A Pattern for Parenting* would be more useful if it offered parents advice about how to decide which choices are most developmentally and contextually appropriate.

## THE BIBLE VS. THE BOOK OF MORMON: STILL LOSING THE BATTLE

David E. Bokovoy

In 1998, Paul Owen and Carl Mosser shocked the turbulent world of anti-Mormonism with their assessment of anti-Mormon polemics. According to these authors, Latter-day Saint scholarship analyzing Book of Mormon historicity had extended far beyond the intellectual scope of evangelical responses.<sup>1</sup> In recent years, several anti-Mormon organizations have taken up the task of raising the intellectual bar of Book of Mormon criticism.<sup>2</sup> In one such recent attempt, the anti-Mormon organization Living Hope Ministries, located in Brigham City, Utah, produced a sixty-six-minute film entitled *The Bible vs. the Book of Mormon*. Throughout the production, Living Hope Ministries presents several interviews with evangelical biblical scholars, Near Eastern and

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

2. Richard Bushman expresses a similar sentiment in his recent biography of Joseph Smith: "On the whole better trained, with more technical language skills than their opponents, they [Book of Mormon proponents] are located mainly at Brigham Young University and associated with the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS). As a loosely coordinated group, they are as assiduous in demonstrating the historical authenticity of the book as the critics are in situating it in the nineteenth century." *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Random House, 2005), 93.

Review of Joel P. Kramer and Scott R. Johnson. *The Bible vs. the Book of Mormon*. Brigham City, UT: Living Hope Ministries, 2005. \$20.00.

Central American archaeologists, and a Jewish rabbi discussing issues pertaining to Book of Mormon historicity and the Bible. According to director Joel P. Kramer, *The Bible vs. the Book of Mormon* project presents the discoveries made by Living Hope Ministries throughout this interviewing process. However, notwithstanding the fact that the film represents an expensive, well-organized endeavor, its obvious rhetoric, coupled with a dearth of genuine scholarship, illustrates the continued failure of anti-Mormon critics to seriously engage the issue of Book of Mormon historicity.

This production by Living Hope Ministries is a scholarly nightmare. Kramer and his colleagues fail to define the parameters of the investigation. The film commences with a quotation—taken out of context—from the current introduction to the Book of Mormon: “The Book of Mormon is a volume of holy scripture comparable to the Bible.” Living Hope Ministries then proceeds for some sixty minutes to investigate whether the Book of Mormon is comparable to the Bible archaeologically and historically. Viewers should be aware that, in reality, the passage extracted from the introduction to the Book of Mormon has nothing to do with these issues but claims, instead, that it “contains, as does the Bible, the fulness of the everlasting gospel.” Therefore, from an academic perspective, this tactical blunder in investigating the Book of Mormon in accordance with a faulty pre-supposition negates the validity of the entire analysis.

By taking this quotation out of context, the film proceeds to compare the Bible and the Book of Mormon on issues other than “the fulness of the everlasting gospel.” “The biblical appeal to remember,” according to one Jewish scholar, “thus has little to do with curiosity about the past. Israel is told that it must be a kingdom of priests and a holy people; nowhere is it suggested that it become a nation of historians.”<sup>3</sup> Throughout the production, Living Hope Ministries has ignored the manner in which the Book of Mormon claims to be comparable to the Bible. However, even when the Book of Mormon’s rela-

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3. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982), 10.



tionship to the Bible is considered in accordance with the producers' assumptions, the film proves incredibly problematic.

The production proceeds to give a basic overview of biblical history entitled "The Bible Story." This summary includes only the crucial historical facts pertaining to the land of Israel and the Jewish exile into Babylonian captivity. Obviously, with this cursory synopsis, the producers wished to leave their audience with little doubt concerning the absolute certainty of biblical history. Egypt existed. Babylon existed. *Israel* existed. Therefore, since modern readers can today look at a road sign identifying the city of Jerusalem, viewers should be fully convinced that the Bible remains completely accurate in its representation of the past.

One of the immediate problems with this logic is the surplus of ancient Near Eastern texts that discuss known archaeological sites, although with little or even no *real* historicity. The Babylonian tale Atrahasis, for example, describes the days prior to human existence when "the gods' load was too great" so "the great Anunnaki made the Igigi carry the workload sevenfold."<sup>4</sup> In its introduction, this ancient myth refers to the gods of Mesopotamia digging out the canals for the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.<sup>5</sup> According to the film's logic, Atrahasis is as historically sound as the Bible since modern-day readers can open up a current Middle Eastern map and actually pinpoint these precise bodies of water. Any contemporary visitor to Iraq who possesses a camera could no doubt return from his or her trip with pictures of actual signs identifying these two geographical bodies. Obviously, contrary to the film's polemic, the ability to identify specific locations described in an ancient text has little relevancy for determining either its religious or historical value. Certainly Living Hope Ministries does not assume that a religious text like Atrahasis provides a correct representation of the past, even if Atrahasis mentions presently known geographical sites.

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4. Atrahasis tablet I as cited in Stephanie Dalley, trans., *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 9.

5. Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia*, 9.

Living Hope Ministries attempts to contrast the Bible's historicity with the Book of Mormon's alleged lack thereof; the organization's agenda is easily witnessed through the film's immediate transition from the Babylonian captivity and King Herod's renovations to the producers' summary of the Book of Mormon story. Unlike their succinct summation of the Bible devoid of any and all references to the supernatural, the producers' recounting of Book of Mormon history moves into a description of extraordinary events involving angels, hidden plates, and Jaredite barges. The film's polemical agenda is obvious through this skillful, but wholly misleading, diversionary tactic. Through the introductory comparison between the Bible and the Book of Mormon, Living Hope Ministries effectively establishes the premise for its scheme by encouraging its audience to ponder how Mormons could ever sustain a belief in the miraculous events described in the Book of Mormon, especially when compared with something so totally rational as the biblical account of the Jewish exile.

But is this bare-bones historical outline summarized by Living Hope Ministries all there is to "The Bible Story"? In an effort to feign accuracy, Living Hope Ministries should have included at least references to the biblical description of Noah placing animals of every species upon the ark, Moses parting the formidable Red Sea, Balaam speaking with his obstinate donkey, Elijah miraculously ascending into heaven, Elisha's floating ax head, Jonah's survival in a fish, and Jesus rising from the dead. Surely, when prefaced with these sorts of biblical events, Book of Mormon references to angels, hidden plates, and Jaredite barges appear far less *extraordinary*.

The film's agenda can be surmised in one dramatic scene in which biblical archaeologist Gabriel Barkay states, "It [the Book of Mormon] doesn't make sense to me. . . . I don't think it has anything to do with the culture of 600 BC, and I'm an expert on that period." Based on this assessment, however, one has to question to what extent Barkay (a respected contributor to his field) has, if ever, seriously engaged the

Book of Mormon.<sup>6</sup> In reality, the Book of Mormon commences with a very plausible historical claim regarding an Israelite family that flees into the wilderness prior to the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC. Nephi's reference to the fact that God commanded his father Lehi to "take his family and depart into the wilderness" (1 Nephi 2:2) immediately relates the Book of Mormon to biblical views regarding the flight-into-the-wilderness motif. As Susan Bratton has shown, "the Bible implies that wilderness fosters dependence on the divine, vastly improved spiritual vision, and the drive for new ministries."<sup>7</sup> This biblical theme recurs prominently throughout subsequent chapters in the Book of Mormon, marking a strong historical, literary, and even religious tie between the two works.<sup>8</sup> Since *The Bible vs. the Book of Mormon* commences with Kramer's disingenuous claim that Living Hope Ministries wanted to learn if the Book of Mormon is truly comparable to the Bible, surely these sorts of important connections should have been addressed in its inquiry.

Conceptually, the Book of Mormon's immediate reference to a biblical-like flight into the wilderness parallels the book's final episode describing Moroni's wilderness escape: "I make not myself known to the Lamanites lest they should destroy me. . . . And I, Moroni, will not deny the Christ; wherefore, I wander whithersoever I can for the safety of mine own life" (Moroni 1:1, 3). The prominent role of wilderness journeys throughout the Book of Mormon clearly links the Nephite record with the Bible in a manner intentionally ignored by Living Hope Ministries. "Israel's religious life as a partner of Yahweh begins in the wilderness," notes Ulrich Mauser. "The desert is the place of God's initial and fundamental revelation to his people . . . the wilderness is the womb of a fundamental datum of the religion of the Old

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6. See John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely, and Jo Ann H. Seely, eds. *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004); and the DVD entitled *Journey of Faith* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2005).

7. Susan P. Bratton, *Christianity, Wilderness, and Wildlife: The Original Desert Solitaire* (Scranton, PA: University of Scranton Press, 1993), 106.

8. In addition to the examples cited above, see 2 Nephi 5:5; Enos 1:3; Mosiah 18:4–5; etc.

Testament.”<sup>9</sup> Certainly, the same observation proves correct for the Book of Mormon.

Though Living Hope Ministries attempts to portray the Book of Mormon as an irrational piece of nineteenth-century fiction, from a biblical perspective there is obviously nothing extraordinary in the idea of a seer “prophesying unto the people that they must repent, or the great city Jerusalem must be destroyed” (1 Nephi 1:4). Ancient Israel witnessed its fair share of false prophets who feigned divine authority in their predictions. Hence Lehi’s biblical contemporary, the prophet Jeremiah, specifically identified a true messenger as one who had “perceived and heard [God’s] word” (Jeremiah 23:18). In Jeremiah 23:18, “perceived” is the King James translation for the Hebrew verb *ra ah*, which means, in its most basic sense, “to see.”<sup>10</sup> Therefore, according to the stipulations provided by Jeremiah, a true prophet had both *seen* and *heard* God’s word.

In his own account, Nephi demonstrates an evident awareness of this biblical standard. Immediately after describing his father Lehi’s experience with a biblical-like pillar of fire, Nephi specifically notes that Lehi “*saw* and *heard* much; and because of the things which he *saw* and *heard* he did quake and tremble exceedingly” (1 Nephi 1:6). Nephi also informs his readers that Lehi “went forth among the people, and began to prophesy and to declare unto them concerning the things which he had both *seen* and *heard*, . . . and he testified that the things which he *saw* and *heard* . . . manifested plainly of the coming of a Messiah” (1 Nephi 1:18–19). In this opening chapter of the Book of Mormon, Nephi matches his apparent effort to portray Lehi as a true prophet, who had *seen* and *heard* God’s word, with a continuous repetition of the biblical designation *my father*.

The Book of Mormon commences with Nephi’s statement “I make a record in the language of *my father*” (1 Nephi 1:2). Indeed, Nephi’s expression *my father* appears a total of twelve times in the initial

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9. Ulrich Mauser, *Christ in the Wilderness: The Wilderness Theme in the Second Gospel and Its Basis in the Biblical Tradition* (London: SCM, 1963), 27, 29.

10. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 2:1157.

twenty-two verses of the Book of Mormon. The repetition provides yet another significant link between the Bible and the Book of Mormon ignored by Living Hope Ministries in their quest to demonstrate that the Book of Mormon is not comparable to the Bible. Throughout the Old Testament, “there are certain well-known passages in which the prophetic leader is called *abi*, ‘my father,’” a title previously unknown in that sense to the prophet Joseph Smith, yet apparently recognized by the prophet Nephi.<sup>11</sup> “And Elisha saw it,” reports the author of 2 Kings concerning the chief prophet Elijah’s ascent into heaven, “and he cried, My father, my father . . .” (2 Kings 2:12). In reality, these types of subtle cultural and religious links between the Bible and the Book of Mormon appear continuously throughout the Nephite record.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, in a film allegedly devoted to a comparison between the Bible and the Book of Mormon, Living Hope Ministries should have acknowledged at least a few of these numerous connections. Yet, of course, its real agenda was based on neither objectivity nor genuine scholarship.

Contrary to the assertions of critics like Kramer and his associates, the teachings presented throughout the Book of Mormon are clearly contiguous with the Bible. Book of Mormon sermons rely extensively on the literary, cultural, and religious traditions of ancient Israel. One of the classic biblical themes presented throughout the Book of Mormon includes the notion of rising from the dust. This Book of Mormon admonition reflects the account of man’s creation described in Genesis 2:7. The imagery of rising from the dust held considerable meaning for Lehi, who, following his initial admonition in 2 Nephi 1:21, continued the theme: “Shake off the chains with which ye are bound, and come forth out of obscurity, and arise from the dust” (2 Nephi 1:23).

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11. James G. Williams, “The Prophetic ‘Father’: A Brief Explanation of the Term ‘Sons of the Prophets,’” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 85 (1966): 345.

12. For a recent survey concerning several literary, cultural, and religious links between the Book of Mormon and the Bible, see David E. Bokovoy and John A. Tvedtnes, *Testaments: Links between the Book of Mormon and the Hebrew Bible* (Tooele, UT: Heritage, 2003).

Lehi's repetitive invitation reflects the use of creation imagery in the Old Testament. In an important study devoted to an analysis of this motif, biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann has illustrated that the Bible features a connection between rising from the dust and enthronement.<sup>13</sup> "To be taken 'from the dust,'" he notes, "means to be elevated from *obscurity* to royal office and to return to dust means to be deprived of that office and returned to *obscurity*."<sup>14</sup> Lehi's use of this biblical image clearly reflects Brueggemann's observation: "Come forth out of *obscurity*, and arise from the dust" (2 Nephi 1:23). Unfortunately, by ignoring these sorts of crucial links between the Bible and the Book of Mormon, Living Hope Ministries stands guilty of a misrepresentation. In this film in which Kramer and his anti-Mormon colleagues attempt to answer the question "is the Book of Mormon comparable to the Bible?" viewers should expect to encounter at least a few references to these sorts of links. However, not only do the producers of the film reveal their ignorance of these issues, but, even more seriously, Living Hope Ministries manifests a tendency toward intentional distortion.

One of the clearest examples of falsification is the subject of coinage in the Book of Mormon. Unfortunately, Living Hope Ministries is guilty of presenting the false impression that the Book of Mormon actually describes the use of coins in Alma 11. Hence, according to the film's logic, the Bible has more evidence for historicity than the Book of Mormon because archaeologists have uncovered coins in the Old World, but have yet to do so in the New. In reality, when it comes to biblical coinage, "very little metal money is found at Palestinian sites from ca. 1300 to 587 B.C.E."<sup>15</sup> And for good reason: The first coins were struck in western Asia Minor in the late seventh or early sixth century BC.<sup>16</sup> The original Book of Mormon family would have had very little, in any, exposure to this medium of exchange.

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13. Walter Brueggemann, "From Dust to Kingship," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 84 (1972): 1-18.

14. Brueggemann, "From Dust to Kingship," 2.

15. John W. Betlyon, "Coinage," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman et al. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1:1078.

16. Betlyon, "Coinage," 1079.

Since money in the Old Testament does not refer to coins, Kramer and company err in their argument. “The references [to Old Testament money] designate measures of value in goods or in precious metals. The metals are not coined, however, in specific weights.”<sup>17</sup> Alma 11 does not describe a coinage system but rather a weights-and-measures system in which the Nephites “altered their reckoning and their measure, according to the minds and the circumstances of the people” (v. 4). Surely Living Hope Ministries was aware of the fact that the chapter summary placed at the beginning of Alma 11, which includes the word *coinage*, is not part of the actual text. Why would they falsify? Perhaps because the use of measures instead of coinage in the Book of Mormon provides evidence for its historicity.

Another example of deception in the film includes the producers’ scorn of the Book of Mormon phrase *reformed Egyptian*. In their efforts to dismantle the Book of Mormon, Living Hope Ministries presents the false impression that the term *reformed Egyptian* appears in the Book of Mormon as a proper name. Nothing, however, could be further from the truth. Instead, the word *reformed* functions as an adjective, meaning “altered, modified, or changed.”<sup>18</sup> Mormon, for example, directly states that “the characters which are called among us the reformed Egyptian, [were] handed down and altered by us” and that “none other people knoweth our language” (Mormon 9:32, 34). Thus, according to Mormon, the Nephites altered the form or shape of the Egyptian characters. The Book of Mormon expression *reformed Egyptian* describes the Egyptian system modified and adapted to suit Nephite needs. According to this definition, archaeologists have uncovered important examples of reformed Egyptian, including hieratic and Demotic.<sup>19</sup> There are also a number of historical examples of Semitic languages written in a “reformed” or modified Egyptian script.<sup>20</sup> In a staged scene, the film

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17. Betlyon, “Coinage,” 1076.

18. See William J. Hamblin, “Reformed Egyptian,” at [farms.byu.edu/display.php?table=transcripts&id=36](http://farms.byu.edu/display.php?table=transcripts&id=36) (accessed 7 March 2006).

19. For a general introduction on hieroglyphs, see W. V. Davies, *Egyptian Hieroglyphs* (London: British Museum Publications, 1987).

20. See 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.

presents a segment with evangelical scholar Simon Gathercole denying the validity of the Book of Mormon reference to reformed Egyptian. However, Book of Mormon scholars have made information concerning the legitimacy of the expression completely accessible, leaving no excuse for Gathercole's dramatic question, "What's ancient reformed Egyptian?"

On a related subject, the same deception holds true for the film's segment regarding Nephite literacy. Living Hope Ministries attempts to land a crucial blow against the Book of Mormon's historicity on the grounds of the scarcity of Egyptian or Hebraic scripts discovered in areas associated with Book of Mormon geography. Contrary to the film's assertion, though, the Book of Mormon never claims that a large literate population inhabited ancient America. In presenting the information in Helaman 3:15, Living Hope Ministries neglects to include the subsequent verse, which specifically states that the written records "have been handed down from one generation to another" (v. 16). This reference does not suggest that the Nephites produced a large supply of written documents. To the contrary, the ability to hand down the written documents described in verse 15 places an obvious limitation upon these texts.

According to the Book of Mormon, the Nephites originated from the land of Jerusalem ca. 600 BC. Studies have indisputably shown that literacy rates in ancient Israel were quite low, especially when compared with contemporary Western standards.<sup>21</sup> In the words of biblical scholar James Crenshaw,

An agricultural economy such as that prevailing in Judah and Israel provided few inducements to formal education, despite the rhetoric in Deut. 6:9 encouraging the people to write the commandments on doorposts and gates. In fact, the de-

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21. See Ian M. Young, "Israelite Literacy: Interpreting the Evidence: Part I," *Vetus Testamentum* 48 (1998): 239–53; and Young, "Israelite Literacy: Interpreting the Evidence: Part II," *Vetus Testamentum* 48 (1998): 408–22; compare the conservative response by Richard S. Hess, "Literacy in Iron Age Israel," in *Windows into Old Testament History: Evidence, Argument, and the Crisis of "Biblical Israel,"* ed. V. Philips Long, David W. Baker, and Gordon J. Wenham (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 82–102.



mands of daily chores—tending sheep and goats, preparing land for cultivation, attending to olive groves and vineyards—discouraged formal schooling.<sup>22</sup>

As a result, “it was [evidently] normal practice in antiquity for people to read out loud, and hence interested but illiterate bystanders would be able to obtain the information presented in the text.”<sup>23</sup> In harmony with this trend, Nephi demonstrates a need to explain the source of his unusual talent: “I was taught somewhat in all the learning of my father; . . . therefore I make a record of my proceedings in my days. Yea, I make a record in the language of my father, which consists of the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians” (1 Nephi 1:1–2).

A cursory survey of Book of Mormon references to the issue of literacy supports a conclusion exactly opposite to the view proposed by Living Hope Ministries. Most Book of Mormon texts suggest that the vast majority of Book of Mormon people, much like their biblical counterparts, lacked the basic ability to read, let alone to write and leave epigraphic remains:

Now it came to pass that I, Nephi, did teach my brethren these things; and it came to pass that *I did read many things to them*, which were engraven upon the plates of brass. . . . And *I did read many things unto them* which were written in the books of Moses; but that I might more fully persuade them to believe in the Lord their Redeemer *I did read unto them* that which was written by the prophet Isaiah. (1 Nephi 19:22–23)

And now *I read unto you* the remainder of the commandments of God, for I perceive that they are not written in your hearts; I perceive that ye have studied and taught iniquity the most part of your lives. (Mosiah 13:11)

And it came to pass that *Mosiah did read, and caused to be read*, the records of Zeniff to his people; yea, *he read the*

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22. James L. Crenshaw, *Education in Ancient Israel: Across the Deadening Silence* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 39.

23. Young, “Israelite Literacy: Part II,” 422.

records of the people of Zeniff, from the time they left the land of Zarahemla until they returned again. (Mosiah 25:5)

And it came to pass that when Aaron saw that the king would believe his words, he began from the creation of Adam, *reading the scriptures unto the king.* (Alma 22:12)

This general Book of Mormon trend certainly relates to the evidence regarding literacy levels in the ancient Near East, a fact rendering Peter Williams's observation in the film regarding literate societies, that they leave written records, completely irrelevant. Besides, the Nephites *did* leave behind a written record—that is, the Book of Mormon.

In another error, Kramer appears in the film's background eliciting an invalid comment made by Rabbi Chaim Richman regarding Israelite temples and 2 Nephi 5:16, a Book of Mormon verse that refers to the Nephites' building a temple like unto Solomon's. While Rabbi Richman's statement regarding most contemporary Jews' rejecting the notion of a temple anywhere outside Jerusalem may be true, ancient Israelites clearly did not share this belief. Rabbi Richman fails to recognize that "although the Hebrew Bible emphatically declared the Jerusalem Temple to be the sole legitimate site for Israelite worship during the monarchial era, other temples and shrines are known through textual and architectural remains."<sup>24</sup> Archeological evidence suggests that Jews actually continued to build temples outside the city of Jerusalem during the Hellenistic and Persian periods.<sup>25</sup> Biblical scholar Joong Ho Chong has gone so far as to suggest that religious Jews living in Babylon during the exilic period probably built temples in the land of Mesopotamia.<sup>26</sup>

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24. Beth A. Nakhai, "Temples: Syro-Palestinian Temples," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*, ed. Eric M. Meyers (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 5:173.

25. Edward F. Campbell Jr., "Jewish Shrines of the Hellenistic and Persian Periods," in *Symposia Celebrating the Seventy-Fifth Anniversary of the Founding of the American Schools of Oriental Research (1900–1975)*, ed. Frank Moore Cross (Cambridge: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1979), 159–67.

26. Joong Ho Chong, "Were There Yahwistic Sanctuaries in Babylonia?" *Asia Journal of Theology* 10/1 (1996): 198–217.

The general scholarly consensus seems to hold that the view espoused by Rabbi Richman concerning Jerusalem as the *only* place that God chose for a temple represents a much later theological development.<sup>27</sup> Ronald Clements suggests that this notion, witnessed for example in Deuteronomy 12, originally developed in the Babylonian exile out of a fear that the destruction of the Jerusalem temple would discredit the holy city in the minds of Jews.<sup>28</sup> Clearly, the mandate espoused by Rabbi Richman would have had no relevancy for the Nephites.

In their discussion of the alleged lack of evidence for pinpointing Book of Mormon geography, Kramer and Johnson deliberately neglect the Book of Mormon's internal evidence, which quite frequently indicates a strong case for toponymic links with Hebrew. For example, one of the important Book of Mormon sites ignored throughout the film is the city Jershon. In recent years, scholars have noted the connection between the Book of Mormon name *Jershon* and the trilateral Hebraic root *yrš*, meaning "to inherit."<sup>29</sup> Though the name *Jershon* does not appear in the Bible, it serves in the Book of Mormon as a designation for the land given to the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi as an inheritance. Filled with compassion for their converted brethren, the Nephites declared, "this land Jershon is the land which we will give our brethren for an *inheritance*" (Alma 27:22; see also 27:24, 26; 35:14).<sup>30</sup> In addition to this link, the Book of Mormon contains another startling piece of evidence connecting ancient Near Eastern traditions regarding acts of possession with the land of Jershon.

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27. For an introduction to the basic issues, see Bernard M. Levinson, *Deuteronomy and the Hermeneutics of Legal Innovation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 23–52.

28. Ronald E. Clements, "The Deuteronomistic Law of Centralisation and the Catastrophe of 587 B.C.," in *After the Exile: Essays in Honour of Rex Mason*, ed. John Barton and David J. Reimer (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1996), 5–25; for an alternative conservative view, see Pekka Pitkänen, *Central Sanctuary and Centralization of Worship in Ancient Israel from the Settlement to the Building of Solomon's Temple* (New Jersey: Gorgias, 2003), who suggests that the mandate to build a temple only in the place that God chose did not prohibit the construction of additional non-Jerusalem shrines.

29. Research by Stephen D. Ricks and John A. Tvedtnes, "The Hebrew Origin of Three Book of Mormon Place-Names," in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 89.

30. Ricks and Tvedtnes, "Hebrew Origin," 89.

In a treatise concerning legal symbolism in Mesopotamia, Israeli scholar Meir Malul has noted the significance of the Akkadian expression “*i/ana (libbi) x ar dum*,” meaning “to descend to x.”<sup>31</sup> This expression occurs in one sale document from Old Babylonian Susa, two Nuzi texts, a Middle Babylonian letter, and a neo-Babylonian sale document. Three other Old Babylonian texts from Susa contain the variation *ana m tim ar dum*, “to descend to the land,” which seems to convey a special nuance of the general meaning common to this and other expressions—claiming and taking possession of something.<sup>32</sup> The expression “to go down to x” as a symbol of possession also appears in the Old Testament:

And it came to pass, when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, that Ahab rose up to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it. And the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel . . . he is in the vineyard of Naboth, whither he is gone down to possess it. (1 Kings 21:16–18, emphasis added)

In this passage detailing King Ahab’s efforts to obtain the vineyard of Naboth, the Hebrew word translated as “to possess” is the verb *yrš*, the same root that provides the apparent base for the proper noun *Jershon* in the Book of Mormon.

A similar usage to that witnessed in Mesopotamian legal documents and the Old Testament also appears in the Book of Mormon’s description of Jershon: “And they [the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi] went down into the land of Jershon, and took possession of the land of Jershon” (Alma 27:26).

The Book of Mormon contains further examples of the technical expression *to go down to x* in the context of possession/inheritance. The prophet Nephi, for example, twice incorporated this statement into his speech prior to the acquisition of the brass plates. Through

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31. See Meir Malul, *Studies in Mesopotamian Legal Symbolism* (Kevelaer, Germany: Butzon & Bercker, 1988), 391–92; Malul, “q b ‘Heel’ and qab ‘To Supplant’ and the Concept of Succession in the Jacob-Esau Narratives,” *Vetus Testamentum* 46/2 (1996): 198.

32. Malul, *Studies in Mesopotamian Legal Symbolism*, 391–92.

the power of repetition, Nephi contrasted the idea of descending to his father *possessionless* with descending to the land of Lehi's *possessions*:

We will not *go down* unto our father in the wilderness until we have accomplished the thing which the Lord commanded us. . . . therefore *let us go down* to the land of our father's *inheritance*, for behold he left gold and silver, and all manner of riches. (1 Nephi 3:15–16)

These statements concerning descent and possession supply additional evidence for understanding Jerusha as an authentic location specifically designated for the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi as a place of inheritance. This connection between Book of Mormon geography and ancient Semitic languages and culture reveals the types of important clues that the film *The Bible vs. the Book of Mormon* all too conveniently neglects.

In their efforts to contrast the supposedly rational, historical nature of the Bible with the purportedly irrational, fictitious framework of the Book of Mormon, Living Hope Ministries includes a variety of misleading statements from archaeologists and theologians familiar with the Bible and the ancient Near East. Because of this, the film leaves viewers with the erroneous perspective that scholars have verified the Bible's historicity. However, much of the archaeological and textual evidence accepted by contemporary biblical scholars proves detrimental to the views advocated by groups like Living Hope Ministries.

In his recent book describing the archaeological and textual evidence for religious developments in ancient Israel, prominent Near Eastern archaeologist William Dever notes:

A generation ago, when I was a graduate student, biblical scholars were nearly unanimous in thinking that monotheism had been predominant in ancient Israelite religion from the beginning—not just as an “ideal,” but as the reality. Today all that has changed. Virtually all mainstream scholars (and even a few conservatives) acknowledge that true monotheism emerged only in the period of the exile in Babylon in the 6th

century B.C., as the canon of the Hebrew Bible was taking shape. . . .

I have suggested, along with most scholars, that the emergence of monotheism—of exclusive Yahwism—was largely a response to the tragic experience of the exile.<sup>33</sup>

While problematic for many Christians, these views endorsed by “virtually all mainstream scholars” present few, if any, challenges for Latter-day Saints. The fact that biblical Israel was originally henotheistic, meaning that it worshipped one God while acknowledging the existence of other deities, stands in harmony with Latter-day Saint beliefs, marking a strong tie between modern revelation and the ancient world.

Sadly, Living Hope Ministries ignores the implications of contemporary archaeological and biblical discoveries. “Of course, no archaeologist can deny that the Bible contains legends, characters, and story fragments that reach far back in time,” state Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman in their recent survey, *The Bible Unearthed*. “But archaeology can show that the Torah and the Deuteronomistic History bear unmistakable hallmarks of their initial compilation in the seventh century BCE.”<sup>34</sup> If groups like Living Hope Ministries wish to support their beliefs with contemporary scholarly evidence, they carry an ethical responsibility to acknowledge the significant problems that this evidence presents for their own religious and historical views.<sup>35</sup> Most contemporary biblical scholars reject the historical and

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33. William G. Dever, *Did God Have a Wife? Archaeology and Folk Religion in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 294–95, 297.

34. Israel Finkelstein and Neil A. Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts* (New York: Free Press, 2001), 23.

35. Of course, acceptance of every critical theory held by contemporary biblical scholars would present unique challenges for Book of Mormon historicity. Presumably, Living Hope Ministries avoided addressing topics such as Deutero-Isaiah and source criticism since these issues stand in direct conflict with an evangelical approach to the Bible and would have also negated their erroneous claim that current scholarship supports a conservative assessment of biblical historicity. For an analysis of the relationship between higher criticism and the Book of Mormon, see Kevin L. Barney, “Reflections on the Documentary Hypothesis,” *Dialogue* 33/1 (2000): 57–99. For a scholarly assessment of the relationship

theological perspectives Living Hope Ministries associates with the Bible.

If anything, the film *The Bible vs. the Book of Mormon* provides evidence that anti-Mormons still have a long way to go before they can claim to have contributed to the discussion regarding Book of Mormon historicity. True, Egypt existed. True, Babylon existed. And yes, we know that Israel *also* existed. But does the mere attestation of these cultures sustain the validity of biblical history and theology, especially as interpreted by Living Hope Ministries? Contrary to the assertions featured in the film *The Bible vs. the Book of Mormon*, acceptance of the Bible as a spiritual guide requires faith on the part of its reader, just as it does for a belief in the religious validity of the Book of Mormon. In my opinion, it is both deceptive and spiritually problematic for anyone to suggest otherwise.

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between history and the Hebrew Bible, see Marc Z. Brettler, *The Creation of History in Ancient Israel* (London: Routledge, 1995).





# THE BOOK OF MORMON ABRIDGED ANEW

Shirley S. Ricks

Jana Riess, who has earned a PhD in American religious history from Columbia University and a master of divinity degree from Princeton Theological Seminary, is the religion book review editor for *Publishers Weekly* and an adult convert to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. These qualifications no doubt netted her an invitation to prepare this book as a part of the SkyLight Illuminations series, which presents great religious classics in an abbreviated, accessible form. Religious traditions from Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam are represented in this series. With the selected text presented on the recto pages, the annotator's comments and explanations appear on the facing verso pages linked to the appropriate text by footnote numbers. The annotations offer explanations of the history, context, and meaning of the accompanying text.

As noted in the introduction, Riess first encountered the Book of Mormon in 1991 on a day trip to Sharon, Vermont, the birthplace of Joseph Smith Jr., founder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. After two years of investigating the church and studying the Book of Mormon, she was baptized. She notes that early Mormons

Review of Jana Riess, annotator. *The Book of Mormon: Selections Annotated and Explained*. Woodstock, VT: SkyLight Paths, 2005. xxi + 234 pp. \$16.99.

quoted much more often from the Bible than from the Book of Mormon and that only in the 1980s did it begin to be cited regularly in general conference talks,<sup>1</sup> perhaps because of the initiative of President Ezra Taft Benson, who encouraged Latter-day Saints to study and become more familiar with the Book of Mormon.<sup>2</sup> She continues to give background for her readers by noting that Joseph Smith called the Book of Mormon “the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion.”<sup>3</sup> In the 1980s a new subtitle, *Another Testament of Jesus Christ*, was added, making more explicit that the book testifies of Christ and his mission and invites the reader to “come unto Christ” (Moroni 10:32).

This compilation of selections from the Book of Mormon raises some relevant issues about the approach to this book of scripture brought forth by Joseph Smith, such as abridging the text (in both ancient and modern times), reaching a specific audience, formatting the text in various editions, changing or modernizing the language, and providing commentaries.

### Abridging the Book of Mormon

Riess acknowledges the difficulty of and, indeed, questions the appropriateness of reducing the Book of Mormon text to about a tenth of its original size for the purposes of this series.<sup>4</sup> She does recognize “an element of hubris in presuming to choose its most significant passages” (p. xvii), which seems to have been her task. Riess admits that such an abridgment is “doubly challenging because it’s already *been*

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1. Noel B. Reynolds, “The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon in the Twentieth Century,” *BYU Studies* 38/2 (1999): 6–47; Riess’s note here (p. 232) inadvertently says this was published in *Dialogue* 38/2 (1999).

2. Ezra Taft Benson, “Cleansing the Inner Vessel,” *Ensign*, May 1986, 4–7 (his first general conference address after becoming president of the church); see Benson, “The Book of Mormon Is the Word of God,” *Ensign*, May 1975, 63–65, another widely quoted address.

3. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 194; also in the introduction to the Book of Mormon, 1981 edition.

4. Such purposes are explained in the section below entitled “Book of Mormon Audience.”

through a stringent editing process” (p. xvii, emphasis in original).<sup>5</sup> The original abridgers made their text selections based on the target audience, which is the modern reader.

The Book of Mormon is a complex, detailed book; its name derives from the prophet Mormon, who was the major editor responsible for abridging and collating the myriad records in his care. The title page of the Book of Mormon, written anciently by Mormon’s son Moroni, proclaims: “The Book of Mormon, an account written by the hand of Mormon upon plates taken from the plates of Nephi. Wherefore, it is an abridgment of the record of the people of Nephi, and also of the Lamanites. . . . An abridgment taken from the Book of Ether also.” However, the abridging process of Book of Mormon records began approximately a thousand years before Moroni, in the early portions of the Book of Mormon—Nephi reports that “I make an abridgment of the record of my father, upon plates which I have made with mine own hands; wherefore, after I have abridged the record of my father then will I make an account of mine own life” (1 Nephi 1:17).

Mormon describes some of the process he went through in abridging the records that had been handed down to him:

After I had made an abridgment from the plates of Nephi, down to the reign of this king Benjamin, . . . I searched among the records which had been delivered into my hands, and I found these plates [the small plates of Nephi], which contained this small account of the prophets, from Jacob down to the reign of this king Benjamin, and also many of the words of Nephi.

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5. Riess discusses the ancient Book of Mormon abridgments: “Like all memoirists, he [Nephi] and other writers only recorded a small portion of the events that occurred in their lives. They geared their narratives for their perceived audiences and shaped the text accordingly. . . . The book’s final editors . . . selected only those pieces that they thought would be most helpful to readers living during and after the time when the Book of Mormon came forth” (p. 8 n. 4). See Grant R. Hardy, “Mormon as Editor,” in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 15–28; Eric C. Olson, “The ‘Perfect Pattern’: The Book of Mormon as a Model for the Writing of Sacred History,” *BYU Studies* 31/2 (1991): 10–15; and “Mormon and Moroni as Authors and Abridgers,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 269–71.

And the things which are upon these plates pleasing me, because of the prophecies of the coming of Christ; and my fathers knowing that many of them have been fulfilled; yea, and I also know that as many things as have been prophesied concerning us down to this day have been fulfilled, and as many as go beyond this day must surely come to pass—

Wherefore, I chose these things, to finish my record upon them, which remainder of my record I shall take from the plates of Nephi; and I cannot write the hundredth part of the things of my people.<sup>6</sup>

But behold, I shall take these plates . . . and put them with the remainder of my record, for they are choice unto me; and I know they will be choice unto my brethren. . . .

And now I, Mormon, proceed to finish out my record, which I take from the plates of Nephi; and I make it according to the knowledge and the understanding which God has given me. (Words of Mormon 1:3–6, 9)

Confident of the ultimate preservation of the records, Mormon explains that “there are great things written upon them, out of which my people and their brethren shall be judged at the great and last day, according to the word of God which is written” (Words of Mormon 1:11). In addressing the remnants of the house of Israel who were spared, Mormon makes clear what he wants the latter-day reader to gain from the words he has so carefully abridged and preserved:

Know ye that ye are of the house of Israel.

Know ye that ye must come unto repentance, or ye cannot be saved.

Know ye that ye must lay down your weapons of war . . . and take them not again, save it be that God shall command you.

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6. In yet another Book of Mormon passage, Mormon acknowledges that of the “many records kept of the proceedings of this people, by many of this people, which are particular and very large,” even “a hundredth part of the proceedings of this people . . . cannot be contained in this work” (Helaman 3:13–14).

Know ye that ye must come to the knowledge of your fathers, and repent of all your sins and iniquities, and believe in Jesus Christ, that he is the Son of God, . . .

And he hath brought to pass the redemption of the world.  
(Mormon 7:2–5, 7)

Mormon's editing process, then, revolves around his purpose—to witness that the gospel of Jesus Christ, as contained in the Book of Mormon, will confirm the record received by the Gentiles from the Jews, or the Bible. The two records will serve as two witnesses of Christ (again as reflected in the subtitle of the Book of Mormon: *Another Testament of Jesus Christ*).

Riess, desiring to replicate in her abridgment the central focus on Christ found in the Book of Mormon, was careful “to select those passages that offer insights into contemporary Mormon beliefs and scriptural emphases, such as the Atonement of Christ, the nature of human freedom, the purpose of baptism, and the need for repentance from sin” (p. xviii). Her winnowing process led her to delete the book of Ether, the story of the stripling warriors, and many of the war scenes (no selections from the book of Helaman appear). However, she has retained such doctrinally powerful portions as Lehi's dream (1 Nephi 8) and Nephi's vision (1 Nephi 11–12); Lehi's spiritual discourse to his son Jacob on opposition, choice, and the purpose of life (2 Nephi 2); the psalm of Nephi (2 Nephi 4); Jacob's sermon on salvation, resurrection, and the infinite atonement (2 Nephi 9); Jacob's words on chastity, pride, wealth, and consecration (Jacob 2); the allegory of the olive tree (Jacob 5); King Benjamin's sermon (Mosiah 2–5); Alma's discourse on repentance and spiritual rebirth (Alma 5); Alma's teachings on death and judgment (Alma 12); Alma's treatise on faith and knowledge (Alma 32); Alma's instructions to his son Helaman (Alma 36–37);<sup>7</sup>

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7. In her annotations here, Riess relies heavily on John W. Welch's careful exegesis of the passage and his identification of major parallels, to which she has added several of her own (p. 160 n. 32). She cites John W. Welch and J. Gregory Welch, *Charting the Book of Mormon: Visual Aids for Personal Study and Teaching* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), chart 132, but she must have referred to one of Welch's more extensive writings on Alma 36, such as John W. Welch, “A Masterpiece: Alma 36,” in *Rediscovering the Book of*

Alma's tutoring his son Corianton on the spirit world, resurrection, and restoration (Alma 40–41); Jesus's visit to the Nephites after his death and his teachings on baptism, the house of Israel, and the sacrament (3 Nephi 11, 15, 17–18); the winding-up scenes (Mormon 6, 8); and, finally, doctrines on faith, hope, and charity, the Holy Ghost, baptism and the age of accountability (Moroni 7–8); and Moroni's challenge to receive spiritual truth (Moroni 10).<sup>8</sup>

A clarification is in order: Riess uses the 1920 text of the Book of Mormon, which is in the public domain. She notes differences in the 1981 version where they appear. She is not rewriting or simplifying the text, just abridging it. She notes that she has used an ellipsis to signify the “removal of the phrase ‘it came to pass that’” (p. 6 n. 2), although it also replaces the phrase “it came to pass” in some instances. Where she has skipped verses in a given chapter, she has inserted a line with five dots; the numbering of the verses, however, also makes it obvious that some verses have been excised.

### Book of Mormon Audience

As has already been mentioned, the ancient editors of the Book of Mormon made their abridgment decisions based on their target audience—the modern reader. Mormon expresses his desire “that a knowledge of these things must come unto the remnant of these people, and also unto the Gentiles” (Mormon 5:9). Specifically addressing us, the latter-day readers, Moroni tells us, “Behold, I speak unto you as if ye were present, and yet ye are not. But behold, Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me” (Mormon 8:35).

As recorded on the inside front cover of *The Book of Mormon: Selections Annotated and Explained*, the intended audience for the SkyLight Illuminations series, to which this book belongs, is “today's

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*Mormon*, 114–31. She does not, however, present this chapter in a format that makes the chiasms readily apparent.

8. It almost seemed that Riess had relied on Welch and Welch, *Charting the Book of Mormon*, charts 53–55 (which present key doctrinal chapters) in making her selections, but then, again, maybe her choices of key chapters were made independently through her own study.

spiritual seeker.” The series offers “an enjoyable entry into the great classic texts of the world’s spiritual traditions.” The translations include commentary from experts, thus enabling “readers of all backgrounds to experience and understand classic spiritual texts directly, and to make them a part of their lives.” Under a mandate to conform her volume to the needs of this series, Riess did an excellent job of selecting material that was intended to enlighten and inspire. She acknowledges that she is “not writing this to persuade people to adopt [her] religious worldview.” Her mission, if she has one, “is one of education and interfaith understanding” so that members of other faiths can “at least sample the Book of Mormon and be enriched by it” (p. xii), just as she herself has been enlightened by reading other sacred texts.

In her foreword to this book, Phyllis Tickle, founding religion editor of *Publishers Weekly*, does not know or care whether the Book of Mormon is true. The salient point for her is that “the Book of Mormon is a body of sacred literature” (p. vii). She expresses a conviction that it is important to know what is in the foundational text for a given group in order to understand and respect the beliefs of those individuals. She concedes the difficulty of “condensing holy writ” (pp. vii–viii) but praises Riess for “achieving an apogee of sorts for herself, for Mormonism, and for ecumenism,” calling her a “cordial and informed” guide (p. viii).

### Formatting the Book of Mormon

Riess presents the text of the Book of Mormon with its current versification. Only rarely does she format the verses in something other than traditional prose. With permission, she has used a few of Grant Hardy’s “poetic renditions of key Book of Mormon passages” (p. xviii),<sup>9</sup> especially the psalm of Nephi (pp. 61–67). Hardy’s edition, also using the 1920 text, dispenses with the traditional versification—

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9. Grant Hardy, *The Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Edition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003); see the reviews by Kristine Hansen and Keith Lawrence in *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12/2 (2003): 100–102, 103–6; the review by Kevin L. Barney in *FARMS Review* 16/1 (2004): 1–10; and the review by Louis Midgley in *Insights* 23/6 (2003): 6.

he does not alter the text but makes changes in punctuation and formatting. Other presentations of the Book of Mormon with the authorized text, also not prepared or endorsed by the church, have focused on parallelistic patterns<sup>10</sup> or on providing maps, pictures, and other resources to enrich the reading experience for families with children.<sup>11</sup> Most recently, Doubleday has published the first commercial version of the Book of Mormon (by special arrangement with the church) in a dual-column format with no notes.<sup>12</sup>

The most prominent feature of the formatting of this book (which Riess may not have had any say in) is the presentation of the text on the right-hand page with the linked commentary on the facing left-hand page. As would be expected, the text and the commentary on facing pages are not always equal in length, thus leaving white space on one page or the other.

### The Book of Mormon in Contemporary English

Though only tangentially related to the book under review, the techniques of simplification and adaptation of the authorized text, rather than abridgement, have been used by other authors in an attempt to make the Book of Mormon more accessible. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, the sixteen-volume *Illustrated Stories from the Book of Mormon* appeared,<sup>13</sup> telling the Book of Mormon story with some additions and some omissions. Max Skousen, in 1991, provided a parallel version with the original text next to his modern-language text.<sup>14</sup> Two years later, amidst statements issued by the church discouraging

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

11. Thomas R. Valletta, gen. ed., *The Book of Mormon for Latter-day Saint Families* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1999); see the review of this book by Rebecca M. Flinders and Anne B. Fairchild in *FARMS Review* 15/1 (2003): 431–34.

12. *The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ* (New York: Doubleday, 2004).

13. Raymond H. Jacobs, et al., *Illustrated Stories from the Book of Mormon*, 16 vols. (Salt Lake City: Promised Land, 1967–72).

14. Max Skousen, *The Book of Mormon . . . Condensed and Modernized Version* (privately published, 1991).



adaptations of the Book of Mormon into familiar or modern English,<sup>15</sup> Timothy B. Wilson produced *Mormon's Story: An Adaptation Based on the Book of Mormon*, with the simplified text parallel to the authorized text.<sup>16</sup> His 1998 version, *A Plain English Reference to the Book of Mormon*, presents only his simplified text.<sup>17</sup> Lynn Matthews Anderson produced her version, *The Easy-to-Read Book of Mormon: A Learning Companion*, in 1995.<sup>18</sup> Other, more recent, versions have been prepared by Mark A. Smith Sr., Susan Stansfield Wolverton, and Thomas Johnson.<sup>19</sup> Obviously, since the original plates are not currently accessible, these books cannot be viewed as “new translations” but merely as authors’ adaptations and simplifications. As far as I can ascertain, the intentions of these authors are laudatory: They wish to make the scriptures accessible to young children, to those with learning disabilities, and to other unsophisticated readers. I do not sense that the authors are trying to recommend their versions as a substitute or replacement for reading the Book of Mormon or for purposes of conversion.

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15. “Rewriting Book of Mormon into Modern English Not Authorized,” *Church News*, 20 February 1993, 3; cf. also the First Presidency statement, “Modern-Language Editions of the Book of Mormon Discouraged,” *Ensign*, April 1993, 74; reprinted in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 7/1 (1995): 1–2. The First Presidency in this statement expressed concern that “this process may introduce doctrinal errors or obscure evidence of its ancient origin.”

16. Timothy B. Wilson, *Mormon's Story: An Adaptation Based on the Book of Mormon* (privately published, 1993); see the review by Camille S. Williams in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 7/1 (1995): 3–12.

17. Timothy B. Wilson, *A Plain English Reference to the Book of Mormon* (Springville, UT: Bonneville Books, 1998); see also plainbookofmormon.com (accessed 13 April 2006).

18. Lynn Matthews Anderson, *The Easy-to-Read Book of Mormon: A Learning Companion* (Apple Valley, MN: Estes Book, 1995); see Lynn Matthews Anderson, “Delighting in Plainness: Issues Surrounding a Simple Modern English Book of Mormon,” *Sunstone*, March 1993, 20–29. See the reviews of this book by Camille S. Williams and Marvin Folsom in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 7/1 (1995): 3–12, 13–18, and by Christian K. N. Anderson in *Dialogue* 27/1 (1994): 274–78.

19. Mark A. Smith Sr., *Book of Mormon Summary* (Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2003); Susan Stansfield Wolverton (pen name), *Having Visions: The Book of Mormon Translated and Exposed in Plain English* (New York: Algora, 2004); and Thomas Johnson, *Modern Revelation: The Book of Mormon Concisely Translated into Plain English* (Moab, UT: WisdomSeed Press, 2005).

### Book of Mormon Commentaries

After making her text selections from the Book of Mormon, Riess was then faced with the challenge of writing her annotations and explanations. This is where Riess aims at her intended audience, spiritual seekers of all faiths. She generously fills in gaps (much as Mormon did in some of his commentary—for example, in Words of Mormon 1:12–18) by explaining how much time has elapsed and by introducing a new cast of characters. She describes what has taken place in the deleted material to prepare the reader for the next selection. For example, to fill in the lengthy gap from Alma 41:15 to 3 Nephi 11:1, she writes:

We now skip ahead more than a hundred years from Alma's advice to his sons (ca. 73 BCE) to the coming of Christ to the New World (sometime between 30 and 35 CE). Prior to this scene, there have been tumultuous and cataclysmic portents; storms, earthquakes, and fires have destroyed several Nephite cities. This destruction happened in the New World at the same time that Christ was being crucified in the old. Then a thick darkness covered the land in the New World for three days (coincident to the time that Christ was in the tomb). During this time, Christ's voice spoke to the people, urging them to repent and give their hearts to him. . . . Some time later, he visits with approximately twenty-five hundred Nephite men, women, and children for three days at the temple in Bountiful. (p. 184 n. 1)

Riess is able to use some of the verses as a starting point to explain some uniquely Mormon doctrines. For example, in explaining 2 Nephi 2:16, "Wherefore, the Lord God gave unto man that he should act for himself. Wherefore, man could not act for himself save it should be that he was enticed by the one or the other," she discusses agency, foreordination, predestination, and choice:

This is a fundamental statement about human *agency*, or free will. Mormons believe that all people are free to act for

themselves and can choose God and righteousness. Although Mormons talk about some souls being *foreordained* to fulfill certain tasks—from being the prophet to mothering a particular child—they do not believe in *predestination*, or the idea that humans are merely the instruments of an all-sovereign God who chooses some individuals for salvation and others for possible damnation. Mormons hold that all people are endowed with agency and can choose between good and evil—recognizing, as this verse suggests, that both righteous and evil spiritual forces will seek to influence them. (p. 54 n. 4, emphasis in original)

One senses that Riess has done a lot of background reading in the preparation of her annotations, although this is not necessarily reflected in her endnotes, which fill merely two pages. A list of suggested readings reveals more of her sources. One of the blurbs on the back cover proclaims: “Captures the spirit and gist of the distinctively Mormon scripture. . . . Coupled with her informed, discerning, and accessible commentary, Riess’s editorial accomplishment is an act of interreligious generosity.” Riess has built on her knowledge of religious writings gained through her job with *Publishers Weekly* and is perhaps uniquely qualified to introduce the Book of Mormon to those of other faiths.

A brief look at commentaries on the Book of Mormon, most of which have been written for the believing reader, illustrates the challenge of bringing this sacred text to a higher level of understanding. Nearly a hundred years ago, B. H. Roberts wrote his three-volume *New Witnesses for God*.<sup>20</sup> Sidney B. Sperry wrote extensively on the Book of Mormon, beginning in 1947 with his *Our Book of Mormon* and culminating about twenty years later with his *Book of Mormon Compendium*.<sup>21</sup> Philip C. Reynolds brought together the notes of

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20. B. H. Roberts, *New Witnesses for God*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1909–11).

21. Sidney B. Sperry, *Our Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Stevens and Wallis, 1947); and Sperry, *Book of Mormon Compendium* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968); see some of Sperry’s Book of Mormon writings gathered in the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 4/1 (1995).

George Reynolds and Janne M. Sjodahl in a seven-volume *Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, published in the mid-1950s to early 1960s,<sup>22</sup> and Chris B. Hartshorn provided a commentary from the RLDS point of view in the mid-1960s.<sup>23</sup> Among many other writings on the Book of Mormon, Hugh Nibley wrote *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, first used in 1957 as a Melchizedek Priesthood manual.<sup>24</sup> More recent commentaries have come to us from Daniel H. Ludlow (1976);<sup>25</sup> Joseph Fielding McConkie, Robert L. Millet, and Brent L. Top (1987–92);<sup>26</sup> K. Douglas Bassett (2000);<sup>27</sup> David J. Ridges (2003–4);<sup>28</sup> and Monte S. Nyman (2003–4).<sup>29</sup> An encyclopedic approach was used in the information-filled *Book of Mormon Reference Companion* under the general editorship of Dennis Largey.<sup>30</sup> And, of course, the church itself has prepared some materials for its seminary and institute programs that comment extensively on the Book of Mormon.<sup>31</sup>

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22. George Reynolds and Janne M. Sjodahl, *Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1955–61).

23. Chris B. Hartshorn, *A Commentary on the Book of Mormon* (Independence, MO: Herald House, 1964).

24. Now available in its third edition from Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988.

25. Daniel H. Ludlow, *A Companion to Your Study of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976).

26. Joseph Fielding McConkie, Robert L. Millet, and Brent L. Top, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 4 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987–92); see reviews by J. Frederick Voros Jr. in *BYU Studies* 29/2 (1989): 121–25; by Louis Midgley in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 1 (1989): 92–113; and by Donald W. Parry and J. Michael Allen in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 4 (1992): 139–46, 147–53.

27. K. Douglas Bassett, *Latter-day Commentary on the Book of Mormon: Insights from Prophets, Church Leaders, and Scholars* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 1999). Bassett's approach was to compile statements by church leaders who have had unique insights into the Book of Mormon. See the review by Ronald W. Asay in *FARMS Review of Books* 14/1–2 (2002): 1–7.

28. David J. Ridges, *Your Study of the Book of Mormon Made Easier*, 3 vols. (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2003–4). This features the full text plus interspersed commentary.

29. Monte S. Nyman, *A Teaching Commentary*, 6 vols. (Orem, UT: Granite, 2003–4).

30. Dennis Largey, gen. ed., *The Book of Mormon Reference Companion* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003); see the reviews by Don E. Norton and Sally L. Taylor in *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 13/1–2 (2004): 161–63, 163–66.

31. *Book of Mormon Seminary Student Manual* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2000); and *Book of Mormon Student Manual: Religion 121 and 122*, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1996).

Riess's selections from the Book of Mormon and the annotations of her chosen verses represent a great deal of work. Although she stands to gain little monetarily from the publication of the book—"All author proceeds from the sales of this book are being donated in equal parts to two charitable funds administered by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints" (p. xix, the Perpetual Education Fund and the LDS Humanitarian Relief fund)—she has probably herself learned a great deal about this sacred book and has made it more accessible to curious readers of other faiths.



SMITH'S ACCOUNT OF TAKING THE "GOLDEN BIBLE" FROM MORMON HILL.

Figure 1. Frontispiece of Pomeroy Tucker's *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism* (New York: Appleton, 1867).

## MORONI AS ANGEL AND AS TREASURE GUARDIAN

Mark Ashurst-McGee

Over the last two decades, many historians have reconsidered the origins of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the context of the early American tradition of treasure hunting. Well into the nineteenth century there were European Americans hunting for buried wealth. Some believed in treasures that were protected by magic spells or guarded by preternatural beings. Joseph Smith, founding prophet of the Mormon religion, had participated in several treasure-hunting expeditions in his youth. The church that he later founded rested to a great degree on his claim that an angel named Moroni had appeared to him in 1823 and showed him the location of an ancient scriptural record akin to the Bible, which was inscribed on metal tablets that looked like gold. After four years, Moroni allowed Smith to recover these “golden plates” and translate their characters

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I presented an early version of this paper in 1999 at Halstead, Pennsylvania, as part of the BYU Department of Church History and Doctrine Summer 1999 New York Faculty Symposium. The paper was later published as “Moroni: Angel or Treasure Guardian?” in *Mormon Historical Studies* 2/2 (2001): 39–75. Its findings on the topic were almost diametrically opposed to those published two years later in an essay by Ronald V. Huggins, “From Captain Kidd’s Treasure Ghost to the Angel Moroni: Changing *Dramatis Personae* in Early Mormonism,” *Dialogue* 3/4 (2003): 17–42, which was reviewed in a recent issue of the *FARMS Review* by Larry E. Morris, “I Should Have an Eye Single to the Glory of God’: Joseph Smith’s Account of the Angel and the Plates,” *FARMS Review* 17/1 (2005): 11–81. My original article appears here, courtesy of *Mormon Historical Studies*, with a few minor revisions. A postscript responding to recent work by Huggins and Morris is appended.

into English. It was from Smith's published translation—the Book of Mormon—that members of the fledgling church became known as “Mormons.” For historians of Mormonism who have treated the golden plates as treasure, Moroni has become a fantastical treasure guardian. In this essay, I argue for the historical validity of the traditional understanding of Moroni as an angel.

In May 1985, a letter to the editor of the *Salt Lake Tribune* posed this question: “In keeping with the true spirit (no pun intended) of historical facts, should not the angel Moroni atop the Mormon Temple be replaced with a white salamander?”<sup>1</sup> Of course, the pun was intended. Document forger Mark Hofmann's “salamander letter” was at the height of public attention at this time. Allegedly penned by Book of Mormon witness Martin Harris, the letter has Harris describing Moroni as a white salamander that bit Joseph Smith and then transformed into a capricious spirit guardian of the golden plates. This letter and other Hofmann forgeries portrayed Joseph Smith's early religious experiences in terms of treasure seeking and magic. The startling new documents caused Latter-day Saint historians to reconsider the founding events of the restoration of the church.<sup>2</sup> As one recent critic poses the question: “Was he [Moroni] a magical guardian of a treasure or a biblical angel of the gospel?”<sup>3</sup>

Many clamored for a radical reinterpretation of the origins of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Latter-day Saint historian Ronald W. Walker responded to the din:

As quieter perspectives inevitably settle in, the breathless ‘antithesis’ gives way to a more sedate “synthesis.” During this second phase, what once seemed so revolutionary is reconciled and merged with the still valid legacies of the past. To illustrate, our understanding of Joseph Smith's encoun-

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1. W. J. Robinson, “Replace Moroni?” *Salt Lake Tribune*, 12 May 1985, A18.

2. Linda Sillitoe and Allen Roberts, *Salamander: The Story of the Mormon Forgery Murders*, with a new afterword, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989); Richard E. Turley Jr., *Victims: The LDS Church and the Mark Hofmann Case* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992).

3. Robert D. Anderson, *Inside the Mind of Joseph Smith: Psychobiography and the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1999), 84.



ters with Moroni will not be insightful if we focus narrowly on Martin Harris's "trickster spirit" and forget the several contemporaneous statements . . . that speak of Cumorah's "angel." These apparent conflicts must be weighed, somehow harmonized, and molded into a new, more complex understanding."<sup>4</sup>

Walker predicted that after a reevaluation of the treasure-seeking and magical influences, historians would return to the traditional story as the more accurate interpretation of Mormon origins.<sup>5</sup>

Eventually, Hofmann's forgery was exposed. The white salamander fell from grace along with its creator. But Walker had also rightly noted that "the question of whether the Smith family participated in money digging and magic does not rely on the recently found letters [the Hofmann forgeries]. The weight of evidence, *with or without* them, falls on the affirmative side of the question."<sup>6</sup> Early Mormon history still needed to be reconsidered. And so historians continued to explore the influence of treasure seeking in particular and magic in general. In 1986, Signature Books published Dale Morgan's unfinished history of early Mormonism, which contained his argument that Mormonism had evolved from Joseph's treasure seeking and magic. Morgan had grown up in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints but had lost his faith and become disaffected.<sup>7</sup> In 1987, D. Michael Quinn produced *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*. Although a believing Latter-day Saint, Quinn perceived a strong influence of magical tradition in early Mormonism.<sup>8</sup> A few years later, in 1994, H. Michael Marquardt and Wesley P. Walters, former authors of anti-

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4. Ronald W. Walker, "Joseph Smith: The Palmyra Seer," *BYU Studies* 24/4 (1984): 463.

5. Walker, "Joseph Smith: The Palmyra Seer," 470–71.

6. Walker, "Joseph Smith: The Palmyra Seer," 463–64, emphasis in original.

7. William Mulder, preface to *Dale Morgan on Early Mormonism: Correspondence and a New History*, ed. John Phillip Walker (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1986), 1–21; Richard Saunders, "'The Strange Mixture of Emotion and Intellect': A Social History of Dale L. Morgan, 1933–42," *Dialogue* 28/4 (1995): 39–58.

8. D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, rev. and enl. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998); Quinn, "On Being a Mormon Historian (and Its Aftermath)," in *Faithful History: Essays on Writing Mormon History*, ed. George D. Smith (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), 69–111.

Mormon literature, presented a new-and-improved, kinder, gentler anti-Mormonism with their book *Inventing Mormonism: Tradition and the Historical Record*.<sup>9</sup> Each of these books drew heavily on the early American history of treasure seeking and magic to interpret the coming forth of the Book of Mormon.

In particular, these books argued that Joseph Smith originally spoke of Moroni as a treasure guardian. It was years later—these authors held—that Smith’s creative mind or developing exigencies transformed Moroni into an angel. Morgan, Quinn, and Marquardt and Walters all portrayed Moroni’s initial visits to Joseph as treasure-seeking experiences. They cast his interactions with Moroni as encounters between a treasure seer and a treasure guardian. Then they argued that as Joseph matured into the leader of an organized church, he reformulated his story and its meaning to better suit his needs.<sup>10</sup> In fact, whereas Latter-day Saints usually refer to Moroni as the “angel Moroni,” in *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, he is called “the treasure-guardian Moroni.”<sup>11</sup> For Morgan, as with Marquardt and Walters, revealing Moroni as a treasure guardian showed that Joseph’s religious claims were illegitimate.<sup>12</sup>

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9. H. Michael Marquardt and Wesley P. Walters, *Inventing Mormonism: Tradition and the Historical Record* (San Francisco: Smith Research Associates, 1994), 63–115. For examples of Marquardt’s previous publications, see *The Use of the Bible in the Book of Mormon and Early Nineteenth Century Events Reflected in the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1979); and *The Book of Abraham Revisited* (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1983). For examples of Walter’s previous publications, see “New Light on Mormon Origins from the Palmyra Revival,” *Dialogue* 4/1 (1969): 60–81; “From Occult to Cult with Joseph Smith, Jr.” *Journal of Pastoral Practice* 1/2 (1977): 121–37; “Mormon Origins: A Tale of Spirits and Salamanders,” *Presbyterian Journal* 44/7 (1985): 7–10; *The Human Origins of the Book of Mormon* (Clearwater, FL: Ex-Mormons for Jesus Ministries, 1979).

10. Walker, *Dale Morgan on Early Mormonism*, 266–75; Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 136–77, especially 138–40; Marquardt and Walters, *Inventing Mormonism*, 89–115, especially 105. See also Rodger I. Anderson, *Joseph Smith’s New York Reputation Reexamined* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990), 46–47; William D. Morain, *The Sword of Laban: Joseph Smith, Jr. and the Dissociated Mind* (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Press, 1998), 58–64; R. D. Anderson, *Inside the Mind of Joseph Smith*, 40, 72–73.

11. Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 167.

12. And see the recent work of Dan Vogel, *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004), 45.

These revisionist histories carried out the explorations into treasure seeking and magic that the Hofmann forgeries had initially sparked. However, they did so at the expense of other interpretations—and in some cases at the expense of reliable sources and historical standards. These authors did not go beyond the “breathless antithesis” to synthesis. The revolutionary was not reconciled or merged with the still valid, traditional understanding of early Mormonism. In sum, these works did not provide the new and complex understanding that Walker had anticipated.

And so—strangely enough—this area of Mormon history finds itself today in a position not unlike that described by Walker during the heyday of the salamander. In this essay, I reassert his position with reference to Moroni in particular and to the coming forth of the Book of Mormon in general. Although Joseph Smith may have understood Moroni to some extent as a treasure guardian, this was a secondary level of meaning for him. An application of basic historical standards to relevant sources confirms that Joseph understood Moroni primarily as an angel in the context of a divine restoration.<sup>13</sup>

The problem addressed here maintains its validity regardless of one’s opinion of Joseph Smith and his claims. Whether or not one believes an actual being appeared to Joseph Smith, the question is whether Moroni evolved from a treasure guardian into an angel in Joseph’s telling of the event.<sup>14</sup> Before I proceed to answer this question,

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13. As some accounts identify the messenger as Nephi, some may wish to quibble over the angel/guardian’s proper name. On the name of Joseph’s visitor, see Dean C. Jessee, ed., *The Papers of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 1:277 n. 1. In this essay, I use “Moroni” to refer to Joseph Smith’s visitor to abstain from calling him either an angel or a treasure guardian.

14. Most historians of Mormonism, whether believing Latter-day Saints or otherwise, agree that Smith was sincere. That is, they agree that whether or not a preternatural being actually appeared to him, Smith believed that this did occur. Even Mark Thomas, who asserts that Smith dishonestly reworked the Moroni story over time, argues that Smith did in fact experience some kind of sensory perception in which he thought he saw “a spirit or angel.” For Thomas, however, this was quite possibly a case of abnormal psychology, not necessarily actual revelation. Thomas, “Was Joseph Smith for Real? How He Lied, Perhaps Even to Himself,” *Free Inquiry* 20/1 (1999): 37–39; Thomas, “Form Criticism of Joseph Smith’s 1823 Vision of the Angel Moroni,” *Dialogue* 35/3 (2002): 145–60.

it will be useful to review the early American practice of treasure seeking and Joseph Smith's involvement in this practice.

### Treasure Seeking

For the most part, the quest for buried wealth and its associated belief system have slipped away into a forgotten world. Though strange to us today, treasure-seeking beliefs probably influenced hundreds of thousands of Europeans and thousands of early European Americans. Many early Americans believed that treasures had been secreted in the earth by ancient inhabitants of the continent, by Spanish explorers, by pirates, or even by the dwarves of European mythology. Treasure hunters usually looked for caves and lost mines or dug into hills and Native American mounds to find these hidden deposits. A legend, a treasure map, or a dream of buried wealth initiated the hunt. Local specialists were enlisted to use their divining rods or seer stones to locate the treasure. To hide from the scrutiny of skeptics and the notice of other treasure seekers, they worked under the cover of darkness.

Gathering at the designated spot, the treasure seekers staked out magical circles around the treasure. They used Bible passages and hymns, prayers and incantations, ritual swords and other magical items, or even propitiatory animal sacrifices to appease or fend off preternatural guardians of the treasure. Excavation usually commenced under a rule of silence. Should someone carelessly mutter or curse, the treasure guardian could penetrate the circle or carry the treasure away through the earth.<sup>15</sup> For one reason or another, the treasure seekers usually returned home empty-handed.

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15. On the treasure-seeking tradition, see William 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*, ed. Peter Benes (Boston: Boston University Press, 1995), 97-106; 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; Alan Taylor, "The Early Republic's Supernatural Economy: Treasure Seeking in the American Northeast, 1780-1830," *American Quarterly* 38/1 (1986): 6-34; Ronald W. Walker, "The Persisting Idea of American Treasure Hunting," *BYU Studies* 24/4 (1984): 429-59; Gerard T. Hurley, "Buried Treasure Tales in America," *Western Folklore* 10/3 (1951): 197-216. See also Byrd H. Granger, *A Motif Index for Lost Mines and Treasures Applied to Redaction of Arizona*

## Joseph Smith's Involvement in Treasure Seeking

In the major work of church history that he began in 1838, Joseph Smith addressed the rumors regarding his pursuit of buried wealth. Most Latter-day Saints are familiar with his account as found in the Pearl of Great Price:

In the month of October, 1825, I hired with an old gentleman by the name of Josiah Stool [Stowell], who lived in Chenango county, State of New York. He had heard something of a silver mine having been opened by the Spaniards in Harmony, Susquehanna county, State of Pennsylvania; and had, previous to my hiring to him, been digging, in order, if possible, to discover the mine. After I went to live with him, he took me, with the rest of his hands, to dig for the silver mine, at which I continued to work for nearly a month, without success in our undertaking, and finally I prevailed with the old gentleman to cease digging after it. Hence arose the very prevalent story of my having been a money-digger. (Joseph Smith—History 1:56)<sup>16</sup>

Although Joseph downplayed his involvement, he nevertheless admitted it.

Lucy Mack Smith, when dictating her history of the Smith family, explained that Stowell hired Joseph because “he possessed certain keys, by which he could discern things invisible to the natural eye.”<sup>17</sup> Lucy also used the term *key* in her history to refer to the Urim and Thummim spectacles, which Joseph would later obtain with the golden plates. She also used the phrase *Urim and Thummim* to refer to Joseph’s seer stone(s).<sup>18</sup>

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*Legends, and to Lost Mine and Treasure Legends Exterior to Arizona* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1977).

16. Cf. *History of the Church*, 1:17; and *History of the Church*, Book A-1 Collection, Family and Church History Department Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (hereafter Church Archives), 8; quoted in Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:282.

17. Lucy Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith, the Prophet, and His Progenitors for Many Generations* (Liverpool: Richards, 1853), 91–92.

18. “That of which I spoke, which Joseph termed a key, was indeed, nothing more nor less than the Urim and Thummim.” Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith*, 106.

Smith's apostles used this same terminology. For example, on 27 December 1841, Wilford Woodruff recorded in his journal a meeting of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles with Joseph Smith in the Prophet's home. "I had the privilege," Woodruff wrote, "of seeing for the first time in my day the URIM & THUMMIM."<sup>19</sup> We know that Joseph had returned the spectacles to the angel Moroni over a decade earlier. Brigham Young's journal account of the same meeting clarifies that Woodruff was writing about one of Joseph's seer stones: "I met with the Twelve at brother Joseph's. He conversed with us in a familiar manner on a variety of subjects . . . [and] he showed us his seer stone."<sup>20</sup> The terms *key* and *keys*—like the terms *urim* and *Urim and Thummim*—could be applied to seer stones and to the spectacles found with the golden plates.<sup>21</sup> Since Stowell hired Joseph in 1825, two years before Joseph received the spectacles, the "keys" that Lucy mentioned were Joseph's seer stones.

In 1826, Peter Bridgeman, Stowell's nephew, attempted to stop his uncle's participation in treasure seeking by hauling Joseph Smith into court on grounds of deception. However, Stowell testified in Joseph's defense. Notes of the legal proceedings record Stowell's testimony "that Prisoner [Joseph Smith] looked through [a seer] stone and described Josiah Stowels house and out houses, while at Palmyra at Simpson Stowels . . . he had been in company with prisoner digging for gold, and had the most implicit faith in Prisoners skill."<sup>22</sup>

According to Book of Mormon witness Martin Harris, Joseph also used his seer stone to try to find treasures near his home in

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See also 101, 104, 126, 135, where Lucy used the term *Urim and Thummim* to refer to the seer stones.

19. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal: 1833–1898 Typescript*, ed. Scott G. Kenney (Midvale, UT: Signature Books, 1983), 2:144.

20. "History of Brigham Young," *Millennial Star* 26 (1864): 118–19. See also Richard Van Wagoner and Steve Walker, "Joseph Smith: 'The Gift of Seeing,'" *Dialogue* 15/2 (1982): 49–68; Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 57, 174–75, 243–45, 250.

21. Van Wagoner and Walker, "Joseph Smith: 'The Gift of Seeing,'" 49–68; Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 174–75.

22. *People of State of New York v. Joseph Smith*, 20 March 1826, Bainbridge, New York, in "A Document Discovered," *Salt Lake City Utah Christian Advocate*, January 1886, 1.

Manchester, New York.<sup>23</sup> A number of former neighbors and other acquaintances from New York and Pennsylvania later recounted the Smith family's involvement with treasure seeking.<sup>24</sup> In fact, the people who tried to steal the plates from Joseph Smith in 1827 had hunted for treasure with him in earlier years. They viewed the ancient record as a treasure—as plates of *gold* rather than as inscribed tablets. Now that precious metal had finally been unearthed, they wanted their share.<sup>25</sup> Before the Hofmann forgeries forced a serious consideration of Joseph's involvement in the folk practices of his time, Latter-day Saints knew little of Joseph's treasure seeking. Latter-day Saint historian Richard L. Bushman notes that now, because of the efforts of believing scholars to understand these events, "the magical culture of nineteenth-century Yankees no longer seems foreign to the Latter-day Saint image of the Smith family."<sup>26</sup>

### Treasure Guardians

Although treasure seeking was common during Joseph's youth, by the end of his life the practice had dwindled.<sup>27</sup> The accompanying belief system likewise faded away along with its lore of treasure

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23. "Mormonism—No. II," *Tiffany's Monthly*, June 1859, 164.

24. For a variety of perspectives on the Smith family's involvement with treasure seeking, see Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984, 1988), 64–76; Walker, "Joseph Smith: The Palmyra Seer," 461–72; Richard Lloyd Anderson, "The Mature Joseph Smith and Treasure Searching," *BYU Studies* 24/4 (1984): 489–560; Richard L. Bushman, "Treasure-Seeking Then and Now," *Sunstone*, September 1987, 5–6; Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*; Richard L. Bushman, "Joseph Smith's Family Background," 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), 1–18; R. I. Anderson, *Joseph Smith's New York Reputation Reexamined*; Dan Vogel, "The Locations of Joseph Smith's Early Treasure Quests," *Dialogue* 27/3 (1994): 197–231; Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York City: Knopf, 2005), 41–52.

25. See Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*, 83–84; and Andrew H. Hedges, "All My Endeavors to Preserve Them': Protecting the Plates in Palmyra, 22 September–December 1827," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8/2 (1999): 14–23.

26. Richard L. Bushman, "Just the Facts Please," review of *Inventing Mormonism: Tradition and the Historical Record*, by Marquardt and Walters, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/2 (1994): 132.

27. Taylor, "Early Republic's Supernatural Economy," 25–27.

guardians. The preternatural beings that guarded treasure took many forms. Most treasures were guarded by ghosts or spirits—usually deceased humans. This particular class of treasure guardians seems to have grown out of the practice of grave robbing. In many ancient societies, people were buried with their valuables in order to retain them in the next life.<sup>28</sup> The dead did not take kindly, therefore, to anyone who tried to plunder their wealth. In fact, dying kings and nobles hoping to protect their sepulchers from ransack may have generated this treasure-guardian lore in an effort to frighten off tomb raiders. Frequently, treasure-guarding ghosts were either the spirit of the person who had hidden the treasure or the spirit of a person who had been killed and deposited with the treasure to watch over it.<sup>29</sup> This latter scenario was considered the customary practice of pirates.<sup>30</sup> In some treasure tales, the unfortunate conscript lost his head.<sup>31</sup>

The devil and his minions made up the next major group of treasure guardians.<sup>32</sup> These satanic guardians apparently owed their existence to the notion that God dwells in the heavens above the earth and the devil lives beneath the earth. Satan laid claim on the treasure deposited within his subterranean dominion.<sup>33</sup> Also, since burying treasure was often associated with greed, robbery, and murder, the devil found his

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28. Charles R. Beard, *The Romance of Treasure Trove* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, 1933), 15.

29. Hurley, "Buried Treasure Tales in America," 200–201.

30. B. A. Botkin, ed., *A Treasury of New England Folklore: Stories, Ballads, and Traditions of the Yankee People* (New York: Crown, 1947), 533–34; Charles M. Skinner, *Myths and Legends of Our Own Land* (1896; repr., Detroit: Singing Tree, 1969), 2:268–69; Sara Puryear Rodes, "Washington Irving's Use of Traditional Folklore," *New York Folklore Quarterly* 13/1 (1957): 5; Henry Buxton, *Assignment Down East* (Brattleboro, VT: Daye, 1938), 169–70; and Harold W. Thompson, *Body, Boots and Britches* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1940), 22. This practice served a double function: Killing the spade man meant that there was now one less person who knew where the booty lay buried.

31. For headless guardians in general, see Granger, *Motif Index for Lost Mines and Treasures*, g 3.1.2.1, 3.1.2.2, 3.1.3.1.

32. Ernest W. Baughman, *Type and Motif-Index of the Folktales of England and North America* (The Hague: Mouton, 1966), N571; Granger, *Motif Index for Lost Mines and Treasures*, g 3.4.

33. Eduard Hoffmann-Krayer, ed., *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1936), s.v. "Schatz," 7:1004. I thank H. Brandon Spencer for help with this and other German sources.



way into many a treasure tale.<sup>34</sup> In 1825, a Palmyra newspaper explained the recent failure of one group to recover a buried treasure: “His Satanic Majesty, or some other invisible agent, appears to keep it under marching orders; for no sooner is it dug on to in one place, than it moves off like ‘false delusive hope,’ to another still more remote.”<sup>35</sup>

Animals formed the third most common class of guardians—dogs being the most prevalent. There were treasures guarded by ghost dogs, headless dogs, yellow dogs with two tails, black dogs, scarlet dogs, and wolves. Other treasures were guarded by horses, bulls, a goat, a black cat, a black panther, a wild boar, and a big black hog with enormous white tusks.<sup>36</sup>

An amphibian-reptilian assortment of sentinels constituted an important subset of the animals said to guard treasure.<sup>37</sup> For example, an old European tradition held that people who had hidden away treasures during their mortality could afterwards appear in the form of a toad to guard them.<sup>38</sup> About 1870, a company of treasure diggers from Niagara County, New York, were said to have been foiled by a large toad that threatened to kill them.<sup>39</sup> The amphibian-reptilian category of guardians extended beyond the natural species of this phyla complex—such as frogs, toads, lizards, and snakes—to include dragons and other monsters.<sup>40</sup> Many people are familiar with the

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34. Hurley, “Buried Treasure Tales in America,” 203.

35. “Wonderful Discovery,” *Palmyra (NY) Wayne Sentinel*, 27 December 1825, 2.

36. Hurley, “Buried Treasure Tales in America,” 201–2; Granger, *Motif Index for Lost Mines and Treasures*, motif g: “Guardians of Mine or Treasure”; Baughman, *Type and Motif-Index*, N571.2; Wayland Hand Collection of Superstition and Popular Belief, Fife Folklore Archives, Special Collections and Archives, Milton R. Merrill Library, Utah State University, Logan, Utah, s.v. “treasure.”

37. Granger, *Motif Index for Lost Mines and Treasures*, g 2.2.

38. *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*, s.v. “Kröte” and “Schatz”; “Exempla of Odo of Cheriton,” c. 1250–1300, no. 122; cited in J. A. Herbert, *Catalogue of Romances in the Department of Manuscripts in the British Museum* (London: Printed by order of the Trustees, 1910), 3:70.

39. Julia Hull Winner, “The Money Diggers of Niagara County,” *New York Folklore Quarterly* 16/3 (1960): 224.

40. Granger, *Motif Index for Lost Mines and Treasures*, g 2.5; Jonathan D. Evans, “The Dragon,” in *Mythical and Fabulous Creatures: A Source Book and Research Guide*, ed. Malcolm South (New York: Greenwood, 1987), 27–58; see especially 29 and xxxii, s.v. “dragon.”



Figure 2. A dragon from Richard Huber, *Treasury of Fantastic and Mythological Creatures: 1,087 Renderings from Historic Sources* (New York: Dover Publications, 1981), plate 36, figure 5. Used by permission.

dragon named Smaug who guarded treasure in a mountain in J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*. Tolkien based Smaug on the classic dragon treasure guardian.<sup>41</sup>

The dwarf is another classic medieval guardian of subterranean treasure that persisted into the nineteenth century.<sup>42</sup>

Everyone who has heard the Germanic tale of Snow White remembers the seven dwarves who mined gold and copper from a treasure mountain.<sup>43</sup> Gnomes—who constituted one of the four classes of elemental spirits—lived within the earth and held

charge of many underground treasures.<sup>44</sup> In the early nine-

teenth century, treasure seer Zimri Allen looked into his seer stone and saw subterranean treasures near Rochester, New York, that had been buried by

gnomes.<sup>45</sup> We are even more familiar with a Celtic counterpart—the leprechaun—who hoards his pot of gold but can be affected by lucky charms.

41. J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit, or There and Back Again*, rev. ed. (New York: Ballantine Books, 1982), 215–25.

42. *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*, s.v. "Schatz," 7:1005; Carol Rose, *Spirits, Fairies, Gnomes, and Goblins: An Encyclopedia of the Little People* (Santa Barbara: ABC-Clio, 1996), s.v. "dwarf"; Granger, *Motif Index for Lost Mines and Treasures*, g 3.6, 3.7; Geo[rge] H. Harris, "Myths of Onanda, or Treasure Hunters of the Genesee," "the first manuscript," 1886, Local History Division, Rochester Public Library, Rochester, New York, 6–7.

43. "Little Snow-White," in *The Complete Grimm's Fairy Tales* (New York: Random House, 1944), 249–58.

44. Beard, *Romance of Treasure Trove*, 67; Rose, *Spirits, Fairies, Gnomes, and Goblins*, s.v. "gnome."

45. Harris, "Myths of Onanda, or Treasure Hunters of the Genesee." Harris uses the term *pygmie*. *Pygmie* and *gnome* are the two proper names for earth elementals.

Giants also appear here and there as guardians of treasure.<sup>46</sup> Because of their size and strength, they made formidable guardians.<sup>47</sup> According to early Mormon Martin Harris, members of Joseph Smith's treasure-hunting group had encountered a giant: "Samuel Lawrence told me that while they were digging, a large man who appeared to be eight or nine feet high, came and sat on the ridge of the barn, and motioned to them that they must leave. They motioned back that they would not; but that they afterwards became frightened and did leave. . . . These things were real to them."<sup>48</sup> The capricious or even malevolent efforts of the guardians helped explain the failure to secure buried treasure.

### Moroni as Both Angel and Treasure Guardian

A few of Joseph Smith's former acquaintances described Moroni as a treasure guardian. For some modern historians, these accounts reflect Joseph's early understanding of his supernatural experiences—before he founded a church and changed the Moroni story to suit his needs. It is equally possible, however, that Joseph Smith's former neighbors changed the story to suit *their* needs. Did Joseph "baptize" Moroni, or was Moroni "defrocked" by others? The question may be formally stated: *Did Joseph Smith's successive narratives eventually transform a treasure guardian into an angel, or did his antagonists' successive narratives eventually transform an angel into a treasure guardian?* The position that Joseph changed his story may be called the treasure-guardian thesis. The position that Joseph's critics changed the story may be called the angel thesis.

Some early critics saw Moroni only as a treasure guardian. A few of the modern historians who have emphasized that interpretation seem to acknowledge the possibility that Joseph understood Moroni as an angel as well, even in early years. The possibility of a

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46. Lewis Spence, *The Fairy Tradition in Britain* (New York: Rider, 1948), 25; Thompson, *Body, Boots and Britches*, 22; also *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*, s.v. "Schatz," 7:1010.

47. Janis L. Pallister, "Giants," in *Mythical and Fabulous Creatures*, 320–21.

48. "Mormonism—No. II," 165. See also Frederic G. Mather, "The Early Days of Mormonism," *Lippincott's Magazine*, August 1880, 200.

dual interpretation needs further emphasis, for treasure guardians and angels are not necessarily mutually exclusive beings. “Angel” is listed as a category of treasure guardian in folklorist Stith Thompson’s classic *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*.<sup>49</sup> Likewise, “Treasure Angel” is listed in a recent bestiary by Carol Rose.<sup>50</sup> W. H. McIntosh’s *History of Wayne County, New York*, includes a circa 1840 story wherein a treasure guardian introduces itself as an angel to a company of treasure seekers by Rose (about twenty miles east of Palmyra).<sup>51</sup>

Angels exist as guardians of treasure in Mormon thought as well. In 1837, Joseph Smith Sr. blessed Wilford Woodruff: “Thou shalt have access to the treasures hid in the sand to assist thy necessities. An angel of God shall show thee the treasures of the earth that thou mayest have riches to assist thee in gathering many orphan Children to Zion.”<sup>52</sup> In 1877, President Brigham Young taught, “These treasures that are in the earth are carefully watched, they can be removed from place to place according to the good pleasure of Him who made them and owns them. He has his messengers at his service, and it is just as easy for an angel to remove the minerals from any part of one of these mountains to another, as it is for you and me to walk up and down this hall.”<sup>53</sup> Because angels can guard treasure in both Mormon and non-Mormon belief, there is no need to adopt an evolutionary model in which a treasure guardian is gradually changed into an angel. Book of Mormon witness David Whitmer may have blended both interpretations when he called Moroni “the angel, the guardian of the plates.”<sup>54</sup>

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49. Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature: A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folktales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Mediaeval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-Books and Local Legends*, rev. and enl. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1957), N583; see also N536. See also Granger, *Motif Index for Lost Mines and Treasures*, g 5.2.

50. Rose, *Spirits, Fairies, Gnomes, and Goblins*, 356.

51. W. H. McIntosh, *History of Wayne County, New York; with Illustrations Descriptive of Its Scenery, Palatial Residences, Public Buildings, Fine Blocks, and Important Manufactories, from Original Sketches by Artists of the Highest Ability, 1789–1877* (Philadelphia: Everts, Ensign & Everts, 1877), 155.

52. *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal*, 1:143.

53. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 19:36–37.

54. P. Wilhelm Poulson, Ogden, to the editors, *Deseret News*, Salt Lake City, 13 August 1878; in *Deseret Evening News*, 16 August 1878. Poulson had interviewed Whitmer

This analysis, which attempts to fulfill Walker's anticipation of a synthesizing of the two interpretations, requires a reformulation of this essay's central question: *Was Moroni initially more meaningful to Joseph Smith as an angel or as a treasure guardian?* This modified version of the question defines a modified "treasure-guardian thesis" and a modified "angel thesis." Walker conjectured that the angel thesis would ultimately prevail. What does the historical record have to say?

To argue the treasure-guardian thesis, its proponents bring forth a number of historical sources that describe Moroni as a treasure guardian or a spirit. They contrast these accounts with the traditional account of Moroni's visits. Whereas Joseph's 1838 history presents Moroni as a divine messenger, these other accounts describe him as a treasure guardian—thus invalidating Joseph's claims to revelation from God. Abner Cole, editor of the *Palmyra Reflector*, composed the first extant source that explicitly identified Moroni as a treasure guardian. "The Book of Pukei," his parody of the Book of Mormon, narrated that "Jo. made a league with the *spirit*, who afterwards turned out to be an angel."<sup>55</sup> Later, in the fourth installment of his "Gold Bible" series of news articles, Cole flatly stated the same as historical fact. "It will be borne in mind," he wrote, "that no *divine* interposition had been *dreamed* of at the period."<sup>56</sup> Then, in the following issue, Cole expounded the point: "It is well known that Jo Smith never pretended to have any communion with angels, until a long period after the *pretended* finding of his book, and that the juggling of himself or father, went no further than the pretended faculty of seeing wonders in a 'peep stone,' and the occasional interview with the spirit, supposed to have the custody of hidden treasures."<sup>57</sup> What was first

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at Whitmer's home in Richmond, Missouri (Dan Vogel, comp. and ed., *Early Mormon Documents* [Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2003], 5:39).

55. Obediah Dogberry [pseudonym for Abner Cole], "The Book of Pukei," *Palmyra Reflector*, 12 June 1830, 37, emphasis in original.

56. Obediah Dogberry [Cole], "Gold Bible, No. 4," *Palmyra Reflector*, 14 February 1831, 101, emphasis in original.

57. Dogberry [Cole], "Gold Bible, No. 5," *Palmyra Reflector*, 28 February 1831, 109, emphasis in original.

given in parody was restated as fact and then expounded as a historical framework.<sup>58</sup>

Joseph and Hiel Lewis, cousins of Emma Hale, also claimed that Joseph initially described Moroni to them as a treasure guardian of gold plates. “In all this narrative,” the Lewis brothers wrote, “there was not one word about ‘visions of God,’ or of angels, or heavenly revelations. All his information was by that dream, and that bleeding ghost. The heavenly visions and messages of angels, etc., contained in Mormon books, were after-thoughts, revised to order.”<sup>59</sup> Like Abner Cole, Joseph and Hiel Lewis articulated the theory that Moroni evolved from a treasure guardian into an angel.

Joseph’s former neighbor Orlando Saunders disagreed. He stated that Joseph “always claimed that he saw the angel.”<sup>60</sup> And, more importantly, Joseph and his family presented Moroni as an angel from the start. Thus Abner Cole and those detractors who followed him have nothing on Joseph Smith. The detractors asserted that Joseph converted a treasure guardian into an angel. Joseph and others maintained that Moroni was always an angel. This takes us nowhere. Adequately addressing the question at hand requires an application of the basic standards of source criticism and good history.

### Eyewitness Testimony

Eyewitness testimony is the most important standard of historical reliability. The only mortal eyewitness to Moroni’s 1823–28 visits is Joseph Smith. All of Joseph’s extant narrations maintain that Moroni is an angel. Aside from Joseph’s accounts, the only other firsthand accounts of seeing Moroni come from Martin Harris, Oliver Cowdery, and David Whitmer. In June 1829, Moroni showed the golden plates

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58. For Morgan’s acceptance of Cole, see Walker, *Dale Morgan on Early Mormonism*, 266. On Quinn’s basic acceptance of Cole, see Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 140.

59. Statements of Joseph and Hiel Lewis, in “Mormon History,” *Amboy Journal* (Amboy, Illinois), 30 April 1879, 1, emphasis removed, in *Early Mormon Documents*, 4:305.

60. Orlando Saunders, interviewed by William H. and Edmund L. Kelley, Palmyra, New York, 6 March 1881; quoted in W[illiam] H. Kelley, “The Hill Cumorah, and the Book of Mormon,” *Saints’ Herald* 28 (1 June 1881): 165.

to these “three witnesses of the Book of Mormon.” They consistently described Moroni as a Judeo-Christian angel in the context of a gospel restoration, not as a guardian spirit in the context of a treasure quest.<sup>61</sup> Therefore, all eyewitness accounts agree on Moroni’s identity. Whether or not Smith, Cowdery, Whitmer, and Harris actually saw a preternatural being named Moroni, their accounts are firsthand. The Moroni story began with those who claimed to have seen him.

Joseph and Hiel Lewis, who claimed to have heard their version from Joseph, gave secondhand testimony.<sup>62</sup> Of course, their secondhand account describing a treasure guardian could be weighed against dozens of secondhand accounts given by Mormons and others describing an angel. The accounts given by David Whitmer regarding his mother deserve mention. He reported that Mary Musselman Whitmer saw “an holy angel” who showed her the plates.<sup>63</sup>

Revisionists also use the accounts given by neighbor Willard Chase and by local businessman Fayette Lapham. Both claimed that Joseph Smith Sr. described Moroni to them as a treasure guardian. As Joseph Smith Sr. would have gained his knowledge of the matter directly from his son, Lapham and Chase provided thirdhand evidence.<sup>64</sup> Of course,

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61. See “The Testimony of Three Witnesses,” appended to *The Book of Mormon: An Account Written by the Hand of Mormon, upon Plates Taken from the Plates of Nephi* (Palmyra, NY: Grandin, 1830). For other firsthand accounts of the angel by Martin Harris and Oliver Cowdery, see Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:336, 499. For other firsthand accounts of the angel by David Whitmer, see A Witness to the Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon [David Whitmer], *An Address to All Believers in Christ* (Richmond, MO: Whitmer, 1887), 7, 12, 13, 29, 32, 43–44; Lyndon W. Cook, ed., *David Whitmer Interviews: A Restoration Witness*, ed. Lyndon W. Cook (Orem, UT: Grandin Book, 1991), 245–47. Numerous secondhand accounts of their eyewitness experiences with the angel can be given for each of these three men (for Harris and Cowdery, see *Early Mormon Documents*, 2: Part III, F–G; for Whitmer, see Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews*).

62. Statements of Joseph and Hiel Lewis, “Mormon History,” 1.

63. It is unclear whether this messenger was Moroni, Nephi, or one of the three Nephites. Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews*, 13, 28, 33, 50, 182, 214, 216, 217, 218; Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 30–32.

64. Fayette Lapham, “The Mormons,” *Historical Magazine* 7, 2nd series (May 1870): 305–9; Willard Chase statement, Manchester, New York, 1833; quoted in E[ber] D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled: Or, A Faithful Account of That Singular Imposition and Delusion, from Its Rise to the Present Time* (Painesville, OH: By the author, 1834), 240–48.

these accounts could be weighed against hundreds, if not thousands, of thirdhand accounts in which Moroni is an angel.

As stories get passed along, they become more and more susceptible to being distorted by biases. According to Oliver Cowdery's serial history written 1834–35, which is clearly informed by his discussions with Joseph Smith, Moroni had given Joseph a warning: "When it is known that the Lord has shown you these things, . . . they will circulate falsehoods to destroy your reputation."<sup>65</sup> William Smith, Joseph's brother, remembered that as soon as Joseph obtained the plates, these rumors prophesied by Moroni began to proliferate.<sup>66</sup> In 1840, Elder Orson Pratt wrote that when the "inhabitants of that vicinity" (western New York) heard about Moroni and the golden plates, they "began to ridicule and mock at those things." Before long, "The news of his discoveries spread abroad throughout all those parts. False reports, misrepresentations, and base slanders, flew as if upon the wings of the wind in every direction."<sup>67</sup> In his 1838 history, Joseph stated that after he returned the plates to Moroni, "The excitement however still continued, and rumour with her thousand tongues was all the time employed in circulating tales about my father's family and about myself. If I were to relate a thousand[d]th part of them it would fill up volumes."<sup>68</sup>

Some of these tales found their way to Abner Cole, the editor of the local tabloid. Cole explained his historical methodology on more than one occasion. For example, in a 6 January 1831 article on Mormonism, he announced his plans to expose the fledgling church and promised to provide readers with the "facts" of the matter—"so far as they may come to our knowledge."<sup>69</sup> These "facts" came not through careful investigative journalism but from local rumor solicited through his paper. Later, Cole specified the origins of his description of Moroni as

65. Oliver Cowdery, "Letter VIII," *Messenger and Advocate* 2/1 (October 1835): 199.

66. "Another Testimony," *Deseret Evening News*, 20 January 1894, 11.

67. Orson Pratt, *An Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions and of the Late Discovery of Ancient American Records* (Edinburgh: Ballantyne and Hughes, 1840; repr., Liverpool: James, 1848), 13.

68. Manuscript History of the Church, Book A-1, p. 8; quoted in Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:284.

69. Dogberry [Cole], "Gold Bible," *Palmyra Reflector*, 6 January 1831.



a treasure guardian: “This tale in substance, was told at the time the event was *said* to have happened by both father and son, and is well recollected by many of our citizens.”<sup>70</sup> Tales told by local residents amount to no more than neighborhood gossip.

When we apply the criterion that firsthand accounts should be favored over secondhand accounts, thirdhand accounts, and gossip, the angel thesis forcefully asserts itself. Some skeptics may be tempted to reject this analysis by arguing that Joseph and maybe even the Book of Mormon witnesses had changed their story. Logicians call this kind of an argument “begging the question.” Sources that speak of a treasure guardian may also have changed their story. An unbiased analysis must consider both possibilities. Firsthand accounts fall on the side of the angel thesis.

### Earliest Sources

The second most important standard of historical methodology is to favor sources composed closer to the time of the event in question over sources composed later on. A historian prefers to work with contemporaneous sources. In their absence, a historian will tend to rely on the earliest sources available. What do the earliest documents tell us about Moroni?

Exponents of the treasure-guardian thesis cite the 1879 account given by Joseph and Hiel Lewis and the 1870 account given by Fayette Lapham. These sources postdate the events they describe by half of a century, which severely reduces their reliability. They could be weighed against hundreds of Mormon accounts given in the middle decades of the nineteenth century that describe Moroni as an angel.

Philastus Hurlbut collected Willard Chase’s description of Moroni as a treasure guardian in 1833. However, at the same time, Hurlbut collected Abigail Harris’s statement describing Moroni as “the spirit of one of the Saints that was on this continent” as well as Henry Harris’s statement identifying Moroni as an “angel.”<sup>71</sup> Although the

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70. Dogberry [Cole], “Gold Bible, No. 4,” 101, emphasis in original.

71. Abigail Harris statement, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 253; Henry Harris statement, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 252.

Chase account predates the official history of the church, it does not predate Joseph Smith's 1832 history, which describes Moroni as "an angel of the Lord."<sup>72</sup>

Abner Cole first described Moroni as a treasure guardian in June 1830 in "The Book of Pukei," his parody of the Book of Mormon. This is a very early source; it predates the official history and even the 1832 history. However, it does not predate the "Articles and Covenants of the Church of Christ," which state that "God visited him [Joseph Smith] by an holy angel, whose countenance was as lightning, and whose garments were pure and white above all whiteness, and gave unto him commandments which inspired him from on high."<sup>73</sup> In fact, every relevant source that predates Cole's Book of Pukei calls Moroni an angel or implies as much. The "Articles and Covenants" was the latest of these sources. Five others are given here in chronological order, starting with the latest and working back to the earliest:

- On 2 June 1830, the *Cincinnati Advertiser and Ohio Phœnix* reprinted a recent article from the *Wayne County Inquirer* reporting that Joseph had claimed to have been "entrusted by God with a golden bible" and a "Divine commission."<sup>74</sup> Moroni is not explicitly mentioned, but contextual phraseology clearly favors the angel thesis. This account describes the coming forth of the Book of Mormon in terms of a traditional Christian view—not as a treasure quest.

- In August 1829, an article appearing in the *Palmyra Freeman* described Moroni as "the spirit of the Almighty."<sup>75</sup> Morgan and Quinn

72. Joseph Smith, Letterbook 1, Joseph Smith Collection, Church Archives, 4; quoted in Jesse, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:8.

73. This document had been composed by 9 June 1830 when it was read in the first conference of the Church, held in Fayette, New York. The Articles and Covenants were first printed in "The Mormon Creed," *Painesville Telegraph*, 19 April 1831, 4; cf. *A Book of Commandments, for the Government of the Church of Christ, Organized According to Law, on the 6th of April, 1830*, 24:7.

74. [no author], [no title], *Cincinnati Advertiser and Ohio Phœnix*, 2 June 1830, 1, reprinted from *Wayne County Inquirer (PA)*, in *Early Mormon Documents*, 3:274.

75. "Golden Bible," *Rochester Daily Advertiser and Telegraph*, 31 August 1829, 2. This is a reprint from the *Palmyra Freeman*, circa 1829. A week later the *Rochester Gem* identified the source of the *Palmyra Freeman* article as Martin Harris and added further detail concerning "the same spirit." Quinn takes this to mean a spirit guardian of treasure, but the *same* spirit is the previously mentioned "spirit of the Almighty"—a messenger

have emphasized the word *spirit* in this source and have read it to mean spirit guardian of treasure. The prepositional phrase “of the Almighty,” however, clearly gives the origin of the messenger in question. Whether this being had a tangible body or not, it was an angel by definition.<sup>76</sup>

- “The Testimony of Three Witnesses,” included in the back of the first edition of the Book of Mormon, was probably composed in late June 1829 when the Three Witnesses had their experience. It was certainly composed before 26 March 1830 when the Book of Mormon was advertised for sale.<sup>77</sup> Their testimony speaks of Moroni as “an Angel of God.”<sup>78</sup>

- On 26 June 1829, the *Wayne Sentinel* reported the local stir concerning the discovery of “an ancient record, of a religious and divine nature and origin” that could be translated only “by inspiration.” In this article, talk of things “divine” and “religious” brings this source down on the side of the angel thesis.<sup>79</sup>

- On 17 June 1829, Jesse Smith wrote a letter to his nephew Hyrum Smith.<sup>80</sup> Jesse wrote in response to letters from the Joseph Smith family written about the fall of 1828.<sup>81</sup> In at least one of these

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from God, not a treasure guardian. Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 114–19.

76. Lorenzo Saunders, who lived just over the hill from the Smith family farm, stated that on one occasion “the angel touched him [Smith] on the shoulders”—imputing tangible corporeality to Moroni (Saunders, interviewed by William H. Kelley, 17 September 1884, E. L. Kelley Papers, Community of Christ [RLDS Church] Library-Archives, Independence, Missouri, 9, in *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:131). Accounts given by Martin Harris, Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Mary Musselman Whitmer, which speak of Moroni holding the golden plates and turning them leaf by leaf, also imply his tangible corporeality. On Martin Harris and Oliver Cowdery, see *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:325, 355, 358, 364, 367, 375, 377–78, 380, 391, 510. On David and Mary Whitmer, see Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews*, 10, 11, 13, 20–21, 218; and Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses*, 30–32.

77. “The Book of Mormon,” *Palmyra (NY) Wayne Sentinel*, 26 March 1830, 3.

78. *The Book of Mormon: An Account Written by the Hand of Mormon, upon Plates Taken from the Plates of Nephi*, appended; cf. *The Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Royal Skousen (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2001), 977.

