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CONTENTS

Editor's Introduction, "The Wedding of Athens and Jerusalem: An Evangelical Perplexity and a Latter-day Saint Answer," Louis Midgley	xi
--	----

Maxwell Lecture

"Probing the Lives of Christ and Joseph Smith," Richard Lloyd Anderson	1
---	---

Christmas Revisited

<i>Christmas: The Original Story</i> , Margaret Barker Reviewed by John W. Welch	31
---	----

The New Atheism

<i>god is not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything</i> , Christopher Hitchens Reviewed by William J. Hamblin	47
--	----

Sectarian Anti-Mormonism

- I Was a Born-Again Mormon: Moving Toward
Christian Authenticity*, Shawn McCraney
Reviewed by Blair Dee Hodges 97

Book of Mormon

- The Reader's Book of Mormon*, ed. Robert A. Rees
and Eugene England
- The Book of Mormon. Translated by Joseph Smith.
Introduction by Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp*
Reviewed by Grant Hardy..... 133
- Mesoamerica and the Book of Mormon: Is This the Place?*
John L. Lund
Reviewed by Brant A. Gardner 153
- Journey of Faith: From Jerusalem to the Promised Land*,
ed. S. Kent Brown and Peter Johnson
Reviewed by Stephen D. Ricks 169

Article

- “Myth, Memory, and ‘Manuscript Found’”
Matthew Roper 179

Joseph Smith

- Of Faith and Reason: 80 Evidences Supporting
the Prophet Joseph Smith*, Michael R. Ash
Reviewed by Stephen O. Smoot..... 225

Book Notes

<i>Is the Reformation Over? An Evangelical Assessment of Contemporary Roman Catholicism,</i> Mark A. Noll and Carolyn Nystrom.	239
<i>World Trade and Biological Exchanges before 1492,</i> John L. Sorenson and Carl L. Johannessen	242
<i>The Joseph Smith Papers: Revelations and Translations, Manuscript Revelation Books,</i> Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman, gen. eds.; Robin Scott Jensen, Robert J. Woodford, and Steven C. Harper, vol. eds.	243
<i>The Cosmic Ring Dance of the Angels: An Early Christian Rite of the Temple,</i> Frederick M. Huchel	247
<i>When Souls Had Wings: Pre-mortal Existence in Western Thought,</i> Terryl L. Givens	248
About the Contributors	253

Editor's Introduction
**THE WEDDING OF ATHENS AND JERUSALEM:
AN EVANGELICAL PERPLEXITY
AND A LATTER-DAY SAINT ANSWER**

Louis C. Midgley

Mormonism rejects the pure gifts of faith, forgiveness, and salvation that Jesus desires to give to them. This biblical teaching of justification is categorically rejected by the Mormon religion.

The Reverend George Mather¹

Those writers familiar with St. Augustine (AD 354–430) tend to grant, in the words of one commentator, that he “appears if not as the originator at least as the foremost exponent in ancient times” of the “attempt to fuse or reconcile elements derived from two originally independent and hitherto unrelated sources, the Bible and classical philosophy.”² Roman Catholics, as well as some Protestants, have seen this as both a worthy endeavor and a large accomplishment, while Latter-day Saints have held that it was a miscalculation that began after an early fatal falling away from the primitive faith. Why?

1. George A. Mather, foreword to Wayne L. Cowdrey, Howard A. Davis, and Arthur Vanick, *Who Really Wrote the Book of Mormon? The Spalding Enigma* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2005), 11. Mather is a Lutheran pastor of Our Savior’s Lutheran Church in St. George, Utah (see p. 429 n. 1, where he is also described as “a noted authority on religion and the occult”). He was trained by the notorious “Dr.” Walter Martin.

2. Ernest L. Fortin, “St. Augustine,” in *History of Political Philosophy*, 3rd ed., edited by Joseph Cropsey and Leo Strauss (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 177.

Athens and Jerusalem Revisited

Tertullian (ca. 160–225), writing in Latin, followed the apostle Paul’s radical distinction between a sophisticated human wisdom and “the wisdom of God” now incarnate in Jesus Christ, whom God raised from the grave. With this distinction in mind, he asked, “What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What concord is there between the Academy and the Church?”³ Tertullian’s prime target was the Academy, or “Plato’s school,” which then offered some version of Neoplatonism. He very much wanted to put an end to “all attempts to produce a mottled Christianity of Stoic, Platonic, and dialectic composition.”⁴ Referring to the two competing claims to wisdom, Tertullian asked in florid language,

What is there, then, about them that is alike, the philosopher and the Christian—the disciple of Hellas and the disciple of Heaven—the dealer in reputation and the dealer in salvation—one occupied with words and one with deeds—one creator of error and its destroyer—friend of error and its foe—the despoiler of truth and its restorer—its robber and its warden?⁵

There are indications that some of the most influential Christian theologians borrowed the categories and concepts found among the disciples of Plato, the Stoics, and then later Aristotle. Evangelicals Norman Geisler and Ralph MacKenzie, in *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals*,⁶ do not hide their own fondness for the fruit of such endeavors. They correctly see Augustine’s effort to meld the two competing claims to wisdom as highly influential. Elsewhere I have argued that Augustine and others made a wrong turn when they invoked the categories and methods of pagan writers as a vehicle for grounding

3. Tertullian, *De praescriptione haereticorum* 7.9. This essay can be found in English translation as “On Prescription against Heretics,” in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3, *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (1885; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 246.

4. Tertullian, *De praescriptione haereticorum* 7.11.

5. Tertullian, *Apologeticus* 46.18.

6. Norman L. Geisler and Ralph E. MacKenzie, *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals: Agreements and Differences* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995).

and setting forth their understanding of Christian faith.⁷ Such endeavors, I believe, damage the integrity of both the quest for wisdom by unaided human reason and the longing for a wisdom revealed from the heavens.

The Augustinian Interpretive Tradition

Roman Catholics and Evangelicals, among other things, provides an assessment of Augustine's endeavors, stressing his crucial role in the subsequent development of both Roman Catholic and Protestant theology. How do contemporary moderate Calvinists describe and evaluate efforts to reconcile Christian faith with pagan philosophy? In setting forth their understanding of Augustine's key influence on evangelical ideology, Geisler⁸ and MacKenzie are not at all concerned about Augustine's dependence upon the wisdom of Athens and hence on an essentially pagan philosophical culture. This is understandable, if not laudable. Why should they tackle the perplexing question of whether violence is done to either or both types of wisdom by fusing one or another brand of philosophy with what they find in the Bible? This issue is not the focus of their book. Instead they examine the similarities and differences between Roman Catholic and current evangelical and earlier Protestant theologies.

God as First Thing

Evangelicals in the pulpits and pews, in addition to those who parade in protest before Latter-day Saint temple dedications and who now

7. See Louis Midgley, "Directions that Diverge: 'Jerusalem and Athens' Revisited," *FARMS Review of Books* 11/1 (1999): 37, 63, 65–66, for commentary on Augustine; see also Midgley, "The Utility of Faith Reconsidered," 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), 140–46.

8. For a lavish appreciation of Norman Geisler's efforts as apologist, theologian, and social critic, see Francis J. Beckwith, William Lane Craig, and J. P. Moreland, eds., *To Everyone An Answer: A Case for the Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004). This volume is a *Festschrift* honoring Geisler. It contains information on his educational background; his academic appointments, honors, and recognitions; and a list of sixty-three separate books or pamphlets that he has contributed to, written, or edited. See pp. 376–80.

clutter the Internet with diatribes against the faith of the Saints, may be stunned to discover that much of the core of their ideology can be traced back to Augustine. They may also be distressed to learn that Augustine was deeply influenced by academic philosophy, which, prior to his famous “conversion,” allowed him to brush aside what he had previously mocked Christians for believing in that he was able to read as equivocal the teachings he thought were unsavory in the Bible. It would be difficult not to have noticed that, in stressing that God is incorporeal, he not only “placed” God above or outside of space but also made him timeless—that is, with no past or future, and in that sense “eternal.” God is not seen as a living being who responds to the dire situations in which humans find themselves, nor as being genuinely open to pleas for help, since everything was presumably fixed at the moment of creation. One of the divine attributes in classical theism is passivity or a kind of apathy. This and other elements of classical theism have led to concern among some evangelicals, especially for those known as “Open Theists,” who have come to see serious flaws in what has been attributed to the divine, especially following Augustine.⁹

For Augustine, both space and time were created in an instant by God, who is neither anywhere nor “anywhen.” At the moment of creation, everything that ever will happen was both present and frozen in God’s mind. Though the created “nature” of man is good, at the

9. For a brief, easily accessible introduction, which stresses the mistakes (many of which are traceable to Augustine) that beset classical theism, see Gregory Boyd, *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000). For a brief review of Boyd’s book, see the Book Note in *FARMS Review* 16/2 (2004): 405–6. Geisler confidently informs his readers that classical theism was “embraced by St. Augustine, St. Anselm, Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin,” among others; see Norman L. Geisler, “Neotheism: Orthodox or Unorthodox? A Theological Response to Greg Boyd,” found on the Web page entitled “Dr. Norman Geisler” at <http://www.normangeisler.net/articles.htm> (accessed 23 October 2009). Geisler complains that those like Boyd who advance an Open Theism attack “God’s attributes of Pure Actuality (with no potentiality), Immutability, Eternality (Non-temporality), Simplicity (indivisibility), Infallible Foreknowledge of everything (including free acts), and Sovereignty (complete control of the universe and the future).” Geisler defends this way of picturing God on the grounds that this is what Augustine and others have taught, and not that this is what Jesus taught or what can be found in the Bible. Open Theists insist, much like Latter-day Saints, that the scriptures be taken seriously even or especially when they fly in the face of classical theism.

instant that it was called into existence out of nothing, all actual, finite human beings became “fallen”—that is, totally depraved—although a few individuals are arbitrarily predestined to salvation. God, for Augustine, is thus not merely a being, even a highest, benevolent, most powerful being, but is instead Being-itself, the is-ness that is in or beneath everything that is. To the degree that something is, it is good. This means that evil is merely the privation or absence of being, and hence evil isn’t really real but merely the absence of reality. Geisler and MacKenzie trace this explanation directly back to Augustine’s turn away from Manichaeism following his adoption of a version of Platonism (see p. 83).¹⁰ They point out that

this new philosophical orientation convinced [Augustine] that the existence of evil could be reconciled with the doctrine of creation. His understanding that evil was not a positive, created thing, but a privation or lack in things proved to be of great theological significance. Hence, concerning substance and evil, he wrote: “Therefore, as they are, they are good; therefore whatsoever is, is good. That evil, then, which I sought whence it was, is not any substance; for were it a substance, it would be good.” Further, “When accordingly it is inquired, whence is evil, it must first be inquired, what is evil, which is nothing else than corruption, either of the measure, or the form, or the order, that belong to nature.” (p. 83, quoting Augustine’s *Confessions*)

Geisler and MacKenzie do not try to explain away Augustine’s dependence upon Platonism. Instead, they grant that one will find, for example, in Augustine’s *Confessions*, an abundance of Neoplatonism (p. 393), and they also stress the role of Platonic language in Augustine’s theology (p. 92).

Some evangelicals may be dismayed to discover that Augustine’s theology was more or less framed with categories and explanations borrowed from pagan sources and that he read the Bible through a

10. This and subsequent parenthetical page references are to Geisler and MacKenzie, *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals*.

lens provided by an alien ideology. Geisler and Mackenzie do not deny the fact that Augustine sought “to fuse or reconcile . . . the Bible with classical philosophy.”¹¹ But some evangelicals may disagree. Why? They may doubt that such efforts are necessary or that they are sanguine, or they may have realized that these efforts were not successful. Geisler and MacKenzie simply skirt these issues even as they recognize some of the details.

