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Abstract Review of *The Mormon Mirage: Seeing Through the Illusion of Mainstream Mormonism* (2008), by Hank Hanegraaff.

STILL LOSING THE BATTLE . . .
STILL NOT KNOWING IT:
AN OPEN LETTER TO HANK HANEGRAAFF

L. Ara Norwood

Review of Hank Hanegraaff. *The Mormon Mirage: Seeing Through the Illusion of Mainstream Mormonism*. Charlotte, NC: Christian Research Institute, 2008. 52 pp. Free with a donation to the publisher.

The evangelical world needs to wake up and respond to contemporary Mormon scholarship. If not, we will needlessly lose the battle without ever knowing it.¹

Dear Hank:

It's a pleasure to be writing to you. I have followed your career over the years ever since you emerged as the heir apparent to Walter Martin's Christian Research Institute as the "Bible Answer Man." I honestly wondered whether you'd get the job over Craig Hawkins, and I think you've done a decent job building on Martin's foundation. I listen to your radio program from time to time, and I have always been impressed with the way you calmly but earnestly articulate your views on the air. You sound congenial most of the time, and while many of the questions your listening audience poses to you are not often what one could call "deep," it's clear you take your job very seriously in trying to offer sound answers and other resources to those who call in. I am also impressed with the fact that, as a father of nine, you seem to

1. Carl Mosser and Paul Owen, "Mormon Scholarship, Apologetics, and Evangelical Neglect: Losing the Battle and Not Knowing It?" *Trinity Journal*, n.s., 19/2 (1998): 204.

take the idea of family very seriously, and I appreciated the 9 July 2008 blog entry you wrote entitled “The Enduring Legacy of a Father.”² I consider you a moral man, and a gentleman.

I have read your new publication, a booklet entitled *The Mormon Mirage*. It may interest you to see how a Latter-day Saint perceives your work on his faith. I wonder if you would consider publishing my review in your *Christian Research Journal*.

Frankly, I find *The Mormon Mirage* rather thin, not just in terms of size but in terms of substance. While you treat subjects as diverse as Mormon-Evangelical relations, the Book of Mormon and other Latter-day Saint scriptural records, priesthood, the deity of Christ, original sin, the biblical canon, the Trinity, resurrection, the virgin birth, salvation by grace, the millennium, temple oaths, and plural marriage, your comments on these matters are brief—barely skimming the surface, highly one-sided, and largely inaccurate, as is often the case with this genre of writing.

Latter-day Saints and their evangelical detractors do not usually have a meaningful or substantive exchange. Instead, the pattern goes like this: the critic makes all sorts of irresponsible and inaccurate statements against Latter-day Saint teachings, all the while betraying no clear understanding of the great conversation³ that has been going on in Latter-day Saint circles about those same issues. The Latter-day Saint apologist then points out the erroneous premises used by the critics in their attacks on all things Latter-day Saint and demonstrates that the answers to the flawed and misleading claims against the restored gospel have already been addressed, usually in print. Neither side ever gets around to a meaningful discussion of the issues in question, as the time is spent, at least by the average Latter-day Saint scholar, pointing out the critic’s plethora of missteps. If the critic would take the time to get the basics correct, a meaningful exchange could take place. All of this demonstrates that the critic is, for the most part, mis- or unin-

2. <http://hankhanegraaff.blogspot.com/2008/07/enduring-legacy-of-father.html> (accessed 30 July 2008).

3. For a useful discussion of the “great conversation” metaphor, see Neil Postman, *The End of Education* (New York: Vintage, 1995), 124–25, 128.

formed. Unfortunately, Hank, like your fellow critics, you appear to manifest no real understanding of the various issues you write about, at least from the Latter-day Saint perspective.

While I won't take the time to respond to everything, or even most things, you write about, for that would be tedious and unnecessary, I will comment on the first three items in your booklet. Your publication opens with a statement by Sandra Tanner. Although only fifty-five words in length, it is instructive for how larded with error it is:

The Mormon church has a PR department probably better than anybody else. And they are very careful in painting a public image that tries to make Mormonism sound like it's just about the same as evangelical Christianity, but it really isn't. . . . I think it's kind of similar to saying that a cat is a dog. (p. 2)

First, a small item: she claims the church has a PR department. The church does not, at least not by that name. She probably has in mind its Public Affairs department. I know, a small quibble. I'll move on.