79. “The Book of Mormon,” *Wayne Sentinel*, 26 June 1829, 3.

80. Jesse Smith, Stockholm, New York, to Hyrum Smith, Palmyra, New York, 17 June 1829; transcribed in Joseph Smith Letterbook, 1837–43, Joseph Smith Papers, Church Archives, 59.

81. See the editorial note to this document in *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:551.

letters from the Joseph Smith Sr. family, Moroni was evidently called an angel. Citing the first of these letters, which had been written by Joseph Smith Sr. or Joseph Smith Jr., Jesse commented:

He writes that the Angel of the Lord has revealed to him the hidden treasures of wisdom & knowledge, even divine revelation, which has lain in the bowels of the earth for thousands of years [and] is at last made known to him, he says he has eyes to see things that are not and then has the audacity to say they are; and the Angel of the Lord (Devil it should be) has put me in possession of great wealth, gold and silver and precious stones so that I shall have the dominion in all the land of Palmyra.

Apparently, Joseph Sr. or Joseph Jr. had written a letter to Jesse that placed Moroni in a treasure-guarding context as well as an angelic context. As Jesse relates it, Moroni put the Smiths in possession of several local treasures. Jesse even used the words “hidden treasures.” Here, however, the treasures were not gold and silver but rather “treasures of wisdom & knowledge, even divine revelation.” Most importantly, this early letter cited by Jesse makes it quite clear that Joseph or his father referred to Moroni as “the Angel of the Lord.” This letter, the earliest relevant source, demonstrates the legitimacy of the treasure-guardian interpretation. At the same time, it manifests the primacy of the angel interpretation.

According to Quinn, “By 1830 Smith and his followers were emphasizing that the otherworldly messenger was an angel.”<sup>82</sup> But Jesse’s letter of 1829—the earliest relevant document—indicates that in 1828, either Joseph or his father had called Moroni “the Angel of the Lord.” All relevant sources predating Abner Cole’s 1830 news articles identify Moroni as an angel or support this version of the story. By 1830, Smith’s detractors were emphasizing that the otherworldly messenger was a treasure guardian.<sup>83</sup>

As with eyewitness testimony, a historical analysis of the early sources overwhelmingly favors the angel thesis. Some skeptics may

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82. Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 139.

83. My analysis of early sources was surpassed by Larry Morris in a recent issue of the *FARMS Review*; see Morris, “Joseph Smith’s Account,” 11–81.

reject this analysis on the grounds that Joseph Smith had changed his story before the earliest sources were recorded. Unfortunately, we have no directly relevant sources that were produced between Moroni's first visits in 1823 and the recovery of the plates in 1827. If there were only one Joseph Smith account, given at any time during his life, that portrayed Moroni as more of a treasure guardian than an angel, one might reasonably take this account as an accurate representation of Joseph's initial interpretation of Moroni's 1823 appearances. On the other hand, if there were an 1823 account from *any* source—Joseph himself, his family, a friend of the family, or even a bitter enemy—wherein Moroni was described primarily as an angel, valiant defenders of the treasure-guardian thesis would probably argue that the story had already been changed. Ultimately, the treasure-guardian thesis is unfalsifiable and therefore, in a sense, falls outside the domain of history into the realm of belief.

### Reminiscence

Proponents of the treasure-guardian thesis avoid the course of analysis followed in the previous section by focusing on the dates their sources claim for themselves rather than the dates on which these sources were actually recorded. Many accounts recorded in later years were based on conversations that took place much earlier. However, the passage of years easily obscures, filters, and even distorts memories. For this reason, historians generally favor the earliest possible accounts of the events under investigation. Proponents of the treasure-guardian thesis, however, have had to place their focus on later accounts that claim to be based on early conversations.<sup>84</sup>

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84. For example, Quinn writes that the “earliest Mormon accounts stated that Smith’s 1823 epiphany was the nocturnal visit of a spirit” (*Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 138). As evidence for this assertion, Quinn cites Abigail Harris, the *Palmyra Freeman*, the *Rochester Gem*, Joseph and Hiel Lewis, and Fayette Lapham (Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 138, see also 140). Taken as a whole, though, these sources are neither early nor Mormon. The Lapham and Lewis accounts are anything but early; they gave their accounts decades after the fact. Abigail Harris made her statement in 1833. She identified Moroni as neither an angel nor a treasure guardian but as “the spirit of one of the Saints that was on this continent” (Harris statement, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 253). Henry Harris, possibly a relative of Martin Harris,

But even if we adopt this less-rigorous standard, the angel thesis holds. Fayette Lapham reported that he spoke with Joseph Smith Sr.

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made a statement at the same time that Abigail Harris did. He identified Moroni as an “angel” (Henry Harris statement, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 252). The newspaper articles Quinn cites are indeed early, but the Jesse Smith letter and the testimony of the Three Witnesses—which predate these articles—call Moroni an angel. Quinn calls the sources he marshals “Mormon,” although none is directly so. It could be argued that these sources are indirectly Mormon—that they came from people who spoke with Mormons or recorded their words—but *every* source that claims to say something historical about Moroni must trace itself back to the Mormons who claimed to have seen him. The truly “Mormon” accounts—those produced by early Latter-day Saints—say nothing of spirits or treasure guardians.

In *Inventing Mormonism*, Marquardt and Walters write, “The earliest versions [of the Moroni story] linked . . . obtaining the plates with magical rituals traditionally associated with winning treasure from its guardian spirits” (p. 89). They cite Willard Chase, Joseph Knight, Fayette Lapham, Joseph and Hiel Lewis, and Lucy Mack Smith. Willard Chase and Joseph Knight did not give their accounts before 1833. Lapham and the Lewises did not give their accounts until decades later. Lucy Mack Smith called the plates a “treasure” but called Moroni “the angel.” She gave her narrative in 1845. None of these sources is particularly early. The earliest versions of the Moroni story linked obtaining the plates with the required obedience traditionally associated with commandments given by God and his angelic messengers.

In defense of the treasure-guardian thesis, Dale Morgan cited Abner Cole’s account of 1831, Fayette Lapham’s account of 1870, the Joseph and Hiel Lewis account of 1879, and the Abigail Harris account of 1833. Morgan seems to have taken Cole’s dwarf and Lapham’s giant as early versions of the treasure guardian. Then, Joseph opted for something less strange—a human guardian—the Spaniard with a gashed throat as described by the Lewises. Next, Joseph decided this guardian ghost was actually an ancient American Christian, as described by Abigail Harris. Finally, “not long after, so far from being a mere spirit, he was recognized to be an actual angel of the Lord” (Walker, *Dale Morgan on Early Mormonism*, 266). Cole claimed that the Smiths were talking about a dwarf just after finding or getting the plates. Abigail Harris spoke with Father and Mother Smith between December 1827 and February 1828. See *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:31 n. 2. The Lewises claimed that Joseph Smith Jr. told them about the bleeding human ghost in April 1828. Fayette Lapham spoke with Joseph Smith Sr. in 1830. As Harris gained her information before Lapham and the Lewises, the evolution that Morgan seems to sketch is highly unlikely.

More recently, Robert D. Anderson has rejected the angel described in the 1834–35 church history in favor of the treasure guardian described in “earlier versions.” R. D. Anderson, *Inside the Mind of Joseph Smith*, 72. He cites Abner Cole, Abigail Harris, Fayette Lapham, and Joseph and Hiel Lewis. As noted, however, the Lapham and Lewis accounts are not earlier versions. The thirdhand account given by Harris and the neighborhood rumor reported by Cole predate the 1834–35 church history by one year and four years respectively. However, as shown above, Joseph’s 1832 history and all of the accounts that predate Cole’s first treasure-guardian story identify Moroni as an angel.

about a treasure guardian in 1830, and Joseph and Hiel Lewis claimed that Joseph Smith Jr. told them about a treasure guardian about April 1828.<sup>85</sup> John A. Clark, however, reported that Martin Harris spoke to him about an angel in the fall of 1827.<sup>86</sup>

Neighbor Willard Chase said he talked to Joseph Smith Sr. about a treasure guardian in June 1827.<sup>87</sup> However, Joseph Knight Jr. related, about November 1826, that Joseph “made known to my father and I, that he had seen a vision, that a personage had appeared to him and told him [where] there was a gold book of ancient date buried, and if he would follow the directions of the Angel he could get it.”<sup>88</sup> Abner Cole claimed that a treasure-guardian tale “was told at the time the event was *said* to have happened by both father and son.”<sup>89</sup> However, Lucy Mack Smith and William Smith both remembered that Joseph described Moroni to the family as an angel on the very day Moroni first visited him.<sup>90</sup> Joseph Smith himself related the same.<sup>91</sup>

Proponents of the treasure-guardian thesis do not consider the Smith family accounts as early sources because they suspect that the Smiths distorted the story. And yet that is the very question at issue. Those who described Moroni as a treasure guardian may also have distorted the story. Sound source criticism applied equally to Mormon and non-Mormon accounts supports the thesis that Moroni

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85. Statements of Joseph and Hiel Lewis, in “Mormon History,” 1.

86. J[ohn] A. C[lark], “Gleanings by the Way, No. VI,” *Fairfield*, 24 August, 1840, *Philadelphia Episcopal Recorder*, 5 September 1840, 94. Harris himself recalled that in early October 1827, Palmyra village was buzzing with talk about Joseph’s discovery of the record. One man exclaimed, “Damn him! *angels* appear to men in this enlightened age! Damn him, he ought to be tarred and feathered for telling such a damned lie!” “Mormonism—No. II,” 168, emphasis added.

87. Willard Chase statement, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 242.

88. Joseph Knight Jr., Autobiographical Sketch, n.d., Church Archives. Knight states that Joseph Smith at this time was “about 21 years of age. I think it was in November he made known to my father and I.” This suggests November of 1827, but Joseph worked for the Knight family in the fall and winter of 1826.

89. Dogberry [Cole], “Gold Bible, No. 4,” 101, emphasis in original.

90. Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith*, 82. On William Smith, see *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:496, cf. 504.

91. History of the Church, Book A-1, Church Archives, p. 7; quoted in Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:281.

was transformed from an angel into a treasure guardian—rather than the other way around.

### Contextual Interpretation

To this point, I have focused on descriptions of Moroni himself. His visits, however, occurred within the context of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. Morgan, Quinn, and Marquardt and Walters spend a great deal of time noting the parallels between this context of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon and the early American culture of treasure seeking. As context often influences interpretation, we have two questions to consider: In what contexts was Moroni said to have appeared? And which of these contexts was most meaningful to Joseph at that time?

Joseph's 1838 history recounts that Moroni first appeared while Joseph was praying for forgiveness.<sup>92</sup> Moroni would be more likely to show up in this context as an angel than as a treasure guardian. However, some have jettisoned Smith's version in favor of an account stating that Moroni appeared to him following one of his nocturnal treasure quests.<sup>93</sup> This account was given by John A. Clark, Palmyra's Episcopal minister, recounting what he had heard from Martin Harris. "According to Martin Harris," Clark wrote,

*It was after one of these night excursions, that Jo, while he lay upon his bed, had a remarkable dream. An angel of God seemed to approach him, clad in celestial splendour. This divine messenger assured him, that he, Joseph Smith, was chosen of the Lord to be a prophet of the Most High God, and to bring to light hidden things, that would prove of unspeakable benefit to the world. He then disclosed to him the existence of this golden Bible, and the place where it was deposited—but at the same time told him that he must follow implicitly the*

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92. History of the Church, Book A-1, Church Archives, p. 5; quoted in Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:276.

93. See, for example, Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 139; Marquardt and Walters, *Inventing Mormonism*, 101; Vogel, *Joseph Smith*, 43–44.



divine direction, or he would draw down upon him the wrath of heaven.<sup>94</sup>

Lucy Mack Smith recounted her memory of what took place on the evening of 21 September 1823:

One evening we were sitting till quite late conversing upon the subject of the diversity of churches that had risen up in the world and the many thousand opinions in existency as to the truths contained in scripture. . . . After we ceased conversation he [Joseph] went to bed . . . but he had not laid there long till [he saw] a bright [light] entered the room where he lay he looked up and saw an angel of the Lord.<sup>95</sup>

Was Joseph Smith hunting for treasure that night or discussing the gospel? Reverend Clark and Mother Smith disagree on this matter. Which account is accurate?

Clark's 1840 account predates Lucy's by five years, but neither account is contemporaneous. His reminiscence is based on a conversation he had with Martin Harris in 1827 or 1828.<sup>96</sup> Did Harris really say that Joseph had been treasure hunting on the night of 21 September 1823? If so, did he hear about or misremember hearing something about a treasure quest on that night from Joseph Smith—which would make Harris a secondhand source—or did Harris get this idea from someone else who had heard it from someone else? Clark's account is thirdhand at best. Lucy was there.

Therefore, reliance on Reverend Clark with regard to this contextual element must be questioned. Even if Joseph had been digging for treasure that night, a treasure-seeking context does not change Moroni's status. Clark recounted Harris describing Moroni as an

94. Clark, "Gleanings by the Way, No. VI," 94, emphasis added.

95. Lucy Smith, "Preliminary Manuscript," Church Archives, 40, in *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:289.

96. Regarding the date of Clark's conversation with Harris, see *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:260–61, 261 n. 4. However, Clark's letters were stimulated by a recent visit to the Palmyra area and his conversations about Mormonism with people in the area. His memory may have been infected by these conversations. Of course, Lucy's memory may also have been contaminated by later conversations.

“angel of God . . . clad in celestial splendour” and as a “divine messenger” who spoke of the purposes of “the Most High God.”<sup>97</sup>

Moroni appeared three times that night. Joseph later wrote, “Almost immediately after the heavenly messenger had ascended from me the third time, the cock crew, and I found that day was approaching so that our interviews must have occupied the whole of that night.” Joseph got up and went to work, but he was so tired that his father told him to go home and rest.<sup>98</sup>

Joseph walked back toward the log home but fell to the ground when he tried to climb over a fence. At this moment, Moroni again appeared, delivered the same message he had given during the night, and instructed Joseph to go immediately to the hill that is now known as Cumorah.<sup>99</sup> Moroni would meet Joseph again on the hill.

The earliest reliable accounts of Joseph Smith’s encounter with Moroni on the hill contain elements of both treasure seeking and angelic dispensationalism. In his 1832 history, Joseph explained why he failed to obtain the plates: “I had been tempted of the adversary and sought the Plates to obtain riches and kept not the commandment that I should have an eye single to the glory of God.”<sup>100</sup> It is difficult to condemn young Joseph, whose family had suffered so much poverty. His candid admission that he intended to financially benefit from the plates of gold invokes the treasure-seeking belief system that he had participated in on occasion. However, it should also be stressed that Joseph attributed his impure intent not to his treasure-seeking background but rather to being “tempted of the adversary.” Moroni filled the role of an angel as he informed young Joseph that God’s purposes were far greater than the Smith family’s financial situation.

Moroni had clearly instructed Joseph as to the purpose of Joseph’s recovery of the plates. And yet, according to Joseph himself, sometime

97. *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:264.

98. History of the Church, Book A-1, Church Archives, 6–7; quoted in Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:280.

99. History of the Church, Book A-1, Church Archives, 7; quoted in Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:280–81.

100. Joseph Smith, Letterbook 1, Joseph Smith Papers, Church Archives, 5; quoted in Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:8.

between Moroni's daytime visit near the farm fence and his appearance on the hill an hour or so later, Joseph's mission to obtain the ancient record devolved into a quest for riches. When did this occur? When he approached the hill, had his mind slipped into a treasure-seeking context? Did he climb the slope of the hill for a golden treasure? Some critics hold that he did. The following cognitive process may have occurred:

1. Joseph began to think of the monetary worth of the golden plates.
2. Thinking of the plates as treasure caused Joseph to think of his recovery of the plates in a treasure-seeking perspective.
3. Thinking with a treasure-seeking perspective caused Joseph to consider Moroni as a treasure guardian.

Or perhaps Joseph's background experience in treasure seeking caused him to begin to see both Moroni and his plates in light of that context.

Accounts of Joseph's first visit to the hill differ as to when he had begun thinking of the plates as treasure. Cowdery's 1834–35 history states that as Joseph began walking to the hill, the power of God and the power of the devil both vied for his attention, and Joseph began to struggle between them. Satan tempted him to desire riches. His family had worked so hard to scrape out a living. Eventually, Joseph gave in. The 1834–35 history continues:

You will have wondered, perhaps, that the mind of our brother should be so occupied with the thoughts of the goods of this world, *at the time of arriving at Cumorah*, on the morning of the 22nd of September, 1823, after having been rapt in the visions of heaven during the night, and also seeing and hearing in open day; but the mind of man is easily turned, if it is not held by the power of God through the prayer of faith, and you will remember that I have said that two invisible powers were operating upon his mind during his walk from his residence to Cumorah, and that the one urging the certainty of wealth and ease in this life, had so powerfully wrought upon him, that the great object so carefully and impressively

named by the angel, had entirely gone from his recollection that only a fixed determination to obtain now urged him forward. In this, which occasioned a failure to obtain, at that time, the record, do not understand me to attach blame to our brother: he was young, and his mind easily turned from correct principles, unless he could be favored with a certain round of experience. And yet, while young, untraditionated and untaught in the systems of the world, he was in a situation to be lead into the great work of God, and be qualified to perform it in due time.<sup>101</sup>

In this account, Joseph's mind had turned by the time he reached the hill.

Other accounts differ from the 1834–35 history. Based on an 1875 interview with David Whitmer, the *Chicago Times* reported:

He strolled out and away from the house and sought the hill Cumorah. . . . He found the exact spot designated by the white-robed visitor, and at once commenced digging in the rock-ribbed soil. At the depth of two and a half or three feet his faith was rewarded by the discovery of A SQUARE STONE CASKET.

Overpowered by the discovery he rested for a few moments, and *then* visions of worldly emolument flitted through his overwrought brain. He had been singled out as the discoverer of this secret of the infinite! Should he neglect this golden opportunity to amass a fortune? No! . . . While these worldly thoughts occupied Joseph's mind, the angel of the Lord again suddenly stood before him, told him that he had approached this sacred spot in [an] irreverent mood, that the secrets of the casket could never be his until he sought them in the proper spirit, and then hurried him unceremoneously to the plain below.<sup>102</sup>

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101. Cowdery, "Letter VIII," 197, emphasis added.

102. "The Golden Tablets," *Chicago Times*, 7 August 1875, 1, emphasis added, in *Early Mormon Documents*, 5:17.

Although this news story was based on an interview with Whitmer, the style and tone are clearly not that of the plainspoken Whitmer. The artistic flair of this dramatic retelling enjoins us to question how far the reporter strayed from Whitmer's narration. The reporter overlays the treasure-digging context, with Joseph digging for the plates, but this *before* he thinks of the deposit as treasure—which does not occur until the moment he sees the stone box.

Other sources indicate that Joseph's mind had not turned until after he opened the box. Congregationalist minister Truman Coe of Kirtland, Ohio—who apparently heard Joseph relate the story of his visit to the hill—wrote that Joseph went “as directed by the angel, and pried up the stone under which he discovered the plates shining like gold, and *when he saw them* his cupidity was excited, and he hoped to make himself rich by the discovery.”<sup>103</sup>

Joseph's mind may not even have turned at this point. Lucy Mack Smith recounted that when Joseph saw the plates, he reached into the box and grasped them. And it was only then, “as he was taking them hence,” that “the unhappy thought darted through his mind.” Lucy places the point at which his mind turned even closer to the moment when “the angel of the Lord appeared to him, and told him that he had not done as he had been commanded.”<sup>104</sup> It would seem that, at this moment, Joseph's treasure-seeking perspective immediately evaporated. Lucy placed Joseph's turn of mind so close to Moroni's appearance that a treasure-seeking context had little time to influence Joseph's perception of Moroni. Indeed, Lucy mentions only a thought of wealth darting through his mind. According to her account, the cognitive process laid out above could not have occurred; Joseph never

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103. Truman Coe, [Kirtland, Ohio?], to “Mr. Editor” [of the *Ohio Observer*], [Hudson, Ohio], n.d.; in “Mormonism,” *Ohio Observer*, 11 August 1836, 1, 6; reprinted with editorial comment in Milton V. Backman Jr., “Truman Coe's 1836 Description of Mormonism,” *BYU Studies* 17/3 (1977): 350–51, emphasis added.

104. Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith*, 85. She conflates this visit to Cumorah with Joseph's second trip to the hill in 1824 and identifies the other contents of the stone box as the treasure Joseph sought, “which would be of some pecuniary advantage to him.”

began thinking of Moroni as a treasure guardian. The David Whitmer and Truman Coe accounts suggest the same.

However, as shown, the 1834–35 history—which should be favored as a more historically reliable account—stated that Joseph began thinking of the plates as treasure as he walked to the hill. If so, this would have provided time for Joseph to ponder a treasure-seeking context that could have influenced a change in his understanding of Moroni. Nevertheless, the possibility that Joseph began thinking of Moroni in terms of a treasure guardian as Joseph walked from his house to the hill remains just that—a possibility.

For the most part, whether Joseph began thinking of Moroni primarily in terms of a guardian lacks relevance because the most reliable accounts present Joseph’s perception of his recovery of the plates not as an evolution but as a devolution. Rather than a treasure turning into an ancient record, the ancient record became a treasure. Joseph’s own mind apparently traveled the same pathway that the minds of his detractors later followed. However, as the same source recounts, if Joseph had begun to think of the angel primarily in terms of a treasure guardian, then Moroni’s sudden appearance on the hill and his chastening message put an abrupt end to this shift in interpretation.

The 1834–35 history recounts that because of Joseph’s impure motive, when he attempted to lay hold on the plates, he experienced a shocking sensation. “What was the occasion of this he knew not—*there* was the pure unsullied record, as had been described—he had heard of the power of enchantment, and a thousand like stories, which held the hidden treasures of the earth, and supposed that physical exertion and personal strength was only necessary to enable him to yet obtain the object of his wish.” Yet, failing, he exclaimed, “Why can I not obtain this book?” Unbeknownst to Joseph, Moroni was there with him on the hill. “Because you have not kept the commandments of the Lord,” Moroni answered. Joseph looked “and to his astonishment, there stood the angel who had previously given him the directions concerning this matter.”<sup>105</sup> This account, like others given by Joseph Smith and by other early Mormons, combines elements of

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105. Cowdery, “Letter VIII,” 198, emphasis in original.

treasure seeking and angelic ministrations.<sup>106</sup> Which context was most important?

Quinn compares the shock that Joseph experienced with treasure tales including the motif of shock as a deterrent.<sup>107</sup> But as shown above, the 1834–35 history states that Joseph was confused by the shock and did not know what to make of it. Then, seeking to understand this perplexing situation, he drew on his knowledge of treasure tales and reasoned that some enchantment was holding the plates in the earth. Since Joseph did not initially know what to make of this shock, he probably had not approached the hill with a treasure-seeking perspective. By the time he reached the hill, he desired the plates as treasure; but until he was shocked, he apparently had not superimposed any other contextual elements of treasure seeking. It seems that he still understood Moroni primarily as an angel.

In retrospect, Joseph understood that his thoughts had taken a turn for the worse. The reliable accounts that mention Joseph's perception of the plates as treasure also clarify that his perception had strayed from the original meaning as given earlier by an angel. Therefore, if Joseph ever considered Moroni primarily in terms of a treasure guardian, it was for a short period of time and was of secondary significance.

For the believer, the issue is largely irrelevant because these accounts present a treasure-seeking context compatible with the traditional understanding of Moroni as an angel. For example, when Lucy Mack Smith narrated her history, she spoke frankly of the treasure-seeking context. She called the plates a "treasure" and stated that the angel had warned Joseph in the nighttime "that he must beware of covetousness, and he must not suppose the Record was to be brought forth with the view of getting gain, for this was not the case, but that it was to bring forth light and intelligence, which had for a long time been lost to the world; and that when he went to get the plates, he must

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106. Other early Mormons who used treasure-tale motifs to tell the story of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon were Lucy Mack Smith, Joseph Knight, Martin Harris, and Brigham Young. See Marvin S. Hill, "Money-Digging Folklore and the Beginnings of Mormonism: An Interpretive Suggestion," *BYU Studies* 24/4 (1984): 473–88.

107. Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 147–48.

be on his guard, or his mind would be filled with darkness.”<sup>108</sup> In Lucy’s account, a treasure-seeking context does not rule out angels at all. Moroni is perfectly aware of Joseph’s background and admonishes him accordingly.

Oliver Cowdery composed the 1834–35 history in part to counter the statements that Eber D. Howe had published in *Mormonism Unveiled*.<sup>109</sup> If this early church history downplayed the treasure-seeking context within which Joseph understood the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, it nonetheless admitted it. Moreover, this history deemed Joseph’s treasure-seeking interpretation as incorrect and based on superstitious tales—“he had heard of the power of enchantment, and a thousand like stories, which held the hidden treasure of the earth.” Joseph’s momentary consideration of treasure-seeking beliefs, however, had no bearing on the reality of either the heavenly messenger or the metal plates. From the vantage point of 1835, Joseph and Oliver could differentiate the objective existence of the angel and the plates from Joseph’s culturally informed understanding of them in 1823. Thus, while the 1834–35 history openly admits the validity of the treasure-seeking context, it properly places it in a position of secondary importance to the visits of the angel. To whatever extent Joseph did view the coming forth of the Book of Mormon in the context of the treasure-seeking beliefs of his youth, it may have paved the way for Moroni to deliver his message.<sup>110</sup> As stated in the 1834–35 history, because Joseph was “young, untraditionated and untaught in the systems of the world, he was in a situation to be lead into the great work of God, and be qualified to perform it in due time.”<sup>111</sup>

Quinn places the coming forth of the Book of Mormon not only within a treasure-seeking context but also within the larger context of

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108. Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith*, 107, 81.

109. See Vogel’s editorial comments in *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:416–17.

110. Eugene England, “On Finding Truth and God: From Hope to Knowledge to Skepticism to Faith,” in *A Thoughtful Faith: Essays on Belief by Mormon Scholars*, comp. and ed. Philip L. Barlow (Centerville, UT: Canon, 1986), 80.

111. Quinn points to a number of other treasure-seeking parallels in “Visions and the Coming Forth of the *Book of Mormon*,” in Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 136–77. I have addressed what I consider to be the most historically robust evidence for a treasure-seeking context.



“magic,” as opposed to “religion.”<sup>112</sup> In its technical sense, stripped of pejorative usage, *magic* is usually more manipulative and coercive in its approach to the preternatural, whereas *religion* is defined more in terms of supplication and submission. Also, magic tends to be individualistic, whereas religion tends to be communalistic.<sup>113</sup> Treasure seers and other scryers attempted to entrap or bind familiar spirits into their seer stones or crystal balls so that the spirits could be forced to reveal buried treasures or occult knowledge. These manipulative actions were conducted to achieve personal ends. With Joseph and Moroni, we get an entirely different picture. Joseph supplicates God for forgiveness; he submits to Moroni’s chastening instruction; and he uses his seer stone to bring about divine purposes that will benefit all of humanity, not himself or even his family. His encounters with Moroni are marked by supplication and submission to bring about communal purposes, as opposed to manipulation and coercion to effect a personal end. Though outside the accepted boundaries of mainstream Christian orthodoxy, these encounters are, by definition, religious, not magical.

The contextual elements of the earliest encounters with Moroni, as given in the most reliable sources, support the angel thesis. Some skeptics may dismiss this conclusion by arguing that Joseph and Lucy and Oliver changed the *entire* story—transforming not only Moroni’s identity but also the treasure-seeking context in which he appeared. Such an argument would rest on presupposition. As with the data that directly impinge on the issue of Moroni’s initial status, historical standards and principles of logic apply to indirect contextual interpretation. Faithful Latter-day Saints should acknowledge that a consideration of the context in which Moroni visited Joseph lends a significant degree of credibility to the treasure-guardian interpretation. Critics

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112. Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 136–77.

113. Stephen D. Ricks and Daniel C. Peterson carefully review historical and anthropological definitions of magic in “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), 129–47. See also Douglas J. Davies, “Magic and Mormon Religion,” in *Mormon Identities in Transition*, ed. Douglas J. Davies (London: Cassell, 1996), 143–49.

should acknowledge that contextual considerations lend even more credence to the heavenly messenger interpretation.

Many historians—both believing Latter-day Saints and secular academics—have placed the founding events of the restoration of the church within other contextual frameworks: millenarianism, biblicism, evangelicalism, seekerism, primitivism, restorationism, and dispensationalism.<sup>114</sup> Although an interpretive framework of magic suggests that Moroni was a treasure guardian, each of these other legitimate contextual interpretations suggests that Moroni was an angel. A preference for the treasure-guardian thesis probably results in part from an assumption that everything in Mormonism must owe its origins to an evolutionary process. Hence, if Moroni was later understood as an angel, he must have been initially understood as something else. However, if Moroni is an actual being, whom the Lord sent into the Smith garret, that is not the case.

### Folklore Analysis

Another way we can attempt to determine the direction in which the Moroni story developed is by considering the alternatives to Joseph Smith's version of the events. What exactly are the treasure tales and how do they compare with the traditional account? Emma Smith's cousins, Joseph and Hiel Lewis of Harmony, Pennsylvania, described Moroni as the ghost of a Spaniard whose throat was "cut from ear to ear, and the blood streaming down."<sup>115</sup> Josiah Stowell had hired

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114. On Mormonism in a millenarian context, see Grant Underwood, *The Millenarian World of Early Mormonism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993). On biblicism, see Philip L. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible: The Place of the Latter-day Saints in American Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). On evangelicalism, see Gordon S. Wood, "Evangelical America and Early Mormonism," *New York History* 61/4 (1980): 359–86. On seekerism, see Dan Vogel, *Religious Seekers and the Advent of Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1988). On primitivism, see Marvin S. Hill, "The Shaping of the Mormon Mind in New England and New York," *BYU Studies* 9/3 (1969): 351–72. On restorationism, see Mario S. De Pillis, "The Quest for Religious Authority and the Rise of Mormonism," *Dialogue* 1/1 (1966): 68–88. On dispensationalism, see John L. Brooke, *The Refiner's Fire: The Making of Mormon Cosmology, 1644–1844* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

115. Statements of Joseph and Hiel Lewis, in "Mormon History," 1.

Joseph to come down to Pennsylvania to locate a legendary Spanish mine.<sup>116</sup> Joseph could not find the mine, but he did find true love and eloped with Emma Hale, which upset her family.<sup>117</sup> Based on the failed Spanish-mine venture, her Lewis cousins apparently concocted a murdered Spaniard treasure guardian and then superimposed it upon the angel. After describing Moroni as a bloody ghost, the Lewis cousins proceeded to dismiss the revelations that Joseph experienced. We might call this a “strawghost” argument. Unfortunately, this poor old ghost’s severed head finally fell off. The year after the Lewises gave their account of early Mormonism, investigative journalist Frederic Mather talked to residents of Harmony, Pennsylvania, and reported that “a headless Spaniard guarded it [the ancient record] with great vigilance.”<sup>118</sup>

Fayette Lapham described Moroni as a classical European giant: “a very large and tall man . . . dressed in an ancient suit of clothes.”<sup>119</sup> In contrast, Oliver Cowdery, in his 1834–35 history, wrote that the “stature of this personage was a little above the common size of men in this age.”<sup>120</sup> David Whitmer said the angel stood at about five feet ten inches.<sup>121</sup> Joseph himself related that when Moroni made his initial appearance, he was standing in the garret of the Smith family’s log home—“between the floors of the room.”<sup>122</sup> As the half-story garret

116. History of the Church, Book A-1, Church Archives, 8; quoted in Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:282; Vogel, “The Locations of Joseph Smith’s Early Treasure Quests,” 213–19.

117. History of the Church, Book A-1, Church Archives, 8; quoted in Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:282–83; Cowdery, “Letter VIII,” 201.

118. Mather, “Early Days of Mormonism,” 200. Mather had conducted his interviews in July 1880.

119. Lapham, “II.—The Mormons,” 306. Giants are often from older or less-civilized societies (Pallister, “Giants,” 293–324).

120. Cowdery, “Letter IV,” to W. W. Phelps, *Messenger and Advocate* (February 1835): 79.

121. David Whitmer, interview with Edward Stevenson, 22–23 December 1877, Richmond, Missouri, in Stevenson Diary, Church Archives; quoted in Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews*, 13.

122. History of the Church, Book A-1, Church Archives, 121; quoted in Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:127. This account was given when Robert Matthews (under the alias Joshua the Jewish Minister) visited Joseph Smith in 1835. Joseph’s 1832 history recorded that the angel “came and stood before me” (Joseph Smith, Letterbook 1, Joseph Smith Papers, Church Archives, 4; quoted in Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:8). His 1839 history

was probably no higher than six feet, Lapham's giant literally does not fit.<sup>123</sup> Whereas Lapham dresses Moroni in an ancient suit of clothes, Joseph remembered him wearing a white robe.<sup>124</sup>

Willard Chase reported that Joseph Smith Sr. had told him that Moroni initially appeared as a creature that looked "something like a toad, which soon assumed the appearance of a man, and struck him [Joseph Smith Jr.] on the side of his head."<sup>125</sup> Because some species of reptiles and amphibians, and toads in particular, could serve as treasure guardians, Chase reinforced his portrayal of Moroni as a treasure guardian by associating him with a toadlike creature. Decades later, Chase's brother-in-law, Benjamin Saunders, repeated this story but improved upon it, claiming that he heard the story directly from Joseph Jr.<sup>126</sup> In 1893, Benjamin's nephew Orson Saunders shared some of his home-brewed hard cider with a newspaper reporter, took him to the Hill Cumorah, and *quoted* Joseph Smith Jr. (whom he had never met) as saying that the creature was indeed a toad—an "enormous toad"—and that it turned into not a man but a "flaming monster with glittering eyes."<sup>127</sup> It is an amphibian story, but it sounds more

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records that Moroni appeared "at my bedside standing in the air for his feet did not touch the floor" (History of the Church, Book A-1, Church Archives, 5; quoted in Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:276). In 1848, early Mormon William I. Appleby recorded an 1839 discourse by Orson Pratt wherein Pratt reported that Joseph "saw a personage about the ordinary size of man in the middle of the room before him." William I. Appleby, "Biography and Journal of William I. Appleby, Elder in the Church of Latter Day Saints," Church Archives, 31.

123. Dale L. Berge, "Archaeological Work at the Smith Log House," *Ensign*, August 1985, 24–26; see also Berge, *Archaeology at the Boyhood Home of Joseph Smith, Jr., Palmyra, New York* (Provo, UT: BYU Museum of Peoples and Cultures, 2003), 67–69.

124. Joseph remembered Moroni wearing "a loose robe of most exquisite whiteness" (History of the Church, Book A-1, Church Archives, 5; quoted in Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:276). However, I suppose it is possible that Moroni was dressed in an ancient suit of clothes because I keep hearing stories of Nephite soldiers guarding temples, the MTC, and sister missionaries (modern Mormons participate in folklore too).

125. Willard Chase statement, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 242.

126. Benjamin Saunders, interviewed by William H. Kelley, ca. September 1884, in "Miscellany," Community of Christ Library-Archives, Independence, Missouri, 23; quoted in *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:137.

127. "Mormon Leaders at Their Mecca," *New York Herald*, 25 June 1893, 12. Quinn draws on this account to reassert the salamander thesis in Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 153.

like a “fish story.” In the newspaper reporter’s account of the Orson Saunders account of the Benjamin Saunders account of the Willard Chase account of the Joseph Smith Sr. account of Joseph Smith Jr.’s account of his encounter with Moroni, we can see the process of distortion at work.

Abner Cole provided another description of Moroni. We read in Pukei 2:4 that the “spirit” was “a little old man” and that “his beard of silver white, hung far below his knees.” Cole’s Book of Pukei further informs its readers that the spirit was wearing items of Egyptian, Hebrew, and Native American clothing. The items of costume obviously spoof the Book of Mormon’s Egyptian, Hebraic, and Native American connections. Without this clothing, the “spirit” is described only as a little old man with a long beard. Here we have a textbook description of a gnome—one of the “elemental spirits” and a classical treasure guardian.

Early critics not only portrayed Moroni as a treasure guardian but also imputed evil to him. Abner Cole wrote that when Joseph Smith Sr. arrived in the Palmyra-Manchester area of New York, he revived the “vulgar, yet popular belief” that the treasures buried in that area “were held in charge by some *evil* spirit, which was supposed to be either the DEVIL himself, or some one of his most trusty favorites.”<sup>128</sup> Cole seems to have equated this “evil spirit” with the “old spirit” that appeared as a little man with a long beard. Anglo-American folk belief included the idea that the devil could appear as a “dwarf” or as “a little, gray old man.”<sup>129</sup>

The Chase and Lapham accounts also seem to impute evil to Moroni by describing him as a toadlike creature and a giant. In European-American folk belief, the toad always represented or embodied evil.<sup>130</sup> Giants are usually malevolent.<sup>131</sup> By imputing evil to Moroni, these accounts attacked Moroni’s angelic status and even ruled out

128. Dogberry [Cole], “Gold Bible, No. 3,” *Palmyra Reflector*, 1 February 1831, 92, emphasis in original.

129. Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*, 3:315–17, G303.3.1.5, and G303.3.2.3; Baughman, *Type and Motif-Index*, G303.3.2.3.

130. Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 152.

131. Pallister, “Giants,” 293–324.

classifying him as an angelic treasure guardian. Their Moroni definitely did not come from heaven. In both the Chase and Lapham accounts, the guardian is dangerously violent. Whereas Chase has the guardian strike Joseph on the side of his head, Lapham has the giant “strike him on the breast.” These accounts bring to mind the *Chicago Times* interview with David Whitmer given above, wherein Moroni “hurried him unceremoniously to the plain below.” Each of these accounts apparently exaggerates the shocking sensation that Joseph experienced when he attempted to remove the plates in 1823.

In his 1829 letter to his nephew Hyrum, Uncle Jesse Smith objected to Joseph Smith’s family calling Moroni an angel. “Devil it should be,” he wrote.<sup>132</sup> It seems almost inevitable that someone would eventually go beyond demonizing Moroni to identifying him as Satan himself. Former Ohio resident James A. Briggs did just that. In 1834, Briggs heard Joseph publicly relate the story of Moroni and the plates. Briggs must have remembered Joseph saying he had experienced a sensation of shock from an “unseen power”—for this is the phrase that Briggs used when recounting the story on three separate occasions.<sup>133</sup> However, in an 1875 letter to journalist John Codman, Briggs recalled Joseph explaining “how he was kicked by the Devil when he uncovered the plates and stooped down to get them.”<sup>134</sup> The Moroni of Joseph’s public 1834 recital was certainly an angel. How did Briggs change Moroni into the devil? Earlier in the letter to Codman, Briggs had written, “I regret that I have not been successful in obtaining for you a copy of ‘Mormonism Unveiled.’” Briggs had helped Howe in his research for *Mormonism Unveiled*.<sup>135</sup> The frontispiece of this book contains an illustration of the devil kicking Joseph Smith (see fig. 3). A glance at Howe’s frontispiece was apparently all it took for Briggs to change an angel into the devil.

Actually, the frontispiece of *Mormonism Unveiled* did not depict the “shock” given by Moroni to Joseph when he tried to take the plates

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132. Jesse Smith to Hyrum Smith, 17 June 1829.

133. Compare the accounts as given in *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:205–6.

134. James A. Briggs, Brooklyn, New York, to John Codman, March 1875; as reproduced in Codman, “Mormonism,” *International Review* 11 (September 1881): 222.

135. *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:13, 13 n. 2.



Figure 3. Frontispiece of E. D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*. Courtesy LDS Church Archives.

the periphery of the angel's glory. Briggs mistakenly superimposed the image from the frontispiece of *Mormonism Unveiled*—depicting a story of the recovery of the plates in 1827—on his memory of Joseph recounting the shocking sensation he had experienced in 1823. Coincidentally, Howe himself would duplicate this conflation in his autobiography, which was published in 1878.<sup>137</sup>

The sources reviewed here present Moroni as a bleeding Spanish ghost, a giant, a toad, a dwarf, and the devil. It seems that Moroni makes a better chameleon than a salamander. Actually, these Moroni variants mutually exclude one another. For example, there is no such thing as a giant dwarf in any mythology, and the devil is not Spanish. Inconsistencies could be further elaborated, but the point is sufficiently clear. For Moroni, as with Jesus of Nazareth, “Many bare false witness against him, but their witness agreed not together” (Mark 14:56). That these variants of the Moroni story present inconsistent treasure guardians clearly demonstrates that their narrators had strayed from an accurate representation of Joseph's original story. These accounts,

in 1823. Rather, it illustrated a story that Joseph was attacked by evil spirits in 1827 *after* Moroni gave him the plates.<sup>136</sup> A version of this story is also illustrated in the frontispiece to Pomoroy Tucker's *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism* (see p. 34 above). Demons clamor in the foreground, waiting to attack Joseph after he leaves

136. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 276.

137. Eber D. Howe, *Autobiography and Recollections of a Pioneer Printer: Together with Sketches of the War of 1812 on the Niagara Frontier* (Painesville, OH: Telegraph Steam Printing House, 1878), 44.

which are so clearly inaccurate, constitute the primary database used by the proponents of the treasure-guardian thesis.

Although these accounts contradict each other, they are agreed in excluding an angelic interpretation of Moroni. In each case, the narrators transformed Moroni into a specific nonangelic treasure guardian—at times an evil treasure guardian. By casting Moroni as a particular type of treasure guardian incompatible with an angelic messenger, detractors solidified their treasure-seeking interpretations of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. By steering Moroni into specific guardian personas, they could ridicule Joseph Smith with the tropes of treasure quest and thereby dismiss the revelations he presented to the world.

Critics have reasonably argued that Joseph's understanding of his experiences with Moroni underwent some development through the years, but this argument rests upon inference. In contrast, those who described a treasure guardian clearly reconfigured the Moroni story. This folklore analysis indicates that Joseph Smith's accounts of the Moroni visitations are more reliable than those of his detractors.

## Conclusion

Returning to the historical record, we can summarize the documentary evidence: (1) All firsthand accounts agree on Moroni's identity as an angel. (2) The earliest accounts say that Moroni is an angel. (3) A contextual consideration indicates that Moroni made a better angel than a treasure guardian. Moreover, a closer look at what the treasure-guardian sources actually say clearly demonstrates that their source is not Joseph Smith but rather run-of-the-mill treasure-lore superimposed upon his story. In this case, it is not difficult to discern the direction in which Moroni's metamorphosis occurred. In conclusion, folklore analysis and the ground rules of history support the thesis that Joseph Smith's encounters with Moroni are best understood as the visits of a heavenly messenger to a prayerful seeker.

The real story that emerges from these documents is not that Joseph Smith transformed a treasure guardian into an angel but rather that Moroni has been transformed from an angel into a trea-



sure guardian by a set of early critics and those historians who have relied on them. Although the historical sources that cast Moroni as a treasure guardian tell us something about Joseph's initial understanding of his experiences, they tell us more about the original need of his community and the current need of his critics to provide an alternative explanation for his encounters with Moroni.

### Postscript

Two years after this article was originally published in *Mormon Historical Studies*, Ronald V. Huggins came to nearly opposite findings in an essay published in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*.<sup>138</sup> Huggins had set out to conduct “a careful study of the *Traditions-geschichte* (tradition history) of the story of the initial discovery of the plates.”<sup>139</sup> At the end of his study, his main conclusion was that the angel Moroni of Mormon tradition was initially conceived of “as a type of murdered treasure-guardian ghost particularly (though not exclusively) associated with the story of Captain Kidd’s treasure.”<sup>140</sup> Huggins also closes with a suggestion for why Joseph Smith initially cast Moroni as this particular type of treasure guardian. Among the various types of treasure guardians Moroni might have been, “only the murdered treasure-guardian ghost was, as an innocent victim, morally neutral—that is to say not necessarily evil.”<sup>141</sup>

In responding to Huggins, I would like to begin by addressing his concluding suggestion. Aware that others before him have argued for Moroni as a treasure guardian, Huggins emphasizes that previous literature has failed to recognize the importance of “the link between Moroni and this particular type of treasure guardian.”<sup>142</sup> He explains that Moroni’s transition to an angel was less difficult having started as a human ghost because, as he puts it, “treasure guardians were almost always regarded as evil in the magic worldview, no matter what form

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138. Huggins, “Changing *Dramatis Personae*,” 17–42.

139. Huggins, “Changing *Dramatis Personae*,” 19.

140. Huggins, “Changing *Dramatis Personae*,” 41.

141. Huggins, “Changing *Dramatis Personae*,” 42.

142. Huggins, “Changing *Dramatis Personae*,” 27.

they took. . . . The one exception, and that by no means always, is the murdered treasure-guardian ghost.”<sup>143</sup> This statement is incorrect and shows that Huggins’s attraction to the pirate stories has narrowed his understanding of the full range of hunted treasures and their guardians. He is apparently aware of only the following guardians, which he lists: the ghost of a person, “an animal familiar spirit,” demons, and the devil.<sup>144</sup> He is correct that the spirits of departed humans are the most common treasure guardians and that they are often victims of whoever secreted the treasure in the earth. He is also correct that demons or even the devil could guard treasure. He is partly correct regarding animal guardians. The animals that guarded treasure were not usually familiar spirits, but preternatural creatures of a different class. There were other types of guardians as well—some from the old European traditions and some from the New World.

American treasure seekers inherited four major classes of treasure guardians from the Old World: gnomes (also sometimes called pygmies or dwarves), magical animals and other creatures (such as toads and dragons), the devil and his minions, and the ghosts of the departed dead. The devil and his minions were by definition diabolical. Animal guardians, to my knowledge, were always or almost always malevolent. Human ghosts were not always malevolent, as Huggins acknowledges, but neither were gnomes. The gnomes were pre-Christian nature spirits, neither divine nor diabolical. In some stories they were spun as capricious or malevolent, but in others they could be friendly (consider the tale of Snow White). Huggins does effectively argue against Quinn’s theory associating Moroni with a salamander.<sup>145</sup> I would add a clarifying note that, of the four classical “elemental spirits”—the gnomes in the earth, the sylphs in the air, the undines in the water, and the salamanders in fire—it was the subterranean gnomes who hoarded and guarded treasure, not salamanders. There were a host of minor Old World guardians as well, which were not necessarily malevolent. As noted in my essay, angels could guard treasure.

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143. Huggins, “Changing *Dramatis Personae*,” 29.

144. Huggins, “Changing *Dramatis Personae*,” 26.

145. Huggins, “Changing *Dramatis Personae*,” 28–29.

To this stock of Old World treasures and treasure guardians was added a range of new American treasures and guardians. Often the New World treasures were really the same treasure changing hands. In some stories, the American treasures were initially made by ancient, even antediluvian, aboriginals. And in some accounts, they were then seized by the conquering invaders who displaced them and became the native Americans later encountered by Europeans. The American treasure then changed hands to the Spanish invaders who so famously plundered Aztec and Inca gold and silver. Finally, the American treasures bound for Europe on the Spanish galleons were seized by British and French pirates. Ordinary Americans of European ancestry were also said to haunt treasures they had left behind. Each of these groups of American treasure hoarders might murder a hapless victim and bury him with the treasure under a curse that his ghost must protect it. Assuming (as Huggins does) that at the beginning Moroni was primarily understood as a treasure guardian, which type was he? It is on the pirates and their victims that Huggins focuses his vision.

Huggins points to two main sources as evidence that Moroni was the ghost of a murdered human. These are (1) the joint secondhand account of Joseph and Hiel Lewis, given fifty years after the fact, and (2) the thirdhand account of Fayette Lapham, given forty years after the fact.<sup>146</sup> That Lapham and the Lewises hailed from different regions should be acknowledged. For Huggins, the fact that both include a murdered guardian points to a common thread in an early version of the Moroni story. However, by his own admission, the murdered guardian was a common motif.<sup>147</sup> In fact, it was ubiquitous. Yet he never considers the possibility that Lapham and the Lewises independently superimposed this commonplace detail in their account of the Moroni story. Huggins also points to the testimony of Smith's treasure-seeking companion Jonathan Thompson, as recorded in notes of Smith's 1826 trial, in which Thompson relates that Smith had once seen a vision of one Indian murdering another and depositing

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146. Huggins, "Changing *Dramatis Personae*," 25–26.

147. Huggins, "Changing *Dramatis Personae*," 26.

the body with a recently interred treasure.<sup>148</sup> The notes of Thompson's testimony—which stand as the solitary piece of credible evidence for Smith having ever claimed to have seen a treasure guardian—indicate to Huggins that Smith had such a motif at his disposal when he invented the Moroni story. He does not acknowledge, however, that the notes of Thompson's testimony constitute further evidence of the motif's commonality. Huggins gives credence to the Lewises by maintaining that they did not explain the motif because they did not understand it.<sup>149</sup> But this just doesn't wash. There are many treasure tales, some cited by Huggins himself, that assume common knowledge of stock motifs.

Even if the Lapham and Lewis accounts were dependable, they would not necessarily lead us into the context of pirate treasure. Huggins has done a better job than anyone of laying out the evidence for the Smith family's interest in Captain Kidd's treasure.<sup>150</sup> However, the Smiths were interested in other treasures as well. Joseph was reported to have dug for a chest of dollars as well as for a box of gold watches—both recently buried American treasures.<sup>151</sup> The notes of Jonathan Thompson's testimony, which Huggins uses, report that Joseph had searched for a treasure buried by American Indians. It is well-known that Joseph traveled to Harmony, Pennsylvania, to dig for treasure left by Spanish explorers or conquistadors. This is why the Lewises gave an account of Moroni as a murdered Spaniard. In the stories of the Harmony treasure, the Spaniards had worked a gold or silver mine in which they coined the precious metal found there. They apparently murdered one of their own when they sealed their mine and moved on for a time. Pirates never entered the stories of that particular Spanish treasure. I would argue that the Moroni described by the Lewises was a victim of other Spaniards, not of Captain Kidd or any other pirate. Similarly, while Lapham described Moroni as a murdered guardian, he was not the victim of pirates. Lapham's Moroni

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148. Huggins, "Changing *Dramatis Personae*," 42; "A Document Discovered," 1.

149. Huggins, "Changing *Dramatis Personae*," 25–26.

150. Huggins, "Changing *Dramatis Personae*," 36–41.

151. "A Document Discovered," 1; Joshua Stafford and Joseph Capron statements in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 258–60.

was not even from that era. He was from an ancient aboriginal race of giants.

In fact, for all his talk of Captain Kidd's treasure, Huggins can actually marshal only two sources that could possibly identify Moroni as the ghost of a human murdered by pirates. The first source is the reported rumor of John Ahmanson, a Danish convert to Mormonism who became disaffected and wrote an anti-Mormon exposé in his native tongue. He wrote, "Joseph Smith found his [plates] while he was digging for treasure which was supposed to have been buried by the notorious buccaneer Captain Kidd in the western part of New York State."<sup>152</sup> However, as Ahmanson had converted in 1850 and emigrated to Utah in 1857, he never knew Joseph Smith. In his book, which was published half a century after Moroni's appearances, it is not clear if he was reporting a rumor, forwarding his own hypothesis, or what.

The second source that might point to Moroni as a pirate victim is a newspaper story reporting Jared Nasmith's rendition of Palmyra native Philetus Spear's reminiscences of stories told in the Palmyra area about Joseph Smith. Nasmith's writings were allegedly published around the early 1870s but are only extant in a 1923 newspaper story, which relates that Smith "claimed to find the Gold Bible" while digging for Captain Kidd's treasure.<sup>153</sup> The Nasmith account also relates that the men searching for this treasure had dug out a mine and had locked the entrance. The story further relates that Smith had made up the golden plates story on a whim and had put a handful of sand in his coat pocket to trick his family (clearly a poorly remembered or passed-along version of the Peter Ingersoll statement published in *Mormonism Unveiled*).<sup>154</sup> The Nasmith account concludes with the

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152. John Ahmanson, *Secret History: A Translation of Vor Tids Muhamed*, trans. Gleason L. Archer (Chicago: Moody, 1984 [1876]), 90; quoted in Huggins, "Changing *Dramatis Personae*," 39.

153. *Early Mormon Documents*, 3:131; quoted in Huggins, "Changing *Dramatis Personae*," 40 n. 106.

154. Peter Ingersoll statement, Palmyra, New York, 2 December 1833, quoted in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 232–36.

then common but now discredited Spalding theory of the origins of the Book of Mormon narrative.<sup>155</sup>

For comparison, I would like to quickly review the other Moroni treasure tales. Lapham described the ghost of an ancient aboriginal giant, while Abner Cole described a gnomelike spirit. Chase described the ghost of an ancient aboriginal who could appear in the form of a toad, while the Lewises described the ghost of a murdered Spaniard. The Abner Cole material, printed as early as 1830, is relatively contemporaneous to the Moroni events. But Cole only reported neighborhood rumor. The Willard Chase source is late, not given until December 1833, several years after the fact. It is also thirdhand information. The Lewises' source is a secondhand account but is given *fifty* years after the fact. Lapham is weaker still, not only forty years after the fact but thirdhand. None of these depicts a victim of pirates.

The accounts of Ahmanson and Nasmith, which do point to a pirate context, were also given decades after the fact. And, they do not even claim to be firsthand, secondhand, thirdhand, or otherwise traceable to Joseph Smith. As problematic as the specific guardian sources are, the allegations of the Ahmanson and Nasmith sources are far weaker. To my view, of all the alleged treasure guardians Huggins might have argued for, his selection of the pirate victim is the weakest possible candidate. Even if one assumes that Moroni was initially understood primarily as a treasure guardian, he was not Captain Kidd's treasure ghost.

Huggins does make a number of contributions. He draws on many sources illuminating the world of treasure seeking that have not previously been utilized in Mormon studies. He supplies, especially, new material on treasure guardians, including ghosts in general and pirate victims in particular, and a handful of new toad sources. He neglects, however, all of the firsthand accounts and most of the earliest sources that directly relate to the Moroni appearances. The fundamental fallacy that invalidates Huggins's work is that he only uses those sources that

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155. "Joseph Smith and Mormonism Which Started 100 Years Ago," *Marion Enterprise* (Newark, New York), 28 September 1923, 1; as transcribed in *Early Mormon Documents*, 3:129–31.

confirm his preconceived conclusion that Moroni was initially understood as a treasure guardian. He never seriously considers the possibility that it is the antagonistic accounts that are changing the story by utilizing the widespread motif of a murdered victim. Moreover, Huggins uses sources in a manipulative fashion as he builds an argument that is strained even with the biased selection of evidence he does use. His prose may read to some as sophisticated source criticism, but there is no rigorous method for analysis.

In a recent issue of the *FARMS Review*, Larry Morris assesses Huggins's essay and indirectly responds to some aspects of my own work.<sup>156</sup> He begins with a helpful analysis of the deeply problematic source material.<sup>157</sup> Because he sees some wrinkles in what I consider early sources or what I consider firsthand or secondhand, I will try to clarify my position here. Because Joseph and Hiel Lewis claim that they heard their story from Joseph Smith in 1828, many consider them an "early" source. But they did not record their remembered story until 1879. Their account is a very late source. Whether it accurately reports an early Moroni story is highly dubious. The same should be said for any 1870s account, whether friendly or antagonistic. For me, an early source is one that was written or printed early. This is the more rigorous standard. In the matter of firsthand and secondhand classification, I take the following view: Because Joseph Smith is the only person who claimed to have seen Moroni on his early visits, only his accounts are firsthand. The Lewises tell a story about hearing his story. This is secondhand. Chase and Lapham tell stories about hearing Joseph Smith Sr. tell stories about the story told by Joseph Smith Jr. These are thirdhand accounts. I would continue to recommend the classification schema in my essay.

Morris brings to his study many sources that Huggins and I had missed. His analysis of early sources, therefore, augments my own and in many respects surpasses it. I was especially impressed with Morris's testing of Huggins's timeline for how the story developed. He expertly

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156. Morris, "Joseph Smith's Account," 11–81.

157. Morris, "Joseph Smith's Account," 12–15.

shows that Huggins's analysis does not hold up.<sup>158</sup> Morris also surpasses my analysis in his consideration of corroboration as a criterion for evaluating evidence.<sup>159</sup> In addition, I was impressed with Morris's own reconstruction of the original story and how it developed.<sup>160</sup>

I would continue to recommend what I called the "folklore analysis" segments of my essay, wherein I discussed the various types of treasure guardians in general, in Smith's own treasure seeking, and in the Moroni stories. Morris seems to follow Huggins's mistaken tendency to see all treasure as Captain Kidd treasure.<sup>161</sup> I would also guard against the tendency manifested by Huggins and Morris to view anything strange in the Moroni stories as treasure motifs. For example, both cite Moroni's requirement that Smith bring someone with him to the hill as a treasure motif.<sup>162</sup> I am not aware of any treasure-tale motif of bringing a designated individual with you in order to secure a treasure. Bringing Alvin or Emma to the hill can only be construed as a treasure motif in the general sense that it is a requirement from a treasure guardian. But angels can give commandments too.

I commend Morris (and the editors of the *FARMS Review*) for again acknowledging the influence of treasure seeking on Smith and his views of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon—a fact that is still discounted by many apologists. I likewise commend Morris for recognizing the strong influence of Christian religion in Joseph Smith's life and for acknowledging that religion and magic were often blended in early American folk belief. Unlike Huggins, who is bent on smearing Moroni with the treasure tales, Morris offers a properly balanced view of magic and religion as they mixed in early American folk culture, in Smith's spiritual life, and in his early perceptions of Moroni.<sup>163</sup> In this respect, Morris exemplifies the careful study and

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158. Morris, "Joseph Smith's Account," 17–21.

159. Morris, "Joseph Smith's Account," 12.

160. Morris, "Joseph Smith's Account," 20, 33; see also appendix C, 60–77.

161. Morris, "Joseph Smith's Account," 31, also 33.

162. Huggins, "Changing *Dramatis Personae*," 21–26; Morris, "Joseph Smith's Account," 21, 33.

163. Morris, "Joseph Smith's Account," 15–17, 41, 43.



considered view of early Mormon history that Walker had anticipated in the 1980s, when serious investigation of the topic first began.<sup>164</sup>

## Second Postscript: Dan Vogel on Moroni

In addition to extensively responding to Huggins in the *FARMS Review*, Morris also wrote a letter to the editor of *Dialogue* summarizing some of his findings.<sup>165</sup> Morris's letter elicited another letter from Dan Vogel, who agreed with him that Huggins "should have been more critical of the sources." At the same time, Vogel asserted that Morris "did little to improve that situation." In general, Vogel felt that Morris had twisted historical standards into "apologetic devices designed to dismiss out-of-hand undesirable testimony."<sup>166</sup> Those who have read both Morris and Vogel will have to decide whether this is a fair accusation.

### The Willard Chase Statement

Vogel pointed to Morris's treatment of the Willard Chase account as the best example of his "misuse of historical methodology."<sup>167</sup> Chase claimed that Joseph Smith Sr. had told him that Moroni initially appeared to Smith on the Hill Cumorah as a creature that looked "something like a toad, which soon assumed the appearance of a man, and struck him on the side of his head."<sup>168</sup> Because some species of reptiles and amphibians, and toads in particular, could serve as treasure guardians, the Chase statement reinforces the portrayal of Moroni as a treasure guardian. Vogel criticized Morris for questioning the accuracy of the Chase statement, asserting that "Morris has no reason to doubt [believe] otherwise."<sup>169</sup>

There are, however, two basic reasons for doubting the veracity of the Chase statement. First, as a representation of the early

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164. Walker, "Joseph Smith: The Palmyra Seer," 463.

165. Larry Morris, "Folklore Rebutted," letter to the editor, *Dialogue* 38/3 (2005): vi-x.

166. Dan Vogel, "Treasure Lore Revisited," letter to the editor, *Dialogue* 39/2 (2006): vii.

167. Vogel, "Treasure Lore Revisited," vii.

168. Willard Chase statement, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 242.

169. Vogel, "Treasure Lore Revisited," vii.

Moroni visions, the statement is a thirdhand account. Chase recounts Joseph Smith Sr.'s secondhand account of Joseph Smith Jr.'s firsthand account. In fact, one might classify the Chase statement as a fourthhand account since it was collected by Philastus Hurlbut and only appears as published in Howe's anti-Mormon book *Mormonism Unveiled*. Although Chase informed the text of the statement and apparently signed it, the statement was made at the prompting of Hurlbut, who was digging for dirt on the Smiths and is known to have prompted his witnesses.<sup>170</sup> Moreover, the statement was probably inscribed by Hurlbut as a reconstruction of his conversation with Chase based on notes taken at the time. Vogel himself dismisses the many statements collected by Hurlbut that fabricate evidence for the Spalding theory he championed.<sup>171</sup>

The second basic reason to doubt the historicity of the Chase statement is dating. Hurlbut collected Chase's statement in December 1833. Therefore, when narrating Moroni's first appearance in September 1823, Chase (*via* Hurlbut) is reporting events a full decade after the

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170. Richard Lloyd Anderson pointed to parallel phraseology in the statements collected by Hurlbut as one of several evidences of Hurlbut's ghostwriting (R. L. Anderson, "Joseph Smith's New York Reputation Reappraised," *BYU Studies* 10/3 [1970]: 286–90). Rodger I. Anderson responded to Richard Anderson's charges of ghostwriting with the hypothesis that similarities in the statements "may only mean that Hurlbut submitted the same questions to some of the parties involved" (R. I. Anderson, *Joseph Smith's New York Reputation Reexamined*, 28–29). Richard Lloyd Anderson, in a rejoinder to Rodger I. Anderson, made the point that even this hypothesis leaves Hurlbut guilty of prompting the witness (Richard Lloyd Anderson, review of *Joseph Smith's New York Reputation Reexamined*, by Rodger I. Anderson, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 3 [1991]: 59–62). The statements of Roswell Nichols and William Stafford furnish an example of this problem. According to Nichols, "he [Joseph Smith Sr.] had often said, that the hills in our neighborhood were nearly all erected by human hands." William Stafford, interviewed a week later, was reported to have stated, "They [Joseph Smith Sr. and his family] would say, also, that nearly all the hills in this part of New York, were thrown up by human hands" (Roswell Nichols statement, Manchester, New York, 1 December 1833, as transcribed in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 257–58; William Stafford statement, Manchester, New York, 8 December 1833, as transcribed in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 237). According to Rodger I. Anderson's hypothesis, Hurlbut's question to William Stafford would be reconstructed as something like "Did Joseph Smith Sr. say that nearly all the hills in this part of New York were thrown up by human hands?"

171. Vogel finds that these statements "shed no light on Mormon origins." *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:xiv.

fact. Vogel sweeps these basic grounds for suspicion aside with the argument that Chase should only be doubted if he cannot be corroborated.<sup>172</sup> But given the third- or fourthhand nature of the Chase account and the unreliability of distant memories, the burden is not on Morris to challenge the Chase account but on Vogel to demonstrate its reliability.

This is where the criterion of corroboration comes into play. Vogel holds that “a closer look reveals that it is a highly credible account since many of its details are corroborated in other independent sources.”<sup>173</sup> Vogel relates several instances in which Chase is corroborated by the early Mormon accounts of Lucy Mack Smith or Joseph Knight, whereupon he claims that, “with such documentary support, Morris would have a difficult time demonstrating that Chase’s account is not an ‘accurate reporting of primary testimony.’”<sup>174</sup> Yet in his recent interpretive biography of Joseph Smith’s early life, Vogel is critical in his use of the Chase statement. To be specific, he finds in the statement instances of chronological error, questionable supposition, concealing relevant detail, making an unconvincing claim, and the likelihood of providing a deliberate false impression.<sup>175</sup> Just as the corroborated facts in the Chase account cause us to give it serious consideration generally, the contradicted, unconvincing, and otherwise problematic statements of fact should cause us to maintain some skepticism of the account generally.<sup>176</sup>

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172. Vogel, “Treasure Lore Revisited,” viii.

173. Vogel, “Treasure Lore Revisited,” viii.

174. Vogel, “Treasure Lore Revisited,” viii.

175. For chronological error, Vogel, *Joseph Smith*, 598 n. 46; questionable supposition, 66; concealing relevant detail, 39; making an unconvincing claim, 39; likelihood of intentionally giving a false impression, 88–89.

176. In my master’s thesis, I used the Chase account extensively but with a more critical view (Mark Ashurst-McGee, “A Pathway to Prophethood: Joseph Smith as Rodsman, Village Seer, and Judeo-Christian Prophet” [master’s thesis, Utah State University, 2000], especially 248–61). I will take this opportunity to respond to Vogel’s assessment of my thesis in his recent biography of Joseph Smith’s early life. I argued that Smith had used his first seer stone to find an even better seer stone, then obtained the ultimate divinatory device (the Urim and Thummim spectacles), and ultimately moved on to unmediated revelation. Vogel classes my thesis with other works that “not only imply that Smith saw objectively real treasures in his stone but embrace as fact a magical world view, including

More to the point, we must ask whether the Chase account can be corroborated on the specific detail in question—the description of Moroni as a treasure guardian who initially appeared on the Hill Cumorah in the form of a toadlike creature. Entering into this area of inquiry, Vogel claims the description is supported by the 1884 account of Benjamin Saunders, another former Smith neighbor. Saunders recounted overhearing Joseph Smith say that when he reached for the ancient record “there was something down near the box that looked some like a toad that rose up into a man which forbid him to take the plates.”<sup>177</sup> Richard Lloyd Anderson has argued that the Saunders account was probably based on the Chase statement.<sup>178</sup> Vogel counters Anderson, however, by pointing out that, “rather than hearing the story from Joseph Sr.,” as claimed by Chase, “Saunders claimed he heard it directly from Joseph Jr.”<sup>179</sup>

Yet Vogel acknowledges in his recent biography of Smith that “Saunders understood this to have occurred when Joseph took the plates from the hill in September 1827,” not in 1823 as in the Chase

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the bleeding ghosts and enchanted treasures that moved through the earth” (Vogel, *Joseph Smith*, xvi). I find this generalization unfair given the statement of historical methodology in the thesis introduction, which explicitly counters this criticism (Ashurst-McGee, “Pathway to Prophethood,” 29–40). Vogel writes that my thesis “fails to explain how one stone might be better than another or what quality a superior stone might have” (Vogel, *Joseph Smith*, 570 n. 43). However, chapter 4 of the thesis describes seer-stone qualities in detail (Ashurst-McGee, “Pathway to Prophethood,” especially 157–82). Vogel also writes that my thesis “ignores the fact that Smith quickly abandoned the urim and thummim and returned to using his seer stone and that the entire Book of Mormon was dictated using the latter rather than the former” (Vogel, *Joseph Smith*, 570 n. 43). However, chapter 5 of the thesis explicitly acknowledges these facts and incorporates them into the larger argument (Ashurst-McGee, “Pathway to Prophethood,” especially 320–30). Finally, Vogel maintains that my thesis fails to explain how seer-stone revelations could lead Smith to receiving unmediated revelations (Vogel, *Joseph Smith*, 570 n. 43). But chapters 4 and 5 of my thesis sketch how this development may have occurred (Ashurst-McGee, “Pathway to Prophethood,” especially 330–36).

177. Benjamin Saunders, interviewed by William H. Kelley, ca. September 1884, in “Miscellany,” Community of Christ Library-Archives, Independence, Missouri, 23; quoted in *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:137.

178. Richard Lloyd Anderson, “The Alvin Smith Story: Fact and Fiction,” *Ensign*, August 1987, 62–63, 71 n. 19.

179. Vogel, “Treasure Lore Revisited,” viii.

statement.<sup>180</sup> Vogel also states that this chronological problem was “probably due to either faulty memory or method of reporting.”<sup>181</sup> If there is a chronological problem in the Saunders account, which was given over half a century after the fact, might not the account also be mistaken as to Joseph Smith being the source of this information?

Elsewhere in his biography of Smith, when discussing the memories of golden plates’ witnesses Martin Harris and David Whitmer, Vogel claims that “differences that might have originally existed between the accounts [of Harris’s and Whitmer’s individual witness experiences] probably became blurred over time as the details faded and general impressions remained. The publication of Smith’s version in 1842 may have influenced Harris’s and Whitmer’s own descriptions.”<sup>182</sup> Recognizing that the Chase statement had also been published years earlier and in a well-known book on the topic, the same reasoning suggests that the Saunders account was influenced by Chase’s description.

In another passage, Vogel questions the memory of Joseph Smith’s mother, Lucy Mack Smith, because he thinks it might have been influenced by her son’s “later emendations.”<sup>183</sup> In a similar vein, should we not also acknowledge that Benjamin Saunders’s memory of an early conversation may have been influenced by the account of his neighbor and brother-in-law Willard Chase? Vogel, in a footnote, seems to acknowledge this possibility. He more cautiously writes that “similarities *may* reflect the likelihood that they both originated with Smith.”<sup>184</sup>

But are we to believe that Saunders’s “some like a toad” and Chase’s “something like a toad” are independent recollections of what Saunders heard Smith say and of what Chase heard Smith’s father say? Vogel does not concede nearly enough. The prior publication of the Chase statement, the Chase-Saunders relationship, the extreme lateness of the Saunders recollection, and the similarity of the words used by both all point to Saunders relying on Chase. The Saunders account simply does not constitute substantial corroboration for the information in the

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180. Vogel, *Joseph Smith*, 49.

181. *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:138 n. 10.

182. Vogel, *Joseph Smith*, 447.

183. Vogel, *Joseph Smith*, 47.

184. Vogel, *Joseph Smith*, 586 n. 74, emphasis added.

Chase statement bearing on Moroni's identity as a treasure guardian. We are left with a healthy skepticism of Chase's version of the events.

### Parallels to Treasure Hunting

Vogel emphasizes the general treasure-seeking interpretation of the Moroni stories by noting similarities with several particular motifs, such as the "thrice-repeated dreams" by which treasures were said to be located.<sup>185</sup> And, in his recent biography of Smith, Vogel notes that "locating treasures through dreams was not uncommon in Smith's day, and thrice-repeated dreams were especially significant."<sup>186</sup> But dreams and visions were also well-known as gifts of the spirit in Christian belief. Moreover, there is numerology in the Bible just as there is in treasure-seeking lore. Either a thrice-repeated vision—like the apostle Peter's vision of the unclean animals—or a thrice-repeated dream may have been just as significant to a primitivist Christian as to a treasure seeker.<sup>187</sup> I am not at all excluding the possibility that Smith viewed his three nocturnal visions of Moroni in a treasure-seeking context. I am only attempting to bring balance to the issue by pointing out that Smith may also have viewed them in a biblical context.

Vogel also emphasizes a general treasure-seeking context by noting "the need to follow instructions precisely" in both the Moroni story and treasure lore. His primary example is the instruction that Joseph be accompanied by his older brother Alvin to recover the plates in 1824.<sup>188</sup> In his recent biography of Smith, Vogel similarly notes that Lucy Mack Smith's narration, "with its emphasis on following the treasure guardian's instructions precisely, captures more fulsomely the folk-magic context of the story."<sup>189</sup> Morris had acknowledged this parallel to the world of treasure seeking, but he also recognized that precise instructions from an otherworldly being have a parallel in the

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185. Vogel, "Treasure Lore Revisited," ix.

186. Vogel, *Joseph Smith*, 45.

187. See Acts 10:10–17; Walker, "Persisting Idea of American Treasure Hunting," 455 n. 60.

188. Vogel, "Treasure Lore Revisited," ix.

189. Vogel, *Joseph Smith*, 47; see also 49.

Bible—as when Moses was instructed by the Lord to be accompanied by his older brother Aaron.<sup>190</sup> There are numerous examples of angels giving precise instructions in both the Old and New Testaments.<sup>191</sup> I am not excluding here the possibility that Smith viewed precise instructions from Moroni in a treasure-seeking context. I am only pointing out that Smith may well also have viewed precise instructions much like biblical commandments given by the Lord and his angels. If we draw parallels to the world of treasure hunting only, our analysis becomes a form of assuming the hypothesis instead of testing it.

Noting the precise instruction to bring Alvin and the dilemma brought about by Alvin's subsequent death, Vogel writes: "Smith's inability to get the plates in 1824 because Alvin had died seems more like the trick of a treasure guardian spirit than what Smith's contemporaries would have expected of an angel."<sup>192</sup> Similarly, in his recent biography of Smith, Vogel insists that this requirement "fit within the tricks and other antics for which guardian spirits were known."<sup>193</sup> Aside, however, from the plat-eyes of South Carolina and the will-o'-the-wisps of the greater American South—which attempted to lead treasure hunters away from treasure—I am not aware of any guardian behavior that could be viewed as tricky.<sup>194</sup> Treasure guardians attempted either to scare the hunters away from the treasure or to move the treasure away from the hunters. Folklorists do not classify treasure guardians as tricksters.<sup>195</sup> The guardian as trickster was invented by Mark Hofmann, the infamous creator of forged Mormon documents.

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190. Morris, "Joseph Smith's Account," 34–38.

191. See Genesis 16:9–11; 22:11–12; Numbers 22:34–35; Judges 6:11–20; 13:3–4; 2 Kings 1:3; 1 Chronicles 21:18; Matthew 1:20–21; 2:13, 19–20; 28:5–7; Luke 1:26–31; Acts 5:19–20; 8:26; 10:3–6; 12:7–8; and the book of Revelation, in which an angel gives John precise instructions on what to write to the churches in Asia. Thanks to John Tvedtnes for these references.

192. Vogel, "Treasure Lore Revisited," ix.

193. Vogel, *Joseph Smith*, 50.

194. Hurley, "Buried Treasure Tales in America," 201, 202.

195. 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; Hurley, "Buried Treasure Tales in America," 200–202; also Walker, "Persisting Idea of American Treasure Hunting," 443–44. See also Baughman and Granger motif indexes (Baughman, *Type and*

In his well-known salamander letter, Moroni directs Smith to look in his seer stone in order to see whom to bring instead of Alvin but then shows him nothing and says, "I tricked you again."<sup>196</sup>

Vogel also bolsters the treasure-hunting interpretation of Moroni's first visits by placing them in close chronological proximity with an actual treasure hunt. He writes that "earlier that evening, according to what Martin Harris later told Palmyra minister John A. Clark, Joseph had acted as seer for a local treasure-seeking expedition."<sup>197</sup> More accurately, Palmyra minister John A. Clark *claimed* that Martin Harris had stated that Smith had participated in a treasure-hunting expedition that evening.<sup>198</sup> As noted earlier, even if Clark correctly remembered Harris saying this, we do not know from whom Harris would have learned this. Presumably it would have been from a member of the Smith family. However, while neither Clark nor Harris was in the Smith home, Lucy was, and she related that the family had stayed up late this night engaged in religious discussion. In Vogel's reconstruction, Joseph Smith participated in both the treasure-hunting excursion and then the intense religious discussion. This is a possibility that I had not previously considered. However, in addition to generally doubting the Clark reminiscence, which constitutes a thirdhand account at best, I question whether Smith had time that night for both a treasure-hunting excursion and the long religious discussion noted in Lucy's eyewitness account.

To bolster the reality of a treasure hunt, as mentioned in the Clark account, Vogel notes that this night was "an especially propitious night for treasure hunting" because "the moon was full and the eve-

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*Motif-Index*, N500–599; Granger, *Motif Index for Lost Mines and Treasures*, motif class g; which are devoid of trickster identifications.

196. Dean C. Jessee, "New Documents and Mormon Beginnings," *BYU Studies* 24/4 (1984): 403.

197. Vogel, *Joseph Smith*, 43.

198. According to Clark, "Jo used to be *usually* their guide, putting into a hat a peculiar stone he had through which he looked to decide where they should begin to dig" (Clark, "Gleanings by the Way, No. VI," 94, emphasis added). Clark, therefore, was not necessarily implying that Smith had used his seer stone that night but only that he had been out with the digging excursion.



ning marked the autumnal equinox.”<sup>199</sup> However, on this point Vogel is citing Quinn’s *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*.<sup>200</sup> While it seems more than mere coincidence that Moroni’s first visits happened on the autumnal equinox, Quinn’s evidences for the auspiciousness of spirit conjuration (not treasure digging specifically) on this night are among his generally insubstantial astrological parallels. And while Quinn furnishes sources that recommend digging under a full moon,<sup>201</sup> there are various sources recommending various times of the day or the night or other phases of the moon for digging.<sup>202</sup> Which of these times or seasons, if any, did Joseph Smith prefer?

William Stafford, who had actually dug for treasure with the Smiths, recounted their opinions on when to hunt for treasure: “At certain times, these treasures could be obtained very easily; at others, the obtaining of them was difficult. The facility of approaching them, depended in a great measure on the state of the moon. New moon and good Friday, I believe, were regarded as the most favorable times for obtaining these treasures.”<sup>203</sup> Of course, the Stafford statement, like the Chase statement, is subject to question. Still, on the issue of when the Smiths may have thought it best to dig, the Stafford statement seems as reliable or even more so than the miscellaneous sources cited by Quinn. The new moon appears only as a small crescent or is completely invisible—just the opposite of the full moon discussed by Quinn and Vogel. The Smiths may have preferred to dig without moonlight for the same reason that treasure diggers generally preferred digging without sunlight. Working under the cover of darkness not only concealed the location of the hidden wealth they sought but spared them from the ridicule of genteel onlookers.<sup>204</sup> The presence

199. Vogel, *Joseph Smith*, 43.

200. Vogel, *Joseph Smith*, 43; quoting Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 141–44.

201. Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 144–45; see also Walker, “Persisting Idea of American Treasure Hunting,” 442–43.

202. See Granger, *Motif Index for Lost Mines and Treasures*, motif h 1, especially h 1.6–h 1.6.2.

203. William Stafford statement, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 238.

204. On the Smiths’ hunting for treasure at night in order to conceal the locations of their digging, see Clark, “Gleanings by the Way, No. VI,” 94. Alan Taylor writes that

of a nearly full moon on the night of 21 September 1823 is probably evidence *against* the Clark account of a treasure excursion that night, not for it.<sup>205</sup>

### Core Issues

For Vogel, the part of the Moroni story “that more than anything pointed nineteenth-century minds toward treasure lore” was “the claim that the plates were protected by the ‘spirit’ of a dead mortal.”<sup>206</sup> This is a point that I did not adequately address in my original essay. As Vogel explains, even if Smith thought of Moroni as an angel, his contemporaries probably would not have used the word *angel* to describe a messenger returning from the dead—even if the messenger had been an ancient prophet.<sup>207</sup> The influence of the Bible and biblical literalism in Smith’s day may have helped some see past this issue. The Epistle to the Hebrews classified angels as “ministering spirits”; the angel appearing to John in his apocalypse stated, “I am thy fellow servant, and among thy brethren the prophets”; and the prophet Elijah had appeared as just such a ministering spirit on the Mount of Transfiguration.<sup>208</sup> However, the free-thinking Abner Cole probably held to the traditional notion of angels as entirely otherworldly creatures. In his biography of Smith, Vogel emphasizes that “the earliest accounts identify the heavenly messenger as a ‘spirit.’”<sup>209</sup> But this is

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“contempt for treasure seeking became universal among the genteel by the early nineteenth [century] as part of their wider criticism of the common folk for inadequate ambition, lackluster work discipline, labor, and attachment to tradition” (Taylor, “Early Republic’s Supernatural Economy,” 16). Such a concern for keeping secrecy by working under the cover of darkness may shed some light on Willard Chase’s claim that Smith went to the Hill Cumorah wearing black clothes and riding a black horse (Willard Chase statement, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 242).

205. For whatever the Clark account is worth, one should recognize that it describes Moroni as an “angel of God . . . clad in celestial splendour” and as a “divine messenger” who spoke of the purposes of “the Most High God.” Clark, “Gleanings by the Way, No. VI,” 94.

206. Vogel, “Treasure Lore Revisited,” ix.

207. Revelation 22:8–9 is sometimes cited to show that angels may be dead mortals.

208. See Hebrews 1:13–14; Revelation 22:6–9; and Matthew 17:3–4. My thanks to Matt Roper for these references.

209. Vogel, *Joseph Smith*, 45.

simply not true. As I demonstrated above, the earliest account uses the word *angel*. As evidence for the (subsequent) use of the term *spirit*, Vogel invokes Abner Cole. “Obviously, for Cole angels were distinct beings from ghosts, or the spirits of dead mortals.”<sup>210</sup> In the biography, Vogel summons another newspaper source using the word *spirit*. Vogel writes, “Martin Harris told people in Rochester that Joseph had been ‘visited by the spirit of the Almighty in a dream, and informed that in a certain hill . . . was deposited a Golden Bible.’”<sup>211</sup> More accurately, Martin Harris *was reported* to have talked about this “spirit of the Almighty” to some people in Rochester. While Vogel emphasizes the word *spirit*, I would emphasize the phrase *of the Almighty*, which indicates that this “spirit” was a heavenly messenger whether or not Harris had used or would have used the word *angel* to describe Moroni at this time.

In relation to the “spirit” vs. “angel” issue, Vogel challenges the work done by me and by Morris as flawed from the outset:

By assuming that Joseph Smith and his non-Mormon critics shared the same definition of “angel,” I believe Morris and Ashurst-McGee have been led to ask the wrong questions, which in turn has led them to make the overly simplistic conclusion that the “early witnesses described an angel who appeared in a religious context” and “later witnesses ‘defrocked’ Moroni.” The question to answer is not: Did Joseph Smith transform a treasure guardian into an angel? But rather: Did Joseph Smith expand his definition of angel to include a particular treasure guardian?<sup>212</sup>

Morris and I have addressed the question as it had been formulated historiographically, and I would maintain that the analysis that

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210. Vogel adds, “Because he failed to note this distinction, Mark Ashurst-McGee’s references to ‘angels’ guarding treasures are irrelevant.” Vogel, “Treasure Lore Revisited,” x. It is true that they are basically irrelevant to Cole’s understanding of Moroni’s status but not necessarily to Smith’s (the real issue).

211. Vogel, *Joseph Smith*, 45, quoting “Golden Bible,” *Rochester (NY) Gem*, 5 September 1829, 70, in *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:272.

212. Vogel, “Treasure Lore Revisited,” x.

followed is stable. Vogel's framing of the issue is valid. I agree that it does not really matter that Cole would not have categorized the returning prophet Moroni (whether embodied or not) as an angel. And neither Morris nor I argued that Joseph Smith's religious terminology fell within the parameters of traditional Christian orthodoxy. The Mormon definition of *angel* remains unorthodox today.

I submit that the central issues can best be clarified in this way: The primary question is whether Joseph Smith originally viewed Moroni as merely a profane treasure guardian, devoid of any angelic or otherwise divine status, or if he saw him as both a treasure guardian and a divine messenger. The secondary question is this: If Smith originally viewed Moroni as both a treasure guardian and a divine messenger, which view was more meaningful to him at that time? The tertiary issue is whether Smith would have used the word *angel* to describe the heavenly messenger as early as 1823.

As to the primary issue, while Vogel emphasizes Moroni as a treasure guardian he nevertheless acknowledges that "Lucy and other [Smith] family members make it clear that God was involved from the start."<sup>213</sup> To my view, this is the most important point of the entire dialogue.

On the secondary issue, Vogel and I disagree. Vogel's position, if I read him correctly, is this: While Smith's fabricated Moroni stories included a divine element from the very beginning, Moroni was primarily conceived of as a ghost treasure guardian, and the divine messenger aspect of his character was not preeminent until later. Though overstating his case, Vogel has effectively compiled the evidence for Smith dropping treasure motifs from his story and adding religious details<sup>214</sup>—evidence that I acknowledged only briefly in my original essay.<sup>215</sup> But, by the basic counting rules of arithmetic, it does not necessarily follow from the fact that Smith was dropping treasure-seeking elements or even adding religious ones that in his original conception the treasure-seeking elements outnumbered the religious—in other

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213. Vogel, "Treasure Lore Revisited," x.

214. Vogel, "Treasure Lore Revisited," x-xi; also Vogel, *Joseph Smith*, 44.

215. Ashurst-McGee, "Moroni: Angel or Treasure Guardian?" especially 65-66.

words, that Moroni was more of a treasure guardian than a heavenly messenger.

In order to bolster his case, Vogel again turns to Palmyra tabloid editor Abner Cole. Vogel maintains that “there is an element of truth in Cole’s statement” and emphasizes that “Cole prefaced his statement with ‘it is well known,’ so Morris’s fabrication-for-the-sake-of-revenge thesis is highly unlikely.”<sup>216</sup> Nonetheless, while Cole’s indisputable antagonism toward Smith justifies questioning him on these grounds, the main problem with Cole is his reliance on neighborhood rumors, which cannot be disentangled from their June 1830 setting. Palmyra was the scene of a minor religious uproar, which was based more on Smith’s new book of scripture and also his new church than on his treasure-hunting past.<sup>217</sup>

I agree with Vogel that there is an element of truth in the Cole statement but not because of what Cole himself wrote. What persuades me is the letter written by Joseph Smith’s uncle Jesse Smith to Joseph’s brother Hyrum Smith. As a source, the Jesse Smith letter is vastly superior to Cole. Whereas the June 1830 issue of Cole’s tabloid may be reporting the most sensational of Palmyra’s gossip, Jesse Smith’s letter of June 1829 is written in response to, and apparently quotes from, an 1828 letter from a member of the Smith family. In fact, Jesse seems to be quoting a letter from Joseph Smith.<sup>218</sup> Jesse groused:

He writes that the Angel of the Lord has revealed to him the hidden treasures of wisdom & knowledge, even divine revelation, which has lain in the bowels of the earth for thousands of years [and] is at last made known to him, he says he has eyes to see things that are not and then has the audacity to say they are; and the Angel of the Lord (Devil it should be) has put me in possession of great wealth, gold and silver and precious stones so that I shall have the dominion in all the land of Palmyra.<sup>219</sup>

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216. Vogel, “Treasure Lore Revisited,” x.

217. See *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:215–50.

218. See the editorial note to this document in *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:551.

219. Jesse Smith to Hyrum Smith, 17 June 1829, in *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:551–52.

Jesse's letter reflects a Smith family understanding of Moroni as both a treasure guardian and as an angel, but primarily as an angel. This is by far the best window into Joseph's early understanding of Moroni, and to me the most accurate. I find it probable that his earliest understanding of the Moroni experiences was influenced to some extent by his exposure to the early American treasure-hunting subculture and even more likely by his involvement in Bible reading, family worship, recent revivalism, and early American Christian culture generally. I do not find either possibility exclusive of the other.

As for the tertiary issue of the appropriateness of the word *angel*, Vogel comments: "I think it's best to regard the word 'angel' (as we do the term 'Urim and Thummim') as anachronistic to the 1823 setting."<sup>220</sup> This term *Urim and Thummim* has been questioned for two reasons, which are related: Mormon usage of the term *Urim and Thummim* has not been documented prior to 1833.<sup>221</sup> Conversely, it does not show up in places where one might expect to find it. For example, Smith's 1832 history mentions only that "The Lord had prepared spectacles for to read the Book."<sup>222</sup> By the same reasoning, should we regard the word *angel* as anachronistic to the 1823 setting? No. The word *angel* does appear in the earliest sources. Using the same standard, we have more reason to regard the treasure-guardian motif as anachronistic.

"Given the obvious shift away from 'folk [magic] culture' in Joseph Smith's account," Vogel concludes, "why is it so hard for Morris and Ashurst-McGee to believe that the luminous 'angel Moroni' was once a nameless, bearded treasure-guardian 'spirit'?"<sup>223</sup> I would like to begin answering Vogel by clearing away some of the less relevant baggage loaded into this crucial question. Whether Smith knew Moroni

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220. Vogel, "Treasure Lore Revisited," x. See also Vogel, *Joseph Smith*, 44.

221. Van Wagoner and Walker, "Joseph Smith: 'The Gift of Seeing,'" 53.

222. This is my edited version of Joseph's 1832 history: "the Lord had prepared specte~~cke~~ spectacles for to read the Book" (Joseph Smith, "A History of the Life of Joseph Smith Jr.," in Joseph Smith Letterbook 1, MS, Joseph Smith Papers, LDS Church Archives, p. 5, quoted in Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:9). The issues surrounding the term *Urim and Thummim* are actually more complex. See Ashurst-McGee, "Pathway to Prophethood," 311–16.

223. Vogel, "Treasure Lore Revisited," xi. See also Vogel, *Joseph Smith*, 44.

by that name in 1823 or if he remained “nameless” to Smith for some time is a minor point. The problem of the name *Moroni* is acknowledged at the beginning of my original essay.<sup>224</sup> Whether Moroni was bearded—as described by Cole and by the Lewises—is another red herring. I am unaware of any descriptions of either biblical angels or Moroni as being clean-shaven, and I don’t know why they should be. As for early descriptions of Moroni as a “spirit,” I feel that whether or not Moroni seemed to Joseph to have had a tangible body is less important than whether or not he was a messenger “of the Almighty.” I view the question of whether Moroni was “luminous” in the same light.<sup>225</sup>

Having cleared these issues out of the way, I am ready to revisit Vogel’s question: Given the obvious shift away from treasure-seeking elements in Joseph Smith’s account, why is it so hard for me to believe that the angel Moroni was once a treasure-guardian? I cannot answer the question because it is *not* difficult for me to conceive that the young Joseph originally understood Moroni as a treasure guardian. At the same time, one must acknowledge the obvious shift toward profane treasure-guardian motifs in the accounts of Smith’s antagonists.<sup>226</sup> Therefore it is not difficult for me to conceive that Joseph originally understood Moroni as a divine messenger. An unbiased approach requires being open to both possibilities, and this is precisely where my original essay began.

After carefully assessing the sources, I found that all the eyewitness accounts of the Moroni visitations portray him as an angel. This

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224. Ashurst-McGee, “Moroni: Angel or Treasure Guardian?” 67 n. 11.

225. Similarly, in his biography of Smith, Vogel writes, “The wingless angel with long flowing robe that Smith later named ‘Moroni,’ one of the ancient authors of the Book of Mormon, is absent from the earliest accounts” (Vogel, *Joseph Smith*, 46). But a winged angel is also absent in the earliest accounts. Neither are there any *late* accounts of a winged angel—unless one counts the frontispiece to Pomeroy Tucker’s 1867 work of anti-Mormonism, which depicts a winged, bare-breasted female (see p. 34 above). The only description of Moroni’s clothing predating Smith’s and Cowdery’s descriptions of a white robe is the ridiculous costume described in Cole’s “Book of Pukei” parody of the Book of Mormon (Book of Pukei 2:4, in *Palmyra Reflector*, 7 July 1830; compare Joseph Smith, “History, 1838,” in *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, rev. ed. [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002], 233; Cowdery, “Letter IV,” to Phelps, February 1835).

226. Ashurst-McGee, “Moroni: Angel or Treasure Guardian?” especially 61–65.

is not a matter of interpretation but an indisputable fact. Morris and I have also demonstrated that, in the earliest sources, either Moroni is called an “angel” or his status as a heavenly messenger is implied. Again, this is not a matter of interpretation. It is a fact that Vogel must concede. In proceeding to issues of corroboration and contextualization, we move into interpretation. Here I am not at all implying that the debate is over or that the contextual analysis conducted by Vogel (or by myself or Morris) is irrelevant. But any analysis of this depth should begin with rigorous source criticism. Exploring further into issues of corroboration and context led Morris and me to acknowledge the relevance of the treasure-seeking context of the Moroni visitations and the possibility that Joseph viewed Moroni as a treasure guardian. However, our investigations did not negate the possibility that he also understood Moroni as a divine messenger. Rather, they supported the view that he understood Moroni as a divine messenger—and primarily so—from the very beginning.



# ADDRESSING QUESTIONS SURROUNDING THE BOOK OF MORMON AND DNA RESEARCH

John M. Butler

## What is DNA?

Our cells contain a genetic code known as deoxyribonucleic acid, or DNA. It provides a blueprint for life, determining to a great extent our physical attributes and appearance. We inherit half of our genetic code from our mother and half from our father. The diversity we see among people results from unique combinations of nucleotides, the building blocks of DNA that exist in every living organism. Because of the many different ways these nucleotides can combine, all humans, with the exception of identical twins, differ from each other on a genetic level.

## How are DNA ancestry studies performed?

Examining the DNA of an individual and comparing it with the DNA of close relatives can reveal the source of different genetic patterns contributed by parents, grandparents, or other shared ancestors. Genetic markers on the Y-chromosome that are transferred exclusively from father to son are used to examine paternal lineages, while maternal lines are traced by analyzing genetic material called mitochondrial DNA, which is only transferred from mother to offspring.

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On 16 February 2006 the *Los Angeles Times* ran a front-page article questioning the authenticity of the Book of Mormon based on studies of human DNA. Citing DNA “evidence” that

## How do DNA ancestry studies compare to forensic DNA testing used in court cases?

The information derived from any DNA analysis does not work in a vacuum. Test results always compare genetic information from a source in question with the same type of information from a known source. In the case of forensic DNA testing that is widely accepted in courts of law, DNA from a suspected criminal is compared with DNA collected from the scene of a crime.<sup>1</sup> When the DNA matches at the regions examined, then it is likely that the suspect was indeed the person who was involved in the crime. In forensic DNA testing there is a one-to-one correlation of DNA results—the individual’s DNA either matches or does not match the evidence.

In ancestry studies, DNA information from multiple modern population groups is projected over many generations between populations tested. Even though the same genetic markers may be used as in forensic DNA testing, in ancestry testing, there is usually not a one-to-one unique match being made. Instead, scientists are often guessing at what genetic signatures existed in the past based on various assumptions—with a bit of educated “storytelling” to fill in gaps.<sup>2</sup> These stories of human migration patterns are constantly being refined with new genetic research. As noted by John Relethford in his book *Genetics and the Search for Modern Human Origins*, “Although working in such a young and developing field is exciting, it is also frightening

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suggests an Asian ancestry for people native to the Americas, critics of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have for the past several years claimed that these DNA studies demonstrate that the Book of Mormon account of a group of colonists coming from the Middle East in 600 BC cannot be authentic. The following article briefly addresses questions surrounding the applicability of DNA studies to the peoples whose story is told in the Book of Mormon. Points of view expressed here are mine and in no way reflect the official opinion of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or the U.S. Department of Commerce or National Institute of Standards and Technology. This was originally posted in February 2006 on the FARMS Web site at [farms.byu.edu/publications/dna/ButlerBofMandDNA\\_Feb2006.php](http://farms.byu.edu/publications/dna/ButlerBofMandDNA_Feb2006.php) (accessed 24 April 2006).

1. See John M. Butler, *Forensic DNA Typing: Biology, Technology, and Genetics of STR Markers*, 2nd ed. (New York: Elsevier, 2005).

2. David B. Goldstein and Lounès Chikhi, “Human Migrations and Population Structure: What We Know and Why It Matters,” *Annual Review of Genomics and Human Genetics* 3 (2002): 129–52, at 143.

because the knowledge base changes so rapidly.”<sup>3</sup> Since the methods for examining DNA in this way are far from perfected, drawing final conclusions about the ancestry of a people from current data would not be prudent. In addition, it is important to keep in mind that *reference samples are always needed to provide relevant results* with any kind of DNA testing. If a reliable reference is not available, confident conclusions cannot be made.

### What current data exist on Native American DNA?

To date there have been more than one hundred scientific articles describing the examination of DNA from thousands of modern-day Native Americans. These studies have shown that almost all Native Americans tested thus far possess genetic signatures closely resembling modern-day Asians, and thus conclusions are usually drawn that these populations are related to one another. Since no Israelite genetic connection has yet been made with Native Americans, critics of the Book of Mormon are quick to point out that this information seems to contradict a statement made in the modern introduction to the book that the Lamanites are “the principal ancestors of the American Indians.”

### What do we know about the genetic background of Book of Mormon peoples?

The angel Moroni informed the Prophet Joseph Smith during his first visit on the evening of 21 September 1823 that the Book of Mormon record gave “an account of the former inhabitants of this continent, and the source from whence they sprang” (Joseph Smith—History 1:34). The Book of Mormon mentions three different groups that journeyed to the New World: the Lehites (1 Nephi 18), the Jaredites (Ether 6:12), and the Mulekites (Helaman 6:10; 8:21), sometimes referred to as the people of Zarahemla (Omni 1:14–16; Alma 22:30).

The title page of the Book of Mormon proclaims that the Lamanites are a remnant of the house of Israel. Lehi found on the plates of brass

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3. John H. Relethford, *Genetics and the Search for Modern Human Origins* (New York: Wiley-Liss, 2001), 205.

recovered from Laban a genealogy of his fathers in which he learned that he was a descendant of Joseph (1 Nephi 5:14), specifically from the tribe of Manasseh (Alma 10:3). Mulek is mentioned in Helaman 8:21 as a son of Zedekiah who was king of Judah when Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians (2 Kings 25:7). The Jaredites descended from multiple families who were led by the Lord from the Tower of Babel to the promised land (Ether 1:33).

The prophets who contributed to the Book of Mormon record focused on religious teachings rather than on geographical or genetic details; they provided only a partial picture of the events of their days and usually within the confines of their family lineage. Thus, the Book of Mormon record does not supply sufficient information to provide a reliable calibration point in the past that may serve as a reference for modern-day DNA comparisons. DNA information alone therefore cannot disprove or prove the Book of Mormon.

### **Could other people have lived in ancient America concurrently with Book of Mormon peoples?**

Careful examination and demographic analysis of the Book of Mormon record in terms of population growth and the number of people described implies that other groups were likely present in the promised land when Lehi's family arrived, and these groups may have genetically mixed with the Nephites, Lamanites, and other groups.<sup>4</sup> Events related in the Book of Mormon likely took place in a limited region,<sup>5</sup> leaving plenty of room for other Native American peoples to have existed.

### **Does DNA testing of modern individuals detect all previous genetic lineages?**

Another way to state this question is "could a group of people vanish without a genetic trace as measured by Y-chromosome and mito-

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4. See John L. Sorenson, "When Lehi's Party Arrived in the Land, Did They Find Others There?" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1/1 (1992): 1-34.

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

chondrial DNA testing and yet be the ancestors of someone living today?” It is important to realize that examination of Y-chromosome and mitochondrial DNA genetic markers permits only a small fraction of an individual’s ancestry to be tracked.

Most genetic analysis studies of human history involve comparing a group of samples of living individuals to another group of living individuals without any detailed knowledge of the genealogy of the individuals in the groups being tested. These types of DNA studies make assumptions about the average time for each generation in the past along with a fixed mutation rate whereby genetic variation may occur over time. Similarities in the modern populations examined are then used to claim a shared origin between the two populations with an estimated time for divergence between the populations.

An interesting study reported in the June 2003 issue of the *American Journal of Human Genetics* leads me to believe that it is possible for Book of Mormon peoples to be ancestors of modern Native Americans and yet not be easily detected using traditional Y-chromosome and mitochondrial DNA tests. This study, conducted by a group of scientists from a company called deCODE Genetics, used the extensive genealogies of people from Iceland combined with probably the most massive population study ever performed. They traced the matrilineal and patrilineal ancestry of all 131,060 Icelanders born after 1972 back to two cohorts of ancestors, one born between 1848 and 1892 and the other between 1742 and 1798.<sup>6</sup>

Examining the same Y-chromosome and mitochondrial DNA markers used in other genetic studies, these 131,060 Icelanders “revealed highly positively skewed distributions of descendants to ancestors, *with the vast majority of potential ancestors contributing one or no descendants and a minority of ancestors contributing large numbers of descendants.*”<sup>7</sup> In other words, the majority of people living today in Iceland had ancestors living only 150 years ago that could not be detected based

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6. Agnar Helgason, et al., “A Populationwide Coalescent Analysis of Icelandic Matrilineal and Patrilineal Genealogies: Evidence for a Faster Evolutionary Rate of mtDNA Lineages than Y Chromosomes,” *American Journal of Human Genetics* 72/6 (2003): 1370–88.

