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Stephen O. Smoot

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BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY • PROVO, UTAH

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Author(s) Stephen O. Smoot

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Abstract Review of *Of Faith and Reason: 80 Evidences Supporting the Prophet Joseph Smith* (2008), by Michael R. Ash.

THE FAITH AND REASON OF MICHAEL R. ASH

Stephen O. Smoot

Review of Michael R. Ash. *Of Faith and Reason: 80 Evidences Supporting the Prophet Joseph Smith*. Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2008. Xvi + 191 pp. \$14.99 (paperback).

Much has been written about the Book of Mormon, both in its behalf and against its claimed authenticity. As Terryl Givens observed, the fact that the book exists as a physical, testable, tangible object compels people to make up their minds as to how it came about—whether by the means described by Joseph Smith or according to one of the many explanations proffered by sectarian or secular critics. Unlike the specious utterances of past mystics and sages, the Book of Mormon and the claims of its translator cannot be dismissed as mere speculation or mysticism.¹

Joseph Smith deserves to be understood on his own terms and not by any standards we might wish to impose on him. If he claimed to have had in his possession records belonging to ancient peoples of the Americas, then we are obliged to test that claim. Not a mystic who offered only subjective maundering,² Joseph claimed to have received through divine means physical objects: *actual* golden plates

1. Terryl Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion* (New York: Oxford, 2002), 79–80.

2. For the classic discussion on the difference between prophets and mystics, see Hugh Nibley, “Prophets and Mystics,” in *The World and the Prophets*, 3rd ed., ed. John W. Welch, Gary P. Gillum, and Don E. Norton (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987), 98–107.

and *actual* ancient instruments once in the possession of an *actual* ancient people. The Book of Mormon claims to be a real history of ancient peoples. Thus its historicity is linked with its authenticity as scripture revealed by a prophet of God. Although detractors have wished to separate its historical claims from its spiritual message,³ such attempts do the book a disservice⁴ by diminishing its power and importance. Had the Book of Mormon purported to be more like the Psalms than like the history of Israel recorded in Chronicles or Kings, then perhaps one might divorce the book's historicity from its message.⁵ However, the Book of Mormon itself allows us no comfortable divorce, and the reader is therefore compelled to accept both if the book is to be regarded as authentic.⁶

3. See Anthony A. Hutchinson, "The Word of God Is Enough: The Book of Mormon as Nineteenth-Century Scripture," in *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology*, ed. Brent Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993), 1–19.

4. See the review of Hutchinson (see note above) in Louis 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.

5. Within the Book of Mormon there are psalms, allegories, parables, and other literary or poetic devices. However, it is a mistake to suggest that because the Book of Mormon contains poetic devices it is not a historical record. This would be similar to claiming that we can discount the Gospel of Matthew as not historical because in it the Savior uses parables to teach moral lessons. If specific texts like Jacob 5 or the parables of Christ claim to be nonliteral, we may treat them as such, but we cannot assume the same for the entirety of the work in question.

6. Brant Gardner, using one example from the Book of Mormon narrative, argues that to separate the historical nature of the Book of Mormon from its spiritual teachings is to make a separation that Mormon never intended and to undermine the message of the book. See Brant Gardner, "The Gadianton Robbers in Mormon's Theological History: Their Structural Role and Plausible Identification," in *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 5:11–29. In this section of his commentary, Gardner explores Mormon's theological understanding of the coming of the Messiah and notes that "Mormon would have seen the Savior's arrival at Bountiful as connected to his second return under new circumstances. His naming of the Gadiantons in these two time periods tells us of his expectations of the [historical] parallels. . . . Mormon is saying that, in Helaman's time, the Nephites' destruction by the Gadiantons was followed by the coming of the Messiah, a miracle that restored the Nephites. Mormon is expecting that, after the destruction of his own people by the new Gadiantons, the Messiah will return and will similarly restore the Nephites. Mormon's record will be the guide for that restoration" (p. 29). If the historical narrative of the Gadianton robbers used by Mormon to frame his theologi-

Both Latter-day Saints and their critics have recognized the importance of the historicity of the Book of Mormon when evaluating the claims of the Prophet Joseph Smith. If the historicity of the book were not important in this regard, there would be no writings on the subject. Indeed, it is odd that the same critics who insist that this matter of historicity is not important for evaluating the spiritual claims of the book, as well as Joseph Smith, often strive to demonstrate that the book is not an authentic history. Both the Book of Mormon's defenders and detractors have presented evidence, historical or otherwise, for their case.