Second, she claims that department is "probably better than anybody else." I assume she is trying to say that it is her view that the Public Affairs Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is superior to that of similar departments in other organizations. This raises several questions. What sorts of organizations does she have in mind when she makes this comparison? Other churches? Other nonprofit groups? Other U.S. corporations? She is unclear. If she means other U.S. corporations, I wonder if you would agree with her. Do you think the Public Affairs Department of the Church of Jesus Christ is "better than" the equivalent departments of such firms as Apple Computer, IBM, Southwest Airlines, or Procter & Gamble? Also, in what sense does she believe the church's Public Affairs Department to be superior? Superior in terms of trained

staff?⁴ talent? budget?⁵ awards garnered?⁶ Again, one can only wonder since she gave a very vague, murky statement, one that you chose to open your publication with. I have to wonder why you opted to lead with her statement.⁷

Third, she makes the allegation that this “PR department” tries very hard to make “Mormonism sound like it’s just about the same as evangelical Christianity.” What evidence does she provide for this allegation? None that I can see. And I will tell you right off that this is erroneous.⁸ We Latter-day Saints do not want our church to resemble evangelical Christianity, nor for that matter mainstream or liberal Protestantism, Eastern Orthodoxy, or Jainism. To suggest otherwise is to demonstrate that even after spending her entire adult life in a career attempting to undermine my church, Sandra Tanner and those who follow her have failed to understand us. I am not talking about agreeing with us, or acknowledging that our doctrinal positions are sound

4. The Public Affairs Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints employs about thirty-eight people in the United States. This number includes about five secretaries. In addition, about eighteen other full-time employees work in various foreign countries. There are also another thirty or so couples who serve as Church-service missionaries. While recent hires for this department have tended to include people with direct experience in fields such as public affairs, advertising, or journalism, many of the full-time staff include people who have had careers as college professors, accountants, businessmen, medical doctors, lawyers, and computer experts; there is even a former lobbyist and a former government analyst. Personal communication with Mark Tuttle, 18 March 2008.

5. While the operating budget of the church’s Public Affairs Department is not a public matter, there is no advertising budget per se. Most of the budget covers the salaries of the full-time employees; much of it covers expenditures associated with things like luncheons hosted by the department and training materials. One can be assured that the church’s public affairs budget does not come even remotely close to the multimillion-dollar budgets of large public firms.

6. The church’s Public Affairs Department does rather good work on a shoestring budget. Over the years it has earned several Creativity in Public Relations Awards (CIPRA), a number of Bronze Anvil Awards, a Silver Anvil Award (the latter two bestowed by the Public Relations Society of America), and two Golden World Awards (presented by the International Public Relations Society), as well as several Certificates of Excellence and six Angel Awards for excellence in broadcasting.

7. The goal of the church’s Public Affairs Department has been no secret: it is to build relationships.

8. Perhaps this erroneous view came about after the Book of Mormon was given the subtitle “Another Testament of Jesus Christ.”

or even plausible. Instead I am talking about accurately assessing our goals, motives, and identity. Hence this open letter—my attempt to aid you in acquiring an understanding of my faith. I am not striving to persuade you that our positions are ones that you should adopt yourself, but rather to encourage you to rethink the issues that you currently misunderstand—and misunderstand badly.

Why on earth would the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints want the public to see it as just another evangelical denomination? What would be its motivation? We see Evangelicals as good people with a flawed theology—one that is based on the philosophies of men mingled with scripture. We believe we possess the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ along with the true priesthood authority. And we believe your religious tradition possesses neither. So why, Hank, would we want to present ourselves as just another evangelical sect? We don't. Sandra Tanner is wrong. It is a shame you chose to lead with her feckless statement.

In saying this, I hasten to add that I come to this task with several assumptions. For example, I assume you are an honest man and that when you get something wrong it is an error of the head, not of the heart. I trust that when I provide evidence that has no clear counter-evidence to refute it, you will accept, at least tentatively, the new evidence as valid and modify your views—at least for the time being. I also believe (or hope) that you would go on the air during future broadcasts of your radio program and correct any misinformation that may have been published in *The Mormon Mirage*. I trust you will do this because I believe that you are a fundamentally decent fellow who tries to live a life of discipleship to our Savior Jesus Christ as you understand him. I will be listening to future broadcasts of your radio show to see if these assumptions of mine are correct.