7. Helgason et al., “Populationwide Coalescent Analysis,” 1370, emphasis added.

on the Y-chromosome and mitochondrial DNA tests being performed and yet the genealogical records exist showing that these people lived and were real ancestors. To the point at hand, if many documented ancestors of 150 years ago cannot be linked to their descendants through Y-chromosome and mitochondrial DNA tests from modern Iceland, then it certainly seems possible that the people who are reported in the Book of Mormon to have migrated to the Americas over 2,600 years ago might not have left genetic signatures that are detectable today.

**Shouldn't we be able to detect Israelite DNA if the Lamanites are descended from Lehi and are the principal ancestors of modern-day Native Americans?**

First, as discussed above, we do not have enough information from the Book of Mormon to confidently determine a source population for the Lehites or Mulekites, and so we cannot compare this population with modern-day Native American results. Another point to consider is that present-day Native Americans represent only a fraction of previous genetic lineages in the Americas because of large-scale death by diseases brought to the New World by European conquerors. As researcher Michael Crawford concludes in his book *The Origins of Native Americans: Evidence from Anthropological Genetics*, “This population reduction has forever altered the genetics of the surviving groups, thus complicating any attempts at reconstructing the pre-Columbian genetic structure of most New World groups.”<sup>8</sup> Again, without reliable reference samples from the past, we cannot proclaim the Book of Mormon true or false based on DNA data.

In forensic science, a documented “chain of custody” is crucial to verifying a link between the DNA profile produced in the lab with the original crime scene evidence. No such “chain of custody” exists with DNA or genealogical records connecting people from Book of Mormon times to people living today.

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8. Michael H. Crawford, *The Origins of Native Americans: Evidence from Anthropological Genetics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 261.

Part of the problem in this whole contrived controversy is the oversimplification of results from DNA studies that are being conducted by scientists in an effort to examine potential patterns of human migration throughout ancient history. The impact of this oversimplification is in many ways similar to the impact that the popular TV show *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* has had over the past few years on forensic laboratories. In the name of entertainment, the *CSI* television shows have created a perception in which the general public now thinks that forensic scientists go to crime scenes, work in fancy and well-equipped laboratories, question suspects in a case, and obtain conclusive results on every complex case in a matter of a few minutes. The truth is that scientists work in poorly supplied labs, are underpaid, and in many situations have large backlogs of samples that prevent rapid responses to new individual cases. In addition, forensic scientists never interrogate the suspects of a crime, and many cases are never solved. The public perception of *CSI* has now created an expectation in many juries that DNA evidence should be present in every case.

Even with this oversimplification of its portrayal of forensic laboratories, there is some truth within the set of the *CSI* shows. For example, the instruments on the TV show are real. However, they do not collect data and generate results as rapidly as portrayed nor are complex cases solved so succinctly. Likewise, oversimplification of DNA results and what they are capable of revealing in examining the authenticity of the Book of Mormon has been greatly exaggerated by critics of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. For the many reasons stated above, DNA testing results from modern Native Americans do not negate the possibility of Book of Mormon peoples having existed anciently on the American continent.

### **Can science ever provide a final answer to a religious question?**

Today's society is impatient and wants quick and easy answers to everything. In science we make measurements and conduct studies hoping to advance knowledge. As an active DNA researcher for the past thirteen years, I can affirm that we are uncovering new information with each passing year that gives us a better picture of the

past and the present. But we must remember that that picture is in no way complete or comprehensive. Science can demonstrate that certain assumptions are unlikely, but it cannot prove that testimonies are false. I believe that science and religion can coexist as long as we remember that each measures different things (see Isaiah 55:8–9 and 1 Corinthians 2). The definitive proof of the Book of Mormon's authenticity comes in the Lord's laboratory of spiritual revelation by following the formula laid out in Moroni 10:3–5.<sup>9</sup>

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9. See John M. Butler, "A Few Thoughts from a Believing DNA Scientist," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12/1 (2003): 36–37.



# DNA AND THE BOOK OF MORMON

David G. Stewart Jr.

## The Traditional Latter-day Saint Position

The Book of Mormon recounts the story of a small Israelite group led by Lehi (and also one headed by Mulek) from ancient Jerusalem to the American continent in approximately 600 BC. Prophets who taught of the Messiah were called from among this people for over a millennium, but the people often fell into apostasy, and one branch of this civilization was destroyed. Modern prophets from Joseph Smith to the present have consistently taught that the remnant of the other branch, the Lamanites, are ancestors of modern Native Americans. According to Joseph Smith, translator of the Book of Mormon,

The Book of Mormon is a record of the forefathers of our western tribes of Indians; having been found through the ministration of an holy angel, and translated into our own language by the gift and power of God. . . . By it we learn that our western tribes of Indians are descendants from that Joseph which was sold into Egypt.<sup>1</sup>

The Lord's revelations to Joseph Smith repeatedly refer to Native Americans as "Lamanites" (see Doctrine and Covenants 28:8–9; 28:14; 30:6; 32:2; 54:8). Dedicatory prayers of temples given by Latter-day Saint

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1. *History of the Church*, 1:315.

prophets in Bolivia, Guatemala, Mexico, Hawaii, and Peru have proclaimed the descent of indigenous peoples from Lehi's colony. Elder Spencer W. Kimball put it this way:

With pride I tell those who come to my office that a Lamanite is a descendant of one Lehi who left Jerusalem some six hundred years before Christ and with his family crossed the mighty deep and landed in America. And Lehi and his family became the ancestors of all of the Indian and Mestizo tribes in North and South and Central America and in the islands of the sea, for in the middle of their history there were those who left America in ships of their making and went to the islands of the sea.<sup>2</sup>

### **Latter-day Saint Position Challenged**

In recent years, some critics have alleged that research demonstrating considerable homology between modern Native American, Mongolian, and southern Siberian DNA, as well as a seeming lack of homology between modern Jewish and Native American DNA, provides conclusive proof that the traditional Latter-day Saint view of Native American origins is false. Some Latter-day Saint defenders have attempted to explain the data by invoking limited geography theories proposing that Nephite and Lamanite activity was restricted to a small area in Central America and that any trace of "Israelite" DNA was lost by intermixing with larger indigenous groups. A closer examination demonstrates that modern DNA evidence does not discredit traditional Latter-day Saint beliefs and that the views of critics are based on nonfactual assumptions and unsupportable misinterpretations of genetic data.

### **Mitochondrial DNA**

In his paper "Lamanite Genesis, Genealogy, and Genetics," Thomas Murphy claims that "some of the most revealing research into Native

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2. Spencer W. Kimball, "Of Royal Blood," *Ensign*, July 1971, 7.

American genetics comes from analyses of mtDNA” and presents mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) data to support his conclusion that Native Americans could not possibly have an origin in ancient Israel.<sup>3</sup> Murphy points out that over 98 percent of Native Americans tested to date carry mitochondrial DNA haplogroups A, B, C, or D. Outside of the Americas, these haplogroups are most commonly found in Mongolians and south Siberians and rarely in modern Jews. Another 1 percent carries haplogroup X, which is found in South Siberian, European, and Middle Eastern populations.

Murphy’s arguments are based on the assumption that modern Jewish mtDNA accurately represents the mtDNA of ancient Israel. However, the findings of modern geneticists that the mtDNA of different Jewish groups shares little commonality with other Jewish groups but closely reflects the mtDNA of their host populations flatly contradict Murphy’s conclusions. Mitochondrial DNA studies have had little success in linking different Jewish groups, leading geneticists to discount mtDNA as a reliable means of ascertaining “Jewish” roots. In an article entitled “Beware the Gene Genies,” genetic researcher Martin Richards observes:

Studies of human genetic diversity have barely begun. Yet the fashion for genetic ancestry testing is booming. . . . Other groups, such as Jews, are now being targeted. This despite the fact that Jewish communities have little in common on their mitochondrial side—the maternal line down which Judaism is traditionally inherited. It’s the male side that shows common ancestry between different Jewish communities—so, of course, that’s what the geneticists focus on. . . . Geneticists—like preachers and philosophers before them—need to avoid promising more than they can deliver.”<sup>4</sup>

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3. Thomas W. Murphy, “Lamanite Genesis, Genealogy, and Genetics,” in *American Apocrypha: Essays on the Book of Mormon*, ed. Dan Vogel and Brent Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), 47–77; see Murphy, “Sin, Skin, and Seed: Mistakes of Men in the Book of Mormon,” at [www.tungate.com/sinsskinseed5.pdf](http://www.tungate.com/sinsskinseed5.pdf) (accessed 30 May 2004).

4. Martin Richards, “Beware the Gene Genies,” *Guardian*, 21 February 2003; see [www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,,899835,00.html](http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,,899835,00.html) (accessed 7 July 2006).

A University College London study found that while separate Jewish communities were founded by relatively few female ancestors, this “process was independent in different geographic areas” and that the female ancestors of different communities were largely unrelated.<sup>5</sup> According to Nicholas Wade, “A new study now shows that the women in nine Jewish communities from Georgia . . . to Morocco have vastly different genetic histories from the men. . . . The women’s identities, however, are a mystery, because . . . their genetic signatures are not related to one another or to those of present-day Middle Eastern populations.”<sup>6</sup> Dr. Shaye Cohen of Harvard University notes, “The authors [of this study] are correct in saying the historical origins of most Jewish communities are unknown.”<sup>7</sup> Mark G. Thomas and colleagues maintain that “in no case is there clear evidence of unbroken genetic continuity from early dispersal events to the present. . . . Unfortunately, in many cases, it is not possible to infer the geographic origin of the founding mtDNAs within the different Jewish groups with any confidence.”<sup>8</sup>

Even close mtDNA homologies among different Jewish groups would not necessarily prove an Israelite origin, but the conspicuous absence of such homologies provides strong circumstantial evidence of non-Israelite origins for the mtDNA and, likely, much of the other genetic makeup of most modern Jews. With no evidence that modern Jewish mtDNA constitutes a valid control of the genetics of ancient Israel—and considerable evidence to the contrary—claims of Israelite lineage can neither be confirmed nor denied based on mtDNA data.

Joseph’s wife Asenath, daughter of Potipherah, priest of On, is the ancestral mother of the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh (Genesis 46:20). While her genealogy is unknown, there is no reason to believe that her mitochondrial lineage or that of her descendants, including the Lehtes, would have matched that of the tribe of Judah. The pres-

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5. Mark G. Thomas et al., “Founding Mothers of Jewish Communities: Geographically Separated Jewish Groups Were Independently Founded by Very Few Female Ancestors,” *American Journal of Human Genetics* 70/6 (June 2002): 1411.

6. Nicholas Wade, “In DNA, New Clues to Jewish Roots,” *New York Times*, 14 May 2002, F1 (col. 1).

7. Quoted in Wade, “In DNA, New Clues to Jewish Roots.”

8. Thomas et al., “Founding Mothers of Jewish Communities,” 1411, 1415, 1417–18.

ence of mtDNA types in Native Americans that do not match those found in modern Jewish groups is fully consistent with both Book of Mormon and Bible accounts.

### Mitochondrial DNA Data Points to a Few Closely Related Founding Groups

Studies seem to demonstrate that Native Americans have less mitochondrial DNA diversity than found among any other large group of comparable size and even less diversity than the much smaller modern Jewish population. The mtDNA research of D. Andrew Merriwether suggests that the mitochondrial genetics of Native Americans could be explained by a single migration,<sup>9</sup> while others believe that there may have been two or three migrations from closely related groups. One writer insists that “most Indians of North America, and all Indians of Central and South America seem to be descended from this first wave of migrants. . . . Similarities in Amerindian languages, as well as in DNA, point to the conclusion that a very small group of migrants gave rise to this enormous, farflung assemblage of peoples in a relatively short time.”<sup>10</sup> Genetic evidence of one or a few closely related founding groups serving as the ancestors of the overwhelming majority of Native Americans is consistent with traditional Latter-day Saint views of Native American origin from the Lamanites, Nephites, and Mulekites.

### The Cohen Modal Haplotype

Murphy provides only one example—the Lemba—of an ostensibly non-Jewish group “decisively confirmed” by modern genetics to have at least some Israelite roots. He mentions this group ten times

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9. D. Andrew Merriwether, Francisco Rothhammer, and Robert E. Ferrell, “Distribution of the Four Founding Lineage Haplotypes in Native Americans Suggests a Single Wave of Migration for the New World,” *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 98 (1995): 411–30.

10. Edward J. Vajda, “The Siberian Origins of Native Americans,” at [pandora.cii.wvu.edu/vajda/ea210/SiberianOriginsNA.htm](http://pandora.cii.wvu.edu/vajda/ea210/SiberianOriginsNA.htm) (accessed 5 May 2006).

in order to highlight his contrast with Native American groups. One example will illustrate his argument:

[Molecular anthropologists] Neil Bradman and Mark Thomas have used the Cohen haplotype to link ancient Hebrews to the modern population of the Lemba, a black southern African, Bantu-speaking population with oral traditions asserting a Jewish ancestry. . . . Claims regarding an Israelite ancestry for Native Americans would fit into this category, but DNA tests of the Lemba yielded a strikingly different outcome than for Native Americans. Two studies to date have demonstrated that one of the Lemba clans carries a high frequency of “a particular Y-chromosome termed the ‘Cohen modal haplotype,’ which is known to be characteristic of the paternally inherited Jewish priesthood and is thought, more generally, to be a potential signature haplotype of Judaic origin.”<sup>11</sup>

The Cohen Modal Haplotype, or CMH, is a genetic signature postulated to be inherited from Aaron Ha-Cohen, brother of Moses. This marker is believed to have originated approximately three thousand years ago, a suitable timeframe for a presumptive origin with the biblical Aaron. The CMH is present in approximately 45–55 percent of Ashkenazic and Sephardic Cohens, compared to 2–3 percent of non-Cohen Jews. It is also found in the Buba clan of the Lemba tribe of Zimbabwe, the Bnei Menashe of India, and in several non-Jewish populations, including Armenians, Kurds, Hungarians, and central and southern Italians.

The Book of Mormon account does not support Murphy’s assumption that the CMH, a presumptive genetic signature of Levite priests, should have been present among the Lehites. We would not expect that two small groups that left Israel without Cohens among them would carry the Cohen Modal Haplotype. Lehi was a descendant of Joseph (1 Nephi 5:14). Mulek, son of Zedekiah, was a descendant of Judah. While the lineages of Ishmael, Zoram, and the servants of

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11. Murphy, “Lamanite Genesis, Genealogy, and Genetics,” 60–61; see 75 n. 74 for Murphy’s references.

Mulek are unknown, there is no textual evidence that Cohen priests were present among these groups. Had Cohens been present, it seems unlikely that Lehi and other non-Cohens could have officiated in sacrificial ordinances that were confined to Levite priests by the Mosaic law. Cohens were specifically forbidden to intermarry even with other Israelites, accounting for the high prevalence of the CMH in today's Jewish Cohens and the very limited presence of this unique genetic marker in non-Cohen Jews even after an additional twenty-six centuries of intermixing. The presence of the CMH among Diaspora Jewish groups with Cohens, including the Lemba and Bnei Menashe, and its absence among Native Americans, is an expected finding fully consistent with the Book of Mormon story.

While he sharply criticizes traditional Latter-day Saint teachings because of the lack of homology between modern Jewish and Native American mtDNA, Murphy inexplicably fails to disclose that the Lemba have virtually no mtDNA commonality with other Jewish groups. Dr. Himla Soodyall noted that “using mtDNA the Lemba were indistinguishable from other Bantu-speaking groups.”<sup>12</sup> Murphy also fails to mention that in contrast to the Lehite colony and the lost ten tribes, which left Israel over two and a half millennia ago, the Lemba are believed to be descended from Yemenite Jews who migrated to their current location in Zimbabwe less than a thousand years ago, representing a recent offshoot of post-Diaspora Judaism. Yet it is only through the priestly Cohen Modal Haplotype that the Lemba have been identified as having a possible Jewish genetic origin at all.

Murphy repeatedly demands “similar evidence” such as he thinks he has found with the Lemba for the Israelite ancestry of Native Americans, while failing to disclose that the CMH is the only known haplotype with a presumptive origin in ancient Israel that demonstrates significant homogeneity among differing Jewish populations worldwide. Ken Jacobs, author of various studies on Jewish genetics, indicates: “The only Jewish subgroup that does show some

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12. Himla Soodyall, quoted in Izelle Theunissen, “Every Gene Tells a Story,” *Science in Africa*, February 2003, at [www.scienceinafrica.co.za/2003/february/gene.htm](http://www.scienceinafrica.co.za/2003/february/gene.htm) (accessed 5 May 2006).

homogeneity—descendants of the Cohanim, or priestly class—makes up only about 2 percent of the Jewish population. Even within these Cohanim, and certainly within the rest of the Jewish people, there’s a vast amount of genetic variation.”<sup>13</sup> In view of the lack of a single validated CMH-like haplotype among modern Jews relevant to non-Cohen Israelites, it seems that Murphy has contrived what might be called a fool’s errand for Book of Mormon believers.

### Y-Chromosome Data

Although critics have claimed that Native Americans and modern Jews share no relevant Y-chromosome affinities, recent data have proven such statements resoundingly false. Douglas Forbes points out that Y-chromosome SNP biallelic marker Q-P36 (also known by the mutation marker M-242), postulated by geneticist Doron Behar and colleagues to be a founding lineage among Ashkenazi Jewish populations,<sup>14</sup> is also found in Iranian and Iraqi Jews<sup>15</sup> and is a founding lineage group<sup>16</sup> present in 31 percent of self-identified Native Americans in the U.S.<sup>17</sup> A branch of the Q-P36 lineage (M-323) is also found in Yemenite Jews.<sup>18</sup> The Q-P36

13. Tony Ortega, “Witness for the Persecution,” *New Times Los Angeles*, 20–26 April 2000.

14. Doron M. Behar et al., “Contrasting Patterns of Y Chromosome Variation in Ashkenazi Jewish and Host Non-Jewish European Populations,” *Human Genetics* 114 (2004): 354–65.

15. Michael F. Hammer et al., “Jewish and Middle Eastern Non-Jewish Populations Share a Common Pool of Y-Chromosome Biallelic Haplotypes,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science* 97/12 (6 June 2000): 6769–74 (p. 6770, table 1; see correlates for 1C in Y Chromosome Consortium, “A Nomenclature System for the Tree of Human Y-Chromosomal Binary Haplogroups,” *Genome Research* 12 [2002]: 339–48); and Peidong Shen et al., “Reconstruction of Patrilineages and Matrilineages of Samaritans and Other Israeli Populations from Y-Chromosome and Mitochondrial DNA Sequence Variation,” *Human Mutation* 24 (2004): 248–60. (M-242 is another label for the Q-P36 group.)

16. Stephen L. Zegura, et al., “High-Resolution SNPs and Microsatellite Haplotypes Point to a Single, Recent Entry of Native American Y Chromosomes into the Americas,” *Molecular Biology and Evolution* 21/1 (2004): 164–75.

17. See [dougshaythis.blogspot.com/2005/09/lamanites.html](http://dougshaythis.blogspot.com/2005/09/lamanites.html) (accessed 7 July 2006), which refers to Michael F. Hammer et al., “A Population Structure of Y Chromosome SNP Haplogroups in the United States and Forensic Implications for Constructing Y Chromosome STR Databases,” *Forensic Science International* (3 December 2005), article in press.

18. See Forbes at [dougshaythis.blogspot.com/2005/09/lamanites.html](http://dougshaythis.blogspot.com/2005/09/lamanites.html) (accessed 7 July 2006).



lineage is ancestral to the Q-M3 mutation group. The Q-P36 and Q-M3 lineages together (haplogroup Q) are found in over 76 percent of Native Americans.<sup>19</sup> Forbes writes, “We find M-242 scattered all over central Eurasia and concentrated in Turkistan just north of Iran.<sup>20</sup> The ten tribes, including Manasseh, were taken captive to Media (northwest Iran). So M-242 is found scattered just where you would expect it would be if legends of the ten tribes escaping captivity by going north are true.”<sup>21</sup> While the ethnohistory behind these variations remains to be elucidated, these intriguing findings produce considerable difficulty for critics’ arguments. Forbes further notes: “Other west Eurasian lineages found in Native American test subjects include R, E3b, J, F, G, and I. All of these are also found in modern Jews.”<sup>22</sup> The question of which of these latter lineages are pre-Columbian and which may represent post-Columbian admixture has not been definitively resolved and will require further research.

The finding of two dominant Y-chromosome lineages in Amerindian populations is harmonious with traditional Latter-day Saint views of Lehi and Ishmael representing the principal male ancestors of Native Americans, with Zoram and the Mulekites contributing minor lineages. The discovery of a founding Y-chromosome lineage prevalent at a very high frequency among Native Americans corresponding to a founding lineage present at a lower frequency in world Jewish populations demonstrates remarkable consistency with the Book of Mormon account.

Some widespread Jewish Y-chromosome affinities represent recent, post-Diaspora influences. Behar and colleagues report:

The Levites, another paternally inherited Jewish caste, display evidence for multiple recent origins, with Ashkenazi Levites having a high frequency of a distinctive, non-Near Eastern haplogroup. . . . the Ashkenazi Levite microsatellite haplotypes

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19. Zegura et al., “High-Resolution SNPs,” 168.

20. Forbes refers to Mark Seielstad et al., “A Novel Y-Chromosome Variant Puts an Upper Limit on the Timing of First Entry into the Americas,” *American Journal of Human Genetics* 73/3 (September 2003): 700.

21. Douglas Forbes, personal communication, 21 November 2005.

22. See [dougssaythis.blogspot.com/2005/09/lamanites.html](http://dougssaythis.blogspot.com/2005/09/lamanites.html) (accessed 7 July 2006).

within this haplogroup are extremely tightly clustered, with an inferred common ancestor within the past 2,000 years. . . . A founding event, probably involving one or very few European men occurring at a time close to the initial formation and settlement of the Ashkenazi community, is the most likely explanation for the presence of this distinctive haplogroup found today in >50% of Ashkenazi Levites.<sup>23</sup>

Another study shows that “comparisons of the Ashkenazic Levite dataset with the other groups studied suggest that Y-chromosome haplotypes, present at high frequency in Ashkenazic Levites, are most likely to have an east European or west Asian origin and not to have originated in the Middle East.”<sup>24</sup> David Keys writes that the so-called Ashkenazi Levite marker that is shared by 30 percent of Ashkenazi non-Cohen Levites was most likely introduced into the Jewish population with the mass conversion of Turkic Khazars between AD 700 and 900.<sup>25</sup> DNA studies demonstrating presumably non-Israelite origins of many of today’s Jews highlight the problems in using modern Jewish genetics as a standard against which claims of other groups to Israelite ancestry are assessed.

### Regional Affiliation Haplotypes

Certain haplotypes have been identified frequently among modern Jews and Middle Eastern Arabs. These haplotypes, some claim, represent markers for regional affiliation to the Middle East. The absence of many of these haplotypes in Native American populations has led some to claim that traditional Latter-day Saint beliefs of an Israelite origin for some Native Americans are false. The genetic

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23. Doron M. Behar et al., “Multiple Origins of Ashkenazi Levites: Y Chromosome Evidence for Both Near Eastern and European Ancestries,” *American Journal of Human Genetics* 73/4 (October 2003): 768.

24. Neil Bradman, Dror Rosengarten, and Karl L. Skorecki, “The Origins of Ashkenazic Levites: Many Ashkenazic Levites Probably Have a Paternal Descent from East Europeans or West Asians,” Proceedings of the 6th International Conference on Ancient DNA and Associated Biomolecules, 21–25 July 2002.

25. David Keys, *Catastrophe: An Investigation into the Origins of the Modern World* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2000), 99–100.

markers found among Native Americans are distinctly different from those of most modern Middle East peoples.

Michael Hammer reports that Jewish and non-Jewish Middle Eastern populations share similar prevalences of certain Y-chromosome haplotypes. However, he cautions: “Many of the same haplotypes present in Jewish and Middle Eastern populations were also present in samples from Europe, although at varying frequencies.”<sup>26</sup> Most so-called regional affiliation markers are present only in a small fraction of modern Middle Eastern peoples. These markers are neither inclusive (that is, not all modern Middle Easterners share these haplotypes) nor exclusive (that is, their absence does not preclude an origin in ancient Israel or elsewhere in the Middle East). Studies of modern Middle Eastern groups like Armenians reveal in many cases a “strong regional structure” as the result of a relatively high degree of genetic isolation even within a “single ethno-national group.”<sup>27</sup> The vast regional differences seen within the Middle East today defy the assumption that a few generic haplotypes can definitively rule in or out a historic origin anywhere in an ethnically heterogeneous region that has been home to many diverse cultures.

Simplistic claims that an Israelite origin for non-Jewish groups can be either ruled in or out based on so-called regional affiliation haplotypes fail to adequately account for known ethnohistoric dynamics. The questions of what these haplotypes represent in the ethnohistory of modern peoples, when were they introduced, and where they came from have not even begun to be answered. Hebrew University geneticist Howard Cedar has argued that “researchers still don’t know what the history is behind the variations. As a result, it is difficult to draw conclusions about genetic affinity.”<sup>28</sup> Many of the haplotypes shared among modern Jews and non-Jewish Middle Easterners may represent genetic material assimilated through intermarriage rather

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26. Hammer et al., “Jewish and Middle Eastern Non-Jewish Populations,” 6771.

27. Michael E. Weale et al., “Armenian Y Chromosome Haplotypes Reveal Strong Regional Structure within a Single Ethno-national Group,” *Human Genetics* 109 (2001): 659.

28. Dina Kraft, “Study Finds Genetic Links between Jews and Arabs,” Associated Press, 10 May 2000.

than genuine Israelite DNA, as not one of the modern Middle Eastern regional affiliation haplotypes has been demonstrated to have been prevalent in Israelite populations before the Babylonian captivity.

John M. Butler has pointed out an Icelandic study in which mtDNA and Y-chromosome haplotypes of many known ancestors were not detectable in modern populations just over a century later.<sup>29</sup> The study traced the genealogy of over 131,000 Icelanders back to known ancestors born between 1848 and 1892 and between 1742 and 1798.<sup>30</sup> The authors argued that the “populationwide coalescent analysis of Icelandic genealogies revealed highly positively skewed distributions of descendants to ancestors, with the vast majority of potential ancestors contributing one or no descendants and a minority of ancestors contributing large numbers of descendants.” They observed that this has caused “considerable fluctuation in the frequencies of mtDNA and Y chromosome haplotypes, despite a rapid population expansion in Iceland during the past 300 years.”<sup>31</sup> According to the study, 86.2 percent of modern Icelandic males are descended from just 26 percent of potential male ancestors born between 1848 and 1892. Women demonstrate even more dramatic trends due to the shorter female intergenerational time: 91.7 percent of modern females descended from only 22 percent of potential female ancestors born between the same years.<sup>32</sup> This study documents that dramatic shifts in haplotype prevalence can occur and that genetic evidence for many known ancestors is entirely lost in an advanced, peaceful, relatively isolated society over the course of little more than a century. It also cautions against drawing sweeping ethnohistoric conclusions about haplotypes present in many different groups based exclusively upon their prevalence in modern populations. One can appreciate the lack

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29. John M. Butler, “Addressing Questions surrounding the Book of Mormon and DNA Research,” in this number of the *FARMS Review*, pages 101–8. This has appeared since February 2006 on the Maxwell Institute Web site.

30. Agnar Helgason et al., “A Populationwide Coalescent Analysis of Icelandic Matrilineal and Patrilineal Genealogies: Evidence for a Faster Evolutionary Rate of mtDNA Lineages than Y Chromosomes,” *American Journal of Human Genetics* 72/6 (2003): 1370–88.

31. Helgason et al., “Populationwide Coalescent Analysis,” 1370.

32. Helgason et al., “Populationwide Coalescent Analysis,” 1373.

of any scientific basis for critics' demands that groups facing frequent episodes of war, persecution, famine, and disease, while experiencing ongoing intermarriage with other groups, should maintain persistent haplotype commonalities over twenty-six hundred years of separation from the initial founders.

### **Ethnohistory and Genetics: Affinities vs. Origins**

“Virtually all Native Americans,” Murphy insists, “can trace their lineages to the Asian migrations between 7,000 and 50,000 years ago.”<sup>33</sup> Yet Merriwether and colleagues explain further: “We conclude that Mongolia or a geographic location common to both contemporary Mongolians and American aboriginals is the more likely origin of the founders of the New World.”<sup>34</sup> While ignored by Murphy and other critics, the possibility of an outside “geographic location common to both contemporary Mongolians and American aboriginals” is allowed by the original researchers.

The only compelling genetic validation that the ancient inhabitants of an area are the ancestors or close relatives of modern peoples can come from comparisons of ancient and modern DNA. DNA studies have demonstrated that the early inhabitants of the New World appear to have had all the main mtDNA haplogroups (A, B, C, and D) found in modern Native Americans, supporting the belief that ancient Native Americans are in fact the ancestors of the present ones.<sup>35</sup>

Issues on the Asian side are more problematic. Very little is known of the peoples inhabiting Mongolia before 200 BC—over five centuries after the dispersion of the ten tribes. Ethnohistory provides abundant data of large groups of people of almost entirely unknown origins who settled in Mongolia and south Siberia, which were active areas

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33. Murphy, “Lamanite Genesis, Genealogy, and Genetics,” 68.

34. D. Andrew Merriwether et al., “mtDNA Variation Indicates Mongolia May Have Been the Source for the Founding Population for the New World,” *American Journal of Human Genetics* 59/1 (July 1996): 204.

35. “Summary of Mitochondrial DNA New World Haplogroups in Humans Worldwide,” National Park Service Archaeology and Ethnography Program Kennewick Man homepage at [www.cr.nps.gov/aad/kennewick/t\\_ktable2.htm](http://www.cr.nps.gov/aad/kennewick/t_ktable2.htm) and [www.cr.nps.gov/aad/kennewick/t\\_kfig2.htm](http://www.cr.nps.gov/aad/kennewick/t_kfig2.htm) (accessed 1 May 2004).

for mass migrations from across central Asia. As a nomadic people traveling over vast areas but leaving few permanent settlements, the ancient ancestors of the Mongolians are particularly difficult to trace. The nomadic character of the equestrian Mongols, whose predecessors ruled an empire from eastern Europe to the Pacific; the absence of any real natural barriers across thousands of miles of territory that comprise the largest plain in the world; and the history of hundreds of migrations of groups allow us to question the genetic basis for Murphy's assumption that those living in Mongolia and southern Siberia today harbor essentially the same gene pool as that present thousands or even tens of thousands of years ago.

DNA studies of ancient human remains from Siberia and Mongolia predating the dispersion of Israel are conspicuously absent. To my knowledge, the only ancient mummies that have been found adjacent to Mongolia are Tocharian—an ancient and mysterious civilization of blond- and red-haired, Caucasian-appearing people who inhabited the Tarim basin approximately three thousand years ago.<sup>36</sup> The Chinese government to date has not permitted DNA testing on these mummies, but mainstream geneticists and anthropologists do not believe the Tocharians to be the principal ancestors or even significant genetic contributors to modern Mongolian, Siberian, or Uighur populations. Our awareness of the ethnogenetic distinctiveness of the Tocharian people and even their very existence comes almost exclusively from their custom of mummification and from the fortuitous discovery of Tocharian mummies in the desert sands in 1987.

The ancient East Asian populations from which we do have some mtDNA data—namely, the Chinese and Japanese—demonstrate genetic patterns strikingly different from those of modern populations. The ancient remains tested from Japan contain none of the four main mtDNA haplogroups (A, B, C, and D) present in 98 percent of modern Native Americans and 52 percent of modern Mongolians. Among ancient Chinese studied, only 13 percent shared a mtDNA haplogroup

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36. Howard Reid, "Mysterious Mummies of China," PBS NOVA broadcast, 20 January 1998, transcript at [www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/transcripts/2502chinamum.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/transcripts/2502chinamum.html) (accessed 15 May 2006).

with Native Americans, and only two of the haplogroups (B and C) were present at all. Even these ancient Chinese remains are only two thousand years old, over seven centuries later than the dispersion of the northern kingdom of Israel. In contrast, a modern study of “central Chinese” with a similar sample size demonstrated the presence of all four mtDNA haplogroups, and the prevalence of the shared mtDNA haplogroups has increased to 45 percent.<sup>37</sup>

The further back we go, the greater genetic distinctiveness we find between ancient and modern Asian populations. One of the earliest Asian studies of ancient human remains was conducted in the Linzi area of central China. The authors studied human remains from three different time periods and found that

the genetic backgrounds of the three populations are distinct from each other. Inconsistent with the geographical distribution, the 2,500-year-old Linzi population showed greater genetic similarity to present-day European populations than to present-day east Asian populations. The 2,000-year-old Linzi population had features that were intermediate between the present-day European/2,500-year-old Linzi populations and the present-day east Asian populations. These relationships suggest the occurrence of drastic spatiotemporal changes in the genetic structure of Chinese people during the past 2,500 years.<sup>38</sup>

Those researchers point out that “the three smallest genetic distances for the 2,500-year-old Linzi population were from the Turkish, Icelander, and Finnish, rather than from the east Asian populations.”<sup>39</sup> Not only did a 2,500-year-old population with strong European genetic features live in central China, but these people appear to be the oldest inhabitants of China yet identified. Geneticists are aware of this group, whose genetic features seem to be almost entirely absent in

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37. “Summary of Mitochondrial DNA New World Haplogroups.”

38. Li Wang et al., “Genetic Structure of a 2,500-Year-Old Human Population in China and Its Spatiotemporal Changes,” *Molecular Biology and Evolution* 17/9 (September 2000): 1396.

39. Wang et al., “Genetic Structure,” 1398.

the modern Chinese population, only because of a relatively unique, recent study.<sup>40</sup> If we were to imagine a hypothetical Linzi group that might have emigrated to an isolated island in 500 BC, the DNA of their descendants would be completely unrelated to that of modern Chinese and would be classified by proponents of regional affiliation genetics as belonging to a European culture group. Self-proclaimed experts would undoubtedly claim that this group had been “proven” not to have originated in China at all. The Linzi data challenge the theories of those who indiscriminately extrapolate the genetics of the modern inhabitants onto ancient peoples without supporting DNA evidence.

### Genetics, History, and Scripture

Critics have largely failed to consider scriptural and historical explanations for modern DNA observations. Abraham was a migrant from Ur of the Chaldees and not a native Palestinian. The Lord explicitly forbade intermarriage between Israelites and the native inhabitants of Palestine, commanding: “Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son” (Deuteronomy 7:3). The spiritual and social separation between Israel and the surrounding nations is a frequent scriptural theme. Limited intermixing occurred between Israel and surrounding kingdoms during the captivity in Egypt and the early period of the kingdom of Israel, mainly consisting of the assimilation of foreign wives. Nonetheless, the continued emphasis on separation between Israel and its neighbors would make it foolish to expect genetic regional affiliation markers gathered from a composite of Canaanites, Syrians, Egyptians, Phoenicians, and other groups then inhabiting the ancient Near East to represent a definitive test of early Israelite ancestry.

The Assyrian captivity of the northern ten tribes and the Babylonian captivity of the kingdom of Judah marked turning points of genetic divergence between the Jews who returned to Jerusalem and other Israelite groups. The Jews who returned from the Babylonian

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40. Wang et al., “Genetic Structure,” 1396–400.



captivity found a land with a markedly different ethnic makeup from the predominantly Canaanite Palestine of early Israel. Many of the Canaanite tribes had been completely destroyed, while the Assyrians had resettled “men from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel: and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof” (2 Kings 17:24). Other groups migrated into Palestine during and after the Babylonian captivity. The returned Jews mixed among a population of Babylonians, Palestinians, Edomites, Moabites, Ammonites, Syrians, Assyrians, and others until after the time of the Savior. These intervening centuries provided abundant opportunities for the introduction of numerous regional haplotypes that were not necessarily present in ancient Israel. Continued intermarriage with foreigners would have progressively diluted the Jewish genome to the point where many of the original haplotypes may no longer have been detectable. The Jews who lived in the Near East until after the destruction of Jerusalem circa AD 70 and then gradually made their way into the Diaspora should be expected to share vastly greater genetic commonalities with modern Syrians, Arabs, Palestinians, Kurds, and Iraqis than the Lehighites, who left Jerusalem approximately 600 BC, or the ten tribes from the northern kingdom who were carried away by the Assyrians between 744 and 721 BC and then lost to history.

Rates of intermarriage increased significantly during and after the Babylonian captivity. Transplanted minority groups are generally more likely to intermarry with other groups than more homogenous ethnic groups in their own societies because of both external cultural factors and limited internal marriage options. The prophet Ezra initiated separations on a massive scale between Israelite men and their foreign wives (Ezra 10), but it is unlikely that restrictions on the ubiquitous challenge of intermarriage were consistently enforced so zealously in subsequent generations. The Jewish prohibition on intermarriage has rarely been consistently achieved. One source reports that since 1985, 52 percent of North American Jews who married

have married non-Jews.<sup>41</sup> Just a few generations of such widespread intermarriage can result in almost a complete loss of initially defining genetic data. Even if the low 10 percent intermarriage rate reported prior to 1965 had been maintained for twenty-six hundred years, modern Jewish populations would bear little genetic resemblance to ancient Israelites.

The Bible reports some 600,000 able-bodied footmen among the Israelites at the time of the Exodus, in addition to women and children (Exodus 12:37; Numbers 11:21), suggesting a likely population of at least 2 million. Throughout history, the Jewish population was reconstituted from only a fraction of its former people on at least several occasions, often with considerable influx of non-Jewish genes. Hebrew scholars estimate that the Jewish population had fallen to approximately 300,000 a century after the Babylonian captivity, increasing to between two and five million by the time of Christ and falling to less than a million following the Roman-Jewish wars.<sup>42</sup> Only a fraction of the Jews returned from Babylon, only a portion of the Palestinian Jews survived the Roman counterattacks leading to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, and many Jews perished in European pogroms. The asymmetric nature of all of these events would have resulted in the loss of many “Israelite” genes from the Jewish gene pool.

Robert Pollack observes that Ashkenazi Jews, who constitute 80 percent of the modern Jewish population, “descend from a rather small number of families who survived the pogroms of the mid-1600s.”<sup>43</sup> Behar reports that “from an estimated number of ~25,000 in 1300 AD, the Ashkenazi population had grown to more than 8.5 million by the beginning of the 19th century.”<sup>44</sup> Daniel Elazar of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs wrote that at the end of the eleventh century, 97 percent of the world’s Jews were Sephardic and only 3 percent were Ashkenazi. He reports that in “the mid-seventeenth

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41. See [www.whymarryjewish.com/j2k.html](http://www.whymarryjewish.com/j2k.html) (accessed 5 May 2006).

42. See Simon Burckhardt in *A Historical Address of the Jewish People*, ed. Eli Baranavi (New York: Schocken Books, 1992).

43. Robert Pollack, “The Fallacy of Biological Judaism,” *Forward*, 7 March 2003, at [www.forward.com/issues/2003/03.03.07/oped4.html](http://www.forward.com/issues/2003/03.03.07/oped4.html) (accessed 5 May 2006).

44. Behar et al., “Contrasting Patterns of Y Chromosome Variation,” 354.

century, Sephardim still outnumbered Ashkenazim three to two. . . . The Ashkenazic high point came in 1931 when they constituted nearly 92 percent of world Jewry.”<sup>45</sup> Ethnohistory repeatedly documents the amplification of a small subset of precursor DNA in modern Jewish populations, the inevitable loss of many Israelite haplotypes altogether, and the introduction of large amounts of non-Israelite DNA. Such ethnohistoric data resoundingly repudiate critics’ assumptions that modern Jewish groups represent a comprehensive and valid control of the genetics of ancient Israel. Pollack further notes: “Though there are many deleterious versions of genes shared within the Ashkenazic community, there are no DNA sequences common to all Jews and absent from all non-Jews. There is nothing in the human genome that makes or diagnoses a person as a Jew.”<sup>46</sup>

There is no evidence that any of the so-called regional affiliation haplotypes shared by some modern Jews and Palestinians reflect ancient Israelite genetics rather than sequences assimilated from non-Israelite groups over centuries of intermixing. Historical and genetic evidence suggest that modern Jewish populations cannot possibly contain all the genetic material present in predispersion Israel and that few modern Jewish haplotypes are even plausible candidates for ancient Israelite origin.

### Alternative Theories

While some claim that the DNA similarities between Native Americans, Mongolians, and Siberians discredit Latter-day Saint teachings, I find just the opposite: the consistency between genetic data, scripture, history, and modern patriarchal blessings is remarkable. Current DNA studies provide no evidence that the haplogroups shared between Siberian and Native American populations were found in Siberia or east Asia before the dispersion of Israel. Existing data also suggest that the prevalence of these haplotypes among central Chinese and other Asian populations may have increased

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45. Daniel J. Elazar, “Can Sephardic Judaism Be Reconstructed?” Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, at [www.jcpa.org/dje/articles3/sephardic.htm](http://www.jcpa.org/dje/articles3/sephardic.htm) (accessed 1 June 2006).

46. Pollack, “Fallacy of Biological Judaism.”

significantly over time. Could there have been a common origin outside of Mongolia for both Native Americans and many modern Mongolians? Virtually nothing is known about the genetics of ancient Israel. The Bible declares that the ten tribes were dispersed to the “land of the north” (Jeremiah 3:18)—a designation for which few lands seem as appropriate as the vast steppes of Siberia and Mongolia. The DNA commonalities between modern Siberian and Native American populations may not have been indigenous to the predispersion inhabitants of east Asia but could have been introduced to both locations by migrants from ancient Israel: to east Asia by dispersed lost tribes of the northern captivity and to the Americas by the Lehite and Mulekite groups described in the Book of Mormon.

Patriarchal blessings of the overwhelming majority of Native American converts in areas without significant post-Columbian admixture cite lineage from Manasseh, consistent with the Book of Mormon teaching that Lehi was a descendant of Joseph (1 Nephi 5:14). Well before Murphy’s criticisms of traditional Latter-day Saint views hit the popular press, I had confirmed from missionaries and members that modern patriarchal blessings have identified members of all the tribes of Israel in Mongolia—a greater number than I am aware of being found in any other country to date. These blessings were given independently by Latter-day Saint patriarchs in stakes throughout the world where ethnic Mongolian missionaries served, as Mongolia had no stakes or patriarchs at the time. More recently, a similar phenomenon has been reported from Siberia. A recently returned missionary from the Russia Novosibirsk Mission wrote: “While there, I had the unique opportunity to be present for the coming of two American patriarchs who delivered the first-ever patriarchal blessings to Siberian Saints on two separate occasions. What turned up was a staggering number of representatives from every single tribe in the relatively few blessings given.”<sup>47</sup> My research into patriarchal lineage declarations has consistently found a strong correlation between specific tribal lineages and certain ethnonational groups, and so I con-

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47. Jeffrey Carr, personal correspondence, 28 July 2006.

sider this finding significant. While this does not offer any kind of scientific proof, it should at least open our minds to consideration of the possibility of a common origin for Native Americans and many modern Mongolians outside of east Asia, perhaps in ancient Israel. One wonders if at least some elements of the genetics of these groups may not represent the genetics of ancient Israel better than do many of today's Jewish populations, which have extensively assimilated the genes of their neighbors.

### Dating the DNA

The only part of the data that has not yet been explained in harmony with the Book of Mormon story is the timing. Many scientists date the genetic divergence of modern Native Americans as having arisen from migrations between 10,000 and 15,000 BC, rather than shortly after 600 BC, as the Book of Mormon account claims. Mitochondrial studies of New World DNA have led to vastly discrepant estimates of time of divergence. According to Ann Gibbons, "All this disagreement prompts [Stanford University linguist Dr. Joseph] Greenberg to simply ignore the new mtDNA data. He says: 'Every time, it [mtDNA] seems to come to a different conclusion. I've just tended to set aside the mtDNA evidence. I'll wait until they get their act together.'"<sup>48</sup>

LDS apologist Martin Tanner explains:

The idea that haplogroup X has been in the Americas for 10 to 35 thousand years is based solely upon the assumptions of the Hardy-Weinberg equilibrium, which include: (1) completely neutral variants, (2) no mutation, (3) no migration, (4) constant near infinite population size, and (5) completely random mate choice. In the Book of Mormon account, most of the Hardy-Weinberg equilibrium assumptions are inapplicable. The wilderness journey, the ocean voyage, and the colonization of the New World result in patterns of genetic selection and DNA migration different from that found in

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48. Cited by Ann Gibbons, "The Peopling of the Americas," *Science*, 4 October 1996, 33.

Lehi's home environment. Closely related individuals married, and we are dealing with an [initially] very small group, not a nearly infinite population which would dramatically alter DNA marker distribution and inheritance over time. If we take these assumptions about haplogroup X instead of the Hardy-Weinberg assumptions, haplogroup X could have been introduced into the Americas as recently as one to two thousand years ago, far less than the ten to thirty-five thousand years under the Hardy-Weinberg assumptions.<sup>49</sup>

DNA researcher Mark Seielstad and colleagues note some of the problems with early dating:

Our results do not contradict earlier studies of mtDNA and the autosomes, whose standard errors were large and whose authors noted several reasons to expect their dates to overestimate the timing of the first human arrivals to the Americas. In addition, a more recent time of entry into the continent makes the proposal of the Amerind language family more plausible; or, conversely—given the rapidity of linguistic change—the existence of a unified Amerind family would itself imply a fairly recent settling of the Americas, as we have suggested here.<sup>50</sup>

Although consensus science still dates the peopling of the Americas well before the Lehites, dating methods depend highly upon assumptions that may not be universally valid and have a wide margin of error. Many estimates of the time of the settling of the Americas have been shortened greatly in recent years. Time will tell whether current calculations will hold or whether continued revision may be required.

### **Amerindians, Native Americans, or Lamanites?**

Whatever one's beliefs on the DNA issue, critics' attacks on Latter-day Saint scripture for describing Native Americans as "Lamanites" can only seem hypocritical when these peoples continue to be errone-

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49. Martin S. Tanner, personal communication, April 2004.

50. Seielstad, Yuldasheva, and Singh, "Novel Y-Chromosome Variant," 704.

ously referred to as “Indians” more than five centuries after Columbus. The pseudoscientific term *Amerindian* used by Murphy does not get around the problem that Native Americans are not Indians at all. Even the terms *Native Americans* or *indigenous peoples* are problematic, as migration from a homeland in the eastern hemisphere is acknowledged by gentile scholars and Latter-day Saints alike. For modern mixed populations, terms such as *Latino* or *Hispanic* are based entirely upon the European admixture while conveying nothing about pre-Columbian roots. While the word *Indian* was used on many occasions by Joseph Smith and other early church leaders, this term does not occur in Latter-day Saint scripture at all. Perhaps the use of the term *Lamanite* reflects the fact that their creator understood their origins in a way that most scientists still do not.

### Facts, Theories, and Consensus

When I was in medical school, physicians believed that hormone replacement therapy (HRT) offered substantial cardiac benefits with no increase in cancer risk for the average postmenopausal woman. Numerous seemingly well-designed, large-scale studies had corroborated these findings. While conducting public health research in an eastern European country, I was informed by a local cardiologist that they did not use HRT because of the belief that it increased cancer risk. At the time, I felt that his community was primitive for harboring views in opposition to abundant medical literature. Yet more recent United States studies have concluded that traditional HRT regimens incur significant cancer risks while failing to provide cardiovascular benefits, leading to a sweeping reversal of prior teachings that had served as the basis for the medical care of tens of millions of women. The initial HRT studies were much more rigorous than many ethnohistoric and anthropologic studies, which draw from far fewer data points.

Numerous other examples could be cited of theories once widely considered to have been rigorously proven but that have since been almost completely repudiated by subsequent findings. Almost every year brings unanticipated findings that require drastic revision of

existing theories. Most individuals would be surprised to learn how few data points current consensus theories for the peopling of the Americas such as the Bering land bridge theory are based on and how many scholars in the field hold widely different views. Recent archaeological finds in South America that appear to be older than those in North America have led some scholars to champion the Pacific colonization theory, while others note that the data are too sparse to settle the debate.

It is fascinating to consider not only how frequently science has changed its pronouncements, but also the societal amnesia that leads each new theory to be proclaimed as fact as definitively as those it supplanted. While the real experts acknowledge the limitations of their data and theories, the popularization of such theories often overextends their mandates. One observant cartoonist quipped: “My opinions may have changed, but not the fact that I am right.”<sup>51</sup> The innate human desire for answers has always led to overextended conclusions in the face of inadequate evidence. Few individuals are able to acknowledge multiple feasible possibilities or to defer judgment until better data becomes available.

The real test of our insight as scientists and of our discernment as Christians is not in our acknowledgment of past findings that are already widely accepted, but in our ability to correctly identify present truths. The Pharisees claimed to acknowledge ancient prophets while rejecting the living Christ of whom the prophets testified: “We know that God spake unto Moses: as for this fellow, we know not from whence he is” (John 9:29). Many professed scholars today are happy to claim the mantle of science for their acceptance of that which is already well-known, while demonstrating a lack of understanding of the principles on which prior discoveries were made by rejecting possibilities that do not fit with their personal assumptions. We are all beneficiaries of theories and principles that have overcome great resistance before eventual acceptance. Great scientists and inventors have always possessed the ability to separate the real facts from unproven assumptions of popular consensus and have pursued their own vision

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51. From Ashleigh Brilliant in her “Potshots” series, undated.



without regard to the deprecations of short-sighted critics. While much can be learned from consensus, those who rely upon it exclusively ultimately perish when the floods descend. Rather than placing our faith in ever-changing popular and academic consensus—the shifting sands of tiny minds—Christ invites us to build upon his rock. He declares: “I am the Lord thy God, I am more intelligent than they all” (Abraham 3:19).

### Evangelical Christianity’s “Suicide Bombing”

Some evangelical critics have latched onto the claims of dissident and ex-Mormon scholars that modern DNA evidence “disproves” Book of Mormon historicity in their effort to discredit the faith of the Latter-day Saints. DNA and dating arguments do not, however, represent an exclusive challenge to Latter-day Saint teachings, although critics would like to paint it as such. Rather, such arguments produce issues for the biblical Judeo-Christian worldview in general. Strict biblical chronology suggests that man has been on the earth for only six thousand years and that a universal flood occurred approximately 2350 BC. If all mankind is descended from Eve, why do not all humans share the same mitochondrial DNA? Where is the archaeological evidence of a great worldwide flood? God promised Abraham: “I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is upon the sea shore” (Genesis 22:17), yet no Abrahamic Y-chromosome has been identified among modern Jews, who consider themselves to be children of Abraham. While addressing such topics is beyond the scope of this article, the attempts of critics to characterize Latter-day Saint teachings as unscientific and irrational while failing to apply similar standards of objective validation to their own tenets amounts to a “suicide bombing.” There is something distinctly bizarre about evangelical groups like Living Hope Ministries enlisting agnostic evolutionist scholars as their experts to challenge the Church of Jesus Christ over DNA and the Book of Mormon. If one could continue the interviews by asking these same scholars about many events described in the Bible, one wonders if their admirers would continue to accept their pronouncements with such credulity. Every faith accepts some

beliefs that lie outside of the ever-changing scientific and societal consensus. If one were to use popular consensus as the basis for religious belief, what would be left? Studies show that today, most Americans do not believe in the resurrection.<sup>52</sup> Arguments that Latter-day Saint beliefs are scientifically untenable while those of other faiths are well-documented are intrinsically dishonest.

### Observations on Anti-Mormonism

My interest in Book of Mormon DNA issues began several years ago when my bishop in Texas asked me to help a less-active young man who was struggling with this topic. I open-mindedly and carefully studied the data and wrote a detailed article to highlight the fallacy of critics' arguments. We established several appointments, but he never appeared. When I finally reached him by phone, he promised to come by to pick up the article when he was interested. I never heard from him again. I have often found that addressing an individual's alleged concerns on one topic only brings forth a litany of others. Many don't want to have their concerns answered. Many have already made a decision to distance themselves from the church on personal grounds but like to flatter themselves that they are doing so for compelling scientific reasons. Attempts to correct their misunderstanding of science are often met with evasiveness or hostility.

Over the past year, I have received many profanity-laced tirades from critics and disaffected ex-Mormons over my writing on the DNA issue. The logic and language of these is not worthy of repetition. Throughout my life, I have had many non-LDS friends and acquaintances who held religious or personal views that I considered to be unsupportable or even bizarre, yet I have never felt threatened by allowing them the right to believe as they wish. Beyond the desire to defend my own faith from false accusations, I have never felt any desire to discredit other beliefs. The New Testament teaches that those of different beliefs should be left alone instead of persecuted. Doctrinal criti-

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52. Thomas Hargrove and Guido H. Stempel III, "Most Don't Believe in the Resurrection," *Detroit News*, 9 April 2006, at [www.detnews.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20060409/LIFESTYLE04/604090330/1041](http://www.detnews.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20060409/LIFESTYLE04/604090330/1041) (accessed 7 July 2006).

cisms of the Church of Jesus Christ by evangelical hirelings can only be considered capricious when viewed in the context of studies that have repeatedly documented that massive percentages of their own pastors do not believe in the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ, that Jesus was the son of God, or that God communicated with ancient prophets. Even from a born-again evangelical viewpoint, Christian researcher George Barna has found that the “biblical purity” of teachings acknowledged by Latter-day Saints is above-average for Christians in general.<sup>53</sup> In his *Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience*, Ronald Sider has documented that the lifestyle of most evangelicals is strikingly discrepant from scriptural standards.<sup>54</sup> Christ taught, “Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46). He declared, “Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but perceivest not the beam that is in thine own eye?” (Luke 16:44). While Latter-day Saints are not perfect and some negative exceptions exist in any large group, the remarkable record of Latter-day Saint society on the whole for scriptural living and morality has been repeatedly documented by sociologic studies. Critics are not objective evidence seekers or fair-minded scholars, but mere cafeteria sophists, playing up findings that they believe they can present to their advantage while ignoring data they find problematic.

### Scientists or Partisans?

To my knowledge, critics to date have not been able to generate a single peer-reviewed publication in a scientific journal on Book of Mormon DNA issues. Although validation of study controls is critical to the testing of any scientific hypothesis, Murphy and other critics have accepted without validation the assumption that modern Jewish populations represent a comprehensive control of ancient Israelite genetics. This assumption in itself demonstrates profound ignorance

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53. George Barna, “Religious Beliefs Vary Widely by Denomination,” Barna Research Group, 25 June 2001, at [www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=92](http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=92) (accessed 11 July 2006).

54. Ronald J. Sider, *Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience: Why Are Christians Living Just Like the Rest of the World?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005).

of Jewish ethnohistoric dynamics. It is rather shocking that while the original study authors repeatedly comment explicitly that their studies of Jewish populations do not necessarily demonstrate that the haplotypes in question reflect early Israelite genetics, Murphy and other critics have conveniently omitted mention of these cautions.

Murphy fails to disclose the lack of any meaningful mtDNA homology among modern Jewish groups that undermines one of his foundational arguments attacking Latter-day Saint views. The internal control he mentions of the Lemba is not comparable to the Lehite colony or lost tribe groups because of its very recent origin, and it fails the mtDNA test he imposes on Native Americans. He fails to mention that there is no reason to expect Cohen priests carrying the CMH, the only haplotype demonstrating significant homogeneity among Jewish populations worldwide, to have been present among the Lehites. Murphy fails to acknowledge the presence of a founding Y-chromosome haplotype present among Jewish communities worldwide and in Native Americans at a high frequency. He presents no data to support his assumption that ancient Mongolians and Siberians share similar genetic makeup to modern peoples and ignores both ethnohistoric and genetic data from other Far Eastern populations demonstrating drastic genetic change over time. His writing demonstrates no evidence of any serious attempt at analysis of events described in the Book of Mormon and Bible texts that might impact genetics, instead relying upon assumption and caricature. Murphy might do well to educate himself regarding Jewish ethnohistory, genetics, and scripture before attempting to tackle claims of Israelite origin for other groups. Murphy's authoritative pronouncement that "The BoMor [Book of Mormon] emerged from Joseph Smith's own struggles with his God"<sup>55</sup> and many similar statements<sup>56</sup> demonstrate his bias and agenda. He mischaracterizes Latter-day Saint policies toward Native

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55. Thomas Murphy, "Lamanite Genesis, Genealogy, and Genetics," found at [www.mormonscripturestudies.com/bomor/twm/lamgen.asp](http://www.mormonscripturestudies.com/bomor/twm/lamgen.asp) (accessed 30 May 2004).

56. The published version in *American Apocrypha*, 68, has been rephrased to say: "The Book of Mormon emerged from an antebellum perspective, out of a frontier American people's struggle with their god, and not from an authentic American Indian perspective."

Americans<sup>57</sup> and ignores the church's strong and consistent record of serving Native American interests dating back to times when Native Americans were scarcely considered human by the U.S. government. A review of some of the major problems with Murphy's claims suggests that his writings are unlikely to pass muster with those familiar with genetics, history, and scripture and that critics will likely continue to find their primary audience among disaffected ex-Mormons and anti-Mormon groups. Claims of critics like Simon Southerton that modern Jewish and Native American DNA data represent the most devastating "scientific evidence facing the LDS Church today"<sup>58</sup> only demonstrate the profound intellectual poverty of critics' arguments.

When I was a missionary in Russia, atheists frequently cited to me cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin's reported statement after traveling into space—"I didn't see any God up there" and his conclusion that "therefore God does not exist." Ill-founded DNA criticisms of traditional Latter-day Saint teachings arise from the same level of simplistic ignorance, erroneous assumptions, and non sequitur logic. The critics' charges that DNA data refute Latter-day Saint teachings do not present the thinking man's conundrum of conflict between science and religion but are rather made-for-media claims that excite sensational headlines for the uninformed while failing rudimentary scientific standards. Critics demonstrate that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing.

The individual who does not understand the limitations of the few data points he possesses and who is unable to separate his assumptions from fact—one with learning, but without wisdom—is often more hopelessly ignorant than the individual who knows nothing at all. Truly, God is "able to show forth great power, which looks small unto the understanding of men" (Ether 3:5). The inability or unwillingness of many to recognize his power ultimately demonstrates their small-mindedness rather than erudition. We do not need to apologize for our prophets. We can learn much about our world from them. Many

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57. Kevin L. Barney, "A Brief Review of Murphy and Southerton's 'Galileo Event,'" at [www.fairlds.org/Book\\_of\\_Mormon/Brief\\_Review\\_of\\_Murphy\\_and\\_Southerton\\_Galileo\\_Event.html](http://www.fairlds.org/Book_of_Mormon/Brief_Review_of_Murphy_and_Southerton_Galileo_Event.html) (accessed 24 July 2006).

58. Simon Southerton, as quoted by Murphy in "Skin, Seed, and the Mistakes of Men."

items in the Book of Mormon that critics had previously claimed to be impossible or anachronistic in ancient Mesoamerica have since been shown to have existed.<sup>59</sup> Many teachings currently presented by critics as “proof” of Mormonism’s falsehood will one day be recognized as some of the most remarkable evidences of Joseph Smith’s prophetic mission. We can take comfort that many honest and perceptive people see through the hypocrisy of those who “lie in wait to deceive.”

### Conclusion

The recent explosion of molecular DNA data has led to a considerable increase in knowledge about our roots. However, some individuals have drawn, and widely publicized, conclusions far beyond those validated by the existing data. The claims of critics that DNA evidence disproves traditional Latter-day Saint teachings about Native American ancestry are based in a misunderstanding or misrepresentation of science and an ignorance of history and scripture. There is still much that we do not know about the genetics of ancient and modern populations, but a careful examination of existing DNA data demonstrates that the teachings of Latter-day Saint prophets are fully consistent with existing DNA data.

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59. See Matthew Roper, “Right on Target: Boomerang Hits and the Book of Mormon,” at [www.fairLDS.org/pubs/conf/2001RopM.html](http://www.fairLDS.org/pubs/conf/2001RopM.html) (accessed 15 May 2006); John E. Clark, “Archaeology, Relics, and Book of Mormon Belief,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14/2 (2005): 38–51; and 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.

## KEEP THE OLD WINE IN OLD WINESKINS: THE PLEASING (NOT PLEADING) BAR OF GOD

John S. Welch

In a FARMS Update in 2004,<sup>1</sup> revised in his 2005 *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon*<sup>2</sup> and supplemented in a subsequent issue of *Insights*,<sup>3</sup> Professor Royal Skousen recommends that the two occurrences of the phrase *pleasing bar* in the Book of Mormon—namely, “the pleasing bar of God” in Jacob 6:13 and “the pleasing bar of the great Jehovah” in Moroni 10:34—should, in both instances, be conjecturally emended to change the word *pleasing* to *pleading*.

Without doubt, conjectural emendation is the most hazardous tool on the workbench of the textual critic. Conjectural emendations need to be proposed with caution and should be adopted only when the weight of the evidence so requires (not when the suggested revision is merely possible or even plausible). Bruce M. Metzger, one of the most respected names in New Testament textual criticism, has said, “If the only reading, or each of several variant readings, which the documents of a text supply is impossible or incomprehensible, the editor’s only remaining resource is to conjecture what the original reading must have been.”<sup>4</sup> Professor Skousen essentially agrees: “The crucial

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1. Royal Skousen, “The Pleading Bar of God,” Update no. 172, *Insights* 24/4 (2004): 2–3.

2. Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part Two: 2 Nephi 11–Mosiah 16* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2005), 1047.

3. Royal Skousen, “The Archaic Vocabulary of the Book of Mormon,” *Insights* 25/5 (2005): 2–6.

4. Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 182.

restriction on conjectural emendation is that there must be something actually wrong with the earliest extant reading.”<sup>5</sup>

Skousen, however, never shows, nor even claims, that *pleasing bar* as used in Jacob 6:13 and Moroni 10:34 is actually wrong. Indeed, his conviction seems to fluctuate from the modest view that *pleasing bar* was a “possible error,”<sup>6</sup> to an outright “error,”<sup>7</sup> to “problematic,”<sup>8</sup> to a “possible misinterpretation.”<sup>9</sup> So readers are left to wonder how a conjectural emendation is justified in this case.

As I understand Skousen’s position, he theorizes alternatively that (a) in the translation process Joseph Smith twice could have seen the phrase *pleading bar* (with his natural or spiritual eyes) and then dictated it to his scribe Oliver Cowdery, and that in both cases Cowdery erroneously wrote down *pleasing bar*; or that (b) Joseph himself could have been responsible for the “misreading,”<sup>10</sup> apparently meaning either that, having received the allegedly revealed phrase *pleading bar*, he erroneously dictated the phrase *pleasing bar*, or that he could have received and dictated the phrase *pleading bar* but, in his later rereadings of the Book of Mormon, he failed to notice and correct Cowdery’s “error.”<sup>11</sup> If Skousen has settled on his latest view, that *pleasing bar* is only a “possible misinterpretation,” then either of these alternatives may be untrue. As is noted above, this does not seem to be a promising foundation on which to base a conjectural emendation.

To the contrary, I undertake here to show that there is nothing “actually wrong” with the existing term, *pleasing bar*, that indeed the weight of the evidence persuades strongly against the proposed

5. Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants, Part One: 1 Nephi–2 Nephi 10*, 7.

6. Skousen, “Pleading Bar of God,” 3.

7. Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants, Part Two*, 1051.

8. Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants, Part Two*, 1052.

9. Skousen, “Archaic Vocabulary,” 6.

10. Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants, Part Two*, 1051.

11. The term *pleasing* is present in the original manuscript at Moroni 10:34 but not at Jacob 6:13, possibly because of a missing piece of the paper it would have been written on, and Skousen conjectures that Cowdery had interlined the word *pleasing* in that verse in the original (see Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants, Part Two*, 1047). It seems reasonable to assume that in transcribing the printer’s manuscript, Oliver was rapidly copying what he saw and not editing as he went. But whether that interlineation happened or not, Oliver wrote the printer’s manuscript as it now appears, and the Prophet let it stand.



change, and that such a change would be wrong. The long-standing text makes ample sense. It should be retained. To borrow a familiar phrase, old wine should be kept in old wineskins.

I believe that the following ten reasons make Skousen's alternatives untenable:

First, Skousen (following Christian Gellinek, a German legal scholar) asserts that the phrase is a "textually difficult reading," apparently because, in his own view, the final judgment is never a pleasing time for the wicked (he quotes such verses as Jacob 6:9, "to stand with shame and awful guilt before the bar of God"). But that criticism ignores the fact that Jacob 6:13 can be understood as implying that while the final judgment is pleasing for the righteous, it will not be so for the wicked. In other words, just as the "pleasing word of God" (Jacob 2:8, 9; 3:2) is naturally pleasing to the righteous yet hard for the wicked, the same can be said for the "pleasing bar of God" in Jacob 6:13. The candidates who appear before the judgment seat will include those who will receive the final invitation to enter into the celestial kingdom as kings and queens, priests and priestesses, the ultimate crowning of the faithful; or as Jacob says more briefly in Jacob 6:11 (just before referring to the judgment bar as "pleasing"), "Enter in at the strait gate, and continue in the way which is narrow, until ye shall obtain eternal life." Is that not a pleasing prospect?

In fact, Jews anciently welcomed God's judgment and saw it as a moment of vindication for his people, not as a terrifying and foreboding event. Thus, as C. S. Lewis astutely observed in his classic *Reflections on the Psalms*, it is Christians who tend to see the final judgment as a courtroom proceeding in which they position themselves as the accused in a criminal case "with [the Christian] himself in the dock; the Jew pictures it as a civil case with himself as the plaintiff. The [Christian] hopes for acquittal, or rather for pardon; the [Jew] hopes for a resounding triumph with heavy damages."<sup>12</sup> Thus the idea of Jacob's "pleasing bar" is not problematic if one emphasizes an Israelite background for Jacob's introduction of this phrase in Jacob

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12. C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1986), 10. I thank my son John W. Welch for this reference.

6:13. In fact, Jacob speaks like the Israelite he is when he sees the judgment bar of God as a “pleasing bar” but warns that this “bar striketh *the wicked* with awful dread and fear” (Jacob 6:13).

Second, unlike the simple terms *bar* or *judgment bar*, the term *pleading bar* was unknown in the United States judicial system in the late 1820s, in American literature, and in the King James Bible (in which, incidentally, there is also no reference to a “pleading bar,” nor even to a “judgment bar” or “bar of God”). Skousen does not appear to contend otherwise. Indeed, since he believes that Joseph as translator did nothing but read the revealed words and pronounce them for the scribe, he may be taking the position that it is not important that the phrase *pleading bar* was totally unknown to the Americans of 1829, including Joseph Smith.

Third, in his latest published FARMS Update, Skousen advances the theory that the entire Book of Mormon was revealed in an archaic English vocabulary containing a number of words the meanings of which had significantly changed long before 1829. This is a theory to be addressed elsewhere, except to note that if it is correct, Book of Mormon readers cannot always get a correct meaning without resorting to the *Oxford English Dictionary* or its equivalent, leaving one to wonder why the Lord would want to make the Book of Mormon that much harder to read and understand, and why the Lord would do that in the case of the Book of Mormon while giving the Doctrine and Covenants to his weak servants in “the manner of their language” (D&C 1:24), not Wycliffe’s or Tyndale’s.

Fourth, without offering any linguistic evidence that any judge or attorney or legislator in the British Empire or in the United States ever used *pleading bar*, Skousen refers to this phrase as a “legal term,” implying to the casual reader that it was a part of ordinary courtroom vocabulary. He cites only two Internet postings that contain the term (referring to a 1944 British film and a tour of an English village, which he calls “historical information”) and two seventeenth-century literary usages of the term in England (one from a five-act play, and the other from an English translation of an Italian poem). He refers also to three pictures of courtrooms in *The English Legal Heritage*, two of

which show a defendant standing in the traditional dock of the British criminal court, but as Skousen acknowledges,<sup>13</sup> the phrase *pleading bar* does not accompany these pictures or any others like them in that book.

Fifth, even if these few archaic and obscure British nonlegal uses were known in America in 1829, that would carry little weight. British and American usage of our shared language is widely divergent, especially in the legal sphere. Indeed, the place in the British justice system where prisoners are arraigned and then held for trial is now, and has been since at least 1624 per the *Oxford English Dictionary*, known as the “dock” or “bail dock” (not the “pleading bar” or “bar”). But even the British term *dock* is not used in the United States in this context.<sup>14</sup>

Sixth, *pleading bar* describes an assumed physical courtroom feature for which we have no scriptural, historical, or legal authority either in human or divine contexts. To American readers of the Book of Mormon, it would not have brought up a familiar image, for prisoners in this country stood before the bench for arraignment, not behind the railing, if any, that separated the spectators from the business of the court. Thus, the idea of a *pleasing bar* speaks not to a physical fixture but only to the high quality of the experience at the bar of God for those who have kept his commandments or have repented in a proper and timely manner.

Seventh, Skousen appears to see Oliver Cowdery as being not very bright or articulate, having a limited vocabulary and “a predilection to misinterpret unfamiliar expressions.”<sup>15</sup> Predilection? Cowdery was bright and eventually became a practicing attorney. And, if the long footnote at the end of Joseph Smith—History in the Pearl of Great

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13. Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants, Part Two*, 1052.

14. Interestingly, modern American courts do use the term *pleading bar*, but exclusively in a completely different context. This technical legal term refers to a written pleading (that is, a filed complaint or answer to complaint) that is so compelling as to render any pleading in opposition to it inadmissible. In other words, a “pleading bar” is a pleading of force sufficient to “bar” any further pleadings and thus wins the case or issue completely. Obviously, this meaning cannot be aptly inserted into the relevant verses in Jacob or Moroni.

15. Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants, Part Two*, 1051.

Price is any indicator, Cowdery was not vocabulary-challenged. One who can describe “opposition” as the “frowns of bigots and the calumny of hypocrites” would not likely have been disconcerted by the term *pleading bar*. But Skousen theorizes that when Cowdery heard a dictated term that he did not properly grasp, he substituted another term (a homophone or near homophone) with which he was more familiar. Examples given are *weed* for *reed*, *bosom* for *besom*, *arrest* for *wrest*, *drugs* for *dregs*, and *fraction* for *faction*,<sup>16</sup> all of which were corrected in the 1830 edition or in subsequent editions. In contrast, however, the phrase *pleasing bar* in Jacob 6:13 and Moroni 10:34 is in the printer’s manuscript and has remained unchanged in every subsequent edition of the Book of Mormon. The words *reed*, *arrest*, *dregs*, and *faction*, as well as *weed*, *wrest*, *drugs*, and *fraction*, are cases where Cowdery surely knew these words and simply misheard what was dictated in those four instances. Such substitutions would seem to have resulted simply from a tired scribe momentarily losing focus or responding to sounds phonetically and not sentiently, as can ordinarily happen in the case of any person taking reasonably rapid and lengthy dictation. Likewise with “I will sweep it with the bosom of destruction.” Since that phrase makes no sense at all, it could hardly have been the result of Cowdery’s alleged “predilection to misinterpret unfamiliar expressions.” But the phrase *pleasing bar* could not have been more familiar and more preferable to Cowdery’s ear than *pleading bar*. He probably had never heard either term. And, when he wrote Jacob 6:13, he had already heard and correctly written the words *plead* or *pleadeth* five times in 1 Nephi, 2 Nephi, and Jacob and had already heard and correctly written the word *please* or *pleased* three times in 2 Nephi. Before he wrote Moroni 10:34, he had already heard and correctly written the words *plead*, *pleadeth*, *pleaded*, or *pleading* fourteen times in Mosiah, Alma, Helaman, and Ether and had heard the word *please* or *pleased* five times in Mosiah, Alma, 3 Nephi, and Ether. Thus, these cases of homophones or near homophones do not seem to present sufficient grounds for concluding that Cowdery heard and misunderstood *pleading bar* and wrongly wrote *pleasing bar*.

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16. Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants, Part Two*, 1050.

Eighth, with plenty of opportunity to correct the text, Joseph Smith, who made many other changes in the Book of Mormon, never deleted the word *pleasing* and replaced it with another. Especially when one realizes that this phrase appears conspicuously in the final verse of the Book of Mormon and also noticeably in the next-to-last line of chapter 4 in the book of Jacob in the 1830 edition, it is very difficult to believe that Joseph did not know the phrase was there in those two places and therefore accidentally left them in place.

Ninth, Skousen states, “Phonetically, the words pleading and pleasing are nearly identical.”<sup>17</sup> If this means that the two words sound alike, one may certainly disagree. It doesn’t take a linguist to know that one of these words has a hard *d* sound in the middle and the other a distinct *z* sound and that these sounds are easily distinguished by one with normal hearing. Vocalizing them consecutively makes the point quite clearly.

Tenth, and most importantly, changing *pleasing bar* to *pleading bar* in the context of the final judgment would produce a doctrinal anomaly. None now exists as the text reads. It seems to me that modifying the term *bar of God* with the adjective *pleading* is what would be “textually difficult.” There are important theological reasons:

1. The idea of a candidate for a degree of glory pleading as an accused criminal at the final judgment has no scriptural or historical basis (no matter whether the setting of the final judgment is mentally pictured as a judgment seat, the throne of God, a tribunal, a strait gate, a veil, or a courtroom). That idea is no more scripturally endorsed than is the enticing “few stripes” conceit so graphically denounced in 2 Nephi 28:8. Why would Jacob or Moroni ever have visualized a candidate for a degree of glory (not a shackled prisoner or an accused person or a defendant, mind you) coming before the judgment seat of the Savior as the Divine and Omniscient Judge (who already knows all the facts) and being asked, “How do you plead, guilty or not guilty?” What could possibly be the purpose of such a question? What would be the value to the Divine Judge of an answer? The final judgment does not seem to me to be a trial scene—a hearing for the purpose of

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17. Skousen, “Pleading Bar of God,” 2.

fact-finding or for distinguishing between truth and falsehood—and accordingly, there should be no need for a jury to be on hand to help the Judge (and likewise no reason to assume that if there were a jury it would be composed of the Twelve Apostles, as Skousen suggests).<sup>18</sup> Judgment will be based on the matters recorded in the “books” kept in heaven and on earth. The Keeper of the Gate will already know whether I am a “sheep” or a “goat.”

2. There is no scriptural basis for the idea that pleading for mercy will be a part of the final judgment. The time and place for repentance is “the day of this life” (Alma 34:32). When the time comes for the final assignment to kingdoms of glory, the opportunity for mercy will have expired (see Alma 42:4). Some sins committed in mortality are unforgivable at any stage of progression, some must be repented of in mortality, and others may be repented of in the spirit prison; but so far as the scriptures say, there is no possibility of effective repentance at the final judgment. The only mercy that will satisfy the demands of justice flows from the atonement, and it is fully beneficial only on the basis of timely repentance and forgiveness.

3. While the Savior is often spoken of in other contexts as our advocate (see, for example, Doctrine and Covenants 45:3), no scripture says explicitly that he will plead for us as our advocate *in the final judgment* and simultaneously act as the Judge.

Thus, the idea of pleading at the judgment bar (whether by the Savior or by candidates for a degree of glory) would be injected for the first time into the standard works by this proposed emendation. It could fuel an incorrect and misleading expectation of what will happen there.

In summary, based on these ten points, I see no viable basis for accepting the proposed conjectural emendation to replace the traditional *pleasing bar* with the problematical phrase *pleading bar*. Bruce Metzger has stated that “before a conjecture can be regarded as even probable, . . . (1) it must be intrinsically suitable, and (2) it must be such as to account for the corrupt reading or readings in the transmit-

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18. Skousen draws this reading without justification from 1 Nephi 12:9. There were no juries, however, in Hebrew or Nephite courts.

ted text. . . . We require of a successful conjecture that it shall satisfy [these tests] absolutely well. The conjecture does not rise [above] ‘a happy guess’ . . . unless its fitness is exact and perfect.”<sup>19</sup> This proposal does not pass these tests. There is no adequate reason to think that Jacob and Moroni would have engraved the words equivalent to *pleading bar* on the gold plates, that the words *pleading bar* would have been revealed to Joseph Smith in the translation process, that Joseph would have thought of them himself, or that he would have dictated them to Oliver Cowdery. The term *pleasing bar* should be retained in the Book of Mormon, where it has been since 1829.

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19. Metzger, *Text of the New Testament*, 182–83.





# AUTHORITY IN THE BOOK OF MOSIAH

Daniel C. Peterson

It has been correctly observed that the Book of Mormon is probably the earliest published Mormon scriptural text to mention the structure and the nature of priesthood.<sup>1</sup> An understanding of just what the book has to say about priesthood is, therefore, of some importance. My intention is to examine a portion of the Book of Mormon, the book of Mosiah, as an initial step in determining the overall doctrine of priesthood in the text as a whole. I will attempt to account for every verse in the book of Mosiah that deals, either directly or indirectly, with questions of priesthood and authority.

The book of Mosiah is a valuable starting place because there is good reason to believe that it was the first portion of the Book of Mormon as we now have it to have been translated into English.<sup>2</sup> Thus, if the Book of Mormon is the earliest Latter-day Saint text to

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A shorter and somewhat different version of this essay was published as Daniel C. Peterson, "Priesthood in Mosiah," in *The Book of Mormon: Mosiah, Salvation Only through Christ*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1991), 187–210. My thanks are due to Professors Kent P. Jackson, Monte S. Nyman, Charles D. Tate Jr., and John W. Welch for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper. I, of course, assume sole responsibility for my conclusions, which I merely suggest as hypotheses to be tested against the evidence of the Book of Mormon.

1. Paul James Toscano, "Priesthood Concepts in the Book of Mormon," *Sunstone*, December 1989, 8. I shall criticize Toscano's arguments below.

2. See John W. Welch, "The Miraculous Translation of the Book of Mormon," in *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820–1844*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and BYU Press, 2005), 90, 93–94.

deal with the question of priesthood, the book of Mosiah may be the earliest part of the (English) Book of Mormon to do so. It is therefore an important piece of evidence for what the very earliest Latter-day Saints might have known or at least encountered about priesthood. Furthermore—and this is an issue to which I shall return below—the book of Mosiah has been adduced as support for positions on priesthood that, I think, are profoundly wrong. Thus, it certainly deserves close examination on this matter.

### Background: Priesthood in the Small Plates

One of the most striking things about the question of priesthood in the Book of Mormon is how little the small plates of Nephi (i.e., 1 Nephi through Omni) have to say on the subject but how abruptly this apparent lack of interest disappears when, with the book of Mosiah, we enter Mormon's abridgment of the large plates of Nephi. The term *priest*, for example, occurs 125 times in the Book of Mormon, either by itself or in compound terms such as *priesthood* and *priestcraft*.<sup>3</sup> Yet only eight of those occurrences are to be found in the portions of the book preceding the book of Mosiah. That is to say that only 6.4 percent of the references to “priests” or “priesthood” occur in a portion of the book that constitutes approximately 27 percent of the entire Book of Mormon—less than a quarter of the occurrences that might have been expected. This situation is even more striking when one realizes that one of those eight references occurs in Nephi's quotation from Isaiah in 2 Nephi 18:2. (If this passage is ignored, our percentage drops to 5.6 percent.)<sup>4</sup>

How are “priests” and “priesthood” viewed in the small plates of Nephi? Our sample is perhaps too small to allow definitive judgments, but it appears that the attitude of the authors of the small plates toward priests and priesthood may not have been entirely positive. (In this regard, Nephite prophets would share the feelings of Lehi's

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3. *Eldin Ricks's Thorough Concordance of the LDS Standard Works* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1995), 597–99.

4. Three of these very early usages are prophetic denunciations of *priestcraft*. If they are deleted, the percentage drops to 3.2 percent.

contemporary, Jeremiah (see Jeremiah 1:18; 2:8, 26; 4:9; 5:30–31; 6:13; 13:13; 23:11, 33–34; 32:32; Lamentations 2:6; 4:13). Other prophets, as at Isaiah 24:1–6; 28:7; and Nehemiah 9:33–34, to choose just a few examples from many, made similarly disparaging comments. One need think only of Hophni and Phineas in 1 Samuel 2–4 or of the parable of the good Samaritan related at Luke 10 to realize how widespread in the scriptures is the notion of the evil priest. At 2 Nephi 10:5, for example, Jacob predicts that “priestcrafts and iniquities . . . at Jerusalem” will lead to the crucifixion of the Savior. At 2 Nephi 26:29, Nephi defines *priestcraft* and represents the Lord as condemning it. At 2 Nephi 28:4, Nephi says that the latter days will be characterized by contentions between “priests,” who will “teach with their learning, and deny the Holy Ghost, which giveth utterance.”

This apparently negative attitude may perhaps reflect the unpleasant experience that Lehi and his family seem to have had with the political and ecclesiastical authorities in Jerusalem. Certainly those experiences would have been a frequent topic of conversation among Lehi’s believing children. More likely, since Jacob had seen Jerusalem only in vision (1 Nephi 18:7; 2 Nephi 6:8–10) and since Nephi was prophesying (2 Nephi 25:7; 26:14; 28:1, 3), the negative attitude was actually the Lord’s, reflecting his evaluation of the corruption wrought among his people in the Old World. Nevertheless, whatever may have been the attitude of the early Nephites toward the potential abuses of priesthood authority, it is clear that their earliest records contain very little positive material—indeed, very little material of any kind—on priests and priesthood.

It is equally clear, however, that they did not reject the idea of priesthood as such. Nephi himself, for example, ordained his brothers Jacob and Joseph “after the manner of [God’s] holy order” (2 Nephi 6:2; cf. 2 Nephi 5:26; Jacob 1:18; also Alma 13:1, 2, 6, 8; and D&C 107:2–4). By the time two centuries had passed—if not, indeed, well before—an entire system of “the prophets, and the priests, and the teachers” existed among the Nephites (Jarom 1:11).<sup>5</sup>

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5. Alma 6:1 and Moroni 3 make it clear that, at least in Nephite history following the close of the book of Mosiah, “priests” and “teachers” were both clearly “ordained” in

In ordaining priests, Nephi was functioning as a kind of king among his people—which was, of course, precisely how they viewed him (see 2 Nephi 5:18–19; 6:2).<sup>6</sup> Ordination is primarily a royal prerogative in the book of Mosiah as well, although, as we shall see, a dramatic shift on that very issue is documented toward the end of the book. This point must be clearly understood. I do not mean to say that Nephite kings somehow had the right to ordain simply because they held political rule. Instead, I wish to suggest that kingship, among the Nephites, was a priesthood calling.<sup>7</sup> A survey of the evidence from the book of Mosiah and elsewhere in the Book of Mormon should serve to make this plausible. Indeed, at least several of the Nephite kings—Nephi (a quasi-king; see 2 Nephi 6:2), Mosiah<sub>1</sub> (see Omni 1:12–22), Benjamin, and Mosiah<sub>2</sub>—were actually major prophets. King Benjamin appointed priests at Zarahemla (Mosiah 6:3). In the secondary Nephite kingdom that endured briefly in the land of Nephi, Zeniff exercised his right as ruler and ordained priests. It will be recalled, of course, that they were then dismissed by his son and successor, Noah. In their place, Noah ordained his own priests, who would presum-

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a manner not unlike that practiced by Latter-day Saints today. There is no reason to suppose that things were different in the earlier periods. Indeed, it can be argued on the basis of Moroni 2:1 that Moroni 3 represents the instructions given by the resurrected Lord during his visit to the Nephites in 3 Nephi. If this is true, it is very clear that the practice of ordaining by the laying on of hands was carried across dispensations, both before and after the advent of Christ. Considering all the changes otherwise effected by the Lord's advent, the continuity in this ordinance is rather impressive.

6. Indeed, while it lasted, legitimate Nephite kingship remained within the line of Nephi. It is clear, for example, from Mosiah 22:13, that Mosiah's was the primary kingship and that the kingship of the Zeniffite line was derivative and subordinate. It is interesting to note that Mosiah<sub>2</sub> ruled a people who were mostly those of Zarahemla, a descendant of Mulek; Mulek's royal prerogatives (see Helaman 6:10; 8:21) had been swallowed up in those of the line of Nephi (Mosiah 25:2, 13). We do not know why or how this occurred, but then we know very little about the Mulekites at all. I suspect that the explanation for this lack of information is to be found in John Sorenson's notion of the Book of Mormon as "lineage history." See John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1985), 50–56.

7. Rodney Turner asserts, correctly in my view, that the Melchizedek Priesthood was held by Lehi and Nephi and "by those righteous prophet-kings who succeeded Nephi." See Turner, "Three Nephite Churches of Christ," in *The Book of Mormon: The Keystone Scripture*, edited by Paul R. Cheesman (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1988), 100–126, at 101.

ably be more pliable in his hands (Mosiah 11:5). Later, when Noah's priests were on the run, it is noteworthy that the king of the Lamanites also appointed them as "teachers" among his people (Mosiah 24:4–5). We must, of course, keep in mind that Amulon and his associates do not appear to have exercised priestly functions under the Lamanites. They had never really had much interest in such things, it would seem, and so their teaching among the Lamanites—Nephite language, record keeping, and a literacy program—was entirely secular. But the Amulonites' characteristically secularizing view of their own office should not blind us to its sacerdotal origins, any more than Noah's abuse of his rank should blind us to its manifestly priestly nature.

This notion of a priestly kingship is perhaps a bit jarring to modern readers, living in a society where what we think of as "church" and "state" are kept separate as a matter of principle.<sup>8</sup> However, the Nephites were not modern, and we should not be surprised to see them untouched by more modern fashions. Kingship in the Book of Mormon is very much a religious affair, much as it had been (or had been intended to be) among the Israelites of the Old World.<sup>9</sup> Following his famous speech, for example, Benjamin "consecrates" his son Mosiah as his successor (Mosiah 6:3), just as he had been "consecrated" by his own father (Mosiah 2:11).<sup>10</sup> The very same verb, of course, is used for the ordination of priests in the Book of Mormon (at 2 Nephi 5:26; 6:2; Jacob 1:18; Mosiah 11:5; 23:17; Alma 4:4, 7; 5:3; 15:13; 23:4). In Noah Webster's 1828 *American Dictionary of the English Language*, a marvelous resource in helping us understand the language Joseph Smith used to translate the Nephite record, *consecration* is "the act or

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8. It should not be so disturbing to Latter-day Saints, whose aspirations for the life to come include becoming both "priests and kings" (D&C 76:56). This eschatological ideal may partially explain why the "priest-king" has so frequently been an earthly ideal as well. Furthermore, it would seem that Christ, the true king of Israel, holds his kingship as a priesthood office.

9. For some of the possible Hebraic biblical links between priesthood and kingship, see John A. Tvedtnes, "King Benjamin and the Feast of Tabernacles," in *By Study and Also by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley*, ed. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 2:197–237; see specifically 233–34 n. 57.

10. Amlici's followers "consecrate" him "king" in Alma 2:9.

ceremony of separating from a common to a sacred use, or of devoting and dedicating a person or thing to the service and worship of God, by certain rites or solemnities.”<sup>11</sup> As examples, Webster cites “the consecration of the priests among the Israelites” and “the consecration of a bishop.”<sup>12</sup> And, indeed, Mosiah, son of Benjamin, was not merely a secular ruler but also a “seer,” which the Book of Mormon informs us is a more exalted title, even, than that of “prophet” (Mosiah 8:13–18; 21:28; 28:16). Seership was connected with possession of certain objects, known as “interpreters” (Mosiah 8:13). So, too, Nephite kingship seems to have been connected with and even symbolized or legitimized by possession of certain material objects.<sup>13</sup> Thus, Nephi took the brass plates with him when he abandoned the land of Nephi, perhaps in part as a token of his legitimacy. That the Lamanites shared his perception of the importance of the plates is shown in their oft-repeated claim that, by taking them, he had “robbed them,” just as “they said that he had taken the ruling of the people out of their hands” (Mosiah 10:15–16; cf. 2 Nephi 5:3; Alma 20:10, 13). When Benjamin transferred the kingdom to his son Mosiah, he also gave to Mosiah the brass plates, along with the plates of Nephi, the sword of Laban, and the Liahona (Mosiah 1:15–16).<sup>14</sup> There is, of course, undoubtedly more

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11. King Benjamin, of course, thought of kingly service to his people as precisely equivalent to service to God; see Mosiah 2:16–17.

12. Any concordance of the King James Bible will illustrate the first example.

13. In the medieval Near East, the Shi'ite imams likewise preserved certain objects as emblems of their legitimacy. Ja far al- ad q (d. AD 767), for example, who was the sixth imam, received not only the explicit designation, or *na*, of his father, Mu ammad al- B qir, but, according to common report, the weapons, the books, and the scrolls of the Prophet Mu ammad. These were not only valuable in their own right, but apparently were thought to contain the esoteric knowledge given by Gabriel to the Prophet and then passed down the line of imams as their special birthright. Al-Muqtadir, one of the last Abb sid caliphs to hold real political power, used the Prophet's staff and cloak as both symbols and proofs of his authority. See, for the two cases, respectively S. H. M Jafri, *Origins and Early Development of Shi a Islam* (London: Longman Group, 1979), 293; and Roy P. Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership in an Early Islamic Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980): 186.

14. On the sword of Laban as a kind of royal heirloom, see 2 Nephi 5:14; Jacob 1:10; Words of Mormon 1:13; Mosiah 1:16. In the Hebrew Bible, the sword of Goliath was preserved as a trophy (see 1 Samuel 21:9; 22:10). Gordon C. Thomasson, “Mosiah: The Complex Symbolism and Symbolic Complex of Kingship in the Book of Mormon,”

to the royal possession of the brass plates than simply a claim to legitimate sovereignty. Deuteronomy 17:18–20 stipulates that the Israelite king should keep with him at all times a copy of the law that he might always keep in mind the commandments of God. But it should be clear that the Nephite monarch was more than merely the supreme secular official in a secular government.

The priestly nature of Nephite kingship is, I think, evident in certain other ways as well. God, says Benjamin, is the appointer of kings (Mosiah 2:4).<sup>15</sup> Zeniffite ideology held that Nephi was chosen by God to lead his people (Mosiah 10:13).<sup>16</sup> Thus, the king represents God on the earth, and his actions, when he is righteous and inspired, are God's actions. Joseph F. Smith's definition of "priesthood" will be recalled here: "The Priesthood in general is the authority given to man to act for God."<sup>17</sup> It is not, therefore, inconsistent for the book of Mosiah, which repeatedly speaks of kings ordaining priests and teachers, to speak also of God as the appointer of teachers (see Mosiah 2:4). Likewise, an inspired king can be said to speak for and on behalf of God, and the distinction between them means very little in this respect (see Mosiah 2:31).<sup>18</sup> God and the king are correlatives, mirroring each other in their respective spheres (Mosiah 2:19)—God rules the

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*Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2/1 (1993): 21–38, offers a number of intriguing insights on the royal trophies associated with Mosiah.

15. Admittedly, it was the people who "conferred" the kingdom upon Limhi, the son of Noah, in the absence of Noah (Mosiah 19:26), as they also seem to have done in the case of Benjamin, who was "chosen" by the people, although he was "consecrated" by his father (Mosiah 2:11). And it was Zeniff who "conferred" the throne upon one of his sons, Noah (Mosiah 10:22; 11:1)—a very unfortunate choice, as it turned out (although we know nothing of the alternatives). In Nephite kingship ideology during this period, lineage seems to be important, but there is no clear evidence that the Nephites followed a rule of primogeniture (see, together, Mosiah 27:34; 28:10; 29:2–3, 6).

16. On the other hand, Lamanite ideology saw Nephi as a usurper (Mosiah 10:15). Second Nephi 5:18–19 and 6:2, taken together, may perhaps help us understand how it could be simultaneously the choice of God and the people that made someone king. The Book of Mormon may also be argued to illustrate the law of common consent, where the Lord reveals his choice of a king and then asks the people, through his appointed servant, to sustain that revelation (see D&C 20:63–67; 26:2).

17. See Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, 5th ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1939), 136; cf. 139.

18. Cf. Doctrine and Covenants 1:38; 68:4.

universe at large, macrocosmically, while the king rules subordinately and microcosmically over a limited portion of God's universe.<sup>19</sup>

### The Roles of Priests

The society in which the Nephite kings ruled was certainly a temple-centered one. Soon after their arrival in the New World, members of the Lehite colony built “a temple . . . after the manner of the temple of Solomon” (2 Nephi 5:16). Important announcements were made at the temple (Mosiah 1:18; 2:5–6).<sup>20</sup> This was true not only at Zarahemla, but also in the derivative society of the Zeniffite colony in the land of Nephi (Mosiah 7:17). Even the none-too-spiritual King Noah lavished money upon his temple, which was served by his chosen priests (Mosiah 11:4–5, 7, 10–11).<sup>21</sup> The role of Nephite priests, we are repeatedly told, was to “teach.” Specifically, they taught, or at least claimed to teach, the law of Moses (see Mosiah 12:25, 28; 18:18; 23:17; 25:21). Abinadi, of course, attacks the hypocritical priests of Noah for not having taught the law of Moses well (Mosiah 13:25–26), but there is no hint that they should not have taught it at all. They had claimed that salvation came through the law of Moses—a proposition that Abinadi condemns as a misinterpretation (contrast Mosiah 12:32 with 13:28, 32). Instead, both King Benjamin and the prophet Abinadi insist that the law of Moses had been given because the Israelites had been “stiff-necked” and resistant to a higher law and that its chief purpose is to

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19. This idea is very common in hierarchical systems. It may be observed, for example, in the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius (ca. AD 500) among Christian thinkers, and in those of *Ism ʿl Sh ʿism* among the Muslims. Similarly, it is hardly coincidence that the various three-member presidencies and bishoprics of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints seem to reflect the Godhead itself.

20. When Jesus Christ appears to the Nephites, he comes to them where they have gathered at the temple in the land of Bountiful (3 Nephi 11:1).

21. Turner's suggestion, at “The Three Nephite Churches of Christ,” 122 n. 19, is attractive: “It is very likely that Zeniff restored the temple originally built by Nephi in the sixth century BC (2 Nephi 5:16). King Noah seems to have remodeled this same temple on a grand scale, making it far more elaborate and costly than it had previously been (Mosiah 11:10). Like Herod the Great, who remodeled the second temple (that of Zerubbabel; Ezra 3), Noah's project was doubtless more a matter of personal vanity than genuine piety.”



point forward to the coming of Christ (Mosiah 3:14–15; 13:29–31; cf. 2 Nephi 11:4; 25:24–30; Jacob 4:5; Alma 25:15; 34:14).

At first glance, it seems striking that “priests” in Mosiah (and elsewhere in the Book of Mormon) appear only to teach.<sup>22</sup> Repeated mention is made of “priests and teachers.” Could this be related to Joseph Smith’s use of the word *priest* for the preachers of his own day? In his 1828 dictionary, Noah Webster writes that “In the United States, the word [*priest*] denotes any licensed minister of the gospel.” And this is, in fact, much the way that Joseph Smith used the term. The draft of his 1839 “History,” for example, speaks of “several learned Priests” who visited him in order to dispute his theological claims, where the context almost certainly involves Protestant preachers rather than actual Catholic or Orthodox priests.<sup>23</sup> The same usage is apparent in his account of the religious disputes that preceded his first vision (see Joseph Smith—History 1:6).

In other words, are the “priests” of Mosiah real priests, in the same sense as those of Levitical lineage in the Hebrew Bible? Surely, if they are really teachers of the law of Moses, we should see some evidence not merely that its moral precepts were discussed but that its sacrificial system was conveyed and put into practice. In fact, we do have the temple as the spiritual (and perhaps literal) center of Nephite society, and we have some (admittedly slight) evidence for Mosaic sacrifice in the book of Mosiah (Mosiah 2:3–4; cf. 1 Nephi 5:9; Alma 34:13–14). Furthermore, a careful reading of Mosiah 1–6 offers plausible evidence that the Nephites, on at least this occasion, celebrated a full-fledged Mosaic Feast of Tabernacles.<sup>24</sup> This offers an interesting interpretive possibility: If it is, in fact, the case that King Benjamin’s address coincided with a Nephite Feast of Tabernacles, the solemn

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22. Actually, at least when Alma’s party arrives at Zarahemla and the church is established there, “teachers” seem also to have filled a *presiding* role (see Mosiah 25:20).

23. Dean C. Jessee, ed., *The Papers of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 1:238; cf. 298 for the final version of that “History.”

24. I am convinced by Tvedtnes’s fascinating article, “King Benjamin and the Feast of Tabernacles,” 197–237. See, too, Terrence L. Szink and John W. Welch, “King Benjamin’s Speech in the Context of Ancient Israelite Festivals,” in *King Benjamin’s Speech: “That Ye May Learn Wisdom,”* ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 147–223.

and moving celebration of the Day of Atonement would have taken place within only the previous few days. Thus, when, at Mosiah 4:2, the people cried out for application of “the atoning blood of Christ,” it is not difficult to imagine that cry as an echo of the deeply religious season through which they were passing, as well as of the sacrifices characteristic of the feast in which they were at that very time engaged. The Nephites were, after all, a people who understood the gospel of Jesus Christ but continued to live according to the performances and ordinances of the law of Moses, a possibility allowed by Galatians 3:8 and Moses 6:54, 59–62. They had just received from their king an angelically delivered message about the atoning blood of Christ (see Mosiah 3:11). They understood the real significance of the ordinances and rituals laid down in the Mosaic law, which were intended to point forward to Christ (2 Nephi 11:4; 25:23–26; Jacob 4:5; 7:7; Jarom 1:11; Mosiah 3:14–15; Alma 25:15–16). Their minds would thus have been directed to the coming of the Savior in a singularly powerful way by the rites of the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Tabernacles. “It is significant to note,” John Tvedtnes observes, “that there are more sacrifices prescribed for Sukkot [Tabernacles] than for any of the other festivals.”<sup>25</sup> Clearly, as is abundantly attested throughout the Book of Mormon before the coming of Christ, the Mosaic law was practiced among the Nephites (2 Nephi 5:10; 25:24), and equally clearly, therefore, the “priests” of the Book of Mormon were really priests and not merely a nineteenth-century farm boy’s retrojection of the circuit-riding revivalist preachers of his own day into his pseudobiblical historical yarn.<sup>26</sup>

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25. Tvedtnes, “King Benjamin and the Feast of Tabernacles,” 222.

26. Why, then, is the law of Moses so much less prominent in the Book of Mormon than it is in the Hebrew Bible? First of all, as my colleague Kent P. Jackson has reminded me, the law is really not so prominent in the Old Testament (outside of a few “priestly” writings) as one might tend to think. The apostle Paul clearly talks more about it than do Lehi’s contemporaries in Jerusalem, at least as they are represented in the prophetic books of the Bible. A further explanation is probably to be found in the fact that much of the book was edited by Mormon, who wrote several centuries after the coming of the Messiah had put an end to the sacrificial law and who had more on his mind while preparing it for its future readers than merely antiquarian curiosity. In the small plates, not edited by Mormon, there is the intriguing reluctance to talk about “priests” and “priest-

The “priests and teachers” referred to throughout the Book of Mormon are often—although not always—two distinct groups, even though, undeniably, the book often attributes teaching functions to its priests. “Priests” and “teachers” are mentioned in close proximity to one another twenty-two times in the Book of Mormon, and in every instance except one “teachers” are mentioned after “priests,” suggesting that they might represent a subordinate priesthood office among the Nephites as they do in the church today.<sup>27</sup> (It is clear from Moroni 3 that the offices were distinct, at least in later Nephite practice.) This seems to be confirmed by the incident depicted in Mosiah 26:7, where the “teachers” are subordinate to the “priests” in a hierarchy consisting of teachers, priests, and Alma the Elder as “high priest.”<sup>28</sup> (As we shall see below, Alma was here taking the place of the king, who seems to have presided over the priests in earlier Nephite usage.)<sup>29</sup>

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hood” to which I have already alluded, and to which I shall return below. Perhaps too, and perhaps most importantly, the Book of Mormon is the record of a people who understood the subordinate and provisional role of the law of Moses and who had among them the higher or Melchizedek priesthood. For the latter point, see Joseph Fielding Smith, *Answers to Gospel Questions* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957), 1:124–26; John A. Widtsoe, *Evidences and Reconciliations: Aids to Faith in a Modern Day* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1943), 1:188–90.