The debate, however, has not revolved around just the Book of Mormon. Other Latter-day Saint scriptures and beliefs have been challenged by critics as either historically inauthentic or heretical. Prime examples of this phenomenon include, but are not limited to, critical attacks on the Latter-day Saints' belief in the Book of Abraham as an authentic ancient text and assaults on their unique doctrines and practices such as theosis (human deification), temple ordinances, and vicarious work for the dead.

General Overview

Bearing in mind the critics' methods and motivation, we can appreciate the approach taken by Michael Ash in his book *Of Faith and Reason: 80 Evidences Supporting the Prophet Joseph Smith*. Ash, a volunteer with the Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research (FAIR),⁷ has produced a steady stream of contributions to LDS apologetics. He has written for FAIR,⁸ the Foundation for Ancient Research

cal understanding of the Messiah's advent was not grounded in reality, then Mormon's record would indeed have been a rather poor guide for said restoration.

7. FAIR operates a Web site at www.fairlds.org (accessed 7 September 2009) and a "Wiki" page at www.en.fairmormon.org/Main_Page (accessed 7 September 2009).

8. Ash's work with FAIR, available at the FAIR Web site (see note), includes "Does Mormonism Attack Christianity?" "Archaeology and the Book of Mormon," "Is an Historical Book of Mormon Compatible with DNA Science?" "Book of Mormon Witnesses," "Book of Abraham 201," "The First Vision," "Is the Bible Complete?" and "What Is Official LDS Doctrine?"

and Mormon Studies (FARMS),⁹ *Sunstone*,¹⁰ *Dialogue*,¹¹ and other venues.¹² His work covers topics ranging from the Book of Mormon and the Book of Abraham to Latter-day Saint history, doctrine, and apologetics in general.

Ash's first published book, *Shaken Faith Syndrome*,¹³ is a stimulating introduction to LDS apologetics. Ash is a qualified guide for both amateur and seasoned Latter-day Saint apologists and scholars who are working online and in print.

According to Ash, *Of Faith and Reason* is intended "to share some of the evidence for the prophetic abilities of Joseph Smith, the antiquity of many unique LDS doctrines and practices, and the fascinating support for the authenticity of the LDS scriptures" (p. xv). Ash is primarily summarizing and popularizing the scholarship of Hugh Nibley and others associated with the Maxwell Institute for readers who are unfamiliar with these works. Ash's efforts are laudable since this vast corpus of literature can be daunting. For instance, in 1998 FARMS published a volume of more than six hundred pages on merely the first six chapters of the book of Mosiah.¹⁴ Earlier that decade, FARMS published a book of equal length covering only one chapter in the Book of Mormon, Jacob 5.¹⁵ Because this scholarship is both voluminous and intimidating to the newcomer, Ash notes that, unfortunately, "most members are completely unaware of these exciting discoveries" (p. xv).

9. "Lehi of Africa," *FARMS Review of Books* 13/2 (2001): 5–25.

10. "The Sin Next to Murder": An Alternative Interpretation," *Sunstone*, November 2006, 34–43.

11. "The Mormon Myth of Evil Evolution," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 35/4 (Winter 2002): 19–38.

12. Ash posts, for example, on the Mormon Apologetics and Discussion Board (www.mormonapologetics.org, accessed 8 September 2009) as well as on the FAIR Blog (www.fairblog.org, accessed 8 September 2009). Ash also runs his own apologetic Web site at www.mormonfortress.com (accessed 8 September 2009).

13. *Shaken Faith Syndrome: Strengthening One's Testimony in the Face of Criticism and Doubt* (Redding, CA: Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research, 2007). My brief review of this work can be found at <http://americantestament.blogspot.com/2008/08/shaken-faith-syndrome.html> (accessed 7 September 2009).

14. See John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks, eds., *King Benjamin's Speech: "That Ye May Learn Wisdom"* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998).

15. See 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).

So it is imperative for there to be a resource that Latter-day Saints and other investigators can turn to for an introduction to these writings.