To close this initial discussion of Sandra Tanner's erroneous statement, let me clarify for you what our actual position is, in terms of how we would like to be seen. I will give it to you in three simple words: *Christian, but different*.

Christian, but different. That should be clear enough. Yes, we see ourselves as Christian. But we do not see ourselves as Christian in the

same sense in which you typically use the word. We do not use the word the way you do. To you, the term *Christian* means one who believes in the fundamentals of what you like to call “historic biblical Christianity.” We think your very definition is the mirage, but I do not intend to debate that with you. Suffice it to say that when we say we are Christian, we are merely saying that we are partisans of Christ. We place Christ at the center of our lives. I have no qualms about referring to you as a Christian. But in doing so, I do not assume that all of your beliefs represent true doctrine (though some of them certainly do). So I do not believe that it is “true doctrine” that bestows the title of *Christian* on a person—if I did, I wouldn’t consider you a Christian. Instead, what makes one a Christian is less about correct theology (important though that is) and more about placing Christ at the center of one’s life and also behaving like a Christian. Why? “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:35).

In your introductory comments, you build on Sandra Tanner’s opening statement. That strikes me as wholly partisan and unbalanced: your words lead me to believe that understanding the Church of Jesus Christ is not your primary interest. You appear to be highlighting what you see as doctrinal differences and then closing the door. In other words, you do not seem interested in a balanced understanding of my faith. For instance, you couldn’t possibly be unaware on where we happen to agree, yet you have no interest in even admitting that some points of commonality exist. I wonder why that is. Only you can answer that.

While you mention Fuller Seminary president Richard Mouw’s apology to the Mormons for regular and ongoing evangelical misstatement of our beliefs, you seem to disagree with Mouw. While you acknowledge that “some Evangelicals have treated Mormons disrespectfully” (p. 5), you are sweeping evangelical dirty laundry under the rug. After thirty years of being involved in various forms of interaction with Evangelicals, I think I know something about the bellicose tendencies of most of your colleagues in the countercult movement.⁹

9. I’ve met them near Temple Square in Salt Lake City during our church’s worldwide general conference. They were saying and doing blasphemous things to that which I

What I know tells me that your statement, while technically true, is misleading. Granted, some Evangelicals who haven't yet been influenced by the countercult movement do not have the sort of distrust, fear, loathing, or hatred of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints that most of your listeners do. But most of those Evangelicals who have read the sort of literature put forth by the likes of Walter Martin, James White, Sandra Tanner, and now yourself do treat what you refer to as "Mormonism" and Latter-day Saints in general with varying levels of contempt and disrespect. So you are out of line or out of touch by downplaying evangelical mistreatment of Mormons—a continuing mistreatment that began more than a century ago. What has my attention is your downplaying the scope of this mistreatment rather than the mistreatment itself. You would have much more credibility if you would simply admit, as Mouw did, that as a general rule most Evangelicals involved with the countercult movement have been abrasive, acrid, sarcastic, insulting, demeaning, rude, belligerent, vindictive, and misinformed. And that's the short list.

Whatever one may think of the efforts of Robert Millet, he does not strive to dupe Evangelicals into believing that Mormons are Evangelicals; rather, he is trying a fresh approach in communicating, an alternative to the usual and unseemly vitriol that accompanies such dialogues. To assume Millet is trying to trick Evangelicals into believing that Mormons are Evangelicals is simply to continue not to get it. Remember: *Christian, but different*.

My final response is to the comments you make about the Book of Mormon (pp. 6–8). My initial thoughts concern your choice of words. You chose to retell the story of Moroni and Joseph Smith and the plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated. I would urge you, in the future, to try to tell the story as we would tell it, using the terminology we would use. What I have in mind here is the way you describe the interpreting device known as the Urim and Thummim. You call that holy instrument "a pair of magical eyeglasses" (p. 7). I suspect you

consider highly sacred. When you've got a group of people who behave in ways that cause even zealous critics like James White to retreat in shame for fear of being associated with such smut, you know you've got a serious problem on your hands.

do this as a way of making light of a detail of a foundational story of the Latter-day Saint faith. But it's unnecessary and unseemly to do this. May I suggest that in the future you take the high ground by avoiding such cheap shots that are both undiplomatic and undignified.