27. See 2 Nephi 5:26; Jacob 1:18; Jarom 1:11; Mosiah 23:17; 25:19, 21; 26:7; 27:5; Alma 1:3; 14:27; 15:13; 23:4; 30:31; 35:5; 45:22–23; Helaman 3:25 (“high priests” and “teachers”); Moroni 3:1, 3–4; 6:1. Only in Alma 4:7 do we find “teachers, and priests, and elders” (cf. Alma 6:1 for “priests and elders”), where it is clear that the offices are simply being mentioned in reverse order. See Moroni 6:1 for a listing in the conventional order.

28. Jarom 1:11 knows a hierarchy of “the prophets, and the priests, and the teachers.”

29. According to Mosiah 11:11, King Noah had “high priests” (emphasis added). It may be that we are here referring to an office analogous to that of high priest (i.e., a priest of the higher priesthood, as opposed to a priest of the Aaronic order) in the contemporary church, which many are able to hold simultaneously. In many other occurrences of the term *high priest* in the Book of Mormon, on the other hand, it seems likely that what is intended is rather more like—although not identical to—the high priest in ancient Israel, of whom there was normally only one at a time. (Alma<sub>1</sub>, for instance, was the single high priest over the church, both when he and his people were in exile [Mosiah 23:16] and after their arrival in Zarahemla and the subsequent expansion of the church [Mosiah 26:7].) In later periods, possibly owing to the sheer size of the church and to difficulties of communication and centralization, there seem to have been regional high priests in Jershon and in Gideon (Alma 30:20–21), and very likely elsewhere—perhaps subordinated to the overall high priest, in this case Alma<sub>2</sub>, resident in the capital city of Zarahemla (Alma 30:29; cf. Alma 46:6, 38; Helaman 3:25; 3 Nephi 6:21–22, 27). Multiple “high priests” in

Nephite priests seem to have served as a kind of council to whom the king could go for counsel and advice. Mosiah<sub>2</sub> consulted with his priests (Mosiah 27:1), as did King Noah at his own (obviously imitative) court in the land of Nephi (Mosiah 12:17; 17:6).<sup>30</sup> It is in fact the priests of Noah who advise the king, in Mosiah 17:11–12, to put Abinadi to death for “revil[ing] the king.”

### Were Early Nephite Priests Ordained?

The case of Alma the Elder brings up an interesting question: Were these priests of Noah legitimate holders of legitimate priesthood? We have no record of any ordination for Alma other than his presumed inclusion among the priests ordained by Noah at the latter’s accession to the throne (Mosiah 11:5). Where, then, did Alma get his priesthood authority? Is it possible that he functioned as a prophet without ordination? This possibility has been raised. “On occasion,” one writer has argued, “certain individuals with unmediated callings are presented as not waiting for ordination before embarking upon their ministries. Ordination, therefore, is not presented as being essential either to create a church or priesthood structure where none before existed, or to preach repentance or teach the gospel, or to castigate an existing ecclesiastical or even political structure that has become rigid or corrupt.”<sup>31</sup>

Among those in the Book of Mormon as a whole who are claimed to have received “unmediated callings” to priesthood or prophetic authority from God are Lehi, Nephi, Samuel the Lamanite, Abinadi, Alma

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*the same location* may simply have been another of King Noah’s apostate and grandiloquent innovations, which tended everywhere to exchange Nephite simplicity for the lavish and the overdone.

30. At Alma 23:16, the king of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies too consults with his priests. Whether he was carrying on Lamanite practice or simply adopting Nephite habits as he had adopted Nephite religion is unclear. The Book of Mormon tells us little about the Lamanites. See again Sorenson, *Ancient American Setting*, 50–56.

31. Toscano, “Priesthood Concepts in the Book of Mormon,” 13. The question must be considered because the position represented in the quotation immediately preceding is not only erroneous, but, I am firmly convinced, is fraught with immense danger for the order of the church. Any number of ark-steadiers have come forward in the history of the restoration of the church, who have seen it as their right and duty to guide the church, to wrest its leadership away from those called of the Lord to preside over it.

the Younger, and Alma the Elder. I shall examine each of these cases individually, if briefly. But first the theoretical basis for a claim of “unmediated” priesthood callings must be investigated. Alma 13:1 is invoked as evidence that “the Lord God [has] ordained priests, after his holy order” without human mediation. But it proves nothing of the sort since the Lord acts through his designated agents and since it makes no difference whether the voice is his or that of one of his servants (D&C 1:38). We have already seen that faithful Nephites could speak of God’s appointing a king or a priest while being fully aware of the human agency through which that appointment was effected. Alma 13:4 is cited as proof that “it is the ‘Spirit of God,’ not any human being,” that calls to priesthood office.<sup>32</sup> But this is at best an unconvincing inference from a rather ambiguous verse. Moreover, Alma 13:8, 10, and 16 make it clear that “ordinances” were involved and that the priests were “ordained” in a manner that looked forward to the Son of God. And Mosiah 21:33–35 strongly implies that Limhi, at least, did not accept the idea of “unmediated” callings to priesthood authority.

## Lehi

Regarding Lehi’s ordination, one simple observation is in order: Arguments from silence are, logically speaking, notoriously weak. The verses cited to prove that Lehi was ordained by no man (1 Nephi 1:18–20) nowhere state that Lehi was not ordained; they simply do not record that he was. However, the fact that Lehi’s ordination goes unmentioned by the Book of Mormon may be no more significant than Luke’s failure to mention the wedding of Elizabeth and Zacharias. It would be irresponsible to conclude, from that omission, that John the Baptist was born out of wedlock.

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32. See Toscano, “Priesthood Concepts in the Book of Mormon,” 12–13, for the presentation of the theory of “unmediated callings” and the individual cases purporting to illustrate such callings upon which I draw. It is worth mentioning here that, whatever may have been the case in early Nephite times, the manner of ordination to the priesthood was prescribed and standardized by Jesus when he appeared at Bountiful (see 3 Nephi 11:18–25; 18:36–38; Moroni 2–3).

## Nephi

Lehi's son Nephi unquestionably held some kind of priesthood since, as noted above, we have record of his having ordained Joseph and Jacob, his brothers. Yet we have no record of his own ordination. First Nephi 17:48–54 says nothing about it. What are we to conclude from these gaps in the Nephite chronicle? Nothing, I submit. Again, such things speak only of the vagaries of historical record keeping; they do not by any stretch of the imagination demonstrate that Nephi was not ordained to the priesthood.

## Samuel the Lamanite

In the case of Samuel the Lamanite, again, we have only an argument from silence. We know little about his career except for that brief portion of it recorded in Helaman 13–16. Certainly there is no statement in the Book of Mormon that says that Samuel did *not* hold the priesthood. The sentiments recorded at Helaman 13:5, 7 do not even remotely hint that he had not been ordained. And, given the general silence of the Book of Mormon about the affairs of the Lamanites when they did not impinge directly upon the Nephites, we would hardly expect to hear anything about Samuel's ordination.<sup>33</sup> (For that matter, we also lack any record of the coronation or accession to the throne of the Lamanite king Lamoni.) It is significant, for our purposes, that the risen Savior later acknowledged Samuel as "my servant" (3 Nephi 23:9), confirming that Samuel was God's authorized agent at the time he prophesied in the name of the Lord from the walls of Zarahemla.

## Abinadi

At the risk of wearisome repetitiveness, essentially the same observation must be made in the case of Abinadi. Admittedly, Mosiah 11:20 and 12:1–2 do not mention his ordination. But what do we know about Abinadi's biography beyond his brief encounter with King Noah and

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33. Again, see Sorenson, *Ancient American Setting*, 50–56.

the court priests? Nothing. Does our ignorance justify a declaration that he had never been ordained?

The case of Abinadi also illustrates how, when the king fails to exercise his responsibility, someone else may be called to fill his role. Abinadi speaks for the Lord, at the Lord's command, as the king was supposed to do (Mosiah 11:20; 12:1–2; 13:6). It is because both king and priests have failed to discharge their responsibilities that Abinadi has to be sent by the Lord: "Have ye taught this people that they should observe to do all these things for to keep these commandments? I say unto you, Nay; for if ye had, the Lord would not have caused me to come forth and to prophesy evil concerning this people" (Mosiah 13:25–26; cf. 12:29).

It is not surprising, thus, that King Noah, who does not acknowledge his own neglect of his divinely ordained stewardship, demands to know "Who is Abinadi?" Who is this unauthorized person who trespasses upon my royal prerogatives and has the effrontery to declare "that I and my people should be judged of *him*"? But when Noah follows that question with the arrogant outburst "Who is the Lord?" it becomes painfully and obviously clear why Abinadi had to be sent (see Mosiah 11:27).<sup>34</sup> Noah has broken the covenant between himself and God that is the ultimate source of his own authority. Rather than recognizing himself as the earthly analogue of the heavenly king, he seeks to deny the authority of that heavenly king.<sup>35</sup> Thus, when God sends Abinadi to Noah, he tells that prophet of the king's impending death by fire, "for he shall know that *I* am the Lord" (Mosiah 12:3).<sup>36</sup>

### Alma the Younger

A rather different argument can be made in the instance of Alma the Younger. After his spectacular angelic conversion, it has been claimed,

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34. Precisely the same question had been asked of Moses and Aaron by Pharaoh (Exodus 5:2; cf. Qur an 26:23–29), and, rhetorically, by Cain (Moses 5:16). Compare too the Rabshakeh's speech at 2 Kings 18:35.

35. Compare the Pharaoh of Qur an 26:29: Having arrogantly asked Moses and Aaron just who the Lord is, he says (as I translate the Arabic), "If you take a god other than me, I will have you imprisoned!"

36. Noah's death in the flames is an entirely appropriate symbol, incidentally, viewed in the light of Benjamin's remarks at Mosiah 2:36–38.

“Alma does not wait for an ordination by any human authority.”<sup>37</sup> Even here, it is possible that Alma the Younger, son of a priest, had already been ordained to some office in the priesthood by the time of his conversion. But it requires no ordination to report a spiritual experience, and this is all that Mosiah 27:32 tells us that he was doing. It is utterly incorrect, however, to cite Alma 5:44, 49, 51 as evidence for the notion that Alma<sub>2</sub> claimed no authority other than a powerful conversion even at a point later in his career, for that very discourse begins with a powerful statement of his own priesthood authority, received through ordination: “I, Alma, having been consecrated by my father, Alma, to be a high priest over the church of God, he having power and authority from God to do these things” (Alma 5:3; cf. Mosiah 29:42).<sup>38</sup>

### Alma the Elder

Indeed, if the cases of Lehi, Nephi, Abinadi, and Samuel are relatively ambiguous, that of Alma the Elder is not ambiguous at all. He was ordained validly by Noah, who was ordained validly by his father, as discussed above. One writer on this question maintains that Mosiah 11:5 rules out any valid ordination under the hand of Noah, but it is difficult to see how that passage says anything of the sort.<sup>39</sup> The fact that Noah was not righteous and that Alma himself seems to have violated the laws of God during his early ministry has nothing to do with Alma’s priesthood authority. Unless and until superior priesthood authority withdraws permission to exercise priestly functions, a legitimately ordained holder of the priesthood may continue to perform valid priesthood ordinances—however unrighteous he may personally be, however

37. Toscano, “Priesthood Concepts in the Book of Mormon,” 12.

38. It is puzzling that Alma 5:3 and 5:44 are quoted, almost fully, on the same page, by Toscano, “Priesthood Concepts in the Book of Mormon,” 12, to illustrate Alma’s “unmediated calling.” They demonstrate precisely the opposite. Jacob 1:17 and 2:11 are likewise used to illustrate that Jacob’s calling came directly from God, but 2 Nephi 5:26, 6:2, and Jacob 1:18 record Jacob’s ordination by his brother, Nephi. Sometimes, Toscano seems merely to claim that divine guidance is needed to make priesthood holders fully effective instruments in the hands of God. This is an incontestable claim, but, unfortunately, he wants to go beyond it.

39. See Toscano, “Priesthood Concepts in the Book of Mormon,” 13.



dead to spiritual promptings, and however unlikely it may be that he will ever actually exercise his priesthood.<sup>40</sup> (As our advocate of “unmediated callings” himself correctly—if somewhat inconsistently—writes elsewhere in his discussion of the subject, “worthiness is not essential for priesthood to function. If, for example, one were baptized by an unworthy priesthood bearer, the baptism would still be effectual.”)<sup>41</sup>

Alma, in fact, claimed to have authority from God (Mosiah 18:13), a claim that the later editor implicitly acknowledges as valid (Mosiah 18:18; Alma 5:3).<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, in the power vacuum left by the absence of King Noah, the people implored Alma to assume the royal title and prerogatives (Mosiah 23:6). He turned down the title but, of necessity, did carry out some kingly duties. It was Alma who ordained priests and teachers for his outcast people, among whom he was in fact the sole human source of authority (Mosiah 18:18; 23:17). Indeed, Mosiah 18:18 informs us that Alma ordained “one priest to every fifty” of his followers.<sup>43</sup>

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40. The ancient Christian church faced this problem in the form of the Donatist schism, which was finally declared heretical in AD 405. The Donatists held that unrighteousness in a bishop or priest invalidated any and all ordinances that he might have performed. However, the Synod of Arles determined in AD 314 that the validity of baptisms and ordinations and the like did not depend upon the worthiness or merit of the officiator. (On the Donatists and the related Novatianist and Meletian movements, see David Christie-Murray, *A History of Heresy* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989], 96–97.) Granted, the Christian church at this period was essentially apostate, but Latter-day Saints take basically the same position, and for good reason. If serious sin, as such, invalidated priesthood ordinances, we could never know whose marriage was legal, or who was really a member of the church. Did the man who ordained you to the priesthood have a secret, unrepented sin? Then your ordination is invalid. Your mission was illegitimate, any converts you baptized are actually nonmembers, and you are living in adultery since you should never have been admitted to the temple. Any of your converts who served missions and baptized are similarly fraudulent, and the consequences ripple onward and outward in utterly unforeseeable ways. How could we ever be sure of anything?

41. Toscano, “Priesthood Concepts in the Book of Mormon,” 16.

42. Alma was a descendant of Nephi (Mosiah 17:2), a fact that may or may not be significant in discussing his priesthood authority since we do not know precisely how priesthood functioned or was apportioned among the Nephites. Certainly most, if not in fact all, of the priests and kings of whom we know anything in the Book of Mormon up to this point were of the lineage of Nephi.

43. This seems quite mechanical, incidentally, when contrasted with the claim that, in the Book of Mormon, “one’s calling in the priestly structure was determined not so

The baptisms that Alma performed required power and authority from God (Mosiah 18:17). One writer on Mormon subjects, mistakenly assuming that Alma had no valid ordination, uses the book of Mosiah as evidence that early Mormonism “placed greater emphasis on the charismatic, or spiritual, nature of restored authority than on its lineal or legal aspects. The exercise of authority in the [early LDS] church derived from the operation of the Holy Spirit rather than exclusively from ordination or as a function of church office. Only gradually did Mormonism’s description of . . . authority become clearly lineal-legal.”<sup>44</sup> He sees a reflection of this in the alleged fact that Alma’s authority to baptize, and even “the legal claim of authority of the priests and teachers [ordained by him] ultimately rested on Alma’s charismatic reception of authority.”<sup>45</sup> However, in so interpreting the account of Alma and his people, this author has not only ignored the very real priesthood clearly possessed by Alma before the coming of

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much by the needs of the Church as by the personal gifts of those ordained.” Toscano, “Priesthood Concepts in the Book of Mormon,” 10. Toscano has particular reference to the period following the visitation of Christ to the Americas, but it appears that he would argue similarly for the entirety of the Nephite record. His claim, which I think incorrect, seems to be an oblique criticism of today’s church.

44. Dan Vogel, *Religious Seekers and the Advent of Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1988), 101. Vogel is trying to assimilate formative Mormonism to an alleged early American religious movement that he terms “Seekerism.” See, however, the critical reviews of his book by Grant Underwood in *BYU Studies* 30/1 (1990): 120–26, and Daniel C. Peterson in *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 30/1 (March 1991): 127–28, 130.

45. Vogel, *Religious Seekers and the Advent of Mormonism*, 102–3. Compare p. 104: “Authority in the early Mormon church was originally patterned on a similar model of charismatic or spiritual power, not on priesthood ordination.” By using the episode of Alma and the waters of Mormon in this way, Vogel wishes to support his contention that the angelic ordination of Oliver Cowdery and Joseph Smith to the Aaronic Priesthood came later, as an afterthought. However, if my reading of the book of Mosiah is correct, Alma and his followers (and all the complexities of lineage and priesthood that surround their story) are in fact indirect evidence that the later claims by Oliver and Joseph (echoed by Orson Pratt) that it was a concern for authority that led them to the Susquehanna river in May of 1829 are not spurious retrojections. Welch, “Miraculous Translation of the Book of Mormon,” 90, puts the translation of Mosiah in April 1829, only about a month before the reception of the Aaronic Priesthood. See Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 100–101, and Milton V. Backman Jr., *Eyewitness Accounts of the Restoration* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986), 107–12, for those claims.

Abinadi, but he has seriously misread the report of Alma's baptismal service at the waters of Mormon.<sup>46</sup> He reads Mosiah 18:12 and finds there Alma's impassioned prayer: "O Lord, pour out thy Spirit upon thy servant, that he may do this work with holiness of heart." Then he notices that the verse immediately following records that "the Spirit of the Lord was upon" Alma, who claimed "authority from Almighty God." Having seen this, and having confused temporal sequence with causation, our author thereupon alleges that Alma's authority actually came entirely through a direct answer to his prayer for "holiness of heart," instead of through formal ordination.<sup>47</sup> However, the passage in question does not require such an inference and cannot truly be said even to suggest it. Surely priesthood holders who have never thought to question their authority, and who well remember the laying on of hands that they believe gave them that authority, can understand a prayer for the Spirit before performing an ordinance.<sup>48</sup> In subsequent

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46. For his interpretation of the material, see Vogel, *Religious Seekers and the Advent of Mormonism*, 102–3.

47. This elementary logical error is most commonly known as *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* (i.e., roughly, "after something, therefore because of it"). It is often illustrated with the image of a rooster who thinks that his crowing causes the sun to rise each morning. Vogel might have done better to have cited Mosiah 18:26, where strength in the Spirit really does appear to enable men to "teach with power and authority from God" (cf. Matthew 7:28–29). However, the problem with this verse, for his purposes, is that the men in question are already ordained priests. And besides, to *teach* "with authority" on a subject is potentially quite a different matter than simply having priesthood authority to perform an ordinance. It can be a function of knowledge, insight, experience, or spiritual sensitivity. Beyond an absolute minimum, none of those attributes (however desirable) is really necessary for the validity of a priesthood ordinance.

48. Alma was both a prophet and a priest and so was especially concerned, although he had unquestionable priesthood ordination, with the spirit (or Spirit) in which he acted. The opposition of legalism and charisma, of priest and prophet, is an old cliché, and, like many old clichés, carries some truth. (In more-or-less Latter-day Saint circles, E. E. Ericksen was particularly fond of it. See Scott G. Kenney, ed., *Memories and Reflections: The Autobiography of E. E. Ericksen* [Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987], xii, 208–9.) But it is only accidentally true, and not essentially so. (Was the Hebrew Samuel a prophet or a priest? What of John the Baptist?) Even King Noah's priests claimed to *understand* prophecy (Mosiah 12:25). For reflections on this issue, with particular reference to **Mu ammad**, see Daniel C. Peterson, "Muhammad," in *The Rivers of Paradise: Moses, Buddha, Confucius, Jesus, and Muhammad as Religious Founders*, ed. David Noel Freedman and Michael J. McClymond (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 457–612;

Nephite history, the reception by ordination of authority to baptize is made absolutely clear (3 Nephi 7:25).<sup>49</sup>

## The Church in the Days of Mosiah,

Noah's breach of the normal order of things in Nephite kingship was to have long-lasting consequences in Nephite history. First, it helped to transform his one-time priest, Alma, into an ardent anti-monarchist. "Behold," says Alma, who draws upon divine revelation<sup>50</sup> as well as upon his own experiences with Noah,

it is not expedient that we should have a king; for thus saith the Lord: Ye shall not esteem one flesh above another, or one man shall not think himself above another; therefore I say unto you it is not expedient that ye should have a king. Nevertheless, if it were possible that ye could always have just men to be your kings it would be well for you to have a king. But remember the iniquity of king Noah and his priests. . . . Trust no man to be a king over you. (Mosiah 23:7–9, 13)

Alma begins his denunciation of kingship by referring to the equality of all flesh but soon alludes to his basic reason for opposing monarchy, which is that the king might well prove to be unrighteous—like his old boss, Noah.<sup>51</sup> (Of course, a truly righteous king would not esteem

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and Peterson, "Final Thoughts: Responses to McClymond's 'Prophet or Loss?'" in *Rivers of Paradise*, 675–81.

49. As it is also in the matter of the administration of the sacrament (see 3 Nephi 18:5). The passage that features ordination for authority to baptize was probably translated within, at the most, five weeks of the report of Alma and the waters of Mormon. See Welch, "Miraculous Translation of the Book of Mormon," 93. If one assumes, as Vogel does, that Joseph Smith was *authoring* the Book of Mormon during that period, there seems hardly enough time for a major theological (or ecclesiological) evolution from one portion of the book to the other.

50. Perhaps he recalls here the revelation he himself had received, and which is alluded to at Mosiah 18:21–29. However, the doctrine that "the Lord esteemeth all flesh in one" is attested from the earliest period of the Lehite colony (1 Nephi 17:35).

51. That Alma was quite serious about equality is shown in his insistence that his priests, both in the wilderness (Mosiah 18:24, 26) and in Zarahemla (Mosiah 27:4–5), labor to support themselves. This was in clear contrast to the practice of King Noah's priests, among whom Alma had once been numbered (Mosiah 11:6, 14).

himself to be better than others and would not allow others to think so of him; see Mosiah 2:10–19, 26.) Later, in Zarahemla, Alma emphasized equality within the church, insisting that priests and teachers should labor for their own support rather than relying upon the surplus of others (Mosiah 27:4–5).

Another consequence of Noah’s iniquity was, in fact, the eventual establishment of a Nephite church, which is described in Mosiah. It is striking that not a single reference to any “church” actually existing in the New World is to be found in the small plates of Nephi—that is, in the portion of the Book of Mormon prior to Mosiah—while such references are quite common from Mosiah onwards.<sup>52</sup> Only one actually existent “church” is referred to in the small plates at all, and that is the “church” at Jerusalem with which Laban was thought to be affiliated (1 Nephi 4:26). Laban’s link with that “church” is perhaps almost enough in itself to account for the neglect of the term throughout the small plates—a neglect broken only by occasional references, the majority of which are negative. (Similar considerations may have led to the apparent reluctance in the small plates, already discussed, to talk about priests and priesthood. When they are mentioned, as often as not it is in the context of a warning against the evils of priestcraft—a sin that can certainly afflict, precisely, churches.) With the exception of the single reference to a Jerusalem church in Lehi’s day and another to the Jerusalem church in the time of Jesus and the apostles (2 Nephi 25:14), the only occurrences of the term *church* in the small plates refer either to the eschatological-apocalyptic “great and abominable church” (1 Nephi 13:4–6, 8, 26, 28, 32, 34; 14:3, 9–10, 15, 17; 22:13–14, 23; 2 Nephi 6:12; 26:20–21; 28:3, 12, 18) or, rather less commonly, to the eschatological-apocalyptic church of God (1 Nephi 14:10, 12, 14; 2 Nephi 9:2). Again, it is striking that there occurs here no mention whatever of an actually existent New World church, despite the fact

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52. One could argue from 3 Nephi 5:12, with its reference to “the first church which was established among [the people of Alma the Elder] after their transgression,” that there must have been churches before Alma’s time. But the passage seems to me too ambiguous to allow for any very strong inferences. It could just as well mean that Alma’s was, simply, “the first church,” and that it was established after the people’s transgression (under Noah?).

that the small plates cover nearly the first five centuries of Nephite history.

Rodney Turner observes that “the Book of Mormon does not indicate the exact nature and extent of the Church, as such, among the early Nephites.”<sup>53</sup> If I am correct, this is simply because, among the early Nephites, there *was* no church.<sup>54</sup> Turner is right to argue that, in a certain sense, “the Church has been found on the earth in every gospel dispensation since the days of Adam. Although it is always founded upon the keys and powers associated with the Melchizedek Priesthood and always embodies certain basic doctrines and ordinances, its organizational structure reflects the times and circumstances in which it is established. Thus the Church of each dispensation has had a personality all its own.”<sup>55</sup> But he can present no evidence that anything even remotely resembling what we today would recognize as a church organization existed among the Nephites before Alma the Elder. Only with Alma do we encounter a separate “church” in the true sense of the Greek word *ekklesia*. (That term, it will be recalled, originally referred, in classical Greece, to an assembly of the citizens called out by a kind of crier. It is related to the verb *ekkaléo*, “to call forth.” The notion of “separation” is inherent, unavoidable, in it.)

I realize that I am working here on the basis of an argument from silence, broadly analogous to the kind of argument I have criticized in those who contend for the presence of “unmediated” priesthood callings in the Book of Mormon. Readers are therefore free to take it for what they think it worth. One way of testing it will be by the plausibility, or lack thereof, of my overall position, in which this particular argument has a specific place. But I must say that the lack of references to an early Nephite church—consistent over many pages and the space

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53. Turner, “Three Nephite Churches of Christ,” 102.

54. Turner asserts that, “while it is clear that Nephi and his successors taught the people of Christ, there is no textual evidence that the early Nephites had an ecclesiastical organization independent of that associated with the law of Moses.” Turner, “Three Nephite Churches of Christ,” 120 n. 5. However, many important features of the “ecclesiastical organization . . . associated with the law of Moses” themselves appear to be lacking in the Book of Mormon. There seem, for instance, to have been no Levites in the New World. (This fact is noted by Smith, *Answers to Gospel Questions*, 1:124.)

55. Turner, “Three Nephite Churches of Christ,” 100.

of many years, but only in a particular portion of the record—seems to me more likely to be indicative of something significant than is the occasional failure, in a book nowhere prone to give biographical details, to mention personal ordinations to the priesthood.

It is Alma who founded the church among the Nephites (Mosiah 23:16), in the sense of a separately existing organization within the larger society. It is easy to see why this was so. The king, Noah, had abdicated his traditional responsibilities in the hierarchical social system of the Nephites, and Alma had taken his place as the spiritual leader and fount of priesthood authority for those who dissented from Noah's leadership. Alma's colony thus became a secessionist group much like the almost precisely contemporary community of Qumran on the shore of the Dead Sea.<sup>56</sup> Birth as a Nephite was no longer enough to make a man or woman one of God's people, as it was emphatically no longer sufficient for the Qumran sectaries. Instead, a conscious and personal decision, a covenant, was required of anyone who wished to be numbered among the people of God.

For Alma and his followers, this decision was expressed in baptism.<sup>57</sup> "Now," Alma cried out to his people, "I say unto you, if this be the desire of your hearts, what have you against being baptized in the name of the Lord, as a witness before him that ye have entered into a covenant with him, that ye will serve him and keep his commandments, that he may pour out his Spirit more abundantly upon you? . . . And they were called the church of God, or the church of Christ, from that time forward. And it came to pass that whosoever was baptized by the power and authority of God was added to his church" (Mosiah

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56. See Hugh Nibley's discussion of "Qumran and the Waters of Mormon," in *An Approach to the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 183–93. For the dating of the Qumran Essenes, see Helmut Koester, *History, Culture, and Religion of the Hellenistic Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 1:234–39.

57. The Qumran sectaries also emphasized ritual washings, which may be related to Christian baptism. On this, see William S. LaSor, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 40, 70–71, 134, 149–51; LaSor, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Christian Faith* (Chicago: Moody, 1962), 78–80, 203–6, 208, 214, 236–39; F. F. Bruce, *Second Thoughts on the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), 50–51, 118, 128, 133–34, 136, 140, 142, 149, 151.

18:10, 17; cf. 18:13–16; 25:17–18). Even Alma received immersion as a sign of his commitment to the Lord (Mosiah 18:14–15).<sup>58</sup>

At a slightly later time, King Limhi and his people also desired baptism as an expression of their commitment to do the will of God. But “they did not at that time form themselves into a church” because “there was none in the land that had authority from God” (Mosiah 21:34, 33).<sup>59</sup> After all, Alma had already fled, as had the wicked but validly ordained priests of Noah. Noah himself was dead, and under such circumstances that he had not managed to “consecrate” Limhi his successor according to Nephite practice. (Ammon, the warrior from Zarahemla who had led the expedition to find them, evidently had priesthood authority but felt himself unworthy to exercise it and declined to perform the ordinance of baptism for them.) Later, when the groups led by Alma and Limhi were reunited in Zarahemla, Limhi’s people were baptized by Alma. “Yea, and as many as he did baptize did belong to the church of God” (Mosiah 25:18).

It would be foolish, of course, to argue that baptism was unknown among the Nephites before the time of Alma. References to baptism are not uncommon in the small plates. (Indeed, Moses 6:52–53, 64 informs us that the ordinance was known to Adam.) But it is noteworthy that, while baptism is said to “fulfil all righteousness” (Matthew 3:15), to open the gate for salvation, and to enable us to obtain a remission of sins, no text in the small plates describes baptism as an initiatory rite for entrance into a church, any more than in the case of Adam. It is also important to bear in mind the fact that church and priesthood are not inseparably linked. It is possible for priesthood to exist without a church (although it is impossible for the true church to exist without

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58. It should be noted here that there is no apparent explanation of what baptism is. Perhaps Alma’s people had already been baptized. Perhaps this represented a rebaptism expressive of recommitment, somewhat along the lines of the rebaptisms performed during the so-called “Mormon reformation” in early Utah. Alma’s immersion of himself may strike us as a bit strange, but it is not incomprehensible. John the Baptist ordained both Oliver Cowdery and Joseph Smith, who then baptized each other with the authority they each had received. Among Alma’s people, only he had such authority.

59. Again, this point is *very* telling. Obviously, Limhi did not give credence to the notion of “unmediated” callings.



priesthood).<sup>60</sup> The church today, as has often been noted, is simply the essential but temporary scaffolding that surrounds an eternal family-priesthood structure in the process of construction; until that construction is complete at some point in the postmortal future, priesthood is mediated through and associated with the church. Second Nephi 31:9, 18 makes it clear that baptism was known and practiced by the early Nephites, in accordance with eternal law, as the first step on the path toward eternal life. What kind of religious society or church community, if any, one joined by those early baptisms is not clear. It is not self-evident, in fact, that baptism has always signified entrance into a church, or that entrance to a church has always been a part of that path.<sup>61</sup>

As a working hypothesis, to be tested by readers and students of the Book of Mormon, I would suggest the possibility that early Nephite priesthood was mediated and given structure through family and clan organization, rather than through a church structure. Furthermore, I propose that the early Nephites found their primary social and religious identification in the very fact that they were Nephites. In the earliest days of the Nephites in the New World, to follow Nephi required a deliberate commitment that might demand sacrifice of those who made it. Baptism was preached, and, indeed, stressed to these early Nephites as something pleasing to God and necessary for salvation in his kingdom—but it would be as easy for an unbaptized Nephite to still think of himself as a member of God’s people (albeit one who had

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60. Widtsoe, *Evidences and Reconciliations*, 1:177, allows for the possibility that priesthood can exist independently of a church; after all, priesthood authority is necessarily prior to any divinely approved ecclesiastical organization.

61. What church did Adam join by receiving the baptism recorded in Moses 7? Having made my point, it is vital that I not be misunderstood: I do not mean to imply that eternal life is available without the ordinances of the priesthood, and I do not mean to suggest for a moment that those ordinances are available or valid in this dispensation apart from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. John A. Widtsoe, having observed that the priesthood can exist apart from an ecclesiastical organization, and that it has on occasion done so, declared nonetheless that, “whenever the Church exists, any and every person who holds the Priesthood must exercise his power under the laws and authority of the Church. Then, no Priesthood power is recognized on earth outside of the Church.” Widtsoe, *Evidences and Reconciliations*, 1:177–78. I fully agree. I have no intention of offering aid or comfort to schismatics and religious freelancers.

not yet gotten around to an important ordinance) as it is easy for some careless Latter-day Saints today to feel themselves members of the church, and believing members, even if they neglect sacrament services, drink coffee, smoke, and marry outside the temple. Eventually, however, it was apparent that being a Nephite could become, and for many perhaps had become, merely a matter of lineage, and therefore that it need involve no deliberate personal commitment to serve the Lord. It was obvious that the Nephites, as such, were not “the Lord’s people.” A more precise definition of that term, and a marker for who was to be counted among the Lord’s people and who was not, became something desirable.

In any event, the “church,” that innovation indirectly brought about by King Noah in the land of Nephi, maintained its separate existence in the land of Zarahemla. King Mosiah granted to Alma the right to “establish churches throughout all the land of Zarahemla” and authorized him “to ordain priests and teachers over every church” (Mosiah 25:19)<sup>62</sup>—a prerogative heretofore pertaining to the kingship.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, Mosiah gave Alma authority over the church (Mosiah 26:8), thus effectively delegating to another man a major portion of the sacral authority that had traditionally been attached to the Nephite throne. (In what follows, we shall see that Mosiah had felt himself overburdened by the responsibilities he bore as king. He was presumably quite happy to divest himself of some of them.) Priests in the church at Zarahemla taught the people what they received from Alma to teach (Mosiah 25:21), he having received it in his turn from God, whom he represented. Thus, the pyramidal hierarchy of heavenly king, earthly king, priests, teachers, and people, so characteristic of earlier

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62. The overall organization was called the “church,” but it was made up of subordinate local units also called “churches.” (There were seven of these local units in Zarahemla itself; see Mosiah 25:20–23.)

63. Or to those lineage, family, or clan leaders, in the earliest days, who effectively functioned as kings—as is clearly the case with Nephi (see 2 Nephi 5:18, 26; 6:2). Nevertheless, Turner’s point is well taken: “Although Mosiah granted Alma the legal right” to organize churches in Zarahemla, “it is evident . . . that Alma had not received his original authority from that prophet-king.” Turner, “Three Nephite Churches of Christ,” 106.

Nephite thought and practice, survived under the new order, albeit in somewhat different form.

It is true that King Mosiah seems to have retained to himself a council of priest-advisers even after the establishment of the church at Zarahemla (Mosiah 27:1). While it is possible that these men continued as a body of priests independent of the new church—the transition from a nonecclesiastical to an ecclesiastical priesthood structure does not need to have occurred all at once, or with absolute neatness—there is no compelling reason to assume that they did.<sup>64</sup> If the virtually universal pattern of advanced cultures in the ancient world held for the Nephites as well, their priesthood would represent many of the best educated and most astute men in the society and would be a natural reservoir of talented advisers for the monarch. There would be no reason, even after the establishment of the church, for King Mosiah to dismiss his council of advisers, regardless of their priestly status. And, indeed, it is noteworthy that the issue upon which they advise him, according to Mosiah 26:38–27:2, is a political matter transcending the church and extending, in fact, to all subjects of the king whether member or not. The king retained authority and responsibility for dealing with such issues.

Questions of ecclesiastical discipline, however, were now to be handled within the organization itself, without the direct involvement of the monarchy. But the establishment of a church within Nephite society, membership in which was both theoretically and practically distinguishable from simple Nephite nationality, led to unprecedented problems.<sup>65</sup> For one thing, some of the younger generation—those

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64. Toscano, “Priesthood Concepts in the Book of Mormon,” 9, regards them as a continuing and independent sacerdotal body.

65. In addition to the problem discussed in the text, it might be noted that the only references to a historically existent “priestcraft” in the entire Book of Mormon occur in Alma 1 (at 1:12, 16), immediately following organization of a separately existing “church.” As Alma<sub>2</sub> put it to Nehor, “Behold, this is the first time that priestcraft has been introduced among this people” (Alma 1:12). Second Nephi 26:29 had defined the offence, saying that “priestcrafts are that men preach and set themselves up for a light unto the world, that they may get gain and praise of the world.” Perhaps the reason that it occurred now was that, in contrast to the earlier Nephite system, where kings (who, by virtue of their very rank, had no lack of glory or, presumably, of such wealth as was available to Nephites)

who had not experienced the great spiritual outpouring that occurred at the abdication sermon of King Benjamin, now perhaps more than two decades in the past—refused to be baptized or to join the church (Mosiah 26:1–5).<sup>66</sup> Their worldly influence, in turn, began to take its toll on those who had already enrolled themselves as members of the church, which was itself well into its second generation. These members of the church began to commit “many sins,” which obviously raised the issue of whether and how they were to be disciplined (see Mosiah 26:6–8).<sup>67</sup>

Now there had not any such thing happened before in the church; therefore Alma was troubled in his spirit, and he caused that they should be brought before the king.

And he said unto the king: Behold, here are many whom we have brought before thee, who are accused of their brethren; yea, and they have been taken in divers iniquities. And they do not repent of their iniquities; therefore we have brought them before thee, that thou mayest judge them according to their crimes. (Mosiah 26:10–11)

Old habits die hard. Here, Alma—he of the pronounced anti-monarchical views—turns to the monarch for assistance in solving a grievous ecclesiastical problem. But he had miscalculated his man,

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presided over the priesthood, separation of priesthood from lineage-based leadership now opened up the “ecclesiastical” route to power, glory, and success for people who would otherwise not have had access to it. Events in televangelism have shown how well religion can serve as a route to advancement, even for those with no great endowment of wealth or education to begin with.

66. This fact shows, implicitly, that the “church” at Zarahemla was meant for all of the inhabitants of that place and not merely for the refugees from the land of Nephi. Organization of the church by Mosiah and Alma represented a major restructuring of Zarahemlan society.

67. In a community of intention, as the church was, one had to ask just how seriously one could sin before it became obvious that his intention to serve God had ceased to exist. And if that intention was gone, could he any longer be validly considered a member of that community? (This was very much a question in early Islam. Did serious sins in and of themselves cause someone to cease to be a Muslim? Was faith alone enough? What of works?) Such questions would not arise where simple Nephite citizenship constituted membership of the people of God, without making a personal decision to join.

for King Mosiah<sub>2</sub> himself was probably Alma's greatest convert to the antimonarchical position. And, at least in this instance, Mosiah was a more consistent partisan of that stance than was the high priest. He refused to become involved in the kind of religious-ecclesiastical issue that he had put onto Alma's shoulders. "Behold," he said, "I judge them not; therefore I deliver them into *thy* hands to be judged" (Mosiah 26:12).

This was extremely troubling to Alma, who saw now no recourse but to approach the Lord in prayer for a solution to the pressing problem facing him (see Mosiah 26:13). The earthly king, who, in earlier Nephite tradition, had been the fount of religious authority and the last resort for religious questions, had definitively given up such a role. Only the heavenly king was left. In answer to Alma's earnest entreaties, the Lord revealed the idea of excommunication, whereby "whosoever will not repent of his sins the same shall not be numbered among my people" (Mosiah 26:32).<sup>68</sup> Put into practice, this idea resulted in the "blotting out" of the names of a number of erstwhile adherents of the gospel. "And it came to pass that Alma did regulate all the affairs of the church" (Mosiah 26:37). This idea of excommunication was obviously wholly new to Alma, who had grown up under the old ideology where one's birth "numbered" one among the people of the Lord—the Nephites—in such a way that one could not be "blotted out," and where one's primary social identity was national or genealogical rather than, as we might express it, "intentional" or "voluntary."<sup>69</sup>

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68. It has been suggested to me that Mosiah 5:8–12 contains the notion of excommunication. But this passage seems rather to refer to events of the postmortal judgment—that is, not to excommunication from an earthly church but to the even more serious, indeed spiritually fatal, "excommunication" from the Lord's presence.

69. Many Nephites apparently continued to see themselves as the Lord's chosen people purely on the basis of their genealogy—and the Lord clearly continued to reject such a self-congratulatory attitude. Note, for example, the drumbeat of warning sounded against "this people," the Nephites (repeated over and over again, clearly with deliberate intent), by Samuel the Lamanite at Helaman 13:5–6. Hope is held out only for "*his* people" (meaning Christ's; emphasis added)—who are not necessarily the same group.

## Of Kings and Priests

When it became clear that none of his sons would accept the kingship, Mosiah proposed the abolition of Nephite monarchy<sup>70</sup>—in language strongly reminiscent of Alma’s own position:

If it were possible that you could have just men to be your kings, who would establish the laws of God, and judge this people according to his commandments, yea, if ye could have men for your kings who would do even as my father Benjamin did for this people—I say unto you, if this could always be the case then it would be expedient that ye should always have kings to rule over you. . . .

Now I say unto you, that because all men are not just it is not expedient that ye should have a king or kings to rule over you.

For behold, how much iniquity doth one wicked king cause to be committed, yea, and what great destruction!

Yea, remember king Noah, his wickedness and his abominations, and also the wickedness and abominations of his people. Behold what great destruction did come upon them. (Mosiah 29:13, 16–18; cf. 29:30–31)

The example of King Noah is surely a clue that Alma’s experiences and Alma’s analysis of the events at the land of Nephi had been deeply influential, if not decisive, for Mosiah’s new position.

Like Alma, Mosiah talks about monarchy from the perspective of human equality. But, although the two men may superficially seem to be saying much the same thing, there is a fundamental difference between their two positions. “I command you,” Mosiah says,

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70. It might be thought that Mosiah’s decision to abolish the monarchy came simply because there was no one in his family who would accept it and because he had no choice. In fact, however, his sons’ decision to forego their hereditary rights gave him opportunity for a choice that he on his own did not entirely have the right to make. When the decision was his alone, he could act on his principles without fear of defrauding his princely sons.

that ye have no king; that if these people commit sins and iniquities they shall be answered upon their own heads. For behold I say unto you, the sins of many people have been caused by the iniquities of their kings; therefore their iniquities are answered upon the heads of their kings. And now I desire that this inequality should be no more in this land, especially among this my people. . . . And many more things did king Mosiah write unto them, unfolding unto them all the trials and troubles of a righteous king, yea, all the travails of soul for their people, and also all the murmurings of the people to their king; and he explained it all unto them. And he told them that these things ought not to be; but that the burden should come upon all the people, that every man might bear his part. (Mosiah 29:30–34)

Where the nonroyal Alma had expressed his antimonarchical sentiments in much the same terms that we today would employ, with our insistence on human rights and the equality of all humanity before God and the law, Mosiah comes to the question from the *king's* perspective.<sup>71</sup> (His approach is very unlike the nineteenth-century American thinking that some critics of the Book of Mormon claim to see in it.) Mosiah worries about the undue burden that kingship imposes even on those who conscientiously strive to carry out their responsibilities. Having attempted for more than three decades to discharge his royal duties well, Mosiah feels that it is the *king* who is victimized by the inequality inherent in the Nephite monarchical system. The ruler carries not only his own mistakes, but risks responsibility for those of his subjects if he has in any way, even inadvertently, misled them (see Mosiah 29:31).<sup>72</sup>

Mosiah's concerns are true to life. "The reflection upon my situation and that of this army," said General George Washington (very

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71. See Richard L. Bushman, "The Book of Mormon and the American Revolution," *BYU Studies* 17/1 (1976): 3–20.

72. What volumes this speaks for the character of Mosiah<sub>2</sub> (especially in contrast to King Noah). The king was clearly worried, too, about the potential threat that the continued existence of the monarchy might pose to his heir (see Mosiah 29:6–9).

nearly America's first king) at the beginning of the fateful year 1776, "produces many an uneasy hour when all around me are wrapped in sleep. Few people know the predicament we are in."<sup>73</sup> Similar views are expressed by both king and commoners in Shakespeare's historical play *The Life of King Henry V*. On the eve of the momentous battle of Agincourt (1415), Henry, unable to sleep, is depicted as wandering among his heavily outnumbered troops, disguised as a common soldier. He engages some of his men in conversation but is not entirely prepared for what he hears:

BATES

If his cause be wrong, our obedience to the king wipes the crime of it out of us.

WILLIAMS

But if the cause be not good, the king himself hath a heavy reckoning to make, when all those legs and arms and heads, chopped off in a battle, shall join together at the latter day and cry all "We died at such a place;" some swearing, some crying for a surgeon, some upon their wives left poor behind them, some upon the debts they owe, some upon their children rawly left. . . . Now, if these men do not die well, it will be a black matter for the king that led them to it.<sup>74</sup>

Understandably, Henry is deeply troubled by this kind of talk and attempts without great success (while still concealing his identity) to argue against it. He does not manage, it seems, even to convince himself, and after his men have gone off to sleep we see him among the slumbering soldiers and speaking somewhat bitterly to himself of his envy for their simple lives, so free of responsibility:

Upon the king! let us our lives, our souls,  
Our debts, our careful wives,  
Our children and our sins lay on the king!  
We must bear all. O hard condition,

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73. Cited in David McCullough, *1776* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005), 1.

74. *The Life of Henry V*, 4.1.138–52.



Twin-born with greatness, subject to the breath  
 Of every fool, whose sense no more can feel  
 But his own wringing! What infinite heart's-ease  
 Must kings neglect, that private men enjoy!  
 And what have kings, that privates have not too,  
 Save ceremony, save general ceremony?  
 And what art thou, thou idol ceremony?  
 What kind of god art thou, that suffer'st more  
 Of mortal griefs than do thy worshippers?

...

Wherein thou art less happy being fear'd  
 Than they in fearing.

...

No, thou proud dream,  
 That play'st so subtly with a king's repose;  
 I am a king that find thee, and I know  
 'Tis not the balm, the sceptre and the ball,  
 The sword, the mace, the crown imperial,  
 The intertissued robe of gold and pearl,  
 The farced title running 'fore the king,  
 The throne he sits on, nor the tide of pomp  
 That beats upon the high shore of this world,  
 No, not all these, thrice-gorgeous ceremony,  
 Not all these, laid in bed majestical,  
 Can sleep so soundly as the wretched slave,  
 Who with a body fill'd and vacant mind  
 Gets him to rest. . . .  
 The slave, a member of the country's peace,  
 Enjoys it; but in gross brain little wots  
 What watch the king keeps to maintain the peace,  
 Whose hours the peasant best advantages.<sup>75</sup>

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75. *Life of Henry V*, 4.1.247–301.

These are, whether regarded as Henry's or as Shakespeare's, utterly pre-democratic sentiments.<sup>76</sup> So, too, are those of King Mosiah, although we can certainly understand how a reigning monarch might be inclined toward monarchical thoughts! Shakespeare's Henry is acutely aware that the king, although burdened with more than ordinary responsibility, is merely a man. Thus, his ironic words (he is still disguised as a commoner) convey a serious point:

I think the king is but a man, as I am: the violet smells to him as it doth to me; the element shows to him as it doth to me; all his senses have but human conditions: his ceremonies laid by, in his nakedness he appears but a man; and though his affections are higher mounted than ours, yet, when they stoop, they stoop with the like wing. Therefore when he sees reason of fears, as we do, his fears, out of doubt, be of the same relish as ours are.<sup>77</sup>

Compare the sentiments expressed by King Benjamin, the father of Mosiah<sub>2</sub>:

I have not commanded you to come up hither that ye should fear me, or that ye should think that I of myself am more than a mortal man.

But I am like as yourselves, subject to all manner of infirmities in body and mind; yet I have been chosen by this people, and consecrated by my father, and was suffered by the hand of the Lord that I should be a ruler and a king over this people. (Mosiah 2:10–11)

Neither Henry's view nor Benjamin's should be thought of as democratic, but merely realistic.

Perhaps Mosiah recalled the fate of Noah, who paid for his crimes with a very painful death while his people seem to have been spared.

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76. The distinguished British historian A. L. Rowse, commenting upon this very passage, remarks, "I fear that this betrays, as usual, Shakespeare's opinion of the average man—not very democratic, no humbug." See A. L. Rowse, *The Annotated Shakespeare* (New York: Potter, 1978), 2:537.

77. *Life of Henry V*, 4.1.105–14.

(Although an evil man, Noah was nonetheless a king, member of a small and quite select fraternity. In this limited but not unimportant respect, Mosiah could probably feel some kinship with him.) Perhaps Mosiah remembered the words of his father Benjamin, spoken at the end of a long, conscientious, and laborious reign devoted to the service of his fellow men and thus to the service of God: “I say unto you that if ye should serve him who has created you. . . . I say, if ye should serve him with all your whole souls yet ye would be unprofitable servants” (Mosiah 2:21; cf. 2:17).

Moved by Mosiah’s obviously deep feelings, the people agreed to his plan to abolish the monarchy. “Therefore they relinquished their desires for a king, and became exceedingly anxious that every man [even those of royal blood] should have an equal chance throughout all the land; yea, and every man expressed a willingness to answer for his own sins” (Mosiah 29:38).

So the relatively secular institution of the “judgeship” was introduced among and accepted by the Nephites (Mosiah 29:11, 41–42) to complement the religious office of “high priest” that had already been introduced. (In a certain sense, this merely formalized the division of functions that Mosiah and Alma had already worked out some time before.) However, the people chose as their first chief judge Alma<sub>2</sub>, who had previously received the office of high priest from his father, the first Alma (Mosiah 29:42). Mosiah<sub>2</sub> having had no willing heirs, this Alma had already received the plates of brass, the records, and the interpreters, the sacred relics that, as we have seen, once formed so important a part of the symbolism of Nephite kingship (Mosiah 28:10, 20). The bestowal of the chief judgeship upon Alma may therefore be plausibly read as an attempt on the part of the people to recombine the secular and sacred functions of the kingship in one man, who might, it is true, not bear the title of “king” but who would nonetheless serve essentially the same role. Kingship had, after all, been a rather popular institution. Nephi’s brothers had thought that he coveted the title (1 Nephi 16:38), and he had later been obliged to refuse it from his people (2 Nephi 5:18; 6:2). Zeniff was made king by the voice of the people in the land of Nephi (Mosiah 7:9). Alma’s

people sought to persuade him to accept kingly honors, but he refused (Mosiah 23:6–7). And it was only after Mosiah’s passionate appeal to his people that “they relinquished their desires for a king” (Mosiah 29:38). Furthermore, the monarchy continued to fascinate and attract factions, at least within the Nephite society, long after its abolition, as is shown by repeated efforts through the years to effect its restoration. Alma 51, 60, 62, for instance, records the struggles Moroni had with the so-called “king-men,” who sought to alter the laws in order to reestablish kingship. Third Nephi 6:30 alludes to yet another attempt to put a king on a Nephite throne, and 3 Nephi 7:9–10 describes an effort that was partially and temporarily successful in doing just that. Obviously, kingship had its appeal—and not only to the one who would, if successful, gain the throne.

The apparent attempt of the Nephite people to circumvent their king’s rejection of kingship did not succeed, however. After only about five years, Alma<sub>2</sub> gave up his position as chief judge (presumably the least effective of his two offices) in order to concentrate his attention upon the high priesthood as the solution for the urgent problems that faced the Nephites (Alma 4:15–20). Never again would a Nephite king serve as both religious and temporal leader of his people. The relatively secular office of the chief judgeship would continue almost to the end of Nephite civilization, but we have no record of any chief judge ever ordaining priests; such ordinations were the prerogative of the high priests before the coming of Christ (as at Alma 6:1; 3 Nephi 7:25),<sup>78</sup> and then, after the coming of Christ and the apparent disappearance of that office, of the “disciples, who were called the elders of the church” (Moroni 3:1).<sup>79</sup> Priesthood functions were essentially severed from governmental functions, and the two would never be fully recombined in the sacral kingship with which Nephite history had

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78. Ammon, Aaron, Omner, and Himni—the four sons of Mosiah<sub>2</sub>—consecrated priests among the Lamanites (Alma 23:4), but there is no reason, despite their absence of fourteen years (Alma 17:4), to suppose that they did so independent of the priesthood authority resident in the Nephite church. Later, Ammon at least appears as an ecclesiastical subordinate to Alma<sub>2</sub> (Alma 30:20, 30).

79. The office of high priest is not mentioned later than 3 Nephi 6:21–22, 27, by which time it has clearly become corrupt.

begun in the New World. The material objects that had once pertained to the Nephite monarchy continued to be passed down but now along a nonroyal line of high priests and prophets (Alma 37:1–47; 63:1–2, 10–13; 3 Nephi 1:2–3; 4 Nephi 1:47–49; Mormon 1:2–5; 4:23; 8:3–5; Moroni 10:2; Joseph Smith—History 1:34–35, 42, 50–53, 59–60).

This brief glance at the question of priesthood and authority in the book of Mosiah has revealed an intricately complex and remarkably consistent system underlying the many incidental details of its already highly involved narrative. I do not see how anyone can fail to be impressed with what the book of Mosiah discloses about the nuanced richness of the Book of Mormon. I certainly have been.



# CONJECTURAL EMENDATION IN THE BOOK OF MORMON

Royal Skousen

## **An Overview of Conjectural Emendation in the Critical Text Project**

Critical texts have previously been prepared for important religious, historical, and literary works, but until fairly recently, not for the Book of Mormon. A critical text shows all the substantive changes that a written work has undergone, from its original version to its present editions. When referring to a critical text, the term means that notes accompany the text so that the reader can see how the work has changed over time and thus judge between alternative readings.

There are two main goals for the critical text of the Book of Mormon. The first is to determine, to the extent possible, the original English-language text of the book. The second purpose is to establish the history of the text, including both accidental errors and editorial changes that the book has undergone as it has been transmitted down through time in its many editions.

In my work on the critical text of the Book of Mormon, I normally rely on the earliest extant sources in determining the reading of the original text. I also look at usage elsewhere in the text to see if it will support the earliest reading or an alternative one. Sometimes

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I wish to thank Don Brugger, David Calabro, Ross Geddes, and Grant Hardy for helpful criticisms of an earlier version of this paper.

the earliest extant reading will contain an unusual word or involve an awkward expression. In such cases, I look for linguistic evidence, both historical and dialectal, in support of such usage. Where appropriate, I consider evidence from biblical language, either from the King James Bible or from the original Hebrew and Greek that underlie the biblical translation. For a brief discussion of these points, along with some examples, see the section entitled “Textual Variants” in the introduction to volume 4 of the critical text, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon*.<sup>1</sup>

After investigating these linguistic sources, I occasionally find cases where the earliest reading is problematic and sometimes even impossible. In instances of this kind, scribes, typesetters, and editors have typically emended the text by conjecture. Each of these cases must be thoroughly investigated to determine whether the conjectural emendation is most plausibly the correct one. But in some cases, neither the earliest reading nor its subsequent conjectural emendation may be acceptable. Such a situation may lead to the possibility of further conjectural emendation.

As an example of an early attempt to emend an impossible reading, consider the following reading from the original manuscript:

1 Nephi 7:5 (lines 5–6 on page 10 of the original manuscript)

hole  
the lord did soften the hart of ishmael and also his ^hole

Here scribe 3 first wrote *hole*, then inserted the same word, *hole*, above the line, so that the corrected text reads “and also his hole hole.” Clearly, this reading is unacceptable. When Oliver Cowdery copied this sentence into the printer’s manuscript, he interpreted “his hole hole” as “his household,” which is one possible conjecture. But usage elsewhere in the Book of Mormon text suggests that the correct emendation should be “his **whole** household.” For example, all other Book of Mormon instances of *household* involve a universal quantifier, either *all* or *whole* or the negative equivalent, *none*. Consider ten cases

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1. Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004), part 1, 3–6.



in positive clauses where we find either *all* or *whole* as the universal quantifier:

“all his household”	1 Nephi 5:14, 2 Nephi 4:10, 2 Nephi 4:12, Alma 23:3, Ether 9:3, Ether 10:1, Ether 13:20, Ether 13:21
“all your household”	Alma 34:21
“his <b>whole</b> household”	Alma 22:23

The example in Alma 22:23 (“his whole household”) suggests that the original text in 1 Nephi 7:5 also read “his whole household.” Such a conjectural emendation would explain why scribe 3 ended up repeating *hole* in the original manuscript: *hole* and *whole* are homophones while *hole* and *-hold* are nearly identical in pronunciation.

It is instructive here to consider what I would do if the original manuscript were not extant for this passage. If this were the case, the earliest textual source would be the printer’s manuscript, with its reading “Ishmael and also his household.” Without the unacceptable reading of the original manuscript (“Ishmael and also his hole hole,” with its repeated occurrence of *hole*), I would not be justified in emending the text of 1 Nephi 7:5 since there is nothing inherently wrong with “Ishmael and also his household.” In fact, the plausibility of the current reading explains why no edition of the Book of Mormon has ever emended Oliver Cowdery’s phraseology here in 1 Nephi 7:5 to read “Ishmael and also his **whole** household” (or “Ishmael and also **all** his household”). If the original manuscript were not extant here, I would simply have to say that, except for this one case, all the Book of Mormon instances of *household* have a universal quantifier. Just because an earliest reading is unique within the text is no excuse for an emendation. Statistically, there will always be unique readings in any text of sufficient length.

The crucial restriction on conjectural emendation is that there must be something actually wrong with the earliest extant reading. The initial motivation for proposing a new conjectural emendation is that none of the readings (either the earliest reading or subsequent emendations) make sense, after taking into account evidence from the

history or dialects of the English language or, when appropriate, evidence from the King James Bible and from Hebrew and Greek, the original languages of the biblical scriptures. And before accepting a proposed conjectural emendation, we must consider whether there is scribal evidence in the manuscripts or from manuscript transmission in general that would explain how the earliest textual reading might have been derived from the proposed conjectural emendation. In other words, the emendation must be supported by evidence from linguistic usage as well as scribal practice elsewhere in the manuscripts.

Throughout my work on the Book of Mormon critical text project, I have tried to credit those who have suggested conjectural emendations. When a suggested change has already appeared in print, I cite the earliest published source that I can find for that suggestion. In many cases, various individuals have communicated their suggestions directly to me. It is amazing how it has helped to have others looking for problematic readings in the text—difficult readings that I have been oblivious to until they were pointed out to me. Of course, some of these suggested emendations have turned out to have insufficient evidence to support their adoption. In other cases, further investigation of a problematic reading has sometimes led me to propose an alternative emendation. In volume 4 of the critical text, I discuss all of these cases of proposed changes and credit those who first suggested them to me. For a list of the proposed conjectural emendations for approximately the first half of the Book of Mormon (up through Alma 21), see the appendix to this article; except for Alma 21, this list derives from the conjectures that have been discussed in parts 1–3 of volume 4, published from 2004 through 2006.

One important aspect of conjectural emendation is that this process is sometimes more frequent than one might expect, although compared with other changes in the text, it is relatively infrequent. For instance, based on work on the critical text project thus far, about 95 percent of the changes proposed to the standard text are based on the earliest textual sources, mostly the two manuscripts. So relatively speaking, the effects of conjectural emendation are limited, accounting for about 5 percent of the changes. Even so, one must recognize

that the text has been subjected to conjectural emendation from the earliest stages of textual transmission, especially by the scribes as they copied from the original manuscript (O) to the printer's manuscript (P) and by the 1830 compositor as he attempted to set the type from his copytext, usually the printer's manuscript P (but from Helaman 13 through Mormon 9, the original manuscript O). The 1830 compositor, John Gilbert, was frequently confronted with difficult readings, usually errors made in copying from O into P. The majority of his conjectural emendations appear to be correct, often because the emendation to the difficult reading was quite obvious, such as his decision to change "fasting and proping" (the reading in P for Omni 1:26) to "fasting and praying" (the 1830 edition).

In the following analysis, I give the statistics for the number of conjectural emendations made at various stages in the history of the Book of Mormon text. (These numbers are based on only those conjectural emendations that have been proposed for the first half of the Book of Mormon, up through Alma 21.) For each source, I specify how many of these emendations have been accepted and how many have been rejected in the critical text project:

	<i>accept</i>	<i>reject</i>
made in O		
Oliver Cowdery	3	11
scribe 3 of O		1
made in P		
Oliver Cowdery	10	16
scribe 2 of P		2
1830 emendations made by John Gilbert		
marked in P	5	3
appearing in the edition only	29	20
1837 emendations made by Joseph Smith		
marked in P	9	12
appearing in the edition only	8	5

	<i>accept</i>	<i>reject</i>
1840 emendations made by Joseph Smith		
appearing in the edition only	1	1
in other printed editions		
LDS textual tradition		
1841 British		2
1849		3
1852	2	1
1879	2	
1902	1	
1906	1	
1911	1	
1920	1	7
1981	5	1
RLDS textual tradition		
1858 Wright		2
1874	1	
1892		1
1908		1
1953	1	1

And as part of this project, I have considered quite a number of additional emendations, some proposed by others (a few in print but most by private communication) and many by me. Overall, I have accepted about one third of these more recently proposed conjectural emendations. Again, these statistics cover the first half of the text (up through Alma 21):

	<i>accept</i>	<i>reject</i>
conjectural emendations		
suggested by 24 individuals	14	37
suggested by me	42	78

The high number of conjectural emendations in this project is largely the result of using the computer to analyze thousands of textual vari-

ants. Textual variants frequently suggest the possibility of alternative readings, based on conjecture. If we consider all these conjectural emendations as a whole, we first observe that the process is **not** rare. Overall, about 40 percent of these proposed emendations have been accepted in the critical text project. Some textual sources for emendation have not fared as well as others. For instance, Oliver Cowdery's conjectural emendations in the original manuscript are generally unacceptable (with an acceptance rate of only 21 percent). Most of the conjectural emendations in the 1920 LDS edition are rejected in the critical text project (7 out of 8), while the rate of acceptance is quite high for the 1830 edition (60 percent), the 1837 edition (50 percent), and the 1981 edition (83 percent).

### The Archaic Vocabulary of the Original Text

One finding that has complicated the application of conjectural emendation to the Book of Mormon text is that the vocabulary of the original Book of Mormon appears to derive from the English of the 1500s and 1600s, not from the 1800s. Lexical evidence suggests that the original text contained quite a few words with meanings that were lost from the English language by 1700. On the other hand, I have not been able thus far to find word meanings in the text that are known to have entered the English language after the early 1700s.

In the following sampling, I list some of the clearest examples in the Book of Mormon of this archaic vocabulary from the 1500s and 1600s. (In this discussion, I exclude, of course, archaic words such as *besom* 'broom' that are found in Book of Mormon quotations from the King James Bible.) For each word and its meaning, I provide citations from the original text of the Book of Mormon and corresponding citations from the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) and include the range of dates for citations in the OED with this meaning. In some instances, the word can be found with that meaning in the 1611 King James Bible (as in the first two examples listed below). Some of the other words appear to predate 1611 by a few decades. The difficulty of these archaic words has sometimes resulted in accidental

changes during the early transmission of the Book of Mormon text. Other times, editors and typesetters have consciously replaced an archaic word with a more recognizable alternative.

*to require* ‘to request’

Enos 1:18 (unedited)

and the Lord said unto me  
thy fathers have also **required** of me this thing

OED, with citations from 1375 to 1665

William Shakespeare, *Henry VIII* (1613)

In humblest manner I **require** your Highnes,  
That it shall please you.

King James Bible

Ezra 8:22

For I was ashamed to **require** of the king  
a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us  
against the enemy in the way

*to cast arrows* ‘to shoot arrows’

Alma 49:4 (unedited)

the Lamanites could not **cast** their stones and their arrows at them

Alma 49:19 (unedited)

and thus were the Nephites prepared to destroy all such  
as should attempt to climb up to enter the fort by any other way  
by **casting** over stones and arrows at them

OED, with citations from about 1300 to 1609

John Wycliffe’s 1382 translation of 2 Kings 13:17

Helise seyde, **kast** an arowe; and he **kest**.

(in the King James Bible: “Then Elisha said, **Shoot**.  
And he **shot**.”)

King James Bible

Proverbs 26:18

As a mad *man* who **casteth** firebrands, arrows, and death.

*to counsel* ‘to counsel with’

Alma 37:37 (edited to *counsel with* in the 1920 LDS edition)  
**counsel** the Lord in all thy doings

Alma 39:10 (edited to *counsel with* in the 1920 LDS edition)  
 take it upon you to **counsel** your elder brothers  
 in your undertakings

OED, with citations from 1382 to 1547

John Hooper (1547)

Moses . . . **counselled** the Lord  
 and thereupon advised his subjects what was to be done.

*but if* ‘unless’

Mosiah 3:19 (edited to *unless* in the 1920 LDS edition)  
 for the natural man is an enemy to God and has been  
 from the fall of Adam  
 and will be forever and ever **but if** he yieldeth to the enticings  
 of the Holy Spirit

OED, with citations from 1200 to 1596

Philip Sidney, *Arcadia* (1580)

He did not like that maides should once stir out of  
 their fathers houses  
**but if** it were to milke a cow.

*to depart* ‘to part, divide, separate’

Helaman 8:11 (changed to *parted* in the 1830 edition)  
 God gave power unto one man even Moses  
 to smite upon the waters of the Red Sea and they **departed**  
 hither and thither

OED, with citations from 1297 through 1677

John Wycliffe’s 1388 translation of Isaiah 59:2

3oure wickednesses han **departid**  
 bitwixe 3ou and 3oure God

(in the King James Bible: “But your iniquities have  
**separated** between you and your God”)

John Maundeville (about 1400)

þe 3erde of Moyses, with þe whilk he **departid** þe Reed See  
(meaning ‘the rod [yard] of Moses with which he **parted**  
the Red Sea’)

William Tyndale’s 1526 translation of Romans 8:39

To **departe** us from Goddes love  
(in the King James Bible: “to **separate** us from  
the love of God”)

The Book of Common Prayer (1548–49)

Till death vs **departe**  
(changed in 1662 to “Till death us **do part**”)

Geneva Bible, 1557 translation of John 19:24

They **departed** my rayment among them  
(in the King James Bible: “They **parted** my raiment  
among them”)

*extinct*, referring to an individual’s death

Alma 44:7 (unedited)

and I will command my men that they shall fall upon you  
and inflict the wounds of death in your bodies  
that ye may become **extinct**

OED, with citations from 1483 through 1675

from a 1675 English translation of Machiavelli’s *The Prince*  
The Pope being dead and Valentine **extinct**

*to raign*, a shortened form of *arraign*

Alma 11:44 (changed to *arraigned* in the 1830 edition)

but all things shall be restored to its perfect frame  
as it is now or in the body  
and all shall be brought and be **raigned**  
before the bar of Christ the Son  
and God the Father and the Holy Spirit



OED, with citations from 1444 through 1581

Henry Brinklow (1542)

The day whan ye shal be **reigned** at the judgemente seate  
of God.

### Conjectural Emendations Based on Archaic Vocabulary

If the original vocabulary of the Book of Mormon text dates from Early Modern English, one might wonder if there are any archaic word meanings that were unrecognizable to Joseph Smith and his scribes, thus leading them to misinterpret and change the language during the early transmission of the text. Two possibilities have arisen thus far. The first one deals with the word *ceremony* in Mosiah 19:24: “and it came to pass that **after they had ended the ceremony** that they returned to the land of Nephi.” The problem with this passage is that the word *ceremony* seems out of place. The larger context implies that their discourse was simply over:

Mosiah 19:22–24

and it came to pass that  
they were about to return to the land of Nephi  
and they met the men of Gideon  
and the men of Gideon told them of all that had happened  
to their wives and their children  
and that the Lamanites had granted unto them  
that they might possess the land by paying a tribute  
to the Lamanites of one half of all they possessed  
and the people told the men of Gideon  
that they had slain the king  
and his priests had fled from them farther into the wilderness  
and it came to pass that **after they had ended the ceremony**  
that they returned to the land of Nephi  
rejoicing because their wives and their children  
were not slain  
and they told Gideon what they had done to the king

The OED lists no meaning for *ceremony* that would work reasonably well for this passage except to assume that the conversation itself is a ceremony or that it involved some kind of ceremonial aspect in, for instance, recounting the execution of king Noah.

I have had a number of my students and research assistants try to find another word that might work better in Mosiah 19:22–24, one that would perhaps sound or look like *ceremony*. The idea behind this approach is that such a word might have been miscopied or misheard as *ceremony*. The most plausible suggestion proposed thus far comes from Renee Bangerter in her 1998 BYU master’s thesis,<sup>2</sup> where she proposes that the original word in Mosiah 19:24 might have been *sermon*. Although the current meanings for this word will not work in this passage, Bangerter notes that the OED gives the earliest meaning for *sermon* as ‘something that is said; talk, discourse,’ which would exactly fit the context described in Mosiah 19:22–24. This meaning is, however, obsolete; the last citation in the OED with this meaning dates from 1594: “Desiring Don Infeligo with very mild sermon to be friends with Medesimo again.” The last citation with this meaning found on *Literature Online* comes from Giles Fletcher and dates from 1593: “Out of my braine I made his Sermon flow.”<sup>3</sup>

In part 3 of volume 4 of the critical text, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon* (published in August 2006), I discuss under Mosiah 19:24 how *sermon* could have accidentally been replaced by *ceremony*. Basically, I propose the following scenario: the scribe for the original manuscript (which is unfortunately not extant here) spelled *sermon* as *cermon*, which was then misread as *ceremony* (and spelled as *cerimony*) when Oliver Cowdery copied the word from the original manuscript into the printer’s manuscript. Such a conjectural emendation is permissible if the vocabulary for the original Book of Mormon text dates from the 1500s and 1600s.

One argument that has been frequently made in support of *ceremony* here in Mosiah 19:24 is that in many cultures conversation is

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2. Renee Bangerter, “Since Joseph Smith’s Time: Lexical Semantic Shifts in the Book of Mormon” (master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 1998), 16–18.

3. See [lion.chadwyck.com](http://lion.chadwyck.com) (accessed 13 June 2005).

ceremonial, so the conveying of information between these two parties in Mosiah 19:22–23 could have been a ceremony. But by this standard, every event in the Book of Mormon could be shown to be ceremonial, cultic, or ritualistic in some way—whether launching ships, engraving scriptures, preaching, fighting battles, planting crops, taking journeys, or dying: anything can be explained as a ceremony. Yet it should be noted that the Book of Mormon otherwise lacks words like *ceremony*, *rite*, and *cult*. The word *ceremony* occurs nowhere else in the Book of Mormon text. And although the scribal spelling *rites* has been maintained in a few places in the text, it is virtually certain that in every case the original text read *rights* rather than *rites*, including two places in the current LDS text, Alma 43:45 and Alma 44:5. (These last two cases will be discussed in part 4 of volume 4 of the critical text, to appear in 2007.)

Besides the general proposal that conversation is a ceremony, some scholars have found different ceremonial aspects that could be linked to the conversation described in Mosiah 19:22–23. John Sorensen, for instance, has argued that the reference to a ceremony in verse 24 has something to do with the earlier killing of king Noah, described in verses 19–21: “Mosiah 19:24 speaks of a ‘ceremony’ in connection with the slaying of king Noah by his rebellious subjects, but there is no hint of the nature or purpose of that ceremony.”<sup>4</sup> John Tvedtnes, on the other hand, has argued that the ceremony referred to in Mosiah 19:24 is “one of purification associated with the onset of the fall festivals of the month of Tishre, at which time citizen-soldiers in the ancient Near East returned home to engage in the fall harvest.”<sup>5</sup>

There is a more general problem with searching for cultural arguments as evidence for strange readings in a text—namely, there is no limit on the use of such arguments. If we hunt long enough, we can always find some culture somewhere with a practice that will support virtually any given reading (although for Book of Mormon work we

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4. John L. Sorensen, *Images of Ancient America: Visualizing Book of Mormon Life* (Provo, UT: Research Press, 1998), 189.

5. See John A. Tvedtnes, *The Most Correct Book: Insights from a Book of Mormon Scholar* (Salt Lake City: Cornerstone, 1999), 186.

might prefer that the evidence come from Mesoamerica or the Middle East). As an example, consider the case of Mosiah 17:13, where all the (extant) textual sources read “and **scourged** his skin with fagots.” Although the textual and linguistic evidence is very clear that in Mosiah 17:13 *scourged* is a mishearing for *scorched* (see the discussion for that passage in part 3 of volume 4), yet some have defended the current reading *scourged* by hunting for examples of people being beaten with burning sticks or of people being beaten prior to being burned at the stake.<sup>6</sup> In my own textual analyses of the Book of Mormon, I avoid using cultural evidence simply because it can always be found. In some cases, specific evidence from the Mosaic law and its practice may be appropriate, as in the discussion regarding whether *striped*, the spelling in the printer’s manuscript for Alma 11:2, should be read as *stripped* or *striped*. But even there that evidence is restricted to practices that are explicitly referred to in the biblical text.

I have also found that the original text of the Book of Mormon always makes linguistic sense, although not necessarily for modern-day speakers of English. There are Hebrew-like constructions that seem strange, even unacceptable, in English, yet these constructions make sense from the point of view of Hebrew. There is vocabulary that is strange today but would have been understandable to English speakers living in the 1500s and 1600s. And the biblically styled language of the text seems to date from this same time period, yet it does not imitate the specific language of the King James Bible. (Of course, the biblical quotes in the Book of Mormon do follow the King James text for the most part.) So when we run up against otherwise inexplicable cases like *ceremony* in Mosiah 19:24, the most probable explanation is that *ceremony* stands for some kind of error providing the error can be explained as textually derivable from an appropriate emendation, one that is consistent with language elsewhere in the Book of Mormon. The proposed *sermon* does fit if we allow the possibility that the original vocabulary of the Book of Mormon derives from the 1500s and 1600s, not the 1800s.

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6. For one example, see Brant Gardner’s “Scourging with Faggots,” *Insights* 21/7 (2001): 2–3.

## The Pleading Bar of God

A second possible misinterpretation deals with the expression “the pleasing bar of God,” as found in Jacob 6:13 (and similarly in Moroni 10:34 as “the pleasing bar of the great Jehovah”). In part 2 of volume 4 of the critical text (this part was published in August 2005), under Jacob 6:13, I argue that “the pleasing bar” is actually a mistake for “the pleading bar.” An abbreviated description of the evidence for emending the text to “the pleading bar” was initially presented in 2004.<sup>7</sup> This conjectural emendation was first proposed by Christian Gellinek in 2003. There are no uses of the term “the pleasing bar of God” anywhere on the Internet except in citations from the Book of Mormon, yet there is clear evidence that the legal term *pleading bar* was used in the 1600s. And as might be expected, no instances of *pleading bar* have thus far been found during the 1800s, in either England or the United States. But such a conjectural emendation is consistent with the hypothesis that the vocabulary of the Book of Mormon dates from Early Modern English.

Part of the argument here relies on the evidence from the manuscripts that at least Oliver Cowdery and maybe even Joseph Smith (as he dictated the text) tended to replace unfamiliar vocabulary with words they were familiar with, even if the resulting phraseology did not make much sense. In every case, there is considerable phonetic similarity between the words that were mixed up:

*weed* (O, P) instead of *reed* (1830 and all subsequent editions)

1 Nephi 17:48

and whoso shall lay their hands upon me shall wither  
even as a dried **reed**

*bosom* (O, P) instead of *besom* (1830 and all subsequent editions)

2 Nephi 24:23 (Isaiah 14:23 in the King James Bible)

and I will sweep it with the **besom** of destruction

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7. Royal Skousen, “The Pleading Bar of God,” *Insights* 24/4 (2004): 2–3.

*wrecked* (P, all early editions, and all RLDS editions) instead of  
*racked* (1879 and all subsequent LDS editions)

Mosiah 27:29

my soul was **racked** with eternal torment

*arrest* (O, P, 1830 edition) instead of *wrest* (1837 and all subsequent editions)

Alma 13:20

behold the scriptures are before you

if ye will **wrest** them / it shall be to your own destruction

Alma 41:1

for behold some have **wrested** the scriptures

and have gone far astray because of this thing

*drugs* (O, P) instead of *dregs* (1830 and all subsequent editions)

Alma 40:26

and they drink the **dregs** of a bitter cup

*fraction* (O, P) instead of *faction* (1830 and all subsequent editions)

Alma 58:36

behold we fear that there is some **faction**

in the government

Notice that some of these earliest readings will work: “wither even as a dried weed,” “my soul was wrecked,” “the drugs of a bitter cup,” and “there is some fraction in the government.” Yet in each case the phonetically similar word introduced into the printed edition works much better and more consistently with usage in the English language. Relying on Oliver’s excessively elevated and ornate writing style in the *Messenger and Advocate* from October 1834, one might deduce that Oliver would never have made such mistakes. But the evidence from the Book of Mormon manuscripts (dating from 1829, over five years earlier) directly contradicts such an assumption. Oliver’s language ability may have improved over the years. To be sure, the 1830 typesetter exceeded Oliver’s language abilities at the time of the printing of the 1830 edition. Note that the 1830 typesetter is the one responsible for

correcting most of the above misinterpreted phrases, but not all: even he left unchanged “my soul was wrecked” and “some have arrested the scriptures.” The important point here is that Oliver twice accepted the implausible phraseology “to arrest the scriptures” (in Alma 13:20 and Alma 41:1) instead of the correct “to wrest the scriptures.” In a similar way, he could have twice misinterpreted the phrase “the pleading bar” as “the pleasing bar” (in Jacob 6:13 and Moroni 10:34).

And these are not the only conjectural emendations that reject a workable but strange reading in the manuscripts, as in the following examples from 1 Nephi (all of which are extant in the original manuscript):

	<i>earliest reading</i>	<i>emended reading</i>
1 Nephi 7:1	that might raise up seed	that <b>they</b> might raise up seed
1 Nephi 7:22	offer sacrifice and <b>offer</b> burnt offerings	offer sacrifice and burnt offerings
1 Nephi 12:1	and beheld <b>the land</b> / the land of promise	and beheld the land of promise
1 Nephi 17:53	but I will <b>shock</b> them	but I will <b>shake</b> them
1 Nephi 18:15	had <b>much</b> swollen exceedingly	had swollen exceedingly

(Interestingly, Oliver Cowdery himself made the first three of these emendations when he copied the text from O into P; I am responsible for the fourth one, while Joseph Smith made the last one in his editing for the 1837 edition.) When we compare each of these earliest readings with usage elsewhere in the Book of Mormon text as well as in the King James Bible or more generally in the English language, including Early Modern English, we discover that these earliest extant readings are probably not the original readings, even though these earliest readings will, in some sense, work.<sup>8</sup>

Just like the use of the word *ceremony* in Mosiah 19:24, one could argue that “the pleasing bar of God” is perfectly fine and should be left

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8. See the discussion under each of these passages in part 1 of volume 4 of the critical text.

alone. Yet this phraseology is inconsistent with respect to the many references to being judged at “the bar of God” found throughout the Book of Mormon text. I repeat them here because it is important to realize that **none** of these passages refer in a positive way to the day of judgment; they are either negative or neutral:

*negative*

2 Nephi 33:15

for what I seal on earth shall be brought against you  
**at the judgment bar**

Jacob 6:9

know ye not that if ye will do these things  
that the power of the redemption and the resurrection  
which is in Christ  
will bring you to stand with shame and awful guilt  
**before the bar of God**

Alma 5:22

how will any of you feel if ye shall stand  
**before the bar of God**  
having your garments stained with blood  
and all manner of filthiness

*neutral*

2 Nephi 33:11

and you and I shall stand face to face **before his bar**

Mosiah 16:10

even this mortal shall put on immortality  
and this corruption shall put on incorruption  
and shall be brought to stand **before the bar of God**  
to be judged of him according to their works  
whether they be good or whether they be evil

Alma 11:44

but all things shall be restored to its perfect frame  
as it is now or in the body



and all shall be brought and be rained  
**before the bar of Christ** the Son  
 and God the Father and the Holy Spirit

Alma 12:12

and Amulek hath spoken plainly concerning death  
 and being raised from this mortality  
 to a state of immortality  
 and being brought **before the bar of God**  
 to be judged according to our works

Mormon 9:13

and they shall come forth both small and great  
 and all shall stand **before his bar**  
 being redeemed and loosed  
 from this eternal band of death

Moroni 10:27

for ye shall see me **at the bar of God**

There is nothing here to suggest anything pleasing about the bar of God. In fact, we get the same result when we look at the two cases in the current text of *pleasing bar*. One passage is negative, the other neutral:

*negative*

Jacob 6:13

finally I bid you farewell  
 until I shall meet you before **the pleasing bar of God**  
 which bar striketh the wicked with awful dread

*neutral*

Moroni 10:34

and now I bid unto all farewell  
 I soon go to rest in the paradise of God  
 until my spirit and body shall again reunite  
 and I am brought forth triumphant through the air  
 to meet you before **the pleasing bar of the great Jehovah**  
 the Eternal Judge of both quick and dead

The first example comes after a long passage (Jacob 6:5–12) in which Jacob warns the unrepentant of God’s coming judgment.

Of course, one can always find some source that will support the notion that the day of judgment will be pleasing, at least to the righteous. One example is C. S. Lewis’s claim in *Reflections on the Psalms* that the Psalms support an interpretation of the day of judgment in which we will be more like plaintiffs than defendants. C. S. Lewis provides evidence from the Psalms for his interpretation, citing examples like “when God arose to judgment to save all the meek of the earth” (Psalm 76:9, the King James Bible). But more importantly, C. S. Lewis does not ignore opposing evidence. For instance, he also cites those passages in the Psalms that support the traditional Christian view of the day of judgment, such as “and enter not into judgment with thy servant / for in thy sight shall no man living be justified” (Psalm 143:2, the King James Bible). And C. S. Lewis is rightly concerned that the positive view of the day of judgment might be misused: “All this of course has its spiritual danger. It leads into that typically Jewish prison of self-righteousness which Our Lord so often terribly rebuked.”<sup>9</sup> To be sure, there is no need here for C. S. Lewis to emphasize the supposed Jewish nature of this self-righteousness; it seems to be endemic to the whole human race! But ultimately, the use of C. S. Lewis’s writings is irrelevant in determining the text of the Book of Mormon. As with the example of *ceremony* in Mosiah 19:24, we can always find some cultural evidence in support of our interpretation of the text. There will always be evidence that for some the day of judgment will be “a resounding triumph.”

In the Book of Mormon text, on the other hand, we have a strong and consistent image of the day of judgment as a trial before the bar of God. Nor is there any reason from the text itself to assume that these references to the bar of God are merely figurative or metaphorical. Note, in particular, the use of the very legalistic word *arraign* (originally *raign* in the Book of Mormon text) in Alma 11:44: “and all shall be brought and be **arraigned** before the bar of Christ.” In fact, the legal interpretation should also be applied to the proposed “the plead-

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9. C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1958), 17.

ing bar of God.” The term *pleading* here does not refer to making a plea for mercy. As lawyers know, the word *pleading* refers to making one’s case in court (originally oral, now written) and neutrally refers to the arguments and evidence both for and against a person. (See the earliest definitions in the Oxford English Dictionary for the noun *pleading* as well as for the noun *plea* and the verb *plead*.)

Another legal aspect to the judgment of God is found in two separate statements in the Book of Mormon—namely, that Christ’s twelve apostles in Jerusalem and the twelve Nephite disciples or ministers will play some role in judging the house of Israel:

1 Nephi 12:8–10

and the angel spake unto me saying  
 behold the twelve disciples of the Lamb  
 which are chosen to minister unto thy seed  
 and he saith unto me  
 thou rememberest the twelve apostles of the Lamb  
 behold they are they which shall judge  
     the twelve tribes of Israel  
 wherefore the twelve ministers of thy seed  
     shall be judged of them  
 for ye are of the house of Israel  
 and these twelve ministers which thou beholdest  
     shall judge thy seed

Mormon 3:18–19

yea behold I write unto all the ends of the earth  
 yea unto you twelve tribes of Israel  
 which shall be judged according to your works by the twelve  
 whom Jesus chose to be his disciples in the land of Jerusalem  
 and I write also unto the remnant of this people  
 which shall also be judged by the twelve  
     whom Jesus chose in this land  
 and they shall be judged by the other twelve  
     whom Jesus chose in the land of Jerusalem

Here the references to the twelve apostles judging the twelve Nephite ministers imply that the judgment being referred to is individual, not collective. Although the specific role of the twelve in that judgment is not spelled out, it is clearly referred to. One should not automatically dismiss the idea that the twelve may play a role in the day of judgment.

The Book of Mormon also refers to the day of judgment as occurring before the judgment seat of God (12 times), as in “that ye may be found spotless at the judgment seat of Christ” (from the title page of the Book of Mormon). Interestingly, references to the bar of God in the Book of Mormon are restricted to the day of judgment, while the judgment seat as a place of judgment is also used to refer to secular governing (45 times), as in the statement that Kishcumen “murdered Parhoron as he sat upon the judgment seat” (Helaman 1:9).<sup>10</sup> There is biblical evidence in support of being secularly judged before the judgment seat (10 times in the New Testament), as in Pilate’s judgment of Christ in Matthew 27:19: “when he was set down on the judgment seat / his wife sent unto him.” The use in the Book of Mormon of “the bar of God” seems real enough even though it may not represent an ancient system of judgment (unlike the references to the judgment seat).

Now let us turn to the question of external evidence for the phrases “the **pleasing** bar of God” and “the **pleading** bar of God.” One thing is quite clear: in judicial contexts there is irrefutable linguistic evidence for *pleading bar*, but none thus far for *pleasing bar* (except in the current Book of Mormon text). To be sure, there is evidence for *pleasing bar* alone, as in “the most aesthetically pleasing bar in Manchai” and “a visually pleasing bar at the side of the screen.”<sup>11</sup> Of course, these examples are not evidence for “the pleasing bar of God.”

Two Internet citations refer to a seventeenth-century English courtroom, now a museum, in Fordwich, England (near Canterbury). This courtroom dates from the time of Charles II (reigned 1649–60). The citations clearly identify what the pleading bar is:

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10. The earliest textual sources, the original and printer’s manuscripts, suggest the spellings *Kishcumen* and *Parhoron*.

11. Gleaned from [www.google.com](http://www.google.com) (accessed 15 May 2006).

The tour ended at the town hall. Mr. Tritton said: “That was the most interesting part of the day. The people who made the film reproduced the court room back at their studio. They had the jury bench, **the pleading bar**, everything, right down to the smallest detail of King Charles II’s coat of arms.”

At the head of the stairs, Sgt. Bassett ducks under a beam inscribed ‘Love and honour the truth.’ In real life **the court’s pleading bar, where prisoners stood while on trial**, is at the head of the stairs. It does not obstruct anyone entering the room, nor bear an inscription—though the motto ‘Love and honour the truth’ is prominent under King Charles II’s Coat of Arms, displayed on the ceiling above the panelled rear wall.<sup>12</sup>

On the first floor is the Court Room where all criminal cases in Fordwich were tried until 1886. **The accused would stand flanked by the Town Constables, at the “pleading bar” situated at the head of the stairs. (Hence the expression “prisoner at the bar”).** The Judge or chief magistrate was the Mayor for the time being and he sat in the chair at the north end of the room, flanked by six Jurats on each side, seated on the “bench.” The Mayor’s seat and bench together with the paneling are early Tudor in origin.<sup>13</sup>

One could dismiss these citations to *pleading bar* as somehow errors, especially since they are not found in legal documents dating from the 1600s. Yet the term *pleading bar* does exist in literary references that do date from the late 1500s and early 1600s.<sup>14</sup> In the first case, there is no doubt that the whole passage refers metaphorically to a courtroom:

John Harington, *Orlando Furioso* (1591), book 27, stanza 46:  
 If you deny my claim, here I will prove it,  
 This field the court, this list my **pleading bar**,

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12. “Report of Fordwich Trip,” *Kent Messenger*, “Extra,” 10 September 1999 at [www.powell-pressburger.org](http://www.powell-pressburger.org) (accessed 23 October 2003).

13. Fordwich Town Hall Web site (updated 23 July 2003) at [www.canterbury.gov.uk](http://www.canterbury.gov.uk) (accessed on 23 October 2003).

14. Found on *Literature Online* at [lion.chadwyck.com](http://lion.chadwyck.com) (accessed 13 June 2005).

My plea is such, as no writ can remove it,  
My judge must be the sequel of the war.<sup>15</sup>

(Here *list* specifies an area set aside for jousting or other combat.) The second citation is found in a play that was apparently written no later than 1634:

John Webster, *Appius and Virginia*, act 5, scene 1  
Fortune hath lift thee to my Chair,  
and thrown me headlong to thy **pleading bar**.

Of particular interest here is the evidence that John Webster was no novice in legal matters. Scholars have argued that he was admitted to the Middle Temple (one of the English courts of law) on 1 August 1598. Moreover, he is considered the primary author of a play that deals with legal issues, *The Devil's Law Case; or, When Women Go to Law, the Devil Is Full of Business* (published in 1623). Thus it is not surprising that there is a metaphorical reference to *pleading bar* in his play *Appius and Virginia*, first published in 1654 (after Webster's death) and attributed to Webster (the title page refers to Webster as the sole author, although he may have had collaborators, a common enough practice even today).<sup>16</sup>

Now one may claim that the term *pleading bar* cannot be found in judicial records dating from Early Modern English. This may be so—although there are a lot of legal records to be checked, most of which have never been electronically transcribed. There might be a good reason for why the term might be missing from legal records—namely, legal records refer to the specifics of cases, not to the structure of the courtroom, neither to its furniture nor to the placement of that furniture. The claim that *pleading bar* does not exist in judicial records is meaningless unless one has already established that in general there are references in those records to the courtroom structure and its furniture. More likely, the term *pleading bar* would appear in histories

15. Sir John Harington's *Translation of Orlando Furioso by Lodovico Ariosto*, ed. Graham Hough (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1962), 318.

16. For further discussion of Webster's possible legal background, see Clifford Leech, *John Webster: A Critical Study* (New York: Haskell House, 1966).

commenting on specific cases, or in literary works that use the term metaphorically, as we have seen.

But if we look long enough, maybe we can find the term *pleading bar* in an actual legal source from the 1500s and 1600s. Quite recently, with the kind help of Frank Kelland, a reference librarian at the Howard W. Hunter Law Library at Brigham Young University, I have been able to locate such an instance of the term *pleading bar*—namely, in the Law Notes Collection deposited in the Department of Special Collections, the Kenneth Spencer Research Library, at the University of Kansas. These seventeenth-century notes are written in the secretary script, a court-derived script common in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.<sup>17</sup> These notes have the manuscript number MS P367 and are identified as a quire of twelve leaves containing a list of headings written in English for the most part and with notes below each heading written in “law French.” The bibliographic citation states that “each heading is followed by a number of phrases—legal apothegms, definitions, judgements—each with a citation either to a statute or to what is apparently a page number. Crowding and blanks indicate on-the-spot compilation.” The word *apothegm* here refers to “a short, pithy, and instructive saying or formulation.”<sup>18</sup> And at the top of the eighth leaf, we have a heading with the term “Pleading bar & trav’s.” The last word, *trav’s*, is Law French for *travers* and means “denial in pleading.”<sup>19</sup> Thus the heading is equivalent to *pleading bar and denial*. On the twelfth leaf, the date is given as “21 Ja. 15” (presumably 21 January 1615). The University of Kansas bibliographer states that this quire “may have been tipped into a printed book.” In other words, the quire seems to have served as an index for an unidentified law book, especially since the headings are arranged alphabetically and the reference citations were added as they were found in the book. The law book itself was probably in French.

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17. See D. C. Greetham, *Textual Scholarship: An Introduction* (New York: Garland, 1994), 201–2, 248–49.

18. *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed., s.v. “apothegm.”

19. See J. H. Baker, *Manual of Law French*, 2nd ed. (Hants., England: Scolar Press, 1990), 207.

In my mind, the linguistic use of *pleading bar* as a legal term is established. This is **not** the relevant issue. Rather, the issue is whether the original Book of Mormon text referred to “the **pleasing** bar of God” or to “the **pleading** bar of God.”

One may then ask, “Why should the Lord give a revealed text to Joseph Smith that he, Joseph Smith, could not fully understand?” Frankly, I do not know the answer. But the evidence is mounting that despite the strangeness of it all, the revealed text was not fully comprehensible to readers in the 1800s (nor to readers today). This is not just an issue of the archaic vocabulary. There are also the non-English Hebraisms in the original text (such as the repeated use of the *if-and* construction originally in Helaman 12:13–21), constructions that were generally removed by Joseph Smith in his editing for the second (1837) edition. So why did the Lord reveal such a Hebraistic text? We do not know why, but we do know that he did do it! And why did the Lord allow the text to be given in nonstandard English? We do not know why, but it was! And why did the Lord choose to have the biblical quotations based on the King James Bible when some of its language was unrecognizable to Joseph Smith and his scribes (as in the indecipherable “the besom of destruction”)? If one assumes that the Lord would only reveal a perfectly understandable text, then we must assume that all of these strange linguistic uses must be mistakes that Joseph or his scribes introduced into the text.

The point is this: we go where the evidence leads us. And we consider all the evidence, not picking and choosing only those interpretations that support our own conceptions. We may have our own views of what may happen at the day of judgment, but we shouldn’t let those views determine how we establish the Book of Mormon text. Just because we may think that the day of judgment will be a positive experience (for us, at least), this does not mean that the Book of Mormon text must agree with us.

There are other examples where our interpretation of the text has been influenced by our conceptions of what the Lord will and will not do. Consider B. H. Roberts’ claim that the Book of Mormon text



could not have been given word for word directly by the Lord since the resulting text was in ungrammatical English:

If the Book of Mormon is a real translation instead of a word-for-word bringing over from one language into another, and it is insisted that the divine instrument, Urim and Thummim, did all, and the prophet nothing—at least nothing more than to read off the translation made by Urim and Thummim—then the divine instrument is responsible for such errors in grammar and diction as occur. But this is to assign responsibility for errors in language to a divine instrumentality, which amounts to assigning such errors to God. But that is unthinkable, not to say blasphemous. Also, if it be contended that the language of the Book of Mormon, word for word, and letter for letter, was given to the prophet by direct inspiration of God, acting upon his mind, then again God is made responsible for the language errors in the Book of Mormon—a thing unthinkable.<sup>20</sup>

According to this view, it is tantamount to blasphemy to think that God would make a grammatical error in English. Of course, what B. H. Roberts was really claiming here was that if God had given the text word for word, it would have been in his, B. H. Roberts', correct English!

A similar example of letting our own conceptions determine our interpretation is found in the assumption that Joseph Smith must have read from an actual copy of the King James Bible when he translated the biblical quotations in the Book of Mormon, mainly because in those passages the Book of Mormon text follows the King James text:

There appears to be only one answer to explain the word-for-word similarities between the verses of Isaiah in the Bible and the same verses in the Book of Mormon. When Joseph Smith translated the Isaiah references from the small plates of Nephi,

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20. See B. H. Roberts, "Translation of the Book of Mormon," *Improvement Era*, April 1906, 428–29.

he evidently opened his King James Version of the Bible and compared the impression he had received in translating with the words of the King James scholars. If his translation was essentially the same as that of the King James Version, he apparently quoted the verse from the Bible.<sup>21</sup>

The unstated assumption here is that if the Lord himself had chosen the translation for the biblical quotations, he would have used his own translation or one that would have directly reflected what was on the plates, rather than following an outdated, awkward, and occasionally mistranslated King James text. But perhaps the Lord himself decided to use the King James text as the base text but allowed for the occasional alteration, just as when Moroni cited the Bible to Joseph Smith, sometimes in agreement with the King James text and other times differently (as explained in Joseph Smith—History 1:36–40).

Clearly, making conjectural emendations is often a difficult task. Sometimes the correct reading is obvious: “it came pass” is undoubtedly an error for “it came to pass.” But in many instances, no clear-cut decision is possible, although a text must be chosen when one decides to publish an edition of the Book of Mormon or to translate it into another language. There are degrees of uncertainty, and some conjectures are more conjectural than others. For me, *pleading bar* makes perfectly good sense, *pleasing bar* does not. Others are welcome to their own views.

### Appendix: Substantive Conjectural Emendations (from the title page through Alma 21)

In the following, I provide a list of substantive conjectural emendations for the first half of the Book of Mormon text (up through Alma 21). I exclude here cases of emendation involving punctuation or grammar.

There are five columns: (1) the passage from the Book of Mormon in which the emendation occurs; (2) the earliest or standard reading;

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21. See Daniel H. Ludlow, *A Companion to Your Study of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 141.

(3) the proposed conjecture; (4) the source for the conjecture (that is, who proposed it first); and (5) whether the conjecture is accepted in the critical text project.

Two-symbol abbreviations are used for the names of the books; basically, for single-word books, the first and last letter are used to represent the book (thus *jb* = Jacob, *es* = Enos, *jm* = Jarom, *oi* = Omni, *mh* = Mosiah, *aa* = Alma); for other books, symbols for each key word are used (thus *1n* = 1 Nephi, *2n* = 2 Nephi, *wm* = Words of Mormon).

The numbers following the books' names stand for the chapter and verse. I assign two numbers each to the chapter and verse, with a leading zero when necessary, thus *1n0205* stands for 1 Nephi 2:5. I use *00* to stand for an original preface, thus *1n0100* stands for the preface to 1 Nephi that is found just prior to chapter 1 of 1 Nephi.

I use bold in the readings to show where the conjectural emendation occurs. If the conjecture involves a fairly long addition to the text, I use *NULL* to mean that the words are not found in the earliest or standard reading.

In giving the source for the emendations, I use *O* to stand for the original manuscript, *P* for the printer's manuscript. *O\** and *P\** stand for original or initial readings in the two manuscripts, while *O<sup>c</sup>* and *P<sup>c</sup>* stand for corrected readings in the two manuscripts. If the change first appears in an edition, I give the year for that edition. If an *R* follows the year, this means that edition is an RLDS edition; the 1858 edition is followed by *W* to indicate that it is the 1858 Wright edition, a privately printed edition that serves as part of the RLDS textual tradition.

Sometimes conjectures can be identified with specific individuals, in which case I give their name. Certain two-letter abbreviations are used for the following individuals who are responsible for a large number of conjectures: *OC* = Oliver Cowdery, *JG* = John Gilbert, *JS* = Joseph Smith, and *RS* = Royal Skousen. Some of the manuscript scribes are unidentified, so they are represented by the symbol *S* followed by a number: scribe *S3* in *O* and scribe *S2* in *P*.