When describing God, Geisler and MacKenzie agree with unidentified Roman Catholic scholars who they report as having argued that “Greek philosophers introduced a higher concept of God. In Plato, the concept of the ‘supreme being’ became more prominent” (p. 36). Apparently these unnamed writers believe that Plato’s speculation about the divine was actually close to what they attribute to the Bible. But Plato’s God still “falls short of Judeo-Christian monotheism, since for him God is limited and is subject to the Good which is beyond him” (pp. 36–37). As he works out his version of natural theology (a theology fashioned entirely by unaided human reason), Augustine simply conflates Being-itself and the Good in such a way that evil is seen as merely a privation of Being—that is, as Non-Being.

“Later Augustine, using Platonic terms, and Aquinas, using Aristotelian concepts,” Geisler and MacKenzie point out, “would develop arguments for the existence of one supreme God. Of course, whatever the philosophical language used to express their convictions, Catholic theologians believe that their concept of God is based on His self-revelation in Scripture” (p. 37); but they also claim that Aristotle found a proof for God in change or motion, and hence God was for him “the ‘Uncaused Cause’” (p. 37), or actually an “unmoved mover.” Theologians have assumed that their own concept of God, though set out in the categories of pagan philosophy, was consistent with what is found in the Bible. They managed this in part by attributing to the Bible the very notions they borrowed from a philosophic culture. If the Bible is sufficient, which Protestants stress, is it necessary to draw upon alien categories to set forth the Christian understanding of the divine? Is a

11. Fortin, “St. Augustine,” 177.

wedding between the wisdom of Athens and the wisdom of Jerusalem necessary or even possible without doing harm to both?

The World of Sectarian Theological Speculation and Controversy

Contemporary evangelicals tend to see themselves as the guardians of orthodox Christian faith. The reason is that they believe that they have access to the essential teachings set forth in the Bible. Much like Latter-day Saints, Roman Catholics face conservative Protestant critics who insist that strict conformity to notions of theological orthodoxy determines whether one can even be considered Christian. Along with hostility toward Latter-day Saints, anti-Catholicism is one of the less endearing activities found on the margins of American evangelical religiosity.

Roman Catholics and Evangelicals has buried in its pages a curious discussion of the sources of both the background assumptions and primary nostrum held by evangelicals. While insisting on biblical sufficiency, Geisler and MacKenzie also argue that evangelicals must turn to the speculation of theologians for crucial elements in their ideology. A corollary is, of course, that the Bible is not alone, since evangelicals also draw upon the creeds and speculation of theologians like Augustine, which are clearly not summoned merely from the Bible *alone*. The Bible must be understood their way. Conservative Protestants thus sense that the Bible is not alone, but it is still sufficient even if their interpretation of it is potentially frail and fragile. Theologians and churchmen tend to proof-text the Bible to support dogmas that were fashioned by theologians and set down (often following intense and sometimes violent quarrels) in the crafting of the creeds and then affirmed, elaborated, and qualified in subsequent confessions.¹²

In *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals*, Geisler and MacKenzie seek to avoid a naive bibliolatry that tends to ignore the complex story of the formation and radical transformations in Christian theology. In addition, they do not deny that both Roman Catholic and Protestant

12. For a remarkable account of the often unseemly, typically violent and brutal conduct of those who fashioned the creeds and confessions, see Ramsey MacMullen, *Voting for God in Early Church Councils* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006).

theologies, in all their vast variety and contentious complexity, are buttressed by attempts to meld concepts and categories borrowed from a pagan philosophical culture to what is found in the biblical narrative. Nor do they deny that there have been some significant shifts in both Roman Catholic and Protestant theology, or that within both traditions there have been and still are competing understandings of the contents and grounds of faith.¹³ In addition, they stress their own fondness for the large figures of Roman Catholic theology, whose views would seem virtually unknown to the bulk of their fellow evangelicals who turn up in the pews on Sundays presumably to hear messages from the Bible alone.

A Moderate Evangelical Appraisal of Roman Catholicism

Geisler and MacKenzie describe the dependence of the magisterial Protestant Reformers, especially Martin Luther (1483–1546) and John Calvin (1509–1564), on the theology of Augustine. They set forth these opinions in an effort to convince their fellow evangelicals that Roman Catholics, at least the more “traditional” (rather than liberal) elements in that tradition, though not entirely in harmony with what they consider fully orthodox Christianity, are fellow Christians and hence worthy of a certain admiration and respect. With the powerful secularizing forces at work in the world, they argue that “the time is overdue for Catholics and Protestants to hang together before we hang separately” (p. 16).

I applaud the willingness of Geisler and MacKenzie to see beyond a polemical past separating various brands of Protestants from Roman Catholics. This past is obviously strewn with numerous bitter conflicts. In assessing the agreements and differences between those they understand as evangelicals and the more faithful faction of Catholics,

13. They identify a “nominal Catholic culture” (p. 389); “folk, cultural, or liberal varieties” of Roman Catholicism set over against “traditional Roman Catholicism” (pp. 15–16); “Liberal Catholics” (p. 473; compare p. 475); “cultural Catholics” (p. 474); “orthodox Roman Catholics” (p. 431); and so forth. They also identify both “fundamentalists” and “liberal churches and denominations” (p. 410), “mainline evangelicals” (p. 16), “secular Protestants” with their “liberal posture” (p. 427), and so forth.

they move somewhat beyond a history plump with sometimes willful misunderstandings and the usual ignorance that quarreling factions manifest toward each other. They have striven to describe both the “agreements and differences” between contemporary evangelicals and informed, faithful Roman Catholics. It is useful to have a book available in which evangelicals are lectured on these matters by two of their own spokesmen.

Augustine—“The Grandfather of the Reformation”

Geisler and MacKenzie stress what they believe are commonalities between faithful Roman Catholics and evangelicals. They also strive to let Catholics define themselves rather than fashioning a series of false images of the Other. They claim (correctly, I believe) that “both evangelicals and orthodox Protestants have a common creedal and Augustinian doctrinal background. Both groups accept the creeds and confessions and councils of the Christian church of the first five centuries. Both claim Augustine as a mentor” (p. 17). This point is made repeatedly in *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals*. In addition, they argue that Augustine was a primary source for key dogmas taught by the Reformers and by current evangelicals. What is unsaid is that Catholics went wrong when they turned away from their original Augustinian roots. But the authors also grant that some of their opinions “will come as a surprise to many evangelicals, particularly those of a more conservative bent, who are used to stressing differences with Roman Catholics” (p. 17).

Geisler and MacKenzie explain how conservative Protestant theology relies heavily upon Augustine. It is therefore not surprising to find them virtually ending their book with tributes to Augustine. They point out that

what is striking about Augustine is that, although a committed Catholic bishop, his writings are claimed by both evangelical Protestants and Catholics. Indeed, through both Luther and Calvin, Augustine is in a real sense the grandfather of the Reformation. To this day many of the best known, and

best worded, theological formulations of Christian truth used by orthodox Protestants are in the words of Augustine. (pp. 394–95)

By stressing the importance of Augustine for the theology of both Roman Catholics and Protestants, Geisler and MacKenzie are not, however, plowing new ground. Better informed evangelicals have, of course, recognized that much of Reformation ideology was the result of efforts by both Luther and Calvin to revive and thereby set in place some, but not all, of Augustine's teachings. A crucial question, then, is not how Augustine is seen by evangelical scholars but how he is seen by ordinary folks in the pulpits and pews. Are they aware that crucial elements of their faith have their roots in Augustine and not in the Bible?

Augustine and “the Major Soteriological Framework”

Geisler and MacKenzie want evangelicals to realize that “both orthodox Protestants and Catholics share the insights of the great troika of Christian theologians: Saints Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas” (p. 67).¹⁴ They also reassure their readers that this “troika of theological giants, Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas, would stand fast on the proposition that God's grace is absolutely necessary for salvation” (p. 64). There is no doubt that this is true. But they later admit that this agreement is mostly formal. Behind this apparent agreement are a number of teachings that separate evangelicals from Roman Catholics. Where they identify these differences, they scold Roman Catholics for not being sufficiently in tune with their version of evangelical ideology.

Geisler and MacKenzie also acknowledge that, prior to Augustine, there were different and shifting views on certain crucial elements of Christian faith¹⁵ that are now considered essential by most

14. Geisler's doctoral degree is from Loyola University in New Orleans. He has published appreciative collections of selected essays by both Augustine and Thomas Aquinas.

15. For some readily accessible details, see Justo L. and Catherine Gunsalus Gonzalez, *Heretics for Armchair Theologians* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008).

evangelicals. Augustine fashioned the notion that salvation is “by grace alone.” This explains why the authors argue that “Augustinianism was the major soteriological framework that informed Western Christianity” (p. 431). Though Augustine’s understanding of justification “underwent significant development,” he “came down decidedly on the side of grace alone (*solo gratia*)” (p. 84).¹⁶

But the formula “grace *alone*” does not address the crucial issue, nor does it do justice to the complexity of Augustine’s opinions. The reason is that whether divine mercy or grace is necessary for salvation is not the issue that an appeal to Augustine’s theology is meant to address. Few, if any, except nominal Christians, have been tempted to deny that salvation is ultimately a gift from God. And no one imagines that they can somehow save themselves from death or forgive their own sins. The problem appears when the word *alone*—a favorite limiting term for Protestants—is linked with the word *faith*, rather than merely with the word *grace*. When this happens, faith is often not seen as a choice or decision but instead as something entirely predestined by God. What is contested is whether God’s mercy is in any way conditional. If it is conditional, what are those conditions and how are they satisfied? By faith without repentance? Without baptism and subsequent signs of faithfulness? Without a genuine desire and hence striving to keep the commandments? Is sanctification necessary or merely optional? Is sanctification, if necessary, also something predestined, or does it require human effort? If sin is forgiven by God—that is, if righteousness is imputed to the depraved one—is it possible to fall from grace?

Tripping through TULIP; Augustine as a Proto Calvinist

Augustine ended up eventually arguing, according to Geisler and MacKenzie, that “it is totally by God’s grace that we are justified.

16. I wonder if Geisler and MacKenzie believe that Augustine thought he was saved by grace *alone* at the moment of his “conversion,” or was his opinion about justification worked out later in the context of quarrels with others? It appears that Geisler and MacKenzie hold that Augustine’s later theology did not match his initial experiences of conversion (p. 84).

Salvation is neither initiated nor obtained by human action. Even the faith by which we obtain salvation is the gift of God” (p. 84). This is a reasonably accurate summary of Augustine’s mature teachings on justification. He also taught that all those who are to be saved were predestined to salvation at the moment of creation. So it appears that Augustine taught what would now be considered Calvinism. Geisler sees Augustine as a “moderate Calvinist,” not as one who advanced an “extreme Calvinism” or “hyper-Calvinism,” except perhaps when he went off the rails at the very end of his life in his quarrel with the Donatists. However, according to Geisler, both the moderate and extreme version of Calvinism are committed to what is now known as Five-Point Calvinism, or TULIP.¹⁷ Augustine did not teach all of TULIP¹⁸ since he held that while confronting overpowering temptations and the subsequent terrors of this world, including the ever-shifting flux of evils, suffering, and death, only a few of those who are predestined by God to salvation may sense that they are numbered among the elect. There is, however, a prevenient grace that provides the predestined one the faith that yields salvation. Hence there is nothing anyone can do about faith one way or another. According to Geisler and MacKenzie, Augustine argued that

the human will is completely unable to initiate or attain salvation. This concept squares quite well with the later [Reformed] doctrine of total depravity—which surfaced more than a millennium later as the first point of the Reformed mnemonic device, TULIP: Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited

17. For his opinion on this and related issues, see Norman Geisler, *Chosen But Free: A Balanced View of Divine Election* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1999). Geisler drew a frenzied response from “Dr.” James White, who engaged in vigorous proof-texting of the Bible in an effort to support his version of extreme Calvinism. See James R. White, *The Potter’s Freedom: A Defense of the Reformation and a Rebuttal of Norman Geisler’s “Chosen But Free,”* foreword by R. C. Sproul Jr. (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press, 2000).