Of Faith and Reason is divided into eight sections, with an introduction to Latter-day Saint scholarship and the nature of the book (pp. xi–3), a conclusion wrapping up the evidence (pp. 179–80), and an appendix on important ancient documents (pp. 181–91). The sections discuss the following subjects: “Joseph Smith” (pp. 3–12), “Book of Mormon” (pp. 13–30), “Book of Mormon Language” (pp. 31–50), “Book of Mormon: Journey through the Old World” (pp. 51–74), “Book of Mormon: Other Old World Evidences” (pp. 75–100), “Book of Mormon: New World Evidences” (pp. 101–32), “Book of Abraham” (pp. 133–40), and “Doctrine” (pp. 141–78). Each section is subdivided according to the specific piece of evidence being discussed, with topics including Joseph Smith’s character, the witnesses of the Book of Mormon, Hebraisms, Book of Mormon geography, ancient Near Eastern culture and society in the Book of Mormon, and Nahom.

Ash presents the evidence succinctly, and his writing is highly engaging. He is especially talented at summarizing complex ideas in a clear and intelligent manner.

Another helpful aspect of the book is the tracking of anti-Mormon arguments through the years and discussion showing the concomitant development of Latter-day Saint refutations of them. Ash shows the best that anti-Mormon authorities such as Ed Decker and “Dr.” Walter Martin¹⁶ have to offer and then adroitly dismantles their arguments by drawing on the work of Latter-day Saint scholars and apologists. Likewise, Ash shows how things considered absurd in Joseph Smith’s day have been strikingly vindicated by modern scholarship. Ash (p. 86) mentions the criticisms of men like M. T. Lamb who, in the late 1800s, chided Joseph Smith for claiming that ancient Israelites kept records on metal plates, only for the Prophet to be vindicated on that count starting with archaeological discoveries in the mid-twentieth century.¹⁷

16. For an amusing exposé of this notorious anti-Mormon mountebank, see vol. 3 of Robert L. and Rosemary Brown’s *They Lie in Wait to Deceive: A Study of Anti-Mormon Deception* (Mesa, AZ: Brownsworth, 1993).

17. John A. Tvedtnes has offered a intriguing study on the practice of writing and preserving ancient metal documents in his *The Book of Mormon and Other Hidden Books*:

Joseph Smith

Ash briefly discusses Joseph Smith's heritage, the circumstances surrounding his leg surgery as a young boy,¹⁸ and the expectation that his name would be "had for good and evil among all nations" (Joseph Smith—History 1:33). This section is but a cursory exploration into the life of the Prophet. Just as the commentary begins to pick up with intriguing details, the author abruptly moves on. I would have preferred more coverage. For example, Ash's treatment of Joseph himself ends with the coming forth of the Book of Mormon.

Book of Mormon

Ash explores subjects such as the witnesses to the Book of Mormon plates and evidence in the original and printer's manuscripts indicating that the record came forth as claimed and was not copied or invented. This is one of the places where Ash's skill as a writer and an abridger of Latter-day Saint scholarship shines. He ably condenses into a few pages the research of Richard L. Anderson on the witnesses,¹⁹ and in lucid terms he develops a solid defense of the validity of the witnesses' testimony in the face of criticism from skeptics like Dan Vogel.²⁰ Ash asks a number of provocative questions that the skeptics have yet to seriously engage. For example, "If he [Joseph Smith] had real gold plates, from where did he get them? How were they manufactured? Who engraved them? In what language were they

"*Out of Darkness unto Light*" (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000). For a review of Tvedtnes, see Kevin Barney, "A Seemingly Strange Story Illuminated," *FARMS Review of Books* 13/1 (2001): 1–20.

18. Ash explains (pp. 5–7) his belief that it is more than just coincidence that the Smith family at the time of the Prophet's sickness was living only a few miles away from one of the few trained doctors in the country who could perform the needed operation and could do so with amazing skill and results not matched until later in the century.

19. Anderson's primary work on the witnesses is found in his book *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981).