<i>passage</i>	<i>earliest or standard reading</i>	<i>conjecture</i>	<i>source</i>	<i>critical text</i>
3witness	we beheld and <b>bear</b> record	we beheld and <b>bare</b> record	1874R	accept
1n0100	<b>I</b> Nephi wrote this record	<b>One</b> Nephi wrote this record	Karl Franson	
1n0205	<b>nearer</b> the Red Sea	<b>near</b> the Red Sea	RS	
1n0316	the commandment	the commandment <b>of the Lord</b>	OC: O <sup>c</sup>	
1n0409	and beheld his sword	and <b>I</b> beheld his sword	OC: P	accept
1n0411	the Spirit saith	<b>and</b> the Spirit saith	OC: O <sup>c</sup>	accept
1n0433	go down <b>in</b> the wilderness	go down <b>into</b> the wilderness	RS	accept
1n0508	yea and also know	yea and <b>I</b> also know	OC: P	accept
1n0701	that might raise up seed	that <b>they</b> might raise up seed	OC: P	accept
1n0705	and also his <b>hole hole</b>	and also his <b>household</b>	OC: P	
1n0705	and also his <b>hole hole</b>	and also his <b>whole household</b>	RS	accept
1n0717	my faith which is in <b>me</b>	my faith which is in <b>thee</b>	OC: O <sup>c</sup>	
1n0719	to lay hands upon me	to lay <b>their</b> hands upon me	RS	
1n0720	that they had done against	that they had done against <b>me</b>	OC: O <sup>c</sup>	accept
1n0722	offer sacrifice and <b>offer</b> burnt offerings	offer sacrifice and burnt offerings	OC: P	accept
1n0811	and beheld that it was most sweet	and <b>I</b> beheld that it was most sweet	OC: P	
1n0812	that it was <b>desirous</b>	that it was <b>desirable</b>	JS: 1837	
1n0820	a <b>straight</b> and narrow path	a <b>strait</b> and narrow path	1981	
1n1106	the Most High	the Most High <b>God</b>	OC: O <sup>c</sup>	
1n1136	the pride of the world	the pride of the world <b>and it fell</b>	OC: O <sup>c</sup>	

<i>passage</i>	<i>earliest or standard reading</i>	<i>conjecture</i>	<i>source</i>	<i>critical text</i>
1n1201	and beheld the land <b>the land</b> of promise	and beheld the land of promise	OC: P <sup>c</sup>	accept
1n1204	<b>on</b> the face of the land	<b>upon</b> the face of the land	RS	
1n1204	<b>that it</b> rent the rocks	rent the rocks	S3, O <sup>c</sup>	
1n1204	<b>that it rent</b> the rocks	<b>and</b> the rocks <b>that they rent</b>	OC: O <sup>c</sup>	
1n1223	a dark and loathsome and a filthy	a dark and <b>a</b> loathsome and a filthy	RS	
1n1324	the gospel of the <b>Land</b>	the gospel of the <b>Lord</b>	OC: P	
1n1324	the gospel of the <b>Land</b>	the gospel of the <b>Lamb</b>	RS and students	accept
1n1332	that state of awful <b>woundedness</b>	that state of awful <b>blindness</b>	JS: 1837	
1n1332	that state of awful <b>woundedness</b>	that state of awful <b>wickedness</b>	RS	accept
1n1412	their <b>dominion</b> ... were small	their <b>dominions</b> ... were small	JS: 1837	accept
1n1427	the name <b>and</b> apostle of the Lamb	the name <b>of the</b> apostle of the Lamb	OC: P	accept
1n1428	which I saw	which I saw <b>and heard</b>	OC: P	
1n1429	and I <b>bear</b> record	and I <b>bare</b> record	RS	
1n1528	also from the saints	<b>and</b> also from the saints	OC: O <sup>c</sup>	accept
1n1530	the <b>justices</b> of God	the <b>justice</b> of God	OC: P	accept
1n1533	to be judged of their <b>work</b>	to be judged of their <b>works</b>	1830	accept
1n1534	<b>that</b> there cannot	<b>and</b> there cannot	OC: O <sup>c</sup>	
1n1535	the devil is the <b>preparator</b> of it	the devil is the <b>father</b> of it	JS: P <sup>c</sup>	
1n1535	the devil is the <b>father</b> of it	the devil is the <b>foundation</b> of it	JS: 1837	
1n1535	the devil is the <b>preparator</b> of it	the devil is the <b>proprietor</b> of it	Renee Bangerter	accept
1n1535	the final state of the souls of <b>man</b>	the final state of the souls of <b>men</b>	OC: P	

<i>passage</i>	<i>earliest or standard reading</i>	<i>conjecture</i>	<i>source</i>	<i>critical text</i>
1n1535	the final state of the <b>souls</b> of man	the final state of the <b>soul</b> of man	RS	accept
1n1607	the <b>elder</b> daughter of Ishmael	the <b>eldest</b> daughter of Ishmael	1830	accept
1n1621	having lost their <b>springs</b>	having lost their <b>spring</b>	1953R	
1n1703	and provide ways <b>and means</b>	and provide means	OC: P	
1n1703	he did provide ways <b>and means</b>	he did provide ways	OC: P	
1n1721	which time we might have enjoyed	<b>in the</b> which time we might have enjoyed	RS	
1n1743	I know not but they are ...	I know not but <b>what</b> they are ...	RS	
1n1748	with even as a dried <b>weed</b>	with even as a dried <b>reed</b>	1830	accept
1n1753	but I will <b>shock</b> them	but I will <b>shake</b> them	RS	accept
1n1806	with all our <b>loading</b>	with all our <b>lading</b>	RS	
1n1815	had <b>much</b> swollen exceedingly	had swollen exceedingly	JS: 1837	accept
1n1902	at that time <b>which</b> I made them	at that time <b>when</b> I made them	OC: O <sup>c</sup>	
1n1910	yieldeth himself	yieldeth himself <b>up</b>	RS	
1n1910	<b>and</b> according to the words	according to the words	JS: 1837	accept
1n1913	and power and glory	and <b>the</b> power and glory	1920	
1n1920	NULL	<b>I should have perished also</b>	JS: 1837	
1n1923	in the books of Moses	<b>written</b> in the books of Moses	OC: O <sup>c</sup>	
1n2001	NULL	<b>or out of the waters of baptism</b>	JS: 1840; 1920	
1n2011	<b>how should I</b> suffer my name ...	<b>I will not</b> suffer my name ...	OC: O <sup>c</sup>	
1n2107	to servant of rulers	to a servant of rulers	RS	accept
1n2111	make all my mountains <b>away</b>	make all my mountains <b>a way</b>	JS: 1840	accept

<i>passage</i>	<i>earliest or standard reading</i>	<i>conjecture</i>	<i>source</i>	<i>critical text</i>
1n2124	or the lawful <b>captive</b>	or the lawful <b>captives</b>	1830	
1n2125	the <b>captive</b> of the mighty	the <b>captives</b> of the mighty	1830	
2n0120	keep <b>his</b> commandments	keep <b>my</b> commandments	OC: O <sup>c</sup>	
2n0120	cut off from <b>his</b> presence	cut off from <b>my</b> presence	OC: O <sup>c</sup>	
2n0124	whose <b>views</b> have been glorious	whose <b>visions</b> have been glorious	RS	
2n0211	neither <b>holiness</b> nor misery	neither <b>happiness</b> nor misery	Corbin Volluz	accept
2n0214	and now my <b>son</b>	and now my <b>sons</b>	1830	accept
2n0222	which they were	<b>in</b> which they were	1920	
2n0222	which they were	which they were <b>in</b>	RS	accept
2n0226	by the punishment of the <b>law</b>	by the punishment of the <b>Lord</b>	1908R	
2n0312	the fruit of <b>my</b> loins	the fruit of <b>thy</b> loins	1837	accept
2n0314	the fruit of <b>thy</b> loins	the fruit of <b>my</b> loins	1837	accept
2n0318	I will raise up	I will raise up <b>one</b>	RS	accept
2n0320	their cry shall go	their cry shall go <b>forth</b>	RS	accept
2n0415	and writeth them	and <b>I</b> writeth them	RS	
2n0426	hath visited <b>me</b>	hath visited <b>men</b>	JG: 1830	
2n0511	we did reap <b>again</b> in abundance	we did reap <b>grain</b> in abundance	Stephen Carr	
2n0706	I gave my back to the <b>smiter</b>	I gave my back to the <b>smitters</b>	RS	accept
2n0711	all ye that <b>kindleth</b> fire	all ye that <b>kindle</b> a fire	RS	accept
2n0804	for a light <b>thing</b> of the people	for a light of the people	JS: 1837	accept
2n0815	the Lord thy God	the Lord thy God <b>that divided the sea</b>	Stan Larson	

<i>passage</i>	<i>earliest or standard reading</i>	<i>conjecture</i>	<i>source</i>	<i>critical text</i>
2n0819	these two <b>sons</b>	these two <b>things</b>	John Tvedtnes	
2n0823	<b>unto</b> the hand of them	<b>into</b> the hand of them	1830	accept
2n0823	which <b>I</b> said	which <b>have</b> said	JS: 1837	accept
2n0905	<b>it</b> should be among them	<b>he</b> should be among them	RS	
2n0913	the grave deliver up the <b>body</b>	the grave deliver up the <b>bodies</b>	1953R	accept
2n0915	<b>insomuch</b> as they have become ...	<b>inasmuch</b> as they have become ...	RS	
2n0916	their torment is a lake of fire	their torment is <b>as</b> a lake of fire	JS: 1837	
2n0922	at the great <b>and</b> judgment day	at the great judgment day	RS	
2n0941	his paths are <b>righteousness</b>	his paths are <b>righteous</b>	1837	
2n1003	for it behooveth our God	for <b>thus</b> it behooveth our God	1830	
2n1014	he that <b>raiseth</b> up a king	he that <b>riseth</b> up <b>as</b> a king	RS	
2n1023	<b>this</b> way of everlasting death	<b>the</b> way of everlasting death	1830	accept
2n1209	the mean man boweth down	the mean man boweth <b>not</b> down	JS: 1837	
2n1402	<b>and</b> excellent and comely	excellent and comely	1830	accept
2n1605	woe me	woe <b>is</b> unto me	JS: 1837	
2n1609	they <b>understand</b> not	they <b>understood</b> not	1837	
2n2506	made mention <b>unto</b> my children	made mention	RS	accept
2n2508	in the last <b>days</b>	in the last <b>day</b>	JG: P <sup>c</sup>	
2n2513	he <b>is</b> laid in a sepulchre	he <b>has</b> laid in a sepulchre	RS	
2n2520	and also <b>give</b> him power	and also <b>gave</b> him power	1830	accept
2n2609	the <b>Son</b> of righteousness	the <b>Sun</b> of righteousness	Sidney Sperry	accept



<i>passage</i>	<i>earliest or standard reading</i>	<i>conjecture</i>	<i>source</i>	<i>critical text</i>
2n2702	visited <b>with</b> the Lord of Hosts	visited <b>of</b> the Lord of Hosts	JG: 1830	accept
2n2706	and shall be the words of them	and <b>they</b> shall be the words of them	JG: 1830	accept
2n2812	false teachers and false <b>doctrine</b>	false teachers and false <b>doctrines</b>	RS	accept
2n2823	and <b>death and hell</b> and the devil	and the devil	Nathaniel Skousen	accept
2n2904	do they remember the <b>travels</b>	do they remember the <b>travails</b>	Stan Larson; 1981	accept
2n3017	which is sealed <b>upon</b> earth	which is sealed <b>on</b> earth	RS	
2n3109	the <b>straightness</b> of the path	the <b>straitness</b> of the path	1981	accept
2n3309	and walk in the <b>straight</b> path	and walk in the <b>strait</b> path	1981	accept
jb0116	to search much gold and silver	to search <b>for</b> much gold and silver	RS	
jb0211	get <b>thou</b> up into the temple	get <b>thee</b> up into the temple	RS	
jb0212	and all manner of precious ores	and <b>for</b> all manner of precious ores	1902, 1911	accept
jb0218	seek ye <b>for</b> the kingdom of God	seek ye <b>first</b> the kingdom of God	Mark Skousen	
jb0234	ye have come <b>unto</b> great condemnation	ye have come <b>under</b> great condemnation	Joanne Case	
jb0305	their filthiness and the <b>curings</b>	their filthiness and the <b>cursing</b>	1920	accept
jb0411	and obtained a good hope	and <b>having</b> obtained a good hope	RS	accept
jb0501	which spake unto the house of Israel	which <b>he</b> spake unto the house of Israel	1879	accept
jb0508	I take away many ...	I <b>will</b> take away many ...	RS	accept
jb0513	in the nethermost <b>part</b>	in the nethermost <b>parts</b>	RS	accept
jb0524	behold that I have nourished also	behold that I have nourished <b>it</b> also	1830	accept
jb0529	let us go down <b>in</b> the vineyard	let us go down <b>into</b> the vineyard	1830	accept
jb0537	thou <b>beheldest</b>	thou <b>beholdest</b>	1830	accept

<i>passage</i>	<i>earliest or standard reading</i>	<i>conjecture</i>	<i>source</i>	<i>critical text</i>
jb0544	thou <b>beholdest</b>	thou <b>beheldest</b>	OC; P <sup>c</sup>	
jb0545	thou <b>beholdest</b>	thou <b>beheldest</b>	OC; P <sup>c</sup>	
jb0545	and <b>the</b> part thereof	and <b>a</b> part thereof	1830	
jb0545	and the part thereof	and the <b>other</b> part thereof	RS	accept
jb0547	I have digged it	I have digged <b>about</b> it	JS: 1837	accept
jb0574	and the Lord had preserved	and the Lord had <b>observed</b>	Paul Huntzinger	
jb0574	and the Lord had preserved	and <b>the good</b> the Lord had preserved	Paul Huntzinger	accept
jb0575	and hath brought	and <b>it</b> hath brought	David Calabro	accept
jb0601	<b>this</b> prophet Zenos	<b>the</b> prophet Zenos	RS	
jb0613	the <b>pleasing</b> bar of God	the <b>pleading</b> bar of God	RS	accept
jb0701	some years had passed away	<b>after</b> some years had passed away	OC; O <sup>s</sup> ; P <sup>c</sup>	
jb0701	some years had passed away	some years had passed away <b>and</b>	RS	accept
jb0704	he was learned that he had ...	he was learned <b>in</b> that he had ...	James Siebach	
jb0704	he was learned that he had ...	he was learned <b>so</b> that he had ...	RS	
jb0708	poured <b>in</b> his Spirit into my soul	poured his Spirit into my soul	Joanne Case	
es0103	and the words which ...	and <b>I pondered</b> the words which ...	Lyle Fletcher	
es0103	and the words which ...	and <b>I remembered</b> the words which ...	Lyle Fletcher	accept
es0113	some future day	<b>at</b> some future day	1830	
es0118	thy fathers have also <b>required</b> of me	thy fathers have also <b>requested</b> of me	Joanne Case	
es0121	and flocks of <b>herds</b>	and flocks of <b>birds</b>	George Talbot	
es0121	and flocks of herds	and flocks <b>and</b> herds	RS	

<i>passage</i>	<i>earliest or standard reading</i>	<i>conjecture</i>	<i>source</i>	<i>critical text</i>
jm01112	destroyed <b>upon</b> the face of the land	destroyed <b>from off</b> the face of the land	RS	
oi0110	behold I Abinadom <b>I</b> am ...	behold I Abinadom am ...	JS: 1837	
oi0118	they are written but not <b>in</b> these plates	they are written but not <b>upon</b> these plates	RS	
oi0126	fasting and <b>proping</b>	fasting and <b>praying</b>	1830	accept
wm0105	I <b>chose</b> these things	I <b>choose</b> these things	1852	accept
wm0115	and they punished	and they <b>had been</b> punished	Stan Larson	
mh0102	which was delivered them	which was delivered <b>unto</b> them	RS	
mh0411	which was spoken by the mouth ...	which was spoken <b>of</b> by the mouth ...	RS	
mh0414	and <b>save</b> the devil	and <b>serve</b> the devil	OC: P <sup>c</sup>	accept
mh0502	a mighty <b>chance</b> in us	a mighty <b>change</b> in us	OC: P <sup>c</sup>	accept
mh0718	<b>in</b> this wise	<b>on</b> this wise	RS	
mh0813	for that he had not ought	for that <b>which</b> he had not ought	RS	
mh0813	for that he had not ought	for that he had not ought <b>to</b>	Paul Huntzinger	
mh0817	things which <b>has</b> past	things which <b>are</b> past	1920	
mh0817	things which <b>has</b> past	things which <b>is</b> past	David Calabro	
mh0817	things which has <b>past</b>	things which has <b>passed</b>	RS	accept
mh0904	near <b>to</b> the land of our fathers	near the land of our fathers	RS	
mh1005	spin and toil and work <b>and work</b>	spin and toil and work	RS	accept
mh1012	a wild and ferocious and a bloodthirsty	a wild and <b>a</b> ferocious and a bloodthirsty	RS	
mh1012	and they were also wronged	and <b>that</b> they were also wronged	RS	
mh1016	they were <b>wrath</b> with him	they were <b>wroth</b> with him	1830	accept

<i>passage</i>	<i>earliest or standard reading</i>	<i>conjecture</i>	<i>source</i>	<i>critical text</i>
mh1109	with gold and silver and with ...	with gold and <b>with</b> silver and with ...	RS	
mh1123	and turn the Lord their God	and turn <b>unto</b> the Lord their God	OC; P <sup>c</sup>	
mh1123	and turn the Lord their God	and turn <b>to</b> the Lord their God	RS	accept
mh1202	and <b>prophesying</b> saying	and <b>prophesy</b> saying	1837	accept
mh1202	smitten on the <b>cheek</b>	smitten on the <b>cheeks</b>	RS	
mh1205	shall be driven <b>before</b>	shall be driven <b>forth</b>	Joanne Case	
mh1229	hath cause send me	hath cause <b>to</b> send me	1830	accept
mh1502	he dwelleth in flesh	he dwelleth in <b>the</b> flesh	RS	
mh1503	thus becoming the Father and Son	thus becoming the Father and <b>the</b> Son	RS	
mh1509	<b>taken</b> upon himself their iniquity	<b>taking</b> upon himself their iniquity	Lyle Fletcher	
mh1509	taken upon himself their iniquity	<b>and</b> taken upon himself their iniquity	RS	
mh1509	taken upon himself their iniquity	<b>having</b> taken upon himself their iniquity	RS	accept
mh1516	that <b>art</b> still publishing peace	that <b>are</b> still publishing peace	1830	accept
mh1601	he stretched forth his <b>hands</b>	he stretched forth his <b>hand</b>	1830	
mh1603	carnal sensual devilish	carnal sensual <b>and</b> devilish	David Calabro	
mh1607	or <b>have</b> broken the bands of death	or broken the bands of death	RS	accept
mh1710	yea and will suffer	yea and <b>I</b> will suffer	JG: 1830	accept
mh1710	yea and I will suffer even <b>until</b> death	yea and I will suffer even <b>unto</b> death	RS	accept
mh1713	and <b>scourged</b> his skin with fagots	and <b>scorched</b> his skin with fagots	RS	accept
mh1807	after many day	after many <b>a</b> day	RS	
mh1807	after many <b>day</b>	after many <b>days</b>	1830	accept

<i>passage</i>	<i>earliest or standard reading</i>	<i>conjecture</i>	<i>source</i>	<i>critical text</i>
mh1828	to those priests that stood in need	<b>and</b> to those priests that stood in need	1830	
mh1903	to breathe out <b>threatening</b>	to breathe out <b>threatenings</b>	1830	accept
mh1924	after they had ended the <b>ceremony</b>	after they had ended the <b>sermon</b>	Renee Bangerter	accept
mh1924	after they had ended the <b>ceremony</b>	after they had ended the <b>testimony</b>	Don Brugger	
mh1926	made oath unto the king	made <b>an</b> oath unto the king	RS	
mh2019	and now behold <b>and</b> tell the king	and now behold tell the king	RS	
mh2106	to murmur <b>with</b> the king	to murmur <b>to</b> the king	Karl Franson	
mh2118	and <b>secure</b> their grain	and <b>secured</b> their grain	1849	
mh2118	<b>and</b> secure their grain	<b>to</b> secure their grain	RS	accept
mh2128	king <b>Benjamin</b> had a gift	king <b>Mosiah</b> had a gift	1837	
mh2208	and our children our flocks and	and our children <b>and</b> our flocks and	RS	
mh2312	bound with the <b>bands</b> of iniquity	bound with the <b>bonds</b> of iniquity	RS	
mh2317	except it were <b>by</b> him from God	except it were <b>given</b> him from God	Karl Franson	
mh2401	and the land of Shilom	and <b>in</b> the land of Shilom	1830	
mh2411	and put guards over them	and <b>he</b> put guards over them	1830	
mh2506	and he also read the account of Alma	and he also read the account of Alma <b>and his brethren and all their afflictions</b> <b>and he also read the account of Ammon</b>	Ellis Harris	accept
mh2609	Alma did know concerning them	Alma did <b>not</b> know concerning them	OC: P <sup>c</sup>	
mh2623	for it is I that hath created <b>them</b>	for it is I that hath created <b>him</b>	Richard Tripp	
mh2633	the people of <b>that</b> church	the people of <b>the</b> church	Ross Geddes	

<i>passage</i>	<i>earliest or standard reading</i>	<i>conjecture</i>	<i>source</i>	<i>critical text</i>
mh2638	sufferings all manner of afflictions	suffering all manner of afflictions	1830	accept
mh2711	behold <b>the</b> angel of the Lord appeared	behold <b>an</b> angel of the Lord appeared	Joanne Case	
mh2716	that their prayers may answered	that their prayers may <b>be</b> answered	1830	accept
mh2719	he could not move his <b>hands</b>	he could not move his <b>limbs</b>	Ross Geddes	
mh2729	my soul was <b>wrecked</b>	my soul was <b>racked</b>	1879	accept
mh2730	but now that they may foresee	but now <b>I know</b> that they may foresee	David Calabro	accept
mh2803	the very <b>thoughts</b>	the very <b>thought</b>	RS	
mh2804	<b>and</b> suffering much fearing	suffering much <b>and</b> fearing	1920	
mh2810	which would accept <b>of</b> the kingdom	which would accept the kingdom	RS	
mh2817	from that time until the creation	from that time <b>back</b> until the creation	1920	
mh2907	which <b>will</b> cause wars	which <b>would</b> cause wars	1830	
mh2907	yea and <b>destroy</b> the souls	yea and <b>destroying</b> the souls	Paul Thomas	
mh2919	must unavoidably <b>remained</b>	must unavoidably <b>remain</b>	S2: P*; 1849	
mh2919	must unavoidably remained	must unavoidably <b>have</b> remained	1858W	
mh2919	must unavoidably remained	must <b>have</b> unavoidably remained	RS	accept
mh2921	ye cannot <b>death</b> an iniquitous king	ye cannot <b>remove</b> an iniquitous king	S2: P <sup>c</sup>	
mh2925	choose <b>you</b> ... judges	choose <b>ye</b> ... judges	RS	
mh2930	and I <b>commanded</b> you	and I <b>command</b> you	JG: 1830	
mh2932	that this <b>inequality</b> should be no more	that this <b>iniquity</b> should be no more	RS	
mh2933	the trials and troubles a righteous king	the trials and troubles <b>of</b> a righteous king	1830	accept
mh2936	contentions and <b>bloodshed</b>	contentions and <b>bloodsheds</b>	RS	

<i>passage</i>	<i>earliest or standard reading</i>	<i>conjecture</i>	<i>source</i>	<i>critical text</i>
mh2942	appointed to be the chief judge	appointed to be the <b>first</b> chief judge	1837	
mh2946	being sixty and three years	being sixty and three years <b>old</b>	1830	accept
aa0115	they carried him <b>upon</b> the top	they carried him <b>up on</b> the top	RS	accept
aa0124	they were <b>remembered</b> no more	they were <b>numbered</b> no more	RS	accept
aa0125	they <b>bore</b> with patience	they <b>bare</b> with patience	RS	
aa0126	and the priest not esteeming himself	and the priest <b>also</b> not esteeming himself	Alison Coutts	
aa0129	whatsoever they stood in need	whatsoever they stood in need <b>of</b>	RS	
aa0130	that was hungry	<b>or</b> that was hungry	1830	accept
aa0132	and in envyings and <b>strife</b>	and in envyings and <b>strifes</b>	John Gee	
aa0204	and privileges of the church	and <b>the</b> privileges of the church	RS	accept
aa0211	<b>Amlikites</b>	<b>Amlicites</b>	1830	accept
aa0222	to watch camp of the Amlicites	to watch <b>the</b> camp of the Amlicites	1830	accept
aa0225	they obtain possession of our city	they <b>will</b> obtain possession of our city	RS	
aa0227	as the <b>sands</b> of the sea	as the <b>sand</b> of the sea	David Calabro	
aa0238	by those beasts and also the vultures	by those beasts and also <b>by</b> the vultures	RS	
aa0238	heaped <b>up on</b> the earth	heaped <b>upon</b> the earth	1892R	
aa0238	heaped <b>up on</b> the earth	heaped <b>up upon</b> the earth	RS	
aa0305	save it were skin	save it were <b>a</b> skin	RS	accept
aa0316	and again <b>will I</b> set a mark	and again <b>I will</b> set a mark	1830	accept
aa0405	three thousand five hundred souls	three thousand <b>and</b> five hundred souls	David Calabro	
aa0408	their own <b>wills</b> and pleasure	their own <b>will</b> and pleasure	1830	

<i>passage</i>	<i>earliest or standard reading</i>	<i>conjecture</i>	<i>source</i>	<i>critical text</i>
aa0503	the land was called the land of ...	the land <b>which</b> was called the land of ...	1830	
aa0504	delivered out of the <b>hand</b> of ...	delivered out of the <b>hands</b> of ...	1830	
aa0507	in the <b>midst</b> of darkness	in the <b>mist</b> of darkness	John Tvedtnes	
aa0511	did he not speak the <b>word</b> of God	did he not speak the <b>words</b> of God	JS: 1837	
aa0511	and my father Alma <b>believed</b> them	and my father Alma <b>believe</b> them	1830	
aa0511	and my father Alma believed <b>them</b>	and my father Alma believed <b>him</b>	RS	
aa0525	such an one can have place in ...	such an one can have a place in ...	1858W	
aa0535	ye shall not be <b>put</b> down	ye shall not be <b>hewn</b> down	1830	
aa0535	ye shall not be <b>put</b> down	ye shall not be <b>cut</b> down	RS	accept
aa0548	yea the Son <b>of</b> the Only Begotten	yea the Son / the Only Begotten	JS: 1837	accept
aa0704	yea hath given unto me	yea <b>he</b> hath given unto me	RS	
aa0712	how to <b>suffer</b> his people	how to <b>succor</b> his people	1837	accept
aa0727	your women and your children	<b>and</b> your women and your children	RS	
aa0727	from this time <b>forth</b> and forever	from this time <b>henceforth</b> and forever	RS	
aa0820	I know that thou <b>will</b> be a blessing	I know that thou <b>will</b> be a blessing	1841	
aa0821	and set before Alma	and set <b>it</b> before Alma	RS	
aa0922	they having <b>been</b> waxed strong	they having waxed strong	1920	
aa0928	the power and <b>captivation</b> of the devil	the power and <b>captivity</b> of the devil	Ross Geddes	
aa1002	I am the son of <b>Gidanah</b>	I am the son of <b>Giddonah</b>	1830	
aa1007	and thou <b>shall</b> receive him	and thou <b>shalt</b> receive him	JS: 1837	
aa1019	the people should <b>cause</b> iniquity	the people should <b>choose</b> iniquity	JG: 1830	accept



<i>passage</i>	<i>earliest or standard reading</i>	<i>conjecture</i>	<i>source</i>	<i>critical text</i>
aa1020	repent ye repent	repent ye repent ye	RS	
aa1022	by pestilence and the sword	by pestilence and <b>by</b> the sword	RS	
aa1028	the people cried out ... <b>saying</b>	the people cried out ...	OC: P <sup>c</sup>	
aa1101	should receive wages	should receive <b>his</b> wages	RS	accept
aa1121	and <b>this</b> Zeezrom began to question	and <b>thus</b> Zeezrom began to question	RS	accept
aa1121	and this Zeezrom began to question	and <b>now</b> this Zeezrom began to question	RS	
aa1136	I <b>spake</b> as though I had authority	I <b>spake</b> as though I had authority	1830	
aa1142	which is called temporal death	which is called <b>a</b> temporal death	1830	
aa1144	and shall be brought	and <b>all</b> shall be brought	Ross Geddes	accept
aa1144	and be <b>raigned</b> before the bar of Christ	and be <b>arraigned</b> before the bar of Christ	JG: 1830	
aa1210	until they <b>knew</b> them in full	until they <b>know</b> them in full	1830	accept
aa1214	for our <b>words</b> will condemn us	for our <b>works</b> will condemn us	RS	accept
aa1214	yea all our <b>work</b> will condemn us	yea all our <b>works</b> will condemn us	1837	accept
aa1227	but behold <b>behold</b> it was not so	but behold it was not so	JG: 1830	accept
aa1301	I would <b>cite</b> your minds forward	I would <b>cast</b> your minds forward	RS	
aa1301	I would cite your minds <b>forward</b>	I would cite your minds <b>back</b>	Douglas Stringer	
aa1309	thus they <b>become</b> high priests forever	thus they <b>became</b> high priests forever	RS	
aa1309	the Son <b>of</b> the Only Begotten	the Son / the Only Begotten	JS: 1837	accept
aa1312	many / <b>an</b> exceeding great many	many / exceeding great many	OC: P <sup>c</sup>	
aa1312	<b>many</b> / an exceeding great many	an exceeding great many	RS	
aa1314	this same order which I have spoken	this same order <b>of</b> which I have spoken	1906	accept

<i>passage</i>	<i>earliest or standard reading</i>	<i>conjecture</i>	<i>source</i>	<i>critical text</i>
aa1316	now <b>their</b> ordinances were given ...	now <b>these</b> ordinances were given ...	1830	accept
aa1316	look forward <b>on</b> the Son of God	look forward <b>to</b> the Son of God	RS	
aa1320	ye will <b>arrest</b> them	ye will <b>wrest</b> them	JS: 1837	accept
aa1405	their lawyers and judges of the land	their lawyers and <b>the</b> judges of the land	RS	accept
aa1405	<b>their</b> lawyers and judges of the land	<b>the</b> lawyers and judges of the land	David Calabro	
aa1418	questioned them <b>about</b> many words	questioned them <b>with</b> many words	Douglas Stringer	
aa1420	will ye stand <b>again</b>	will ye stand <b>against</b>	RS	
aa1501	they departed	they departed <b>out of the land</b>	Paul Huntzinger	
aa1501	came out <b>even</b> into the land of Sidom	came out <b>over</b> into the land of Sidom	Paul Huntzinger	
aa1603	and <b>taking</b> others captive	and <b>taken</b> others captive	1852	
aa1605	<b>whether</b> ... they should go	<b>whither</b> ... they should go	JS: P <sup>c</sup> ; 1981	accept
aa1611	Desolation of Nehors	Desolation of <b>the</b> Nehors	RS	
aa1611	Desolation of <b>Nehors</b>	Desolation of <b>Nehor's</b>	RS	
aa1611	Desolation of Nehors	<b>the</b> Desolation of Nehors	RS	
aa1619	and the resurrection of the dead	and <b>also</b> the resurrection of the dead	1830	
aa1708	to preach the word	to preach the word <b>of God</b>	OC: P <sup>c</sup>	
aa1711	good examples <b>unto them</b> in me	good examples unto me	JS: P <sup>c</sup>	
aa1718	he departed from them	<b>and</b> he departed from them	OC: P <sup>c</sup>	
aa1726	the <b>water</b> of Sebus	the <b>waters</b> of Sebus	RS	accept
aa1727	scattered the <b>flock</b>	scattered the <b>flocks</b>	1830	accept
aa1731	we will <b>reserve</b> the flocks	we will <b>preserve</b> the flocks	1849	

<i>passage</i>	<i>earliest or standard reading</i>	<i>conjecture</i>	<i>source</i>	<i>critical text</i>
aa1731	we will <b>reserve</b> the flocks	we will <b>restore</b> the flocks	RS	accept
aa1738	save it were their leader	save it were their leader <b>with his sword</b>	JS; 1837	
aa1738	save it were their leader	<b>with the sword</b> save it were their leader	RS	accept
aa1802	and had learned of the faithfulness	and <b>he</b> had learned of the faithfulness	OC; P <sup>c</sup>	accept
aa1819	Ammon answered and said unto him	<b>and</b> Ammon answered and said unto him	RS	
aa1819	and he answered unto him	and he answered <b>and said</b> unto him	1830	
aa1836	<b>and</b> which had been spoken	which had been spoken	1837	accept
aa1836	and which had been spoken	and <b>that</b> which had been spoken	RS	
aa1837	and their <b>travel</b>	and their <b>travail</b>	Stan Larson; 1981	accept
aa1837	and their <b>travail</b>	and their <b>travails</b>	RS	
aa1901	and lay it <b>into</b> a sepulchre	and lay it <b>in</b> a sepulchre	1830	
aa1906	the light of everlasting <b>light</b>	the light of everlasting <b>life</b>	JS; P <sup>c</sup> ; 1852	accept
aa1923	Mosiah <b>trusted</b> him unto the Lord	Mosiah <b>entrusted</b> him unto the Lord	RS	
aa2102	<b>Amalekites</b>	<b>Amlicites</b>	Lyle Fletcher	accept
aa2103	in wickedness and <b>their</b> abominations	in wickedness and abominations	RS	
aa2103	in wickedness and their abominations	in <b>their</b> wickedness and their abominations	RS	
aa2103	in wickedness and their abominations	in wickedness and <b>in</b> their abominations	RS	
aa2105	there arose an Amlicite and began ...	there arose an Amlicite and <b>he</b> began ...	RS	
aa2105	there arose an Amlicite <b>and</b> began ...	there arose an Amlicite <b>which</b> began ...	RS	
aa2113	fled ... <b>unto</b> the regions round about	fled ... <b>into</b> the regions round about	1841	
aa2121	for <b>that</b> his father had granted ...	for his father had granted ...	RS	



# IMAGINE

Michael D. Jibson

Every now and then it all becomes clear. The incessant vagaries of history, the complex interactions of cultures, the unfathomable dynamics of human behavior are no longer mysteries, but all fall into predictable patterns when the one great unifying factor of human experience is identified. Karl Marx figured it out—all history is the manifestation of class struggles.<sup>1</sup> Sigmund Freud knew what was lurking beneath the surface of conscious humans and their history—it was the conflict between the social norms of civilized society and the personal aggressive instincts of its members.<sup>2</sup> B. F. Skinner unraveled the great mystery—it was the interaction of causally determined behavior with the environment.<sup>3</sup> John Lennon knew the secret—it was about allegiance to nations and religions.<sup>4</sup> Francis Fukuyawa had it nailed—

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1. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “Manifesto of the Communist Party,” in *Marx and Engels: Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy*, ed. Lewis S. Feuer (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1959), 7.

2. Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1961), 82.

3. B. F. Skinner, *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* (New York: Bantam Books, 1971), 175.

4. John Lennon, “Imagine” (Apple Records, 1971). I include Lennon’s rather cursory musical analysis among the more serious works mentioned because Harris’s thesis most closely parallels Lennon’s lyrics.

Review of Sam Harris. *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason*, 2nd ed. New York: Norton, 2005. 348 pp., with index. \$13.95.

it was all about the inexorable progression of societies toward liberal democracy.<sup>5</sup> Somehow, each theory failed to pan out, but the search goes on.

Enter Sam Harris with the latest addition to the historical equivalent of unified field theory. The conflicts of nations, the violent clashes of ethnic communities, the personal crimes of aggressive leaders all arise from a single overriding factor. It is all about their mindless acceptance of religious faith.

### Summary and Critical Comment

Harris's book—a mix of antireligious diatribe, philosophy term paper, and personal testimony—opens with a provocative series of assertions. First, suicide bombing is a unique evil in the world, representing an escalation of violence never before seen. Second, suicide bombing is not the product of one religiously preoccupied culture pushed too far but is the inevitable consequence of any religion taken too seriously. Third, all organized (and much individual) violence throughout history arises from religious faith. Finally, the availability of nuclear materials to terrorists makes it essential that those who harbor dangerous religious beliefs be rendered inoperable (i.e., killed) and that faith-based religion be quashed in all its forms.

Curiously, Harris does not discount spirituality, or even the adherence of large groups to a unifying practice of spiritual exploration. On the contrary, he speaks earnestly of his own spiritual exercises and insights and strongly advocates their acceptance by society at large. He has his own presumably harmless version of religion. His objection is instead to religious faith that purports to teach us anything about the way the world works, about transcendent realities not verifiable by scientific methods.

His use of the term *faith* is entirely within this context. Faith, by his definition, is what we exercise when there is no evidence in sup-

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5. Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992), xi–xxiii.

port of a proposition.<sup>6</sup> This he sees as the inherent, core problem with harmful religions. They blithely assert the unknowable. He acknowledges no evidence for a personal God, divine special revelation, literal readings of scripture, miraculous events, the existence of heaven, or any version of salvation or damnation. Without such evidence there is no basis for belief and certainly none for knowledge of divine things. We are left with dogma—unquestioned assertions rigidly held despite a paucity of data in their support, perhaps even despite obvious evidence to the contrary.

If such beliefs were harmless, they could be ignored by the more enlightened among us, but they are not. Because they are without empirical validity, they are virtually random in their assertions, mutually incompatible, and uncompromisingly hostile to one another. Thus, true believers of these superstitions are inevitably drawn toward acts of violence against opposing doctrines. There are no true religious moderates, only failed “fundamentalists” who lack the courage of their convictions.

Harris pushes the point further, however, not only asserting that religious faith leads to violence, but also that all violence ultimately originates from some form of religious belief. “I take it to be self-evident,” he tells us, “that ordinary people cannot be moved” to the extreme forms of violence that religious hatreds achieve (p. 31).

True spirituality, in contrast, can be described as experiences “of meaningfulness, selflessness, and heightened emotion that surpass our narrow identity as ‘selves’” (p. 39). If this sounds a lot like Buddhism, it is. Harris finally admits late in the book that he openly espouses Buddhism, or rather one branch of Buddhism, as the only true path to enlightenment. That this experience of spirituality can transform us is “proven” by the effects of psychotropic medications and psychedelic drugs. Consciousness, he argues, is entirely subjective, as it is impossible to experience the real world directly. Since most subjective experience is altered by mental state, it follows that perception of the world

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6. The nature of faith is too rich a topic to dismiss with Harris’s narrow definition or to discuss at length in this review. For a more insightful perspective, an unparalleled resource is found in *Lectures on Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1993).

can be altered by spirituality. Although “a scientific approach to these subjects is still struggling to be born” (p. 42), once a full “science of the mind” (p. 20) has matured, it will be able to answer all questions of a spiritual, aesthetic, emotional, and existential nature.

I must point out here that such a science exists in experimental psychology, which Harris largely overlooks. At the outset, it appeared that he was going to undertake a review of the neuroscience of religiosity, regarding which there is a small but interesting body of research, or perhaps the more extensive work related to cognition or ethical decision-making. Aside from a few superficial references, however, Harris did not attempt to cover these topics at all, despite his repeated references to neuroscience as holding the key to these areas. I thought it rather akin to an expectation that the problem of Internet pornography would be solved if we had a more complete understanding of the physics of semiconductors. The references he did include were mostly from cognitive philosophy, an interesting field in its own right, but one firmly entrenched in the philosophy department, not bound by the evidential standards Harris demands of religion. Neuroscience was held out as the bastion of empirical understanding of these issues, but in the absence of even a rudimentary review of the topic, readers were left to take that on faith.

Aside from the obvious gaps in Harris’s empirical database respecting human behavior and historical activity, I was troubled by the tone of this first chapter of his book. I had hoped to find here an intellectually satisfying critique of modern faith, or at least a coherent argument for a more rational theology. Instead I found a harsh, overgeneralized, and self-congratulatory denunciation of persons of faith as stupid, blind, hypocritical, and dangerous. The book drifted into diatribe at several points. If my descriptions seem extreme, they are considerably softer than their source, which became quite wearing with repetition. Note the following:

There seems, however, to be a problem with some of our most cherished beliefs about the world: they are leading us, inexorably, to kill one another. A glance at history, or at the pages of any newspaper, reveals that ideas which divide one group of



human beings from another, only to unite them in slaughter, generally have their roots in religion. (p. 12)

We have been slow to recognize the degree to which religious faith perpetuates man's inhumanity to man. (p. 15)

Religious moderation, insofar as it represents an attempt to hold on to what is still serviceable in orthodox religion, closes the door to more sophisticated approaches to spirituality, ethics, and the building of strong communities. (p. 21)

To speak plainly and truthfully about the state of our world—to say, for instance, that the Bible and the Koran both contain mountains of life-destroying gibberish—is antithetical to tolerance as moderates currently conceive it. (pp. 22–23)

In fact, every religion preaches the truth of propositions for which no evidence is even *conceivable*. (p. 23, emphasis in original)

But in its effect upon the *modern* world—a world already united, at least potentially, by economic, environmental, political, and epidemiological necessity—religious ideology is dangerously retrograde. (p. 25, emphasis in original)

Our world is fast succumbing to the activities of men and women who would stake the future of our species on beliefs that should not survive an elementary school education. (p. 25)

Insufficient taste for evidence regularly brings out the worst in us. (p. 26)

Because most religions offer no valid mechanism by which their core beliefs can be tested and revised, each new generation of believers is condemned to inherit the superstitions and tribal hatreds of its predecessors. (p. 31)

We must find our way to a time when faith, without evidence, disgraces anyone who would claim it. (p. 48)

It is imperative that we begin speaking plainly about the absurdity of most of our religious beliefs. (p. 48)

Faith is what credulity becomes when it finally achieves escape velocity from the constraints of terrestrial discourse—constraints like reasonableness, internal coherence, civility, and candor. (p. 65)

Most religions have merely canonized a few products of ancient ignorance and derangement and passed them down to us as though they were primordial truths. This leaves billions of us believing what no sane person could believe on his own. In fact, it is difficult to imagine a set of beliefs more suggestive of mental illness than those that lie at the heart of many of our religious traditions. . . . Jesus Christ—who, as it turns out, was born of a virgin, cheated death, and rose bodily into the heavens—can now be eaten in the form of a cracker. A few Latin words spoken over your favorite Burgundy, and you can drink his blood as well. Is there any doubt that a lone subscriber to these beliefs would be considered mad? Rather, is there any doubt that he would *be* mad? The danger of religious faith is that it allows otherwise normal human beings to reap the fruits of madness and consider them *holy*. Because each new generation of children is taught that religious propositions need not be justified in the way that all others must, civilization is still besieged by the armies of the preposterous. We are, even now, killing ourselves over ancient literature. Who would have thought something so tragically absurd could be possible? (pp. 72–73, emphasis in original)

Indeed, we know enough at this moment to say that the God of Abraham is not only unworthy of the immensity of creation; he is unworthy even of man. (p. 226)

The absence of evidence for various religions' assertions about the nature of the world was one of Harris's key points throughout the book. He made some form of the statement that religious beliefs have

no empirical basis over 40 times in 237 pages. I thought it curious that he did not develop this idea more completely, rather than simply asserting it repeatedly. The one attempt that he made to justify his charge of irrational belief focused on the doctrine of inerrancy of scripture. Specifically, he attacked the belief that scripture is the exact and unalterable word of God spoken by God's own mouth. There may be some legitimacy to this attribution within Islam, where the Qur'an purports to be precisely that, but within contemporary Christianity it is a definite minority of conservative Protestants that views the entire Bible as infallible and inerrant. His argument that the Bible is self-contradictory and of uncertain provenance has an element of truth but is largely beside the point.

His second chapter opened with a brief review of what is known about cognition, including how beliefs are formed, how they are related to the external world, and how conflicts among them are resolved. Most of this discussion was at the level of philosophical speculation since neuroscience is not sufficiently well developed to explain how the brain constructs beliefs.<sup>7</sup> He barely touched, however, on a vast and mature body of research in this area from the field of cognitive psychology. It is true that how the brain generates beliefs, resolves conflicts among them, and stores them for future reference remains a mystery. How the mind operates in these areas, in contrast, has been the subject of serious research for more than a century.<sup>8</sup> A review of

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7. For a novice's guide to cognitive psychology and its relationship to neuroscience, see Floyd E. Bloom, Charles A. Nelson, and Arlyne Lazerson, *Brain, Mind, and Behavior*, 3rd ed. (New York: Worth, 2001). For the definitive review of where the field stands, see Eric R. Kandel, James H. Schwartz, and Thomas M. Jessell, *Principles of Neural Science* (New York: McGraw-Hill Medical, 2000). Most recently, Eric R. Kandel, *In Search of Memory: The Emergence of a New Science of Mind* (New York: Norton, 2006), shares his thirty-year journey from psychoanalyst to Nobel Prize-winning neuroscientist with a compelling combination of scientific and personal memoir.

8. For example, William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (New York: Dover, 1950), has been in print continuously since 1890 and remains an exceptionally insightful source. The first of this two-volume set deals almost exclusively with cognition. For a recent review, an excellent textbook for undergraduate and graduate level students is Robert L. Solso, M. Kimberly MacLin, and Otto H. MacLin, *Cognitive Psychology*, 7th ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2004).

this literature would have been helpful and would have helped Harris avoid some of his less defensible conclusions.

Curiously, in the midst of a discussion of cognitive philosophy, Harris drifted back into the topic of the absence of evidence for religious beliefs, repeating much of his earlier argument. He then went on to something of a non sequitur, a brief description of all dogma as essentially religious. Among the beliefs that he attributed to religion were Nazism and Communism, which he characterized as “political religion” (p. 79). This is a circular argument of short radius. Since any belief that causes people to kill one another is defined as religious, it is self-evident that religion is the cause of all evil in the world. Harris pauses briefly here to tell us that what he really opposes is not just religion, but dogma in any form; then he quickly drops the point and returns to his focused attack on religions of faith in God. This was unfortunate. The hypothesis that rigid dogma in any realm leads to problems would have been more defensible and probably more useful. It certainly would have allowed a more nuanced view of religious faith and practice that recognized the benefits of faith to individuals and communities.

The most chilling component of this chapter was a bold announcement that there may be ethical justification for killing some people simply because of what they believe. Harris is clearly not at all opposed to killing people on the basis of his own beliefs.

The link between belief and behavior raises the stakes considerably. Some propositions are so dangerous that it may even be ethical to kill people for believing them. This may seem an extraordinary claim, but it merely enunciates an ordinary fact about the world in which we live. Certain beliefs place their adherents beyond the reach of every peaceful means of persuasion, while inspiring them to commit acts of extraordinary violence against others. There is, in fact, no talking to some people. If they cannot be captured, and they often cannot, otherwise tolerant people may be justified in killing them in self-defense. This is what the United States attempted in Afghanistan, and it is what we and other Western powers

are bound to attempt, at an even greater cost to ourselves and to innocents abroad, elsewhere in the Muslim world. We will continue to spill blood in what is, at bottom, a war of ideas. (pp. 52–53)

The book's third chapter is a descent into hell, graphically describing religion's ugliest moments. No detail is spared in the anatomically correct depictions of torture in the Inquisition, step-by-step characterizations of the execution of witches in late medieval Europe, and the recurrent fruits of Christian and Islamic anti-Semitism. Harris asserts that these religions have not developed or advanced over the years, that they are frozen in a barbaric past. Thus, the apparent absence of recent witch burnings is deceptive, for the Holocaust is depicted as exactly the same thing. Because secular anti-Semitism followed religious persecution of Jews, the Nazis were acting out their latent religious beliefs. Dogmatic loyalty to Hitler was a religious loyalty, as evidenced by Himmler's bizarre personal beliefs (pp. 100–101). "At the heart of every totalitarian enterprise, one sees outlandish dogmas" (p. 101). That may well be true, but are they religious dogmas? Do they involve belief in God? Or are they atheistic? Harris's final assertion in this context, that killers always believe preposterous things, is certainly not true.

The fourth chapter is more ambiguous in its stance, if not more nuanced. Indeed, at times it was hard to discern just where Harris stood on certain critical issues. He acknowledged that not all religions are equally bad, but he did so primarily in the context of singling out militant Islam for attack. In this, I suspect, he has many followers. Certainly there has been no shortage of books and articles in the West on the problems of Islam as a religious faith or cultural anchor. Harris, however, takes his argument in two troubling directions. First, he equates Islam with most other religions and with totalitarian ideologies. Second, he concludes that Islam is not compatible with civil society and must be eliminated by a combination of "economic isolation" and "military intervention" (p. 151), lest we be left with no option but "a nuclear first strike of our own" (p. 129). Following that housecleaning, we would need to establish a world government so

that war between countries will be as unimaginable as war between states. Since “diversity of our religious beliefs constitutes a primary obstacle” (p. 151), religion of all kinds must be abandoned. Perhaps I missed some subtle shade of difference, but this looked to me a lot like the violent dogma that he spent most of the book condemning. His only argument to the contrary was that intent is more important than action, and our intent would be to save ourselves, whereas theirs is to spread their beliefs. He showed no hint of irony as he endorsed the very course of military intervention in Afghanistan that was set by the religiously tainted leaders of American government he later decried (pp. 155–58). I also found his inability to imagine war between the states a curious historical blind spot.

Chapter five turns from the problem of Islam’s confrontation with the Western world to the impact of religion in American society. He first expresses horror and disdain that American political leaders include individuals who openly avow religious beliefs. Most of the chapter, however, focuses on morality laws of various kinds, including drug abuse, victimless crimes, and restrictions on stem-cell research. “The idea of a victimless crime is nothing more than a judicial reprise of the Christian notion of *sin*” (p. 159, emphasis in original), and the proscription of such “crimes” blindly subverts the harmless pursuit of enjoyment. To his credit, Harris equivocates as to whether pornography and prostitution are truly victimless, but most of his arguments would tend to include these crimes. Recreational drugs contribute to human happiness but are banned because pleasure is averse to piety. There is no basis for the astronomical sums spent fighting the futile battle against them. Our drug laws are the height of absurdity, and they endanger us by diverting resources from defense against terrorists. Furthermore, if we behaved consistently, alcohol would have to be banned, for it is the most damaging of all. Finally, we have the death penalty, but ignore the role of “bad genes, bad parents, bad ideas, or bad luck” (p. 157). This was a particularly disappointing and poorly thought-out section. These libertarian arguments ignore significant facts of public health that have nothing to do with religious morality.

Harris moves on to a philosophical treatise, positing that happiness and suffering are measurable qualities and are therefore the appropriate basis for an ethical framework. Ethical law is what contributes “to human happiness in the present” (p. 185). He somewhat implausibly argues that concern for others is a natural phenomenon, biologically driven and not arising from any religious institution. As such, it is a brain function and will be elucidated in its final and perfect form by neuroscience. Religion may be dismissed because theodicy, the problem of suffering and cruelty in the world, is incompatible with the concept of God. Counterarguments invoking free will are “incoherencies” (p. 173), for free will violates laws of cause and effect as applied to neuronal systems (pp. 272–74). This is familiar ground, and he acknowledges the contributions of the dean of atheist apology, Bertrand Russell, with a quotation or two, but overlooks B. F. Skinner’s messianic foray into utopian behaviorism.<sup>9</sup> He makes an exception, however, for Buddhism, which provides empirical evidence that moral living leads to happiness through greater positive emotions, proved in the “laboratory of one’s life” (p. 192). With this background, he conducts a lengthy discussion on the merits of torture in the interest of self-preservation and the selfish immorality of pacifism, citing Gandhi’s tepid response to the Holocaust as a failure of insight and courage.

In the final chapter he speaks of the merits of what he calls “spirituality,” as opposed to religious faith. Spirituality is transcendent experience in the exploration of consciousness by meditation, chanting, fasting, and drugs. Spirituality need not fall into the trap of making insupportable claims about the nature of the world, such as the existence of God, heaven, spirits, or life after death. Epistemology, the study of how and what we know, is the realm of science only. Science, he notes however, is incapable of fathoming consciousness, so spiritual exercise is essential to its understanding. These investigations will lead to an understanding that the “self” is not just a set of cells surviving by interdependence with nature or social interactions, but independent consciousness that emerged at some point in evolution. It is

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9. Skinner, *Beyond Freedom*, 175–206.

possible to overcome the sense of “I” as separate from the experience of the world, for “I” was not there at birth but formed gradually as “an implied center of cognition that does not, in fact, exist” (p. 213). Since conflict in the world arises from conflicts among “selves,” it would end if we achieved a transcendence of subjective and objective views of the world. This is empirical, not speculative, is available to everyone, and can be studied just as any other subjective experience can. “Mysticism is a rational enterprise. Religion is not” (p. 221). The greatest obstacle “to a truly empirical approach to spiritual experience” (p. 214) is our current belief in God. The end of faith is the bringing together of “reason, spirituality, and ethics” (p. 221).

An epilogue summarizes much of the earlier thesis, adding a new twist here and there. Briefly stated, faith causes us to believe and act irrationally, so we sacrifice happiness and justice for fantasies of heaven. Religions of faith are inherently incompatible with one another and are therefore destined for war; we need to stop allowing our faith to lead us to such wars. “Where we have reasons for what we believe, we have no need of faith” (p. 225), and the test of reasonableness is acceptance of facts. Foremost among facts is that we are all going to die. Knowing that, why should we be anything but kind to one another? We don’t need a final judgment to be ethical, just acknowledgment of our mortality should be enough. The logic here completely eluded me.

The second edition of the book includes an afterword that summarizes and responds to the more common critiques the book has received. Among the objections that have been raised are that most organized violence in the last century was about politics and ethnicity, led by atheists such as Mao Zedong, Josef Stalin, Adolf Hitler, and Pol Pot. Even among suicide bombers, there have been more among the separatist Tamil Tigers of Sri Lanka than among religiously motivated Muslims. Second, objection has been raised to the narrow interpretation of “faith” as the antithesis of “knowledge,” rather than as an essential precursor to action. Third, historians and sociologists assert that most of the Islamic world is not engaged in violence, which arises not from their faith alone but from the political and economic forces



that have brutalized them. Finally, atheists complain that after happily reading the first several chapters, they find themselves mired in a plea for religious conversion after all.

Harris's responses to these points begin with his reiterating his definition of "faith" as "dogma" (p. 231), irrespective of whether it is theological, political, cultural, or economic. That argument would be more credible, however, if 99 percent of the book were not focused on religious faith. He answers the statistics about the Tamil Tigers with the same approach. They are motivated by a rigid adherence to a cultural identity that is in part religiously defined and they are willing to kill themselves because of a belief in an afterlife, so they are really just religious fanatics after all. Regarding the importance of faith as essential to any action, Harris acknowledges that people "occasionally" use the word in that way, but his definition is "the license they give themselves to *keep believing when reasons fail*" (p. 232, emphasis in original). Harris dismisses assertions that political and social factors may play a part in motivating suicide bombers, asking where the Buddhist bombers are. He seems to have forgotten the kamikaze pilots who crashed planes without landing gear into Allied ships and airfields for the glory of a predominantly Buddhist Japan. Ironically, his response to betrayed atheist readers is a frank acknowledgment that we have no idea where consciousness arises or how it is related to brain function and so we must accept at least the possibility of spiritual realities, including life after death.

### General Comments

In responding to Harris's book as a whole, I find myself troubled by the sense that for all his insistence on the need for facts, he has allowed his hypothesis to drive not only his selection but also his interpretation of available data. This is not empiricism but advocacy. He is certainly at liberty to write such a book but owes his readers an acknowledgment that it is a political and ideological recruiting tool, not a neuroscientific or sociological text, and not one whose thesis is demonstrable by clear evidence to objective readers. I disagreed with most of his assertions and many of the examples he cited to prove his case.

His opening theses—that suicide bombing is uniquely evil and dangerous, that religious zeal inevitably leads to violence, that most organized violence arises from religious chauvinism, and that the nascent threat of nuclear terrorism necessitates preemptive violence against those of particular beliefs—are either demonstrably false or ethically indefensible. Suicide bombing is exceptionally frightening and is therefore useful as a tool of terror but is not a particularly effective weapon of war. Neither is it clear that the victims of civilian bombings have any preference as to whether the perpetrator carries the bomb or leaves it behind and flees the scene. Suicide bombing is a subtype of a much more common phenomenon of murder-suicide, which has occurred in all industrialized societies at a steady annual rate of 2–3 per million of population for the last several decades.<sup>10</sup> Most cases are driven by jealous rage or profound depression and involve relatives or sexual partners as victims. The banality of domestic violence hardly captures our attention but teaches us much about the personal dynamics of an individual willing to give up his own life for the privilege of killing another. Rage, jealousy, and hopelessness, not religious dogma, are the operative issues and must be considered in any discussion of the motivation of suicide bombers.

Among the faithful of most religions, the idea that they have become carriers of “tribal hatreds” (p. 31) or have latent homicidal thoughts toward their unbelieving neighbors is untenable. Particularly for those whose beliefs include an emphasis on the importance of moral agency, such as Latter-day Saints, the association between religious fervor and violence falls flat. The few brief lapses into violence in Latter-day Saint history were driven by self-preservation and carried no hint of missionary zeal.

Finally, the concept of preemptive violence against whole communities because of our perception of what they believe and what that might lead them to do is antithetical to the most basic human rights and to the broader values of a free society. Even if Harris’s background arguments had been indisputable, his thesis would have to be rejected

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10. Peter M. Marzuk, Kenneth Tardiff, and Charles S. Hirsch, “The Epidemiology of Murder-Suicide,” *Journal of the American Medical Association* 267 (1992): 3179–83.

on the basis of this conclusion alone. We would do well to reflect on the consequences of simplistic ideas applied with idealistic zeal. As Adam Hochschild noted in relation to Stalinist purges:

The desire to eradicate tyranny and suffering is one side of the Utopian impulse. All sorts of good ideas, from abolition of slavery to equal rights for women, were first scorned as Utopian, then gradually accepted. However, there is another, more hazardous facet of Utopianism: the faith that if only we make certain sweeping changes, then all problems will be solved. Most of us have felt, at one time or another, the appeal of a simple solution for life's difficulties.<sup>11</sup>

Harris would merely have us overthrow one set of values and beliefs for another and is prepared to advocate the use of violence to do it.

I was left wondering for whom the book was written. It was certainly not calculated to persuade those of militant Islam to abandon their beliefs, or if it was, it was a uniquely futile attempt. Neither was it for the secular democracies of western Europe now threatened by Islamist terrorism. Europe already boasts nations no longer besotted with the taint of fundamentalist faith, yet they face violence in their own homelands and lack interest in pursuing the roots of terror elsewhere. They have been unable to unify even their financial systems, not because of religious divisions but rather because of economic self-interest. This is hardly a model Harris could champion.

Perhaps he is targeting the United States, a country where religious faith runs strong in public and private life (p. 17), and the will to confront a real or imagined threat with military might has not waned. The book has two apparent objectives: First, to encourage wider military intervention against all Islam, an unjustified and almost certainly impossible task smacking of hubris perhaps even the Crusaders would not fathom, and second, to promote the transformation of the United States into a secular humanist society along the lines of the current regimes of western Europe. Before we go that way, we ought to

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11. Adam Hochschild, *The Unquiet Ghost: Russians Remember Stalin* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1994), xviii–xix.

remember Neal A. Maxwell's adage, "In the case of a value-free society, the bottom line is clear—the costs are prohibitive!"<sup>12</sup>

### Origins of Violence

Several of Harris's isolated assertions also need to be answered. For example, can "ordinary people" (p. 31) commit acts of horrible violence? Harris tells us that they cannot, but virtually all the historical and psychological data we have says otherwise. Among the most enlightening and disturbing psychological studies of the last century were the experiments of Stanley Milgram<sup>13</sup> and Philip Zimbardo.<sup>14</sup> Over a ten-year period comprising most of the 1960s, Milgram assigned volunteers to administer potentially lethal electric shocks to other individuals whom they believed to be volunteers but who were in fact actors pretending to experience the shocks. The conditions of the experiment were varied to investigate the role of proximity to the victim, institutional authority, and other variables. To his surprise and dismay, most volunteers were willing to continue administering shocks at ever-increasing voltage over the objections and despite the cries of distress of their supposed victims. Although the percent of volunteers continuing the experiment to the end decreased as the victim was moved into the same room with them, as they were asked to have physical contact with him, and when the experiments were moved away from Yale into an industrial warehouse, a large percentage of the volunteers continued under each of these conditions simply because they were told to do so. Milgram was a careful and ethically sensitive researcher who systematically screened and debriefed his subjects to

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12. Neal A. Maxwell, "The Prohibitive Costs of a Value-free Society," *Ensign*, October 1978, 55. This talk, given to Salt Lake Rotarians, for me remains the definitive answer to the allure of secular humanism.

13. Stanley Milgram, "Some Conditions of Obedience and Disobedience to Authority," *International Journal of Psychiatry* 6 (1968): 259–76.

14. Craig Haney and Philip G. Zimbardo, "Social Roles and Role-playing: Observations from the Stanford Prison Study," in *Current Perspectives in Social Psychology*, ed. Edwin P. Hollander and Raymond G. Hunt (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 266–74. Zimbardo has created a Web site photoessay of the experiment at [www.prisonexp.org](http://www.prisonexp.org) (accessed 6 May 2006).

ensure that none entered the experiment with conspicuous pathology and none came out overtly traumatized. The absolute “ordinariness” of his subjects was among the most striking of his findings.<sup>15</sup>

Zimbardo’s prison experiment at Stanford University in 1971 was designed to simulate the conditions of inmates in penal institutions. Ten student volunteers from a pool of seventy-five were selected at random to act as prison guards for the duration of the two-week experiment conducted in the basement of the Stanford psychology building. The experimental paradigm was that guards and prisoners playing their roles would be able to simulate real-life situations. The experiment had to be terminated on its sixth day, in part because the brutality of several guards had reached intolerable levels. In contrast to Milgram’s experiment, this was not simulated or feigned violence and in all cases the guards and prisoners were in immediate contact with one another. These were college students, unique only in the fact that they were willing to volunteer for an unusual experiment.

From the historical perspective, consider World War I, in which millions of young men placed themselves at risk and took the lives of others out of a sense of duty to their countries, when even the leaders of those nations were not clear themselves on the issues that led to war.<sup>16</sup> Ethnic hatreds were a minor factor compared with nationalistic fervor and the imperialistic ambitions of nations and governments. Mostly, however, it was about leaders without vision allowing events to sweep them along to a disastrous conclusion.<sup>17</sup> Religion was nowhere on the scene.

What motivated the great acts of murder of the twentieth century? Mao Zedong is blamed for the deaths of sixty-five to seventy million of his own people,<sup>18</sup> quite possibly the most destructive regime in

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15. Hannah Arendt popularized the phrase *the banality of evil*, applying it to Adolf Eichmann in particular.

16. Jere Clemens King, *The First World War* (New York: Walker, 1972), xiii–xl.

17. This is the overriding theme of Barbara W. Tuchman, *The Guns of August* (New York: Bantam Books, 1962).

18. The higher estimate is from Jung Chang and Jon Halliday, *Mao: The Unknown Story* (New York: Knopf, 2005), 1. The more conservative number is from Stéphane Courtois et al., *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression*, trans. Jonathan Murphy and Mark Kramer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 4.

world history. He was not motivated by religion or even by political dogma but by pure thirst for power. Dogma was wielded in the service of authoritarianism, not the other way around.

Josef Stalin likewise liquidated twenty million of his own people to ensure continuity of his political power.<sup>19</sup> These people were not sacrificed on the altar of unquestioned assumptions but rather of institutional paranoia,<sup>20</sup> or they simply had the audacity and bad judgment to oppose a corrupt and oppressive political machine.<sup>21</sup>

The Holocaust is more complex but still fails to meet the standard of a religiously motivated action and provides a unique opportunity to elucidate the mentality of mass murders. Although Jews may be identified as a religious group, it was not their religion but their ethnicity that marked them for destruction. It would not have helped a German Jew to convert to Christianity or even to Nazism. Nor was the Nazi agenda religious. It is also debatable whether it was driven by unquestioned dogma or if the dogma was merely used as justification for an act of hatred in the context of a government freed of ethical and institutional constraints. Initially, however, the systematic killings were entirely medical and perversely rational. The first executions, in 1939, were actually euthanasia of newborns with severe birth defects, followed by older children with similar conditions, then the mentally ill.<sup>22</sup> As wounded soldiers returned from the front, the medical establishment was faced with the choice of how best to use limited medical resources. Was it preferable to use a hospital bed to treat an incurable schizophrenic or severely mentally retarded patient while an otherwise healthy young man died of treatable battle wounds? Faced with that choice, physicians began to justify themselves in administering to children lethal doses of barbiturates, which they had dissolved in their tea or sprinkled in their food.<sup>23</sup> They betrayed the various justifications they gave for the

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19. Hochschild, *Unquiet Ghost*, xv–xvi. Courtois et al., *Black Book of Communism*, 4.

20. Hochschild, *Unquiet Ghost*, xvi–xvii.

21. Courtois et al., *Black Book of Communism*, 1–31.

22. Robert J. Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), 51–76.

23. Lifton, *Nazi Doctors*, 55–57.

practice by falsifying the death certificates of the patients,<sup>24</sup> hoping that families of their victims would not notice the sudden epidemic of “pneumonia” cases that was emptying the mental hospitals and allowing them to be converted to trauma units. The slope is indeed slippery, and it was only a short time before the physicians found themselves at the death camps making “selections” of Jews, Gypsies, and the politically inopportune as they were unloaded from boxcars, determining with a quick glance and nod of the head which went to the slave labor barracks and which directly to the gas chambers.<sup>25</sup> A significant portion of the physicians in the SS had no particular loyalty to the Nazi party, never served prison time, and were not closely identified with the death camps, despite their participation in one of history’s most singular acts of cruelty. What was most striking about them was their “ordinariness”; “they were by no means the demonic figures . . . people have often thought them to be.”<sup>26</sup> Despite Harris’s assertion to the contrary, Robert Lifton tells us:

What I have struggled with . . . is the disturbing psychological truth that participation in mass murder need not require emotions as extreme or demonic as would seem appropriate for such a malignant project. Or to put the matter another way, ordinary people can commit demonic acts.<sup>27</sup>

Amateur historian Matthew White has compiled an exhaustive review of the almost unfathomable violence of the twentieth century, which shows no obvious pattern of religious motivation or intolerance.<sup>28</sup> In fact, no particular pattern emerges at all.<sup>29</sup> Political, ethnic, economic, and other factors all seem to be in play.

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24. Lifton, *Nazi Doctors*, 74.

25. Lifton, *Nazi Doctors*, 163–79.

26. Lifton, *Nazi Doctors*, 4–5.

27. Lifton, *Nazi Doctors*, 5.

28. Matthew White, “Source List and Detailed Death Tolls for the Twentieth Century Hemoclysm,” available at [users.erols.com/mwhite28/warstat1.htm](http://users.erols.com/mwhite28/warstat1.htm) (accessed 6 May 2006).

29. Matthew White, “30 Worst Atrocities of the 20th Century,” which is available at [freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/560855/posts](http://freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/560855/posts) (accessed 6 May 2006).

## Drugs, Crime, and Accountability

Further, I object to Harris's support for the legalization of drugs. A significant part of my career has been spent picking up the pieces of lives gone to ruin in the pursuit of happiness by drug use, including alcohol. If we made strictly rational decisions regarding financial allocations and their consequences for public health, we would focus entirely on the effects of alcohol and drug abuse and would disregard the threat of terrorism altogether. Statistically, they are not even on the same order of magnitude. Even in 2001, only 2 percent of all trauma deaths were attributable to terrorism. In other years the numbers are too small to appear in public health statistics. The three leading causes of death below age 45 are accidents, homicide, and suicide.<sup>30</sup> Collectively, they constitute more than 150,000 deaths per year in the United States. Nearly 40 percent of the deaths in all three categories involve intoxication.<sup>31</sup> This is a painfully high price for pleasure. Harris argues that since alcohol is the biggest offender, it makes no sense to ban other intoxicants. On the contrary, alcohol is legal, cheap, and readily available. By what logic are we to conclude that making other drugs more accessible will lead to fewer comparable problems?

Harris's inclusion of drug-induced states as a legitimate form of spiritual experience is misplaced and weakens his arguments. The initial excitement about the mind-expanding ("psychedelic") value of hallucinogens such as LSD, mushrooms, and psilocybin quickly waned in responsible circles. One of my favorite anecdotes from this era is an experience that was shared by one of my early psychiatric mentors. As a young psychiatrist in the 1950s he tried LSD and discovered through this enhancement of his brain's serotonin systems that the entire meaning of life was encoded in Vivaldi's "Four Seasons." Satisfying as this discovery was, he soon became disillusioned with

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30. Arialdi M. Miniño et al., "Deaths: Injuries, 2002," *National Vital Statistics Reports* 54 (31 January 2006): 35.

31. Lawrence A. Greenfield, "Alcohol and Crime" (U.S. Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1998), iii-vii. Available at [www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/ac.pdf](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/ac.pdf) (accessed 2 May 2006).



this path to inner knowledge as his insights evaporated with the return of sobriety.

I have the same feelings about supposed victimless crimes. I have seen few arguments in support of these activities made by anyone who actually knew the individuals involved in prostitution or the production of pornography. These activities are demeaning and destructive to those who participate. Prostitution is highly correlated with addiction, homicide, suicide, and sexually transmitted diseases.<sup>32</sup> Early exposure to pornography is a risk factor for substance abuse and criminal behavior.<sup>33</sup> Society may yet decide that such activities are not crimes, but they cannot be made victimless.

Further, I object to the exculpatory invocation of “bad genes, bad parents, bad ideas, or bad luck” to the exclusion of bad choices in dealing with criminals. Biological, sociological, and psychological reductionism leads nowhere useful—not to a functioning society and not even to the type of rational thought Harris purports to advocate.

### Origins of Ethical Behavior

If religion does not motivate most of us to kill one another, what motivates us to do good? Harris suggests that it is a natural biological instinct, but if so, it is only within the narrow spectrum of immediate family or community that we easily love one another. And even there it can be a challenge. As the circle widens, we experience less intensity of whatever emotion connects us. Acts of kindness, charity, courtesy, and love are acts of maturity and conscience, not responses to biological instincts. Most of us learn those behaviors in the context of religious and social institutions, occasionally flavored with a sprinkling of moral philosophy from the classroom.

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32. Stuart Brody et al., “Psychiatric and Characterological Factors Relevant to Excess Mortality in a Long-term Cohort of Prostitute Women,” *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy* 31 (2005): 97–112.

33. Michele L. Ybarra and Kimberly J. Mitchell, “Exposure to Internet Pornography among Children and Adolescents: A National Survey,” *Cyberpsychology and Behavior* 8 (2005): 473–86.

I likewise found implausible his assertion that knowledge of our mortality should naturally lead us to be kind to one another. I came to the opposite conclusion. If we are all just going to die anyway, why does it matter how we treat each other? Shortly after being expelled from the Soviet Union, where he experienced the full weight of political oppression, Nobel laureate Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn observed in his 1978 Harvard University commencement address,

Yet there is a disaster which is already very much with us. I am referring to the calamity of an autonomous, irreligious humanistic consciousness. It has made man the measure of all things on earth—imperfect man, who is never free of pride, self-interest, envy, vanity, and dozens of other defects. . . . On the way from the Renaissance to our days we have enriched our experience, but we have lost the concept of a Supreme Complete Entity which used to restrain our passions and our irresponsibility.<sup>34</sup>

If we are not accountable to such a being after the end of this life, what will constrain us? Will the values of secular humanism do so?

## Spirituality

The larger questions Harris raises are likewise problematic. Consider what he calls “spirituality” and its relationship to epistemology. Harris argues that spirituality is an exploration of consciousness that cannot teach us anything about the external world. He apparently does not really believe that, however, as he concludes that the loss of a subjective sense of “I” that comes with meditation, chanting, and drugs represents the reality of interpersonal connectedness. I do not agree with either of the extreme views he expressed at different points in the book: First, that we cannot really know anything about the world around us but can only experience our subjective sense of that world and, second, that we can reach a higher truth by systematically

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34. Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, *East and West* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980), 69.

subverting the conscious processes that occupy most of our waking thoughts.

Both our sensory organs' and our brains' capacity to process and respond to their input meaningfully represent the world around us and our place in it. Irrespective of whether they were the product of divine creation, natural selection, or some other process not yet proposed, they would serve no purpose if they were merely fantasies or misrepresentations. Our sensory organs and mental constructs of the objective world are of value specifically because they allow us to interact with the world in consistent and useful ways. In fact, we can know a great deal about the world.

Does the development of "spirituality" teach us anything beyond our everyday world? Spirituality might be a search for transcendent experience, the pursuit of understanding beyond our immediate sensory and intrapsychic surroundings. This endeavor constitutes some part of all major religions, but they differ dramatically in what they seek and how they search for it. One consequence of this diversity of spiritual traditions is the possibility of misunderstanding and disdain for one another, but this does not necessarily mean they are mutually exclusive.

Meditation, for example, is recommended by practitioners of many faiths. Various forms of quiet reflection, self-examination, contemplation, prayer, fasting, journaling, and focused study may all be included under this general heading. The extreme version of it prescribed by some branches of Buddhism purports to lead to experiences consistent with interpersonal transcendence. This degree of consistency among practitioners is intriguing and opens the possibility that some aspect of the experience may produce valid knowledge. The alternative possibility that this exercise in sensory deprivation and forced mental emptiness—states foreign to the native working of the human mind—is largely an artifact must also be considered. There is no obvious reason why our minds would hold but conceal so important a truth about our existence in such an inaccessible crevasse. There is certainly no justification for Harris's contention that this sense of interpersonal transcendence represents a higher reality in which we are not really individuals.

Consider, in contrast, David O. McKay's teachings on spirituality. He was a man of unimpeachable character and widely recognized spiritual depth, who remained consistent in his religious commitments over a remarkably long life. By whatever measure we choose, if there is anyone in modern times to whom we can look for guidance on this topic, he qualifies. He taught the principle of spirituality in a series of talks in general conferences and to the BYU student body beginning in 1936. His definition of spirituality is familiar to Latter-day Saints; the context in which it occurred is less so. One pertinent sample of these teachings is from 1956:

Spirituality, our true aim, is the consciousness of victory over self and of communion with the Infinite. Spirituality impels one to conquer difficulties and acquire more and more strength. To feel one's faculties unfolding and truth expanding the soul is one of life's sublimest experiences. Would that all might so live as to experience that ecstasy!

Being "honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to all men" are attributes which contribute to spirituality, the highest acquisition of the soul. It is the divine in man, the supreme, crowning gift that makes him king of all created things.

The spiritual life is the true life of man. It is what distinguishes him from the beasts of the forests. It lifts him above the physical, yet he is still susceptible to all the natural contributions that life can give him that are needful for his happiness or contributive to his advancement. "Though in the world, not of the world." (See John 8:23.) . . .

Spirituality and morality as taught by the Church of Jesus Christ are firmly anchored in fundamental principles—principles from which the world can never escape even if it would, and the first fundamental is a belief—and among the members of the Church who are truly converted, a knowledge—of the existence of God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ. Children of the Church are taught, at least should be taught, to recognize him and to pray to him as one who can

listen and hear and feel just as an earthly father can listen and hear and feel, and they have absorbed into their very beings, if taught rightly, from their mothers and their fathers, the real testimony that this personal God has spoken in this dispensation.

Inseparable from the acceptance of the existence of God is an attitude of reverence, to which I wish now to call attention most earnestly to the entire Church. The greatest manifestation of spirituality is reverence; indeed, reverence is spirituality. Reverence is profound respect mingled with love. It is a complex emotion made up of mingled feelings of the soul. Carlyle says it is “the highest of human feelings.” I have said elsewhere that if reverence is the highest, then irreverence is the lowest state in which a man can live in the world. Be that as it may, it is nevertheless true that an irreverent man has a crudeness about him that is repellent. He is cynical, often sneering, and always iconoclastic.<sup>35</sup>

I would call attention to several aspects of this passage. David O. McKay concurs that spirituality includes an expansion of consciousness. From that point on, however, he diverges from Harris’s ideas. Spirituality is achieved through a virtuous life, and spirituality and morality cannot be separated. Further, spirituality is tied to a specific understanding of the nature of God and our relationship to him. Belief and knowledge are on a continuum: Belief is adequate and serviceable, and knowledge is desirable and attainable. Spirituality inspires reverence. His characterization of the irreverent provides a most pithy critique of Harris’s book.

### **Faith and Knowledge**

To address Harris’s contention that religion is incapable of teaching us anything about the real world requires an examination of both the nature of knowledge and the basis of religious doctrine. Harris makes a brief reference to the limitations in our capacity to truly know

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35. David O. McKay, in Conference Report, October 1956, 6.

anything. This is true, but not terribly enlightening. That we may call into question the validity of any memory, sensory perception, emotional experience, logical connection, or other mental process is not helpful in discerning what is true. Such arguments are more about intellectual sophistry than sophistication. A more useful approach is to acknowledge the limitations of what we can know without despairing of our capacity to at least experience and understand things at some level. The recognition that there is always room for further understanding should not be taken to invalidate what we now know in part.

Complicating things further is the need for some sort of framework within which to interpret our experience and beliefs about how the world is constructed and functions. This is akin to the “paradigms” described by Thomas Kuhn in reference to the progress of modern science.<sup>36</sup> He argues that one may gather observations at great length without contributing to knowledge until some coherent system is proposed to make the data meaningful. The empirical process of scientific investigation does not consist merely of observations, hypotheses, predictions, and tests. This entire endeavor must occur within a larger belief system about how the world works. Physical science is impossible unless one believes that the world is an orderly place in which natural laws are constant and detectable.

Turning to the topic of religious faith, these two points are crucial: First, we may know only in part and yet have true knowledge. Second, our perception of experience and willingness to act upon it—to test our faith—is dependent on what we believe about how the world works.

Harris contends that religious faith is bankrupt because it is not based on knowledge. He has a point. Some religious traditions long ago abandoned the pursuit of empirical validation in favor of philosophical extrapolation. I found myself sympathetic to Harris’s repeated pleas for evidence, for a more rational theology. He erred, however, in asserting that “every religion preaches the truth of propositions for

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36. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 10–22.

which no evidence is even *conceivable*” (p. 23, emphasis in original). This is a problem of paradigm. If you begin with the understanding of “spirituality” as an exploration of internal experience, then it is impossible to validate any observations of faith in the exterior world.

But what happens if someone sees God? More to the point, what happens when that person tells the rest of us about having seen God?

Most of what we know and believe about the world is based on other people’s experience. Even when we have personal knowledge, most of our understanding is based on paradigms elucidated by others. This is as it must be. To insist that only what we experience ourselves is valid and that we are obliged to find our own unique way to organize it is to invite a life of chaos and futility. On the other hand, we often take some small element from the observations of others and test it in our own lives. If it proves consistent and useful, we incorporate it. If it does not, we reject it.

Harris dismisses belief in the Bible as unjustified because the Bible could not have come directly from the mouth of God. He points out internal contradictions and translational problems. I would add questionable integrity of manuscripts<sup>37</sup> and historical evidence of a politically charged environment within which early Christian manuscripts were selected for canonization.<sup>38</sup> A more realistic view of the Bible is as a compilation of witnesses, of individuals who have something to tell us about their experiences with God—in some cases their direct experience. Harris dismisses stories of the virgin birth, miracles, and the resurrection as preposterous only because his religious paradigm does not include such things. This is a dogmatic, wholesale rejection of evidence in defense of the unprovable proposition that such things could not occur.

John tells us that he saw Jesus Christ risen from the dead (John 20–21), Paul says that several hundred others saw him (1 Corinthians 15:6), and Luke cites “many infallible proofs” that it really happened

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37. Arthur G. Patzia, *The Making of the New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 112–36.

38. For a sympathetic treatment of the conflicts, see Patzia, *Making of the New Testament*, 61–66. For a less idealized view see Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (New York: Knopf, 1993), 2:295–367.

(Acts 1:2–3). What are we to make of this? There are only a few possible options. First, it really happened and the story is basically accurate. Second, they were mistaken and inadvertently wrote something that was not true. Third, they lied and intentionally wrote something untrue. Fourth, their oral accounts were distorted and embellished during innumerable retellings. Fifth, they were psychotic. They lived a long time ago, and it is difficult to reconstruct anything of their lives beyond what is in their writings. Perhaps that is why prophets of ages past are easier to deal with than current ones.

Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon tell us that they saw God the Father, Jesus Christ, angels, Lucifer, heavenly kingdoms, hell, and numerous other things they were not allowed to talk about (D&C 76). There is an extensive record of their lives and a detailed description of their experiences. It is highly unlikely that these were psychotic perceptions: They did not occur in a context of other symptoms typical of psychotic disorders, they were not shallow or chaotic, and they were shared by more than one person. Few writers have concluded that it was all an honest mistake. They wrote firsthand accounts that have not been changed in the retelling. That leaves intentional fraud or true story. Historians, theologians, psychiatrists, and innumerable others have weighed in on this issue without arriving at a consensus.

How are we to know what to believe? Cognitive psychology has studied this process and noted several patterns but offers no mechanism for validation of belief. We believe what we are taught to believe by people important to us, less by their explicit instruction than by the implications of their actions and priorities. We are conservative in changing our beliefs, doing so only when faced with a compelling reason. We seek internal consistency but are capable of compartmentalizing beliefs if they do not fit well together. There is a hierarchy of beliefs with some being given greater weight than others. Finally, when there is a discrepancy between our beliefs and our actions, there is a tendency for one of them to change to resolve the conflict,<sup>39</sup> but it is more often

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39. Simon Draycott and Alan Dabbs, "Cognitive Dissonance I: An Overview of the Literature and Its Integration into Theory and Practice in Clinical Psychology," *British Journal of Clinical Psychology* 37 (1998): 341–53.



the belief that changes. All of this is intended to ensure that our beliefs are accurate, but none of it guarantees that it will be so.

Some trust what their senses tell them—what they see. Others trust their intuition—what they feel. There is a place for both in spiritual learning, but we are usually led first by intuitive knowledge, the sense of recognition we experience when we hear truth. In a wonderfully insightful paper on ethical decision-making in medicine, Edward Hundert suggested that we would do better to stop trying to impose acceptance on ethical decisions reached by intellectual reasoning, but begin instead with our sense of right and wrong and then reflect on what that sense teaches us about our personal values.<sup>40</sup> The implication is that we have such a sense but may learn to ignore it by forced rationality. We have no trouble with flow of information in this direction in other realms, such as falling in love or appreciating a work of art. Only afterward do we rationalize the feeling by struggling to find reasons for it.

An analogous process is at work with things of the Spirit. We hear an eternal principle, and something within us responds with recognition and acceptance. We may subsequently discover the logic of it, but that is not what gives it significance. It is as natural for us to respond to spiritual truths as it is to respond to the love of our families. Authentic spiritual experience not only gives us a sense of transcendence but also opens our minds and teaches us something, not just about ourselves but about the nature of the eternal world. Faith in this context follows knowledge. We first learn a principle, then believe it, then act on it.

But that is just the beginning. We must then observe the consequences of the action. This is the empirical component of faith, not simply to wait for enlightenment, but to act, assess, and adjust. In fact, scriptural teaching is rife with passages that introduce faith as the product of empirical investigation.

And prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts.  
(Malachi 3:10)

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40. Edward M. Hundert, "A Model for Ethical Problem Solving in Medicine, with Practical Applications," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 144 (1987): 839–46.

If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself. (John 7:17)

Awake and arouse your faculties, even to an experiment upon my words. (Alma 32:27)

Try the experiment of its goodness. (Alma 34:4)

These are not invitations to blind but to enlightened faith, informed by experiential knowledge. It is true, however, that the first steps toward this understanding are generally into the darkness. Consider once again the familiar insights of David O. McKay:

I am going to tell you what happened to me as a boy upon the hillside near my home in Huntsville. I was yearning, just as you boys are yearning, to know that the vision given to the Prophet Joseph Smith was true, and that this Church was really founded by revelation, as he claimed. I thought that the only way a person could get to know the truth was by having a revelation or experiencing some miraculous event, just as came to the Prophet Joseph.

One day I was hunting cattle. While climbing a steep hill, I stopped to let my horse rest, and there, once again, an intense desire came over me to receive a manifestation of the truth of the restored gospel. I dismounted, threw my reins over my horse's head, and there, under a serviceberry bush, I prayed that God would declare to me the truth of his revelation to Joseph Smith. I am sure that I prayed fervently and sincerely and with as much faith as a young boy could muster.

At the conclusion of the prayer, I arose from my knees, threw the reins over my faithful pony's head, and got into the saddle. As I started along the trail again, I remember saying to myself: "No spiritual manifestation has come to me. If I am true to myself, I must say I am just the same 'old boy' that I was before I prayed." I prayed again when I crossed Spring Creek, near Huntsville, in the evening to milk our cows.

The Lord did not see fit to give me an answer on that occasion, but in 1899, after I had been appointed president of the Scottish Conference, the spiritual manifestation for which I had prayed as a boy in my teens came as a natural sequence to the performance of duty. For, as the apostle John declared, “If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.” (John 7:17.)

Following a series of meetings at the conference held in Glasgow, Scotland, was a most remarkable priesthood meeting. I remember, as if it were yesterday, the intensity of the inspiration of that occasion. Everybody felt the rich outpouring of the Spirit of the Lord. All present were truly of one heart and one mind. Never before had I experienced such an emotion. It was a manifestation for which as a doubting youth I had secretly prayed most earnestly on hillside and in meadow. It was an assurance to me that sincere prayer is answered sometime, somewhere.<sup>41</sup>

The critical element to the achievement of knowledge of divine things is not limited to studied meditation or prayer but “the performance of duty” to which these manifestations follow as a “natural sequence.” This is the true nature of faith—willingness to act in anticipation of full knowledge, followed by confirmational experience.

These experiences are humbling, not compatible with the dogmatic rage described by Harris in reference to a handful and ascribed by him to many. The fact is that few of us are killing each other and those who do have lost touch with the personal transformative power of faith and have fallen into the baser experience of cultural identification and fanatic advocacy. As Gibbon wryly noted of the Christians of the fifth century:

After the extinction of paganism, the Christians in peace and piety might have enjoyed their solitary triumph. But the principle of discord was alive in their bosom, and they were more

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41. David O. McKay, in Conference Report, October 1968, 85–86.

solicitous to explore the nature, than to practise the laws, of their founder.<sup>42</sup>

Perhaps this is the essence of fanaticism, identification with a doctrine to the exclusion of its practice. That such may occur among the religious is a sad fact but not a sufficient cause to abandon all faith. As Huston Smith noted:

Probably as much bad music as good has been composed in the course of human history, but we do not expect courses in music appreciation to give it equal attention. Time being at a premium, we assume that they will attend to the best. I have adopted a similar strategy with respect to religion.<sup>43</sup>

Harris, and all of us, would do well to do the same.

## Conclusion

Harris has thrown down a challenge to all who champion faith as a source of understanding, basis for moral behavior, and companion to knowledge. His book carries energy and zeal, but little in the way of a coherent critique of the broad spectrum of religious faith. It was particularly disappointing in its unfulfilled promise of a neuroscientific perspective on religious belief, acquisition of knowledge, and behavioral motivation. The book's primary appeal will be to those who have not experienced the transformative power of religious conversion and look disdainfully on those who have. Despite its failings, however, the book does offer one interesting challenge for those whose experience with religion has been more constructive, by posing the question of how and what we know. Beyond that, the book was more chaff than wheat. Like John Lennon, Harris would have us imagine an ideal world without faith. I would really rather not.

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42. Gibbon, *Decline and Fall*, 5:3.

43. Huston Smith, *The World's Religions: Our Great Wisdom Traditions* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 4.

# THE GOSPEL AND THE CAPTIVE WOMAN

Ted Vaggalis

And when thou goest forth to war against thine enemies, and the Lord thy God hath delivered them into thine hands, and thou hast taken them captive, And seest among the captives a beautiful woman, and hast a desire unto her, that thou wouldest have her to thy wife; Then thou shalt bring her home to thine house; and she shall shave her head, and pare her nails; And she shall put the raiment of her captivity from off her, and shall remain in thine house, and bewail her father and her mother a full month: and after that thou shalt go in unto her, and be her husband, and she shall be thy wife. And it shall be, if thou have no delight in her, then thou shalt let her go whither she will; but thou shalt not sell her at all for money, thou shalt not make merchandise of her, because thou hast humbled her. (Deuteronomy 21:10–14 KJV)<sup>1</sup>

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1. This scripture and its interpretation, along with the title for this review, was taken from a sermon by Harvard political scientist Harvey C. Mansfield entitled “The Captive

Review of Sterling M. McMurrin. *The Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion*, with a biographical introduction by L. Jackson Newell and a glossary of terms by Trudy McMurrin. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2000. xxiii + [iii–xii] + 151 + 31 pp. (book is not paginated sequentially). \$14.95.

Gradually it has become clear to me what every great philosophy so far has been: namely, the personal confession of its author and a kind of involuntary and unconscious memoir; also that the moral (or immoral) intentions in every philosophy constituted the real germ of life from which the whole plant had grown.<sup>2</sup>

What provokes one to look at all philosophers half suspiciously, half mockingly, is not that one discovers again and again how innocent they are—how often and how easily they make mistakes and go astray; in short, their childishness and childlikeness—but that they are not honest enough in their work, although they all make a lot of virtuous noise when the problem of truthfulness is touched even remotely.<sup>3</sup>

When the editors of the *FARMS Review* asked me to comment on Sterling McMurrin's *Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion*, it took me back to my initial encounter with the essays in this volume. I first read McMurrin's essays on the philosophical and theological foundations of Mormonism over twenty-five years ago when I was an undergraduate at Brigham Young University.<sup>4</sup> At the time I was beginning to take an interest in philosophy, leaving behind my law school ambitions, much to the dismay of family and friends. To further my philosophical interests I wanted to read anything that would broaden my understanding of the history of the Western intellectual tradition. In addition, I was also curious about how my faith was connected to this larger tradition. It was my belief then, and is now, that Mormonism was not to be understood as just an extension of this tradition but that it also offered a unique lens through which to view the meaning and significance of this tradition. It was while in

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Woman," *Claremont Review of Books* 4/3 (2004): 65, available at [www.claremont.org/writings/crb/summer2004\\_toc.html](http://www.claremont.org/writings/crb/summer2004_toc.html) (accessed 4 May 2006).

2. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, trans. and ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York City, NY: Modern Library, 1968), 202.

3. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 203.

4. *Theological Foundations* was originally published in Salt Lake City at the University of Utah Press in 1965.

the grip of this mood that I was first directed to McMurrin's essays on Mormon theology.

While McMurrin's essays were difficult to wade through for a beginner, they were not without rewards. They were rich in detail about various philosophical and theological schools of thought, and McMurrin offered interesting accounts about the parallels and disagreements between these facets of the Western tradition and Mormonism. In addition, the essays also situated Mormonism within the politics of the nineteenth-century American cultural debate, arguing that it was not only born of the tensions of this debate, but that this debate had an ongoing influence in determining the development of Mormonism as a religious movement.

However, as I read these essays, I could not shake the thought that McMurrin had also missed something important about Mormonism. What was central to McMurrin's account of Mormonism was that it represented a progress toward the ideals of the Enlightenment as one finds them in Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) or Marquis de Condorcet (1743–94)—that is, in the triumph of reason over superstition and prejudice in the service of liberal democratic ideals. McMurrin sees Mormonism in strictly political terms, theology being one of the vehicles through which political ideals are realized. Mormonism represents a step beyond the antiliberal ideals of traditional Protestant and Catholic theology—that is, it includes a rejection of original sin, Greek metaphysics, salvation by grace, and so forth, toward a more humanistic conception of God and man that can be made consistent with liberal politics (TF, p. 37).<sup>5</sup> But the parallels that he argues for in these lectures, while interesting, failed to account for the claims of Mormonism to stand apart from the Western intellectual tradition in some fundamental and important ways. By looking at Mormonism through a twentieth-century philosophical lens, he had ignored the

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5. Throughout this review parenthetical references are to the two essays contained in McMurrin's volume. TF refers to the essay, "The Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion," 1–151. PF refers to the essay, "The Philosophical Foundations of Mormon Theology," 1–31. The pagination of the second essay begins anew after the first essay. A citation to the "foreword" refers, of course, to McMurrin's foreword to the two essays (pp. [ix–x]).

richness of the historical context within which Mormonism entered the world, a context in which Mormonism was not simply a passive recipient of whatever intellectual influences were impressed on it. Joseph Smith's claim that the heavens were once again open, that God spoke to his children once again through prophets, set it at odds with the prevailing epistemological, metaphysical, scientific, and even moral views of the world.

For this reason, I believed that McMurrin failed to appreciate the way in which Mormonism, even today, challenges the certainty of our contemporary secular self-understanding and the narrative forms that such certainty takes. In order to see that, he would have had to take seriously the historical context that he bracketed out in his essays, a context that stretches back beyond even the primitive Christian church. One other aspect of these lectures struck me as odd at that time. I noticed then that McMurrin did not speak much of the Book of Mormon and its role in Mormonism, with its challenges to the reigning philosophical and theological schools of the time. Now, after nearly twenty-five years, I think that I understand these essays better, both in terms of appreciating their richness of detail and also in terms of what they failed to capture about Mormonism and the challenges that it offers those who take philosophical and theological questions seriously. In what follows I will examine McMurrin's account of Mormon theology and set out what I see as the limits of his approach. At the same time, I hope to raise some concerns about both the possibility and the desirability of a Mormon theology.

In order to provide a presumably objective basis for his analysis of what he thinks of as "Mormon theology," McMurrin begins with an investigation of the metaphysical principles and concepts presupposed in the foundations of Mormonism (PF, p. 6). Beginning in this fashion has two advantages. First, McMurrin assumes that while it is true that Mormonism has its origins in a concrete historical context, only by seeing its underlying principles and concepts detached from that context is it possible to understand the meaning and significance of Mormonism, especially if we are to understand its connections to the larger Western intellectual tradition. Then, an analysis of those



underlying principles and concepts will allow us some way to set limits to and provide directions for our understanding of Mormonism. That is, we can avoid arbitrary and loose interpretations of Mormonism by defining the terms that give meaning to it. McMurrin grants that

Mormon theology developed for the most part within concrete historical contexts and was not derived from the metaphysics. And yet although it is not chronologically prior, the metaphysics by its very nature has a kind of logical priority over the theology. For although the theological doctrines are not necessarily deducible from the metaphysical principles, the metaphysics once defined sets the limits for and in a sense indicates the direction of theological development, for the strong intellectualistic tendencies of Mormonism guarantee a continuing effort to rationalize the theology on philosophical foundations. (PF, p. 6)

McMurrin initially connects Mormonism to the Western tradition by noting that it shares much in common with the naturalistic tendencies of ancient Greek thought (TF, p. 2). According to McMurrin, Greek naturalism is the view that not everything that exists is the product of divine creation. While the gods may have created this and that, the order of existence is independent of the gods (TF, p. 2). The Greeks, then, deny the existence of what we now call the “supernatural” as it is understood in traditional monotheistic religious traditions. Mormonism also denies that the order of existence is fully dependent on God. While God did create this world, this creation was done by organizing the elements that already existed. This is an important point, according to McMurrin, for it means that Mormonism denies an essential distinction in the Western tradition, the distinction between the *supernatural* and the *natural*. As evidence of this, McMurrin notes that Mormon writers tend to discuss miracles not as a suspension of what are now thought to be natural, physical laws by a supernatural being, but as natural events fully consonant with physical laws. They appear miraculous because of our limited knowledge of these physical laws (TF, p. 2). Thus, an investigation of

the metaphysical foundations of Mormonism brings out something truly progressive in Mormonism, the reduction of the supernatural to the natural, or at least a blurring of this distinction.

On the basis of this reduction, McMurrin then argues that the elimination of the supernatural leads to a denial of the distinction between necessary and contingent beings (TF, p. 3). Philosophers distinguish necessary beings from contingent beings in that the existence of the latter is dependent on the former. For contingent beings, it is possible that one can think of them as not existing. For example, an existent person, tree, or any material object could be imagined to not exist. However, in order to explain why there is something rather than nothing, some metaphysicians, among them some Christian thinkers, have argued that there must be some being whose existence is necessary. In other words, it is not possible to explain anything unless there are those beings that cannot not exist (TF, pp. 3–4). For this reason, traditional Christian theology has distinguished God from human beings in terms of the fact that the existence of God must be understood as necessary if there is to be an answer to the question about existence—that is, why anything exists. Human beings are understood to be contingent, because their existence is dependent on God.

McMurrin notes that Mormonism offers an interesting twist to this traditional problem. One would think that if there is no realm above that of the natural realm of beings, if the order of existence does not depend on God but in fact includes God, then there is no need for any being whose existence is necessary. Both the divine and the human would be on even footing, ontologically speaking. Both would be contingent beings. Mormonism, however, does away with the notion that human beings are contingent. Both God and human beings are viewed as necessary because no one else is responsible for their being. Human beings, in one form or another, have coexisted throughout eternity with God.

But to return to the idea that the world is not created in the ultimate sense, the Mormon scripture *The Doctrine and Covenants* states the matter succinctly, “The elements are eternal. . . .” This is taken by Mormon writers to mean that the

basic constituents of which the world is composed are without beginning and without end and are therefore uncreated. More than that, Joseph Smith elsewhere advanced the idea that also among the uncreated, beginningless, and endless entities are human souls or spirits, which he referred to as minds or intelligences. It was clearly his view, and one accepted in the Mormon Church, that whatever is ultimate and essential in the human soul is self-existent. (TF, p. 3)

For McMurrin, Mormonism then is set apart from traditional Christianity in its denial of a vast separation between God and human beings. Mormonism “is a naturalistic, humanistic theism” (TF, p. 3).

Having established these points, McMurrin then goes on to argue a most important claim, that Mormonism endorses a pluralistic and materialistic metaphysical conception of the world. For those who engage in what they call metaphysical speculation, one of the most important questions has to do with the nature of reality. Is it composed essentially of one substance or many substances (TF, p. 8)? Traditional Christian theology has usually answered this question in terms of a dualism of substances. There is the simple, absolute, infinite substance, God, which has made all things possible through a creative act. Finite or contingent substance is dependent upon God for its existence or reality. The emphasis on the necessary nature of the divine substance means that the dualism embraced by traditional Christianity is a weak pluralism (TF, p. 9). Mormonism, however, embraces a more robust pluralism. This means that reality at various levels is pluralistic, whether one is speaking about God, the relationship between divine and human beings, or the nature of a person’s spirit or soul (TF, pp. 8–9). For example, traditional Christianity views the Godhead as both one in substance or essence and three in person; this is the notion of the Trinity common to Catholicism and Protestantism. Mormonism, though, views the Godhead as three separate persons, two of whom are physical beings (PF, p. 8). But what is most important for McMurrin is the fact that Mormonism’s commitment to metaphysical pluralism endows individual human beings with a central status, which in turn provides human beings with a sense of dignity.

A more interesting pluralistic element of Mormon thought is the belief that the individuality of a human person is guaranteed by the fact that the “intelligence” which constitutes his essential nature is an uncreated and underived and therefore an ultimate constituent of the universe. On the Mormon view the world is a composite of particular persons, things, and events, and these can in no way be interpreted simply as aspects, facets, or expressions of one all-inclusive solitary reality. For the Mormons, individuality is a given and guaranteed fact of the structure of being and the universe is a pliverse. This is not to say that it is necessarily a disordered collection, or that the persons, events, and things that compose it are not importantly and perhaps even organically related to one another. It is to say rather that the relations that obtain among the entities that compose the world are external to those entities, that the being of particular objects or events is autonomous. The mystery of existence attaches to the individual taken in and of itself, for its being is in its uniqueness as an individual, and not in its function in a system or in its expressiveness of a larger whole. (PF, pp. 8–9)

It is important to note at this point, however, that McMurrin qualifies this pluralism because he believes that Mormonism also endorses what he calls a materialistic view of the universe. This means that there is a sense in which there is a monism of sorts. Everything in existence, including God and human beings, is material. But in elevating human beings to the status of necessary beings, their being is determined by their individuality. Thus, Mormonism embraces the nominalist views that are characteristic of modern thought. This last point cannot be emphasized too strongly, for it is what allows McMurrin to refer to Mormonism as part of the modern world in terms of its basic concepts and outlook.

It is not possible, therefore, to describe for Mormonism the relation of the ways of knowing to the nature of reality with anything like an explicit thesis. But it is possible to say that

Mormonism in its philosophical inclinations participates strongly in the empirical attitudes that are characteristic of recent and contemporary thought. It acknowledges the claims of scientific method—a combination of empiricism and qualified rationalism—and it even exhibits sensory empirical leanings in its references to revelation. It can at least be said that a common-sense empiricism seems to be not unrelated to the explicit pluralism of Mormon metaphysics. (TF, p. 11)

Now I want to further consider in what sense Mormonism can be said to hold a materialist view of reality. This is, again, a rather surprising twist because materialist metaphysical theories traditionally deny the existence of God and the soul—they tend to reduce everything to matter in motion. The reason for this atheism is found in the mechanistic interpretation of matter and the determinism that results from this conception of matter (TF, p. 44). According to this view, cause and effect can only be understood in naturalistic terms. In addition, if something cannot be experienced through the senses, then there is nothing regarding it to be known or explained. There can be no cause or explanation of something without being able to empirically verify it. Material effects must have material causes. Because God is not material and cannot be known empirically, at least according to traditional theology, God cannot cause anything in the world or be explained by the effects of any of his actions in the world. This mechanistic interpretation of nature made possible a unified conception of the sciences in the nineteenth century that linked together the physical and biological sciences and held out the promise of eventually subsuming the social sciences (TF, p. 44).