You also refer to the religion founded by Joseph Smith as "Mormonism." But you really ought to call this new religion by its official name, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, if you wish to be more accurate in your retelling of the past. The term *Mormon* was originally applied to us by our enemies.

After presenting some background information, you dismiss the Book of Mormon with a mere three paragraphs of badly reasoned analysis. You make five points:

1. The Book of Mormon contains language that militates against the biblical doctrine of the Trinity.
2. The Book of Mormon contains the silly notion of a man struggling to catch his breath after having his head cut off.
3. There is no archaeological support for a reformed Egyptian language, for lands such as the land of Moron, or for Book of Mormon peoples migrating from the ancient Near East to the Americas.
4. The widely held Mormon belief that Native Americans are descended from the Hebrew Lamanites has been undermined by DNA science.
5. Whole sections of the Book of Mormon are derived directly from the King James Version of the Bible, in spite of the fact that the writings of Mormon and Moroni are said to predate the King James Version by more than a thousand years.

Hank, do you honestly believe any of these five criticisms cannot be answered, and answered decisively? Better yet, are you under the impression that these criticisms have not been answered already? All five of those issues, which I find deplorably weak, are easily answered. I want to cut you some slack since you are not the "Book of Mormon Answer Man," but I would have assumed that someone of your stature would offer more compelling criticisms.

Here is why these five criticisms lack merit:

1. As to the Book of Mormon employing language about the Godhead that is not Trinitarian, I would simply reply: *Ignoratio elenchi!* Totally irrelevant! So what if the Book of Mormon's teachings are not what you consider orthodox Trinitarian? You are wrong to speak of "the biblical doctrine of the Trinity." There is no such doctrine taught in the Bible. You are certainly free to preach whatever version of the Trinity you find compelling as the supposedly correct way of conceiving the oneness of the Father and the Son, but please do not pretend this doctrine is biblical. Creedal notions of the Trinity may or may not be true, but it is misleading to call it a *biblical* doctrine. Why do I say that? Because many scholars make the case for it not being biblical. Let me cite a number of them for you (and note that not one of these scholars is a Latter-day Saint—in fact, all of them seem to believe in some version of the Trinity):

The NT does not actually speak of triunity. We seek this in vain in the triadic formulae of the NT. . . . Early Christianity itself . . . does not yet have the problem of the Trinity in view.¹⁰

The New Testament itself is far from any *doctrine* of the Trinity or of a Triune God who is three co-equal Persons of One Nature.¹¹

In the N.T. there is no direct suggestion of a doctrine of the Trinity.¹²

The formal doctrine of the Trinity as it was defined by the great church councils of the fourth and fifth centuries is not to be found in the NT.¹³

10. Gerhard Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965), 3:108–9.

11. William J. Hill, *The Three-Personed God: The Trinity as a Mystery of Salvation* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America, 1982), 27.

12. Ernest F. Scott, in *An Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Vergilius Ferm (New York: Philosophical Library, 1945), 344.

13. *Harper's Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 1099.

I could have cited many more than these four statements that put your statement in a very unfavorable light. The scholarly world claims that the doctrine of the Trinity is not a biblical doctrine. So to denigrate the Book of Mormon for not supporting a nonbiblical doctrine makes no sense at all.

As an aside, I have to wonder just why you think that some understanding of the Trinity that was adopted in the fourth and subsequent centuries AD is the correct doctrine. A look at the history of Trinitarian formulas leaves one with evidence that the great apostasy as foretold in scripture (Amos 8:11–12; Isaiah 24:5; 60:2–3; Acts 20:29; 2 Timothy 4:3–4; 2 Thessalonians 2:1–3) and as taught by modern prophets was well under way.