20. Vogel, in something of an ad hoc rationalization, posits that Joseph Smith may have manufactured a set of tin plates to trick the eight witnesses into thinking that he had in his possession real ancient plates. "The Validity of the Witnesses' Testimonies," in *American Apocrypha: Essays on the Book of Mormon*, ed. Dan Vogel and Brent Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), 79–121.

written?” (p. 19). These are indeed important questions that skeptics have ignored.²¹

Ash also covers the evidence that Royal Skousen has uncovered from the manuscripts of the Book of Mormon through more than two decades of research, arguing that the original text was dictated as claimed by Joseph Smith and corroborated by the testimony of several eyewitnesses.²² Ash then discusses politics in the Book of Mormon. Appealing to the work of Richard Bushman, Ash describes how the Book of Mormon “should be understood according to the ‘ancient patterns’ deeply ingrained in the Nephite narrative” (p. 27).²³

Book of Mormon Language

Among the topics covered in the section on Book of Mormon language are Hebraisms and proper names. In these two areas, Ash skillfully conveys the work of scholars such as John W. Welch and John A. Tvedtnes, who have explored the presence of Hebraisms such as chiasmus and *if-and* conditional clauses in the text. Likewise, Ash notes that a number of names in the Book of Mormon are in fact attested in other ancient sources, lending credence to the book’s claims of authenticity.

I did not find Ash’s appeal to wordprint studies persuasive. This approach to determining Book of Mormon authorship is suspect for several reasons. For instance, Tvedtnes explains that “the wordprint

21. Daniel C. Peterson has noted that Vogel argues that the testimony of the eight witnesses was based on a “supernatural” or “illusionary” experience but then oddly postulates that Joseph Smith may have faked a set of tin plates to trick them and his other credulous followers. Which is it for Vogel? Were the witnesses tricked by fake, albeit real, plates or simply hallucinating? See Daniel C. Peterson, “Not So Easily Dismissed: Some Facts for Which Counterexplanations of the Book of Mormon Will Need to Account,” *FARMS Review* 17/2 (2005): xxiii n. 37.

22. Skousen’s work on the critical text edition of the Book of Mormon has spanned two decades and has yielded important developments in our understanding of the text. His most recent offering is *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

23. Here Ash is quoting Richard L. Bushman, “The Book of Mormon and the American Revolution,” in *Believing History: Latter-day Saint Essays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 57.

studies were made of an English translation of a text said to have been written in another language (in which case it should reflect the language of the translator more than that of the original author)” and that “the particles used in the wordprint studies (e.g., the word “of”) are often nonexistent in Hebrew, which instead uses syntax to express the meaning of the English particles. I strongly object to determinations made on words that could not have existed in the original.”²⁴

Old World Evidences

In providing evidence for the Book of Mormon from the ancient Near East, Ash relies primarily, but not exclusively, on the studies done by Hugh Nibley in the 1950s and 1960s. Ash covers Old World candidates for Bountiful and Nahom, pre-Columbian transoceanic crossings, ancient shipbuilding, King Benjamin’s speech in the light of ancient Israelite festivals, ancient metal plates being hidden and preserved, and the temple in the Book of Mormon. He briefly treats the subject of angels as guardians of sacred texts, noting that “according to one non-LDS Near Eastern expert, ‘Few religious ideas in the Ancient East have played a more important role than the notion of the Heavenly Tablets or the Heavenly Books [that are] handed over [to a mortal] in an interview with a heavenly being’” (p. 75).²⁵

I urge caution with Ash’s identification of Columbus as the Gentile spoken of in 1 Nephi 13:12. Although this idea has most certainly been a prevalent interpretation among Latter-day Saints, it is speculative and cannot be classed as evidence for the Book of Mormon. Ash does give some intriguing details about Columbus’s own conviction

24. John A. Tvedtnes, “New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology,” *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994): 33, emphasis in original. Compare Tvedtnes’s remarks with Roger Keller, *Book of Mormon Authors: Their Words and Messages* (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1996). For a review of Keller’s work and further musings on wordprint studies, see Tvedtnes, “Not Your Everyday Wordprint Study: Variations on a Theme,” *FARMS Review of Books* 9/2 (1997): 16–27.

25. Ash is quoting Brent E. McNeely, “The Book of Mormon and the Heavenly Motif,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 26. McNeely is in turn quoting Geo Widengren, *Ascension of the Apostle and the Heavenly Book* (Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1950), 7.

that he was being led by divine forces in his explorations, and he mentions the famous mariner's *Libro de las profecías* (p. 95). There are, however, risks in constructing an argument based on a fundamental uncertainty.

New World Evidences

In his discussion of New World evidences for the Book of Mormon, Ash follows the geography proposed by John Sorenson in 1985 and developed in his subsequent publications.²⁶ Commonly called the Limited Geography Model, this theory posits that the events of the Book of Mormon took place in a limited area in southern Mexico and northern Guatemala. Although it should be noted that the Church of Jesus Christ has no official position on the geography of the Book of Mormon, and that other models have been proposed by Latter-day Saints over the years, the model proposed by Sorenson has the most backing from the historical and textual evidence. Ash wisely limits his discussion of New World evidence for the Book of Mormon to the work of scholars like Sorenson. Ash is methodical in his presentation and avoids going beyond the evidence.