18. Five-Point Calvinism is often known by the acronym TULIP—Total depravity, Unconditional election (human decision or choice is neither necessary nor possible), Limited atonement (Jesus was only “lifted up” in death for those already predestined for salvation by God at the moment of creation out of nothing), Irresistible grace (given only to those predestined for salvation at the moment of creation), and Perseverance of the Saints (once saved, always saved).

atonement, Irresistible grace, and Perseverance of the Saints.
(p. 85)

“It seems clear that in spite of significant differences in their systems, Luther and Augustine were united in their belief that man is spiritually destitute and, apart from God’s grace, is incapable of producing any semblance of spiritual merit. Luther was, indeed (at least concerning the basic tenets of justification), a spiritual son of the bishop of Hippo” (p. 99). Geisler and MacKenzie also insist that Calvin (see p. 101) found in Augustine a convenient way of understanding salvation. The dependence of both Luther and Calvin on Augustine is not controversial. It is also not inaccurate to say that the Protestant Reformation is a return to dogmas first set out by Augustine, even if the Reformers were not committed to all the precise details of Augustine’s shifting opinions. To the extent that evangelicals now find themselves in agreement with the Protestant Reformers, they are also dependent in large measure upon Augustine’s theological speculation, which was grounded in a version of academic philosophy.

There are, of course, some differences between Augustine’s teachings and those of the Protestant Reformers. Certain of these are significant. For one thing, Augustine’s understanding of what constitutes the church was not adopted by the Reformers (see p. 87 for some details), though they tended to follow him on political theory¹⁹ by insisting that governments, with all of their attendant evils, were instituted by God as a just punishment for sin, and also as a means of preventing self-destruction by depraved humans driven by misplaced love.

Augustine did not radically distinguish, as did the Reformers, between the justification and sanctification of sinners. Geisler and

19. Geisler and MacKenzie claim that Augustine advanced a theory of moral natural law somewhat like that advanced later by Thomas Aquinas (p. 123). It is, however, not entirely clear what stance the Reformers took on moral natural law. What can be said with some confidence is that Protestants have been skeptical of natural theology, and also, for similar and related reasons, dubious that a moral natural law can be known by unaided human reason. Karl Barth is a good but by no means the only example of a Protestant theologian who rejected both natural theology and moral natural law. See Midgley, “Karl Barth and Moral Natural Law: The Anatomy of a Debate,” *Natural Law Forum* 13 (1968): 108–26.

MacKenzie are right on this matter. Despite or because of his belief in strict predestination, Augustine tended to see justification as a temporal process by which the predestined one becomes over time more of a genuine child of God as he is gradually sanctified (see p. 85). Certainly infants at baptism have not experienced nor are they aware of either process.

Protestants tend to see justification taking place when the sinner is “born again,” which presumably takes place at the instant the sinner confesses Jesus. Salvation is seen as a single event and not as a process. Evangelicals tend to insist that this event takes place at an “altar call,” or as a result of a prayer offered by the sinner. At that instant the “righteousness of God” is imputed to the totally depraved sinner; sanctification may subsequently take place with the assistance of the Holy Spirit after justification. Keeping the commandments of God is seen as something done out of gratitude for having been justified at the moment one confesses Jesus, or when one discovers that he was predestined to be saved at the moment of creation.

Augustine argued that salvation, understood as both justification and sanctification, is a process because he thought that salvation necessarily involved baptism and even began with infant baptism (see p. 85). Subsequently, Roman Catholics have tended to argue that the beginning of a process of sanctification hopefully commences at or with baptism.²⁰ And when baptism typically takes place, the infant is unable to know and hence assent to what has happened. So there must be a subsequent temporal process involving human deeds, or baptism is an empty form. In addition, Augustine granted that some who are thereby presumably regenerated at baptism may not persevere, since they may not come to know that they were even baptized. For this reason (and perhaps others) they may not end up being in any sense saved. How all this can be harmonized with predestination is unclear.

20. Augustine, however, maintained that, at least in some sense, regeneration takes place at baptism; otherwise it makes no sense to baptize infants. Evangelicals tend to deny this. Why is infant baptism necessary unless little children, if not baptized, are faced with damnation? (see p. 92). But if infants can be regenerated by baptism, then moral agency and conscious choice (and even faith) have little if anything to do with salvation, however understood.

Evangelicals, and especially those who stress what is called either “eternal security” or the “perseverance of the Saints,” brush aside baptism and focus instead on totally depraved sinners responding to something like an “altar call.” This is especially true of those who follow the formula “once-saved, always-saved,” which is not exactly what Augustine seems to have taught (see p. 86).

Freedom and Fatalism

Augustine’s insistence on a radical predestination in which there is nothing that anyone can possibly do to draw upon the blessings of the atonement if one was not already predestined to salvation seems to come close to what evangelicals draw from the wisdom of Athens—that is, classical theism—rather than from the Bible. Despite denials, they edge close to the fatalism common to the Stoics. Geisler and MacKenzie skirt these issues. They merely insist that “Augustine does not deny the freedom of the human will” because he “took great pains to distinguish between predestination and fatalism” (p. 89). This is undoubtedly true since Augustine seems to have insisted that the will is free to follow desire but that desire is wholly determined by God at the moment of creation, and hence humans have no control over their desires.

Augustine asked, is the will free? (see p. 445). Why ask such a question unless one is faced with a problem? And what might this problem be? Predestination wanders close to a strict determinism and hence raises questions about the possibility of moral agency. If humans are not genuinely free to choose either to accept or reject the gospel, then salvation becomes a form of fate. Augustine did not, of course, deny that humans are free to gratify their desires. What he denied is that they can do anything to change their destiny, access God’s mercy, or frustrate the strict providence of God. The will, while in one sense free, is in utter bondage to sinful desires. This is at least the way conservative Protestants have tended to read Augustine. This explains why Geisler and MacKenzie claim that Augustine, with perhaps one small caveat, subscribed to a version of TULIP. Subscribing to the core of TULIP raises questions about whether humans can be considered genuinely responsible moral agents, even if they are somehow free in

some trivial way to do what they may desire—and cannot help desiring—to do.

Sinners are saved, according to the Reformers, following Augustine, if and only if God has predestined them for salvation at the moment of creation; salvation is neither proximately nor ultimately dependent on their moral choices or decisions. Nor do infants have a choice in their regeneration. Predestination, however, does not explain the frenzy to baptize infants on the assumption that human failure somehow leaves a child exposed to damnation; “believer baptism” does not deal with the problem either.

When justification is believed to be predestined, then we face questions about the coherence of the theology being advanced. When the righteousness of God is believed to be imputed to the saved one by God, despite continuing depravity, sinners are then thought to be saved in and not from their sins. Why is baptism (or any thought or deed) necessary for the one predestined by God to salvation? If one is justified by faith *alone*, and even faith is predestined, why then bother to witness to anyone concerning Jesus Christ?²¹ If a strict predestination is assumed, then nothing can possibly change anything. How so? Salvation, including both justification and sanctification, may be thought to be determined once and for all by God at the very moment everything was created out of nothing, and hence it necessarily takes place despite the depravity brought on by the fall. Salvation is not conditional upon anyone ever having made a right choice, since the depraved one is incapable of turning to or recognizing the light, unless God has determined that this will happen. Righteousness is imputed to some but not all sinners despite their depravity.

The “Common Core” Came “Only Later”

Geisler and MacKenzie strive to show that Roman Catholics and evangelicals “share a *common core* of beliefs about salvation” (p. 81, emphasis added). They claim that this kernel has its roots “in the early

21. The soul must be competent to receive and act on a message, or there is no point in witnessing. This explains why Southern Baptists once denied strict predestination precisely because they thought that witnessing to pagans was otherwise pointless.

church fathers and flowered in Augustine” (p. 81). They also hold that the issues that originally and primarily confronted the church fathers concerned Christology—that is, how to understand the identity and role of the Messiah—and not salvation. The church fathers, they claim, were concerned about who Jesus was and how he was the Messiah or Christ.²² This was the primary issue and not justification. They therefore acknowledge that “it is *only later* that theologians addressed the doctrine of what Christ accomplished, agreeing that salvation is based on God’s grace” (p. 81, emphasis added). By *later* they mean when Augustine took up these issues. This seems to be their admission that the church fathers were not teaching Augustine’s notion of justification, predestination, prevenient grace, and so forth. There was no real semblance of TULIP prior to Augustine.

Geisler and MacKenzie also claim that, in the struggle against Gnostics, the church fathers “stress[ed] the freedom of the human will” (p. 83), or what the Saints, following language found in the Book of Mormon, understand as agency or moral agency. Was this because certain Gnostics, following the intellectual fashions of the time, argued that salvation was somehow determined by forces entirely beyond human initiative? Was it that some Gnostics denied the possibility that humans can make morally significant choices because their spirits are trapped in an alien world? This seems to be what Geisler and MacKenzie believe to have been the case. Hence they argue that writers like “Justin Martyr and John Chrysostom argued that good and evil come *not from the individual’s nature but from the will and choice*. In response to the Gnostic libertarians[,] Tertullian focused on the importance of works and righteousness, going so far as to say that ‘the man who performs good works can be said to make God his debtor’” (p. 83, emphasis added). They call this an “unfortunate phrase,” but they grant that it “set the stage for centuries to come” (p. 83).

What Geisler and MacKenzie neglect to indicate is the extent that stress on moral agency dominated the thought of early Christians. They allow that what they label a “‘works-righteousness’ concept,

22. That is, how Jesus of Nazareth could be a living human being and also divine, and so forth.

which seemed to be so ingenuous in combating Gnosticism, was popular for the first 350 years of the church's history" (p. 83). This is a casual way of granting that the now-popular teaching that justification is by "faith *alone*," coupled with the notion that those who have faith are predestined that way, was fashioned by Augustine and was not found among the early church fathers. Apparently the slogan "Bible *alone*" does not preclude, among other things, the Bible as understood through the lens provided by Augustine, with the assistance of certain books of the Platonists with which he was familiar.

Frozen Abstractions . . .

In part because contemporary conservative Protestant preachers tend to operate from within a partisan setting that is sometimes intensified within seminaries and Bible schools, and hence mostly outside the mainstream of university based scholarship, and perhaps for other reasons, they tend to ignore the complex history of Christian theological disputation and biblical interpretation.²³ They merely assume, of course, that their beliefs are drawn from the Bible *alone*. As a corollary, they may also assume that their opinions have not been influenced, and hence compromised, by the complicated web of post-biblical Christian dogmatic and confessional history.²⁴ They may assume that their hoary tradition must be correct since the clearing of the cobwebs from Christian faith by the Reformation is now fin-

23. For a remarkably candid account from an evangelical perspective of the variety of evangelical opinions, see Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, *Twentieth-Century Theology: God and the World in a Transitional Age* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992); Roger E. Olson, *The Mosaic of Christian Belief: Twenty Centuries of Unity and Diversity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002); and Gregory A. Boyd and Paul R. Eddy, *Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002). See my commentary on this literature in "On Caliban Mischief," *FARMS Review* 15/1 (2003): xxiv–xxxii.

24. For fine accounts of this crucial and remarkable history, written from an evangelical perspective, see Roger E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999); Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, 2 vols. (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1984); and Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought*, 3 vols, revised ed. (New York: Abingdon, 1987).

ished. Furthermore, they may not have given attention to the actual historical roots of their own ideology.²⁵

... or Living the Story?