To further show that the doctrine of the Trinity was formulated in an environment of apostasy and darkness, I would recommend to you a very enlightening book written by Ramsay MacMullen, Yale professor of history, entitled *Voting About God in Early Church Councils*.¹⁴ In it MacMullen examines what church councils were like and who the typical bishop was that attended such councils, pointing out that “some bishops were by their own admission ill-equipped to follow the arguments they had to resolve.”¹⁵

Also, it is very interesting to know how these self-professed men of God conducted themselves when things didn’t go quite their way. According to MacMullen:

A particular proof of fervor lies also in the suffering they are as ready to inflict as to suffer, where differences in belief arise. This too, in its remarkable prevalence, is a novelty. In councils, bishops are at their most ceremonious and reverent; yet even in such a solemn setting they sometimes strike each other or restrain by force, muzzle or shove each other, throw about this or that object, and yell out the most savage cries for this or that adversary to be killed in this or that cruel manner. Outside of the council chamber, they directly incite or

14. Ramsay MacMullen, *Voting About God in Early Church Councils* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006).

15. Ramsay MacMullen, *Voting About God*, 114.

participate in physical acts against their adversaries, or witness such acts without protest; nor can they be heard often, or ever, calling for an end to all the death and destruction which darkened the streets around them.¹⁶

MacMullen concludes that shaping this Trinitarian doctrine through the “creeds could be at least a contributing factor [to much violence and loss of ecclesiastical authority], sometimes really the only one, in street fights, stabbings in the church, brawls in public squares, and general rough stuff”:

Besides, what of the tongues torn out of the mouths of bishops found to have uttered blasphemous opinions? and bishops worked to death by a sentence to the mines? or scarred for life by the beatings they received, sometimes a judicial flogging, sometimes a blow from a sword that missed its mark—to be seen on a fellow-bishop’s body, a sight to bring shivers.¹⁷

Does the formation of creedal Trinitarian doctrine sound to you like it came through the work of the Holy Spirit, or is it more likely to have come out of the then-fertile soil of apostasy? I think you know where I stand on this question.

2. Your concern with a passage in Ether (15:30–31) is misguided and based on a misreading of the text. But this is a common misunderstanding, though I would have thought that since context is something you focus on so often on your radio show, you would have examined the context of this passage. (Have you ever read the entire fifteenth chapter of Ether?)

Here is the context: two warriors, Shiz and Coriantumr, are left standing following a war of extermination. Shiz is said to have his head cut off by Coriantumr.

And it came to pass that when Coriantumr had leaned upon his sword, that he rested a little, he smote off the head of Shiz. And it came to pass that after he had smitten off the head of

16. MacMullen, *Voting About God*, 116–17.

17. MacMullen, *Voting About God*, 59–60.

Shiz, that Shiz raised up on his hands and fell; and after that he had struggled for breath, he died. (Ether 15:30–31)

A simplistic reading suggests an absurdity. I understand that. However, you should understand the text a bit differently.

But first an aside: Do you really think that if Joseph Smith were astute enough to produce a volume as singular as the Book of Mormon he'd be such a colossal dunce as to assume that a man who had just gotten decapitated could still breathe?

Here is how the context of this passage might be understood: Shiz and Coriantumr had been battling for a long time. They were both exhausted. Coriantumr, in accordance with prophecy (Ether 13:20–21), got the upper hand, as an incapacitated Shiz was essentially lying prone. While Coriantumr tried to steady himself to deliver the deathblow with his sword, he evidently did not decapitate his foe. Taking what was likely a wild swipe brought on by sheer exhaustion as opposed to the pinpoint accuracy he would have employed had he been well rested, Coriantumr may have missed his intended target of Shiz's neck. The blade of the sword struck perhaps about five to eight inches above the intended target, cutting off a portion of Shiz's head, perhaps just above the ear. This was a deadly blow, but not a decapitation as we normally envision it. Thus Shiz, though dying, still had much of his head intact while some of the upper portion was crushed and/or severed. Read this way, it is entirely possible that Shiz could have raised up on his hands and gasped for breath before giving up the ghost.¹⁸ Therefore, the only real problem here is in the reading of this passage, not the passage itself. Comments? Counterpoints? I'd love to hear them.