It is refreshing that Ash does not use late Mesoamerican folk legends to support the Book of Mormon account. Specifically, he does not appeal to the legends of Quetzalcoatl as evidence of Christ's visit to the New World, though this identification has been popular among many Latter-day Saint writers.²⁷ His restraint is commendable because these sources, as Brant Gardner notes, were most likely influenced by the Christianization of Mesoamerican peoples with the arrival of the Europeans and are thus too recent to function as evidence for the Book of Mormon account.

Ash also takes up the cultural and geographic imprints that Mesoamerica has left in the Book of Mormon text. Here he is following

26. See especially John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1985) and *Mormon's Map* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000).

27. Brant Gardner, *Second Witness*, 5:353–95, tracks the development of Latter-day Saint arguments on this subject and then casts doubt upon the validity of such methods.

Gardner's methodology, which avoids many of the pitfalls inherent in other analytic approaches to this problem.²⁸ Ash focuses on subjects such as warfare and politics in the text and how they relate to Mesoamerican practice. When he does venture into discussing external evidences, such as the recent discovery of pre-Columbian cement and barley (pp. 118–20), he is careful not to go beyond what the evidence allows. His review (p. 122) of the work of Brian Stubbs on the Uto-Aztecan language is likewise moderate and restricted to the current evidence.

The Book of Abraham

Here we have the most disappointing aspect of Ash's book. This section is far too short, especially considering the vigorous debate raging around the Book of Abraham. It is lamentable that Ash overlooks the volumes of affirming evidence in this area coming from Latter-day Saint researchers. He only briefly covers topics of interest such as the location of Ur of the Chaldees and its relation to the Book of Abraham, the cosmology of Abraham 3, Joseph Smith's explanations of the facsimiles, and other ancient accounts of Abraham and their relation to the account in the Pearl of Great Price.

In commenting on the location of Ur of the Chaldees, Ash omits important sources. His only citation,²⁹ while adequate in conveying the main thrust of these arguments, is one of many such sources that Ash could have included in his presentation to good advantage.³⁰

Ash gives scant attention to the outstanding recent work on the cosmology of Abraham 3.³¹ One important aspect of this work that Ash

28. Gardner, *Second Witness*, 1:4, notes that it is time for students of the Book of Mormon to "find Mesoamerica in the Book of Mormon rather than [looking for] the Book of Mormon in Mesoamerica."

29. Daniel C. Peterson, "News From Antiquity," *Ensign*, January 1994, 16–22.

30. These include 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), 119–36; and John M. Lundquist, "Was Abraham at Ebla? A Cultural Background of the Book of Abraham (Abraham 1 and 2)," in *Studies in Scripture: The Pearl of Great Price*, ed. Robert L. Millet and Kent P. Jackson (Salt Lake City: Randall Book, 1985), 225–37.

31. 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*

neglected is the seeming conflation of “stars” with “planets.” While this conflation is decried as absurd by modern critics of the Book of Abraham, Gee, Hamblin, and Peterson demonstrate that it conforms with ancient cosmological understanding and is thus another point in favor of the Book of Abraham.³²

Ash discusses only a few instances where Joseph Smith’s interpretations of the facsimiles have scholarly support from the Egyptological evidence. Specifically, he limits his discussion to figure 11 in Facsimile 1 and figures 1, 4, and 6 in Facsimile 2. However, in discussing the Joseph Smith hypocephalus, he does not utilize Michael D. Rhodes’s work on the subject and overlooks a number of insights offered by Rhodes for the authenticity of Joseph Smith’s interpretation of the hypocephalus.³³ Likewise, Ash does not reference the work of Hugh Nibley on the Book of Abraham, which is surprising considering Ash’s constant reference to Nibley elsewhere in his book and the overall impact Nibley has had on Book of Abraham studies.³⁴

Ash, however, does redeem this section somewhat with a commendable discussion of an important work by FARMS that collects an impressive array of ancient documents detailing unique aspects of Abraham’s life that are not found in the Bible but in many cases are found in the Book of Abraham.³⁵

Covenant, ed. John Gee and Brian Hauglid (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2005), 1–16.