The materialism that Mormonism embraces is radically at odds with the mechanistic interpretation of the sciences. This is because Mormon writers have resisted the mechanistic and deterministic implications of materialism by advancing views that are Newtonian, but that are also panpsychistic (TF, p. 45). McMurrin offers the writings of Orson Pratt as the best example of this Mormon materialism. Pratt held that “reality is material and atomistic,” but also that atoms possess “powers of intelligent action and self-direction.”

These atoms “constitute an intercommunicating community” that freely follows the dictates of the divine will. This might sound a bit far-fetched, but McMurrin sees in this crude theory of Pratt’s an anticipation of Heisenberg’s principle of uncertainty (TF, p. 45). The point is that Mormonism’s embrace of materialism anticipated the twentieth-century views of indeterminacy as found in relativity physics and quantum mechanics (TF, p. 46). Thus, there is no necessity to link materialism to a mechanistic and deterministic interpretation of nature. “Granted that Mormon orthodoxy demands a materialistic metaphysics, there is certainly nothing about it that necessitates allegiance to a scientifically obsolete approach to the nature of matter and the structure of the natural universe” (TF, p. 46).

It is important to note a tension here in McMurrin’s claim that Mormonism embraces both pluralism and materialism. For if reality is fundamentally composed of matter and only matter (however this is understood), then we have a monistic view of the nature of things and not a pluralistic one. The resolution to this conflict is found in the metaphysical doctrine of nominalism. In its descriptions of the world, Mormonism has always emphasized the concrete and the particular (TF, p. 40). It holds that only what is physical and concrete is real (TF, p. 41). One can see this in the Mormon doctrine of God, with its denial of the traditional doctrine of the Trinity in favor of the view that the Godhead is found in three distinct beings, two of whom are embodied.

The Mormon doctrine is tritheistic, asserting the ontological independence of the three divine persons, a doctrine traditionally declared heretical. This anti-trinitarian position is consistent with the nominalistic position that only particular objects and events have reality. It is sometimes found associated with nominalism in the history of Christian philosophy because a nominalistic metaphysics necessarily denies the possibility of a universal substance over and above the particularity of the three members of the Godhead. The term “God” is not commonly used in Mormon discourse as a synonym for “Godhead,” for in Mormon terminology the latter designates

no subsistent entity but rather is a collective name for referring to the three divine persons taken as a unity, where the ground of that unity is not a relation internal to their being that dissolves their ontological independence but is rather an external relationship involving total agreement in will and purpose. (TF, pp. 41–42)

On the basis of the commitment to such notions as pluralism, materialism, and nominalism, it is clear why Mormonism is considered by its critics to be a radical break with traditional Christian theology or what is now called classical theism. Where this traditional theology sees God as separate from his creation, Mormonism places God squarely within it. The consequences of this view are far reaching. For if God is not “wholly other,” then he is not absolute and infinite. According to McMurrin, the pluralistic nature of Mormon theology means that God is “a being who is conditioned by and related to the world of which he is a part and which, because it is not ultimately his creation, is not absolutely under his dominion” (TF, p. 29).

But where traditional Christian theology would see heresy, McMurrin sees a significant stage in the history of religious thought. If religion is the “progressive attempt” to explain the divine, then it must do so in terms of the concepts and ideas of the world in which it lives. In other words, religion is a reflection of the time in which it lives. Mormonism reflects its time and place by drawing on both its Enlightenment and American heritages to supply it with its ideas and concepts. From the Enlightenment, Mormonism has received its materialistic, pluralistic, and finite view of God and the universe, a view tempered by the sciences themselves. From its American heritage Mormonism has embraced the idea of moral agency and hence stresses moral responsibility. Thus, McMurrin refers to Mormonism as “a modern Pelagianism in a Puritan religion” (foreword, p. [x]). To see the full implications of this, one must turn to McMurrin’s discussion of the problem of evil.

The idea that God is not simple, absolute, and infinite has implications for the problem of evil. The problem of evil has long haunted the religious believer. It is an intractable problem for any theology that

considers God absolute and infinite, for it is impossible on that supposition to escape the conclusion that in some way God is responsible for evil. However, this turns out to be a particular strength of Mormon theology. “Here the concept of the free will of the uncreated self joins the non-absolutistic conception of the divine power to absolve God of any complicity in the world’s moral evil, the evil that is done by men. And the uncreated impersonal environment of God provides the explanation of natural evil, the evils of the world that are not the product of an evil personal will” (TF, p. 91).

Traditional Christian theology has found itself reduced to taking one of two positions on the problem of evil. The first position is found in St. Augustine’s writings, where he argues that evil is the privation of good and has no reality (TF, p. 91). This idea, which also influenced Aquinas and other Catholic theologians, had the virtue that evil could not be identified as a thing that God created. In fact, evil was nothing at all. This view was then set against the Manichean heresy that argued for two basic forces, one good and one evil, that were locked in battle with each other. The other view emerged with the rise of Protestantism, where evil was seen as something actual that had its origin in the depravity that followed from original sin (TF, p. 93). A problem with this view is that natural evil is then viewed as in some sense a consequence of human actions. God punishes people for the actions of an individual. Those who have thought through these issues have found these answers to the problem of evil unsatisfactory, as well they should.

McMurrin argues that Mormonism’s view of evil is derived from the rise of naturalistic philosophy in the Enlightenment. The skepticism that was part of this philosophical movement proved too much for the literalism of religious orthodoxy. Enlightenment philosophy forced on religion the need to account for evil in the light of moral freedom. America in the nineteenth century proved to be the place where a coherent account of moral evil could be set forth. Mormonism, for McMurrin, is the fruit of that development (TF, p. 56). It sees moral evil as the result of the moral decisions that individuals make when they exercise their moral agency (TF, p. 96). Natural evil is a



consequence of the neutrality of the material world (TF, p. 96). While Mormonism cannot explain why these natural evils occur, it is clear that they are not necessarily the result of punishment for exercising our free will, or moral agency.

It is obvious that its pluralistic metaphysics and resulting non-absolutistic theology offer Mormon philosophy a most attractive framework for the discussion of the problem of evil, the most persistent of all questions attending a theistic world view. A Mormon theodicy can describe the uncreated elementary character of the material universe as the occasion for natural evil, and can further vindicate God by assigning the responsibility for moral evil to the freedom of the will possessed as an essential property by the uncreated and underived spirits that are a “given” in the original structure of the universe. (PF, p. 15)

In addition to the problem of evil, McMurrin applies this interpretation to the atonement of Christ. As in other areas of theology, Mormonism rejects the traditional Christian views in favor of what he calls a liberal interpretation that emphasizes how Christ’s passion moves human beings towards a consciousness of their sinfulness, leading to repentance (TF, p. 89). This view had its beginnings in the writings of Abelard. But it was not able to flower until nineteenth-century America in the teachings of Mormonism. What McMurrin finds important here is the fact that salvation is somehow earned or merited. The atonement makes it possible for individuals to work out their salvation and return to the presence of God (TF, p. 90). This means that the significance of the atonement is that it allows for moral agency and places responsibility squarely upon the individual for her or his salvation. It further underscores the emphasis that McMurrin places on the influence of nineteenth-century American liberalism in shaping Mormonism.

The Mormon conception of the nature and predicament of man is rooted in more than the pluralistic metaphysics that logically supports Mormon liberalism. It is in part the

product of the nineteenth-century spirit of enlightenment and the commitment to the expansive possibilities of human freedom that have generally characterized American thought and attitude. (TF, p. 56)

For McMurrin the Mormon idea of a God that is finite and non-absolutistic marks a significant moment in the history of Christian theology. (One wonders whether this is an absolute moment.) He views this history as “a progressive attempt” to explain God and his significance (TF, p. 37). Throughout this history, religion has had to use the prevailing metaphysical concepts available to it. In antiquity Christian writers used “the static, timeless, ultimate *being* of Greek metaphysics” (TF, p. 37). With Mormonism, though, there is no such commitment to the traditional metaphysical categories. Its world is that of the rise and progress of the natural sciences and the naturalism characteristic of nineteenth-century American thought. This in turn brings out the liberalism inherent in Christianity. Mormonism, then, by acknowledging the claims of science and the connections to the natural world, embraces a common-sense empiricism (TF, p. 11).

This common-sense empiricism is also reflected in the process of revelation that Mormons accept as authoritative. According to McMurrin, “the primary task of theology is the reconciliation of the revelation to the culture, to make what was taken on faith as the word of God meaningful in the light of accepted science and philosophy” (TF, p. 110). Thus, Mormon theology must take up the task of showing how Joseph Smith and his revelations are part of the larger American story. This narrative focuses on the importance and dignity of the individual; it is a story about the value and importance of a certain liberal temper that has marked America from its colonial beginnings down to our day, featuring the Puritans and their struggle for religious freedom, the Declaration of Independence and the American Revolution, the adoption of the Constitution, the Civil War and the abolition of slavery, women’s suffrage, and the Civil Rights era. The American story, in its turn, is part of a larger story about how the idea of freedom and the universal extension of human rights is the meaning of history. It is through an examination of the logical and ontologi-

cal commitments of Mormonism that one can see its liberal temper and how Joseph Smith's accomplishments fit this larger human story.

One cannot help but be impressed with the scope and extent of McMurrin's account of both the Western theological-philosophical tradition and Mormon theology. Perhaps most impressive is how he fits Mormonism into the Western tradition and is able to characterize its basic features as innovations within that tradition. But one is wise to be suspicious of the ease with which McMurrin does this because the Western tradition is deep and full of surprising undercurrents and contradictions. It does not take much to pull one away from the safety of the shore and its familiar landmarks. This being the case, one should beware that there is always a cost to such comparisons. I want to turn now to what I regard as the limits of this analysis and how far away it takes McMurrin from Mormonism. For while I am personally in agreement with his characterization of Mormonism as liberal in its temper, I believe that his conception of liberalism is anachronistic. More important, I think that situating Mormonism within the Western intellectual tradition, especially nineteenth-century liberal American thought, wrenches it out of the historical context that brought it into the world. When one reflects on these two aspects of accounting for Mormonism, McMurrin's analysis turns out to be arbitrary in the sense that it reveals more about McMurrin's own politics and preferences than it does about Mormonism. Thus, it fails to provide an honest characterization of Mormonism as a religion.

The most obvious example of where McMurrin has lost sight of the shore is his characterization of Mormonism as some form of naturalism—either ancient Greek or modern naturalism. According to naturalism in general, the order of existence is independent of the divine. As I noted earlier, this view led McMurrin to see in Mormonism a naturalism that elevates human beings and brings them on par with the divine. In addition to this, it led McMurrin to claim that Mormonism is “a kind of naturalistic, humanistic theism” (TF, p. 3). This claim that Mormonism is naturalistic in its outlook is important for McMurrin's account in two senses. First, it means that Mormonism denies the distinction between the natural and supernatural (TF, p. 2). In denying

the supernatural, as understood in classical theism, Mormonism is a nonabsolutistic religion. This means that God is not independent of the creation and is conditioned by the environment or world of which he is a part (TF, p. 29). On the one hand, this means that God is not some abstract entity, such as being itself or a Platonic idea. Instead, God is seen as *a* being among other beings, in some ways finite and limited like these other beings. The other sense in which this denial of the supernatural is important for McMurrin emerges because it means that Mormonism has a commitment to concreteness that also ties its materialism to the idea of verification in the sciences (TF, pp. 40–41). McMurrin is aware that the materialism embraced by Mormonism is not like the materialism of Newtonian physics or Darwinian biology, with its mechanistic outlook (TF, pp. 44–45). But he suggests that it is possible to engage in a serious discussion of scientific principles that would confirm the Mormon conception of materialism (TF, p. 46). The reason McMurrin makes these claims is that it must be possible for Mormon intellectuals to be able to reconcile their faith with the sciences or to revise them as the situation dictates.

So Mormon theological writing and sermonizing are more often than not replete with the vocabulary of absolutism. But, like it or not, the Mormon theologian must sooner or later return to the finitistic conception of God upon which his technical theology and his theological myths are founded. Here Mormonism reveals the radical nature of its heresy and its tendency toward the kind of common-sense liberalism that so deeply affected the nineteenth-century English-speaking world. (TF, p. 35)

But McMurrin is mistaken to see in Mormonism anything at all like a commitment to naturalistic philosophy, such as either the ancient Greeks or the moderns conceive it. For that form of naturalism, like its modern version, meant that knowledge is available to humans as such and that they were not dependent on God for that knowledge. It is characteristic of philosophy, from antiquity onwards, to hold that philosophy (or science) is the one thing needful for the

good life. The restored gospel, however, has always maintained that such a view leads human beings to disaster because it promises what it cannot deliver, a full and comprehensive view of the whole of things, such that humans can master this whole and solve all their own problems without divine assistance. There are at least some problems that lie beyond the capacity of philosophy or science to comprehend, one of them being whether God exists or not. Such problems, lying beyond reason, provide the believer with good reasons for doubting the capacity of unaided reason to comprehend the whole of things. These considerations are the grounds for turning to revelation and the prophets.

One very surprising and noticeable omission in McMurrin's essays on Mormon theology is that there is no sustained discussion of the Book of Mormon or even the foundational events of the restoration of the church. While the Book of Mormon is mentioned here and there, it is never seriously considered in its own right. Now part of this is because McMurrin himself has publicly admitted that he did not take the book seriously and that he had not even read it carefully. Why? Simply put, angels do not bring books written on gold plates. But it is certainly a mistake in a book on Mormon theology not to take into account the meaning and significance of this volume, even if one such as McMurrin does not take it for what it claims to be. One reason for not treating it in his essays is that it challenges his claim that Mormonism is a product of its time and culture. It is necessary to raise and answer this challenge to see why we should take McMurrin's interpretation of Mormonism seriously. Without a serious treatment of the Book of Mormon, these essays cannot provide a complete account of Mormonism as a theology.

Nowhere is the contrast between the gospel and naturalism clearer than in the Book of Mormon. Throughout its pages we are reminded of the centrality of this conflict between unaided human reason and revelation. King Benjamin, in his sermon, refers to the natural man as an enemy of God (Mosiah 3:19). Here the natural man does not refer to some Calvinistic conception of human beings as totally depraved. Rather it refers to that state in which human beings live without God,

depending on their own wisdom to deliver them from their troubles. Nephi tells us that human beings turn away from God “when they think they are wise,” rejecting his commandments and counsels. They think they know better (2 Nephi 9:28). He also reminds us that we are cursed when we trust in the arm of flesh. Our safety and salvation lies in the precepts and commandments revealed to us through the Holy Ghost (2 Nephi 28:30–31).

This conflict is given dramatic form in the confrontation between Alma and Korihor in Alma 30. Korihor appears among the Nephites and teaches them to trust in their own wisdom. He regards the idea of Christ and the atonement for sin as a vain hope, used by society to keep people in their place (Alma 30:12–16). He tells the people that “every man fared in this life according to the management of the creature; therefore every man prospered according to his genius, and that every man conquered according to his strength; and whatsoever a man did was no crime” (Alma 30:17). Korihor is eventually exposed by Alma as a fraud and stricken for his disobedience (Alma 30:50–60). In my opinion, Mormon includes this episode for us to see that the naturalism of Korihor lacks any ability to reach beyond the senses and find what is truly good. Because it lacks any ability to see beyond the human, one finds that there is a desolation and hopelessness that underlies the naturalism advocated by Korihor.

In the chapters following the confrontation with Korihor, we find Alma giving us his sermon on faith (see Alma 32). There Alma describes faith not as a perfect knowledge but as a thirsting after knowledge that causes us to experiment and try out the promises made to us by God. In doing this we find that our faculties are aroused and our understanding enlightened and that our faith has grown (Alma 32:26–28). Nourishing the word of God in our hearts, living the commandments, and hearkening to the precepts revealed by the Holy Ghost provide us with that which is most precious and sweet, the hope of everlasting life (Alma 30:41–42). We are thus drawn to a realization of something higher than ourselves, a possibility of living that cannot be understood within the distinction between the natural or supernatural. The Book of Mormon continuously presents this contrast between naturalism

and the gospel in order to help us see what the fundamental choices are—to choose to trust in our own wisdom or to rely on the word of God. There is no question that its chapters are structured in order to impress upon us the choice we must make in order to live.

At this point I would like to note that I agree with McMurrin that it is desirable to eliminate the distinction between the natural and the supernatural. In doing this, I think we must see that a better contrast is that between reason and revelation or between the mantic and the philosophic, to borrow an idea from Hugh Nibley.<sup>6</sup> But McMurrin does not really eliminate the natural/supernatural distinction. He merely reduces both to the natural. For him it is to place God and human beings on a more equal footing, to show the kinship between the two. However, he goes beyond this to deny miracles. Having eliminated the supernatural, miracles are now understood to be events that are entirely consistent with natural physical laws. We cannot understand them because of deficiencies in our knowledge (TF, p. 2). But ultimately they can be explained according to the laws of nature. McMurrin appears to be on solid ground here, for there are a lot of Mormon writers, including Bruce R. McConkie, who would agree with this point.

I have always been perplexed that Latter-day Saints have embraced this view and never questioned it. In particular, the Saints seem not to notice that it is at odds with the teachings of the prophets in the Book of Mormon. Moroni reminds us that the record of the Nephites will come forth at a time when miracles will be denied (Mormon 8:26). If we reflect on the meaning of this passage, it surely means that we live in an age when we no longer understand miracles and the miraculous. But given the fact that the Book of Mormon has emphasized the conflict between reason and revelation, we should not be surprised at the fact that our day is characterized by a desire to explain away miracles and see them merely as explainable interventions in nature. There can be no doubt that science, technology, and the increasing rationalization of the world has dominated our world so thoroughly

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6. See Hugh Nibley, "Three Shrines: Mantic, Sophic, and Sophistic," in *The Ancient State* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 311–79.

that we cannot see its reach anymore. Both science and religion desire to explain in a systematic and total way the world that we live in, including God and his relationship to his creation. In fact, the idea of a theology is to explain religion as a system of belief in order to make it scientifically comprehensible. The coming forth of the Book of Mormon, though, is to remind us that miracles are given to lead us to Christ and repentance. Only if the miraculous is possible will we be able to find our way back to God. I do not know whether miracles are consistent with the laws of nature or not. That should not be the point. Again I return to the idea of faith as we find it in the Book of Mormon, this time in the words of Moroni:

And now I come to that faith, of which I said that I would speak; and I will tell you the way whereby ye may lay hold of every good thing. For behold, God knowing all things, being from everlasting to everlasting, behold he sent angels to minister unto the children of men, to make manifest concerning the coming of Christ; and in Christ there should come every good thing. And God also declared unto prophets, by his own mouth, that Christ should come. And behold, there were divers ways that he did manifest things unto the children of men, which were good; and all things which are good cometh of Christ; otherwise men were fallen and there could no good thing come unto them. Wherefore, by the ministering of angels, and by every word which proceeded forth out of the mouth of God, men began to exercise faith in Christ; and thus by faith, they did lay hold upon every good thing. (Moroni 7:21–25)

Moroni goes on to say that miracles have not ceased. Returning to Alma's conception of faith, he says that miracles are necessary to help us as we experiment with the commandments of God, testing his promises to us through our obedience to those commandments and seeking to return to him. Miracles are not to be understood in terms of nature or the laws of nature. They are given to us in order to strengthen our faith and lead us to repentance. They are the evidence



we need of things unseen. Naturalism, with its emphasis on reason as the one thing needful for the good life, puts us at odds with God and his ways. It is clear that McMurrin has drifted away from the foundations of Mormonism when he argues that it is a naturalistic, humanistic theism. What he has done has transformed Mormonism or reinterpreted it as a product of the human mind or a cultural artifact. It is no longer to be understood in terms of a conflict with revelation. It must be reconciled with reason and made consistent with the expectations of a modern liberal democratic society.

The primary task of theology is the reconciliation of revelation to the culture, to make what is taken on faith as the word of God meaningful in the light of accepted science and philosophy. Mormon theology has in the past pursued this task with some consistency and at times with intellectual strength, and certainly with a stubborn independence and indifference to criticism from traditional thought. (TF, pp. 110–11)

Such a view of Mormonism no longer understands the context within which it came into the world. It has discounted the historical in favor of finding its logical or ontological underpinnings, as if such underpinnings were independent of history. Now McMurrin has reasons for looking past the historical to the logical and ontological underpinnings. It is because he believes that to take Mormonism's historical claims seriously is to give in to those social and religious conservative forces that would rob Mormonism of its philosophically progressive character. In place of that progressiveness there would instead be an irrationalism that would only drain Mormonism of strength and vitality (TF, p. 111). McMurrin sees the orthodox side of Mormonism, which has been dominant throughout the latter part of the twentieth century, as a retreat back into the Calvinism against which Mormonism rebelled in its early years (TF, p. 67).

However, McMurrin has failed to see that Mormonism is as much a rejection of nineteenth-century American liberal culture as it is a rejection of conservative Protestantism. The foregoing discussion of the Book of Mormon view of the conflict between naturalism and

the prophetic is but one example of the conflict between Mormonism and the larger liberal culture. One must also see that it was the liberal culture of nineteenth-century America that was most offended by Joseph Smith, his revelations, the Book of Mormon, and the faithful Saints that he gathered together. The early Saints knew that liberal culture was just as repressive as the conservative Protestant culture. After Joseph Smith's death, Brigham Young and the Saints made the decision to move West to be free of both parts of American culture. They were looking for a place that would allow them to practice their religion, to take revelation and revealed scripture seriously.

McMurrin's attempt to assimilate Mormonism within the larger American cultural framework only serves to diminish the divine character that sustained the Mormon religion in its early years and has continued to sustain it in contemporary times. It is clear that, for McMurrin, what distinguishes Mormonism is its modern liberal temper, as well as what he perceives to be the willingness of Mormon intellectuals to bend and revise its myths in line with science and philosophy. Thus, Mormonism proves to be a part of culture itself, perhaps its highest expression, given its opposition to America's prevailing conservative Protestant culture. But, contrary to McMurrin's understanding of it, Mormonism is defined not by its so-called liberal temper or its modern origins. It is defined by Joseph Smith's first vision and the coming forth of the Book of Mormon and other latter-day scriptures, along with the emphasis on continuing revelation. As such, this foundation is not a product of mind or culture. It is revelation and God's continuing relationship with his covenant people that define the Saints and how they understand their relationship to the world around them. It therefore stands apart from the world in which it arose, pointing to a different and higher way of life.

McMurrin's effort to situate Mormonism between the battle lines of liberal and conservative Protestantism, then, can only be a reflection of his own personal desire for what he would like to see Mormonism become. It is clear that he would like to see it transformed into an intellectual system that reflects the liberal attitude of modern America. A

thoroughly modern product, Mormonism can only reflect the culture and time in which it originated.

Mormon theology is a modern Pelagianism in a Puritan religion. Mormonism is a Judaic-like community religion grounded in the Puritan moral doctrine that the vocation of man is to create the kingdom of God. Its fundamentalism is rooted in the biblical literalism native to American religion. Its heresy is the denial of the dogma of original sin, a heresy that exhibits both the disintegration of modern Protestantism and the impact of nineteenth century liberalism on the character of American sectarianism. (foreword, p. [x])

There is something anachronistic about situating Mormonism in this interpretive setting—that is, of referring to it as a “modern Pelagianism in a Puritan religion.” McMurrin never attempts to see whether there is some other interpretive category that would better fit as a description of Mormonism. For example, why not see Mormonism in terms of its own claims to be the restoration of an ancient faith? This would be something that McMurrin could then test against his own claim that Mormonism is a modern phenomenon. But there is no such testing of his claims. The reason for this is that in characterizing Mormonism as strictly modern, McMurrin can then fit it into the larger cultural conflict that he sees defining religion *per se*. However, in doing this, there is something arbitrary about this characterization of Mormonism. The effect is that this interpretive scheme undercuts the logical force of the appeal to Mormonism’s underlying metaphysical notions. Because these notions merely reflect McMurrin’s prejudices about religion, the turn to metaphysics seems nothing more than a rhetorical device that serves to further McMurrin’s desire to make the faith of the Saints at home in American intellectual life. Thus, McMurrin fails to provide the substantive critical perspective needed to justify his conception of Mormonism as a modern American religion.

Reading these essays again raises for me a question about the need for producing a Mormon theology. From time to time there have been attempts to do so. Parley P. Pratt, Orson Pratt, and others have tried

to produce such accounts. But they have usually tended to reflect their own idiosyncratic views about the gospel, and the Saints have never accepted such accounts as authoritative. Louis Midgley's account of theology in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* sums up well the reasons why the Saints have not been inclined to produce a speculative account of the faith that would reconcile it with science and culture.<sup>7</sup> The most important reason for this has been that the faith of Latter-day Saints is not grounded in metaphysical systems, but in revelations from God. For the Saints, knowledge of God and his commandments has always been tied to revelation given to prophets and apostles, as well as the Holy Ghost confirming the truth of prophetic claims to individual members of the church.

Joseph Smith's first vision, which is the founding event of the restoration of the gospel, best illustrates why the Saints have been suspicious of constructing a systematic, speculative theology. It is an essential starting point, in my estimation, for any attempt to understand the uniqueness of Mormonism as a religion and why a theological account is insufficient to capture the faith of the Saints. There, in answer to Joseph's question about which church he should join, he was told to join none of them. The reason given is what is crucial here.

I was answered that I must join none of them, for they were all wrong; and the Personage who addressed me said that all their creeds were an abomination in his sight; that those professors were all corrupt; that: "they draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me, they teach for doctrines the commandments of men, having a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof." (Joseph Smith—History 1:19)

It is clear that, echoing the prophet Isaiah, the turn to theology somehow diminished and corrupted the gospel. The restoration of the gospel was to mark a turn away from such things and to establish anew that revelation is the basis for the knowledge of God and salvation. It would seem that such an event would be regarded as authoritative

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7. Louis C. Midgley, "Theology," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4:1475–76.

in terms of whether there should be a Mormon theology. But some continue to feel the need to provide a rational and systematic account. Why? I think the answer to that question is to be found in Moroni's words of warning to us, to which I referred above (Mormon 8:26 and Moroni 7:21–25). He saw that the gospel would be restored at a time when miracles would be denied, when science and technology would so overwhelm us as to create within us the need to provide a complete and total system through which we could manipulate the world and solve human problems. As we look around us and see our world, it is clear that it is being successfully systematized and rationalized. As our technological capacities increase, our power over the world also increases, and no one seems to seriously think that we need revelation to avoid destruction. Such a world makes the claims of the restoration look like quaint frontier primitivism. It is clear why some come to see the restored gospel as a product of both the time and culture of Joseph Smith and why they see a need to revise such myths to be consistent with advances in science and culture.

Ultimately, the desire for a Mormon theology must be balanced against the consideration as to whether such a thing is consistent with the gospel and what the price of such a project entails. From the results of McMurrin's account of Mormon theology, it is clear that such an account is possible only if one puts aside revelation in order to systematically fit together what are fragmentary statements that various people use to try to make sense of Mormonism. How one interprets Mormonism theologically will depend in the first place on the philosophical presuppositions that one brings with him or her. But one must then go on to ask which of the various logical or metaphysical frameworks is best suited for the task. This is a larger philosophical issue about what ultimately is the truth of things. To situate the gospel in such an enterprise is not only ultimately fruitless, it misses the point that what is expected of us is to take seriously the commandments and precepts of God as we find them in the scriptures and in the words of the prophets and apostles (Doctrine and Covenants 1). Latter-day Saints must take seriously the conflict between reason and revelation as that is set out in dramatic form throughout the Book of

Mormon. Its counsels must dictate to us what tasks we should undertake in coming to an understanding of the restored gospel. Unless we adhere to it, we will find our faith taken from us. Philosophy will not allow revelation to have the final say in any account of Mormon things. In the end, theology is the captive woman mentioned in Deuteronomy 21:10–14. She has been given a home by certain Saints. But through long experience we have found that such marriages cannot be happy ones and will not last. For the woman is neither willing to remain a captive nor to become a woman of Israel. It is time to set the woman free and to return to the covenants that have nurtured us throughout the restoration.<sup>8</sup>

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8. See Mansfield, "Captive Woman," 65.

# BLAKE OSTLER'S MORMON THEOLOGY

Richard Sherlock

I will review some themes in the first two volumes of a projected four-volume work on Mormon theology by Blake Ostler. Since my engagement will inevitably raise questions about the organization and arguments of Ostler's work, let me state my overall assessment of his project at the outset. These books are the most important works on Mormon theology ever written. There is nothing currently available that is even close to the rigor and sophistication of these volumes. B. H. Roberts and John A. Widtsoe may have had interesting insights in the early part of the twentieth century,<sup>1</sup> but they had neither the temperament nor the training to give a rigorous defense of their views in dialogue with a wider stream of Christian theology. Sterling McMurrin and Truman Madsen had the capacity to engage Mormon

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1. B. H. Roberts, *The Mormon Doctrine of Deity* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1903); B. H. Roberts, *The Seventy's Course in Theology* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1907); B. H. Roberts, *The Way, The Truth, The Life* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 1994); John A. Widtsoe, *Rational Theology* (Salt Lake City: General Priesthood Committee, 1915).

Review of Blake T. Ostler. *Exploring Mormon Thought: The Attributes of God*. Salt Lake City: Kofford Books, 2001. xvi + 526 pp., with bibliography, subject and scripture indexes. \$29.95; and Blake T. Ostler. *Exploring Mormon Thought: The Problems of Theism and the Love of God*. Salt Lake City: Kofford Books, 2006. xi + 503 pp., with bibliography, subject and scripture indexes. \$34.95.

theology at this level, but neither one did.<sup>2</sup> They were both better at broad, sweeping generalizations and comparisons than they were at rigorous detailed analysis. Ostler's work brings together the rigor of current work in philosophy of religion in the Anglo-American tradition, a rich knowledge of major Christian thinkers like St. Augustine (354–430), Thomas Aquinas (1225–74), and John Calvin (1509–64), as well as a deep commitment to Mormonism. Nothing of this depth and obvious faith has ever been attempted before.

## I

At the beginning of his Reformation masterpiece *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin claimed that “nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves.”<sup>3</sup> Whether all theologians, Mormon or otherwise, have followed this advice may be debated, but these seem to me to be the two pillars of Ostler's theology. His theological position is centered on (1) a strong view of human freedom and (2) a view of God as a being of love and compassion who invites us to use our freedom to establish a truly loving relationship with him.

At the outset Ostler wisely avoids two errors that plague Mormon theological writing. First, he explicitly recognizes that his view of Mormon theology is not the only one in the published literature. At times he directly criticizes other Latter-day Saint authors whose views he finds confused, contradictory, or morally indefensible.<sup>4</sup> He also makes clear his admiration for the views of John A. Widtsoe and B. H. Roberts. Second, Ostler does not merely assert or stipulate what

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2. Sterling M. McMurrin, *The Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion* (1965; repr., Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2000); Truman G. Madsen, *Eternal Man* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1966). See the review of McMurrin's book by Ted Vaggalis in this number of the *FARMS Review*, pages 265–90.

3. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford L. Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967), 1:35.

4. He specifically rejects what he calls “neo-absolutist” Mormonism (1:98–100). He sees signs of this in the writings of Bruce R. McConkie and Orson Pratt, both of whom advocated a view of God in a timeless realm called “eternity.” McConkie, for example, specifically rejected the eternal man thesis.



Mormon doctrine is or must be. He argues for his views. He does not, as many do, assume that his views are correct without argument.

Ostler's view of human freedom is at the core of his work. Though his discussion of human freedom does not appear until the middle of the second volume, I believe that it is one of the two keys to his entire theological project. He is a strong proponent of what philosophers and theologians now tend to call a "libertarian" concept of free will (or what the Saints tend to call free agency). This position holds that persons are free if and only if "they can do otherwise given all the circumstances that obtain in the moment of free decision" (1:206). In order to be free it must be the case that I could have done otherwise than I did in a situation of choice.

On a whole range of philosophical problems—such as skepticism, the existence of an external world, or moral convictions—one will reach a point where no further argument can be given. For example, as the late eminent moral philosopher John Rawls (1921–2002) said, if we do not know that slavery is wrong, moral philosophy can go no further. For Ostler, human freedom is one such case. At times the only relevant answer to the question of "why did John steal a car?" is simply "he chose to." To be brief: sometimes it is up to me what I do next. What I do is not determined by either external forces or internal mental states.

Ostler's libertarianism is supported by three lines of argument. First, he believes, correctly in my view, that libertarian notions of moral agency are "presupposed throughout the Mormon scripture" (1:242 n. 7). Persons are regarded as at least sometimes having the power to do otherwise than they chose to do. Second, he argues that only a libertarian understanding of agency can preserve a robust notion of individual free will that we know by examining our own lives and our most basic understanding of moral responsibility. Third, he adopts the view of "eternal man" as explicated by Truman Madsen, that human beings are partially uncreated causes of their own actions, a metaphysic that makes us as individuals ultimately responsible for our own moral lives and for choices leading to a loving relationship with God (1:201–46).

In taking this strong view of moral agency, or freedom, Ostler is in dialogue with a number of recent thinkers who have revived the notion of libertarian agency from the nearly defunct status to which many philosophers had consigned it. In doing so Ostler has placed himself at odds with what we might call the mainstream views in both theology and philosophy. The mainstream view is known as “compatibilism.” Compatibilism holds that we can accept both causal determinism of all events (including human acts) and human freedom. They defend this position by holding that one is only “unfree” in performing an act if one is coerced or forced to perform the act by forces external to one’s self. One may be held to be free, however, if the cause of one’s acts is one’s own internal mental state. Thus my actions can be both free and caused by my mental state. Hence, causal determinism and human freedom can be held concurrently.<sup>5</sup>

A textbook example of this view comes from one of its most eminent progenitors, John Locke, who posits a case in which a person is taken while asleep and placed in a room with someone whom he has been longing to see and converse with. When he awakes, he engages in an animated discussion with the friend. All the while the door is locked. The person could not get out even if he wanted to. Locke claims that this person is acting freely because he is doing what he wants.<sup>6</sup>

Libertarians like Ostler regard this as an unpersuasive rhetorical sleight of hand. It is not real freedom if you cannot do otherwise. If a chain of causality that leads to our mental state combined with the relevant physical laws can explain our acts, then it would seem that our acts are caused by something other than our choice. Ostler’s defense of libertarian agency is crucial because compatibilism in its

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5. For a short introduction to libertarianism, see Richard Taylor, *Metaphysics*, 4th ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1991); for a vigorous and technical defense, see Peter van Inwagen, *An Essay on Free Will* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); and for a comprehensive overview of free-will issues, see Robert Kane, ed., *Oxford Handbook of Free Will* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

6. John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), ed. Peter H. Nidditch (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), 238. Some Mormon authors have adopted compatibilism. See L. Rex Sears, “Determinist Mansions in the Mormon House?” *Dialogue* 31/4 (1998): 115–41; and Kent E. Robson, “The Foundations of Freedom in Mormon Thought,” *Sunstone*, September/October 1982, 51–54.

many nuanced forms has been a backbone of various versions of theological determinism: the idea that all acts we do are already predetermined by God. If I do what I desire and God created both me and my desires, then I am determined by God and yet still free. Ostler, correctly in my view, holds that divine predetermination of our acts before we make them is simply not a plausible or acceptable view for Latter-day Saints.

Ostler's rejection of compatibilism is crucial to his view of God. If libertarianism is correct, then no one, not even God, can know exactly what I will do with my freedom in the future until I make those choices. Libertarianism preserves real agency. To adopt this position forces us to rethink commonly held assumptions about God. Ostler engages in such rethinking. He believes that much of what has been said about God in the Christian past is simply wrong and also unscriptural and that those Latter-day Saint writers who have been enamored of more traditional Christian theologies have brought these same errors along with them. He believes, of course, that God knows all that can be known. Hence, God is omniscient. But he cannot know, at least in precise detail, what actions free agents will perform in the future. If God can know today that John will steal a car tomorrow, then it is true today that John will steal a car tomorrow. This is determinism, and it follows from the belief that God can know for certain whether or not John will steal the car tomorrow (1:137–86, 295–330).

To preserve moral agency and responsibility as taught in scripture, Ostler accepts the currently widely discussed view called “present omniscience.” God knows everything that is true at every present moment. If freedom is real, however, he cannot have future omniscience—that is, he cannot know the future contingent acts of free agents. Ostler argues in rigorous detail that none of the ways in which philosophers have sought to reconcile absolute divine foreknowledge and human freedom are sound. The traditional timeless God of Boethius (480–524) and much of the Christian tradition cannot be an agent in time as ancient and modern revelation clearly show him to be. Nor is the currently fashionable Molinism (named after the Spanish Jesuit Luis de Molina [1535–1600], who thought it up) ultimately any

better. On Molina's view God's foreknowledge is the result of knowing what any free creature will do in any particular circumstance. God knows that John will steal the car in circumstances C. If the circumstances change God knows what John will do then as well. The issues are highly technical, but Ostler does a masterful job in explaining them and showing that Molinism ultimately requires God to know what a person would do if placed in any certain set of circumstances.<sup>7</sup> The only way this can be held is to assume that I have no freedom to surprise God. When the Lord tells Abraham, after the near sacrifice of Isaac, "now I know that thou fearest God" (Genesis 22:12), it must, on a Molinist or compatibilist view, be either a mistranslation or a condescension to our limited perspective.<sup>8</sup> According to the Christian tradition it cannot be a real gain in divine knowledge.

Ostler puts the matter in contemporary terms by posing the question regarding which of two worldviews is correct. Is it the picture given in the classic movie *It's a Wonderful Life*, where Clarence the angel can show George Bailey just how different Bedford Falls would have been without him? Or is the best view the one painted in Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*? At the key point Scrooge pleads, "Spirit! hear me! I am not the man I was. I will not be the man I must have been but for this intercourse. Why show me this, if I am past all hope?"<sup>9</sup> With elegance and precision Ostler shows that human freedom, the moral and devotional life, and revelation ancient and modern all demonstrate that Dickens is right and Frank Capra is wrong (1:164–65).

Ostler's picture of God's knowledge is deeply interconnected with the scriptural picture of God as distinct and different from that portrait as given in the Christian theological tradition (often called clas-

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7. Luis de Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge (Part IV of the Concordia)*, introduction, translation, and notes by Alfred J. Freddoso (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988); for a very competent version of Molinism in contemporary terms, see William Lane Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom* (Leiden: Brill, 1991).

8. Ostler is very much in sympathy with what is known as "open theism" in contemporary evangelical thought. Open theists argue that the future is open because free agents have not yet completed it. See especially John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Divine Providence* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), and the substantial literature he cites.

9. Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol* (New York: Macmillan, 1950), 125.

sical theism). At the heart of this difference are the concepts of divine immutability and impassability. Immutability implies that God cannot change since he is already perfect and real change would involve moving from a state of perfection to some other state. Impassability means simply that God has no emotions. Put these two concepts together and you have a picture of a God who cannot change his mind, cannot learn new things about his children through seeing their acts or hearing their prayers, and cannot feel sorry, sad, happy, or loving toward his children. If this passionless, changeless being does not sound consistent with the scriptures to Latter-day Saints, that is because it is not, at least not according to Ostler (1:365–408), and I agree.

Divine passability—that is, having emotions—is an excellent example of how concepts of human nature and of God are deeply connected in Ostler’s thought. Consider God feeling angry or sad over the sins of human beings, such as David’s sin with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12:1–14). Does such anger make any sense if God already knew beforehand what David would do? Does such anger and the subsequent divine punishment resulting from such anger make sense if David could not have done otherwise? The scriptural witness of God’s emotions is perhaps the best ground we have for rejecting complete divine foreknowledge and accepting a libertarian notion of moral agency in which a person can do otherwise than he has done or is doing. On a libertarian notion of agency God can be surprised and thus actually feel sad or happy. The fact that the scriptures portray God as feeling emotions, and humans as morally responsible, is the best ground on which we can only assert present omniscience, while also accepting libertarian agency.

Consider in this regard perhaps the most telling religious practice of all, private prayer. There are many reasons to engage in public religious actions: appearing righteous to others, seeing friends, showing off, and so forth. Private prayer is different. In private prayer we thank God for his blessings and ask for comfort, guidance, and intervention; “lead me, guide me, walk beside me” are the keys of what we ask for in prayer.<sup>10</sup> But would this make any sense if God already knew what was going to happen or if he could not be moved (was immutable) by our

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10. See “I Am a Child of God,” *Hymns*, no. 301.

sincere petition? (2:25–75).<sup>11</sup> The plain answer is no. We would have no reason to bother with asking God for help if our asking with faith would make no difference. According to the traditional view of God, the central challenge of the restoration—that is, the story of Moroni and the Book of Mormon—would make no sense (see Moroni 10:4).

By rejecting the classical picture of God as existing in a timeless realm called “eternity” with a set of attributes like classical omniscience, immutability, and impassability, Ostler believes that Mormonism can untie the Gordian knot of Christology that has plagued traditional theology for two millennia. As a theological discipline, Christology addresses the problem of how we can explain and hold together Jesus as both divine and human. Suppose one holds with traditional theologies that God is, in his essence, fundamentally different from human beings. If he exists in a level of being that is utterly different from us, then the problem of how one person, Jesus, can be both God and man is difficult to comprehend. But it is less of a mystery if we reject the two-natures ontology that underlies it. If God is at some fundamental level like us, then Christ’s humanity is less of a mystery because it is something like our potential divinity. God and man are not as different as classical Christologies have supposed (1:409–50).<sup>12</sup>

Furthermore, classical theology has difficulty explaining why God came down to the human level and allowed himself to go through what Jesus went through. If God is immutable, then he is unchangeable. But Jesus clearly went through changes. He was angry, tired, happy, and sad, and he ate food. These are points that are reinforced in modern revelation. Furthermore, if God is impassable, then he has no emotions like love and no need to enter into a relationship

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11. Ostler argues that those who try to view petitionary prayer in the context of classical foreknowledge must resort to some form of divine manipulation of humans. See Paul Helm, “Prayer and Providence,” in *Christian Faith and Philosophical Theology*, ed. Gijssbert van den Brink, Luco J. van den Brom, and Marcel Sarot (Kampen, Neth.: Kok Pharos, 1992), 103–15; and Terrance Tiessen, *Providence and Prayer: How Does God Work in the World?* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000); the classical discussion of this view is Eleonore Stump, “Petitionary Prayer,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 16/2 (1979): 81–91.

12. The best current defense of the classical position on the incarnation is Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986).

with human beings. To enter into such a relationship is to imply that God is changeable and that he has some need to enter into a loving relationship with us, as Jesus Christ obviously does.

Ostler's view of God and man also underlies his discussion of salvation (justification) and the atonement. Since human beings have real freedom, they can be held partially, but only partially, responsible for their personal relationship with God. Since God is a being to whom moral terms apply because he is fundamentally like us, doctrines like sin, grace, and atonement must be understood in a way consistent with the fundamental attributes of divine love and individual moral responsibility. The concept of original sin in its classical (Augustinian) formation includes imputing the consequences of one person's sin (i.e., Adam's) to others who are not themselves guilty of it. This is a morally unsustainable conclusion, and Mormonism properly rejects it. We are, however, still sinful beings because we alienate ourselves from God by our own actions and our desires (2:119–46).<sup>13</sup>

As morally sensitive free beings we have some responsibility for our own salvation. God's grace, however, is real and necessary. It is a gift that is unmerited but freely given as a means of turning us away from our self-deception, which, for Ostler, is the essence of sinfulness. Divine grace, however, does not make us righteous by itself. Nor does grace operate in distinction to or in opposition to our will (2:351–432).<sup>14</sup> We must freely invite God into our lives—we must trust God—for his grace to be a means of our salvation. At this point Mormonism is plainly distinct from classical Protestantism. It is closer to the Thomistic position of concurring grace,<sup>15</sup> but with a profound distinction: Since freedom is real and omniscience only available for past

13. There are contemporary thinkers who still defend the imputation of Adam's sin to us. See Anthony B. Badger, "TULIP: A Free Grace Perspective, Part 1: Total Depravity," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 16/31 (2003): 35–61; and Michael Rea, "The Metaphysics of Original Sin," in *Persons: Human and Divine*, ed. Dean Zimmerman and Peter van Inwagen (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

14. On the contemporary evangelical notion of justification by grace, see Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1985); for a contemporary Latter-day Saint appreciation of grace, see Robert L. Millet, *Grace Works* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003).

15. Thomism refers to Thomas Aquinas.

and present events, it must be the case that God could not know nor can he cause what our response to his gracious love will be.

Finally, Ostler develops a richly nuanced view of the atonement, somewhat different from the standard in Mormon thinking. He rejects most of the classical theories of the atonement that have deeply influenced common Mormon thought and writing. He is especially critical of the line of thinking that starts with Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109) and reaches its apex in Calvin. Known technically as the penal substitution theory, it will sound familiar to many Latter-day Saint readers.<sup>16</sup>

The theory is this: Humans have sinned and need to be punished, but the punishment that we deserve is too heavy for us to bear. So our elder brother volunteers to accept the punishment we merit. In so doing he clears our debt with God so that God can give us his love abundantly. Given common expression in stories such as that of the brother who repays the father the money stolen by the sibling, the theory has a certain cachet. But for Ostler it is deeply flawed. Several reasons are given on this point, but for our purposes here we may focus on the two that are crucial in Ostler's view. First, the theory is unjust, and as created moral beings with a conscience, we know it. What moral sense does it make to punish the innocent for the sins of the guilty? Would we accept such a view in any other context? Would a guilty person be thought righteous because someone else served his prison sentence or was executed in his stead? Of course not, says Ostler. Listening to our internal moral voice will reveal that this makes no sense. Nor does the position of some Mormon authors that Christ actually became guilty in our stead fare any better.<sup>17</sup> In an attempt to save the principle of punishing only the guilty, some have argued that Christ actually became a sinner. For Ostler, such a view is simply nonsense. It entails that Christ was guilty

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16. Anselm of Canterbury, "Cur Deus Homo (Why God Became Man)," in *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, ed. Brian Davies and Gillian Evans (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 260–356; Calvin, *Institutes*, 1:503–34; for a contemporary defense, see J. I. Packer, *What Did the Cross Achieve? The Logic of Penal Substitution* (Leicester: TSF Monograph, 1974).

17. This view is advanced in Stephen E. Robinson, *Believing Christ: The Parable of the Bicycle and Other Good News* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992). Neither does he think much of the idea that a ransom must be paid to Satan to secure a release, a view found in Ronald A. Heiner, "The Necessity of a Sinless Messiah," *BYU Studies* 22 (1982): 5–30.



even though he did nothing wrong. This view is wrong in the same way as the notion of original sin—that is, it involves imputing the guilt of one to another. If we reject the idea that we can be held guilty of the sin of another, Adam, then why would we accept the same flawed principle of imputed sinfulness in the case of Christ?

Ostler's view has something in common with Abelard's theory of Christ's moral influence in turning our hearts to God.<sup>18</sup> But Ostler's compassion theory goes much farther. "The purpose of the Atonement," he writes, "is to overcome our alienation by creating compassion, a life shared in union where we are moved by our love for each other" (2:235). Christ comes to be with us and suffer like us, to break through the alienation that we have created by our own sin. Christ suffers for us by being mortal, and in so doing he offers us his love freely to bridge the gap between him and us that we have created by our own self-deceptive turning away from him.

By being with us, Christ enables us to freely choose to walk back into God's loving embrace. "He will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh," writes Alma, "that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities" (Alma 7:12). This is a teaching that is at the core of Ostler's theory of the atonement. To be reconciled to us, Christ must understand our plight. Thus he must come and suffer with us to be moved by our condition. For us, the atonement softens our hearts and enables us to choose a loving relationship with Christ.

The grace of Christ's love, manifested in his life and way of being with us, works in us to persuade us to soften the hardened exterior that we create to protect our tender hearts. When we truly realize that God himself has become what we are and that he loves us so much that he is willing to be in relationship with us even though it causes him extensive and intense suffering, we can be persuaded by his compassion for us to soften our hearts and open up to receive him. (2:240)

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18. Richard E. Weingart, *The Logic of Divine Love: A Critical Analysis of the Soteriology of Peter Abailard [Abelard]* (London: Clarendon, 1970).

That is the essence of the compassion theory that Ostler sees as a unique teaching of Mormonism.

I have only been able to scratch the surface of these important volumes. As noted, they are the most competent works of their kind in Mormonism. That Ostler takes positions at odds with other Mormon writers ought to provoke a civil discussion of key issues. Hopefully we will not have to wait decades for another work of this kind.

## II

I have great respect for Ostler's theological work, but we should recognize that one might start at a different place than Ostler and draw different conclusions. The first and most astounding feature of the first vision and the coming forth of the Book of Mormon is one simple idea: God answers prayers. Joseph knew he needed wisdom, so he sought it from what he believed was the best source—God.

What, however, makes Joseph's prayer for guidance and our prayers comprehensible? Must it not be because God can give advice, which we always ought to follow? God's advice is qualitatively different from and superior to anything we can get from professionals, friends, or family. Why go to the trouble to pray if God's advice is no better than what we can get from other sources? Why pray for a true contracausal miracle<sup>19</sup> such as Jesus performed if we are not certain that he has the ability and knowledge to perform such a deed? But this line of thinking leads us in the direction of conceding that God must have the very qualities that Ostler rejects.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, consider our temple commitments. They are "absolute" commitments. But complete and absolute commitments

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19. All we know about the chain of natural causes in the world leads us to conclude that X will happen. Yet something else, Y, happens instead. This is especially true when all we know about the world would lead us to conclude that Y could not have happened, such as raising Lazarus from the dead.

20. Ostler never discusses the concept of "centering prayer," in which the object is not to ask but to center your will on God's will for you. "Not my will but Thine be done" is the key to this sort of prayer. This provides a view of prayer more compatible with the traditional picture of divine attributes. See Thomas Keating, *Intimacy with God* (New York: Crossroad Books, 1994); and Thomas Keating, *Centering Prayer in Daily Life and Ministry* (New York: Continuum, 1998).

only make sense if they are commitments to an absolute source about whose knowledge and power to reciprocate we have no doubt.

Properly thought out, Mormonism in practice seems to lead us to a picture of God at odds with Ostler's. Perhaps this explains the obvious preference of Latter-day Saints for the classical picture of God. Ostler believes that this preference is misguided. But he never explains how such educated and such spiritually sophisticated people have adopted a position he regards as so wrong.

I think Ostler is right about the atonement and the difficulties about the traditional views, but it would have been helpful to show why so many have been attracted to debt repayment and penal substitution theories. I have my own suspicions of theories about this, but it would have been nice to see Ostler's understanding of why so many Latter-day Saint writers have read Alma to be teaching a version of a penal substitution theory.

Ostler's third volume will, according to him, treat the problem of evil (also known as theodicy) and the idea of the Trinity. I should like to engage these topics briefly in order to raise questions for Ostler's fundamental theology. The problem of evil has engaged serious thinkers for millennia, as the book of Job testifies. The solution most compatible with Ostler's theology is the combination of free will and character-building claims that have patristic ancestry and that have been so brilliantly developed by John Hick in his seminal *Evil and the God of Love*.<sup>21</sup> Hick's argument is familiar to Latter-day Saints. We bring most evils on ourselves by our own free acts. Their existence does not count against God's goodness or existence. Evil and suffering in general build personal strength and character, which in turn enable us to get through further trials. Analogies are often made in popular accounts to the defects of overprotective parents or to one who learns compassion through having a serious illness.

The problem with this sort of view is what Marilyn Adams calls "horrendous evils" in her seminal response.<sup>22</sup> Some persons are put

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21. John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966).

22. Marilyn M. Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999); for a variety of views, see Marilyn M. Adams, ed., *The Problem of Evil* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

through such evils that their character cannot develop. One thinks of rape, pedophilia, and torture as three examples. On a larger scale one thinks of genocide and the Holocaust as cases in point. These evils surpass any plausible amount needed for building character. Why should we have faith in God in the face of these purposeless horrors? Adams argues powerfully that faith still makes sense because God's qualities of love, wisdom, and power are such that accepting him as a real presence in our lives is reasonable even in the face of the horrible. Solving the problem of horrendous evil may seem to require us to have faith in a God with precisely the attitude that Ostler rejects. Furthermore, we might note that God's answer to Job in chapters 38–42 does not imply a character-building argument but rather appears to appeal to those qualities of God that Ostler wishes to reject, God's absolute power and knowledge.

Finally, we might note the interconnection of Christology and social trinitarianism and the problem it creates in Ostler's thought. Ostler holds, with the Mormon tradition, a social trinitarian view of the Godhead. Social trinitarianism has become popular in many theological circles in the last two decades.<sup>23</sup> It does, however, have ancient roots, especially in the Cappadocian fathers and later in the eastern Christian church. There are three beings united in a special kind of indwelling love that the Cappadocians call perichoresis, or "mutual indwelling." The analogy is often made to three indwelling lights from lanterns or light bulbs. The light from the three indwelling lights will be greater than what would be arrived at adding the lumens of the three lights sepa-

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23. For some current work on social trinitarianism with which Ostler is in dialogue, see Cornelius Plantinga Jr., "Social Trinity and Tritheism," in *Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement: Philosophical and Theological Essays*, ed. Ronald J. Feenstra and Cornelius Plantinga Jr. (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 32–47; David Brown, *The Divine Trinity* (LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1985); Richard Swinburne, *The Christian God* (London: Oxford University Press, 1994); Stephen T. Davis, "Perichoretic Monotheism: A Defense of a Social Theory of the Trinity," in *The Trinity: East/West Dialogue*, ed. Melville Y. Stewart (Dordrecht, Neth.: Kluwer Academic, 2003), 35–52. Ostler's view is especially close to that of Davis. For a very useful comparative essay, see Paul Owen, "The Doctrine of the Trinity in LDS and 'Catholic' Contexts," *Element: The Journal of the Society for Mormon Philosophy and Theology* 1 (2005): 59–84.

rately. Thus, the indwelling of the three in mutual love is at the heart of the Godhead.

Then, however, in one of the volumes under review, Ostler adopts a view of Christ's person—that is, a Christology—that focuses on what is called divine *kenosis*. *Kenosis* is a Greek term that refers to God's emptying himself of his divine properties in order to come down and establish a relationship with us. The Book of Mormon refers to the same idea as “the condescension of God.” Ostler calls his view a modified kenotic Christology. It is modified because core problems of classical Christology stem from placing God and man in qualitatively distinct and hierarchical levels of existence, a move that Ostler rejects, as do most Latter-day Saint writers. But here is the problem. If the Son empties himself of his divinity or even some part of it to be with us, then can he any longer be a real partner in the social trinity? Will not the divine light be diminished, as would the three lamps if one were lowered?

### Conclusion

Ostler's project is deeply important. Perhaps it signals the start of a true intellectually rigorous Mormon theological tradition that can stand on its own with other theologies like those of Thomism or, more recently, Karl Barth. Furthermore it might signal that we as a people are mature enough as a tradition to engage in robust theological conversations among ourselves. Such a development can only be welcomed. True faith is strong enough to withstand the most probing inquiry and analysis. It may well be the right time for Ostler's project and the right time for others to engage him in dialogue.



## THE CHURCH AND EVOLUTION: A BRIEF HISTORY OF OFFICIAL STATEMENTS

Frank B. Salisbury

The authors/compilers of this slim volume say that they had only one purpose in mind: to assemble under one cover all the *official* statements of the First Presidencies of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints regarding evolution and the origin of man, augmented by some other statements (those known to them) made by others but with First Presidency permission. They further state that they do not express their own opinions regarding these topics. The book does not strive for “balance” of views held by church members but is a sourcebook based on official statements only. Evenson and Jeffery achieve their stated purposes well.

After an introduction and a preface, the contents of a thirty-page packet assembled in 1992 to be given to students at Brigham Young University is reproduced. Different professors were handing out various materials relevant to evolution and the origin of man, so Evenson, who was then dean of the College of Physical and Mathematical Sciences and who had prepared the article on evolution for the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, was asked by University Provost Bruce C. Hafen to assemble a packet that could be handed out to students. If they desired,

Review of William E. Evenson and Duane E. Jeffery. *Mormonism and Evolution: The Authoritative LDS Statements*. Salt Lake City: Kofford Books, 2005. vi + 122 pp., with index. \$15.95.

professors could add their own materials to this packet. Evenson provided various documents, including some that Jeffery had already assembled for placement in the library. These materials were then submitted to the BYU Board of Trustees, including the First Presidency and seven apostles.

This packet of essays begins with a cover letter from the Board of Trustees, which is followed by three statements of First Presidencies (in 1909 and 1910 under Joseph F. Smith and in 1925 under Heber J. Grant). The entry “Evolution” from the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* is the final document. It is included because it “had material input from the First Presidency” (p. 34). Each document is preceded by a brief introduction that provides its historical context.

Following the “BYU Evolution Packet” (pp. 9–38) is an appendix called “Other Authoritative Materials.” It consists of twelve documents that were sponsored or approved by the First Presidency or that were published over a president’s signature alone (pp. 39–114). Some of the documents in this book are very short, even less than a page, but three are rather extensive statements that are of considerable importance. The first is the statement of the First Presidency in 1909 (document 1 in the “BYU Evolution Packet”), which includes a review of scriptural statements on the origin and preexistence of man, the literal likeness of both preexistent spirits and their temporal bodies to our Father in Heaven and his Son Jesus Christ, and the reality of Adam as a real person and progenitor of the human race.

Some members then (as even now) used the statement to claim that the church rejects the theory of evolution. Hence, a year later, the First Presidency, in their regular column in the *Improvement Era*, “Priesthood Quorums’ Table,” stated the following: “Whether the mortal bodies of man evolved in natural processes to present perfection, through the direction and power of God; whether the first parents of our generations, Adam and Eve, were transplanted from another sphere, with immortal tabernacles, which became corrupted through sin and the partaking of natural foods, in the process of time; whether they were born here in mortality, as other mortals have been, are questions not fully answered in the revealed word of God”



(pp. 43–44, document A, appendix). Clearly, if the 1909 statement is mentioned, the 1910 clarification should also be quoted. Subsequent statements agree with the ideas presented in these two documents.

The second extensive document (pp. 54–67, document C, appendix) is a memo from the First Presidency dated 5 April 1931 and addressed to the Council of the Twelve, the First Council of Seventy, and the Presiding Bishopric. It responds to a controversy that had erupted between the young apostle Joseph Fielding Smith, B. H. Roberts (the presiding president of the Seventy), and other members of the Twelve. The memo reviews the background of the controversy. Elder Smith had given a sermon to the Genealogical Society on 5 April 1930; the speech was published in the *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine* and also as a pamphlet. Elder Smith had proclaimed that evolution was a fraud, that the earth was very young, as implied in the Genesis account of creation, and that there was “no death upon the earth, either vegetable, insect or animal, prior to the fall of man, and that human life did not exist upon the earth prior to Adam” (p. 55). Although Evenson and Jeffery do not mention it, Elder Smith had become acquainted with the teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist creationist George McCready Price and had corresponded with him.<sup>1</sup>

In response to Elder Smith’s sermon, B. H. Roberts had written a letter to the First Presidency taking strong issue with the ideas presented by Elder Smith, especially the concept of no death before the fall. (I have personally wondered what happens to “vegetables” when eaten by “insect, or animal.” Do they die? And if there is no death before the fall, then all coal, limestone, diatomaceous earth, and all the fossils are younger than Adam, perhaps trapped in the Noachian flood!) The matter was discussed at length in meetings of the Twelve, and Elder Roberts was asked to defend his viewpoint, which he did with a fifty-page manuscript. Elder Smith responded a few weeks later with his own fifty-eight-page manuscript. The memo from the First Presidency in 1931 requested that the Brethren set this argument aside

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1. Ronald L. Numbers, *The Creationists: The Evolution of Scientific Creationism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 309–10.

because it seemed to have no resolution and did not affect the basic teachings of the church.

Some of the Twelve noted that, because Elder Smith's sermon had been widely disseminated, while Elder Roberts's views had not been made public, members of the church might conclude that Elder Smith's sermon represented the official doctrine of the church. And many have concluded just that, based not only on the sermon but also on Elder Smith's book entitled *Man: His Origin and Destiny*.<sup>2</sup> It was concluded that James E. Talmage of the Twelve should give a sermon expressing his viewpoint and also encompassing that of others who sided with him and Elder Roberts. The Talmage speech was given in the Tabernacle in August 1931, and, after some resistance from Elder Smith but with the blessing of the First Presidency, it was published first in the *Church News* and then by the church as a pamphlet. In the speech, Elder Talmage (a geologist by training) strongly emphasized that countless organisms had lived and died for millions of years before the fall of Adam, some small portion of them becoming fossils. He also quoted scripture and expressed his conviction that Adam was indeed the first member of the human race, that we existed previously in heaven, and that we were created in the image of God (pp. 68–70).

Because the First Presidency had encouraged and supported Elder Talmage's talk, Evenson and Jeffery include it in their collection (pp. 71–94, document D, appendix). It is the third long document mentioned above, and it is a very valuable source. The other, shorter documents are also of interest, with statements by Presidents Heber J. Grant, David O. McKay, Spencer W. Kimball, and Gordon B. Hinckley. These brief statements reiterate the ideas put forth in the official statements of 1909 and 1910.

Reviewing all these documents and the history that goes with them, I was sorry that the compilers had set standards that eliminated inclusion of the sermon of Joseph Fielding Smith, the complete letter of B. H. Roberts, his manuscript to the Twelve, and Elder Smith's response. It would be useful to read these documents in the context of

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2. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Man: His Origin and Destiny* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1954).

the others, although several excerpts are included in the Presidency's memo of 1931. The compilation and comments of Evenson and Jeffery have provided a valuable source for those who are interested in the evolution controversy, and they also make highly interesting reading.



## CREATION BY EVOLUTION?

Frank B. Salisbury

This is a book by two Latter-day Saint evolutionary biologists who are highly committed to both their faith and their biology. Helped by a movie producer/writer, they present strong arguments for evolution as the mechanism of creation, including humans as well as all other living things. Before embarking on reading the entire book, I first checked to see what references they had made to my own writing; in one such reference, the authors seemed to completely miss the point I was trying to make. Hence I began examining the book further with a bit of skepticism—I was looking for more errors. But as I got into the volume, my attitude toward it became increasingly positive. This is not to say that I agree with everything they say, but the book presents a strong case for evolution in creation and perhaps, above all, provides much food for religious thought. As far as I know, some ideas are truly unique to these authors.

Stephens and Meldrum are well qualified to discuss evolution in the light of the restored gospel. Both are professors at Idaho State University in Pocatello, and both are engaged in research and teach

Review of Trent D. Stephens, D. Jeffrey Meldrum, with Forrest B. Peterson. *Evolution and Mormonism: A Quest for Understanding*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2001. xxii + 238 pp., with index. \$19.95.

classes directly related to evolution. Stephens was a bishop at the time the book was published, and Meldrum was a priesthood instructor. Peterson, who is also an active Latter-day Saint, provided perspective from a nonspecialist's viewpoint. The list of acknowledgments is impressive. The authors have discussed the topic of their book with dozens of others, including Professor Duane Jeffery at Brigham Young University, who wrote the foreword.

The authors discuss the three official statements from First Presidencies on the origin of man, and these are reproduced in an appendix (pp. 209–18). The statements do not necessarily or categorically reject a role for evolution in creation. Other Latter-day Saint authors are also quoted, and while some support evolution, others oppose such a view.

Stephens and Meldrum review the history of the idea that man is not an animal, an idea that might be held by some church members, and then they present rather detailed anatomical, physiological, and psychological evidence that humans have all the characteristics of other animals and are easily classified as primates. Having always believed that humans are anatomically and physiologically part of the animal kingdom, I am weary of this discussion. Do all animals have all the same psychological (mental) abilities of humans, only in lesser degree, as Stephens and Meldrum argue? Well, yes, some animals use tools, exhibit the rudiments of language (e.g., can be taught sign language), and even have some degree of self-awareness and compassion, but what other animal could write a book like this one? Other animals may have creative intelligence (i.e., can solve problems), but the gap between that and human intelligence seems huge. Stephens and Meldrum note that humans truly are unique in one sense because “man, as a spirit, was begotten and born of heavenly parents” (p. 125, quoting the 1909 First Presidency statement).

Another topic to which the authors repeatedly return is the idea that there was no death of any living thing before the fall of Adam and Eve. This old sectarian doctrine does still need much attention. The idea goes back to the period before the restoration of the gospel; Stephens and Meldrum suggest John Milton's *Paradise Lost* as the

possible origin of the doctrine (pp. 183–84). Yet it has been preached by some prominent Latter-day Saint General Authorities, including Orson Pratt, Joseph Fielding Smith (though not when he was president), and Bruce R. McConkie.<sup>1</sup> With such backing for the idea, it is not surprising that it has sometimes been taught in seminaries and institutes, as well as in some gospel doctrine classes.

Stephens and Meldrum point out that nowhere in scripture does it say that Adam and Eve—let alone all other living things—were created in an immortal state. Rather, *after* the fall, the tree of life was guarded so that Adam and Eve could not partake of its fruit and live forever—that is, be immortal (Genesis 3:22–24; Moses 4:28–31). If they were to partake of the fruit of the tree of life while they were in the garden, in some way that we do not understand the fruit would have made their bodies capable of living forever. We may not understand how a fruit could produce “eternal youth” in two special people, but we can at least imagine it. But it is impossible for a biologist or paleontologist to imagine how *all* organisms could avoid death until after the fall. As Adam and Eve ate of the fruit of every tree of the garden, the cells in that fruit would die. And the idea of there being no death also means no reproduction, but fruits are reproductive organs that produce seed. And in the creation story, the Lord commands all living things to *bring forth* of their own kind—clearly a command to reproduce (e.g., Moses 2:11–12, 20–22, 24–25, 28–30).

The fossils in the earth’s sedimentary rocks are the remains of organisms that lived and died on the earth. If there were no death of any organisms until after the fall, all of these fossils must have been produced in the Noachian flood—and that is what some people during the Middle Ages believed. This idea can be found now among the young-earth creationists. This would mean that all those organisms—for example, dinosaurs and humans—were living on earth at the same time. The ordering of the strata in the earth’s crust just does not fit this

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1. See Orson Pratt, *Masterful Discourses and Writings of Orson Pratt* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1962), 356–57; Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1999), 1:108; and Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 185.

picture. No traces of humans have ever been found in the same strata as dinosaur bones, for example. I see large quantities of the remains of living organisms that testify to an ancient earth: coal, limestones, dolomites, and diatomaceous earth represent such remains. The diatomaceous earth, for example, consists of microscopic shells of diatoms laid down one cell at a time, a process that would require millions of years to produce the known strata thicknesses (1,500 feet in one location).

But what about that statement in 2 Nephi 2:22 that says that if Adam had not fallen, “all things which were created must have remained in the same state in which they were after they were created; and they must have remained forever, and had no end”? This is the key scripture quoted by proponents of the no-death-before-the-fall doctrine. It is the *only* scripture that seems to support the doctrine (*no* scripture in Genesis, Moses, or Abraham does), but that support depends on one’s interpretation of the word *state*. Was this a state of immortality as some have taught? Or was it some kind of ecological state, perhaps with no development of human civilizations? To assume that *state* means immortality goes against all the things mentioned above as well as against other ideas, as Stephens and Meldrum point out.

I was very excited by Stephens and Meldrum’s idea that Adam and Eve were not placed on earth as immortal beings but gained their immortality from eating of the tree of life (see pp. 181–83). As far as I know, this idea is unique with these authors. Stephens and Meldrum’s views on the fall and its consequences provide great insight to me.

A strong impression gained from reading the book is that Stephens and Meldrum are convinced that creation involved evolution. Their summary of the principles of evolution by natural selection of random mutations is excellent and convincing. They answer many objections to evolutionary theory such as no transitional forms in the fossil record (many such “missing links” are now known). I see some problems at the level of genes and enzymes (are mutations *really* sufficient to account for the needed variability?), but it does seem that evolution has occurred over past eons on the earth’s surface.

One question concerns the extent to which God intervened in his creations. For Stephens and Meldrum, the extent of intervention



must be very limited. Natural selection is capable of handling creation almost by itself, they imply, so how can man be created in the likeness and image of God? Stephens and Meldrum present preliminary data (drawn from some of Stephens's research) that suggest that there are "constraints" during development—that is, evolution may not be as random as many evolutionists have claimed but is rather directional instead, leading to man. I was not convinced by this argument, although I am taking a wait-and-see attitude.

Stephens and Meldrum seem to be saying that God wound things up and then let them play out without his intervention until humans were the result, at which time Adam's spirit could be introduced into his body. Pushed to its ultimate, this is the doctrine of *deism*, which says that God started things going, after which the universe ran and now runs like clockwork and will run for the rest of eternity. This philosophy of a clockwork universe (i.e., a purely mechanistic universe) became popular after Newton and others formulated the basic laws of physics. Several of our founding fathers taught it, and Charles Darwin finished *The Origin of Species* with a paragraph based on this approach. (The paragraph includes: "Life . . . having been originally breathed by the Creator into a few forms or into one . . . [from which] endless forms . . . have been, and are being evolved.")<sup>2</sup> Modern physics, especially quantum mechanics, rejects a mechanistic universe, and Stephens and Meldrum would of course agree that God can and did intervene in creation whenever it fulfilled his purposes, but their chapter does smack of deism.

A final short chapter summarizes the Latter-day Saint doctrine of eternal progression as a kind of evolution. It may be a nice analogy, but it can be misleading to someone who thinks that some individual near-ape ancestor itself changed into a human. That is not what the theory of evolution says—only that an individual might differ slightly from its parents such that it had a somewhat better chance of surviving and reproducing than its parents did. As these small changes

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2. Charles R. Darwin, *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*, 6th ed. (1859; London: Collier Books, 1962 [1969 printing]), 484–85.

accumulated over thousands of generations, new species could gradually be distinguished. (Always, any set of parents produces only its own “kind.”) But “eternal evolution,” as Stephens and Meldrum call it, is a change in *individuals* from intelligences, to spirit children of God, to mortals, back to spirits, and finally to resurrected beings. This is not evolution based upon mutations and natural selection.

The book is remarkably free of errors, but I did notice a very few. For example, Darwin did not present Wallace’s paper in 1858 (p. 96). Darwin had just buried an infant and did not attend the meeting at the Linnean Society. I was also surprised that there is no mention of intelligent-design creationists, only the flood-geology, young-earth creationists. Intelligent-design creationism started in the mid-1990s, but it was not well known until more recently, which might be why Stephens and Meldrum do not discuss it.

About the authors’ misunderstanding of my writing, which I mentioned at the beginning of this review: I was trying to make the point that similarity in form does not *prove* genetic descent of one form from the other.<sup>3</sup> There are, as Stephens and Meldrum point out, by now thousands of fossil hominids that *could* be human ancestors. The logical thing to do is to try to arrange them into “trees” that show how one might have descended from the other (with many generations between the two, of course). But the fact that they have similarities and that the trees may appear “logical” does not *prove* that the trees actually represent descent through time. Actually, the trees have been changing with almost every new discovery during the past century and a half. But that is another story. I went on to say that if similarity proved descent, then “we would have to conclude that Fords and Chevrolets are genetically related and that 1976 Fords descended from 1975 Fords.”<sup>4</sup> “A little reflection,” according to Stephens and Meldrum, “reveals the fundamental flaw in this analogy, which incorrectly equates cars, that cannot pass on traits, with biological organisms capable of reproduction and transmission of genetic information from one generation to the next” (p. 143). But that was my whole point! I assumed that it was obvious to

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3. Frank B. Salisbury, *The Creation* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 225.

4. Salisbury, *Creation*, 225.

anyone that cars don't reproduce! I even noted that "each automobile is the product of an act of special creation" (i.e., in a factory).<sup>5</sup> Still, cars can and often do resemble each other, but since it is obvious that they do not reproduce, resemblance is not enough to prove genetic descent.

Paleontologists have no choice but to try to arrange fossils according to similarities in form, but they can never *prove* that the results of their arrangements really represent what happened. And it doesn't really matter. The important thing is that arrangements can logically be made, whether the exact arrangements represent history or not. The overall arrangement shows the simplest organisms in the oldest strata and the most complex fossils in the youngest strata. That is what evolutionary theory predicts.

This little story merits discussion because it illustrates what is perhaps a minor problem with Stephens and Meldrum's book as a whole—they are so busy defending evolutionary theory that it never seems to occur to them that there might still be problems with the theory. Perhaps that is the result of creationist attacks on evolution, especially during the past decade or so. It has put the evolutionists so much on the defensive that they tend to ignore any questioning of proposed evolutionary mechanisms. I agree with the authors that the case for evolution is so strong that many aspects are now well established, but it is shortsighted to imply that *all* the problems have been solved—and to suggest to young Latter-day Saint students that all the answers are in and that those answers include an evolutionary creation by a deist God.

On balance, Stephens and Meldrum have done a wonderful job of telling the story of evolution in a way that can make much sense to Latter-day Saint readers—even providing thoughtful insights into the restored gospel scriptures. Because of the amazing progress of science during the past thirty years, if I were writing my 1976 book now, it would come much closer to the book written by Stephens and Meldrum—I would take a much less favorable view of the creationist literature than I did then, but I would still point out some problems.

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5. Salisbury, *Creation*, 225.



## JOSEPH SMITH AND “INTERPRETIVE BIOGRAPHY”

Larry E. Morris

Several years ago, when I researched the translation of the Book of Mormon for a prominent professor at Brigham Young University, he recommended that I get Dan Vogel’s *Early Mormon Documents*—I believe two volumes were available at the time.<sup>1</sup> I was one step ahead of him because I already owned those volumes and had made good use of them. But since the other volumes had not been published yet, I searched far and wide for such documents as statements by Joseph and Hiel Lewis (cousins of Emma Hale Smith). This meant digging through archives (where you naturally spend half your time waiting), fussing with microfilm, and sometimes relying on friends for second- or third-generation photocopies. What I ended up with, of course, was a stack of papers that I had to organize and index myself (all the while suspecting that even my list of documents was incomplete).

As I continued this research project—and started others—I was always tremendously relieved when a new volume of *Early Mormon Documents* rolled off the press. Yes, I had managed to find poor copies of *some* of the Lewis material, but Dan Vogel had found it all, had

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Thanks to Louis Midgley, Shirley Ricks, and my son Isaac for their help with this review.

1. See Dan Vogel, ed., *Early Mormon Documents*, 5 vols. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996–2003).

Review of Dan Vogel. *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004. xxii + 715 pp., with index. \$39.95.

given me readable transcriptions, and had also provided background information and biographical details on the Lewises.<sup>2</sup>

Not to say that Vogel was always my first choice. If I were dealing with a Joseph Smith document, for instance, I went to Dean Jessee.<sup>3</sup> For help with Lucy Mack Smith's history, I went to Lavina Fielding Anderson.<sup>4</sup> Still, as I have researched early Mormon history for the past ten years, the *Early Mormon Documents* collection has been by far my most useful resource. It is hard enough to locate the documents and transcribe them, but Vogel really went the extra mile by providing valuable footnotes throughout. Admittedly, transcription and factual errors can be found here and there in the volumes, but errors can be found in virtually any collection of such size and scope. Dan Vogel has made a significant and lasting contribution to Mormon studies, and he deserves to be thanked for his bibliographic work. I sincerely appreciate his prodigious research. I have also had a positive experience with him personally. We met at a Mormon History Association conference, and I found him cordial and respectful.<sup>5</sup>

Considering the extent of Vogel's research and his obvious interests, it came as no surprise that he produced *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet*, a massive, heavily annotated study of Joseph Smith's life up to 1831. It also came as no surprise that reactions to the book have varied widely. As I look at Vogel's work and the controversy surrounding it, however, I am persuaded that the discussion must center on an assumption Vogel announces in his introduction. "I am convinced," he writes, "that it is impossible to write a meaningful biography of [Joseph] Smith without addressing his claims" (p. viii). Vogel apparently believes that the biographer must not only decide (among other things) whether Joseph Smith was really a prophet of God and

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2. See *Early Mormon Documents*, 4:299–321.

3. Dean C. Jessee, ed., *The Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989); and Jessee, ed., *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002).

4. Lavina Fielding Anderson, ed., *Lucy's Book: A Critical Edition of Lucy Mack Smith's Family Memoir* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2001).

5. As I see it, some have been reluctant to acknowledge Vogel's contribution because he is a nonbeliever.

whether the Book of Mormon is really an ancient record but must also integrate his or her conclusions into the narrative. This is exactly what Vogel does. I believe, however, that this crucial assumption is fundamentally flawed and, in fact, is undercut by his previous work in *Early Mormon Documents*.

### Criticizing the Sources

In *Early Mormon Documents*, Vogel has published more than 450 documents—a truly astonishing number. This he has done in a straightforward manner, stressing that they are important for the information they contain about people and events. He correctly points out that “not all historical documents are created equal,” and he offers a solid discussion of the significance of “firsthand testimony from unbiased eyewitnesses,” “the time-lapse between an observation and its recollection,” and “the character or reliability of witnesses.”<sup>6</sup> He also groups the documents into distinct categories: official or authorized histories; diaries; memoirs and reminiscences; personal letters; journal and newspaper reports; and civil, business, and ecclesiastical records.<sup>7</sup>

Vogel’s attitude toward source criticism serves him well in *Early Mormon Documents*. Take his treatment of Oliver Cowdery. Although some critics of the church have quoted a document entitled “Defense in a Rehearsal of My Grounds for Separating Myself from the Latter Day Saints” in an attempt to discredit Oliver—as well as Joseph—Vogel excludes it from *Early Mormon Documents* because it is “now considered by most scholars to have been forged by R. B. Neal in 1906.”<sup>8</sup>

I was also impressed with Vogel’s discussion of Oliver Cowdery’s reported testimony of the Book of Mormon in a court of law during the decade (1838–48) that he was out of the church. Vogel has carefully researched this item, and he includes eleven different statements (none of which comes from a firsthand source), concluding that “the claim

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6. *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:xiv–xv.

7. *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:xv–xvi.

8. *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:xiv.

[of Cowdery's testimony] rests on less than satisfactory grounds."<sup>9</sup> I agree entirely.

Again, Vogel proves himself to be a careful researcher when he discusses Barnes Frisbie's allegations that Joseph Smith's and Oliver Cowdery's fathers were involved in a money-digging fiasco known as the "Wood Scrape." Siding with Richard L. Anderson<sup>10</sup> rather than D. Michael Quinn,<sup>11</sup> Vogel agrees that Frisbie was "speculating beyond his data."<sup>12</sup>

Apparently continuing this emphasis, Vogel argues in *The Making of a Prophet* that his "discussion and conclusions are firmly grounded in the primary source documents"—just as they should be. He adds, however, that he "will consider the Book of Mormon and the texts of Smith's revelations as *primary sources* containing possible clues to his inner conflicts and state of mind" (pp. xvii, xviii, emphasis added). This assertion reveals that, as a biographer, Vogel has radically changed his methodology, for he has defined *primary sources* in a completely new way. First, he did not even include the Book of Mormon or the early revelations (such as Doctrine and Covenants sections 6, 7, 8, and 9) in his exhaustive list of more than 450 primary documents associated with early church history. Second, in *Early Mormon Documents* he took a *literal* approach to affidavits, interviews, letters, census records, road lists, receipts, and a host of other records, assuming that these documents both say what they mean and mean what they say (while properly acknowledging that that does not necessarily make them accurate). But now he has shifted to a *figurative* stance, where statements about Lehi or King Noah, for example, might mean something entirely different. What are we to make of all this?

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9. *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:468.

10. Richard L. Anderson, "The Mature Joseph Smith and Treasure Seeking," *BYU Studies* 24/4 (1984): 521–24.

11. D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, rev. and enlarged (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998), 34–36, 122–33.

12. *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:599.



## Vogel's View of the Historian's Task

Perhaps anticipating questions about his methodology, Vogel addresses this issue in the introduction to *The Making of a Prophet*.<sup>13</sup> “I believe,” he writes, “we must address what Jan Shippo, non-Mormon historian of the LDS experience, once termed the ‘prophet puzzle’ if we ever hope to understand Smith and the church he founded. . . . Shippo called for a more fully integrated view of Smith, one allowing for, even encouraging, the complex spectrum of human personality” (pp. vii–viii).<sup>14</sup>

Vogel also notes that “no biographer is completely free of bias. As is no doubt apparent, my inclination is to interpret any claim of the paranormal—precognition, clairvoyance, telekinesis, telepathy—as delusion or fraud. I do not claim that the supernatural does not exist, for it is impossible to prove a negative. I maintain only that the evidence upon which such claims rest is unconvincing to me” (p. xii).

Vogel eventually launches into a discussion of methodology:

Taking a cue from Robert F. Berkhofer's 1969 book, *A Behavioral Approach to Historical Analysis*,<sup>15</sup> some writers have suggested that historians should not attempt to evaluate Smith's supernatural experiences but instead “try to understand [such] experiences in the way in which the actors themselves understood them.”<sup>16</sup> Reflecting this approach in his 1984 biography of Smith,

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13. Throughout the rest of this review, I frequently include the text of endnotes with quoted material, allowing the authors to more fully speak for themselves and also allowing readers to see which works are being quoted. The actual text of these quoted notes is enclosed by curly brackets, { }.

14. {Jan Shippo, “The Prophet Puzzle: Suggestions Leading toward a More Comprehensive Interpretation of Joseph Smith,” in *The Prophet Puzzle: Interpretive Essays on Joseph Smith*, ed. Bryan Waterman (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1999), 44. As early as 1943, Dale Morgan recognized that Smith could not be explained in simple black or white terms and called for a more integrated view of his motives and personality (see John Philip Walker, ed., *Dale Morgan on Early Mormonism: Correspondence and a New History* [Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1986], 44).}

15. {Robert F. Berkhofer Jr., *A Behavioral Approach to Historical Analysis* (New York: Free Press, 1969).}

16. {See, e.g., Thomas Alexander, “The Place of Joseph Smith in the Development of American Religion: A Historiographical Inquiry,” *Journal of Mormon History* 5 (1978):

Richard L. Bushman wrote: “My method has been to relate events as the participants themselves experienced them. . . . Insofar as the revelations were a reality to them, I have treated them as real in this narrative.”<sup>17</sup> While there is value to such a method, I am reluctant to dispense with critical tools and become a storyteller or narrator of the supernatural. I, too, want to understand Smith on his own terms, but I would like to be able to explain him.

The suggestion that historians simply “relate events as the participants themselves experienced them” oversimplifies Berkhofer’s thesis and results in a methodological reductionism that assumes the historical record is both factual and accurate. Berkhofer knew well that the record of an event cannot be taken at face value because accounts are so often tainted by a recorder’s subjective beliefs. The historian’s task is to determine, as best he or she can, what really happened. Berkhofer was not dealing with reports of supernatural events but with more mundane human behavior. Even so, when Smith fails to mention foundational visions until years after the event and gives conflicting and anachronistic accounts of them, how certain can one be that he relates events as he experienced them at the time?

Even if we were to accept the idea that testimony regarding supernatural phenomena is reliable, we would still be under no obligation to uncritically embrace the witnesses’ interpretations of those experiences. What Berkhofer did in 1969 was to open the door to psychology and sociology, not to close the door on the humanistic sciences. Historians do well to narrate the Salem witch trials of 1692 “as the participants themselves experienced them”—complete with accounts of paranormal phenomena, demonic possession, etc.—but they

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17; Klaus Hansen, “Jan Shipps and the Mormon Tradition,” *Journal of Mormon History* 11 (1984): 136; and George D. Smith, editor’s introduction, *Faithful History: Essays on Writing Mormon History* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), ix.}

17. {Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 3.}

are also right to make a case for mass hysteria, for example.<sup>18</sup> Simply put, a researcher is not limited in his or her analysis by the subjective view of the participant or even the work of past generations. Often, succeeding generations find additional sources and better tools with which to assess an event beyond what the participants themselves assumed.

Arguing that skeptics like me are victims of their own “naturalistic assumptions” diverts attention from the fact that there is simply no reliable proof for the existence of the supernatural. Naturalism is part of our everyday experience; supernaturalism is not.<sup>19</sup> The burden of proof rests with those making supernatural claims, and until such claims are proven “beyond a reasonable doubt,” one is justified in approaching such claims skeptically. (pp. xv–xvi, brackets and ellipses in original)

“In writing this biography,” Vogel adds on the next page, “I did not want to provide a simple chronological narrative of Smith’s early life. Rather, I intended to consider the psychological implications of Smith’s actions and beliefs and get as close to the man as possible. Thus, I have written an interpretive biography of an emotional and intellectual life” (p. xvii).

Vogel has touched on a number of key issues. The portions of his introduction reproduced above (and I have quoted him at length in an attempt to let him speak for himself) show what a multitude of controversial decisions are involved in the writing of history, particularly Mormon history. I would like to deal with several of these issues.

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18. {Chadwick Hansen, *Witchcraft at Salem* (New York: Braziller, 1969).}

19. {At heart, I am a rationalist and naturalist. I believe that the physical universe follows natural law, that it does not behave in supernatural or contradictory ways, that it functions without supernatural forces, and that it is unnecessary to go outside nature to explain what takes place within it. In an attempt to replace a rational conception of the universe with one that includes magic, miracles, etc., some writers appeal to quantum mechanics and the seemingly inexplicable behavior of subatomic particles. However, to my mind, such appeals are unconvincing. As a possible corrective, see Martin Gardner, “Parapsychology and Quantum Mechanics,” in Paul Kurtz, *A Skeptic’s Handbook of Parapsychology* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1985), 585–98.}

### An “Integrated View” of Joseph Smith

Referring to Jan Shipps’s oft-quoted essay “The Prophet Puzzle,”<sup>20</sup> Vogel, like Shipps, calls for a more fully integrated view of Joseph Smith. And what does Shipps mean by this? She says, for example, that the “Dogberry, Bennett, and Hurlbut and Howe reports of the way the people of Palmyra perceived the prophet are crucial to the development of a complete religious profile of Joseph Smith.”<sup>21</sup> She also maintains that a proper chronology of Joseph Smith’s life will include both his visions and his treasure-seeking activities and that our “perspective must be lengthened through a consideration of the prophet in the context of the social, political, economic, and theological milieu from which he came.”<sup>22</sup>

When Vogel says it is necessary to “address” the prophet puzzle to understand Joseph Smith, he apparently means that one must decide whether or not to believe Joseph’s claims. That is not exactly what Shipps says, however. Rather, when she wrote that essay, she was interested in accounting for what is found in the sources both friendly and hostile to Joseph Smith, arriving at “a picture of the prophet and an account of the foundations of the Mormon faith which will be convincing to both *tough* minds, which demand empirical facts, and *tender* minds, comfortable in the presence of leaps of faith.”<sup>23</sup> I understand Shipps’s point (although I would like to engage her in a conversation about what “empirical facts” are). Further, I believe the book that best offers an “integrated view” of Joseph Smith and is most convincing to both tough and tender minds is Richard Bushman’s *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*,<sup>24</sup> not *The Making of a Prophet*, which is likely to leave the tender-minded, as well as even some tough-minded, souls aghast.

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20. Shipps, “Prophet Puzzle,” 25–47.

21. Shipps, “Prophet Puzzle,” 36.

22. Shipps, “Prophet Puzzle,” 28.

23. Shipps, “Prophet Puzzle,” 28–29, emphasis in original.

24. Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Knopf, 2005).

## That “Noble Dream”

When Vogel says the “historian’s task is to determine, as best he or she can, what really happened,” he seems to be saying that historians should be objective, or that the history they write should be objective. And what does *that* mean? As Peter Novick points out, the notion of “historical objectivity” is “not a single idea, but rather a sprawling collection of assumptions, attitudes, aspirations, and antipathies,” including

a commitment to the reality of the past, and to truth as correspondence to that reality; a sharp separation between knower and known, between fact and value, and, above all, between history and fiction. Historical facts are seen as prior to and independent of interpretation: the value of an interpretation is judged by how well it accounts for the facts; if contradicted by the facts, it must be abandoned. Truth is one, not perspectival. Whatever patterns exist in history are “found,” not “made.” Though successive generations of historians might, as their perspectives shifted, attribute different significance to events in the past, the meaning of those events was unchanging.

The objective historian’s role is that of a neutral, or disinterested, judge; it must never degenerate into that of advocate or, even worse, propagandist. The historian’s conclusions are expected to display the standard judicial qualities of balance and evenhandedness.<sup>25</sup>

This idea of objectivity—with strong roots, at least for Americans, in the writings of the German historian Leopold von Ranke—has had

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25. Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 1–2. Reviewer Ann Wilson calls *That Noble Dream* an “elegantly written, wide-ranging study” in which “Peter Novick explores the ways that American historians have constructed, modified, defended, and challenged the idea of objectivity since the establishment of professional historical practice over one hundred years ago.” Review of *That Noble Dream* at [userwww.sfsu.edu/~epf/2002/wilson\\_novick.html](http://userwww.sfsu.edu/~epf/2002/wilson_novick.html) (accessed 15 March 2006). For a discussion of Novick’s book in the context of Mormon history, see Louis Midgley, “The Myth of Objectivity: Some Lessons for Latter-day Saints,” *Sunstone* 14/4 (1990): 54–56.

enormous influence in the writing of history. “When Ranke in the 1830s,” writes E. H. Carr, a prominent historian of the mid-twentieth century, “in legitimate protest against moralizing history, remarked that the task of the historian was ‘simply to show how it really was (*wie es eigentlich gewesen* [war]),’ this not very profound aphorism had an astonishing success.”<sup>26</sup> Such statements, for instance, as “let the facts speak for themselves” or “follow the evidence where it leads” are simply different ways of saying that historians ought to be objective.

Take a well-known statement by B. H. Roberts on the writing of Mormon history:

It is always a difficult task to hold the scales of justice at even balance when weighing the deeds of men. It becomes doubly more so when dealing with men engaged in a movement that one believes had its origin with God, and that its leaders on occasion act under the inspiration of God. Under such conditions to so state events as to be historically exact, and yet, on the other hand, so treat the course of events as not to destroy faith in these men, nor in their work, becomes a task of supreme delicacy; and one that tries the soul and the skill of the historian. The only way such a task can be accomplished, in the judgment of the writer, is to *frankly state events as they occurred*, in full consideration of all related circumstances, allowing the line of condemnation or of justification to fall where it may; being confident that in the sum of things justice will follow truth; and God will be glorified in his work, no matter what may befall individuals, or groups of individuals.<sup>27</sup>

More recently (in the same essay quoted earlier), Shipps wrote: “The entire project must be approached with an open mind, a generous spirit, and a determination to *follow the evidence* that appeals to reason

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26. E. H. Carr, *What Is History? The George Macaulay Trevelyan Lectures Delivered in the University of Cambridge, January–March 1961* (Houndmills, Engl.: Macmillan, 1961), 3.

27. *Comprehensive History of the Church*, 1:vi–vii, emphasis added.

from whatever source it comes, wherever it leads.”<sup>28</sup> Taking the negative side, Quinn said that one of the “seven deadly sins” of traditional Mormon history is hesitating “to *follow the evidence* to ‘revisionist’ interpretations that [run] counter to ‘traditional’ assumptions.”<sup>29</sup>

This notion of “stating events as they occurred” or “following the evidence where it leads” has strong appeal. It seems the proper way to do history. I believe it is particularly influential because it resonates with ideas found in other areas of life. One of the definitions of the adjective *objective* is “expressing or dealing with facts or conditions as perceived without distortion by personal feelings, prejudices, or *interpretations*.”<sup>30</sup> Being objective certainly seems both sound and possible. Students, for example, want their instructors to be objective when grading papers. Our culture has also come to place a high value on “objectivity” in both the media and the courtroom. We expect reporters to set aside their own feelings, get at the truth, and “tell it like it is” (well illustrated by former CBS anchorman Walter Cronkite’s “and that’s the way it is” at the close of his evening news broadcasts). Likewise, judges are expected to be “impartial” or “unbiased.”

But the problem is, of course, that the façade of objectivity starts to crumble when you look at it closely. Students may want their papers graded “objectively,” but what does that really mean? The things that are most objective—most easily agreed upon by “impartial” observers—are also the kinds of things likely to be least meaningful to the student, such as the basic rules of grammar, punctuation, and spelling. (But get copyeditors together, and even this so-called objectivity will evaporate.) As soon as the instructor comments on the more important aspects of a paper, such as its coherence or credibility, he or she has seemingly stepped into a much more “subjective” realm, relying less on rules that can be explicitly spelled out. Does the student really want objectivity? (If so, designing all tests and papers so they can be graded by a computer might be the answer. Better yet, use both computer instruction and

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28. Shipps, “Prophet Puzzle,” 28, emphasis added.

29. D. Michael Quinn, ed., *The New Mormon History* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), viii, emphasis added.

30. *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed., emphasis added.

computer grading and eliminate human elements altogether. Then find a way to eliminate software programmers, etc.)

Similarly, “objective” hardly describes what takes place in either the newsroom or the courtroom. Television stations and newspapers are first of all owned by groups or individuals who ultimately decide what is broadcast or printed. Could a reporter ever be completely objective when doing a story concerning the personal life of the owner or publisher? Second, ratings and sales obviously play a key role in what stories are presented and how they are presented. Third, those involved in an incident later reported in the news often see the coverage not as objective but rather as slanted and incomplete. As for the courtroom, the notion that facts or conditions can be dealt with in that setting without interpretation is laughable. Interpreting is exactly what a judge is supposed to do (such as deciding what can and cannot be introduced as evidence). Lawyers fully expect the judge to be “biased” by the interpretations of previous judges, or case law, and those judges in turn were influenced by earlier judges, making the process anything but objective.

“Objective history” runs into the same kind of problems. From the minute I start “doing” history, I face one decision after another and naturally make those decisions based on previous experience, aptitudes, personal preferences, and so on (in other words, what might be called *subjective* factors). If I decide to write a book on the early U.S. fur trade, I have already chosen a book rather than an article, the U.S. rather than Canada, the fur trade rather than the liquor trade, and early rather than late. I have also begun to formulate some kind of story, or plot, in my mind. I continue with an amazing array of personal decisions—deciding whether to do research at the Missouri Historical Society, the National Archives, or both (and so on). Next I frame certain questions rather than others, focus on certain individuals rather than others, use certain sources rather than others, and quote certain documents (and certain sections of those documents) rather than others, all the while refining and reshaping my plot. If being objective means dealing with historical facts or conditions without personal feelings, prejudices, or interpretations, then I am not



being objective. Quite the opposite—I am making personal interpretations at every step along the way. (It is not even clear what *objective* would mean at this point.)

That is not all. Notions like “stating events as they occurred,” “following the evidence,” or “letting the facts speak for themselves”—which no doubt sounded fair and noble at first glance—are suddenly sounding hollow. In the case of a violent conflict between Blackfoot Indians and trappers in Montana in 1810, for example, what in the world is the event “as it occurred”? Blackfoot oral tradition may see the event one way while witnesses Thomas James (a young, hired trapper) and Pierre Menard (a seasoned fur-company partner) see it a second and third way. I must somehow construct my own version, using my words, my interpretations, and my plot. (And even if only one account of a given event is available in the primary documents, I will be asking about the date of composition, the reliability of the recorder, and any other number of questions, and modifying my story in the process.) As for “evidence” or even “facts,” these do not come prepackaged and labeled for me—I am the one who decides what the facts are and which ones are significant enough to count as evidence.

“We have, in recent years,” writes Yale University history professor John Lewis Gaddis, “embraced postmodernist insights about the relative character of all historical judgments—the inseparability of the observer from that which is being observed—although some of us feel we’ve known this all along.”<sup>31</sup> Keith Jenkins, lecturer at the Chichester Institute of Higher Education in England, goes even further when he says that

no matter how verifiable, how widely acceptable or checkable, history remains inevitably a personal construct, a manifestation of the historian’s perspective as a “narrator.” Unlike direct memory (itself suspect) history relies on someone else’s eyes and voice; we see through an interpreter who stands between past events and our readings of them. Of course, as Lowenthal

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31. John Lewis Gaddis, *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 9–10.

says, written history “in practice” cuts down the historian’s logical freedom to write anything by allowing the reader access to his/her sources, but the historian’s viewpoint and predilections still shape the choice of historical materials, and our own personal constructs determine what we make of them. . . .

So far I have argued that history is a shifting discourse constructed by historians and that from the existence of the past no one reading is entailed; change the gaze, shift the perspective and new readings appear. Yet although historians know all this, most seem to studiously ignore it and strive for objectivity and truth nevertheless.<sup>32</sup>

### Telling a Story the Best You Can

So how does this discussion of objectivity relate to Vogel? First, I believe it shows that his statement that the “historian’s task is to determine, as best he or she can, what really happened” is ill-conceived (even though it sounds perfectly good). The past is gone forever, and whether we have access to “what really happened”—or whether such a phrase actually even means anything—is questionable.

Second, history involves interpretation from start to finish. When a figure in the past creates a so-called primary document by recording an experience, he or she, in the act of recording it, has already interpreted the experience (not to mention the interpretation that took place when he or she experienced the event itself). The historian again interprets when deciding whether or not to use a document (and, if so,

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32. Keith Jenkins, *Re-Thinking History* (London: Routledge, 1991), 12, 13–14. As if to illustrate Jenkins’s point, Robert Remini, whom one must assume is well aware of postmodernist trends, introduces his biography of Joseph Smith as follows: “As a historian I have tried to be as objective as possible in narrating [Joseph Smith’s] life and work.” Remini, *Joseph Smith* (New York: Viking, 2002), x. Writing twenty years ago, Thomas G. Alexander, a vocal proponent of “New Mormon History,” claimed that he knew “of no historicist who believes that objectivity is anything more than a sympathetic attempt to understand objects outside his or her own mind, including the ideas of others.” Alexander, “Historiography and the New Mormon History: A Historian’s Perspective,” *Dialogue* 19/3 (1986): 38–39. I believe, however, that some “historicists” mean something more than that by objectivity. I would also ask if these objects “outside our own minds” are static and somehow capable of being understood without personal interpretation.

how much). And the reader interprets when reading the narrative (by imagining the scene in a certain way, emphasizing certain details and deemphasizing others, and so on).

What then, is the historian's task? Gaddis offers this fascinating anecdote about the process of writing history:

Some years ago I asked the great global historian William H. McNeill to explain his method of writing history to a group of social, physical, and biological scientists attending a conference I'd organized. He at first resisted doing this, claiming that he had no particular method. When pressed, though, he described it as follows:

I get curious about a problem and start reading up on it. What I read causes me to redefine the problem. Redefining the problem causes me to shift the direction of what I'm reading. That in turn further reshapes the problem, which further redirects the reading. I go back and forth like this until it feels right, then I write it up and ship it off to the publisher.

McNeill's presentation elicited expressions of disappointment, even derision, from the economists, sociologists, and political scientists present. "That's not a method," several of them exclaimed. "It's not parsimonious, it doesn't distinguish between independent and dependent variables, it hopelessly confuses induction and deduction." But then there came a deep voice from the back of the room. "Yes, it is," it growled. "That's exactly how we do physics!"<sup>33</sup>

As Gaddis himself points out, however, such sentiments do not leave us anchorless:

Consider the meteorologist Lewis Richardson's famous question: how long is the coastline of Britain? The answer is that there is no answer—it depends. Are you measuring in miles,

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33. Gaddis, *Landscape of History*, 48.

meters, or microns? The result will differ in each instance, and not just as a consequence of converting from one unit of measurement to another. For the further down you go in the scale of measurement, the more irregularities of coastline you'll pick up, so that the length will expand or contract in relation to the manner in which you're measuring it. . . .