The distinguished American church historian Martin E. Marty recently explained that when Protestants do theology they “combine the language of the Hebrew scriptures with mainly Greek philosophical concepts as filtered through academic experiences in Western Europe, most notably Germany.”²⁶ However, the faith of the Latter-day Saints rests on the *narrations of actual events*, on variations of these stories and the symbols these stories invoke, and then on the *praxis* grounded on these stories. The scriptures are not to be read by the Saints as awkwardly set out, unstoried, timeless ideas, nor as a system or philosophical worldview. They are instead a veritable beehive of stories that contain, frame, and constitute the core of the messages from God, and hence hopefully also what is remembered and recorded in the hearts and minds of the Saints. These stories are not childish expressions of some purer abstract truth that, with the help of Plato or Aristotle, can be fashioned into a tight, finished system. The Saints do not do theology that way. Instead, they see in such endeavors the result of the falling away that made a restoration necessary. The Saints read the scriptures as essentially narratives setting out both God’s purposes and plans and the halting human responses at this stage in a great, ongoing drama. The Saints also tell stories about their own encounters with the divine in the present.

If one insists on using the word *theology*, then what the Saints do is a kind of *narrative theology*. The Saints find themselves in a network

25. For an explanation for why this seems to be so, see my essay “Knowing Brother Joseph Again,” *FARMS Review* 18/1 (2006): xiv–xx.

26. Martin E. Marty, foreword to *Mormonism in Dialogue with Contemporary Christian Theologies*, ed. Donald W. Musser and David L. Paulsen (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2007), vi. For an analysis of the significance of this radical difference between both Protestant (including contemporary evangelical theologies) and Roman Catholic ways of doing theology, and the primarily narrative and experiential mode of understanding divine things, see my essay “Debating Evangelicals,” *FARMS Review* 20/2 (2008): xxiv–xxvi.

of narratives about divine and human things, with their own personal story as yet unfinished, since they see themselves on probation and hence being tested and instructed by God.

The apostle Paul warned of mere human wisdom, which he contrasted sharply with the wisdom of God as found in the Holy Messiah or Christ (see 1 Corinthians 1:17–25; 2:6–16). He placed what he witnessed being taught in Athens in the various schools of philosophy—that is, by the students of Plato, the Stoics, and so forth—in the category of empty and deceptive human traditions. Paul also contrasted being in Christ to such vain and foolish things (Colossians 2:8).

The faith of the Saints is thus Mantic and not Sophic, for it sides with the wisdom of Jerusalem and not Athens, and it rejects the notion that the two must be melded into a single ahistoric system of thought. To attempt such a melding damages both. When witnessing or testifying, as well as they can, the Saints give reasons for the faith that is in them. They do not begin with syllogisms proving a First Thing that created everything out of nothing and at that moment determined everything that will ever happen in exact detail. Instead, they tell the story of their own immediate encounter with divine things, and they link their story to the restoration of the fulness of the gospel through Joseph Smith, to the recovery of the Book of Mormon, and then to the Bible and to a salvation history running back to events in the heavens prior to the world as we now know it.²⁷

“According to Human Tradition”²⁸

Despite Geisler’s fondness for Roman Catholic theologians who endeavored to fashion a formal, systematic theology by invoking categories borrowed from the various schools of philosophy, he is very much aware of the dangers of what he describes as “alien systems of thought that have invaded Christianity down through the centuries.”²⁹

27. See Louis Midgley, “Two Stories, One Faith,” *FARMS Review* 19/1 (2007): 55–79.

28. This phrase is borrowed from Colossians 2:8 (NRSV, AMSB, NAB).

29. Norman L. Geisler, “Beware of Philosophy: A Warning to Biblical Scholars,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 42/1 (1999): 3. This was a presidential address to the Evangelical Theological Society, 19 November 1998.

He does not see Roman Catholic theologians like Augustine and Thomas Aquinas borrowing from Plato and Aristotle as instances of the nefarious impact of “alien systems of thought.” The reason is that he insists that at least some “alien systems” are useful because they provide the conceptual foundation for evangelical theology. “The truth is that Aristotle and his distant pupil Aquinas,” according to Geisler, “have been of great service to evangelicals.” The reasons he offers are that Aristotle “believed in the correspondence theory of truth, the fundamental laws of logic, and the historical-grammatical hermeneutic—all of which are essential to the preservation of evangelical theology.”³⁰ None of this is explained, but merely asserted.

Geisler grants that he is “aware of the errors of Aristotle,” none of which he mentions. Instead, he asserts “that Thomas Aquinas, known for his use of Aristotelian concepts, rejected all the errors of Aristotle. In short, the Aristotle he used had to repent, be baptized and catechized before he was serviceable to Christian thought.”³¹ He does not explain what he thinks was going on with Augustine’s vigorous effort to blend a form of Platonism with the Bible. Was Augustine able to baptize Plato? It seems that the “alien systems” are merely the ideologies Geisler finds objectionable. The others get a pass, and hence jumbling together two competing types of wisdom—that is, of Athens and Jerusalem—is fine, if the results ground evangelical theology.

Geisler lists thirteen types of dangerous “philosophies” that evangelicals must now avoid. When he lambasts presumably dangerous philosophies, his notion of what constitutes “philosophy” is remarkably loose. One of these alien systems is actually “Aristotelianism,”³² but not, of course, the Thomist version of Aristotle. Geisler sometimes identifies a writer commonly recognized as a philosopher in his catalogue of dangerous ideologies. For example, he mentions Benedict Spinoza, David Hume, Immanuel Kant, Georg Wilhelm Hegel, Martin

30. Geisler, “Beware of Philosophy,” 12. Geisler cites his book *Thomas Aquinas: An Evangelical Appraisal* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985). Compare with his book *What Augustine Says* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1982).

31. Geisler, “Beware of Philosophy,” 12. It seems that Geisler believes in a kind of forced baptism of the dead.

32. Geisler, “Beware of Philosophy,” 12.

Heidegger, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and William of Occam. But some of those he names are simply not philosophers. Examples include Karl Barth,³³ the great Swiss-German Neo-Orthodox theologian whom some but not all evangelical scholars draw upon.³⁴ Geisler's fundamentalist proclivities glisten in his diatribe about what he calls "evolutionism," where his targets are Herbert Spencer and Charles Darwin.³⁵ He issues dire warnings about "historical criticism," "anthropological monism," "Platonic allegorism," or "conventionalism." Geisler's list of evil "isms" seems to be his way of settling accounts with evangelical authors whose orthodoxy he disputes. His so-called "intellectual and spiritual advice" to fellow evangelicals is an attempt to stem the tide of heresy sweeping through the ranks of evangelical scholars.³⁶ The evangelical center does not seem to hold; bickering over the fine points or the foundational issues continues to plague evangelicals.

Only God Can Save Us . . .

Those who preach what they believe is the "orthodox religion," if they are Protestants, claim that God is necessarily limited to the Bible *alone*. But of course they simply cannot mean only the Bible since they also have in mind the creeds, the speculation of theologians and the deliberations of councils, and so forth—that is, the traditions of men, and not, from their own perspective, divine special revelations, because the canon and also the heavens are closed. They are faced with reading the Bible from a variety of interpretive frameworks that the authors of *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals* admit are grounded in what amounts to the wisdom of Athens. They also face an array of sometimes bitter internecine squabbles within and also struggles with Roman Catholics without, as well as with a host of competing, often secular faiths with no Christian pretensions. And they face in Europe

33. Geisler, "Beware of Philosophy," 9.

34. For an example of a prominent evangelical theologian in thrall to Karl Barth, see Bernard L. Ramm, *After Fundamentalism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983). Other evangelicals have had a low opinion of Barth, for example, Carl F. H. Henry, an early influential editor of *Christianity Today*, and also Cornelius Van Til.

35. Geisler, "Beware of Philosophy," 7–8.

36. Geisler, "Beware of Philosophy," 14–19.

and elsewhere the ebbing away of the sea of faith.³⁷ They call for an alliance with Roman Catholics, whatever their differences, in the hope that this might help stem the tide. Geisler has none of these generous prudential sentiments when he turns toward the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. When that happens, and it has happened, he appears to ally himself with unseemly anti-Mormon countercult bottom-feeders.³⁸

The Story of Salvation: An Alternative View

During the Messiah's visit to the Nephites, he explained that he had, with his death and resurrection, fulfilled the old covenant he had made with Moses. Animal sacrifice and the other ritual indicators of covenant identity were henceforth to be replaced with a "broken heart and contrite spirit" (3 Nephi 9:20) manifest by faithful obedience to the new testament or covenant. He promised to justify before his Father those who have shown by their deeds that they have endured well their probationary mortal test. This justification does not commence the journey of faith since it comes after one has been true and faithful by yielding to the sanctifying, purifying, cleansing work of the Holy Spirit. It is at the final judgment, when the books are opened and we are all judged by our deeds, that the final justification takes place. If one has turned to God, repented of sin, put one's trust in the Holy One of Israel, entered into a covenant with him beginning with baptism, and then subsequently sought and accepted the spiritual cleansing or purification known as the baptism of fire or of the Holy Spirit, then one can hope to be vindicated in that final court scene.

Justification is what takes place, if and only if one has been sanctified, which is not an event but a long, difficult process in which one is gradually purged of sin and built up little by little through repentance and obedience to God. The virtues of faith, hope, and love are

37. See Matthew Arnold, "Dover Beach."

38. See Norman L. Geisler et al., *The Counterfeit Gospel of Mormonism* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1998). For my comments on the quirks in Geisler's criticisms of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, see my essay "Orders of Submission," *FARMS Review* 18/2 (2006): 193 and especially note 14.

educated habits that come through sometimes bitter experience and much pleading for God's mercy. One must, of course, have relied upon the merits and mercy of the Lord and thereby have been separated to God—that is, sanctified from the ways of the world so as to become a Saint or Holy One (*hagioi*). Mercy, which is entirely necessary, simply cannot rob justice (Alma 42:25). Our justification is possible only through the merits and mercy of the Holy One of Israel, whose seed or children we seek to become through the painful rebirth we all should desire above mere worldly goods.

In virtually the closing words in the Book of Mormon, after mention is made of the covenant that the Eternal Father has made with the house of Israel, we find these words: “Come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness.” Then we are admonished to “love God” without reservation. If these things are done, “then is his grace sufficient for you” (Moroni 10:32). This affirmation is then followed with this additional conditional statement: “If ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and deny not his power, then are ye *sanctified in Christ by the grace of God*, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become *holy, without spot*” (Moroni 10:33).

The blood of the Christ, the Holy One of Israel, covers or hides our sins. We use the English word *atone* for this covering of sin. To be numbered among the seed or children of Jesus Christ, one must have been initially cleansed of the sins of the world. An initial cleansing (or remission) takes place at baptism. Then through obedience to the terms of the covenant made with God, and with the mercy of God forgiving sins, one may become a genuine Saint. One has then been delivered or rescued—that is, saved (*soteria*)—from the disease and distress of this world, delivered from the chains of darkness and brought into the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ.³⁹

We are also told that at the final judgment, when we all will be judged by our deeds or works, those who have genuinely “come unto

39. Preachers sometimes ask the Saints, “When do you know you have done enough?” The answer is that we are all beggars before God (Mosiah 4:18–20).

Christ” will be acquitted or declared righteous before the Most High God. Mercy cannot rob justice. Only if we have been true and faithful will the Lord declare to the Most High God that we are justified. All will receive what they truly deserve. The faithful—through their repentance, subsequent faithfulness, and the mercy of the Lord—will avoid the justice that awaits those who refuse to turn to the Holy One of Israel and seek his mercy. Justification in this scenario follows sanctification.

The Gospel according to Jesus

The scriptures do not teach that one becomes a disciple of Jesus Christ by being justified *in one’s sins* at the moment one confesses Christ through the imputation of an *alien* righteousness upon depraved sinners. Instead, we become part of the community of Saints or People of God by making a covenant with him and bearing faithfully his name in the world. Christ saves us by rescuing us from the spiritual prison and darkness we have created for ourselves by our own sins, for which we are accountable as responsible moral agents. He does this as one might rescue a sailor on a sinking ship or heal a person with a deadly disease. Christ saves us from spiritual death by atoning for (or covering) our sins with the blood he sacrificed to fulfill the ancient covenant. We flourish in the kingdom of God as his covenant people by obedient faithfulness. It is Christ who forgives us, sanctifies us, and then also gives us the glorious gift of eternal life, or the fullness of life, if and when we are eventually fully sanctified and finally justified.