18. Dr. Gary M. Hadfield offers this medical diagnosis: "Shiz's death struggle illustrates the classic reflex posture that occurs in both humans and animals when the upper brain stem (midbrain/mesencephalon) is disconnected from the brain. The extensor muscles of the arms and legs contract, and this reflex action could cause Shiz to raise up on his hands." Gary M. Hadfield and John W. Welch, "The 'Decapitation' of Shiz," *Insights* (FARMS newsletter), November 1994, 2; *BYU Studies* 33 (1993): 324–25. See also http://en.fairmormon.org/Book_of_Mormon_anachronisms/Shiz_struggles_to_breathe (accessed 19 August 2008).

3. You claim that there is no archaeological support for the Book of Mormon, nor evidence for a language like reformed Egyptian. Have you read Professor William Hamblin's paper on this subject? I rather doubt it. It will only take you a couple of minutes to get up to speed on this issue. Hamblin concludes: "There are thus a number of historical examples of Semitic or other languages being written in 'reformed' or modified Egyptian script; the Book of Mormon account is entirely plausible on this point."¹⁹

I wonder just how informed you are on the question of archaeological support for the Book of Mormon. Are you aware of the work that has been done in the Old World, particularly on the question of Book of Mormon place-names such as Nahom and Bountiful?²⁰ If you are not, one may fairly wonder how responsible it is to make such dogmatic and uninformed statements. Are you familiar with the work of archaeologist John Clark?²¹ Apparently not, for his analysis brings your dismissive disregard for the Book of Mormon with respect to archaeological support into a very bad light. What about the work of anthropologist John Sorenson?²² If you have not studied his work, I would urge you to do so, for he makes a compelling case for the historical reality of the Book of Mormon.

As to your assertion that there is no evidence that Nephites, Lamanites, or Jaredites migrated to the Americas from the Old World, I wonder if this is a resort to a kind of legerdemain on your part. Is the

19. William J. Hamblin, "Reformed Egyptian," Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, <http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/display.php?table=transcripts&id=36> (accessed 19 August 2008).

20. See S. Kent Brown, "New Light from Arabia on Lehi's Trail," in *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002), 55–125.

21. John Clark, "Archaeology, Relics, and Book of Mormon Belief," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14/2 (2005): 38–49; available at <http://farms.byu.edu/publications/jbms/?vol=14&num=2&id=376> (accessed 19 August 2008).

22. John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1985); *Images of Ancient America: Visualizing Book of Mormon Life* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998); and *Mormon's Map* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000). A massive two-volume work, Sorenson's forthcoming magnum opus on the issue of archaeology and the Book of Mormon will put to rest the notion that there is no archaeological support for the Book of Mormon's truth claims.

issue one of looking for evidence that points to exactly and only Nephites, Lamanites, and Jaredites that migrated to the Americas from the Old World? Wouldn't one start out by asking, more generally, if there is evidence that various peoples migrated to the Americas from the Old World? If you agree with that approach, then the evidence does support the Book of Mormon, as a number of studies show.²³

4. "In fact," you assert, "in recent years the widely held Mormon belief that Native Americans are descended from the Hebrew Lamanites has been undermined by DNA science. Ironically, Mormon biologists, geneticists, and anthropologists acknowledge this powerful DNA evidence that refutes the alleged historical accounts of the Book of Mormon" (p. 8). You are simply not stating the truth here. Plenty of Mormon scholars who are trained in the intricacies of DNA science have said the opposite. Here are some samples:²⁴

Michael F. Whiting: "As someone who has spent a decade using DNA information to decipher the past, I recognize the tentative nature of all my conclusions, regardless of whether or not they have been based on DNA. There are some very good scientific reasons for why the Book of Mormon is neither easily corroborated nor refuted by DNA evidence, and current attempts to do so are based on dubious science."²⁵

John M. Butler: "A spiritual witness is the only way to know the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon. Although DNA studies have made links between Native Americans and Asians, these

23. See Steven C. Jett, "Before Columbus: The Question of Early Transoceanic Interinfluences," *BYU Studies* 33/2 (1993): 245–71; and John L. Sorenson, "Ancient Voyages Across the Ocean to America: From 'Impossible' to 'Certain,'" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14/1 (2005): 4–17.

24. For a compilation of recent scholarship on this issue, see *The Book of Mormon and DNA Research: Essays from "The FARMS Review" and the "Journal of Book of Mormon Studies,"* ed. Daniel C. Peterson (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2008).