32. Gee and Hauglid, *Astronomy, Papyrus, and Covenant*, 11. See also the discussion by Kerry Muhlestein, “Encircling Astronomy and the Egyptians: An Approach to Abraham 3,” *Religious Educator* 10/1 (2009): 33–50.

33. Michael D. Rhodes, “A Translation and Commentary of the Joseph Smith Hypocephalus,” *BYU Studies* 17 (Spring 1977): 259–74. See also his study “The Joseph Smith Hypocephalus . . . Twenty Years Later,” available online at <http://home.comcast.net/~michael.rhodes/JosephSmithHypocephalus.pdf> (accessed 9 September 2009).

34. Nibley’s most important works on the Book of Abraham include *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1975), a revised edition of which appeared as vol. 16 in the *Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* (hereafter CWHN), ed. John Gee and Michael Rhodes (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 2005); *Abraham in Egypt* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), reprinted in enlarged, updated form as vol. 14 in CWHN, ed. Gary P. Gillum (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 2000); and *An Approach to the Book of Abraham*, vol. 18 in CWHN, ed. John Gee (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 2009).

35. John A. Tvedtnes, Brian M. Hauglid, and John Gee, eds., *Traditions about the Early Life of Abraham* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2001).

Doctrine

Ash analyzes what he considers unique Latter-day Saint doctrines and argues for their support from ancient Jewish and Christian sources. This is important since sectarian critics of the Church of Jesus Christ generally exclude the Latter-day Saints from their idiosyncratic definition of Christianity because of these doctrines, which the Saints hold to be a restoration of primitive Judeo-Christian belief or practice.

Ash covers such doctrines as the Latter-day Saint view of the canon, the council of the gods, esoteric teachings revealed only to the initiated, and theosis. Ash's treatment is excellent, giving an instructive overview of the Latter-day Saint position on these subjects and then summarizing what scholars such as Hugh Nibley,³⁶ Blake Ostler,³⁷ James Barker,³⁸ William Hamblin,³⁹ Richard Anderson,⁴⁰ and others have written on these matters.

It is commendable that Ash avoids the pitfalls that mar the work of some Latter-day Saint authors. He does not look for proof texts in ancient Jewish and Christian texts or "quote mine" the ante-Nicene fathers for statements that affirm Latter-day Saint doctrine. Rather, Ash is careful to put his sources in their proper historical context.

Ash ends his book with a wise caveat: "the only sure way of knowing if Joseph Smith was a prophet of God, if the Book of Mormon is true, or if God exists and Jesus is the Christ is by the power of the Spirit. Nevertheless, we can take comfort in knowing that our spiritual convictions have support from the secular world" (p. 179). I wholeheartedly agree. It is important for the Saints to understand that while a spiritual conviction of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ is

36. Hugh Nibley, *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, ed. Todd M. Compton and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987).

37. Blake Ostler, "Clothed Upon: A Unique Aspect of Christian Antiquity," *BYU Studies* 22/1 (1982): 31–45.

38. James L. Barker, *Apostasy from the Divine Church* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1960).

39. William J. Hamblin, "Aspects of an Early Christian Initiation Ritual," in *By Study and Also by Faith*, ed. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 1:202–21.

40. Richard L. Anderson, "Clement, Ignatius, and Polycarp: Three Bishops between the Apostles and the Apostasy," *Ensign*, August 1976, 51–56.

the most important grounding for faith, we should not neglect the works of believing Latter-day Saint scholars. The Saints are instructed to “seek . . . diligently and teach one another words of wisdom; yea, seek . . . out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith” (Doctrine and Covenants 88:118). Thus, instead of compartmentalizing faith and reason, study and faith should be seen as complementary. We should avoid the extremes of blind faith or dogged skepticism and seek instead a balance of both reason and faith. The appropriate balance between the two must, of course, be made after prayerful study.

Ash’s book, although lacking in a few aspects, is a commendable attempt to distill some of the evidences currently available supporting the restoration and the prophetic mission of Joseph Smith. Ash should be lauded for bringing together these faith-affirming evidences into a single, handy volume that can be enjoyed both by those just learning about the work of Latter-day Saint scholars and by seasoned veterans of LDS apologetics and scholarship. I highly recommend Ash’s book for those who are seeking wisdom by study and also by faith.