All must eventually “come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny [themselves] of all ungodliness, and love God” (Moroni 10:32). Then and only then is his grace “sufficient” for us. Through his grace—his gift given to us in return for our gift of diligently striving to love and obey him—we can be declared “perfect in Christ” (v. 32) at the final judgment and allowed to enter into his presence and peace. In this scenario we find the core elements of the plan of redemption (or happiness). We begin the necessary rebirth by making a covenant that has conditions, obedience to which ultimately determines whether

we are blessed or cursed, and hence whether we are justified in the final court scene. If we are true and faithful to the covenant we have made with him, then Jesus Christ, our advocate against the demonic accuser, will vindicate (justify) us in the final judgment. We must turn (or return) to God, place our trust in him alone, open ourselves to the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, genuinely seek to *remember and keep* his commandments, and endure to the end. This is what Jesus Christ himself set out as his doctrine (see 3 Nephi 11:31–40). This he called the rock upon which we must build, or we build on sandy foundations that will not withstand the fury of the inevitable storms of life or the wiles of the devil (v. 40).

Christ urged the Nephites to take upon themselves his name—that is, be known by their discipleship (see 3 Nephi 27:3–5). He also admonished them to “endure to the end” so that they could “be saved at the last day” (v. 6). His true and faithful disciples build upon the rock of his gospel (vv. 8–9). If this is done, then the Father will “show his own works” in our community (v. 10). Christ then described his gospel. He “came into the world,” he indicated, “to do the will of my Father, because he sent me” (v. 13). He then sketched salvation history: he was sent to be “lifted up upon the cross” so that afterwards he could draw all unto him (v. 14). “As I have been lifted up by men,” he said, “even so should men be lifted up by the Father, to stand before me, to be judged of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil,” which statement is repeated twice (vv. 14–15).

Those who repent and are baptized will be filled with the Holy Spirit, and if faithful, they will be cleansed and purified—that is, made Saints. If they endure the tests of mortal probation “to the end,” then they will be held guiltless at the final judgment. They are those who, according to the Messiah, will have “washed their garments in my blood, because of their faith, and the repentance of all their sins, and their faithfulness unto the end” (v. 19). The Messiah cautioned us that no unclean thing can enter into the kingdom of God, only “those who have washed their garments in my blood” (v. 19). They will have been “sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost” and thus made fit to “stand spotless . . . at the last day” (v. 20) and be justified.

We are constantly being told by our evangelical critics that we believe in what they call “works righteousness”—that is, that we can save ourselves through works, and hence that we deny the necessity of divine mercy or grace. This is rubbish. Instead, our scriptures teach that deeds or works are necessary, even if they are not sufficient for our entering into God’s presence and becoming one with him. When we are ultimately judged by our works, we must rely on the merits and mercy of the Holy One of Israel to justify us. This is possible if we have been sanctified by yielding to the purifying, cleansing work of the Holy Spirit, whose influence we seek as we renew our covenants. I testify that we must all rely on God’s tender mercies as we strive to love and obey him as obedient children to their parents, or as servants are wont to do to gain favor in the sight of their masters. This is the wisdom of Jerusalem unblemished by that of Athens.

The New Birth as a Covenant Cleansing

I have, I believe, provided evidence from the Book of Mormon that without the redemption from both sin and death made possible by the sacrifice of Jesus of Nazareth, and also without his mercy, we are all lost. The Saints have absorbed these teachings sufficiently to see a very large place for the sanctification that must precede the final justification, when everyone will be judged by their works rather than merely their words. What is not sufficiently well known is that the Saints now have strong support for their stance on these issues from a highly regarded evangelical scholar and churchman, N. T. (Tom) Wright, who has, much like Latter-day Saints, stressed the necessity of entering into and participating in salvation history so that one’s own story is drawn from and also melds with salvation history.

Wright’s compelling challenge to the foundational claim of the Protestant Reformation—that is, justification by faith alone—has been set forth in a series of books and essays.⁴⁰ Latter-day Saints should be

40. See the following works by N. T. Wright: *Justification: God’s Plan and Paul’s Vision* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009); *Paul: In Fresh Perspective* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005); *What Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997); and a host of similar and related

pleased with Wright's opinion (which rests upon a careful study of the New Testament in its Jewish setting) that becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ does not begin with getting oneself saved—that is, justified once and for all, come what may—but begins when one genuinely enters into a covenant with God and is henceforth governed by its conditions. Among other things, Wright argues that Paul was profoundly misunderstood by Augustine, and hence later by both Luther and Calvin. Why? The idea that one is saved—that is, justified in one's sinful, depraved state by the imputation of an alien righteousness—is exactly not what Paul taught, if Paul is correctly understood in his profoundly Jewish context.

I have sought to popularize Tom Wright among Latter-day Saints.⁴¹ The reason is that I believe it is unnecessary for the Saints to be pestered and berated and otherwise ridiculed and shoved around by evangelicals whose faith is fastened to the slogan “justification by faith alone.” Wright has managed to put evangelicals on the defensive on precisely the primary intellectual issue that the better-informed evangelicals, rather than countercultists selling their snake oil, see as either deficient or even missing in the faith of the Saints.

Evangelicals are simply wrong in believing that we become disciples of Jesus Christ by answering an altar call. Instead, we must covenant with God, beginning with baptism, in which we symbolically are born again as the seed of Jesus Christ. Then and only then can we be eventually justified if we genuinely experience the baptism of fire or the Holy Spirit and endure in faith to the end. If and only if our feet are solidly planted on the narrow path can we hope and even expect that a forgiving, merciful, and loving Lord will have good and sufficient reason to present us eventually to his Father as true and faithful and hence worthy of being in the presence of God. But now, here below, we must constantly strive to keep the commandments as well as

essays. Tom Wright has drawn sufficient attention that a major effort is under way to try to salvage what amounts to the primary defining element of Protestant theology. Wright has appended to *Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision* a useful listing of his own works and other relevant and related literature, including criticisms of his stance (see pp. 264–69).

41. See note 42 below.

we possibly can as we undergo the painful new birth that will cleanse and purify and sanctify us as his Saints if and only if we rely on the Holy One of Israel, whose gifts are always good. I see Tom Wright as a gifted, articulate ally on these crucial issues.⁴²

Some Comments on Contents

We are pleased to make available the most recent Neal A. Maxwell Lecture, in which Richard L. Anderson provides a retrospective look at the many reasons he has for his deep affection for both Jesus of Nazareth, the Holy Messiah or Christ, and Joseph Smith, the seer through whom the Lord restored the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We have also included a variety of essays in this issue, some of which I will highlight here.

One can be excused for wondering what can be found in Margaret Barker's *Christmas: The Original Story*. But it turns out that there is much in this volume of interest to Latter-day Saints. In a remarkably able review, John W. Welch has assembled a summary and commentary on the wonders and riches found in Barker's latest book. Barker finds evidence that the Christmas story has roots reaching back to a deep past, even before the organization of this world. In addition, Welch makes the many links between the Jewish temple cult and the entrance of the Holy Messiah into mortality clear and accessible. If only a portion of the rich detail Barker has amassed from various sources and traditions is sound, she has opened some wonderful belvederes revealing much of interest and importance to Latter-day Saints.

42. See my comments on Tom Wright's version of the so-called New Perspective on Paul found in my essay titled "Debating Evangelicals," *FARMS Review* 20/2 (2008): xxxvi–xxxviii. Also the Book Note on Wright's *Paul: In Fresh Perspective* in the *FARMS Review* 20/1 (2008): 260–63; compare the Book Notes in the *FARMS Review* 21/1 (2009): 216–20 with the Book Note on John Piper's *The Future of Justification: A Response to N. T. Wright*, found on pp. 223–24, which is an impassioned but civil effort to defend the Augustinian/Reformation dogma on justification by faith alone. In some volumes responding to Wright's New Perspective on Paul, we even have some tasteless, inaccurate anti-Mormon commentary. See Gary L. W. Johnson, "The Reformation, Today's Evangelicals, and Mormons," in *By Faith Alone: Answering the Challenge to the Doctrine of Justification*, ed. Gary L. W. Johnson and Guy P. Waters (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006).

In this issue of the *Review*, William Hamblin examines a curious book entitled *god is not Great*. Its author, christopher hitchens,⁴³ is perhaps the most outlandish in the stable of New Atheists. Why focus on such an author?

It is not entirely a secret that atheists in the ancient world were a rather shy and retiring lot. There were several reasons for this. In addition to possible dire consequences from those anxious to defend regimes grounded on opinions about divine things and the moral/legal order, premodern atheists also seem to have been keenly aware of the dire consequences for the social order of a bold public atheism.⁴⁴ The ultimate reason for their reticence was a recognition that belief in divine things, however understood, provided a necessary mandate or sanction for the moral and legal order. Premodern atheists were thus fully cognizant of the utility of belief in the Gods, which they recognized afforded an ultimate sanction for their regimes, as well as a proximate vehicle for an indoctrination in a salutary public morality, and thereby provided a palliative taming of otherwise unruly desires and passions.⁴⁵ Without such a salutary *pharmakon*, they often understood that a civil society was replaced by war not only in words but in dreadful deeds.

It is only in the modern world that a public atheism has been made fashionable among social elites, taught or assumed in universities, celebrated by the media, and thereby shouted from the rooftops. Modern public atheism has tended to claim that faith in God is now an unnecessary consolation for diseases for which some government program does or could provide well-being or some science could provide a therapy or even a cure. Currently, especially in Europe, we see the toadstooling of secular regimes, where talk of divine things is

43. I have chosen to style this name in lowercase because this famous author has established his own rule of not capitalizing the proper noun *God*.

44. For a wise introduction to this matter, see Leo Strauss, "Preface to Spinoza's Critique of Religion," in Strauss, *Liberalism: Ancient and Modern* (New York: Basic Books, 1968), 255–57; and compare Louis Midgley, "The First Steps," *FARMS Review* 17/1 (2005): xxi–xxv.

45. For some details, see Louis Midgley, "The Utility of Faith Reconsidered," in *Revelation, Reason, and Faith*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002).

excluded from the public square. And we also see in America a flush of very belligerent, blunt, bold atheism. This so-called New Atheism is hardly of the same intellectual quality as the earlier, robust atheism proclaimed by Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, and others who saw all talk of divine things as a justification for enslavement and as either an illusion or delusion. Instead, it is rude and crude, vulgar and overconfident. However, even with their idiosyncrasies, the New Atheists seem to me to be more intellectually interesting than Protestant preachers with a desire to attack the faith of the Saints. In addition, those Saints who for whatever reason go missing enter a vacuum and hence must find a new, secular religion to justify their treason. They are much more likely to turn to some version of atheism. This explains why we have included Professor Hamblin's examination of Christopher Hitchens's bizarre book.

Those who might otherwise put down roots in the gospel of Jesus Christ are unfortunately sometimes tilted away from doing so by sectarian anti-Mormon preachers whose idea of witnessing to their own faith is to launch promiscuous attacks on the genuine faith of others. One of these, the Reverend Shawn McCraney, has a weekly call-in show on KTMR-TV20 in Salt Lake City. Those who have witnessed McCraney's performances or who have read his book may wonder at the very gentle but also devastating response by Blair Hodges. McCraney, who appears to be both sponsored by and also a disciple of Chuck Smith's Los Angeles-based Calvary Chapel countercult, treats his TV audience to a rash of unseemly diatribes aimed at the faith of Latter-day Saints. Hodges has provided a modest, kindly response to a dreadful, self-published book by McCraney, who was once, he boasts, a very flawed, highly hypocritical Saint, until he came to believe that he had suddenly managed to get his seat locked up in heaven. He could then justify being a truly eccentric critic of his former faith.