25. Michael F. Whiting, "DNA and the Book of Mormon: A Phylogenetic Perspective," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12/1 (2003): 24–35. Whiting earned his PhD at Cornell University, is director of Brigham Young University's DNA Sequencing Center, and is currently an associate professor in BYU's Department of Integrative Biology.

studies in no way invalidate the Book of Mormon despite the loud voices of detractors.”²⁶

Ryan Parr: “There will always be those who must have every detail before them prior to any acceptance of truth. This view always generates a cascade of doubt that ends in an appeal to the secular judge of science; however, in this particular instance, the insistence that the presence of small groups from the ancient Near East must absolutely be present in the current genetic record of Native Americans, as a means of testing the authenticity of the Book of Mormon, is an unrealistic expectation.”²⁷

David A. McClellan: “Although it may be possible to recover the genetic signature of a small migrating family from 2,600 years ago, it is not probable. But either way, it would not allow the story line of the Book of Mormon to be rejected because the absence of a genetic signature means absolutely nothing. . . . Thus, a statement that the Book of Mormon account is absolutely impossible would be at the very least naïve, but most probably quite foolish. It would reveal the overall absence of scientific training, as well as an underlying agenda.”²⁸

26. John M. Butler, “A Few Thoughts from a Believing DNA Scientist,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12/1 (2003): 36–37. Butler earned his doctoral degree in chemistry from the University of Virginia, is the author of eighty research articles and book chapters on human DNA, and in 2002 was awarded the Presidential Early Career Award for Scientists and Engineers from President George W. Bush for his work in pioneering modern forensic DNA testing.

27. Ryan Parr, “Missing the Boat to Ancient America . . . Just Plain Missing the Boat,” review of *Losing a Lost Tribe: Native Americans, DNA, and the Mormon Church*, by Simon G. Southerton, *FARMS Review* 17/1(2005): 83–106. Parr earned his PhD in biological anthropology from the University of Utah and is currently vice president of Research and Development at Genesis Genomics, a Canadian biotechnical company exploring the use of mitochondrial DNA as a “biosensor” for the early detection of prostate and breast cancer. He has authored and coauthored mitochondrial DNA studies of Native Americans, specializing in ancient DNA.

28. David A. McClellan, “Detecting Lehi’s Genetic Signature: Possible, Probable, or Not?” *FARMS Review* 15/2 (2003): 35–90. McClellan earned his PhD at Louisiana State University and is an assistant professor of integrative biology at Brigham Young University.

I hasten to point out that all the statements I have quoted here are summary statements that come at the end of very detailed and scholarly essays.

Yet I think it telling that the statement you made about DNA, which you probably know little about since you are not a scientist, reveals something about the nature of your overall commentary on my faith. It reveals that you often say things that are, frankly, irresponsible. I would hope that as you continue your ministry you would grow more circumspect and less cavalier in your pronouncements on Latter-day Saint matters. The simple fact is this: had you done the requisite study and analysis of the issues regarding DNA science and the Book of Mormon, you would not have made the claims you did. I hope you will recant them.

5. Your fifth criticism concerns the language of the Book of Mormon. You write: “A final crack in the credibility of the Book of Mormon is that whole sections are derived directly from the King James Version of the Bible—*this despite the fact that the writings of Moroni and his father, Mormon, are said to predate the King James Version by more than a thousand years*” (p. 8, emphasis in original).

Hank, I wish you could have been more clear. Since you didn’t give a single example to support your claim, I am forced to try to read your mind, something I prefer not to do.

Perhaps you are referring to the various Isaiah passages that are found in the Book of Mormon (e.g., 1 Nephi 20–21; 2 Nephi 12–24). If so, your claim has no merit. All one has to do to reach that conclusion is to consider the fact that the Book of Mormon story includes a narrative of Lehi’s family obtaining an early version of the Old Testament (as found on the brass plates of Laban discussed in 1 Nephi 3 and 4). So if this is part of the Book of Mormon story, which it is, why do you not see that there is no particular problem with reproducing whole sections of the Isaiah portions of the King James Version in the Book of Mormon? These passages didn’t originate with Mormon and Moroni.