At the same time, though . . . we'd be most unwise to conclude from this, as a postmodernist might, that Britain is not actually there.<sup>34</sup>

Gaddis's last point can hardly be overemphasized. Some postmodernists head in the direction of claiming Britain is not there. Although Jenkins, for example, makes good points about history being a personal construct, he goes quite a bit further than that, ironically describing relativism in absolute terms. "Today," he writes, "we know of *no* foundations for Platonic absolutes. . . . Truth is a self-referencing figure of speech, *incapable* of accessing the phenomenal world. . . . I think people in the past were very different to us in the meanings they gave to their world, and that *any* reading on to them of a constancy of human nature type, of whatever kind, is *without foundation*."<sup>35</sup>

As I see it, the danger is that we can slip into nihilism: "the belief that all values are baseless and that nothing can be known or communicated."<sup>36</sup> I agree with Gaddis, however, that Britain is still there, even if we recognize that our descriptions are indeed dependent upon both interpretation and explanation.

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34. Gaddis, *Landscape of History*, 27–28, 123.

35. Jenkins, *Re-Thinking History*, 29, 29–30, 46, emphasis added.

36. *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, at [www.iep.utm.edu/n/nihilism.htm](http://www.iep.utm.edu/n/nihilism.htm) (accessed 25 April 2006). I believe that many of the so-called postmodern arguments are quite enlightening. But one must ask: Do deconstructions apply to the postmodern arguments themselves? If so, what is the meaning of such arguments? Some of these authors, for example, seem to be experts at deconstructing language itself and showing how relative meaning is. But if that is so, why are they publishing books? One can easily get caught in the endless cycle of deconstructing a text, only to deconstruct the deconstruction, ad infinitum, so that nothing ever means anything, kind of like the person who asks what a word means, then asks what the definition means, and then what the definition of the definition means.

So what stops history from slipping into what Jenkins calls “hapless relativism,” where one asks, “if [history] seems just interpretation and nobody really knows, then why bother doing it? If it is all relative what is the point?”<sup>37</sup> I believe my colleague Louis Midgley offered an excellent answer to this question when he suggested to me that historians must tell a story the best they can using the available texts. I like this simple explanation, and I think both parts of it—the story and the texts—offer grounding for evaluating histories. Yes, each historian tells a different story, but the lack of a single, absolute story (even as an ideal) hardly means that one story is as good as another (any more than the lack of an absolute map means that any map will do or that there is no coastline at all). So how does the reader evaluate historical accounts? By looking at how the author tells the story and how he or she uses the texts, or primary documents.

Philosophers, literary theorists, and historiographers have struggled over the nature of history and debated whether it is an art, a science, or something else.<sup>38</sup> One aspect of this discussion I find quite intriguing deals with the correlation between fiction and history. “Against the positivist conception of the historical fact,” writes Paul Ricoeur, “more recent epistemology emphasizes the ‘imaginative reconstruction’ which characterizes the work of the historian.”<sup>39</sup> “Fiction’s persuasive force,” adds Nancy F. Partner,

its “sense of reality,” results from an author’s ability to offer the reader a suggestive array of fictional elements that satisfy the requirements of possible reality in the shared world of

37. Jenkins, *Re-Thinking History*, 25.

38. To really get a handle on the question “What is history?” it seems one would have to read philosophers like Heidegger, Husserl, Gadamer, and Habermas; literary theorists like Ricoeur, Derrida, Foucault, and Lyotard; and historiographers like Carr, Collingwood, Elton, White, Jenkins, and Novick. If that is true, I do not think many people have a handle on the question, although Alan Goff might be one of them; see Goff’s “Uncritical Theory and Thin Description: The Resistance to History,” *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 7/1 (1995): 170–207; and Goff, “Dan Vogel’s Family Romance and the Book of Mormon as Smith Family Allegory,” *FARMS Review* 17/2 (2005): 321–400.

39. Paul Ricoeur, “The Narrative Function,” in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, ed. and trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 289, cited in Goff, “Uncritical Theory,” 184.

writer and reader. The historian, using techniques that differ only a little from those of the novelist, has to persuade the reader not only of the *possible* reality of his array of verbal elements, but that those on display in the text are “guaranteed” by their relation (reference, logical inference) to things outside the text, and thus the result is a real mimesis.<sup>40</sup>

The distinction between “fiction” and “nonfiction” has traditionally implied some kind of wide gulf between the two. I suspect that “objective historians” emphasized this distinction and tried hard to separate themselves from novelists and align themselves at least with the so-called “science” of social scientists. But historians and writers of fiction have something crucial in common because they both use *narratives*, while science does not seem to do so.<sup>41</sup> The historian and the novelist both employ plots and fashion stories. The Greek *mimesis*, normally translated as “imitation,” can also be rendered as “make-believe.” As soon as he or she moves from analyzing sources to casting a narrative, the historian has begun to make up a story, to create his or her own plot, just as one would if fashioning fiction. In much the same way, the writer of a memoir has made up a story. Ricoeur is right when he says that “the references of empirical narrative and fictional narrative *cross upon* . . . historicity or the historical condition of man.”<sup>42</sup>

I believe the links between history and fiction are so fundamental that we should abandon the outdated fiction/nonfiction distinction (perhaps replacing it with narrative/exposition) and that we should judge “empirical” and “fictional” narratives largely by the same standards:

- character (Can we relate to and understand the characters? Do they have reasons for what they do?)
- plot (Can we see why one thing leads to another?)

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40. Nancy F. Partner, “Making Up Lost Time: Writing on the Writing of History,” *Spectrum* 61 (1986): 97, emphasis in original, cited in Goff, “Uncritical Theory,” 186.

41. Social scientists sometimes tell stories (such as case studies), but these are peripheral and supplementary to studies that presumably are distinctly nonnarrative.

42. Ricoeur, “Narrative Function,” 289, cited in Goff, “Uncritical Theory,” 183, emphasis in original.

- conflict (Does the author create tension and interest by dramatizing the struggle of opposing forces?)
- description (Does the author bring the story alive through the use of colorful and precise details?)<sup>43</sup>

All these help us decide if historians have told a story “the best they can.”

The second half of the equation is “using the texts,” or drawing on primary documents. Put simply, no text means no history. We tend to think of these sources as being substantial and authoritative, even though we acknowledge that they are incomplete. I think Jenkins is on the right track, however, when he calls the primary documents *traces*, which strikes me as a sound description. As genealogists can tell you, the record of the past is much more random, even willy-nilly—make that helter-skelter—than systematic. The people of the past had an infinite number of reasons for either recording or not recording various events. Like us, they sometimes forgot or neglected to record matters they considered important, such as the births of children, while noting items that now seem insignificant, such as train schedules. Not surprisingly, tax and financial records now considered rather mundane tended to be preserved while many a family memoir that would now be considered priceless perished.

Again, whether or not a given record survives is a matter of chance. The fact that someone in the past thought an event important, recorded it, and carefully preserved that record in no way guarantees its survival (a rather disconcerting thought to those of us who assume we can ensure the life of certain records). That person’s descendants may lose the record or throw it in the trash heap; a new government may destroy the record for political reasons (or a family member for personal reasons); the ink or lead may fade (or the microfilm may turn brittle and break); the paper may disintegrate or be devoured by insects or rats (or the hard disk may crash); water may seep into the container holding the record (such as the cornerstone of a building) and damage it. As any

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43. These similarities have not escaped publishers, who will often promote a history by proclaiming that “it reads like a novel.”

genealogist can tell you, there is no end to the ways in which records can be lost or destroyed, including mishandling, misdating, misfiling, and mistranscribing by clerks and scribes. But the great bane of us genealogists is fire. We can all tell long and detailed stories of making good headway in our research only to be halted by the notation “courthouse records destroyed by fire.”<sup>44</sup>

This, then, is the state of the texts—they are random and haphazard and allow us, at best, only a *glimpse* of the past. In addition, they are not static pieces of evidence containing one and only one meaning. Rather, they have to be interpreted.<sup>45</sup> This makes it that much more important for historians to treat the traces of the past responsibly. So, if character, plot, conflict, and description are standards for evaluating how well the historian tells the story, what is the standard for evaluating the historian’s use of the texts? For what might be called academic history (a category that presumably includes the writings of Bushman, Givens, Vogel, and many others), I believe the most appropriate question is whether the historian does his or her best to deal with the texts honestly and fairly.<sup>46</sup>

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44. Virtually all of the 1890 U.S. census, a crucial record because of the great numbers of immigrants who entered the country during the previous decade, was lost through two different fires twenty-five years apart and by government foul-ups.

45. I would not claim with prominent British historian Geoffrey Rudolph Elton that the primary documents speak for themselves. At the same time, however, I disagree with Jenkins, who describes the documents as “absolutely mute,” which strikes me as an absurd claim. It makes more sense to say that texts speak but require interpretation or “translation” by the historian. The reader in turn must interpret the historian. As with every other question involving history, questions related to the sources are complex; they are answered quite differently by different people.

46. The recent trend has been to judge all forms of history by academic standards, but that won’t do. I do not believe, for example, that I am obligated to apply the same standards in compiling a family history as I am in preparing an article on the fur trade for an academic journal. If I discover that my grandfather made a serious mistake as a young man but later rectified it and went on to live an honorable life, I am not obligated to mention that mistake. True, I may decide to do so, but that all depends on the purpose and methodology I establish for the family history. If I write an autobiography, am I obligated to confess to and describe in detail every foolish mistake or harmful thing I ever did? I don’t think so. (And again, I will no doubt record things differently depending on whether I am writing a memoir for my children or a bestseller for Random House [not that they have offered me a contract recently].) In Sunday School manuals intended to strengthen the faith of members, is the church obligated to include affidavits hostile to



Is there an objective way to answer this question? Certainly not. I don't believe in objectivity. But that does not mean we are left without maps (or without a coastline). Groups of people still find principles they can agree on, allowing for what some call intersubjectivity. Many contemporary historians, for example, agree on such guidelines as (1) thorough research that attempts to account for all relevant texts; (2) emphasis on texts that are firsthand and early (as opposed to those that are secondhand or late); (3) emphasis on primary rather than secondary sources; (4) cross-referencing of sources to see which corroborate or contradict each other; and (5) accuracy in transcribing and referencing textual materials.<sup>47</sup>

Further, certain practices don't seem sound. For example, I could advance a thesis about Joseph Smith's involvement in treasure seeking. Then I quote a statement from one of Joseph's neighbors that apparently supports my thesis. So far, so good. But let's also suppose my quotation includes an ellipsis and that the excluded material runs counter to my thesis. That is clearly dishonest, just as it would be dishonest to fail to inform the reader of entire texts containing language that runs counter to my thesis. On the other hand, it does not seem fair if I spend all my time researching sources friendly to Joseph Smith and ignore hostile sources. Here is another valuable standard: Is the historian's approach to texts consistent? This implies that the historian describe that methodology and explain the rationale behind various choices, such as choosing one source over another.

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Joseph Smith from the likes of Willard Chase and Peter Ingersoll merely for the sake of doing thorough research? No, because that is expressly *not* the church's purpose. Does that give the church carte blanche to do history any old way it pleases? Of course not. Rather, the individual, group, or institution writing a history is obligated to establish careful and thoughtful principles for their history and consistently follow those principles. Even within the confines of my family history, there are ways that I can be fair or unfair, honest or dishonest. For a good examination of various traditions in religious historiography, see David B. Honey and Daniel C. Peterson, "Advocacy and Inquiry in the Writing of Latter-day Saint History," *BYU Studies* 31/2 (1991): 139–79.

47. Applying these standards is easier said than done. How does the reader (or the historian, for that matter), for instance, know when a reasonable effort has been made to account for all relevant texts? Which is better—a late firsthand or early secondhand source? Also, these standards involve assumptions that can certainly be argued. Why is early necessarily better than late? Doesn't it depend entirely on particular circumstances?

Therefore, although the primary sources of history are not what we assumed them to be, and although doing and reading history involves much more “subjective” interpretation than we imagined, we can still get our bearings and find ways to evaluate a historian’s use of the sources.

### The Question of Bias

In a response to a review of his book, Vogel seems to modify his views on objectivity. “True,” he writes, speaking of his own book, “it is Vogel’s Joseph Smith. But it’s also Bushman’s Joseph Smith, Brodie’s Joseph Smith, Donna Hill’s Joseph Smith, and Robert Remini’s Joseph Smith. There is no getting around it. A biographer can try to hide behind neutral language, but he is always present, even when quoting his subject.”<sup>48</sup> I agree. It is not a question of who is biased and who is not. Everyone is biased. This is simply to say that we all have beliefs and outlooks that influence the way we interpret and tell stories about the past. Every historian brings a preunderstanding of Joseph Smith to his or her work. I do not hold that Vogel’s beliefs disqualify him from doing Mormon history.<sup>49</sup> I do, however, have serious reservations

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48. Dan Vogel, “Seeing through the Hedges: A Response to Andrew H. and Dawson W. Hedges,” at [www.signaturebooks.com/excerpts/making2.html](http://www.signaturebooks.com/excerpts/making2.html) (accessed 30 March 2006). Vogel himself does not try to hide behind neutral language.

49. Just as I believe that Vogel’s beliefs neither qualify nor disqualify him as a historian, I also believe that his academic credentials (or lack thereof) are not relevant. I am therefore not comfortable with Andrew and Dawson Hedges’ apparent attempt to discredit Vogel because he does not have a graduate degree in history. They write, “Just as one must train in formal programs for several years in a formal setting to be a good lawyer or doctor, so one must train for several years in a formal setting to be a good historian.” Andrew H. Hedges and Dawson W. Hedges, “No, Dan, That’s Still Not History,” *FARMS Review* 17/1 (2005): 208 n. 2. I find this claim problematic for several reasons. First, it is not clear what “several years” means, nor is it clear if a degree in history is required or if a degree in another field will do. Second, the comparison to law and medicine strikes me as a false analogy. Law and medical students are not legally allowed to practice their crafts in the United States until they receive an advanced degree and pass certain tests. Therefore, we have no way of knowing whether a nongraduate could be a good doctor or lawyer (I suspect it is entirely possible). Those interested in history, on the other hand, are quite free to “do” history by writing articles and books. We therefore have perfect opportunity to judge their ability by their writings. Also, I believe one can raise counterexamples to the Hedges’ claim by pointing out a number of good historians (at BYU and elsewhere)

about Vogel's statement that while "there is value to such a method [of relating events as the participants themselves experienced them], I am reluctant to dispense with critical tools and become a storyteller or narrator of the supernatural."

This is precisely where Vogel makes a serious mistake. First of all, narrating events as the participants reported them in no way means that the author abandons critical tools. Quite the opposite: a careful narration requires historians to bring all of their critical tools to bear. Just as Vogel applies source criticism in his selection and annotation of early Mormon documents, the biographer of Joseph Smith must also apply similar criticism in deciding whether and how much to rely on various documents, asking such questions as these: Was the author of the document a first- or secondhand (or hearsay) witness? What do we know about that person's reliability? When was the document written? Do other sources either corroborate or contradict this source? Second, narrating events as the witnesses reported them does not mean the historian believes or agrees with those accounts, thus becoming a "narrator of the supernatural." Vogel seems particularly concerned with this, but I don't understand why. After all, he knows the sources as well as anyone, and he can construct a narrative based on the documents. As a reader, this helps me understand the people and events being discussed. But I do not assume that Vogel (or any other historian) agrees with the claims made in the sources.

Again, Vogel writes, "I, too, want to understand Smith on his own terms, but I would like to be able to explain him" (p. xv). Now we are really getting to the heart of the matter. Certainly, historians have every right to use source criticism to explain and interpret things.

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who do not have graduate degrees in history. A good example of a top-notch historian who completed *no* graduate training in history is Dale Morgan, who studied commercial art at the University of Utah. Trained "on the job," Morgan worked initially for the Utah Historical Records Survey. He eventually edited the *Utah Historical Quarterly* and was later appointed senior historian at the University of California Bancroft Library. Two of Morgan's works on the early fur trade, *Jedediah Smith and the Opening of the West* (San Francisco: California Historical Society, 1954; repr., Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1967), and *The West of William H. Ashley* (Denver: Old West, 1964), are among the best books produced on the subject. (Dan Vogel, by the way, has more formal training in history than I do.)

In this instance, however, Vogel does not intend to “explain” Joseph Smith by drawing on the primary documents. Instead, he intends to explain Joseph Smith based on a nonhistorical standard—that is, his own private belief that, in the words of Sterling McMurrin, “you don’t get books from angels and translate them by miracles.”<sup>50</sup>

Vogel has thus stepped outside of historical methodology (and, as far as I’m concerned, abandoned the principles espoused in *Early Mormon Documents*) to take up what is essentially a religious (or antireligious) position. He has failed to see that understanding Joseph Smith “on his own terms” and denying that Joseph had authentic religious experiences are mutually contradictory goals. Since Vogel does not believe in the supernatural, he can only explain Joseph Smith by contradicting what Joseph himself says in the primary documents (such as his 1832 history). This results in a puzzling irony: Vogel, who took such care in researching and compiling the primary documents, has taken an adversarial position toward those same documents, where he has to discount them or ignore them in order to make his case for atheism.

Preoccupied with this need to promote his own views, come what may, Vogel enters into discussions that mystify me. He says, for example, that “there is simply no reliable proof for the existence of the supernatural” and “the burden of proof rests with those making supernatural claims” (p. xvi). But why is he raising these points at all? Does he mean to tell us that the biographer of a religious figure, whether it is Jesus, Muhammad, or Buddha, has to first of all determine the nature of the universe so he can editorialize on the rightness or wrongness of that figure’s theology?

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50. Blake T. Ostler, “An Interview with Sterling M. McMurrin,” *Dialogue* 17/1 (1984): 25. In his Internet article, Dan Vogel mentions how biographer Alan Taylor used James Fenimore Cooper’s novel *The Pioneers* “to illuminate Cooper’s troubled relationship with his father” (“Seeing through the Hedges,” p. 30). I think this is legitimate, just as a biographer of Hemingway might use *A Farewell to Arms* to illuminate Hemingway’s experiences as an ambulance driver in World War I. But there is a crucial difference between Cooper and Hemingway on one hand and Joseph Smith on the other. Both novelists claimed authorship of their novels, but Joseph claimed to be the *translator* of the Book of Mormon. Vogel must therefore directly contradict Joseph Smith in any attempt to use the Book of Mormon to illuminate Joseph’s personal life, which is not true at all of Cooper’s or Hemingway’s biographers.

Vogel quotes a number of historians in an attempt to gather support for his “interpretive” study, but the trouble is, these historians understandably have their hands full with “normal” historical conundrums and do not address the specific question of how to deal with the matter of belief when writing about a religious figure. One notable exception is Brad S. Gregory, associate professor of history at Notre Dame University, author of *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe*, and winner of Harvard University Press’s Thomas J. Wilson Prize.

“What Did It Mean to Them?”<sup>51</sup>

As Gregory puts it,

The distinctiveness of religion demands methodological astuteness if we want to understand its practitioners, lest we misconstrue them from the outset. In seeking to explain religion, many scholars have employed cultural theories or social science approaches in ways that preclude its being understood. Instead of reconstructing religious beliefs and experiences, they reduce them to something else based on their own, usually implicit, modern or postmodern beliefs.<sup>52</sup>

I believe this is an apt description of what Vogel has done: he has precluded Joseph Smith from being understood by attempting to reduce Joseph’s beliefs to something else.

Gregory continues:

What people believed in the past is logically distinct from our opinions about them. Understanding others on their own terms is a completely different intellectual endeavor than explaining them in modern or postmodern categories. . . . I fail to follow the logic of a leading literary scholar who recently implied, during a session at the American Historical Association

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51. Brad S. Gregory, *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 15.

52. Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 9.

convention, that because he “cannot believe in belief,” the religion of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century people is not to be taken seriously on its own terms. Strictly speaking, this is an autobiographical comment that reveals literally nothing about early modern people. One might as well say, “I cannot believe in unbelief; therefore, alleged post-Enlightenment atheism should not be taken seriously on its own terms.”

Could bedfellows be any stranger? Reductionist explanations of religion share the epistemological structure of traditional confessional history. Just as confessional historians explore and evaluate based on their religious convictions, reductionist historians of religion explain and judge based on their unbelief.<sup>53</sup>

Taking Gregory’s approach of asking “What did it mean to them?” hardly means the historian is reduced, in Vogel’s words, to writing a “simple chronological narrative.” As Gregory explains, “Contextual understanding compels us to relate religion to other aspects of life—social, political, economic, cultural—while resisting absorption by any of them.” Nor is the historian required to accept primary sources at face value. Gregory does not mean to “imply that no early Christian used religion in deliberately manipulative ways. Doubtless some did, perhaps quite a few. But this is a matter for empirical demonstration, not methodological assumption.”<sup>54</sup> Likewise, I believe that Vogel (or any other historian) is free to examine the motives of Joseph Smith and others, as long as he bases his conclusions on the documents, not his *a priori* assumptions about the existence of God and angels.

Gregory seeks to “reconstruct, not deconstruct” the experiences of early modern Christians. He acknowledges that “‘understanding’ does not mean ‘perfect reconstruction.’” But, he adds, “the impossibility of the latter neither justifies a general skepticism nor warrants the adoption of reductionist theories.”<sup>55</sup>

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53. Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 10–11.

54. Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 13, 15.

55. Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 11, 15.

I believe Gregory has explored the questions surrounding the writing of religious history with unique clarity and insight. Certainly, if I am reading a biography of St. Francis of Assisi, for example, I want the biographer to follow Gregory's standard—so that I can, as much as possible, understand St. Francis's experiences the way *he* perceived them. If St. Francis himself was inconsistent about what he said, or if others viewed his reports skeptically, discussions of these topics are quite acceptable because they will be based on the sources. (Moreover, if the author makes certain historiographical points in his endnotes, I am also fine with that.) Indeed, a look at Gregory's book shows his methodology to be wonderfully efficient: we gain fresh insights into the beliefs of early modern Christians and feel that we are really beginning to *understand* them (and I, for one, am delighted to see that Gregory, a Roman Catholic, makes no judgment whatsoever about the beliefs of Protestants put to death by Catholics). Vogel, unfortunately, has produced a work that is, in Gregory's words, reductionist. (Put another way, he's doing missionary work.)

### Reconstructing the Visit of Moroni

The flaws in Vogel's approach become quite evident when we compare his book to Bushman's. Their respective narrations of the night of 21–22 September 1823 (when Joseph Smith said he was first visited by Moroni) are reproduced below, following the accounts from Joseph Smith himself:

#### *Joseph Smith's 1832 Account*

I 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 written and my Fathers family have suffered many persicutions and afflictions and it came to pass when I was seventeen years of age I called again upon the Lord and he shewed unto me a heavenly vision for behold an angel of the Lord came and stood before me and it was by night and he called me by name and he said the Lord had forgiven me my sins and he revealed unto me that in the Town of

Manchester Ontario County N.Y. there was plates of gold upon which there was engravings which was engraven by Maroni & his fathers the servants of the living God in ancient days and deposited by the commandments of God and kept by the power thereof and that I should go and get them and he revealed unto me many things concerning the inhabitants of the earth which since have been revealed in commandments & revelations and it was on the 22<sup>nd</sup> day of Sept. AD 1822 and thus he appeared unto me three times in one night.<sup>56</sup>

*Joseph Smith's 1838 Account*

In consequence of these things I often felt condemned for my weakness and imperfections; when on the evening of the above mentioned twenty first of september, after I had retired to my bed for the night I betook myself to prayer and supplication to Almighty God for forgiveness of all my sins and follies, and also for a manifestation to me that I might know of my state and standing before him. For I had full confidence in obtaining a divine manifestation as I had previously had one. While I was thus in the act of calling upon God, I discovered a light appearing in the room which continued to increase untill the room was lighter than at noonday and <when> immediately a personage <appeared> at my bedside standing in the air for his feet did not touch the floor. He had on a loose robe of most exquisite whiteness. It was a whiteness beyond any<thing> earthly I had ever seen, nor do I believe that any earthly thing could be made to appear so exceedin[g]ly white and brilliant, His hands were naked and his arms also a little above the wrists. So also were his feet naked as were his legs a little above the ankles. His head and neck were also bare. I could discover that he had no other

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56. "A History of the Life of Joseph Smith," in Joseph Smith Letterbook 1, in *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 12–13. The section prior to this, which describes the first vision, is in Joseph Smith's handwriting; this section is in the hand of Frederick G. Williams. The year is incorrectly given as 1822—it was actually 1823, which is consistent with Joseph saying he was seventeen years old.



clothing on but this robe, as it was open so that I could see into his bosom. Not only was his robe exceedingly white but his whole person was glorious beyond description, and his countenance truly like lightning. The room was exceedingly light, but not so very bright as immediately around his person. When I first looked upon him I was afraid, but the fear soon left me. He called me by name and said unto me that he was a messenger sent from the presence of God to me and that his name was Nephi <Moroni>. That God had a work for me to do, and that my <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. He said there was a book deposited written upon gold plates, giving an account of the former inhabitants of this continent and the source from whence they sprang. He also said that the fullness of the everlasting Gospel was contained in it as delivered by the Saviour to the ancient inhabitants. Also that there were two stones in silver bows and these (~~put~~ <stones fastened> ~~into~~ a breast plate) ~~which~~ constituted what is called the Urim & Thummin deposited with the plates, and <the possession and use of these stones> ~~that~~ was what constituted seers in ancient or former times and that God <had> prepared them for the purpose of translating the book. After telling me these things he commenced quoting the prophecies of the old testament, he first quoted part of the third chapter of Malachi and he quoted also the fourth or last chapter of the same prophecy though with a little variation from the way it reads in our Bibles. Instead of quoting the first verse as reads in our books he quoted it thus, “For behold the day cometh that shall burn as an oven, and all the proud <yea> and all that do wickedly shall burn as stubble, for <they day> that cometh shall burn them saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.” And again he quoted the fifth verse thus, “Behold I will reveal unto you the Priesthood by the hand of Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dread-

ful day of the Lord.” He also quoted the next verse differently. “And he shall plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers, and the hearts of the children shall turn to their fathers, if it were not so the whole earth would be utterly wasted at his coming.” In addition to these quotations he quoted the Eleventh Chapter of Isaiah saying that it was about to be fulfilled. He quoted also the third chapter of Acts, twenty second and twenty third verses precisely as they stand in our new testament. He said that that prophet was Christ, but the day had not yet come when “they who would not hear his voice should be cut off from among the people,” but soon would come.

He also quoted the second chapter of Joel from the twenty eighth to the last verse. He also said that this was not yet fulfilled but was soon to be. And he further stated the fulness of the gentiles was soon to come in. He quoted many other passages of scripture and offered many explanations which cannot be mentioned here. Again he told me that when I got those plates of which he had spoken (for the time that they should be obtained was not yet fulfilled) I should not show <them> to any person, neither the breastplate with the Urim and Thummim only to those to whom I should be commanded to show them. If I did I should be destroyed. While he was conversing with me about the plates the vision was opened to my mind that I could see the place where the plates were deposited and that so clearly and distinctly that I knew the place again when I visited it.

After this conversation communication I saw the light in the room begin to gather immediately around the person of him who had been speaking to me, and it continued to do so until the room was again left dark except just round him, when instantly I saw as it were a conduit open right up into heaven, and he ascended up till he entirely disappeared and the room was left as it had been before this heavenly light had made its appearance.

I lay musing on the singularity of the scene and marvelling greatly at what had been told me by this extraordinary messenger, when in the midst of my meditation I suddenly discovered that my room was again beginning to get lighted, and in an instant as it were, the same heavenly messenger was again by my bedside. He commenced and again related the very same things which he had done at his first visit without the least variation which having done, he informed me of great judgements which were coming upon the earth, with great desolations by famine, sword, and pestilence, and that these grievous judgements would come on the earth in this generation: Having related these things he again ascended as he had done before.

By this time so deep were the impressions made on my mind that sleep had fled from my eyes and I lay overwhelmed in astonishment at what I had both seen and heard:

But what was my surprise when again I beheld the same messenger at my bed side, and heard him rehearse or repeat over again to me the same things as before and 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, This he forbid me, saying that I must have no other object in view in getting the plates but to glorify God, and must not be influenced by any other motive but that of building his kingdom, otherwise I could not get them. After this third visit he again ascended up into heaven as before and I was again left to ponder on the strangeness of what I had just experienced, when almost immediately after the heavenly messenger had ascended from me the third time, the cock crew, and I found that day was approaching so that our interviews must have occupied the whole of that night.<sup>57</sup>

*Vogel's Version*

Joseph's involvement with Robinson's hill began, according to Joseph's own account, on the night and early morning hours

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57. *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 233–36.

of 21–22 September 1823. Earlier that evening, according to what Martin Harris later told Palmyra minister John A. Clark, Joseph had acted as seer for a local treasure-seeking expedition.<sup>58</sup> It had been an especially propitious night for treasure hunting. The moon was full and the evening marked the autumnal equinox,<sup>59</sup> but as usual, the seekers returned home empty-handed. Lucy, who by this time was attending Palmyra's Western Presbyterian Church and may have begun to have misgivings about her husband's involvement in magic, did not mention the digging that occurred on this astrologically significant night. Instead, she related that her family stayed up late into the evening "conversing upon the subject of the diversity of churches that had risen up in the world and the many thousand opinions in existence as to the truths contained in scripture."<sup>60</sup> Not an unlikely topic for a late Sunday night conversation, but Lucy probably minimized the intensity of this discussion since young Joseph's reaction was more pronounced than usual.

Lucy noticed that seventeen-year-old Joseph seemed withdrawn as if in deep contemplation. He was quiet but not unaffected. What he may have felt about his part in the treasure hunt, it was undoubtedly his parents' religious turmoil that most stirred him, in the words of his mother, "to reflect more deeply than common persons of his age upon everything of a religious nature."<sup>61</sup> Joseph more than any of his siblings well understood the religious quandary in which his parents found themselves. There was much that he could say, but in the swirl of emotional debate, who would hear him? Besides, he was just a youth with little standing or authority in such matters. More than anything, Joseph's silence likely resulted from his ambivalent feelings and the high emotional price of choosing

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58. {John A. Clark to Dear Brethren, 24 August 1840, *Episcopal Recorder* (Philadelphia) 18 (5 September 1840): 94 (*Early Mormon Documents*, 2:264).}

59. {See D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 2nd ed., rev. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998), 141–44.}

60. {Lucy Mack Smith, Preliminary Manuscript, 40 (*Early Mormon Documents*, 1:289).}

61. {L. M. Smith, Preliminary Manuscript, 40 (*Early Mormon Documents*, 1:289).}

sides. Very little was resolved when the Smiths finally retired for the night.

As Joseph lay in his bed, likely troubled by his family's religious conflicts, he may have prayed for deliverance—perhaps asking God to soften his parents' hearts. He may have asked that God would give him the words to convert his father, but he knew that words alone were not sufficient to persuade. Joseph Sr.'s intellectualized approach to the Bible and Universalistic beliefs seemed like impassible barriers to Joseph Jr. From his failed attempt to persuade him in 1820/21, Joseph knew that his father resisted visionary experiences. Joseph's line of authority with his father was his gift of seeing. Perhaps for the good of the family and his father's future welfare, Joseph might call upon that influence to bring his father to repentance and give his family the religious harmony they so badly needed. These were desperate thoughts, but in Joseph's mind, the situation called for decisive action.

He would later claim that his mind was preoccupied only with thoughts of his unworthiness before God and that he began to pray "to Almighty God for forgiveness of all my sins and follies, and also for a manifestation to me that I might know of my state and standing before him."<sup>62</sup> Shortly an "angel" appeared at his bedside, declaring that his sins were forgiven and that God had a special work for him to perform. This messenger proceeded to tell Joseph about a history of the ancient inhabitants of America written on gold plates and hidden in a nearby hill. (pp. 43–44)

At this point Vogel drops his narrative in favor of an editorial aside. "[Joseph's] willingness to change this and other visions in order to meet later needs prompts one to wonder whether the visions were invented to serve utilitarian purposes," he writes (p. 44).

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62. {Joseph Smith, Manuscript History, Book A-1, 5, LDS Church Archives (*Early Mormon Documents*, 1:63).}

*Bushman's Version*

The Smiths had spent the evening of September 21, as Lucy recalled, “conversing upon the subject of the diversity of churches . . . and the many thousand opinions in existence as to the truths contained in scripture.”<sup>63</sup> That night after the others in the crowded little house had gone to sleep, Joseph remained awake to pray “to Almighty God for forgiveness of all my sins and follies.”<sup>64</sup> While praying he noticed the room growing lighter until it was brighter than broad daylight. Suddenly, as he later reported, a person appeared in the light standing above the floor.

He had on a loose robe of most exquisite whiteness. It was a whiteness beyond anything earthly I had ever seen, nor do I believe that any earthly thing could be made to appear so exceedin[g]ly white and brilliant, His hands were naked and his arms also a little above the wrist. So also were his feet naked as were his legs a little above the ankles. His head and neck were also bare. I could discover that he had no other clothing on but this robe, as it was open so that I could see into his bosom. Not only was his robe exceedingly white but his whole person was glorious beyond description, and his countenance truly like lightning.

This time all the accounts agree on the burden of the message. If Joseph initially understood the First Vision as his conver-

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63. {This memory may not be entirely trustworthy because Lucy thought Moroni was the one to tell Joseph the churches were wrong. Her lack of knowledge of the First Vision confused her sense of the sequence of events. L. M. Smith, Preliminary Manuscript, 335.}

64. {Manuscript History of the Church A-1, in, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:276. The frame house remained unfinished in 1823, and unless some family members slept there to relieve congestion, Joseph received Moroni in the cabin. Larry C. Porter, “Study of the Origins of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the States of New York and Pennsylvania, 1816–1831” (PhD diss. Brigham Young University, 1971), 25–26. In 1835 Oliver Cowdery commented that Joseph prayed when “slumber had spread her refreshing hand over others beside him.” *Messenger and Advocate*, February 1835, 79.}

sion, similar to thousands of other evangelical conversions, this vision wrenched Joseph out of any ordinary track.

The being, who identified himself as Moroni, assured Joseph that his sins were forgiven, but then said God was giving Joseph a work unlike any envisioned in his time. He was told about a book “written upon gold plates, giving an account of the former inhabitants of this continent and the source from whence they sprang. He also said that the fulness of the everlasting Gospel was contained in it as delivered by the Saviour to the ancient inhabitants.” Besides that, “there were two stones in silver bows and these stones fastened to a breast plate constituted what is called the Urim and Thummim deposited with the plates, and the possession and use of these stones was what constituted seers in ancient or former times and that God had prepared them for the purpose of translating the book.”<sup>65</sup> All this was buried in a nearby hill that Joseph saw in his vision.

The rest of the vision was more familiar and comprehensible. Moroni quoted Old and New Testament prophecies relating to the final days of the earth: the third and fourth chapters of Malachi, Acts 3:22–23, Joel 2:28–32, and Isaiah 11. These were the texts the clergy used to teach about the millennium. Joseph knew them well enough to note small departures from the words in the Bible. Hearing the familiar texts from the angel confirmed the common belief that the last days were near and Joseph was to prepare.<sup>66</sup>

Moroni warned him not to show the plates and the Urim and Thummim to anyone, and then the light began to gather around him until the room was dark except near his person. “Instantly I saw as it were a conduit open right up into heaven,

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65. {Manuscript History of the Church A-1, in *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:276–78.} Joseph said nothing about forgiveness of sins in his 1838 account, but Oliver Cowdery mentioned this personal message twice in his 1835 letters. *Messenger and Advocate*, February 1835, 78–79; and July 1835, 155–56. In his 1838 account, Joseph said the angel called himself “Nephi,” a puzzling mistake. For discussion of possible reasons why, see Anderson, ed., *Lucy’s Book*, 336–37; *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:277; Quinn, *Early Mormonism*, 198–99.}

66. {Manuscript History of the Church A-1, in *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:278–79.}

and he ascended till he entirely disappeared.” Joseph lay back in astonishment, trying to understand what had happened, when the room brightened again, and the angel reappeared. Moroni repeated every word he had said before and then added comments about “great judgements which were coming upon the earth with great desolations by famine, sword, and pestilence.” Moroni again ascended but soon after appeared a third time to repeat everything again. This time he added the warning 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 was to have no other object “but to glorify God.”<sup>67</sup>

### Comparing Vogel to Bushman

These two versions reveal much about the differences between Vogel’s and Bushman’s methodologies. But first things first. Since Joseph Smith’s 1832 history was the first document giving details on Moroni’s visit, I am quite surprised that neither Vogel nor Bushman even mentions it. I consider it a key source and believe both of their retellings are the weaker for not confronting it.

The first difference between Vogel and Bushman is quite conspicuous: Vogel places the events of 21 and 22 September in a treasure-seeking context while Bushman does not. Vogel does this by referring to a document written by John A. Clark. Here is the quotation in question, which Clark wrote in 1840 (taken from—where else?—*Early Mormon Documents*): “According to Martin Harris, it was after one of these [money-digging] night excursions, that [Joseph Smith], while he lay upon his bed, had a remarkable dream. An angel of God seemed to approach him, clad in celestial splendour. This divine messenger assured him, that he, Joseph Smith, was chosen of the Lord to be a prophet of the Most High God, and to bring to light hidden things, that would prove of unspeakable benefit to the world.”<sup>68</sup>

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67. Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 43–45. In what appears to be an editing mistake, Bushman provides no note here for the internal quotations from Joseph Smith, but these quotations are from his 1838 history.

68. Clark to Dear Brethren, 24 August 1840, 94 (*Early Mormon Documents*, 2:264).



Vogel takes it as a given that the Smiths had indeed engaged in a treasure-seeking excursion on the evening of 21 September 1823. But here is the problem. Clark is at least a thirdhand source. He claims his information came directly from Martin Harris, probably in the autumn of 1827, but we do not know where Martin Harris got his information (nor do we know if Clark reported Martin Harris accurately or if Martin Harris reported whomever accurately). Well, there is evidence and there is evidence. As Vogel himself said, “historians are guided but not bound by the rules of evidence practiced in United States courts of law,”<sup>69</sup> and courts and historical studies are both naturally skeptical of hearsay testimony.<sup>70</sup> The hearsay rule is the “basic rule that testimony or documents which quote persons not in court are not admissible. Because the person who supposedly knew the facts is not in court to state his/her exact words, the trier of fact cannot judge the demeanor and credibility of the alleged first-hand witness, and the other party’s lawyer cannot cross-examine (ask questions of) him or her.”<sup>71</sup> However, the law recognizes the difficulty of always going to the source, whether because of impossibility or impracticality, and so there are several exceptions to this rule, such as excited utterances, present sense impressions, declarations of physical condition, and business records (to name a few).

Historians, of course, also make exceptions to the hearsay rule. The great majority of David Whitmer documents, for example, are secondhand because they were recorded by someone other than David Whitmer himself. Still, these interviews are considered valuable historical documents. However, thirdhand statements are another matter. The claim that “it was after one of these night excursions” that Joseph claimed to have seen an angel is a case of “he said he said

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69. *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:xiv–xv.

70. Historians, of course, are considerably more liberal in their attitude toward hearsay evidence. If no firsthand accounts are available, a historian may make a plausible case by quoting independent secondhand witnesses (something not likely to be allowed in a courtroom). Still, historians and jurists agree that the farther removed from the source, the more suspect a witness is.

71. Definition of “hearsay rule” from law.com dictionary, at [dictionary.law.com](http://dictionary.law.com) (accessed 17 March 2006).

he said.” In other words, “John Clark said that Martin Harris said that Joseph said.” (Even this is giving Vogel the benefit of the doubt because Martin Harris did not reveal his source. It is possible that he talked to a neighbor, who said that Joseph said he had been searching for treasure that night—making Clark a fourthhand source.) I believe this is too far removed to carry substantial weight. (I also assume that Clark’s claim cannot be corroborated. If so, Vogel would have mentioned it in *Early Mormon Documents*.) The proper place for Clark’s comment is in an endnote.

Judging from the standards Vogel uses in evaluating Oliver Cowdery’s purported courtroom declaration, I would expect him to relegate Clark’s comment to an endnote. After all, the two cases are quite similar. Most of the Cowdery statements come from Charles M. Nielsen, who said he heard a man by the name of Robert Barrington relate the experience of hearing Oliver Cowdery bear his testimony. Nielsen’s account is therefore thirdhand, and, as Vogel says, “rests on less than satisfactory grounds.”<sup>72</sup> The very same is true of Clark’s claim.

Not only that, but Lucy Mack Smith, a firsthand witness of events on the night of 21 September 1823, gives this account: “One evening we were sitting till quite late conversing upon the subject of the diversity of churches that had risen up in the world and the many thousand opinions in existence as to the truths contained in scripture.”<sup>73</sup> Lucy not only fails to corroborate Clark’s claim, she strongly implies that it is not accurate—how could the family engage in a long religious conversation if Joseph and his fathers and brothers were out searching for treasure the same night?

So how do Vogel and Bushman deal with Clark’s thirdhand account and Lucy’s firsthand account? Vogel gives precedence to Clark, describing the entire evening in terms of treasure seeking and even suggesting that Lucy did not mention the money digging because she may have had misgivings about her husband’s involvement in magic. This is making a firsthand source subordinate to a thirdhand source. That is not what I call good source criticism. (And it is hard to escape the conclusion that

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72. *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:468.

73. Anderson, ed., *Lucy’s Book*, 335.

Vogel is manipulating the sources to fit his preconceived notion of what happened.) Bushman, on the other hand, excludes Clark's thirdhand statement from his narrative (a choice I agree with, although I think he should have mentioned Clark in an endnote).

The second half of the treasure-seeking issue has to do with Vogel's claim that "it had been an especially propitious night for treasure hunting." Vogel cites Quinn's *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View* as a source. When we check Quinn, however, we find no evidence (despite Quinn's rather strenuous efforts to manufacture it) that the Smith family themselves saw 21 September as being "astrologically significant." All we really have is Quinn's speculation on that issue. When Vogel, therefore, describes Moroni's visit in a treasure-seeking context, he does so by relying on uncorroborated thirdhand testimony and conjecture from a secondary work, resulting in a strained narrative that wrests the truly good sources.

The night of 21–22 September 1823 was undoubtedly a crucial night in Joseph Smith's life, perhaps more crucial than any other. It would therefore seem like a biographer's dream that Joseph left such extensive firsthand accounts (totaling more than 1,500 words) of the experience. The natural temptation would be to quote too much from Joseph, as well as quoting from such secondhand sources as Lucy Mack, William, and Katharine Smith and Oliver Cowdery. If the biographer were not careful, he could lose his narrative (and distract the reader) in a long series of quotations. For the judicious author, however, Joseph's accounts offer a gold mine (no pun intended) of memorable details.

So how do Vogel and Bushman deal with these firsthand accounts? Vogel quotes exactly twenty-nine words (about Joseph praying for forgiveness) and says virtually nothing about Moroni and nothing at all about his three different visits. The more one thinks about this, the more incredible it seems: Vogel, a master of the sources, has written a book of over 700 pages about a man who claimed to converse with heavenly messengers, and he essentially bypasses that man's firsthand and detailed account about what an angel looked like and what he said. More than anything else, this illustrates just how much Vogel's "bias" (more properly, his making his own religious beliefs—actually

antireligious beliefs—the overarching and controlling bias of his “history”) has destroyed his ability to tell the story by drawing from the sources. How can the reader possibly understand Joseph Smith (or trust Vogel, for that matter) when Vogel refuses to let Joseph speak for himself?<sup>74</sup>

Not surprisingly, Bushman quotes from Joseph Smith at length, just as Robert Remini does.<sup>75</sup>

As if it is not enough to ignore Joseph Smith’s accounts, Vogel presumes to do Joseph’s speaking for him. As Andrew and Dawson Hedges say, “Vogel takes it upon himself to tell us what *really* happened that night—indeed, what young Joseph was actually *thinking* over the course of that night and the following day, whatever he or his mother might later say.”<sup>76</sup> Vogel has once again put himself in an adversarial relationship with the sources, trying to convince us that *something else* happened. But rather than reaching these conclusions through source criticism, Vogel deduces them based on his idea of *what must have happened*.

Bushman’s version once again offers a striking contrast. He sticks with the sources, does his speculating (still related, however, to the sources themselves) in his endnotes, and asks what the events meant to the people themselves, offering a retelling they would probably recognize.

Echoing a common theme, Vogel writes that “an ‘angel’ appeared at [Joseph Smith’s] bedside, declaring that his sins were forgiven” (p. 44). Vogel puts the word *angel* in quotation marks, implying that Joseph did not initially use the word. “Unlike the ‘vision’ Smith would later narrate for an audience that would be unreceptive to folk-magic,” says Vogel, “the earliest accounts identify the heavenly messenger as a ‘spirit’ who visited Joseph three times in a ‘dream’” (p. 45). Other critics, including Ronald Huggins and William D. Morain, have made

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74. Drawing on a multitude of primary sources, Matthew B. Brown creates the kind of detailed and fascinating narrative that I had hoped for from Vogel. See *Plates of Gold: The Book of Mormon Comes Forth* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2003), 3–12.

75. Remini, *Joseph Smith*, 43–45.

76. Hedges and Hedges, “That’s Still Not History,” 210–11.

similar claims.<sup>77</sup> But let's look at what two volumes of *Early Mormon Documents* reveal on the matter.

Vogel makes it clear that the earliest references to the Book of Mormon both date to June 1829. The first, dated 17 June, was a letter from Jesse Smith, Joseph Sr.'s older brother, to Hyrum. The first paragraph reads as follows:

Once as I thot that my promising Nephew, You wrote to my Father long ago, that after struggling thro various scenes of adversity, you and your family, you had at last taught the very solutary lesson that the God that made the heavens and the earth w[o]uld at onc[e] give success to your endeavours, this if true, is very well, exactly as it should be—but alas what is man when left to his own way, he makes his own gods, if a golden calf, he falls down and worships before it, and says this is my god which brought me out of the land of Vermont—if it be a gold book discovered by the necromancy of infidelity, & dug from the mines of atheism, he [Joseph Jr.] writes that *the angel of the Lord has revealed to him the hidden treasures of wisdom & knowledge, even divine revelation*, which has lain in the bowels of the earth for thousands of years [and] is at last made known to him, he says he has eyes to see things that are not, and then has the audacity to say they are; and the angel of the Lord (Devil it should be) has put me in possession of great wealth, gold & silver and precious stones so that I shall have the dominion in all the land of Palmyra.<sup>78</sup>

The second reference, dated 26 June, is from a local newspaper:

Just about in this particular region, for some time past, much speculation has existed, concerning *a pretended discovery*,

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77. See Ronald V. Huggins, "From Captain Kidd's Treasure Ghost to the Angel Moroni: Changing *Dramatis Personae* in Early Mormonism," *Dialogue* 36/4 (2003): 17–42; and William D. Morain, review of *The Making of a Prophet*, by Dan Vogel, *Journal of Mormon History* 31/1 (2005): 212.

78. Jesse Smith to Hyrum Smith, 17 June 1829, in *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:551–52, emphasis added.

*through superhuman means, of an ancient record, of a religious and a divine nature and origin, written in ancient characters impossible to be interpreted by any to whom the special gift has not been imparted by inspiration. It is generally known and spoken of as the "Golden Bible." Most people entertain an idea that the whole matter is the result of a gross imposition, and a grosser superstition.*<sup>79</sup>

Although they are both hostile, these accounts clearly set the story of the angel and the plates in a religious rather than treasure-seeking context. Vogel has therefore misrepresented the sources he himself went to so much trouble to compile. And if the counterargument is given that the earliest people to *hear* the story—such as Willard Chase—told of a treasure guardian, it can easily be shown that individuals who heard the story before Chase—such as Joseph Knight Sr., Joseph Knight Jr., Lucy Mack Smith, and William Smith—told of an angel.<sup>80</sup>

### Deus ex Machina

In ancient Greek drama, play producers sometimes lowered deities by a crane or “machine” to rescue the hero or heroine from a tight spot. The Greek phrase used to describe such divine intervention was *theos ek mekhanes*. As William Harmon explains, “Such abrupt but timely appearance of a god, when used to extricate characters from a situation so perplexing that the solution seemed beyond mortal powers, was referred to in Latin as *deus ex machina* (‘god from the machine’). The term now characterizes any device whereby an author solves a difficult situation by a forced invention.”<sup>81</sup>

Dan Vogel has made up a detailed narrative about Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. Like any other historian, he plots his story

79. Palmyra (NY) *Wayne Sentinel*, 26 June 1829, in *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:218–19, emphasis added.

80. I cover all this in detail in my review “I Should Have an Eye Single to the Glory of God?: Joseph Smith’s Account of the Angel and the Plates,” *FARMS Review* 17/1 (2005): 11–81. See also Mark Ashurst McGee, “Moroni as Angel and as Treasure Guardian,” in this number of the *FARMS Review*, pages 35–100.

81. William Harmon and C. Hugh Holman, *A Handbook to Literature*, 7th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1996), 147–48.

by showing how one thing leads to another. But Vogel has worked himself into a corner by insisting on “addressing” Joseph’s religious claims, something that historians like Brad Gregory and Robert Remini do not find at all necessary. Since Vogel’s “inclination” (hardly a strong enough word) is to “interpret any claim of the paranormal” as “delusion or fraud,” he develops “natural” explanations (such as the influence of the magic worldview and the effects of a dysfunctional family) for Joseph Smith’s experiences. This is inevitably Vogel’s only solution to the question of why one thing leads to another. When these elements are introduced into the narrative, however, they jar conspicuously with the causes and effects apparent in the sources. In what is a doubly ironic twist, Vogel has attempted to solve his “plot problems” not by drawing on early Mormon documents but by calling on a god in a machine.

### Concluding Unscientific Postscript

Dan Vogel has published a letter in *Dialogue*<sup>82</sup> responding to a letter of mine.<sup>83</sup> Since the topic in question—whether Joseph Smith first described Moroni as a heavenly messenger or a treasure guardian—is relevant to my review of Vogel’s book, I will respond to Vogel’s letter. My letter was a response to Ronald V. Huggins’s article “From Captain Kidd’s Treasure Ghost to the Angel Moroni: Changing *Dramatis Personae* in Early Mormonism,”<sup>84</sup> in which Huggins claims that Joseph’s account of the angel and the plates originated as a “money-digger’s yarn” and was later transformed into “restoration history.”<sup>85</sup> I also subsequently published a much more detailed review of Huggins.<sup>86</sup> Huggins was apparently unaware that Mark Ashurst-McGee had previously published an important paper on this same topic, which is reprinted in this issue of the *Review*.<sup>87</sup>

82. Dan Vogel, “Treasure Lore Revisited,” *Dialogue* 39/2 (2006): vii–xi.

83. Larry E. Morris, “Folklore Rebutted,” *Dialogue* 38/3 (2005): vi–x.

84. Huggins, “Changing *Dramatis Personae*,” 17–42.

85. Huggins, “Changing *Dramatis Personae*,” 19.

86. Morris, “Joseph Smith’s Account,” 11–81.

87. See Mark Ashurst-McGee, “Moroni: Angel or Treasure Guardian?” *Mormon Historical Studies* 2/2 (2001): 39–75; reprinted with some changes and additions as “Moroni as Angel and as Treasure Guardian,” in this number of the *FARMS Review*, pages 35–100.

My primary criticisms of Huggins were that he fails to provide a historical context for treasure seeking, he neglects important documents, he obscures the timeline, and he hides crucial details. I further argued that, if one wants to discover what Joseph originally said about the plates and how his account may have changed over time, it is necessary to systematically examine all relevant sources (identifying what Joseph said and when he said it) and to develop a method for judging the relative value of these sources. Agreeing with Ashurst-McGee's statements that "eyewitness testimony is the most important standard of historical reliability" and that "sources composed closer to the time of the event" take precedence over "sources composed later on,"<sup>88</sup> I proposed dividing the primary sources into four categories: (1) those coming from individuals who talked directly to Joseph Smith, (2) those coming from individuals who talked to a second party who had talked to Joseph, (3) those composed before 1850, and (4) those composed after 1850. I referred to these categories as first- and secondhand and early and late, arguing that the best sources were those that were both firsthand and early.

I next examined thirteen different accounts of what Joseph Smith said about the angel and the plates, listing them in the order these individuals talked to Joseph (or to a second party who had talked to Joseph) and showing what details they included, as summarized in table 1. Those accounts marked by an asterisk are what I call prime witnesses, meaning that they are both firsthand (based on a direct conversation with Joseph) and early (composed at least by 1850). The date after the person's name tells when he or she talked to Joseph Smith; the date in brackets indicates when the account was recorded.

Four specific claims by Vogel are numbered below:

1. *"Historical standards are guides in assessing evidence, not apologetic devices designed to dismiss out-of-hand undesirable testimony."*<sup>89</sup>

With this statement, Vogel begins a series of what amounts to rhetorical tricks. He characterizes my argument in such a way that anyone accepting that characterization is bound to agree that Vogel is right and I am wrong. After all, who would argue that historical

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88. Ashurst-McGee, "Moroni as Angel and as Treasure Guardian," 53 above.

89. Vogel, "Treasure Lore Revisited," vii.



Table 1. Reminiscences of Joseph’s Account

	Toad	Treasure guardian	Black clothes/ horse	Plates disappear	Shock	Bring someone	Divine purpose	Angel
*Lucy Smith 1823 [1844–45]				♦	♦		♦	♦
William Smith 1823 [1883, 1884]				♦	♦		♦	♦
Lorenzo Saunders 1823 [1884]			black horse			♦	♦	♦
*Knight Sr. 1826 [circa 1835–47]				♦		♦	♦	“personage”
Knight Jr. 1826 [1862]							♦	♦
Willard Chase 1827 [1833]	♦	“spirit”	black clothes and horse	♦	♦	♦		
Benjamin Saunders 1827 [1884]	♦							♦
Orlando Saunders 1827 [1881]								♦
John A. Clark 1827–28 [1840]				♦	♦	♦	♦	♦
Lewis brothers 1828 [1879]		bleeding Spaniard			♦	♦		
*Oliver Cowdery 1829 [1835]					♦		♦	♦
*Henry Harris 1829 [circa 1833]						♦	♦	♦
Fayette Lapham 1830 [1870]		murder victim	black clothes	♦	♦	♦	♦	

standards should be used as apologetic devices? Who would claim that it is acceptable to dismiss out-of-hand undesirable testimony? I certainly do not. Vogel thus fashions a straw man: he has described a weak position and then falsely attributed that position to me.

Vogel also gives the impression that one can use historical standards to do anything one wants, easily casting aside contrary evidence. But if that were true, it seems that the so-called standard would immediately be suspect. One could hardly employ a reasonable standard and then accept or reject evidence on a whim. The standard itself would not allow that.

So, the question arises, is my standard flawed? In an earlier essay, I suggested the following principles of dealing with historical documents: (1) firsthand accounts are preferred over second- or thirdhand, (2) early statements are preferred over late statements, (3) all relevant sources must be accounted for, (4) corroboration (or a lack thereof) is a key criterion in evaluating sources, and (5) each separate claim within a document must be judged on its own merits.<sup>90</sup>

Does Vogel honestly think that this five-point standard could really be used to quickly dismiss contrary sources? As I see it, a quick dismissal would mean that the standard was not being followed. And, as I said in my letter, “all accounts—both hostile and friendly to Joseph—deserve careful study.”<sup>91</sup>

Here’s what Vogel himself said on the topic of standards:

Not all historical documents are created equal. Each must be evaluated to determine its significance, and readers should not confuse actual historical events with written descriptions. The informant records his or her perceptions or interpretation of the event. . . . These documents reflect the bias, personality, and world view(s) of the men and women who produced them—they are never mere records of events.

When evaluating human testimony, historians are guided but not bound by the rules of evidence practiced in United States

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90. Morris, “Joseph Smith’s Account,” 12.

91. Morris, “Folklore Rebutted,” ix-x.

courts of law. Ideally, one wishes for firsthand testimony from unbiased witnesses, but this is rarely found in either historical sources or courts of law.<sup>92</sup> Instead we are left to sift judiciously through various kinds of testimony, imperfectly recorded, and without the benefit of cross examination. But where a court may be unable to convict the guilty or exonerate the innocent, historians, with the benefit of hindsight, enjoy greater perspective and, in some ways, more flexibility when evaluating testimony. Historians, for example, do not automatically exclude hearsay, perjured, or even biased (or interested) testimony.

In Mormon studies it can be especially difficult to find disinterested witnesses. Nevertheless, despite the believer's zeal and the antagonist's scorn, such testimony can yield valuable insight. An enemy, for example, may notice something an average observer would miss, or a friend may take for granted (and fail to mention) things outsiders would find distinctive or significant. The particular side of an issue an informant falls on should never be reason alone for ignoring or dismissing his or her testimony.

The time-lapse between an observation and its recollection is important. Generally the closer to an event, the more reliable the document. But not always. One contemporary source might report only hearsay testimony, whereas a document written many years later might be from an eyewitness. Yet the hearsay source may report the information more accurately, while time and faulty memory may obscure and distort the eyewitness account. The same applies in determining the character or reliability of witnesses. Often a reluctant or even hostile witness is the most candid. In matters of religion, the religious are sometimes tempted to lie, just as nonbelievers may be more inclined to discount the miraculous.<sup>93</sup>

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92. I believe there is no such thing as an unbiased witness and therefore feel this part of Vogel's discussion is misdirected.

93. *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:xiv–xv. (I have not included Vogel's parenthetical references to various works.)

Now, how would Vogel respond if someone said, “You may call that a set of standards, but it’s really just a polemical device that you are using to easily dismiss evidence you don’t agree with”? I would expect Vogel to say that his set of standards allows no such thing.

Furthermore, although I did not have Vogel’s statement in front of me when I fashioned my five points, I had read and carefully marked his statement several years earlier. His standard influenced mine. In fact, I believe that all five of my points are stated or implied in Vogel’s statement. Vogel and I also agree that evaluation of sources is an intricate business and that, as he says in his letter, “applying these standards is not . . . mechanical and automatic. . . . Historical sources and their relationships to one another can be complex, and often there are other complicating factors to consider.”<sup>94</sup> As the above table shows, I carefully considered a wide variety of sources in attempting to determine what Joseph originally said about the plates, including statements hostile, friendly, and seemingly neutral to Joseph; first- and secondhand statements; and early and late statements. I took careful note of when conversations were said to have occurred and when they were recorded, and I closely checked for corroboration among all sources. I believe that such a systematic approach has so many checks and balances built into it that it would simply not be possible to summarily dismiss “undesirable testimony.”

2. *“The best example of Morris’s misuse of historical methodology is his hasty dismissal of Willard Chase’s 1833 report of what he had learned from Joseph Smith Sr. in 1827 about Joseph Jr.’s claimed 1823 encounter with ‘Moroni.’”*<sup>95</sup>

I did not dismiss Chase at all; rather, I simply pointed out that his statement is secondhand (because, purportedly, he got his information from Joseph Sr. rather than Joseph Jr.) and that this statement is not the earliest account concerning the plates (as Huggins claimed). Still, in retrospect, I believe I should have given more emphasis to the Chase document in my *Dialogue* letter. It is an important source, and, as Vogel points out (and as the table above makes quite clear), “many

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94. Vogel, “Treasure Lore Revisited,” vii.

95. Vogel, “Treasure Lore Revisited,” vii.

of its details are corroborated in other independent sources.”<sup>96</sup> But more on Chase later.

3. “Although [Benjamin Saunders’s 1884] account meets Morris’s requirement for ‘firsthand’ testimony, he dismisses the toad story as a later embellishment without acknowledging support from Chase’s 1833 statement.”<sup>97</sup>

This claim mystifies me. Here is what I actually wrote about Saunders:

“Accounts emphasizing a treasure guardian came later. Benjamin Saunders reported in 1884 that he had heard Joseph say, ‘there was something down near the box that looked like a toad that rose up into a man which forbid him to take the plates.’ This conversation took place in 1827, shortly after Joseph obtained the plates.”<sup>98</sup> Nowhere did I use the word *embellishment* (this is not the only time that Vogel implies I used a certain word when I did not). I simply pointed out that Saunders’s statement was not recorded until 1884. Nor do I dismiss Saunders’s statement. Along with quoting it in my letter, I include it in the above table. (I will grant Vogel’s point that I could have mentioned Chase in this context.)

4. “Cole prefaced his statement with ‘it is well known,’ so Morris’s fabrication-for-the-sake-of-revenge thesis is highly unlikely.”<sup>99</sup>

Here again, Vogel has misrepresented my position. I never said that Cole fabricated his story—nor do I believe it. Rather, I pointed out that Cole took a very neutral tone when he first discussed the Book of Mormon and that his tone changed radically after he had a confrontation with Joseph Smith (which occurred because Cole was illegally publishing excerpts from the Book of Mormon in violation of Joseph’s copyright). If Cole had any solid evidence that Luman Walter(s) or anyone else was involved in the creation of the Book or Mormon, he did not mention it in his initial articles. After the confrontation with Joseph, however, Cole launched a parody of the Book of Mormon

96. Vogel, “Treasure Lore Revisited,” viii.

97. Vogel, “Treasure Lore Revisited,” viii.

98. Morris, “Folklore Rebutted,” vii–viii.

99. Vogel, “Treasure Lore Revisited,” x.

called “The Book of Pukei.” That treatment (a sort of nineteenth-century tabloid journalism) has all the earmarks of rumormongering. Even when Cole later makes statements about the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, he offers vague accusations without supplying specific dates (making it virtually impossible to either prove or disprove his claims). Also, Cole’s saying that something was well known hardly shows that it was. Such a statement needs supporting evidence, and Cole offers none. Any careful discussion of Cole must take all of this into account.

### The Willard Chase Document

One of the main things Vogel takes me to task for is my supposed “hasty dismissal” of the Willard Chase statement. While I agree that this statement is important, I believe that Vogel himself makes hasty conclusions that cause him to miss crucial details related to the Chase account.

Vogel is correct that the Chase version includes several details confirmed by other sources (indeed, the table shows that Chase mentions six of the eight categories). Because of this, Vogel jumps to the conclusion that Chase is “highly credible,”<sup>100</sup> apparently assuming that the Chase affidavit is therefore a reliable guide to what Joseph Smith Jr. said about the angel and the plates.

But Vogel (like Huggins, for that matter) has glossed over the fact that Chase is a hearsay witness because he talked to Joseph Sr., not Joseph Jr. And the whole point of my investigation (and of Huggins’s article) is to discover what *Joseph Jr.* originally said and how that account may have changed over time. I agree with Vogel that we should not automatically exclude Chase’s claims because they are secondhand. At the same time, however, we don’t automatically accept them either. What we must do is carefully consider what Vogel calls complicating factors.

The key question is this: how do we determine what Joseph Jr. originally said about the plates? The answer is obvious: we look at the

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100. Vogel, “Treasure Lore Revisited,” viii.

accounts of those who talked to Joseph about this subject. (If these accounts are found to be unsatisfactory for some reason, we would then move to hearsay accounts.) This is not as simple as it may seem because, as Vogel points out, the relationships among historical sources can be quite complex. We have to consider when these individuals talked to Joseph, when they recorded their experiences, whether they were friendly or hostile to Joseph, and whether their claims can be corroborated by other sources. It can be argued that even a witness who talked to Joseph can be unreliable for one reason or another. This is true enough (and it is also true of those who talked to his father). But the way we protect against that contingency is by looking for corroboration among sources. And what do we find when we compare the four prime sources (identified as such because they were all first-hand and early)?

As the table shows, Lucy Mack Smith, Joseph Knight Sr., Oliver Cowdery, and Henry Harris are remarkably consistent.<sup>101</sup> They all agree on the divine purpose associated with the plates and with the appearance of an angel (although Knight uses the term *personage*—the same term Joseph uses in his 1838 account). Furthermore, not a single one of these witnesses mentions a detail not mentioned by at least one other witness. Finally, none of them makes any mention of black clothes or a black horse, a treasure guardian, or a toad.

Such consistency safely allows us to use these prime sources as a standard. There is no need to use Chase's account to tell us what Joseph Jr. said—that would only have been necessary if the firsthand sources had been shown to be unreliable.<sup>102</sup> Of course, establishing a standard

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101. Ideally we would have two friendly sources and two unfriendly, balancing the human tendency to naturally emphasize details consistent with one's personal beliefs. Nevertheless, the Henry Harris statement offers a reasonable degree of "balance" because Harris was quite hostile and because he recorded his statement earlier than Lucy Smith, Oliver Cowdery, or Joseph Knight Sr. In terms of being early and firsthand, Harris's statement is *the* prime source. (In addition, the candid tone of Joseph Knight Sr.'s statement makes it doubtful that he excluded any details for the sake of making Joseph look good.)

102. At best, Chase's account is a guide to what Joseph Sr. said about the plates. But even this is problematic because Chase is the only person who talked to Joseph Sr. and recorded his experience early. Also, there are no accounts from believers who talked to Joseph Sr., leaving us with a lack of balance. Finally, Fayette Lapham, who recorded his

does not mean that we have discovered exactly what Joseph originally said. Absolute proof is not possible because we are only working with traces of the past. Nevertheless, these are the best sources available, and the fact that they confirm rather than contradict each other indicates a reasonable level of reliability. The best evidence thus indicates that Joseph Smith mentioned the following when he first told of the plates:

- There was a divine purpose associated with the visit of an angel.
- The plates disappeared and a “shock” prevented Joseph from retrieving them.
- The angel instructed Joseph to bring someone with him to obtain the plates.

As for Chase and Lapham, consider this: they both talked to Joseph Sr., and they both mention the need for Joseph Jr. to wear black clothes or bring a black horse and the presence of a treasure-guardian spirit, while none of the four prime sources mentions these details. Furthermore, the four prime sources all include religious elements of Joseph Jr.’s experience in a way that Chase and Lapham do not (with Chase conspicuously making no mention of the angel or a divine purpose while the great majority of the other sources do).

A conspicuous pattern emerges: those who talked directly to Joseph Jr. emphasize the religious aspects of the story and deemphasize the “Captain Kidd” aspects, while those who talked to Joseph Sr. do the exact opposite. It therefore seems quite reasonable to conclude that this is merely a reflection of the different ways that Joseph Sr. and Joseph Jr. viewed or reported the experiences of the Prophet. This is hardly surprising. Who has not had the experience of hearing of an event directly from the person involved only to later hear a second-hand report with quite different nuances and shades of meaning?<sup>103</sup>

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statement in 1870, corroborates several of Chase’s details, but he was a frequent visitor to Palmyra who could have talked to Chase. He also could have seen Chase’s published statement in *Mormonism Unveiled*, which was published in 1834.

103. I have personally seen several examples of how hearsay statements can differ from firsthand statements. My grandfather was a well-known patriarch in Rexburg, Idaho, and left dictated accounts of several spiritual experiences. I later heard retellings of some of



Vogel and Huggins have failed to examine systematically which details of the Chase statement are confirmed by which witnesses. It is quite striking, for instance, that not a single prime source mentions the black clothes or horse, the treasure guardian, or the toad. In addition, the sources (other than Chase and Lapham) who do mention these details all recorded them quite late (the Lewis brothers in 1879 and the Saunders brothers in 1884), greatly increasing the possibility that they unintentionally conflated statements they had heard from various sources in the past.

In this light, it is quite revealing to reread the statement of Henry Harris. He had quite a negative view of Joseph Smith and had every reason to mention details likely to embarrass or discredit the Prophet. Rather than offering a “Captain Kidd” tale, however, Harris reports that Joseph “said he had a revelation from God that told him [the plates] were hid in a certain hill and he looked in his stone and saw them in the place of deposit; that an angel appeared, and told him he could not get the plates until he was married, and that when he saw the woman that was to be his wife, he should know her, and she would know him.”<sup>104</sup> Harris says nothing at all about a toad, a spirit guardian, or the need for black clothes or a black horse. Interestingly, this account sounds remarkably like that of Joseph Knight Sr., a friendly source who also talked with Joseph Smith.

The dating of Harris’s conversation with Joseph (another factor not carefully analyzed by Huggins or Vogel) is also important. As Vogel says, the conversation “evidently occurred sometime after Martin Harris’s trip to New York City in February 1828 and before the Book of Mormon’s publication in March 1830. It possibly occurred during Smith’s visits to Palmyra/Manchester in early June and late June to late September 1829 in preparation for printing the Book of Mormon.”<sup>105</sup> This information allows us to establish a timetable of sorts for the prime witnesses. Lucy Mack Smith heard of the plates and the angel in

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those experiences from people who talked to my grandfather. Their accounts have invariably differed in major ways from my grandfather’s firsthand accounts.

104. *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:76.

105. *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:76–77 n. 7.

1823, Joseph Knight Sr. in 1826, Henry Harris between 1828 and 1830, and Oliver Cowdery between 1829 and 1835. Given the consistency of these sources, it is clear that Joseph Smith was giving the same kind of account at the end of the 1820s as he did in 1823. Far from beginning with a “Captain Kidd” version and later altering it, Joseph related a religious experience from the start, a point confirmed by hostile and friendly witnesses alike.

# AARON'S GOLDEN CALF

Paul Y. Hoskisson<sup>1</sup>

**H**ave you ever wondered why Aaron made the golden calf? Did he not know that making graven images was wrong? Or why, after being chastised for making it, his punishment seems so light compared with other punishments in the Old Testament? With a little information from the Bible itself and from other ancient Near Eastern sources, I will answer these questions. Some of the answers will lead to unexpected implications.

## Setting the Stage

Aaron's actions will not seem so strange when we realize that the Israelites came out of an uncertain religious background and found themselves in an unsettling situation in the Sinai desert while the man who had successfully brought them out of Egypt was away. According to Exodus 12:40, the Israelites lived in Egypt for 430 years. Prior to that, the patriarchs lived in the Holy Land and had some contact with Haran, located in the great western bend in the upper Euphrates River system where Abraham had once lived. This background would have

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1. My thanks to Adam Anderson and Stephenson Smith for their help with updating my research. This article was first given as a lecture at the 1975 Annual Welch Lecture Series and was published as "Another Significance of the Golden Calf Motif" in typescript form in 1978 in *Tinkling Cymbals: Essays in Honor of Hugh Nibley*, ed. John W. Welch. A copy is on deposit in the Harold B. Lee Library of Brigham Young University.

allowed the Israelites to continue in a Canaanite cultural identity,<sup>2</sup> as mentioned in Joshua 24:14. (“Beyond the river” refers specifically to Haran—that is, “beyond the Euphrates River.”) While in Egypt, the Israelites would also have had the chance to pick up considerable Egyptian cultural baggage. Ezekiel 20:8 specifically mentions that the Israelites did not “forsake the idols of Egypt” when they exited. As verses 5 through 32 in this chapter explain, from the time of the exodus onward, the Israelites were not on the religious plane on which the God of Israel would have had them. Aaron’s actions took place within this somewhat uncertain religious and mixed cultural background.<sup>3</sup>

In addition, the Israelites had passed from Egyptian slavery into one terrifying experience after another. By the time Aaron made the golden calf, Moses, who had visibly wrought miracles in their presence and who had more than once occasioned their physical safety, had been missing for almost forty days. Anyone who is a stranger to the Near Eastern deserts, as the Israelites must have been after more than one generation in Egypt, knows how frightening the absence of an individual for even one or two days can be. Thus, the demands of the people and Aaron’s acquiescence, though improper, seem all too human.

### What Was the Golden Calf?

I suggest that the golden calf or young bull (the Hebrew word means “a young ox or bull”)<sup>4</sup> was not a pagan god. Rather, it was a symbol of the God of Israel. The relevant passage, Exodus 32:4–8, reads (with the Hebrew words substituted in italics for the terms for

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2. *Canaan* is used here as the designation for the land between the Sinai Peninsula and the present Turkish border with Syria. In general the “Canaanites” spoke Northwest Semitic languages closely related to Hebrew. Their religious practices are known from the Bible (which presents a negative view), from Ugaritic and other Northwest Semitic literature, and from archaeological findings.

3. For an interesting exploration of this subject, see Roland de Vaux, “El et Baal, le Dieu des Pères et Yahweh,” *Ugaritica* 6 (1969): 501–17. Compare also M. H. Segal, “The Religion of Israel before Sinai,” *Jewish Quarterly Review*, n.s., 52/1 (1961–62): 41–68, continued in *Jewish Quarterly Review*, n.s., 53/3 (1962–63): 226–56.

4. *The JPS Torah Commentary: Exodus*, comm. Nahum M. Sarna (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 203.

deity of the King James English translation—for example, *elohim* for “gods,” *Jehovah* for “the LORD”):

After he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These be thy *elohim*, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.

And when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, To morrow is a feast to *Jehovah*.

And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play.

And *Jehovah* said unto Moses, Go, get thee down; for thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves:

They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them: they have made them a molten calf, and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed thereunto, and said, These be thy *elohim*, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.

It is clear from this passage that Aaron and the people spoke not in pagan terms but in terms that denote the God of Israel. When the calf was completed, the people spoke of the calf as being the “*elohim*, O Israel,” that brought them out of Egypt. While it is true that *elohim* can be used in the Hebrew Bible to refer to pagan gods, its predominant use is for the God of Israel.<sup>5</sup> Almost as a confirmation of the Israelite nature of the calf, Aaron then declared, “Tomorrow is a feast to *Jehovah*.” If the calf had been a pagan god or pagan symbol, Aaron would not have proclaimed a feast to “*Jehovah*” nor would the people have said with reference to the calf, “These be thy *elohim*.” And when God told Moses what was happening, he made no mention of a pagan god, just that the Israelites “have made them a molten calf, and have

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5. For example, Genesis 1:26 reads, again with the Hebrew word in place of the English name for deity (God): “And *Elohim* said, Let us make man in our image.”

worshipped it, and have sacrificed thereunto, and said, These be thy *elohim*, O Israel.”

If then the calf was not a pagan god or the symbol of a pagan god, what was it? H. Th. Obbink has suggested that the calf was a syncretism between the worship of Jehovah and the cult of Baal.<sup>6</sup> In this view, the cultic figure of a young bull or calf was borrowed from the Baal cult, divested of its Baalism, and employed in an Israelite setting as the pedestal or throne upon which the invisible Jehovah stood,<sup>7</sup> analogous to the cherubim that flanked the throne of Jehovah on the ark of the covenant.

As Latter-day Saints, though, we do not have to appeal to syncretism to explain why an animal was used as a symbol of the God of Israel. As Christians we are familiar with “the Lamb of God” as a symbol for the Savior, the Son of God. Passages such as Isaiah 53:7, John 1:29, several verses in the book of Revelation, 1 Nephi 10:10 (see also 1 Nephi 11–14 and other places in the Book of Mormon), and Doctrine and Covenants 76:21 all mention “the lamb.”<sup>8</sup> Both the calf and the lamb were prominent as sacrificial animals in the law of Moses. The blood of calves was used by Moses to sprinkle the people as a symbol of the covenant (Exodus 24:6–8). The calf was also used symbolically in covenant settings (see Jeremiah 34:18–19; see also the use of a heifer

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6. H. Th. Obbink, “Jahwebilder,” *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 47 (1929): 272. For other general treatments, see, for example, Ziony Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel* (New York: Continuum, 2001); John N. Oswalt, “Golden Calves and the ‘Bull of Jacob,’” in *Israel’s Apostasy and Restoration: Essays in Honor of Roland K. Harrison*, ed. Avraham Gileadi (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 9–18; and J. Gerlad Janzen, “The Character of the Calf and Its Cult in Exodus 32,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 52/4 (1990): 597–609. See Alberto R. W. Green, *The Storm-God in the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003).

7. Obbink, “Jahwebilder,” 268.

8. As far as I can determine, the first use of the word *lamb* to symbolize Jehovah (as the Savior) occurs in Isaiah. Prior to that time, the word *calf* was used, as will be clear shortly. I would speculate that the use of a *calf* as Jehovah’s animal fell out of favor at least by the time of Elijah and his efforts to purge Baalism from among the Israelites. The symbolic animal of Baal was also the *calf* or *bull* and therefore would have been a source of possible syncretism between Jehovah and Baal. After Elijah, *baal* could no longer be used as an epithet of Jehovah. Perhaps under these circumstances, Isaiah introduced or drew on an otherwise unknown tradition of the *lamb* as Jehovah’s symbolic animal.

in Genesis 15:9–10). Therefore, both the lamb and the calf could function as an appropriate symbolic animal for the God of Israel.

In addition, other animal designations are used symbolically in the Old Testament. One of the names for the God of Israel is the “אֲבִיר ( *byr* ) of Jacob” (Genesis 49:24), usually translated the “mighty *God* of Jacob” or the “mighty One of Jacob.”<sup>9</sup> The original meaning of the root may have been “mighty” or “powerful,” but it is also the name of an animal. The cognate in Ugaritic (a language closely related to Hebrew) is *ibr* and stands in poetic parallel with two words, *r* and *rum*, that mean, respectively, “bull” and “buffalo.”<sup>10</sup> For this reason, “the *br* of Jacob” can be translated as “the Bull of Jacob.”<sup>11</sup> That “the Bull of Jacob” refers to Jehovah in post-Mosaic times as well is clear from passages such as Isaiah 49:26, 60:16, and Psalm 132:2, where the *br* of Jacob is paralleled with Jehovah (LORD in the KJV).

Along with the passage at hand in Exodus 32:4, in which the calf is specifically connected to the God of Israel, other passages also bring Jehovah and the calf into a symbolic relationship. When Jeroboam wanted to dissuade the people of the newly established northern Israelite kingdom from going to Jerusalem to worship Jehovah there, he had two golden calves made and installed at the northern and southern ends of his kingdom. It would not have been possible to use the calves in the cultic setting Jeroboam constructed and to convince the people to stay away from Jerusalem if the people had not already

9. The consonantal root of אֲבִיר ( *byr* ) is אֲבַר ( *br* ).

10. Cyrus Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook* [hereafter *UT*], *Analecta Orientalia* 38, revised reprint (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1998), Glossary 2664 for *r* and 2294 for *rum*. For the parallels in Ugaritic, see respectively CAT 1.12 I 31–32 and CAT 1.10 III 21–22. These are the standard notations for Ugaritic texts. CAT stands for Manfred Dietrich, Oswald Loretz, and Joaquín Sanmartín, *The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1995).

11. See Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* [hereafter *KB*], CD-ROM edition (Leiden: Brill, 1994–2000), s.v. “אֲבִיר.” Thus also Frank Moore Cross in *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 4. Note that in Jeremiah 8:16 אֲבִיר is paralleled with “horses,” which corresponds with the meaning of Egyptian *ibr*, “stallion” (see *UT*, under *ibr* in the glossary).

had the concept that the calf was the symbolic animal of the God of Israel.<sup>12</sup>

I need to point out specifically, however, that the calf was not a representation of the God of Israel—it was merely a symbol of Jehovah, perhaps even of his pedestal. The concept of a god standing or riding on an animal is widespread in the ancient Near East. While one of the most famous representations features the goddess Qadesh standing on a striding lion,<sup>13</sup> the majority of the animal representations are symbolic of male gods. “Among Canaanites, Aramaeans, and Hittites we find the gods nearly always represented as standing on the back of an animal or as seated on a throne borne by animals.”<sup>14</sup> Indeed, no Canaanite gods were ever represented “as themselves in animal form.”<sup>15</sup> Just as the Canaanite “storm-god Hadad is frequently represented standing on a bull”<sup>16</sup> but is never represented as a bull himself, so also the golden calf symbolized the God of Israel, perhaps in the mode of a pedestal. But it was not an image of Jehovah. W. F. Albright, in speaking of the golden-calf incident, stated, “It refers specifically to an attempted return by the Israelites of Moses’ time to the ancient practice of representing the chief divinity in the form of a storm-god standing on a young bull.”<sup>17</sup>

### The Nature of Aaron’s Sin

If Aaron was not guilty of constructing an image of Jehovah or any other god, what was his sin? Certainly it does have something to do with the second commandment, in Exodus 20:4–5, which reads:

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12. See Aaron Rothkoff, “The Golden Calf,” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 7:711a: “In any case Jeroboam’s initiative must have had some basis in an old tradition; otherwise he could not have succeeded in his enterprise.”

13. James B. Pritchard, ed., *The Ancient Near East: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), plate 140.

14. William F. Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity: Monotheism and the Historical Process*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1957), 299. For examples, see Pritchard, *Ancient Near East*, plates 129, 141, 142.

15. Albright, *Stone Age*, 299.

16. Rothkoff, “Golden Calf,” 7:711a.

17. William F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968), 197.



“Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God” (emphasis changed). I suggest that Aaron’s sin had more to do with the second half of the commandment than the first half.

If we take a strict interpretation, as some religions do, of the first part of the commandment (“Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image”), then any image would be prohibited, including photographs and realistic sculpture of any kind. Surely this is not what is prohibited. For example, the Lord himself told Moses to make images of pomegranates to decorate the priestly robes (see Exodus 28:33–34) and to adorn the mercy seat with cherubim, a type of image with wings (Exodus 25:18–20). It seems to me, therefore, that the commandment not to make any images was not a general prohibition against all images of all kinds. There must be more to the correct understanding of the commandment.

A rephrasing of the Ten Commandments in Leviticus 26:1 helps to clarify the prohibition: “Ye shall make you no idols nor graven image, neither rear you up a standing image, neither shall ye set up any image of stone in your land, to bow down unto it: for I am the Lord your God.” The prohibition against images has more to do with using the image in religious services than with constructing a likeness. In other words, there is reason to read the two parts of the second commandment together rather than to separate the parts.

Aaron’s sin, then, was not so much in making a likeness of a calf but, rather, in allowing the image of a calf, even if it was a symbol of Jehovah and not of a pagan god, to be used in a significant way in the “feast to *Jehovah*.” After the construction of the calf, Aaron allowed the people to declare, “These be thy *elohim*, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.” He then built an altar in front of the calf, and the people offered sacrifices to the calf during a “feast to *Jehovah*.” The calf had been allowed to become a central figure in the Israelite religious services.

It is hard for Latter-day Saints to imagine Aaron allowing such a practice. Currently in the church we do not use any images in our worship services. With the exception of a few grandfathered chapels, we do not even have any passive images or likenesses (except flowers) in our chapels. We can have a statue in the Relief Society room, paintings on the walls of the foyers, and pictures as part of our Sunday School lessons. But we do not have images or realistic figures in our chapels. What Aaron did would be tantamount to bringing a beautiful sculpture of a lamb into one of our chapels and placing it in a prominent position, perhaps next to the sacrament table, during a sacrament meeting. Though bringing the image of a lamb into our worship services might be well intentioned, it would certainly be inappropriate. Perhaps Aaron's good intentions, in spite of his poor judgment, account for the relatively light rebuke that Aaron eventually received (Exodus 32:30–32).

### Implications of the Golden-Calf Motif

Similarities between the revealed gospel of Jesus Christ and various facets of non-Christian religions create no problems for Latter-day Saints. In general, we believe that the gospel was taught to Adam and his posterity and that remnants of the gospel have survived in all religions. We also believe that, from time to time, “the Lord doth grant unto all nations, of their own nation and tongue, to teach his word, yea, in wisdom, all that he seeth fit that they should have” (Alma 29:8). Therefore we expect to find tenets of the truth in all religions and would be disappointed or surprised if there were none. Because Latter-day Saints can examine such similarities without taking umbrage, we can also view the golden calf as the symbolic animal of Jehovah and not be afraid to look for parallels in other ancient Near Eastern mythologies.

In his seminal article many years ago, H. Th. Obbink pointed out numerous similarities between the cult of Canaanite Baal and many aspects of Jehovah worship in the Old Testament.<sup>18</sup> He ascribed the

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18. Obbink, “Jahwebilder,” 264–74.

similarities to syncretism—that is, the Israelites appropriated some characteristics of Baal worship into Hebrew religion. While this is possible and no doubt happened, especially on the level of popular religion, there are other explanations. It is also possible, if Canaanite religion was a corrupted form of the truth, that some of the similarities could ultimately have a common source in the gospel. The similarities, however, do exist and, rather than viewing them as a threat to our understanding of the Old Testament, we as Latter-day Saints can examine the similarities for what they tell us about religion among the ancient Hebrews.

One of the shared points between Canaanite and Hebrew religion is, surprisingly, the word *baal*. It has long been known that *baal* comes from a Semitic root *b l* that means simply “lord,” “master,” “owner,” or “husband.”<sup>19</sup> It could be used of ordinary men and women<sup>20</sup> and of various gods, especially as an epithet. Just when the epithet began to be used as the name of a god is not known, but “it was certainly common from the fifteenth century on.”<sup>21</sup> In the earlier texts of the Bible, *baal* is applied to Jehovah and to the Canaanite god Hadad,<sup>22</sup> whom the Israelites almost exclusively referred to as Baal.

Two examples of *baal* being used in place of Jehovah should suffice. When King David achieved a victory over the Philistines, he named the place “Baal-perazim,” which can be translated literally as “lord of the breaking forths.” He named it such because, reading with the Hebrew, “*Jehovah* hath broken forth upon mine enemies before me, as the breach of waters. Therefore he called the name of that place Baal-perazim” (2 Samuel 5:20). The parallel here makes it clear that one of Jehovah’s epithets was “baal,” in its meaning of “lord.”

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19. KB, “בעל.”

20. For example, see the Hebrew text of Judges 9 passim. For the feminine form, see the Hebrew of 1 Kings 17:17. Especially interesting is the last phrase in Genesis 20:3, where the verb and the noun form a cognate accusative combination (היא בעלת בעל). Literally translated, the Hebrew reads, “She [the pointing in Hebrew makes it clear that this is the third person feminine singular nominative pronoun] is lorded of a lord.” The KJV has simply, “She is a man’s wife.”

21. Albright, *Yahweh*, 124.

22. De Vaux, “El et Baal,” 515.

The second example is even more interesting. One of Saul's sons bore the name "Esh-baal" (1 Chronicles 8:33 and 9:39), which means "Man of Baal" or, more literally, "Man of the Lord." Saul would not have allowed his son to have a name containing as its theophoric element the name of a non-Israelite god, especially not the name of a Canaanite god. Just as with "Baal-perazim," *baal* here must have been a title for the Israelite God Jehovah. Later in Israelite history, after Saul had been killed, his legacy tarnished, and his remaining son removed from the throne, and when *baal* began to take on a totally negative connotation, Saul's son's name was changed to read "Ish-bosheth" (2 Samuel 2:8 and *passim*), which means "Man of Shame." (This is technically known as a dysphemism, the opposite of a euphemism. In a dysphemism, a perfectly acceptable word is changed into something negative or disgusting.)<sup>23</sup> Concerning such name changes, Albright stated, "Just what this oscillation in the use of [Baal in] personal names meant, we do not know, but its very existence indicates that there was still much uncertainty as to whether 'Baal' could be used as an appellation of Yahweh in the sense of 'lord.'"<sup>24</sup>

These two examples make it clear that *baal* was a title that could be applied to Jehovah<sup>25</sup> or, for that matter, to any god. Just when the title took on the negative connotations we now associate with it cannot be determined with precision. A good guess would be that by the time of Elijah's sparring with King Ahab and his contest with the priests of the Canaanite god called Baal in 1 Kings 18, the title would have begun to become repugnant. That a change in attitude toward

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23. The Israelites were not the only ones who engaged in dysphemisms. In Babylon those who were not particularly enamored with Nebuchadrezzar changed his name to Nebuchadnezzar (both KJV spellings). The former is his real name and means "Nabu protect the heir." This is the form employed by Ezekiel and preferred by Jeremiah. The latter is the dysphemism and means "Nabu protect the mule." This is the form used in Kings and Chronicles.

24. Albright, *Yahweh*, 200.

25. Other examples include the passages Isaiah 54:5, "Thy Maker is thine husband; the LORD of hosts is his name . . . the God of the whole earth," and Hosea 2:16, "Thou shalt call me Ishi [my husband]; and shalt call me no more Baali [my husband]." Other examples of personal names include Judges 6:32, Jerubbaal (Gideon's other name); 1 Chronicles 14:7, Beeliada; and 1 Chronicles 12:5 Bealiah, all of which contain the name *baal*. The latter is particularly instructive because it means "Jehovah is Baal."

the title *baal* did take place, though, is certain. As mentioned above, Saul's son's name was changed to a dysphemism. And the name of the site of David's victory over the Philistines, Baal-perazim, was changed in Isaiah 28:21 to "mount Perazim."

Besides their sharing a common title early in the Bible, there are other shared features between Jehovah and the Canaanite god designated as "Baal." As mentioned above, both were represented by the figure of a young bull. Both were considered to be gods of the storm.<sup>26</sup> For example, in the Ugaritic literature, Baal is called *rkb rpt*, "rider of the clouds,"<sup>27</sup> In Psalm 68:4, Jehovah carries exactly the same epithet, in transliteration *rkb b rbwt*, "rider in/from the clouds."<sup>28</sup> Because both were thought to control the weather, the contest staged by Elijah on Mount Carmel between Jehovah and Baal took the form of proving who really could control the heavens by bringing fire down from the sky.<sup>29</sup> After the proof was given that Jehovah was the only true God who controlled the heavens, Elijah, as Jehovah's prophet, could add to that proof by declaring an end to the drought that Jehovah had commanded him to initiate several years earlier.

It should not be surprising to Latter-day Saints that the God of Israel shared several titles with the gods of its neighbors.<sup>30</sup> Judaism and Christianity also share many of the same titles for God. The different Christian churches also share most of their titulary for deity. Such sharing of titles and epithets among Christians and Jews also comes from the fact that churches and synagogues share in part a common scripture. No doubt the sharing of titles between Israel and its Canaanite

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26. It may seem strange to us as Latter-day Saints that Jehovah would be called a god of storms. This somehow seems to limit him. Therefore, it is helpful to view such a designation not as his only attribute, but as one of his all-encompassing attributes.

27. *UT*, Glossary 2331.

28. See KB, "רִכַּב." Compare also Mitchell J. Dahood's commentary on this verse in volume 17 of the Anchor Bible series, *Psalms* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970), 136.

29. See Fred E. Woods, *Water and Storm Polemics against Baalism in the Deuteronomian History* (New York: Lang, 1994), 97–103; see also Woods, "Who Controls the Water? Yahweh vs. Baal," *FARMS Occasional Papers* 4 (2004).

30. There are other shared titles besides *baal*. For example, without going into the details and the machinations of the scholarly debates, "El Shaddai [KJV: "Almighty God"] must have been taken over by Israel from its Canaanite neighbours" (KB, "שַׁדַּי").

neighbors may be as innocent as having a common language base, though certainly syncretism could also have played a role.

With the acceptance of the fact that many common aspects of Israelite religion were shared with Canaanite religion,<sup>31</sup> it is now possible to theorize about an added significance of the golden calf. As we have seen, the God of Israel shared symbols and titles with the gods of its neighbors. This shared cultural baggage may point to a reason that the calf was chosen as a symbol of Jehovah. Albright presumed that “early Hebrew popular religion” consisted of a set of three gods similar to other Semitic divine triads, namely “a father, El, a mother whose specific name must remain obscure, . . . and a son who appears as the storm-god.”<sup>32</sup> The father god of the Canaanites was called El, the same term that is used in the Hebrew Bible for generic “god.” As mentioned above, El was called “the bull.” Is it not possible that the choice of a calf as the symbolic animal of Jehovah was appropriate because Jehovah was understood to be a son? The evidence that Jehovah was perceived as the Son of the Most High has been conveniently gathered by Margaret Barker.<sup>33</sup> The massive amount of data she has collected from early Judaism to early Christianity leaves little doubt that in ancient Israel there was a Father God and a Son God, that Jehovah was the Son, and that, therefore, a calf was an appropriate symbol for Jehovah.<sup>34</sup>

A surprising number of father-and-son god pairs are at home in the geographic vicinity of Israel. The Sumerian god Enlil, whose name means “Lord Wind”<sup>35</sup> and who is later identified with the Babylonian

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31. There were also many dissimilarities. For example, honey is not allowed in any Israelite offering to Jehovah, but it was quite common in Canaanite offerings.

32. Albright, *Stone Age*, 247.

33. Margaret Barker, *The Great Angel: A Study of Israel's Second God* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1992). See especially the first chapter. However, she does not mention the golden-calf incident or the supporting Canaanite material.

34. It is interesting to note that Jesus, in his role as the “Lamb of God” (John 1:29) and the “Son of the Highest” (Luke 1:32), exercised control over the wind and sea (Matthew 8:23–27; Mark 4:34–41; and Luke 8:22–25), thus claiming dominion over the storm, as Jehovah had done through the contest on Mount Carmel.

35. Thorkild Jacobsen, *Toward the Image of Tammuz* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), 31.

storm-god Marduk,<sup>36</sup> is the son of An, the Bull of Heaven.<sup>37</sup> Marduk in his own right is called the son of Ea in *Enuma Elish*.<sup>38</sup> Like Enlil he is also linked with a bovine creature because the first element of the Sumerogram for his name can mean “calf” or “son,” rendering his full name either “son of the storm” or, according to Thorkild Jacobsen, “calf of . . . the Sungod.”<sup>39</sup> Ranging a little further abroad beyond the Semitic language connection, the Egyptian god Seth, often equated with Semitic Baal,<sup>40</sup> is the product of the union of Geb and Nut.<sup>41</sup> Even further afield, the Greek god Zeus, another god of the storm, is the son of Cronus<sup>42</sup> and is often syncretized with Baal.

### Conclusion

The calf Aaron made represented neither a non-Israelite god nor a statue of Jehovah. The calf was simply used as the symbolic animal of Jehovah, perhaps as his pedestal. Aaron's transgression was in allowing the image to take center stage in the Israelite sacrifices and celebrations. The shared symbolism and titles between Jehovah and Canaanite Baal point to a third prevalent feature of ancient Near Eastern religions—namely, the existence of father-and-son god pairs. The choice of the symbolic calf, like Isaiah's choice of the lamb, indicates that Jehovah is a son, the Son of the Most High, and that one of his defining attributes would be to become the ultimate sacrifice that would redeem the sons of Adam.

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36. Jacobsen, *Toward the Image of Tammuz*, 21.

37. Jacobsen, *Toward the Image of Tammuz*, 27, 31.

38. See Benjamin R. Foster, trans., “Epic of Creation (*Enuma Elish*),” in *The Context of Scripture, I: Canonical Compositions*, ed. William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger Jr. (London: Brill, 1997), 1.111 I 81–85.

39. Pinchas Artzi and Raphael Kutscher, “Marduk,” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 11:951a.

40. Henry O. Thompson, *Mekal, the God of Beth-Shan* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 132.

41. Thompson, *Mekal*, 129.

42. Hesiod, *Theogony* 1.69–70.





# MORMONISM AS A RESTORATION

Daniel C. Peterson

In his 1996 book on *The Rise of Christianity*, the noted sociologist Rodney Stark repeatedly uses the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as a model for understanding the growth of the early Christian movement.<sup>1</sup> The church, he has written elsewhere, represents “that

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Frequent reference will be made in what follows to several surveys, including Noel B. Reynolds, ed., *Book of Mormon Authorship: New Light on Ancient Origins* [hereafter *Authorship*] (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1982); John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne, eds., *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon* [hereafter *Rediscovering*] (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991); John W. Welch, ed., *Reexploring the Book of Mormon* [hereafter *Reexploring*] (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992); Noel B. Reynolds, ed., *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins* [hereafter *Authorship Revisited*] (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997); John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne, eds., *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon: The FARMS Updates of the 1990s* [hereafter *Pressing Forward*] (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999); Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch, eds., *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon* [hereafter *Echoes and Evidences*] (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002); also the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*. The acronym FARMS refers to Brigham Young University’s Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, now a part of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship; *Insights* is the Foundation’s newsletter. The essays I cite should not be regarded as an exhaustive list of books and articles contending for the truth of Latter-day Saint claims. At most, it constitutes a representative sample of certain strands of argument. The relevant literature is, by now, considerable. And, virtually without exception, each cited reference here offers further primary data and bibliographical hints for continued pursuit of the topics mentioned.

1. Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

incredibly rare event: the rise of a new world religion”; the Latter-day Saints “stand on the threshold of becoming the first major faith to appear on earth since the Prophet Mohammed rode out of the desert.”<sup>2</sup> Early in the twentieth century, the famous historian of antiquity Eduard Meyer took a year’s leave from the University of Berlin to study the Latter-day Saints in Utah. “Mormonism . . . is not just another of countless sects,” he concluded, “but a new revealed religion. What in the study of other revealed religions can only be surmised after painful research is here directly accessible in reliable witnesses. Hence the origin and history of Mormonism possess great and unusual value for the student of religious history.”<sup>3</sup>

Such comments do not surprise Latter-day Saints. From the beginning, they have understood their church and the doctrines it teaches as restorations of ancient originals, and most specifically of a Hebraic Christianity as yet largely untouched by Greek philosophy. “Mormonism, a nickname for the real religion of the Latter-day Saints, does not profess to be a new thing,” said Lorenzo Snow, the fifth prophet-president of the church, at the dawn of the twentieth century,

except to this generation. It proclaims itself as the original plan of salvation, instituted in the heavens before the world was, and revealed from God to man in different ages. That Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and other ancient worthies had this religion successively, in a series of dispensations, we, as a people, verily believe. To us, the gospel taught by the Redeemer in the meridian of time was a restored gospel, of which, however, He was the author, in His pre-existent state. Mormonism, in short, is the primitive Christian faith restored, the ancient

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2. Rodney Stark, “The Rise of a New World Faith,” *Review of Religious Research* 26/1 (September 1984): 18–27, at 18, 19. Compare Rodney Stark, “Modernization and Mormon Growth: The Secularization Thesis Revisited,” in *Contemporary Mormonism: Social Science Perspectives*, ed. Marie Cornwall, Tim B. Heaton, and Lawrence A. Young (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 13–23.

3. Eduard Meyer, *Ursprung und Geschichte der Mormonen* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1912), 2. For a critical evaluation of Meyer’s work on the Latter-day Saints, see James K. Lyon, “Mormonism and Islam through the Eyes of a ‘Universal Historian,’” *BYU Studies* 40/4 (2001): 221–36.

gospel brought back again—this time to usher in the last dispensation, introduce the Millennium, and wind up the work of redemption as pertaining to this planet.<sup>4</sup>

During their trek to the West, Latter-day Saints were the Camp of Israel, led by an American Moses, Brigham Young.<sup>5</sup> The initial pioneer companies crossed the Mississippi without getting their feet wet, aided by an ice bridge that seemed to them like the “dry ground through the midst of the sea” that enabled the Israelites to escape the armies of pharaoh.<sup>6</sup> Many later recalled miraculous supplies of quail and of a substance called “honeydew,” reminiscent of the biblical “manna,” that, as in the story of ancient Israel’s exodus, saved them from starvation (see Exodus 16). The Great Basin is studded with Old Testament place names such as Enoch, Ammon, Manassa, Moab, Ephraim, Ophir, Goshen, Mount Nebo, Samaria, and Zion, names reflecting that self-understanding. Temples and tabernacles ornament their landscape. Prophets, seers, apostles, deacons, priests, bishops, and patriarchs, apportioned between two orders of priesthood named after the Old Testament figures Aaron and Melchizedek, are among their ordained officers.<sup>7</sup> When they found a river draining from a freshwater lake into a huge body of saltwater, they naturally called it the Jordan. In the view of those who led it and participated in it, the Mormon settling of the Intermountain West—by an influx of English,

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4. *The Teachings of Lorenzo Snow*, ed. Clyde J. Williams (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1984), 100. Compare Joseph Smith’s remark in *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1972), 59–61, and Brigham Young’s comments in *Journal of Discourses*, 5:229, 10:324, and 13:269. The early Christians likewise believed that the “gospel” they knew had been revealed previously to prominent figures among the Hebrews. See, for instance, 1 Corinthians 10:1–4; Galatians 3:8; Hebrews 3:6–17, 4:2; Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.4.14–15.

5. See, for example, the 14 January 1847 revelation received by Brigham Young and canonized as Doctrine and Covenants 136; see also Leonard J. Arrington, *Brigham Young: American Moses* (New York: Knopf, 1985).