We have also included the following in this issue of the *Review*: (1) some observations by Stephen Ricks on elements of *Journey of Faith*, a remarkable film produced by the Maxwell Institute on the Book of Mormon; (2) Brant Gardner's close and, I believe, helpful look at John Lund's popular treatment of the Book of Mormon—whatever flaws

Gardner finds in Lund's book are, from my perspective, rather minimal, especially when compared with the recent and rather bizarre, amateurish efforts to sell the idea that the events described in the Book of Mormon took place either around the Great Lakes or in Peru; (3) Stephen Smoot's thoughtful examination of Michael Ash's most recent book, which is an effort to set out evidences for the truthfulness of the restoration; and (4) Grant Hardy's learned reflections on two of the newly published versions of the English text of the Book of Mormon.

And, finally, we have included Matthew Roper's very detailed examination of the claim that there once was a second and entirely lost second novel by Solomon Spalding that somehow became the historical basis for the Book of Mormon. This claim is being revived in various ways by quarreling sectarian and secular critics, both of whom are anxious to breathe new life into the rather moribund Spalding explanations of the Book of Mormon. Latter-day Saints, and most of their critics, now see any version of the Spalding theory as the least plausible naturalistic account of the Book of Mormon. But this fact only energizes those who are deeply into conspiracy theories. Though the idea that Joseph Smith, in league with various others, especially Sidney Rigdon but also Oliver Cowdery, was involved in a dark conspiracy to somehow fashion the Book of Mormon by borrowing from a lost manuscript for a novel has, since World War II, been rather routinely rejected even by those not at all sympathetic to Joseph Smith. There are, however, now two competing if not warring factions who have dedicated their lives to reviving the Spalding corpse. One faction, composed of sectarian critics of the Church of Jesus Christ, got its initial sectarian indoctrination from the notorious "Dr." Walter R. Martin, the father of the countercult industry in America.⁴⁶ This faction clings to the hope that they can find a way to pull the Church of Jesus Christ from its historical foundations by building a case for the Spalding theory. These detractors, currently being led by Arthur Vanick, after falling flat with their first attempt, have been struggling to rise from the ashes with a heavily revised, more

46. The fruit of this indoctrination can be seen in the remarks in the Reverend George A. Mather's foreword to the 2005 version of *Who Really Wrote the Book of Mormon?* See note 1 above for details.

detailed, and somewhat less bizarre version of their earlier stunningly flawed effort. This explains why we have published still another long, detailed examination of some of the textual debris and the assumptions with which they are read. Matthew Roper has become the authority on Spalding speculation.⁴⁷

Editor's Picks

It is, of course, difficult to assign exact levels of merit to worthwhile books. And, as we have previously done, we have included in our ranking a few publications that are briefly reviewed in our Book Notes section.

This is the scale that we use in our rating system:

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

And now for the results:

- **** *The Joseph Smith Papers: Revelations and Translations, Manuscript Revelation Books*
- *** Margaret Barker, *Christmas: The Original Story*
- *** Terryl L. Givens, *When Souls Had Wings: Pre-mortal Existence in Western Thought*
- *** S. Kent Brown and Peter Johnson, eds., *Journey of Faith: From Jerusalem to the Promised Land*
- ** Michael R. Ash, *Of Faith and Reason: 80 Evidences Supporting the Prophet Joseph Smith*
- ** Frederick M. Huchel, *The Cosmic Ring Dance of the Angels: An Early Christian Rite of the Temple*

47. See Matthew Roper, "The Mythical 'Manuscript Found,'" *FARMS Review* 17/2 (2005): 7–140, in which the work of Vanick and his associates is dissected.

Acknowledgments

This number of the *Review* would not have been possible without the dedicated efforts of its contributors. We owe much to these volunteers. As editors, we engage in strategic planning, which includes the delicate business of charming an ever-widening circle of specialists and enthusiasts into providing sound and ample content without remuneration. We are also much indebted to a small but mighty production team at the Maxwell Institute: Don Brugger and editing intern Sophie Barth, copyediting; Alison Coutts, editorial review and typesetting; and Sandra Thorne and Sabrina Clifford, proofreading.

PROBING THE LIVES OF CHRIST AND JOSEPH SMITH

Richard Lloyd Anderson

Before probing the lives of Christ and Joseph Smith, I want to thank this special audience for gathering in the cause of religious research. I especially recognize several individuals. Great appreciation goes to director Jerry Bradford and other Maxwell Institute leaders for inviting me to represent the value of studying revelation with careful scholarship. Elder Maxwell's companion, Colleen Hinckley, is here, and children Rebecca, Cory, Nancy, and Jane and companions, on this occasion of honoring Elder Maxwell and what he stood for. My wife, Carma de Jong Anderson, and our children are here, all of whom sacrificed to enable my lifetime studies. Former students and colleagues are present, including Larry Porter, who has done such valuable work on Joseph Smith's early life. Retired teachers know that many students later become their mentors.

President Samuelson began this lecture series by sharing memories of Elder Maxwell and his ideals in action. Elder Bruce Hafen followed with insights into religious truth and into Elder Maxwell gained as an alert biographer. Many feel close to Elder Maxwell personally from his personable communication in public and private. Perhaps we knew him as a respected administrator at the University of Utah. Or we had direct contact when he became Church Commissioner of Education

This Annual Neal A. Maxwell Lecture was originally given at Brigham Young University on 20 March 2009.

and then served in higher levels before becoming the impressive apostle who was both friend and teacher. And how we admired this man given the simultaneous blessing and trial of demonstrating his total integrity under physical suffering and leaving with honor.

Could I create a similar feeling about the early Christians who would meet to recall Christ and his first apostles? Some of our great-grandparents were in this situation in regard to Joseph Smith. T. Edgar Lyon, peerless Nauvoo historian and father of two senior BYU faculty members, wrote about the “old Nauvooers” in his Salt Lake Valley ward who would relate their experiences with Joseph Smith.¹ My study has concentrated on the areas of New Testament and Joseph Smith period history. I’ve never been able to exclude either path from my investigation. Once I explained my Joseph Smith work to a senior and respected New Testament scholar from Duke University, and he strongly advised me to concentrate on Joseph Smith because that was a more accessible topic, whereas early Christianity was remote and to some extent debatable. This lecture reflects ancient and modern research. I continue to be impressed with the parallel claims and comparable validations of early Christianity and the restored church. Arguments you may make for the divinity of Christ and the truth of the original church are matched by similar arguments for the restoration of the gospel. Mormon leaders have said from the beginning that you can’t divide the Bible from the restoration if you are going to be consistent. I will return to Joseph Smith after explaining why I accept the claims of Jesus and his apostles as historically valid.

Foundations of the Four Canonical Gospels

Time restricts what can be said about early Christianity, so I want to work with this subject structurally, showing that many evidential chains verify the historicity of the canonical biographies of Christ. Here we are probing the life of Christ by showing the reliability of

1. T. Edgar Lyon, “Recollections of ‘Old Nauvooers,’” *BYU Studies* 18/2 (1978): 143–50. Quotations in this printing follow spelling and punctuation in the original version. My appreciation is extended to editor Alison Coutts for capably processing the manuscript version of my lecture.

the four Gospels, which record his miraculous power, doctrine, atonement, and resurrection. Their spectacular content goes against the academic habit of ruling out the supernatural. But using legitimate methods in ancient studies, we should be confident that the apostolic generation left records of the Savior's life and teachings. Early in my career I attended an annual convention of the American Historical Association and took a lunch break with De Lamar Jensen, outstanding early modern history professor at Brigham Young University. We sat by a couple of Americanists, one of whom nearly exploded in surprise as he heard the early dates of our disciplines. His first question was an incredulous, "But where are your archives?" The question was essentially, how do you re-create a past that is so long ago?

Christ's Ministry in Paul's Letters

Objective history is constantly based on contemporary records. This reconstruction of the past should depend on firsthand sources, or information traceable to them, which is the question our U.S. history friend was asking. He could go to the National Archives, presidential libraries, newspapers, and so on but could not imagine what kind of records were kept by premodern societies. Christianity emerged in the early Roman Empire, which left behind a huge amount of literary and historical works, copied and recopied because they were in demand, not to speak of private letters and legal documents on papyri, as well as inscriptions of imperial decrees, commemorations, and grave monuments. For the New Testament, I am especially interested in parallel secular collections of letters, for instance, from Roman senator Cicero in the first century BC and from Roman senator Pliny the Younger, bridging the end of the first century AD.

After a consulship, prominent senators were eligible for provincial governorships, and Pliny the Younger became imperial legate over Pontus and Bithynia, adjoining the Black Sea in what today is northern Turkey. Trajan was emperor, ruling between AD 98 and AD 117. Pliny's letters to Trajan combine flattery and administrative need, and one request asks how to treat Christians, who were suspect in the Roman system for disloyalty to the state. Pliny describes putting

some to death without shaking their convictions, but also finding they were relatively harmless, meeting early to renew vows of honesty and chastity, and meeting later to eat a common meal. Not daring to follow common sense, Pliny wrote to the emperor, who answered that a rigid rule was not possible, though anonymous accusations should be rejected; but he did give the general rule that confessed Christians must be punished and recanting Christians should be exonerated upon sacrifice to Roman gods.²

Roman and Christian historians do not question this letter or the collection it comes from. It is attested by early manuscripts, fits into what is known in its time period, and has come to us labeled with the name of Pliny the Younger and grouped with like letters without serious contemporary challenges. If secular historians accept Pliny's letters, why can't religious historians accept Christian letters of the same period with equal or superior attestation? As a professional in ancient history and Christian history, I sense a double standard. Many religious scholars think that acceptance of all New Testament books is uncritical. However, unjustified skepticism can also skew history when there are substantial reasons for accepting the validity of a Gospel or of an apostolic letter. Early acceptance of authorship is significant in judging the historicity of most classical works. The religious historian may demand "proof" for a New Testament book that is unrealistic in ancient history. Religious preconceptions aside, evidence for authenticity of New Testament letters mostly equals or exceeds that for letters or books accepted from prominent personalities in antiquity.

The early collection of fourteen letters of Paul is comparable to the letters of Pliny the Younger. Nine of Paul's letters to churches and groups were found in a papyrus collection transcribed around AD 200, which gives a very short gap between actual composition and the oldest known copy.³ New Testament manuscripts are generally dated much closer to the time of composition than most classical writings

2. Pliny the Younger, *Letters* 10.96-97, in Pliny [the Younger], *Letters and Panegyricus*, trans. Betty Radice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969).

3. See the facsimile edition of Frederic G. Kenyon, *The Chester Beatty Biblical Papyri, Fasciculus III Supplement* (London: Emery Walker, 1936).

are. The AD 200 collection just mentioned, part of the Chester Beatty Papyri, contains all letters that Paul wrote to churches or groups save one, 2 Thessalonians, which was obviously part of the copied manuscript since pages have flaked off and 1 Thessalonians is one of the nine preserved letters. Hebrews is second in this early Pauline collection, placed right after Romans and before 1 Corinthians, which supports my minority view that Paul wrote Hebrews in rabbinical style to strengthen Greek-speaking Jewish converts.⁴

Paul's letters build a solid bridge to the four Gospels. As just suggested, authorship of given letters may be debated. That is not as significant as it sounds, for skepticism generates many spurious arguments. I accept the authorship of the fourteen letters attributed to Paul in the King James Bible. New Testament studies are flawed by trends and speculative theories not really capable of proof. Avoiding peripheral discussion here, I emphasize that the four letters whose Pauline authorship is least questioned are Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, and Galatians. They were championed by Reformers as embodying the doctrine of justification by faith, but they also tell most about Paul personally and his relationship with earlier apostles. The evidence for the core four is solid, though I think other letters have similar credibility. Yet given the wide recognition that Paul is the author of these four, we can pursue our source chain to the Gospels through 1 Corinthians.