Perhaps you are referring to the Sermon on the Mount passages that are found in the Book of Mormon (see 3 Nephi 12–14). If so,

again, your claim has no merit since the Book of Mormon includes a narrative of the resurrected Savior Jesus Christ appearing to the Nephite faithful and delivering essentially that same sermon found in Matthew 5–7. So there is no particular problem with this kind of duplication. These passages didn't originate with Mormon or Moroni either.²⁹

Perhaps what concerns you is the very nature of King James idiom within the pages of the Book of Mormon. If so, your argument might be stated as follows: “The Book of Mormon is false because Mormon and Moroni, who spoke no Elizabethan English, use Elizabethan English throughout the Book of Mormon.” I hope I am not creating a straw-man argument here, but you force me to make some assumptions about your point of view since your argument needs clarification. If this is essentially your point, it's a terrible argument to put forth because no thinking Mormon would claim that either Mormon or Moroni employed English of any era, let alone Elizabethan English. The English text of the Book of Mormon is the result of Joseph Smith's translation—a process of which we know very little. The King James–like language we read in the English translation of the Book of Mormon is just that—a *translation*. It in no way is meant to suggest that any Nephite prophet used such language. Thus I do not see why you make such a fuss about the fact that the Book of Mormon employs an idiom in line with the King James Bible. That was considered the scriptural language of Joseph Smith's day; I would have been surprised if the translation had come out differently.

Finally, you write, “Little wonder, then, that Mormons accept the testimony of Moroni . . . based on a subjective feeling—a ‘burning in the bosom’—rather than on history and evidence” (p. 8). Do you really want your constituency to believe that divine truths can be decided strictly on the basis of “history and evidence”? Do you truly

29. See John W. Welch, *The Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990). See especially pages 161–63, where Welch discusses the absence of the phrase *without a cause* in 3 Nephi 12:22a; compare Matthew 5:22a. This same phrase, while present in the KJV, is absent from many if not most of the earliest Greek manuscripts. So much for the charge of blind plagiarism on the part of the Prophet Joseph Smith.

not understand that “evidence” is in the eyes of the beholder and what constitutes one man’s “evidence” is another man’s “wishful thinking”? And the same goes for history: do you not realize that what passes for “history” in some circles would be called “myth” in others?

Let me pose a question to you: when two of the New Testament disciples were walking on the road to Emmaus along with Jesus (who was incognito at the time), what was the ultimate source of their testimony? Was it history and evidence as you use those terms? Here is what the New Testament records: “And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?” (Luke 24:32). In other words, the final deciding factor for these two early disciples was an inner conviction, born of the Holy Ghost, that brought them truth. The New Testament language (“Did not our heart burn within us”) is not too different from the language of latter-day scripture as found in Doctrine and Covenants 9:8: “I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right.”

Likewise, it was the Holy Spirit, not man’s logic and reason, nor evidence and history, that brought truth to the early apostles when deciding on a question involving circumcision for gentile converts: “For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things” (Acts 15:28). And also, in the case of Peter’s testimony concerning the divine sonship of Jesus, the source of such testimony was not of man (as history and evidence is) but from a divine source: “And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 16:17).

Hank, the Latter-day Saints do not ignore evidence, history, logic, reason, or other forms of education and learning, even when it is secular in origin. However, while we keep a passport to Athens, we understand our citizenship lies with Jerusalem. I think I have some idea as to why you tend to discount the notion of someone receiving special revelation from the Holy Spirit. I suspect that since the Bible is the only source you have (and thus the only source you believe you need), you tend to assume that since you do not receive divine revelation

from the Holy Ghost, then no one else possibly can. If indeed this is how you feel, ironically it has far more in common with atheism than it does with theism. Atheists typically think in similar terms: they deny divine things because they are not part of their world.

Hank, I would invite you to take a second look at the teachings and practices and scriptures of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I believe if you were to really examine what it is we teach with a fresh curiosity and a true desire to understand, I think you would do a much more credible job the next time you decide to publish something about the faith of the Saints. Unlike the nearly fact-free tract you have published, I would hope that with more inquisitiveness and less of an agenda, you would produce something that is not quite so honeycombed with misstatements and instead produce something fresh, distinctive, and instructive.

Warm regards,
L. Ara Norwood