6. The biblical account occurs in Exodus 14. The phrase quoted comes from 14:16.

7. Lee A. Palmer, *Aaronic Priesthood through the Centuries* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1964), a textbook formerly used for church instruction, and John A. Tvedtnes, *The Church of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1980), will serve to illustrate a very strong version of the claim of structural continuity between ancient Israel, the early Christian church, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Scandinavian, German, and other pioneers—was a literal gathering of modern Israel from its lengthy dispersion.<sup>8</sup> The authority to initiate and guide this gathering was conferred upon Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, Latter-day Saints believe, through a visit by Moses to their temple in Kirtland, Ohio, in April 1836. Even today, the return of the Jews to Palestine and the continued remarkable missionary success of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are regarded as facets of the same ongoing process.<sup>9</sup>

But it is not Latter-day Saints alone who recognize resemblances between their church and more ancient movements. For Joseph Smith, as the great German social theorist Max Weber recognized, “resembled, even in matters of detail, Muhammad and above all the Jewish prophets.”<sup>10</sup> Similarly, the non-Mormon Old Testament scholar Lester L. Grabbe has recently argued that an understanding of Joseph Smith can shed light

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8. The theme recurs constantly in such accounts of the westward trek as Wallace Stegner, *The Gathering of Zion: The Story of the Mormon Trail* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964); William Mulder, *Homeward to Zion: The Mormon Migration from Scandinavia* (1957; repr., Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press and BYU Studies, 2000); and Eugene E. Campbell, *Establishing Zion: The Mormon Church in the American West, 1847–1869* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1988).

9. For a Latter-day Saint scholar’s analysis of the concept of “gathering” in the biblical prophets, see Stephen D. Ricks, “The Prophetic Literality of Tribal Reconstruction,” in *Israel’s Apostasy and Restoration: Essays in Honor of Roland K. Harrison*, ed. Avraham Gileadi (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 273–81. Mormon apostle Orson Hyde, commissioned and sent by Joseph Smith, offered up a lengthy, formal prayer on the Mount of Olives in 1841, dedicating Palestine for the return of the Jews; see *History of the Church*, 4:456–59. The Zionist movement arose over the following several decades.

10. Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, trans. Ephraim Fischoff (Boston: Beacon, 1968), 54. Meyer, too, was fascinated by what he regarded as parallels between Mormonism and Islam. “Mormonism,” he wrote, “excited my interest at an early age before all else because of the surprising analogy, extending even to the smallest details, between it and the fundamental drives, external forms, and historical development of Islam: here one might hope to discover significant clues for a proper understanding of Muhammad and his religion. . . . There is hardly another historical parallel as instructive as this one. . . . It is impossible to undertake the scholarly investigation of the one without a closer acquaintance with the other.” Meyer, *Ursprung und Geschichte der Mormonen*, 1. For a brief narrative biography of Muhammad with some scattered comparisons to Joseph Smith and Mormonism, see Daniel C. Peterson, “Muhammad” and “Final Thoughts: Response to McClymond’s ‘Prophet or Loss?’” in *The Rivers of Paradise: Moses, Buddha, Confucius, Jesus, and Muhammad as Religious Founders*, ed. David Noel Freedman and Michael J. McClymond (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 457–612, 675–81.

on prophecy in ancient Israel.<sup>11</sup> The prominent American literary critic Harold Bloom calls Joseph Smith “an authentic religious genius” and marvels at his mysterious ability to restore what Bloom calls “the archaic Jewish religion.”<sup>12</sup> The Finnish scholar Heikki Räisänen, too, has written about the uncanny way in which Joseph Smith hit upon salient issues and problems in ancient scriptural texts and moved to resolve them.<sup>13</sup> The Saints’ westward exodus or *hegira*, as it is often and significantly termed, formed them into a people, and not merely another American denomination.<sup>14</sup> Although they come “out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation,” they have themselves become a distinct group, with their own history and common culture, as the *Harvard Encyclopedia of Ethnic Groups* insightfully recognizes.<sup>15</sup> In this light, it is understandable that Latter-day Saints frequently cite the words of the apostle Peter, addressing the Christians of his day, with reference to themselves:

Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light:

Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy. (1 Peter 2:9–10)

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11. Lester L. Grabbe, “Prophecy: Joseph Smith and the *Gestalt* of the Israelite Prophet,” in *Ancient Israel: The Old Testament in Its Social Context*, ed. Philip F. Esler (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 117–27. (I thank John Gee for bringing this article to my attention.) It should be noted that Professor Grabbe’s article suffers from some serious misapprehensions, notably with respect to the Book of Mormon witnesses.

12. Bloom’s rather eccentric analysis of Joseph Smith and the faith he founded, bristling with sharp insights and serious errors, occurs at Harold Bloom, *The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 79–129, at 80, 99.

13. Heikki Räisänen, “Joseph Smith und die Bibel: Die Leistung des mormonischen Propheten in neuer Beleuchtung,” *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 109/2 (1984): 81–92.

14. For a discussion of this phenomenon, and of how the migration to the Great Basin separated members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints even from the followers of Joseph Smith who did not experience it, see Jan Shippy, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 84–85.

15. Dean L. May, “Mormons,” in *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*, ed. Stephan Thernstrom (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 720–31; see Revelation 5:9.

For believing members of the church, it is no insult but rather a matter of quiet satisfaction that others recognize that their history and doctrines recapitulate what has gone before. Writing about the Dead Sea Scrolls and about the community at Qumran that seems to have produced and guarded them, the Austrian scholar Georg Molin reflected in 1954 that the title “Latter-day Saints,” although it belongs to a modern religious movement, could also properly have been given to the ancient authors and custodians of the Scrolls.<sup>16</sup> And, indeed, the story of a prophetic figure who leads his followers to an arid wilderness beside the shore of a saltwater lake where they might find refuge from persecution does offer undeniable parallels to the history of the Latter-day Saints.<sup>17</sup>

### The Book of Mormon

But comparisons to the story of the Book of Mormon, the charter document of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, seem even more striking. Impelled, like Qumran’s “Teacher of Righteousness,” both by revelation and by a sense of peril, apostasy, and impending judgment at Jerusalem, the Book of Mormon’s Lehi led his followers into the Judean desert. Like the people of the Dead Sea, he and his successors produced a considerable religious literature, some of it on metal plates. Finally, the last keepers of those records—faced with military destruction like the doomed sectarians of Qumran—buried them in a hillside to come forth at some later time. In fact, this story of a book inscribed on metal, hidden in a stone box, buried in a hillside, and guarded by an angel has fascinating parallels in many other documents from antiquity. We now know that the writing of religious texts on metal plates (sometimes on gold) was an authentic ancient practice that, indeed, seems to appear at precisely the time and in exactly the

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16. See Georg Molin, *Die Söhne des Lichtes: Zeit und Stellung der Handschriften vom Toten Meer* (Vienna: Herold, 1954), 146.

17. A concise and judicious discussion of the parallels and divergences between Latter-day Saint ideas and those of the Qumran community is Donald W. Parry and Stephen D. Ricks, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Questions and Responses for Latter-day Saints* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000).

place from which the Book of Mormon peoples emerged.<sup>18</sup> Even the form of the Book of Mormon plates, as described by those who saw them and in the book itself, seems to reflect ancient Israelite practice in remarkable ways.<sup>19</sup>

Joseph Smith obtained the plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated from the angel Moroni on 22 September 1827—which was not only the autumnal equinox but Jewish New Year’s Day, Rosh Hashanah, the so-called “birthday of the world.”<sup>20</sup> More and more, the Book of Mormon appears to fit the ancient world from which it claims to have emerged.<sup>21</sup> This is a remarkable fact, considering that

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18. For a discussion of these and other related themes, see John A. Tvedtnes, *The Book of Mormon and Other Hidden Books: Out of Darkness unto Light* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000); H. Curtis Wright, “Ancient Burials of Metal Documents in Stone Boxes,” in *By Study and Also by Faith*, ed. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 2:273–334; William J. Hamblin, “Sacred Writings on Bronze Plates in the Ancient Mediterranean” (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1994); William J. Adams Jr., “Lehi’s Jerusalem and Writing on Metal Plates,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3/1 (1994): 204–6; Adams, “More on the Silver Plates from Lehi’s Jerusalem,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 4/2 (1995): 136–37; *Pressing Forward*, 20–28; David B. Honey and Michael P. Lyon, “An Inscribed Chinese Gold Plate in Its Context: Glimpses of the Sacred Center,” in *The Disciple as Scholar: Essays on Scripture and the Ancient World in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks, Donald W. Parry, and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000), 19–65; Stephen D. Ricks, “Converging Paths: Language and Cultural Notes on the Ancient Near Eastern Background of the Book of Mormon,” in *Echoes and Evidences*, 406–7. A popular statement on the subject was Paul R. Cheesman, *Ancient Writing on Metal Plates: Archaeological Findings Support Mormon Claims* (Bountiful, UT: Horizon, 1985). See the discussion of inscriptions on metallic plates by C. Wilfred Griggs, “The Book of Mormon as an Ancient Book,” in *Authorship*, 79–87.

19. John W. Welch, “Doubled, Sealed, Witnessed Documents: From the Ancient World to the Book of Mormon,” in *Mormons, Scripture, and the Ancient World: Studies in Honor of John L. Sorenson*, ed. Davis Bitton (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 391–444, supplies an intriguing instance of this. See Welch, “A Steady Stream of Significant Recognitions,” in *Echoes and Evidences*, 374–79.

20. There is no evidence that Joseph Smith was aware of the Jewish significance of the date. See *Reexploring*, 209–11.

21. A very brief summary of selected evidence for this proposition is Daniel C. Peterson, “Mounting Evidence for the Book of Mormon,” *Ensign*, January 2000, 18–24. The works of Hugh Nibley constitute an indispensable introduction to the question of the antiquity of the Book of Mormon but cannot be recapitulated here. See his *Lehi in the Desert; The World of the Jaredites; There Were Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988); *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 3rd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988); *Since Cumorah*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988); and *The*

its translation and dictation appear to have been accomplished in roughly 63 working days—a torrid pace that, with neither rewrites nor significant corrections, produced nearly 8.5 pages (of the current English edition) daily.<sup>22</sup> And it was produced in what might justly be termed an “information vacuum” by a semiliterate young farm boy who had essentially no access to data of any kind about antiquity.<sup>23</sup> Yet Joseph Smith’s account of the translation process, according to which he made use of a priestly implement that the Hebrew Bible terms the Urim and Thummim, now finds remarkable circumstantial support from contemporary scholarship on that rather mysterious object.<sup>24</sup>

And the book that resulted from the process is littered with what can now be recognized as authentically ancient names, many of them unknown in the Bible or in any other source available to Joseph Smith.

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*Prophetic Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1989). In very many ways, on the other hand, the Book of Mormon does not seem to fit the culture of early nineteenth-century America. For instance, the military romanticism of Joseph Smith’s America (the War of 1812 was a fresh memory; veterans of the American Revolution still lived in almost every family) is absent from the Book of Mormon. Instead, we see grimly realistic portrayals of war’s devastation and suffering. And, in the Gadianton robbers, we have a detailed, realistic portrayal of a prolonged guerrilla struggle—lacking any trace of fife and drum, uniforms, or parades—published well over a century before the great guerrilla theorists of the twentieth century put pens to paper. See Daniel C. Peterson, “The Gadianton Robbers as Guerrilla Warriors,” in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 146–73. Other examples of the Book of Mormon’s premodern character appear in Richard L. Bushman, “The Book of Mormon and the American Revolution,” in *Authorship*, 189–211; Royal Skousen, “The Original Language of the Book of Mormon: Upstate New York Dialect, King James English, or Hebrew?” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3/1 (1994): 28–38; Noel B. Reynolds, “By Objective Measures: Old Wine into Old Bottles,” in *Echoes and Evidences*, 143–45; also Daniel C. Peterson, “Authority in the Book of Mosiah,” in this number of the *FARMS Review*, pages 149–85.

22. See John W. Welch, “The Miraculous Translation of the Book of Mormon,” in *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820–1844*, ed. John W. Welch with Erick B. Carlson (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and BYU Press, 2005), 77–213; and Neal A. Maxwell, “By the Gift and Power of God,” in *Echoes and Evidences*, 5–12.

23. See, for example, Robert Paul, “Joseph Smith and the Manchester (New York) Library,” *BYU Studies* 22/3 (1982): 333–56; *Pressing Forward*, 283–84.

24. See Cornelius Van Dam, *The Urim and Thummim* (Kampen: Uitgeverij Van Den Berg, 1986); Cornelius Houtman, “The Urim and Thummim: A New Suggestion,” *Vetus Testamentum* 40/2 (1990): 231. For a useful summary, see *Pressing Forward*, 280–82. See also Tvedtnes, *The Book of Mormon and Other Hidden Books*, 195–225.



The name of Lehi's wife Sariah, for example, previously invisible outside the Book of Mormon, has now been found in ancient Jewish documents from Egypt.<sup>25</sup> Likewise, the nonbiblical name *Nephi* belongs to the very time and place of the first Book of Mormon figure who bears it.<sup>26</sup> Other uniquely Book of Mormon names—such as *Abish*, *Aha*, *Ammonihah*, *Chemish*, *Hagoth*, *Himni*, *Isabel*, *Jarom*, *Josh*, *Luram*, *Mathoni*, *Mathonihah*, *Muloki*, *Sam*, and *Shule*—are now attested in ancient materials.<sup>27</sup> Two male characters named *Alma* appear in the Book of Mormon. And, of course, this seems to run counter to what we might have expected: If Joseph Smith knew the name at all from his environment, he would most likely have known it as a Latinate woman's name. (Many will recognize the phrase *alma mater*, which means “beneficent mother.”) Recent documentary finds demonstrate, however, that *Alma* also occurs as a Semitic masculine personal name in the ancient Near East—just as it does in the Book of Mormon.<sup>28</sup> As a final example, *Jershon* designates a place that was given to the people of Ammon as a “land . . . for an inheritance” (Alma 27:22). In Hebrew, *Jershon* means “a place of inheritance.”<sup>29</sup> It is simply inconceivable that Joseph Smith could have known this in the late 1820s.

The presence in the Book of Mormon of the characteristically ancient literary structure or technique known as chiasmus—a complex rhetorical device largely overlooked by biblical scholarship until

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25. Jeffrey R. Chadwick, “Sariah in the Elephantine Papyri,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2/2 (1993): 196–200 (cf. *Pressing Forward*, 6–10); Ricks, “Converging Paths,” 402–3.

26. John Gee, “A Note on the Name *Nephi*,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1/1 (1992): 189–91 (cf. “Four Suggestions on the Origin of the Name *Nephi*,” in *Pressing Forward*, 1–5).

27. See the discussion between Paul Y. Hoskisson, Jeffrey R. Chadwick, Dana M. Pike, John A. Tvedtnes, John Gee, and Matthew Roper, in *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9/1 (2000): 28–51; E. Jan Wilson, “Inside a Sumerian Temple: The Ekishnugal at Ur,” in *The Temple in Time and Eternity*, ed. Donald W. Parry and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000), 319.

28. Paul Y. Hoskisson, “Alma as a Hebrew Name,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 7/1 (1998): 72–73.

29. Stephen D. Ricks and John A. Tvedtnes, “The Hebrew Origin of Some Book of Mormon Place Names,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 6/2 (1997): 255–59 (cf. *Pressing Forward*, 88–92).

decades after Joseph Smith's martyrdom in Illinois—is another powerful indicator of the record's antiquity and almost certainly did not arise by random chance.<sup>30</sup> (The same literary structure has now been identified in pre-Columbian America.)<sup>31</sup> In one intriguing example of chiasmus, the crucial wordplay rests on an equivalence between the word *Lord* and the royal name *Zedekiah* (see Helaman 6:10). But those words are only equivalent to readers aware that the term *Lord* probably stands (as it does in the King James Bible) for the divine name *Jehovah* or *Yahweh*, and that the *-iah* element in *Zedekiah* is the first portion of that same divine name. This chiasm thus works better in Hebrew than in English, which seems an important clue to the original language of the Book of Mormon.<sup>32</sup>

A number of details from the Book of Mormon text appear to support a view of the book as a rather literal translation from an ancient document.<sup>33</sup> In an ancient Hebrew idiom, for example, arrows

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30. The literature on chiasmus is now extensive. Consult John W. Welch and Daniel B. McKinlay, eds., *Chiasmus Bibliography* (Provo, UT: Research Press, 1999). See also John W. Welch, ed., *Chiasmus in Antiquity: Structures, Analyses, Exegesis* (1981; repr. Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999); Noel B. Reynolds, "Nephi's Outline," in *Authorship*, 53–74; John W. Welch, "Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon," in *Authorship*, 33–52; Welch, "A Masterpiece: Alma 36," in *Rediscovering*, 114–31; Boyd F. Edwards and W. Farrell Edwards, "Does Chiasmus Appear in the Book of Mormon by Chance?" *BYU Studies* 43/2 (2004): 103–30. Donald W. Parry, *The Book of Mormon Text Reformatted according to Parallelistic Patterns* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1992), illustrates chiasmus and many other sophisticated and genuinely ancient literary patterns in the Book of Mormon. One of these is "enallage." On this, see Kevin L. Barney, "Enallage in the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3/1 (1994): 113–47; 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 (cf. *Pressing Forward*, 43–48). John A. Tvedtnes, "Colophons in the Book of Mormon," in *Rediscovering*, 32–37, identifies yet another. See also *Reexploring*, 13–16; John W. Welch, "A Steady Stream of Significant Recognitions," in *Echoes and Evidences*, 340–47.

31. Allen J. Christenson, "The Use of Chiasmus by the Ancient Maya-Quiché," *Latin American Literatures Journal* 4/2 (1988): 125–50; Christenson, "Chiasmus in Mayan Texts," *Ensign*, October 1988, 28–31; Christenson, trans. and ed., *Popol Vuh: The Mythic Sections—Tales of First Beginnings from the Ancient K'iche'-Maya* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000), 15–17; Christenson, *Popol Vuh: The Sacred Book of the Maya* (Winchester, UK: O Books, 2003), 46–48.

32. *Reexploring*, 230–32.

33. In addition to the specific examples following, see John A. Tvedtnes, "The Hebrew Background of the Book of Mormon," in *Rediscovering*, 77–91.

are “thrown” (see, for example, Alma 49:22). Also, just as in ancient Hebrew and other Semitic languages, in a construction known as a “cognate accusative,”<sup>34</sup> the word denoting the object of a verb is sometimes derived from the same root as the verb itself. “Behold,” says the prophet Lehi, “I have dreamed a dream.”<sup>35</sup> Similarly, the (to us) redundant *that* in such expressions as “because that they are redeemed from the fall” and “because that my heart is broken” is a Hebraism (see, respectively, 2 Nephi 2:26 and 4:32).

But some Hebrew constructions that appeared in the first (1830) edition of the Book of Mormon have been erased from later printings, in a bid to make the book read more smoothly as English. One striking example of this involves a series of conditional sentences in Helaman 12:13–21. Such sentences, in English, typically feature an *if*-clause (either using the word *if* itself, or something equivalent), which expresses a hypothetical condition, and a result clause that describes what will occur if the hypothetical condition comes about. For example, “If you don’t study, you will fail.” The result clause may contain a word such as *then*, but commonly does not. By contrast, the result clause of a conditional sentence in ancient Hebrew can be introduced by the word *wa* (and), so that the sentence takes what might be termed an *if-and* form.<sup>36</sup> The occurrence of *if-and* conditionals in the 1830 Book of Mormon seems to indicate that it did not originate in the mind of a native English-speaker, but is a quite literal translation from a Hebrew original:

13. yea and *if* he saith unto the earth move *and* it is moved  
 14. yea *if* he say unto the earth thou shalt go back that it  
 lengthen out the day for many hours *and* it is done.

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34. See Donald W. Parry, “Hebraisms and Other Ancient Peculiarities in the Book of Mormon,” in *Echoes and Evidences*, 176–77.

35. For this and other illustrations, see *Pressing Forward*, 29–31.

36. See, for instance, the original Hebrew of Genesis 18:26; 24:8, 41; 28:20–21; 31:8 (twice); 34:17 (twice); 44:26; 47:6. The *if-and* conditional construction is invisible in the King James Version of the English Bible—the version with which Joseph Smith would have been familiar—just as it is in all other translations that I have checked. In current editions of the Book of Mormon, it has been anglicized. See Daniel C. Peterson, “Not Joseph’s, and Not Modern,” in *Echoes and Evidences*, 212–14.

16. and behold also *if* he saith unto the waters of the great deep be thou dried up *and* it is done.

17. behold *if* he saith unto this mountain be thou raised up and come over and fall upon that city that it be buried up *and* behold it is done.

19. and *if* the Lord shall say be thou accursed that no man shall find thee from this time henceforth and forever *and* behold no man getteth it henceforth and forever.

20. and behold *if* the Lord shall say unto a man because of thine iniquities thou shalt be accursed forever *and* it shall be done.

21. and *if* the Lord shall say because of thine iniquities thou shalt be cut off from my presence *and* he will cause that it shall be so. (Helaman 12:13–14, 16–17, 19–21, 1830 edition)

4. and *if* ye shall ask with a sincere heart with real intent having faith in Christ *and* he will manifest the truth of it unto you by the power of the Holy Ghost. (Moroni 10:4, 1830 edition)<sup>37</sup>

It is difficult to imagine a native speaker of English (such as Joseph Smith, though poorly educated at the time, indisputably was) producing such sentences. Yet they represent perfectly acceptable Hebrew.

Lehi's vision of God and his accompanying prophetic call, we now know, could serve as a textbook illustration of such visions and calls as they are recounted in ancient literature, complete with motifs of the heavenly book and the divine council that have only garnered scholarly attention in recent decades.<sup>38</sup> The imagery of Nephi's subsequent vision, too, is deeply rooted in ancient Near Eastern symbolism with

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37. On this matter, see *Pressing Forward*, 201–3.

38. The relevant passage in the Book of Mormon is 1 Nephi 1. See John W. Welch, "The Calling of a Prophet," in *The Book of Mormon: First Nephi, the Doctrinal Foundation*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1988), 35–54; Blake T. Ostler, "The Throne-Theophany and Prophetic Commission in 1 Nephi: A Form-Critical Analysis," *BYU Studies* 26/4 (1986): 67–95; *Reexploring*, 24–28; compare Daniel C. Peterson and Stephen D. Ricks, "The Throne-Theophany/Prophetic Call of Muhammad," in *Disciple as Scholar*, 323–37.

which Joseph Smith could not conceivably have been familiar but that seems to point directly to an origin in preexilic Israel (see 1 Nephi 11).<sup>39</sup> Not surprisingly, in that light, the account of Jerusalem just prior to the Babylonian captivity that is given early in the Book of Mormon narrative gains in plausibility as research accumulates.<sup>40</sup> Although it is generally supposed, for instance, that the captured Judahite king Zedekiah was forced to watch the execution of all his sons before his eyes were put out and he was taken off to Babylon, the Book of Mormon says that one of them, named Mulek, survived. A careful reading of the Bible, particularly in the original Hebrew, suggests that the claim is plausible, to the point, even, of including the detail of the prince's name.<sup>41</sup> Even Nephi's slaying of Laban, and the justification given to him for doing so, can now be seen to fit very specifically into that period.<sup>42</sup> The book claims, moreover, to have been written in "reformed Egyptian" (Mormon 9:32). Most who have studied the subject conclude that this signifies writing the Hebrew language in modified Egyptian characters. In recent years, we have learned that several indisputably ancient documents were written in precisely that fashion.<sup>43</sup>

The account of Lehi's Arabian sojourn after his hasty departure from Palestine is remarkably accurate—in fact, likely Book of Mormon locations have been identified along the coasts of Arabia—but no scholar

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39. See, for example, Griggs, "Book of Mormon as an Ancient Book," in *Authorship*, 75–101; "The 'Lamb of God' in Pre-Christian Texts," *Insights* (August 1998): 2; Daniel C. Peterson, "Nephi and His Asherah: A Note on 1 Nephi 11:8–23," in *Mormons, Scripture, and the Ancient World*, 191–243; Peterson, "Nephi and His Asherah," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9/2 (2000): 16–25; and Peterson, "Not Joseph's, and Not Modern," 214–19.

40. See, for instance, Hugh Nibley, "Two Shots in the Dark: i. Dark Days in Jerusalem: The Lachish Letters and the Book of Mormon (1 Nephi)," in *Authorship*, 103–21; and John W. Welch, David R. Seely, and Jo Ann H. Seely, eds., *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004).

41. *Reexploring*, 142–44.

42. *Pressing Forward*, 17–19.

43. 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; William J. Hamblin, "Reformed Egyptian" (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1995); John Gee, "Two Notes on Egyptian Script," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5/1 (1996): 162–76; *Pressing Forward*, 237–47; John A. Tvedtnes, "Ancient Texts in Support of the Book of Mormon," in *Echoes and Evidences*, 233–35.

in the nineteenth century, let alone Joseph Smith, could have known any of this.<sup>44</sup> And Lehi's epic journey from Jerusalem to the New World endured for a millennium in the memory of his descendants, who saw it as a signal instance of God's miraculous power much like the Israelites' earlier deliverance from Egyptian bondage.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, careful modern readings show that the very terms in which it was described and remembered derive from the biblical account of the exodus. The literary crafting of the story is both sophisticated and authentically Near Eastern.<sup>46</sup>

44. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 1–149; Warren P. Aston and Michaela J. Aston, *In the Footsteps of Lehi: New Evidence for Lehi's Journey across Arabia to Bountiful* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994); Eugene E. Clark, "A Preliminary Study of the Geology and Mineral Resources of Dhofar, the Sultanate of Oman" (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1995); Warren P. Aston, "The Arabian Bountiful Discovered? Evidence for Nephi's Bountiful," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 7/1 (1998): 5–11, 70; Aston, "Newly Found Altars from Nahom," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 10/2 (2001): 56–61; George Potter and Richard Wellington, *Lehi in the Wilderness: 81 New Documented Evidences That the Book of Mormon Is a True History* (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2003), 31–51, 107–62; S. Kent Brown, Terry B. Ball, Arnold H. Green, David J. Johnson, and W. Revell Phillips, "Planning Research on Oman: The End of Lehi's Trail," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 7/1 (1998): 12–21, 70; Brown, "The Place That Was Called Nahom," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8/1 (1999): 66–68; Brown, "Lehi, Journey of, to the Promised Land," in *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, ed. Dennis L. Largey et al. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 511–16; and Brown, *Voices from the Dust: Book of Mormon Insights* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2004), 1–63; Lynn M. Hilton and Hope Hilton, *In Search of Lehi's Trail* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976); *Reexploring*, 47–51; Ricks, "Converging Paths," 404–6; also Alan Goff, "Mourning, Consolation, and Repentance at Nahom," in *Rediscovering*, 92–99. For Lehi's ocean voyage, see John M. Lundquist's appendix, entitled "Biblical Seafaring and the Book of Mormon," to Raphael Patai, *The Children of Noah: Jewish Seafaring in Ancient Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 171–75. See, too, Eugene England, "Through the Arabian Desert to a Bountiful Land: Could Joseph Smith Have Known the Way?" in *Authorship*, 143–56; and S. Kent Brown, "New Light from Arabia on Lehi's Trail," in *Echoes and Evidences*, 55–125. See the new FARMS DVD entitled *Journey of Faith* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2005), which was filmed on location in Arabia, and the companion volume *Journey of Faith: From Jerusalem to the Promised Land* (Provo, UT: Maxwell Institute, 2006).

45. Louis Midgley discusses the very Hebraic importance of "memory" in the Book of Mormon in "The Ways of Remembrance," in *Rediscovering*, 168–76; "O Man, Remember, and Perish Not," in *Reexploring*, 127–29; and "'To Remember and Keep': On the Book of Mormon as an Ancient Book," in *Disciple as Scholar*, 95–137.

46. George S. Tate, "The Typology of the Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon," in *Literature of Belief: Sacred Scripture and Religious Experiences*, ed. Neal E. Lambert (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1981), 245–62; Terrence L. Szink, "To a Land of Promise (1 Nephi 16–18)," in *Studies in Scripture: Volume Seven, 1 Nephi to Alma 29*, ed. Kent P. Jackson (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987), 60–72; S. Kent Brown, "The Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 30/3 (1990): 111–26; Terrence L.

A bare list of several more features of the Book of Mormon will perhaps serve to illustrate a bit more of the richness of its ties to the vanished world of the ancient Near East, from which it claims to come. The system of market exchange set out in Alma 11:3–19 recalls ancient Babylonian economic legislation.<sup>47</sup> After Zemnarihah's execution, the tree upon which he had been hanged is ritually chopped down, as ancient Jewish law required (see 3 Nephi 4:28).<sup>48</sup> The manner of blessing food in the Book of Mormon resembles that followed among ancient Israelites.<sup>49</sup> The lengthy allegory of the olive tree given in Jacob 5 betrays a knowledge of olive cultivation considerably beyond what Joseph Smith, growing up in the American Northeast, could have possessed. But it is remarkably consistent, in detail, with what we learn from ancient manuals on Mediterranean olive cultivation.<sup>50</sup> The shining stones in the account of the Jaredite voyage across the sea have numerous parallels in ancient lore.<sup>51</sup> The book features authentically pre-Christian terminology and ancient Semitic imagery.<sup>52</sup> It seems to know remarkably much about the Jewish Passover and about the

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Szink, "Nephi and the Exodus," in *Rediscovering*, 38–51 (compare Goff, "Mourning, Consolation, and Repentance at Nahom"); Bruce J. Boehm, "Wanderers in the Promised Land: A Study of the Exodus Motif in the Book of Mormon and Holy Bible," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3/1 (1994): 187–203; Mark J. Johnson, "The Exodus of Lehi Revisited," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3/2 (1994): 123–26 (cf. *Pressing Forward*, 54–58); S. Kent Brown, *From Jerusalem to Zarahemla: Literary and Historical Studies of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1998), 75–98; Peterson, "Not Joseph's, and Not Modern," 192–97. Recent literary appreciations of the Book of Mormon include Marilyn Arnold, *Sweet Is the Word: Reflections on the Book of Mormon—Its Narrative, Teachings, and People* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 1996); Eugene England, "A Second Witness for the Logos: The Book of Mormon and Contemporary Literary Criticism," in *By Study and Also by Faith*, 2:91–125; Richard Dilworth Rust, *Feasting on the Word: The Literary Testimony of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1997).

47. *Pressing Forward*, 147–49; see John W. Welch, "Weighing and Measuring in the Worlds of the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8/2 (1999): 36–46.

48. See *Reexploring*, 250–52; *Pressing Forward*, 208–10.

49. *Pressing Forward*, 142–46.

50. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch, eds., *The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob 5* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1994).

51. See Tvedtnes, *The Book of Mormon and Other Hidden Books*, 195–225. For a scientific comment on the shining stones, see *Pressing Forward*, 253–55.

52. See, for example, David Rolph Seely, "The Image of the Hand of God in the Book of Mormon and the Old Testament," in *Rediscovering*, 140–50.

significance of the New Year in antiquity.<sup>53</sup> In ancient Israel, although it seems odd to us, iron was a precious substance used for decoration. Iron is used in the same way in the Book of Mormon.<sup>54</sup> Even the curse of speechlessness placed upon Korihor in Alma 30:49 finds striking ancient parallels.<sup>55</sup> The Book of Mormon uses the terms *statute*, *ordinance*, *judgment*, and *commandment* in the same way that the Hebrew Bible uses (and distinguishes) equivalent terms.<sup>56</sup> It contrasts thieves and robbers in the same manner as did ancient Hebrew law.<sup>57</sup>

King Benjamin's classic address (Mosiah 2–5) occupies roughly eleven pages in the current English edition, which means that Joseph Smith must have dictated this doctrinally rich nearly 5,000-word text in slightly more than one day. The sermon appears to be intimately linked with the ancient Israelite Feast of Tabernacles and the Day of Atonement, as well as with archaic treaty and covenant formulas, Israelite farewell addresses, and early Near Eastern coronation festivals.<sup>58</sup> (Throughout the Book of Mormon, seemingly ancient attitudes toward covenants and covenant ceremonial can be identified.)<sup>59</sup> Even the physical setting of the speech—delivered while the king stood upon a tower (Mosiah 2:7)—is ritually appropriate to the occasion, though Joseph Smith would not have known that from the English Bibles available to him.<sup>60</sup> Likewise, he could not have known that the ancient Hebrew term *moshia* signifies a champion of justice against oppression, appointed by God, whose mission it is to liberate a chosen

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53. *Reexploring*, 196–98, 209–11.

54. *Reexploring*, 133–34.

55. *Pressing Forward*, 154–56.

56. *Reexploring*, 62–65.

57. *Reexploring*, 248–49.

58. John A. Tvedtnes, "King Benjamin and the Feast of Tabernacles," in *By Study and Also by Faith*, 2:197–237; Stephen D. Ricks, "The Treaty/Covenant Pattern in King Benjamin's Address (Mosiah 1–6)," *BYU Studies* 24/2 (1984): 151–62; Ricks, "King, Coronation, and Covenant in Mosiah 1–6," in *Rediscovering*, 209–19; Ricks, "Kingship, Coronation, and Covenant in Mosiah 1–6," in *King Benjamin's Speech: "That Ye May Learn Wisdom"*, ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 233–75; *Reexploring*, 120–26; *Pressing Forward*, 103–9.

59. See Blake T. Ostler, "The Covenant Tradition in the Book of Mormon," in *Rediscovering*, 230–40.

60. *Pressing Forward*, 97–102.



people from oppression, especially by nonviolent means. For the term does not occur in the English of the King James Bible. But such nonviolent deliverance by a God-ordained champion is a major theme of the Book of Mormon book of *Mosiah*.<sup>61</sup>

Alma 7:10 predicts that Jesus “shall be born of Mary, at Jerusalem which is the land of our forefathers.” Although this would have seemed an obvious mistake for at least a century after the publication of the Book of Mormon, it is now plain that Bethlehem could be, and indeed was, regarded as a town in the “land of Jerusalem.” A recently released text from the Dead Sea Scrolls, for example—a text claiming origin in the days of Jeremiah (and, therefore, in Lehi’s time)—says that the Jews of that period were “taken captive from the land of Jerusalem.”<sup>62</sup> Joseph Smith could not have learned this from the Bible, though, for no such language appears in it.

Each of the two major narratives in the Book of Mormon ends in a military cataclysm. Depictions of military conflict in the Book of Mormon, while foreign to many modern notions, strikingly suggest a dual heritage from the ancient Near East and pre-Columbian Mesoamerica.<sup>63</sup> The oath of allegiance taken by Nephite soldiers in Alma 46:21–22 is almost identical in form to military oaths among ancient Israelite and Hittite warriors.<sup>64</sup> The painstaking research of

61. John Sawyer, “What Was a Mošia ?” *Vetus Testamentum* 15 (1965): 475–86. *Reexploring*, 105–7, summarizes and applies Sawyer’s article.

62. For the original text and a translation of 4QApocryphon of Jeremiah C (4Q385b [4QapocrJer C]), see Robert Eisenman and Michael Wise, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Uncovered* (Shaftesbury: Element, 1992), 57–58. Florentino García Martínez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated: The Qumran Texts in English*, trans. Wilfred G. E. Watson (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 285, inadequately renders the Hebrew. See, too, Daniel C. Peterson, William J. Hamblin, and Matthew Roper, “On Alma 7:10 and the Birthplace of Jesus Christ” (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1995); John A. Tvedtnes, “Cities and Lands in the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 4/2 (1995): 147–50 (cf. *Pressing Forward*, 164–68); *Reexploring*, 170–72; *Pressing Forward*, 139–41.

63. For a convenient summary, see William J. Hamblin, “Warfare in the Book of Mormon,” in *Rediscovering*, 241–48. See, too, the above-mentioned anthology *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*; and *Reexploring*, 180–81, 189–92.

64. Terrence L. Szink, “An Oath of Allegiance in the Book of Mormon,” in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, 35–45; Mark J. Morriss, “Simile Curses in the Ancient Near East, Old Testament, and Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2/1 (1993): 124–38; *Reexploring*, 189–92, 199–201, 206–8.

John L. Sorenson and others has demonstrated the plausibility of the complex geographical data contained in the Book of Mormon and suggested fascinating correlations, both in the big picture and in the details, with what we are learning about life in ancient Mesoamerica.<sup>65</sup>

### The Book of Abraham

But the Book of Mormon is not the only canonical Latter-day Saint text that claims ancient origin. Later, in the 1830s, Joseph Smith produced the Book of Abraham, which, he said, was a selection from actual writings of the biblical patriarch bearing that name.<sup>66</sup> As with the Book of Mormon, the Book of Abraham clearly seems to reach back into ancient materials regarding its hero and his environment to which Joseph Smith could not have gained access through natural means. Within its brief text, for instance, the book tells us that Abraham's own fathers had turned aside from worship of the true God to the service of "the god of Pharaoh, king of Egypt" (Abraham 1:6, 13; also Fac. 1, fig. 9). The Bible, on the other hand, appears to know

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65. See, for example, John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1985); Sorenson, "Animals in the Book of Mormon: An Annotated Bibliography" (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1992); Sorenson, ed., "Metals and Metallurgy Relating to the Book of Mormon Text" (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1992); Sorenson, "The Book of Mormon as a Mesoamerican Record," in *Authorship Revisited*, 391–521; Sorenson, *Images of Ancient America: Visualizing Book of Mormon Life* (Provo, UT: Research Press, 1998); Sorenson, "How Could Joseph Smith Write So Accurately about Ancient American Civilization?" in *Echoes and Evidences*, 261–306; also portions of Ricks and Hamblin, *Warfare in the Book of Mormon; Reexploring*, 236–38; *Pressing Forward*, 196–200, 248–52. See John E. Clark, "Archaeology, Relics, and Book of Mormon Belief," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14/2 (2005): 38–49; Clark, "Archaeological Trends and the Book of Mormon Origins," *BYU Studies* 44/4 (2005): 104; and Brant A. Gardner, "Multi-dimensional Commentary," at [frontpage2000.nmia.com/~nahualli/commentary.htm](http://frontpage2000.nmia.com/~nahualli/commentary.htm) (accessed 12 July 2006).

66. For brief summations of selected data regarding evidence of the antiquity of the Book of Abraham, see Daniel C. Peterson, "News from Antiquity ['Evidence supporting the book of Abraham continues to turn up in a wide variety of sources']," *Ensign*, January 1994, 16–21; John A. Tvedtnes, Brian M. Hauglid, and John Gee, comps. and eds., *Traditions about the Early Life of Abraham* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2001); John Gee and Stephen D. Ricks, "Historical Plausibility: 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.

nothing about the idolatry of Abraham's ancestors.<sup>67</sup> However, their polytheism, along with Abraham's conversion to the worship of the true God and his attempt to convert his family, is a common theme of many very old Jewish stories.<sup>68</sup>

The Book of Abraham mentions "the plain of Olishem" (Abraham 1:10). No such place name occurs in the Bible, but it does occur, appropriately timed and located, in an inscription of the Akkadian ruler Naram Sin, dating to about 2250 BC.<sup>69</sup> Similarly—and strikingly, in a book produced by an uneducated farmer at the very time when the discipline of Egyptology was being born across the Atlantic Ocean—the Book of Abraham correctly identifies the Egyptian crocodile deity Sobk as "the idolatrous god of pharaoh" (Fac. 1, fig. 9).<sup>70</sup> The Book of Abraham tells of an attempted sacrifice of the patriarch (see Abraham 1:7–20; Fac. 1). While the Bible is silent regarding the incident, post-biblical literature repeatedly mentions Abraham's miraculous deliverance from an attempt to kill him.<sup>71</sup> And the name of Abraham has actually been found in a third-century AD Egyptian papyrus in

67. A passing reference occurs at Joshua 24:2.

68. See, for instance, *Jubilees* 11:4, 7–8, 16–17; 12:1–8, 12–14; English translation at *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* [hereafter *OTP*], ed. James H. Charlesworth (Garden City: Doubleday, 1983–85), 2:78–80. See also *Jasher* 9:6–19; 11:15–61; Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 1.7.1; *Apocalypse of Abraham* 1–8 (*OTP* 1:689–93); Qur an 6:75; 9:114; 19:42–51; 21:52–68; 26:70–83; 37:84–97. See, generally, Tvedtnes, Hauglid, and Gee, *Traditions about the Early Life of Abraham*.

69. See John M. Lundquist, "Was Abraham at Ebla? A Cultural Background of the Book of Abraham (Abraham 1 and 2)," in *Studies in Scripture, Volume 2: The Pearl of Great Price*, ed. Robert L. Millet and Kent P. Jackson (Salt Lake City: Randall Book, 1985), 233–35; Paul Y. Hoskisson, "Where Was Ur of the Chaldees?" 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), 136 n. 44; John Gee, "A Tragedy of Errors," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 4 (1992): 115 n. 64.

70. Intriguingly, Middle Kingdom Egypt, at around the time of the Twelfth Dynasty—most likely the time of Abraham—saw a great deal of activity in the large oasis to the southwest of modern Cairo known as the Fayyum. Crocodiles were common there, and Sobk or Sobek was the chief local deity. The last king of the Twelfth Dynasty even adopted the name of the crocodile god, calling himself Nefru-sobk, and five pharaohs of the Thirteenth Dynasty took the name Sebek-hotpe. Compare Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973–80), 1:40, 201.

71. *Jasher* 12:1–43 (cf. *Jasher* 8); *Pseudo-Philo* 6 (*OTP* 2:310–12); Qur an 21:69–72; 37:98–99. These sources, however, differ from the Book of Abraham in saying that he was

association with a lion-couch scene much like the sacrificial scene depicted in the Book of Abraham's Facsimile 1.<sup>72</sup>

According to the Book of Abraham, in order to preserve the patriarch's life the Lord advises him to conceal the fact that Sarai is his wife and instead to tell the Egyptians that she is his sister. By contrast, the Bible records the story of Abraham's "lie" but is silent regarding the divine counsel that authorized it (compare Abraham 2:22–25 and Genesis 12:11–20). However, the *Genesis Apocryphon*, a document found among the Dead Sea Scrolls in the mid-twentieth century, supports the claim of the Book of Abraham that the patriarch's behavior in this matter was divinely ordained.<sup>73</sup>

The third chapter of the Book of Abraham offers a remarkable portrait of what might be termed "Abrahamic astronomy," and its Facsimile 3 shows an Egyptian scene in which "Abraham is reasoning upon the principles of Astronomy, in the king's court." Very old Jewish and Christian materials sustain this claim.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, recent research indicates that the astronomical model portrayed in the Book of Mormon fits exceedingly well among ancient geocentric (earth-centered) notions. And, once again, while nothing in the Genesis account of Abraham's life suggests that he had any special astronomical interests or knowledge, many postbiblical texts preserve precisely that image of him.<sup>75</sup> The fourth and fifth chapters of the Book

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cast into a furnace. The only possible biblical reference to Abraham's escape from death is the vague comment of Isaiah 29:22 about "the Lord, who redeemed Abraham."

72. John Gee, "References to Abraham Found in Two Egyptian Texts," *Insights* (September 1991): 1, 3; Gee, "Abraham in Ancient Egyptian Texts," *Ensign*, July 1992, 60–62.

73. For a discussion of the incident, see Thomas W. Mackay, "Abraham in Egypt: A Collation of Evidence for the Case of the Missing Wife," *BYU Studies* 10/4 (1970): 429–51.

74. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 1.8.1–2; Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9.17.8; 9.18.1–2 (OTP 2:881–82); cf. *Jasher* 15:22. See Tvedtnes, Hauglid, and Gee, *Traditions about the Early Life of Abraham*, 544–45.

75. See John Gee, William J. Hamblin, and Daniel C. Peterson, "'And I Saw the Stars': The Book of Abraham and Ancient Geocentric Astronomy," in *Astronomy, Papyrus, and Covenant*, ed. John Gee and Brian M. Hauglid (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2005), 1–16. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 1.7.2; 12:16–19 (OTP 2:81); Qur'an 6:76–80; *Apocalypse of Abraham* 12, 15–24 (OTP 1:694–701); *Ab Ja far Mu ammad b. Jar r al- abar , J mi al-Bay n f Tafs r al-Qur n* (Beirut: D r Ma rifa li al- ib a wa al-Nashr, 1978), 7:160; cf. *Ab Abd All h Mu ammad b. A mad al-An r al-Qur ub , Al-J mi li-A k m al-Qur n* (Cairo: D r al-Sha b, n.d.), 3:2459. *Testament of Abraham* 9–10 (OTP 1:886–88)

of Abraham recount a modified version of the familiar Genesis story of creation. Ancient traditions preserve reports that the patriarch was granted a vision of those momentous events.<sup>76</sup>

### The Restoration of the Ancient Church

On the foundation of such scriptural texts as the Book of Mormon and the Book of Abraham, which Latter-day Saints regard as restorations of inspired ancient documents, accompanied by the Bible and modern revelations, stands the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It proclaims itself the restoration of the church originally founded and led by Jesus and his disciples, itself a restoration of earlier dispensations, with a priesthood authorized by God and restored to the earth by the ancient biblical figures John the Baptist and Peter, James, and John. In several ways, it is undeniably similar to the ancient church.<sup>77</sup> It practices baptism by immersion, and it ordains its officers and—like the elders mentioned in James 5—anooints and blesses the sick by the laying on of hands. Its missionaries take its message to the ends of the earth, “baptizing . . . in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matthew 28:19).

Like the original Christian movement founded by Jesus, the church today is led by prophets and by a council of twelve apostles. When they occur, vacancies in the apostolic council are filled, so that the council continues from generation to generation. (This was attempted in ancient times, too—as at Acts 1:15–26—but, with persecution, scattering, and death, the council of the apostles nonetheless soon ceased to exist as an organized body.)<sup>78</sup> Echoing both New Testament Christianity and the Old Testament’s wandering desert Israel, quorums of seventy perform significant portions of the church’s work (see

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refers to the fulfillment of Abraham’s request “to see all the inhabited world and all the created things which you established.”

76. Al- abar , *J mi al-Bay n*, 7:160.

77. A brief survey of relevant materials is Daniel C. Peterson and Stephen D. Ricks, “Comparing LDS Beliefs with First-Century Christianity,” *Ensign*, March 1988, 6–11.

78. See Hugh Nibley, *Apostles and Bishops in Early Christianity* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 2005).

Luke 10:1, 17; compare Exodus 24:1, 9; Numbers 11:16; Ezekiel 8:11).<sup>79</sup> Like the earliest church, it features priests, deacons, and bishops. (The Reformation notion of the priesthood of all believers had clearly not yet arisen.) Before the departure of the apostles, the Christian movement possessed leaders whose authority was general, rather than local, who traveled throughout the world and among the branches of the church, giving their witness, bringing order, and resisting false doctrines. Thereafter, though we find a deep need for such general officers, there were none. The writings of the so-called “apostolic fathers,” the first literature from the post–New Testament church, are replete with appeals for unity from bishops and others who did not hold, and knew that they did not hold, the authority to bring such unity about.<sup>80</sup> The earliest Christian church enjoyed what are often called “the gifts of the spirit,” including ongoing prophecy and revelation for its guidance (for example, see Acts 10; 16:6–10).<sup>81</sup> (The New Testament itself is evidence of the Christian movement’s consciousness of its right to add to the scriptural canon.) But prophecy died out in the early church. By about the middle of the second century, it was essentially gone.<sup>82</sup>

Following the appearance of the Father and the Son to Joseph Smith in the spring of 1820, however, the claim of ongoing revelation became one of the notable characteristics of the movement he founded. Prophets and apostles are the general officers of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, presiding over local bishops and other leaders after the manner of early Christianity. Even the spec-

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79. See also S. Kent Brown, “The Seventy in Scripture,” in *By Study and Also by Faith*, 1:25–45.

80. Exhortations to be loyal to local bishops are especially common and impassioned in the various epistles of St. Ignatius of Antioch (d. ca. AD 107)—that is, at an early age when the loss of apostolic direction was still acutely felt. See again Nibley, *Apostles and Bishops*.

81. Compare, for the general idea of spiritual gifts in the ancient church, 1 Corinthians 2:4; Galatians 3:5; and 1 Thessalonians 1:5.

82. See, for example, Eusebius, *Church History* 3.37.1; 5.17.1–4. The Montanist movement, in the second half of the second Christian century, represents both a protest against the loss of prophecy in the church and a failed attempt to bring it back. See Noel B. Reynolds, ed., *Early Christians in Disarray: Contemporary LDS Perspectives on the Christian Apostasy* (Provo, UT: FARMS and BYU Press, 2005).

tacular spiritual outpouring of Pentecost (Acts 2) had its analogue at the dedication of the temple in Kirtland, Ohio, in 1836.<sup>83</sup>

“Built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets,” the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints demonstrably teaches doctrines today that reach back, in unique and (to its adherents) miraculous ways into ancient Christianity.<sup>84</sup> Although it lacks such later concepts as the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* (out of nothing), original sin, and the metaphysical or ontological Trinity preeminently associated with the Council of Nicea, the gospel as taught in the church today manifests several features that were lost after the earliest centuries of the Christian movement.<sup>85</sup> Edwin Hatch, in his famous 1888 Hibbert Lectures, remarked that

It is impossible for any one, whether he be a student of history or no, to fail to notice a difference of both form and content between the Sermon on the Mount and the Nicene Creed. The Sermon on the Mount is the promulgation of a new law of conduct; it assumes beliefs rather than formulates them; the theological conceptions which underlie it belong to the ethical rather than the speculative side of theology; metaphysics

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83. See Milton V. Backman Jr., *The Heavens Resound: A History of the Latter-day Saints in Ohio, 1830–1838* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983). At least two of the persons involved compared the revelation on priesthood, given in 1978, to the experience of the early Christians at Pentecost. See Leonard J. Arrington, *Adventures of a Church Historian* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 177; compare Bruce R. McConkie, “Day of Pentecost,” in *Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 181–82. See also Steven C. Harper, “A Pentecost and Endowment Indeed: Six Eyewitness Accounts of the Kirtland Temple Experience,” in *Opening the Heavens*, 327–71. For notes on the restoration of spiritual gifts in the modern church, see Matthew B. Brown, *All Things Restored: Confirming the Authenticity of LDS Beliefs* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2000), 133–57. Much, much more could be written on this topic.

84. General treatments of the specific issues that will be briefly discussed below, and many besides, include Hugh Nibley, *The World and the Prophets*, 3rd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987); Hugh Nibley, *Mormonism and Early Christianity* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987); Barry R. Bickmore, *Restoring the Ancient Church: Joseph Smith and Early Christianity* (Ben Lomond, CA: Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research, 1999).

85. Stephen D. Ricks, “Adam’s Fall in the Book of Mormon, Second Temple Judaism, and Early Christianity,” in *Disciple as Scholar*, 595–606.

are wholly absent. The Nicene Creed is a statement partly of historical facts and partly of dogmatic inferences; the metaphysical terms which it contains would probably have been unintelligible to the first disciples; ethics have no place in it. The one belongs to a world of Syrian peasants, the other to a world of Greek philosophers.

The contrast is patent. If any one thinks that it is sufficiently explained by saying that the one is a sermon and the other a creed, it must be pointed out in reply that the question why an ethical sermon stood in the forefront of the teaching of Jesus Christ, and a metaphysical creed in the forefront of the Christianity of the fourth century, is a problem which claims investigation.<sup>86</sup>

Latter-day Saints see their church and its teachings as belonging to the world of the Sermon on the Mount, rather than to the later cosmos of the Nicene Creed. Indeed, it is quite helpful to regard the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as a community constituted, to a considerable extent, by a common memory—of scriptural stories (deriving from a substantially larger canon than that of surrounding Christendom) and of the stories of its own persecuted and heroic past. It is a community, by contrast to others, that is little inclined toward systematic theology.<sup>87</sup>

Latter-day Saints practice baptism on behalf of the dead, just as some ancient Christians quite certainly did.<sup>88</sup> Their practice rests on a belief that the gospel is preached in the world of spirits to those who

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86. Edwin Hatch, *The Influence of Greek Ideas on Christianity* (Gloucester, MA: Smith, 1970), 1.

87. Midgley, “To Remember and Keep,” 95–137; also Daniel C. Peterson, “What Has Athens to Do with Jerusalem?: Apostasy and Restoration in the Big Picture,” *FARMS Review of Books* 12/2 (2000): xi–lii.

88. See 1 Corinthians 15:29 for an oblique reference to the practice, clearly among Christians; also Nibley, “Two Ways to Remember the Dead,” in *The World and the Prophets*, 163–71; Hugh Nibley, “Baptism for the Dead in Ancient Times,” in *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, 100–167; John A. Tvedtnes, “Baptism for the Dead in Early Christianity,” in Parry and Ricks, *Temple in Time and Eternity*, 55–78. See, too, the important statement by the eminent Lutheran New Testament scholar and clergyman Krister Stendahl, “Baptism for the Dead: Ancient Sources,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1:97.



missed the opportunity to hear it in mortality—a belief that, very arguably, existed among ancient Christians as well.<sup>89</sup> Their patterns of temple worship strikingly echo ancient patterns from around the world, but particularly from the ancient Near East.<sup>90</sup> As Protestant scholar Harold Turner has observed with specific reference to Latter-day Saint sanctuaries and their ancient prototypes, temple architecture and temple functions are quite distinct from those of ordinary meetinghouses. Temples constitute set-apart spaces that are not equally accessible to all (and may even be shrouded in secrecy). They are oriented directionally, as well as to the worlds of the dead, the living, and the divine, and their designs are divinely revealed.<sup>91</sup> Moreover,

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89. For discussions of this subject, see Daniel C. Peterson, review of *Die Mormonen: Sekte oder neue Kirche Jesu Christi?* by Rüdiger Hauth, *FARMS Review of Books* 9/2 (1997): 131–39; John A. Tvedtnes, “The Dead Shall Hear the Voice,” *FARMS Review of Books* 10/2 (1998): 184–99. A Protestant philosopher suggests the possibility of a postmortem chance for those who have not heard the message of Christianity and specifically adduces Paul’s reference to baptism for the dead at 1 Corinthians 15:29, in Stephen T. Davis, *Risen Indeed: Making Sense of the Resurrection* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 159–65. See Jeffrey A. Trumbower, *Rescue for the Dead: The Posthumous Salvation of Non-Christians in Early Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), and Gaye Strathearn’s review of this book in “Did the Early Christian Church Seek Salvation for the Dead?” *FARMS Review* 16/1 (2004): 419–25; see also David L. Paulsen and Brent Alvord, “Joseph Smith and the Problem of the Unevangelized,” *FARMS Review* 17/1 (2005): 171–204.

90. For samples of a considerable and growing literature, see Truman G. Madsen, ed., *The Temple in Antiquity: Ancient Records and Modern Perspectives* (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1984); John M. Lundquist, “Temple, Covenant, and Law in the Ancient Near East and in the Old Testament,” in *Israel’s Apostasy and Restoration*, 293–305; William J. Hamblin, “Aspects of an Early Christian Initiation Ritual,” in *By Study and Also by Faith*, 1:202–21; Hugh Nibley, *Temple and Cosmos: Beyond This Ignorant Present* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992); John M. Lundquist, *The Temple: Meeting Place of Heaven and Earth* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993); Donald W. Parry, ed., *Temples of the Ancient World* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1994); Matthew B. Brown, *The Gate of Heaven: Insights on the Doctrines and Symbols of the Temple* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 1999); Parry and Ricks, *Temple in Time and Eternity*; William J. Hamblin and David R. Seely, *Solomon’s Temple in History and Myth* (Thames and Hudson, forthcoming April 2007). Guy G. Stroumsa, *Hidden Wisdom: Esoteric Traditions and the Roots of Christian Mysticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), offers a useful glimpse of early Christian esotericism.

91. See Harold W. Turner, *From Temple to Meeting House: The Phenomenology and Theology of Places of Worship* (New York: Mouton, 1979), 46. Directions for building the portable Israelite tabernacle and establishing its liturgy were given to Moses in great detail, as recorded in Exodus 25–31. First Chronicles 28:11–19 says that the plans for the

the temple embodies, in architectural form, the ancient notion of the cosmic mountain. It represents an avenue of ascent to the divine and sits upon a source of the waters of life.<sup>92</sup>

Latter-day Saints believe that the “sealing power” to bind families and generations together in the temples was restored through a personal visitation of the Hebrew prophet Elijah to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery in the Kirtland Temple during the period of the Jewish Passover, on 3 April 1836—which is to say, during the very period when Jewish families around the world had set chairs and utensils for his visit.<sup>93</sup>

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temple in Jerusalem were given by inspiration to David and passed on by him to his son Solomon. Specifications for the temple at Kirtland, Ohio, were given in at least two revelations received in 1833, including Doctrine and Covenants 94:3–9 and an interesting vision granted to the entire First Presidency of the church. For the latter, see Lyndon W. Cook, *The Revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith: A Historical and Biographical Commentary of the Doctrine and Covenants* (Provo, UT: Seventy’s Mission Bookstore, 1981), 197–98. Joseph Smith had also seen the original Nauvoo Illinois Temple in vision prior to its construction. See, for example, *History of the Church*, 6:196–97; also the mocking and dismissive account given in Josiah Quincy, *Figures of the Past: From the Leaves of Old Journals* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1883), 389; compare Doctrine and Covenants 124:25–44. The case of the Salt Lake Temple is similar. “I scarcely ever say much about revelations, or visions,” said Brigham Young in a sermon on 6 April 1853, “but suffice it to say, five years ago last July I was here, and saw in the Spirit the Temple not ten feet from where we have laid the Chief Corner Stone. I have not inquired what kind of a Temple we should build. Why? Because it was represented before me. I have never looked upon that ground, but the vision of it was there. I see it as plainly as if it was in reality before me.” See *Journal of Discourses*, 1:133. And the pattern holds true for the latest generation of temples. In the dedicatory prayer for the Colonia Juarez Chihuahua Temple on 6 March 1999, President Gordon B. Hinckley said, “It was here in Northern Mexico, that Thou didst reveal the idea and the plan of a smaller temple, complete in every necessary detail, but suited in size to the needs and circumstances of the Church membership in this area of Thy vineyard. That revelation came of a desire and a prayer to help Thy people of these colonies who have been true and loyal during the century and more that they have lived here.” The complete text of the prayer is readily available at [www.ldschurchtemples.com/cgi-bin/prayers.cgi?colonia\\_juarez&operating](http://www.ldschurchtemples.com/cgi-bin/prayers.cgi?colonia_juarez&operating) (accessed 11 April 2006). For background information, see Dell Van Orden, “Inspiration Came for Smaller Temples on Trip to Mexico,” *Church News* (1 August 1998): 3.

92. John M. Lundquist, “The Common Temple Ideology of the Ancient Near East,” in Madsen, *Temple in Antiquity*, 53–76; Richard J. Clifford, “The Temple and the Holy Mountain,” in Madsen, *Temple in Antiquity*, 107–24; John M. Lundquist, “What Is a Temple? A Preliminary Typology,” in Parry, *Temples of the Ancient World*, 83–117.

93. But, again, Joseph Smith seems to have been unaware of the coincidence. At least, he never appears to have mentioned it, let alone to have attempted to capitalize upon

In their anthropomorphic view of God—holding him to be not only a personal being, but a corporeal or embodied one—Latter-day Saints clearly hold to an opinion that, while very much out of favor among mainstream theologians for many centuries now, was widely shared among the first generations of Christians.<sup>94</sup> “Ordinary Christians for at least the first three centuries of the current era commonly (and perhaps generally) believed God to be corporeal,” or embodied. “The belief was abandoned (and then only gradually) as Neoplatonism became more and more entrenched as the dominant world view of Christian thinkers.”<sup>95</sup>

Anglican church historian Alan Richardson has argued that the theologians who produced such classical creeds as the famous Definition of Faith of the fifth-century Council of Chalcedon were overly influenced by contemporary philosophical fashions, and that, consequently, they exaggerated the gulf between humans and the divine. “God and man are fundamentally akin,” he writes.<sup>96</sup> Latter-day Saints agree with their ancient Christian forebears on this matter, and it is that belief that undergirds their most dramatic break with contemporary theological views—their doctrine, called the doctrine of “exaltation,” that humans,

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it. It is also appropriate that Moses, during whose time and through whose prophetic ministry the Passover itself was instituted, appeared on the same occasion to restore the authority to direct the gathering of Israel (as alluded to above). See Stephen D. Ricks, “The Appearance of Elijah and Moses in the Kirtland Temple and the Jewish Passover,” *BYU Studies* 23/4 (1983): 483–86.

94. Edmond LaB. Cherbonnier, “In Defense of Anthropomorphism,” in *Reflections on Mormonism: Judaeo-Christian Parallels*, ed. Truman G. Madsen (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1978), 155–73; Roland J. Teske, “Divine Immutability in Saint Augustine,” *Modern Schoolman* 63 (May 1986): 233–49; David L. Paulsen, “Early Christian Belief in a Corporeal Deity: Origen and Augustine as Reluctant Witnesses,” *Harvard Theological Review* 83/2 (1990): 105–16; David L. Paulsen, “The Doctrine of Divine Embodiment: Restoration, Judeo-Christian, and Philosophical Perspectives,” *BYU Studies* 35/4 (1995–96): 6–94; Daniel C. Peterson, “On the Motif of the Weeping God in Moses 7,” in *Revelation, Reason, and Faith: Essays in Honor of Truman G. Madsen*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002), 285–317; and Carl W. Griffin and David L. Paulsen, “Augustine and the Corporeality of God,” *Harvard Theological Review* 95/1 (2002): 97–118.

95. Paulsen, “Early Christian Belief in a Corporeal Deity,” 105.

96. Alan Richardson, *Creeds in the Making: A Short Introduction to the History of Christian Doctrine* (1935; repr., London: SCM, 1990), 86; see, generally, 85–88.

being children of God, have the potential of becoming like their Father. In the ancient church, this doctrine (or one very like it) was given the Greek name *theosis*. It was very widespread.<sup>97</sup>

Speaking of the Latter-day concept, the late German Lutheran historian Ernst Benz commented,

One can think what one wants of this doctrine of progressive deification, but one thing is certain: with this anthropology Joseph Smith is closer to the view of man held by the Ancient Church than the precursors of the Augustinian doctrine of original sin were, who considered the thought of such a substantial connection between God and man as *the* heresy, par excellence.<sup>98</sup>

For these and many other reasons, Latter-day Saints rejoice in their church, the doctrines it teaches, and the ordinances it administers as restorations of what was had among the saints of early Christianity and the patriarchs and prophets of ancient Israel. They recall the words of the apostle Peter, spoken at the temple in Jerusalem:

And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you:

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97. For some references and commentary, see Keith E. Norman, “Deification: The Content of Athanasian Soteriology” (PhD diss., Duke University, 1980); now reprinted as *FARMS Occasional Papers* 1/1 (2000); and Jordan Vajda, “‘Partakers of the Divine Nature’: A Comparative Analysis of Patristic and Mormon Doctrines of Divinization” (master’s thesis, Graduate Theological Union, 1998); now reprinted as *FARMS Occasional Papers* 3 (2002). Daniel C. Peterson, “‘Ye Are Gods’: Psalm 82 and John 10 as Witnesses to the Divine Nature of Humankind,” in *Disciple as Scholar*, 471–594. See also the references given at Daniel C. Peterson and Stephen D. Ricks, *Offenders for a Word: How Anti-Mormons Play Word Games to Attack the Latter-day Saints* (1992; repr. Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 75–92. The Latter-day Saint doctrine of “eternal progression” manifests unmistakable affinities with the “irenaean” view of the afterlife—the term is derived from the name of the great second-century bishop of Lyons, St. Irenaeus—identified by John H. Hick, *Death and Eternal Life* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1976), 47–48.

98. Ernst W. Benz, “*Imago Dei*: Man in the Image of God,” in *Reflections on Mormonism: Judaeo-Christian Parallels*, ed. Truman G. Madsen (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1978), 215–16; and “*Imago dei*: Man as the Image of God,” trans. Alan F. Keele, *FARMS Review* 17/1 (2005): 250.

Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began. (Acts 3:20–21)

In their view, the restoration, which began with Joseph Smith's vision of the Father and the Son in a grove of trees near Palmyra, New York, in 1820, is a harbinger of the eventual second advent of the Savior and Son of God, Jesus Christ:

And when these things come to pass . . . it shall be a sign unto them, that they may know that the work of the Father hath already commenced unto the fulfilling of the covenant which he hath made unto the people who are of the house of Israel. (3 Nephi 21:7)



## “LOOK UNTO ABRAHAM YOUR FATHER”

Brian M. Hauglid

Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you. (Isaiah 51:2)

Over the past few decades or so I have had the privilege of studying the life and teachings of Abraham, and it has been as interesting as it has been fulfilling in both my personal and professional life. The driving force behind my interest in Abraham was initially fueled by verses from Isaiah quoted in my patriarchal blessing: “Hearken unto me, ye that follow after righteousness. Look unto the rock from whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit from whence ye are digged. Look unto Abraham, your father, and unto Sarah, she that bare you; for I called him alone, and blessed him” (2 Nephi 8:1–2; cf. Isaiah 51:1–2).

Since receiving this first inspired and personal emphasis on Abraham, which has continued to direct my life, others have helped me to see and appreciate Abraham in personal and uplifting ways. In my view, E. Douglas Clark’s book, *The Blessings of Abraham: Becoming a*

Review of E. Douglas Clark. *The Blessings of Abraham: Becoming a Zion People*. American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2005. 331 pp., with appendix, chart, abbreviation lists, and bibliography. \$29.95.

*Zion People*, is worthy, with only a couple of reservations, to sit on my bookshelves beside other favorite works on Abraham.

### Stylistic and Devotional Considerations

In the introduction to his book, Clark gives the main thesis: “Together Abraham and Sarah built Zion, and together they are to be remembered by their righteous posterity who aspire to build Zion. Together they teach us how to build Zion and qualify for the very blessings once bestowed on them for their faithfulness” (p. 26). For the next twelve chapters, which cover the life of Abraham from birth to death, Clark stays assiduously close to this purpose. His prose carries each event, concept, idea, principle, or doctrine smoothly and clearly forward. I found that this helped the book flow from one chapter to the next in a most satisfying and readable manner.

From a devotional perspective, Clark focuses on the best characteristics of Abraham (and Sarah) as he weaves together a tapestry of ancient Jewish, Christian, and Islamic lore in support of or expanding on the scriptural text. For instance, according to Abraham 1:31, Abraham learned the “knowledge of the beginning of the creation, and also of the planets, and of the stars.” Here Clark notes that Abraham had the Urim and Thummim and that rabbinic tradition evidences Abraham owning a “rare stone in which he could read a man’s destiny” (p. 113); also, in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, Abraham prayed and “received revelation upon revelation teaching him about history, astronomy, theology, and science” (p. 114). To expand on this further, Clark uses Jewish tradition to demonstrate that Abraham “possessed great genius,” “spoke every tongue and mastered every art,” and “was the greatest scientist of his day” (p. 114).

Clark then builds on some of these ancient traditions with statements from modern scripture and prominent church leaders in order to apply learned gospel concepts and principles to the contemporary Latter-day Saint. As Abraham sought for his “appointment unto the Priesthood” (Abraham 1:4), according to President Spencer W. Kimball and President Ezra Taft Benson, so should every worthy male member of the church (p. 65); as Abraham was hospitable to all,



President Harold B. Lee and President Gordon B. Hinckley encourage us to show gratitude to God through our service to those in need (pp. 130–31); as Sarah was the great exemplar of patience and good motherhood, so, as Sheri Dew teaches, the sisters of the church should look to Sarah (pp. 167–68). Clark does not overuse statements by the Brethren, but instead inserts them at appropriate times for a spiritual lesson. On more than one occasion I found myself inspired, moved, and seeking to pattern my own life more on the example of Abraham. This one aspect alone made the book a worthwhile read for me. I also found that Clark provided many interesting bits of information and told the story of Abraham in an engaging manner. I feel the chapter on the Akedah (chap. 10), the binding of Isaac, is particularly insightful and instructive.

### Academic Considerations

Clark's use of sources demonstrates an impressive knowledge of ancient Jewish, Christian, and Muslim lore. His use of secondary works and church sources also shows he has paid the price to fill this book with as much insightful and helpful information as possible. But his use of sources also raises some important questions: How should we use ancient lore with the scriptures? Can ancient nonscriptural accounts provide truth? And if so, how are we to sift through these traditions to find it? What kinds of criteria should we use to discriminate among these traditions? These issues need to be probed more fully at some point.

These were ever-present questions as research and writing progressed for *Traditions about the Early Life of Abraham*.<sup>1</sup> As we worked on that collection, we found that the Book of Abraham could not have been produced in the early nineteenth century—it contained too many themes and characteristics from antiquity. In other words, we were not trying to prove that the Book of Abraham was true. However,

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1. John A. Tvedtnes, Brian M. Hauglid, and John Gee, eds., *Traditions about the Early Life of Abraham* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2001).

it is apparent that it fits more comfortably in the ancient world than in Joseph Smith's time period.

I do not believe that Clark is trying to prove the truth of the Book of Abraham, but he does sometimes cite ancient tradition in support of weak assumptions not confirmed in the scriptures. Concerning Enoch, for instance, Clark argues from ancient lore that Enoch saved Abraham from near death on the altar (p. 77), ordained Abraham to the patriarchal priesthood (p. 84), inspired Abraham to desire translation (to Enoch's city) (p. 92), presided over the sacrifice in Genesis 15 (pp. 147–48), and stayed Abraham's hand from sacrificing Isaac (p. 221). Of course, none of this is specifically supported in the scriptures.

The reader should also be aware that ancient sources are used indiscriminately throughout the book. No attempt is made to evaluate which sources may be more reliable than others. Sometimes a source will appear to be cited as if it were the true account. Could the number of converts in Haran reach the thousands because the *Book of Jasher* says it was seventy-two (heads of families) (p. 87)? Did Pharaoh in Abraham's day really convert to the gospel, according to a Samaritan and a late Muslim account, so that possibly widespread conversions occurred in Egypt (p. 121)? Does Rashi (like many later commentators faced with difficult verses) take liberty in rescuing Sarah from her harshness against Hagar in Genesis 16:5 (pp. 162–63)? Does Martin Luther give the correct interpretation of Sarah's "laugh" in Genesis 18:11–12 (p. 176)? How correct is the obscure Jewish tradition that says that Sarah had no hatred for Ishmael? Could this be, as commonly happened, a later "improvement" on the text made by commentators sympathetic to Sarah (p. 196)?

Later rabbinic, Christian, and Muslim commentators often expanded on the scriptural text because, in most cases, the sacred text leaves room for conjecture and speculation. For the biblical scholar these traditions serve to provide a peek into the world of the commentator and how the scriptural text was once viewed by redactors. To determine if a certain tradition in a nonbiblical text is factual, however, is difficult. A good starting point for this type of investigation is the work of James Kugel in volumes such as *Traditions of the Bible*:

*A Guide to the Bible as It Was at the Start of the Common Era and In Potiphar's House: The Interpretive Life of Biblical Texts.*

*The Blessings of Abraham* is not a scholarly work that painstakingly sifts through these many traditions, thus making a distinction between the reliable and unreliable. Therefore, the reader should be cautioned in accepting these traditions wholesale. My advice is to read them for the feel and flow of Abraham's life but with an appropriate grain of salt.

Although not a serious concern, I noticed other weaknesses in the book. For example, we know, according to Abraham 1:31, that Abraham had records from which he learned about astronomy. Does this mean, as Clark suggests (p. 71), that Abraham had access to *our* version of the Book of Moses account about Enoch? This could imply that our version is a direct translation from a text that would have existed during the time of Abraham. However, we have no clear evidence of this. Phrases such as "Abraham would have read" (pp. 71, 72, 77, 78, 79) or "Abraham may well have recognized" (p. 74) denote the shakiness of the assumption. I have noted above other examples of weak assumptions connected to questions of source reliability and discrimination.

However, this is a good book. If Clark wrote it to give an inspirational and uplifting view of Abraham and Sarah, he has succeeded. But readers should not accept all that the ancient Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions say as true and factual.



# THE OLD TESTAMENT AS RELIABLE HISTORY

John Gee

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1. Kitchen is Personal and Brunner Professor Emeritus of Egyptology and Honorary Research Fellow at the School of Archaeology, Classics and Oriental Studies, University of Liverpool, England.

2. Kenneth A. Kitchen, *Ramesside Inscriptions: Historical and Biographical*, 8 vols. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1975–90); Kitchen, *Ramesside Inscriptions, Translated and Annotated, Translations*, 4 vols. to date (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993–2003); Kitchen, *Ramesside Inscriptions, Translated and Annotated, Notes and Comments*, 3 vols. to date (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992–2003).

3. Kenneth A. Kitchen, *The Third Intermediate Period in Egypt (1100–650 BC)* (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1973; 2nd ed., 1986; rev. 2nd ed., 1996).

4. Among others, Kenneth A. Kitchen, *Suppiluliuma and the Amarna Pharaohs: A Study in Relative Chronology* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1962); Kitchen, "Egypt, the Levant and Assyria in 701 BC," in *Fontes atque Pontes* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1983), 243–53.

Review of Kenneth A. Kitchen. *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003. xxii + 662 pp., with subject and scripture indexes. \$45.00.

coherent picture.<sup>5</sup> He has dealt with such diverse topics as chronology, poetry, and the kings of Byblos.<sup>6</sup> He is comfortable with both the minute details and the big picture. He is a first-rate ancient historian. He is also a believing Christian. His book *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* is essential reading for anyone interested in the historicity of the Old Testament. It is the best book on Old Testament history that I have seen to date.

Kitchen's book, however, is not a narrative history of the Old Testament period. It is a long, detailed argument for the reliability of the Old Testament, which is impressive in sweep and scope, care and meticulous detail. Although Kitchen's prose is lively, trenchant, and insightful, Kitchen's book is not necessarily an easy read. It is easier to read when you see the big picture of his argument, which is much clearer in outline form. Unfortunately, the publisher did not include in the table of contents the detailed outline Kitchen used throughout the book. The volume is capped with one hundred pages of notes and forty plates of illustrated figures, most of which are hand drawn by Kitchen himself.

Kitchen's volume systematically supports the historicity of the Old Testament narratives, including an argument that Genesis 1–11 can only have been composed before Abraham. He views it as reliable history with limitations. Given that Kitchen is a rather prominent evangelical scholar, who might, therefore, be expected to have typical evangelical views on biblical infallibility, it is significant that his book is on the reliability of the Old Testament rather than on its infallibility.

Kitchen's method couples a careful reading of the text with the use of relevant archaeological, typological, and inscriptional material. Perhaps one of the more interesting aspects of Kitchen's scholarship

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5. Kenneth A. Kitchen, *Documentation for Ancient Arabia*, 2 vols. to date (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1994–2000).

6. For example, Kenneth A. Kitchen, "The Chronology of Ancient Egypt," *World Archaeology* 23/2 (1991): 201–8; Kitchen, "Ancient Egyptian Chronology for Aegeanists," *Mediterranean Archaeology and Archaeometry* 2/2 (2002): 5–12; Kitchen, *Poetry of Ancient Egypt* (Jonsered: Aströms, 1999); Kitchen, "Byblos, Egypt, and Mari in the Early Second Millennium BC," *Orientalia*, n.s., 36 (1967): 39–54.

is that his way of arguing for the historicity of the Bible is of the same sort as has been typically employed by the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies to argue for the historicity of the Book of Mormon. This is really not surprising since they are the same methods one would have to use to argue for the historicity of any ancient text, whether it be the works of Tacitus, Tudhaliya, or Tuthmosis; Sennacherib, Suetonius, or Sinuhe; or Hattusilis, Herodotus, or Hammurabi. Kitchen cannot be faulted for his method or his evidence; those who have sought to discredit him have criticized him for his beliefs, his field of specialty, or his style of prose.

Although I enjoyed Kitchen's vigorous and forceful prose, an acquaintance of mine told me that he did not like Kitchen's book because of its tone. There is perhaps some truth to this accusation directed at Kitchen. He does at one point refer to an argument as "absolute bunkum!" (p. 470). A few examples of Kitchen's prose might suffice to illustrate the extreme end of his tone:

Yes, an uncomfortably large proportion of old books, theses, and papers on (e.g.) endless variants of literary-critical theories of the composition of the books of the Old Testament could be profitably pulped and recycled. . . . Down to the present time, biblical studies journals still carry overmuch of these gossamer speculations (unsullied by objective data) that real professional scholars of Near Eastern texts and material cultures could easily dispense with. (p. 459)

Scholars who would cavalierly dismiss such references are out of touch with the usage of three millennia (from the Palermo Stone to the Seleucid Babylonian chronicles), and thus go badly astray in their assessments of the origin and nature of the contents of Kings and Chronicles. (p. 63)

Let that fact sink in; Wellhausen's arrogant dismissal of the list is wholly without any factual foundation whatsoever. And what is true of this item is true of most of the rest of his work. (pp. 496–97)

We today *do* have the vast resources hinted at just above. And they *do* enable us to profile ancient history accurately in its broad sweep. And straight bottom-to-top evolution is *out*. It *never* happened like that; no, not ever. (p. 487, emphasis in original)

And so one could go on and on. But this tiny handful of examples of (anti)academic lunacy will suffice. If the English departments that started off all this nonsense can find nothing better to do than this drivel, then we would be much better off without them. And their resources would be freed up for people with something worthwhile to offer their fellow humans. The only worthwhile thing one can really do with claptrap deconstruction is . . . to deconstruct it. (pp. 471–72, ellipses in original)

[J. M.] Miller's claim was, and remains, an entirely irresponsible misstatement of the real facts, and still needs to be publicly withdrawn in print. It is not acceptable that a tyro, totally unqualified in reading hieroglyphic texts, should so accuse a long-experienced epigrapher, merely to prop up some pet a priori prejudices about the Old Testament text. . . . This was a shabby way to treat important firsthand evidence, and those who go to some trouble to provide it, ultimately for the public good. (pp. 481–82)

In spite of this hard-hitting rhetoric, it is seriously the best book on the historicity of the Old Testament currently in print and probably will remain so for the foreseeable future. Potential readers who brush aside the book because of its tone use this issue as an excuse to avoid substantive arguments. Kitchen invariably confronts his opponents' arguments, though occasionally he takes the argument further by claiming that extensive use of shoddy arguments might say something about their authors. Kitchen's treatment of William G. Dever, with whom he sometimes agrees and sometimes disagrees, and whom he characterizes as "firm rock and sinking sand" (pp. 468–69), is more typical. Ironically, those who dismiss the arguments because of tone,



claiming that bad tone is a form of the ad hominem fallacy, are themselves engaging in the very fallacy they decry.

One of the issues at stake over tone is how well such tone is communicated through the written word. Estimates of the ratios of the verbal component in communication vary from about 7 to 35 percent.

Although the value of nonverbal communication is sometimes overstated, the fact remains that nonverbal information is an important cue to the speaker's meaning, particularly when the literal content of the message is ambiguous. After all, the same statement can, depending on tone, emphasis, and expression, be either sarcastic or serious, disrespectful or deferential, sanguine or somber.<sup>7</sup>

Studies show that "participants overestimated their ability to communicate" in writing and "this was true regardless of whether participants were trying to communicate sarcasm, humor, or some other emotion or tone, and regardless of whether participants were free to craft their own communication or were constrained by the experimenter."<sup>8</sup> The same studies also show, however, that not only are people poor in judging the tone of their own writing, but they also significantly overestimate their ability to correctly determine the tone of the written communication of others.<sup>9</sup> These studies indicate that readers frequently misinterpret the tone of what they read; therefore, complaints about someone's tone should take these facts into account. Those who complain about the tone of a work are likely misinterpreting it, perhaps intentionally.

It is inevitable that specialists in a field will not see eye to eye on every topic. Although I agree with Kitchen in most things, I disagree with him on a couple of minor points. I will mention only one: the location of Ur (see p. 316). Equating Ur with Tell el-Muqayyar rests on exceedingly slender foundations. In fact, a careful reading of the text

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7. Justin Kruger, et. al, "Egocentrism over E-mail: Can We Communicate as Well as We Think?" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 89/6 (2005): 926 (references omitted).

8. Kruger et al., "Egocentrism over E-mail," 933.

9. Kruger et al., "Egocentrism over E-mail," 931.

shows that it is impossible. In Genesis 24:4, Abraham sends his servant back to his native land (*môladti*), which turns out to be Aram-Naharaim in the north (Genesis 24:10; the KJV translation of “Mesopotamia” is in error). This excludes the possibility of a southern Ur.

A more serious problem is that some of the evidence that Kitchen has brought forward is now charged with being forged. Currently an Israeli court case is still pending, and it would be best to wait until the court has decided which, if any, of the alleged forgeries are actually forged. The use of some artifacts that have been generally accepted as genuine in a book published before they were charged as forgeries is not Kitchen’s fault, and if reference to them is removed, the impact on his argument is small; Kitchen has cast his net so broadly and deeply that the loss of a few pieces is not critical. Kitchen has argued from both external and internal evidences of the text and from sources both outside and inside of ancient Israel. The alleged forgeries were items from the antiquities market that were not found on archaeological excavations. The items being examined include the Jehoash inscription, the ivory pomegranate, and various seals and bullae, although most of them are not included in Kitchen’s work. When the dust settles, it will be worthwhile to go through Kitchen’s book and note the places where the evidence he uses turns out to be forged.

I thoroughly enjoyed this book. I highly recommend it. I wish I had written it.

*DEXIOSIS AND DEXTRARUM IUNCTIO:*  
THE SACRED HANDCLASP IN THE CLASSICAL  
AND EARLY CHRISTIAN WORLD

Stephen D. Ricks

On a recent trip to California to prowl through its exquisitely tasty academic libraries, my wife and I were told by friends that the Getty Museum, just a few miles up Interstate 405 from UCLA, had free admission, so we decided to visit it before returning home. The museum itself contains an embarrassment of art riches from antiquity to the modern era. In the antiquities collection, my attention was caught by a gravestone dating to the end of the fifth century BC from Attica in Greece. In it, the husband, Philoxenos (whose name, as well as that of his wife, is carved in the register above his head), is grasping the right hand of his wife, Philoumene, in a solemn and ceremonial handclasp (fig. 1). This handclasp, the description informs us, “was a symbolic and popular gesture on gravestones of the Classical period,” which could represent “a simple farewell, a reunion in the afterlife, or a continuing connection between the deceased and the

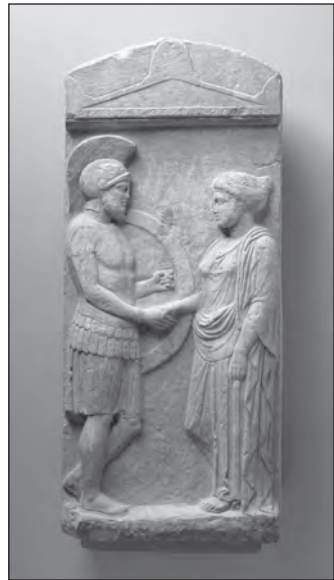


Figure 1. Grave stele of Philoxenos with his wife, Philoumene, about 400 BC. Courtesy of the J. Paul Getty Museum.

living.”<sup>1</sup> After returning home, I did some further study on this hand-clasp (known in Greek as *dexiosis* and in Latin as *dextrarum iunctio*, meaning “giving, joining of right hands”) and discovered that it was to be found in classical Greek art on grave *stelai*, but especially in Roman art, where it is to be seen on coins and sarcophagi reliefs, as well as in Christian art in mosaics and on sarcophagi reliefs.

### *Dextrarum Iunctio* in the Classical World

The depiction of the *dextrarum iunctio* was highly popular in Roman art. In the Roman world, the right hand was sacred to Fides, the deity of fidelity.<sup>2</sup> The clasping of the right hand was a solemn gesture of mutual fidelity and loyalty at the conclusion of an agreement or contract,<sup>3</sup> the taking of an oath of allegiance,<sup>4</sup> or reception in the mysteries, whose initiates were referred to as *syndexioi* (“joined by the right hand”).<sup>5</sup>

On a second-century coin Antoninus Pius (AD 86–161) and Faustina are shown clasping each other’s right hand in the *dextrarum iunctio*. Antoninus is holding in his left hand a small statue of Fortuna or Pax (fig. 2). In another coin Commodus (AD 161–92) and his wife, Bruttia Crispina, are shown performing the *dextrarum iunctio*. Juno Pronuba, the divine patron of marriage,<sup>6</sup> taller than either of the bridal pair, stands behind them, with an outstretched arm on the shoulder of each (fig. 3). In a relief on the sarcophagus of Flavius Arabianus, prefect of Annona, dating to the last quarter of the third century AD, bride and groom are

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1. J. Paul Getty Museum Handbook of the Antiquities Collection (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2002), 22.

2. Livy, 23.9.3; Walter Otto, “Fides,” in *Paulys Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, ed. Georg Wissowa (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1909), 6:2283–84; Axel Hägerström, *Der römische Obligationsbegriff im Lichte der allgemeinen römischen Rechtsanschauung* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1941), 157–60.

3. Tacitus, *Annales* 2.58.

4. Per G. Hamberg, *Studies in Roman Imperial Art, with Special Reference to the State Reliefs of the Second Century* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1945), 26 fig. 2.

5. Michael Rostovtzeff, “Das Mithraeum von Dura,” *Römische Mitteilungen* 49 (1934): 205.

6. Werner Eisenhut, “Juno,” in *Der Kleine Pauly: Lexikon der Antike*, ed. Konrat Ziegler and Walther Sontheimer (Stuttgart: Druckenmüller Verlag, 1967), 2:1563.



Figure 2 (top left). Antoninus Pius and Faustina. Figure 3 (bottom left). Commodus and his wife, Brutia Crispina, before Juno Pronuba. Figure 4 (right). Sarcophagus of Flavio Arabianus. Courtesy of SASKIA Ltd. Cultural Documentation.

both clothed in togas. Between them is Juno Pronuba or Concordia. They are flanked on either side by men and women or deities who act as witnesses or onlookers (fig. 4).<sup>7</sup>

### *Dextrarum Iunctio* in Early Christian Art

Though mostly restricted to sarcophagi, scenes of *dextrarum iunctio* are also found in early Christian mosaics. In the Church of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome is a mosaic depiction of the marriage of Moses and Zipporah. The marriage scene takes place in front of the tent of Jethro, whose position behind the bridal pair recalls that of Juno Pronuba or Concordia. Again, like Juno Pronuba or Concordia, Jethro towers over the other figures in the scene—bystanders and witnesses—and is depicted laying his hands on the shoulders of his daughter and his son-in-law (fig. 5).<sup>8</sup> An additional mosaic scene of *dextrarum iunctio* in Santa Maria Maggiore is of the wedding of Rachel and Jacob, which is

7. Giovanni Uggeri, "Sul sarcofago di Flavio Arabiano prefetto dell'Annona," *Atti della pontificia accademia romana di archeologia. Rendiconti* 40 (1967–68): 114.

8. Fernand Cabrol and Henri LeClercq, ed., *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne e de liturgie* (Paris: Letouzey et Ane, 1933), 11:1653–54 fig. 8249; Josef Wilpert, *Die römischen Mosaiken und Malereien der kirchlichen Bauten vom IV. bis XIII. Jahrhundert* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1916), 1:449; 3: plate 17; Beat Brenk, *Die frühchristlichen Mosaiken in Santa Maria Maggiore zu Rom* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1975), 80–82.



Figure 5. The marriage of Moses and Zipporah. Image from Brink, *Die frühchristlichen Mosaiken*, plate 50. Used by permission.

in a very poor state of preservation (for which reason no illustration is provided and this description is more comprehensive than for other figures).<sup>9</sup> In this scene, Laban performs the marriage and, like Juno Pronuba or Concordia, stands behind the bridal pair and with his arm leads Rachel to Jacob. He wears an orange-red pallium pulled over his shoulder and is looking at Rachel. Rachel herself is dressed in a golden gown with her neck decked with precious stones. Above her brow two diamonds are shining, while a transparent veil surrounds her head in the form of a halo. Rachel is shyly stretching out her right hand to Jacob in the *dextrarum iunctio*, while she holds her left hand to her mouth as a sign of diffident reflection. For his part, Jacob is dressed as a shepherd and solemnly looks directly in front of himself. Behind Jacob a person who seems to be a witness to the wedding is standing. Rachel's sister Leah gently urges her forward with a gesture of encouragement and lightly grasps her upper arm. For her part, Rachel, aware of the significance of the event, is looking toward her father, Laban.

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9. I have been greatly assisted in preparing this description by a careful reading of Brenk's *Die frühchristlichen Mosaiken in Santa Maria Maggiore*, 69.

In the sarcophagus relief of Gorgonius in the Cathedral of Ancona, dating to the late fourth or early fifth century AD, the bride and groom are clasping each other's right hand; the left hand of the bride is draped over the shoulder of the groom. The bridal pair is flanked by two columns (fig. 6). In a large sarcophagus from Tolentino the hand of God is holding a crown—a symbol of future blessedness<sup>10</sup>—over the head of the bridal pair, Catervus and Settimia. In the panel to the right and left and above the pair are the Greek letters *chi* and *rho*, an abbreviation for “Christos,” or Christ (fig. 7).<sup>11</sup>



Figure 6 (top). Sarcophagus of Gorgonius.

Figure 7 (bottom). Back side of the sarcophagus of Catervus and Settimia. Alinari/Art Resource, NY. S. Nicola, Tolentino, Italy.

## Conclusion

Why were early Christians in the Roman world depicted performing the *dextrarum iunctio*? They did so in part because they agreed with the non-Christian Romans that “fidelity and harmony are demanded in the longest-lasting and most intimate human relationship, marriage.”<sup>12</sup> But they also did so because they accepted, perhaps, the ancient Israelite view that marriage was a

10. For a discussion of the symbolism of crowns and wreaths in classical and Christian antiquity, see Karl Baus, *Der Kranz in Antike und Christentum, eine religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung mit besonderer Berücksichtigung Tertullians* (Bonn: Hanstein, 1940); Michael Blech, *Studien zum Kranz bei den Griechen* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1982).

11. For these scenes of *dextrarum iunctio* in Christian art, see Giuseppe Bovini, “La scene della ‘dextrarum iunctio’ nell’arte cristiana,” *Bullettino della commissione archeologica comunale di Roma* 72 (1946–48): 113–14; Bernhard Kötting, “Dextrarum iunctio,” in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, ed. Theodor Klauser (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1957), 3:885–86; Louis Reekmans, “La ‘dextrarum iunctio’ dans l’iconographie romaine et paleochretienne,” *Bulletin de l’Institut historique belge de Rome* 31 (1958): 69–73, 90 fig. 32, plate 12.

12. “Fides und Concordia sind im besonderen Masse gefordert bei der intimsten menschlichen Dauerverbindung, der Ehe.” Kötting, “Dextrarum iunctio,” 883.

sacred covenant<sup>13</sup> and, further, because they understood “marriage,” in the words of the Protestant scholar Philip Schaff, “as a spiritual union of two souls for time and eternity.”<sup>14</sup> A sacred handclasp—the *dextrarum iunctio*—was a fitting symbol for the most sacred act and moment in human life.

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13. Gordon P. Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant: A Study of Biblical Law and Ethics Governing Marriage, Developed from the Perspective of Malachi* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), has argued persuasively that marriage was a covenant, using sources ranging throughout the entire Hebrew Bible.

14. Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 5th ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 2:367. Further, see John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, 2nd ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 1979), 196–97, who observes that “as a sacrament, or *mysterion*, marriage reflects the union between Christ and the Church, between Yahweh and Israel, and as such can be only *one*—an eternal bond, which death itself does not destroy. In its sacramental nature, marriage transfigures and transcends both fleshly union and contractual legal association: human love is being projected into the eternal Kingdom of God.” Later (pp. 198–99) Meyendorff notes that “the most striking difference between the Byzantine theology of marriage and its medieval Latin counterpart is that the Byzantines strongly emphasized the *unicity* of Christian marriage and the *eternity* of the marriage bond; . . . the West seemed to ignore the idea that marriage, if it is a sacrament, has to be projected as an eternal bond into the Kingdom of God.”



## BOOK NOTES

**Ben Bridgstock.** *The Joseph Smith Family.* Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2005. 362 pp., with bibliography and index. \$24.95.

This book provides a convenient summary of the lives of the remarkable family of Joseph Smith Sr. and Lucy Mack Smith, parents of the Prophet Joseph Smith. It includes biographical information on Joseph Smith and all his siblings. Separate chapters provide sketches of the lives of Joseph Smith Sr., Lucy Mack Smith, Alvin Smith, Hyrum Smith, Sophronia Smith, Joseph Smith Jr., Emma Hale Smith (the Prophet's wife), Samuel Harrison Smith, Katherine Smith, William Smith, Don Carlos Smith, and Lucy Smith. Final chapters provide a narrative of the final days of Joseph and Hyrum, concluding observations by the author, and a compilation of comments on Joseph Smith by several prominent persons.

**William J. Hamblin.** *Warfare in the Ancient Near East to 1600 BC: Holy Warriors at the Dawn of History.* London: Routledge, 2006. xxiv + 517 pp., with bibliography and index. \$29.95.

Dr. Hamblin, a professor of history at Brigham Young University and a frequent FARMS contributor (for example, with Stephen D. Ricks, coeditor of the important 1990 FARMS volume *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*), has produced a hefty tome that ranges from its opening chapter on "The Neolithic Age and the Origin of Warfare (to c. 3000)"

to an eighteenth chapter treating the “Early Second Intermediate Period Egypt (1786–1667).” In between, he discusses warfare and siegecraft in Mesopotamia under the Akkadians and Neo-Sumerians and through the Middle Bronze Age (which furnishes the volume’s terminal date); covers Mari, Syria, Lebanon, Canaan, and Anatolia; and closes with several chapters on warfare in Egypt commencing from the Pre-Dynastic, Early Dynastic, and Old Kingdom periods. Among many other topics, the book treats questions of recruitment and training, logistics, weaponry, the role of “magic,” naval conflict, fortifications, and combat narratives. Hamblin pays particular attention to the ideology of the “holy war” in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, arguing that subsequent Near Eastern concepts of “holy war” (including today’s) should be understood against this older background. In a jacket endorsement, Professor Robert Drews of Vanderbilt University pronounces the book “a goldmine of information—both textual and archaeological.”

**Carol Hansen. *Reorganized Latter Day Saint Church: Is It Christian? Independence, MO: Refiner’s Fire Ministries, 1999 [revised and reprinted 2000, 2003]. viii + 291 pp., with appendix and bibliography. \$12.00.***

What is noteworthy in the radical changes made (beginning in the 1960s) in what is now the Community of Christ is the ease with which some have been able to shed the last vestiges of the heritage of Joseph Smith. When the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith’s prophetic charisms were challenged within the Reorganization, these changes either led to the formation of a movement waiting for something to happen to restore the old order or to the formation of a series of tiny sects. But some—it is not at all clear how many—former RLDS simply shifted allegiance to some form of conservative Protestantism. Carol Hansen’s disillusionment led her directly into the countercult version of evangelicalism. Her book manifests little understanding of the Restoration and little sympathy for those who have invested much of their energies in the Restoration movement.

**John P. Hatch, ed. *Danish Apostle: The Diaries of Anthon H. Lund, 1890–1921*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books in association with Smith-Pettit Foundation, 2006. lxxiv + 822 pp., with introduction, chronology, listing of prominent characters, and index. Limited edition. \$100.00.**

This book provides a substantial collection from the diaries of Anthon H. Lund (1844–1921), especially from the period of his most prominent contribution to church leadership. In his youth, Lund was a convert to Mormonism in Denmark. He came to Utah in 1862 and served the church in many capacities. Among his callings and responsibilities, he served as a missionary several times, as a mission president in Scandinavia and Europe, as president of the Manti and Salt Lake Temples, and as church historian. He was ordained an apostle in 1889, later serving as a counselor to President Joseph F. Smith and President Heber J. Grant in the First Presidency. His journals touch on many significant events in church history, including the practice and cessation of plural marriage, tensions between Moses Thatcher and the other apostles, the refusal by the U.S. House of Representatives to seat B. H. Roberts as a congressman from Utah, hearings over the seating of Reed Smoot in the Senate, publication of the *History of the Church*, and the review of doctrinal matters and important publications. In his editor's introduction, John P. Hatch provides a well-documented sketch of Lund's life and work. A selection of interesting photographs is also included.

**Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Thomas A. Wayment, eds. *The Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ, Volume 2: From the Transfiguration through the Triumphal Entry*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006. viii + 456 pp., with scripture and subject indexes. \$25.95.**

This volume on Christ's mortal ministry completes the ambitious series beginning with the birth of the Savior (volume 1) and culminating with the period of his arrest, trial, crucifixion, resurrection, and atonement (volume 3, already published). Powerful portrayals of Christ, his teachings, and his interactions are presented by twelve faithful Latter-day Saint scholars. Richard Holzapfel and Thomas Wayment,

the editors of the series, introduce the challenges and advantages of having four separate Gospel accounts and suggest ways to use both those individual accounts as well as harmonies of the Gospels. The articles present insights on the relationship of Jesus with his family and friends, the effect on the Savior of the death of John the Baptist, the events on the Mount of Transfiguration, the opposition of the Jewish rulers, and the meaning of the triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

**Paul Trask. *Part Way to Utah: The Forgotten Mormons; A Look at the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints*, with a foreword by R. Philip Roberts, 2nd ed. Independence, MO: Refiner's Fire Ministries, 2005. ix + 193 pp., with four appendixes and bibliography. \$12.00.**

Paul Trask, the author of *Part Way to Utah*, is a former member of what is currently known as the Community of Christ. Trask depicts himself as one of the many casualties among conservative members of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints generated by a gradual takeover, beginning in the late 1960s, by those indoctrinated in liberal Protestant seminaries. An escalating and ever increasingly radical series of changes were forced upon those previously situated in the Reorganization. Many conservative RLDS ended up joining one of the splinter groups that have broken away from the Reorganized Church. Unlike these, Trask gravitated into a form of fundamentalist Baptist religiosity. This explains the glowing endorsement of Trask's essay by Phil Roberts, currently the president of the Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Roberts was the person primarily responsible for the anti-Mormon propaganda circulated before and during the 9–11 June 1998 annual convention in Salt Lake City of the Southern Baptist Convention. Trask has become a rather typical countercult anti-Mormon. The primary difference between this book and the usual countercult literature on Mormon things is that *Part Way to Utah* attempts to direct the attack against the Community of Christ.

One useful feature of this volume is the collection of statements by those now disaffected from the Reorganization whose transition into Protestantism was clearly facilitated by their already having imbibed

much of the style and some of the content found in nineteenth-century Protestant fundamentalism. They have now shifted fully in that direction.



## ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Mark Ashurst-McGee received a master of arts degree from Utah State University. He is currently a research historian and documentary editor for the Joseph Smith Papers Project, Division of Research and Development, Department of Family and Church History, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. His thesis, “A Pathway to Prophethood: Joseph Smith Junior as Rodsman, Village Seer, and Judeo-Christian Prophet,” was the winner of a Reese History Award from the Mormon History Association in 2000. He is a doctoral candidate majoring in history at Arizona State University.

David E. Bokovoy is a doctoral student in Hebrew Bible and the ancient Near East at Brandeis University. He coauthored *Testaments: Links between the Book of Mormon and the Hebrew Bible*.

John M. Butler holds a doctoral degree in chemistry from the University of Virginia and is the author of eighty research articles and book chapters on human DNA, including essays on Y-chromosome and mitochondrial DNA as applied to human-identity testing. He has received a number of awards in the field of forensic genetics and is the author of the award-winning textbook *Forensic DNA Typing*, now in its second edition. In July 2002, Butler received the Presidential Early Career Award for Scientists and Engineers from President George W. Bush in a White House ceremony for his work in pioneering modern

forensic DNA testing. He is currently employed as a research chemist in the Biochemical Science Division at the U.S. National Institute of Standards and Technology, where he directs a project team developing new DNA technologies for forensic and human-identity applications.

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## EDITOR'S PICKS

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