Paul's Corinthian letters were written before AD 60, and Paul reviews what he taught in Corinth about AD 50. Like other letters, Paul wrote to strengthen and reconvert, but his passionate reminders take us into Corinthian meetings and state that Paul taught facts about Christ told by Peter and other apostles who were taught by Christ. A point of beginning is chapter 11 of 1 Corinthians, where Paul asks the Corinthians to take the bread and wine as Jesus commanded. Where did Paul get this information about Christ? He said, "For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you," followed by a detailed, fifth version of the Last Supper, consistent

4. Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2007), 193–98.

with the Gospels and close to the account in Luke. “Received of the Lord” reflects Paul’s confidence that what Christ said and did has been relayed to him intact. “Received of the Lord” does not refer to a known vision or revelation to Paul on that subject. But Paul does mention direct contacts with the Galilean apostles. In Galatians, Paul minimizes this contact to show the Galatians that his own revelations regarding Christ are as true as Peter’s. At the same time, Paul insists that both apostles had spent time together and saw eye to eye. In his words, three years after his Damascus vision, “I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days” (Galatians 1:18). In my generation a senior British scholar used acceptable sarcasm by asking whether Peter and Paul spent this two weeks just talking about the weather. The point is that Paul did not invent the divine Christ, as many scholars so often say, but relayed what earlier apostles knew from walking with the Master.

However, a countermodel to this biblical picture is advanced by perhaps the majority of influential New Testament scholars. They contend that the Gospels were produced by doctrinal and historical evolution. Here is a simplified version of this reasoning: A late date for all canonical Gospels is presupposed, from about AD 70 to 110.⁵ Christ lived to about AD 33, so what was happening in the third of a century between his death and the biographical era beginning about AD 70? Revisionary scholarship claims that unnamed missionaries circulated stories by mid-century, telling about Christ’s parables, miracles, and sayings, all patterns or forms, hence the name “form criticism.” The

5. Christ’s long prophecy about the temple’s destruction (Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21) was remarkably fulfilled in AD 70, when a Roman army plundered the city and demolished the temple. Without trusting divine prediction, liberal scholars contend that these chapters incorporate many historical details and thus were written after AD 70. But this is inference, not evidence. A counterinference is based on the anticlimactic end of Acts, which takes Paul to Rome and abruptly ends before he was brought to Caesar’s judgment about AD 63, which most likely indicates that the final chapter of Acts was written before this hearing was held. Since Acts is a sequel to Luke’s Gospel (Acts 1:1), dating Acts to about AD 62 would suggest that Luke wrote his Gospel when Paul was imprisoned in Israel about AD 58–60; and Luke’s preface (Luke 1:1–3) speaks of earlier, orderly Christian narratives, suggesting that Matthew and Mark were perhaps written at mid-century.

stories changed in the telling, and thus variant versions appear for similar events in the Gospels, which are based not on eyewitnesses of Christ's life, but rather on oral traditions as expanded in the middle third of the first century.

Here literary and historical source methods violently conflict. Instead of speculative "trajectories," consistent source scholars should accept Paul's mid-century letters, which indicate that some original apostles yet lived and with Paul were a force for maintaining Christ's doctrine and history. We have seen how Paul learned what Peter knew in their fifteen-day visit well before AD 40. We have seen how Paul depended on early information in teaching the significance of the Lord's Supper. And writing in the supposed period of shifting stories, Paul wrote 1 Corinthians well before AD 60, calling on that Christian branch not to abandon the historical resurrection that he and other apostles had been preaching for two decades. Telling the Corinthians a second time that he preached "what I also received," Paul testified that Christ "died for our sins" and "rose again the third day," which Paul supported by naming five appearances of the resurrected Christ, three of which are also in the four Gospels. Paul added that the first apostles would verify this information: "Therefore, whether it were I or they, so we preach and so ye believed" (1 Corinthians 15:1-11).

Instead of mid-century evolution, Paul's great Corinthian letter shows that the closing episodes of the Gospels came from personal knowledge of the original Christians and their leaders, including James, apostolic brother of the Lord, who was with Paul in Jerusalem on important occasions there. These leaders met when Paul came to Jerusalem to see Peter (Acts 9:27-30; Galatians 1:18-19). Paul and James were together with other apostles in the council that ruled on Gentile circumcision (Acts 15; Galatians 1-2), and they again conferred when Paul brought Gentile welfare funds to Jerusalem (Acts 21:17-26). Such documented dialogues with Peter and James are behind Paul's mid-century letters that closely reflect Christ's teachings on the Galilean mount (Matthew 5-7) and Christ's extended prophecy on the Mount of Olives (Matthew 24). Commenting on the "impressive list of parallels" between the Sermon on the Mount

and Romans 12–13, respected scholar F. F. Bruce added, “While none of our canonical Gospels existed at this time, the teaching of Christ recorded in them was current among the churches—certainly in oral form, and perhaps also in the form of written summaries.”⁶

Sources behind the Four Gospels

Authentic biographies recapture early years with oral history interviews or find various written records. An early-second-century Christian tells us that Mark is basically oral history and that Matthew incorporates early written records. The source is one Papias, bishop of Hierapolis, which anciently was in the Roman province of Asia, now western Turkey. Roughly a hundred miles to the west stood Ephesus, the famous coastal city where Paul labored three years and where several Christian sources place the apostle John in his later years. A number of fragments of Papias’s writings survive, showing that he searched for surviving memories of Jesus, but his extant writings give something equally valuable—what ancient Christians then knew about the origins of the Gospels of Matthew and Mark. Papias gave his source as “the elder John,” which I think was the aged apostle because other historical references to this period make that identification, as will be discussed. Papias included “the elder John” among “the Lord’s disciples,” in a context applying that phrase to the Jerusalem Twelve.⁷

6. F. F. Bruce, *The Letter of Paul to the Romans*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 212–13, cited in Richard Lloyd Anderson, “Paul’s Witness to the Historical Integrity of the Gospels,” in *Sperry Symposium Classics: The New Testament*, ed. Frank F. Judd Jr. and Gaye Strathearn (Salt Lake City: BYU Religious Studies Center and Deseret Book, 2006), 223. For detailed parallels of the teachings of Jesus in Paul, see pp. 217–27.

7. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.3–4, trans. Kirsopp Lake (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953), 292–93, with *elder* substituted here and in other quotations for Lake’s untranslated *presbyter*. Eusebius (ca. AD 260–ca. AD 340), bishop of Caesarea and the first major church historian, possessed a Palestinian manuscript collection and quotes materials not preserved elsewhere. In this contested passage, Papias states he preserved what the first disciples said, including John, and what present disciples are saying, “Aristion and the elder John,” which I take to mean that Papias had earlier quotations from the apostle John and current quotations also. Eusebius thinks the passage speaks of two Christian leaders named John, but good evidence is lacking for a second prominent John in that area.

The point is that Papias is relaying information from a survivor of the generation that was familiar with the origins of the four Gospels.

Papias said he had reliably learned the following: “Matthew collected the oracles in the Hebrew language, and each one interpreted them as he could.”⁸ Here *oracles* translates a term clearly meaning “sacred words,” which indicates that the converted tax recorder (Matthew 9:9) also recorded the teachings of the Lord. But that compilation was written in the language of Palestinian Jews, probably Aramaic, so it was not easily translated when the gospel first went to the Greek world, which took place by AD 40. Thus Matthew’s Aramaic compilation was much earlier than the present Gospel, written later for the Mediterranean world in Greek, with Greek translations of Hebraic terms.

Luke’s preface concisely explains that his information came from “the eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word,” a double reference to the apostles chosen by Christ who then presided over the Mediterranean church. As Paul’s traveling companion, Luke learned what Paul knew about Jesus and talked with other apostles and early disciples. Moreover, Luke was a doctor (Colossians 4:14) with observable literary skill and who perhaps made notes in anticipation of presenting Christ’s life to the Greco-Roman world, where he was clearly at home. Luke’s stated methods (Luke 1:1–3) and the quality of his work well equal that of the most respected Roman and Greek historians, so I think that revisionary scholars are arbitrary in rejecting the claim of careful historical presentation expressed in Luke’s preface. The criterion of apostolic eyewitnesses also appears in the Papias report of how Mark’s Gospel came to be. Just before his Matthew comment, Papias explained that “the elder John” described that Mark traveled with Peter (1 Peter 5:13), translated Peter’s recollections of what Jesus said and did, and accurately recorded Peter’s narratives in this shortest, most vivid of the above three Gospels, which are labeled “synoptic” because they have a “similar view” chronicling the life of Jesus.⁹

8. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.16, 1:297. The comment on Matthew immediately follows the quotation about Mark, which begins, “And the elder used to say this,” referring to “the elder John,” an introduction that contextually carries over to the Matthew statement. After *as*, I have deleted *best*, which is not in the Greek text.

9. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.14–15; see also 2.15.1–2.

My final New Testament chain of information concerns the Gospel of John, which differs from the other three Gospels by including many conversations and teachings of Christ that are not in the synoptic story. As indicated, several early church fathers speak of the apostle John's late residence in the large city of Ephesus. Traceable details come from Irenaeus (ca. AD 130–ca. AD 200), bishop of Lyons, in present France. As a boy Irenaeus lived north of Ephesus, in Smyrna, modern Izmir in western Turkey. The bishop there was Polycarp, martyred in AD 155 at age 86. Irenaeus vividly remembered how Polycarp described associating “with John and with the others who had seen the Lord, how he remembered their words, and what were the things concerning the Lord which he had heard from them.”¹⁰ Irenaeus heard Polycarp and clearly understood that Polycarp referred to the aging apostle John. Polycarp spoke of knowing “those who were conversant in Asia with John, the disciple of the Lord.” Irenaeus said this was one of the Twelve, stating that “John, the disciple of the Lord, who also had leaned upon his breast, did himself publish a Gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia.” Thus “John the disciple of the Lord,” referred to repeatedly by Irenaeus, is the John whose name is on the Gospel. Irenaeus elsewhere informs readers that the apostle John remained at Ephesus “until the times of Trajan” (AD 98–117),¹¹ which means this Gospel may have originated as late as the early second century. John's Gospel seems to assume that readers know the basics of Christ's life, which suggests it was written after the other three.

In review, each Gospel is based on primary or traceable secondary information. The synoptic Gospels tap three significant sources. These Gospels are independent of each other and yet broadly blend in reporting Christ's teachings, miracles, prophecies, suffering, and resurrection. Though these Gospels were composed later, they reach back to Matthew's early compilation of Jesus's teachings, Peter's recollections, and Luke's interviews of “eyewitnesses.” So the synoptic authors

10. Irenaeus, letter to Florinus, in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.20.6, 1:496–99.

11. Irenaeus quotations, in order of appearance, are in *Against Heresies*, 2.22.5; 3.1.1; 3.3.4, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Robertson and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981).

based their biographies on written and oral information from the generation that walked with Christ. In 1 Corinthians, Paul adds a fourth transmission of early information, producing a mini-Gospel that reiterates what he was told by apostles about the close of Christ's ministry and his resurrection. All this is far more than historical hearsay or general tradition, both of which claim to transmit history but only from unidentified sources. In the case of the synoptic Gospels and 1 Corinthians, information is relayed from identified and informed observers. Finally, John's Gospel is a firsthand account, obviously the last surviving apostle's most valued memories of the Master. It preserves data from the end of the apostolic age. The late-second-century bishop Irenaeus reported hearing the earlier bishop Polycarp, who repeated what he had learned by associating with "John and with the others who had seen the Lord."

Thus Irenaeus adds external data to the internal evidence of authorship of the Fourth Gospel: "According to John" stands at the beginning of innumerable copies of that Gospel, the earliest known dating to about AD 200 and linking with the close of Irenaeus's life.¹² "Which John" is answered by the Gospel's closing chapter, informing readers that the author is the disciple who leaned on the Savior's breast at the Last Supper (John 21:20–24). There was but one John among the original Twelve at this final feast. Thus the Fourth Gospel comes from the apostle John, who writes with slight indirection at the end, "We know that his testimony is true" (John 21:24). When *we* appears in such interjected comments in that Gospel, it is the editorial *we*, a self-effacing but clear assertion of first-person experience. Thus John's Gospel opens with the theme of intimate, personal observation: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). Moreover, the same apostle began his first letter with a powerful authentication of Christ's resurrection: "That which

12. The early copy mentioned is the near-complete Bodmer Papyrus II (P⁶⁶) and associated fragments. For description and date, see the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece*, rev. 27th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993), 687, with all variant headings naming John at p. 247.

was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life” (1 John 1:1).

Christ’s miraculous resurrection certifies that he accomplished the miraculous atonement. Every Gospel describes how he deliberately submitted to arrest the night before the crucifixion. Probably because the synoptic Gospels so well summarized Christ’s life and teachings, the apostle John could write a virtual appendix to what was known, devoting over a third of his space to the final week and the Savior’s explanations of his coming death. The last temple teaching in John prefigured Gethsemane, for Jesus prayed openly to be spared from the coming hour yet closed that petition by conceding that for life-giving death “came I unto this hour” (John 12:23–24, 27). Christ then testified that by being “lifted up” he would “draw all men unto me” (John 12:32–33). Jesus openly proclaimed that his greatest mission was “to save the world” (John 12:47), and within days he gave the apostles symbols of his atoning suffering and death: broken bread for his body and wine for his blood, which Jesus clearly said would be shed for the sins “of many” (Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:19). He defined the highest standard of love, “that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13), and personally maintained that standard of selflessness to the end. On investigation, details of this divine life came from those commissioned at the end to preach worldwide, baptize, and teach the converted “all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19–20; Mark 16:15–16; Luke 24:46–47). Could literate Christian founders imagine fulfilling this charge without written records about the life, teachings, and triumph of the Son of God?

Joseph Smith as a Prophet

I have used *probing* in regard to the Gospels because knowing Christ starts with the trustworthiness of the books that document his life. In the case of Joseph Smith, however, there are abundant early sources, so *probing* here applies more to selecting materials that best

illuminate his claims as a prophet, especially finding what those observers nearest him say. Before presenting materials that impress me positively about Joseph Smith, I would like to comment on whether believing historians ignore what is negative. The answer is partly that the LDS Church and independent LDS scholars are attempting to publish and analyze all available sources about the Mormon founder, whether perceived as positive or negative. For decades researchers have cast a wide net for materials in collections in and beyond Salt Lake City and Independence, Missouri. The Joseph Smith Papers Project stemmed from increasingly careful cataloguing and greater knowledge of and access to relevant sources during my lifetime. This immense LDS project brings together numerous full-time and other contributing scholars with the goal of editing all known documents produced by or received by Joseph Smith. My disclaimer is that I do not make policy nor speak for the church. But already the openness has been remarkable, and I understand that the only things to be withheld from publication are redundant materials—repetitious financial records, for instance. Ultimately, primary sources of everything Joseph Smith spoke, wrote, or dictated should be in this collection, which will pack several thousand documents into more than two dozen categorized volumes. Sources will be quality controlled by professional standards of text and commentary, with nationally recognized scholars included on the board of review. I am proud of a church that is willing to publicly share its archives and allow the world to see its founding prophet without stage props and without censoring his expressions. The commitment in time and resources is really astounding and could not be sustained without the initial aid of the late Larry H. Miller and the continuing support of his companion, Gail, and their children.

This avalanche of available Joseph Smith materials compels true scholars of every persuasion to be better informed on Joseph Smith sources. Lower judges strive to be accurate in their legal interpretations and avoid the embarrassment of reversal by appellate courts. I have always hoped that my historical work would stand the test of review, that is, the test of conclusions backed up by documents of the time, perceptively interpreted. History written by that method may be

supplemented but not reversed, because nothing can erase primary and responsible secondary sources on which it is based. As a historian of early Mormonism, I now have access to virtually all surviving sources, and only lack of industry or empathy can limit my understanding of Joseph Smith. What he became is huge in contrast to his limitations, which are mortal and understandable. The following issues convince me that this founding prophet was called and inspired of God in his lifetime mission.

Joseph Smith's First Vision

Whether or not one accepts the answer to Joseph Smith's first vocal prayer, Joseph should have credit for clearly framing one of the great religious questions of all time. His simple eloquence on the confusion of competing religions should deeply touch every sensitive person. As a young Mormon missionary, I retold that story to hundreds, and most at least listened with some degree of interest. Yet biographer Brodie dismisses Joseph's experience in the grove as "the elaboration of some half-remembered dream stimulated by the early revival excitement," or "it may have been sheer invention" to strengthen his prophetic career.¹³ This is a classic example of cheating on the outcome by silently limiting the possibilities, for Mrs. Brodie writes from a sophisticated plateau that is above the issue of whether a real God could appear to anyone. Yet a deity of power and concern could give someone a profound answer to this universal question, and the claimed answer requires a test far different from quibbling about the ages that Joseph vaguely remembered in different accounts of the First Vision.

Every converted Latter-day Saint knows that public revelation may be validated by private revelation—that God spiritually vindicates the word he has given by his Spirit (Moroni 10:4). Though this dimension is beyond the modern academic curriculum, the truly educated person should be aware of this additional insight, which is a major test of the First Vision. As a high school sophomore, I thoughtfully

13. Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 2nd ed. (New York: Knopf, 1971), 25.

read Joseph Smith's account in the Pearl of Great Price and strongly felt this was an actual experience told by an honest man. This was a distinct religious experience but also a personal reaction to unsophisticated narrative, for reading had long been my hobby. Arthur Henry King confronted this account as a seasoned literature and linguistics professor with international scholarly experience. He reflected that Joseph Smith's unstudied, straightforward words "deeply impressed" him, explaining: "He is not trying to make me cry or feel ecstatic. That struck me . . . for I could see that this man was telling the truth."¹⁴

Two objections have persisted against the First Vision, both pseudo-historical. The first is ironic, for early critics discredited the First Vision because of arbitrary limits on memory. The only well-known account was dictated eighteen years after the event; this is the record in the Pearl of Great Price, which is taken from the opening of Joseph Smith's manuscript history. More careful research turned up earlier accounts, principally one written in Joseph Smith's handwriting in late 1832. These earlier reports gave believers new details but critics more words to dissect, with a resulting theory that the story grew in retelling. Joseph Smith's defenders pointed out other possibilities, for instance, that additional aspects of the original experience came out in later accounts. Joseph's handwritten 1832 history enriched our understanding by describing how "the Lord" appeared to him, assured him of forgiveness through his atonement for mankind, informed him that no religious organization was his, and stated that he would come in glory.¹⁵ Though Joseph's report focused on the appearance and words of Christ, it by no means denied that the Father had appeared. Taking a part for the whole is a standard logical error, and historical sources often describe a vivid part of the picture without perspective on the broader interrelated events.

The problem is that Joseph Smith didn't spell out all the details in any one account. I'm a married man, and when I come home tired and

14. Arthur Henry King, *The Abundance of the Heart* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1986), 200–201.

15. The account is transcribed in Dean C. Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002), 9–14.

my wife asks me a question, sometimes I don't spell out all the details. Then I get a second and a third question because my wife is analytical enough that she would really like the full story and not a piece of it. But in every account, whether it's my son, Nathan, giving me graduation reminiscences today, or whether you think back to something significant that happened on your wedding day, when have you sat down and written the whole story? It's going to be a part of the story no matter what. And that's the intrinsic problem with Joseph's testimonies of the First Vision.

However, that possibility does not prevent some from claiming that describing the Son rules out a previous sequence of seeing the Father. So Mrs. Brodie upgraded her "half-remembered dream" to an "evolutionary fantasy," claiming "that 'the Lord' of the first version became two 'personages'" as Joseph related his experience afterward.¹⁶

Those who think deeply may be victimized by intellectual tunnel vision. The best historians retain perspective of all sources while studying a single source. In the familiar Pearl of Great Price account, Christ alone responded to Joseph's prayer after being introduced by the Father (JS—H 1:17). Most Latter-day Saints know that Joseph later defended his experience by saying, "I saw two Personages, and they did in reality speak to me" (v. 25), but in early printings the next phrase in the manuscript—"or one of them did"—was lost.¹⁷ To me this suggests that Christ was most vivid in Joseph's mind in 1832 as the one answering his question, though later retellings gave broader perspective to the whole experience.

The other main negative claim against the First Vision is also historically wanting because it oversimplifies Joseph Smith's story and then refutes the simplification. Reverend Wesley Walters died probably believing that he had disproved Joseph's First Vision story because he so well documented spectacular religious conversions in Palmyra during 1824 and 1825. The oversimplification emerged when he made a point of finding no evidence of such religious activity in Palmyra just before 1820, when Joseph Smith dated the First Vision (JS—H 1:14).

16. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 409; "Supplement" in 2nd edition.

17. Jessee, *Personal Writings*, 232.

By contrast, Brigham Young University professor Milton V. Backman Jr. showed that critics were not careful in reading the Pearl of Great Price account, which did not mention one localized revival but a sustained “unusual excitement” with the most substantial conversions not in the Palmyra area but in “the whole district of country” (v. 5).¹⁸ Yet a Walters associate still thinks that “the excitement of religion that Joseph Smith mentioned in his official account was the Palmyra revival of 1824–25.”¹⁹ However, according to Joseph Smith’s handwritten 1832 history, such a conclusion is based on looking for the wrong thing in the wrong time period. Even the Pearl of Great Price account shows that Joseph Smith had been investigating churches over a “process of time” (v. 8). But Joseph’s 1832 report states that his period of confusion lasted “from the age of twelve years to fifteen,” which would extend from December 23, 1817, to December 23, 1820.²⁰

These broad brackets mean that Joseph was intensely searching during the years 1818 and 1819, up to early 1820, the time of the First Vision (JS—H 1:14). We now know that a large Methodist camp meeting was held near Palmyra during June 19–23, 1818. This is found in the diary of Aurora Seager, a young circuit rider who left entries concerning these dates: “On the 19th I attended a camp-meeting at Palmyra. The arrival of Bishop Roberts, who seems to be a man of God and is apostolic in his appearance, gave a deeper interest to the meeting until it closed. On Monday the sacrament was administered; about twenty were baptized; forty united with the Church, and the meeting closed.”²¹ The harvest of forty new Methodists indicates an estimated crowd of at least 400 on the campground, with saturated sermons during five days from the visiting Methodist bishop and about a dozen senior preachers, all declaring to a largely unchurched

18. See Milton V. Backman Jr., *Joseph Smith’s First Vision*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980), 79–80; and Richard Lloyd Anderson, “Joseph Smith’s Testimony of the First Vision,” *Ensign*, April 1996, 15–16.

19. H. Michael Marquardt, *The Rise of Mormonism: 1816–1844* (Longwood, FL: Xulon, 2005), 639.

20. Jessee, *Personal Writings*, 10.

21. Aurora’s diary was extensively copied in Reverend E. Latimer, *The Three Brothers: Sketches of the Lives of Rev. Aurora Seager, Rev. Micah Seager, Rev. Schuyler Seager, D. D.* (New York, 1880), 21–22, microfiche at Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

crowd the need for Christ and personal repentance. None in the small village of Palmyra and vicinity would be ignorant of this great gathering for that area, broadly coinciding with the family's settlement on their farm. According to Joseph, in that period an unusual religious excitement arose with the Methodists (JS—H 1:5), and the 1818 Palmyra camp meeting shows that his recollection had a factual basis.

The Book of Mormon Witnesses

An early revelation promised the Three Witnesses a view of the plates with the command that they should testify of their experience so “that my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., may not be destroyed,” and also so that God's latter-day purposes should be fulfilled (Doctrine and Covenants 17:4). It is a huge step from an individual assertion to a group verification. In 1947 our mission plan devoted the second lesson to the testimony of the Three Witnesses, that they had seen an angel displaying the plates while they heard a divine voice certifying the translation as correct. That lesson also covered the testimony of the Eight Witnesses, that in an ordinary situation they had lifted the metallic record and turned its engraved leaves. In law school I was motivated to learn more about these eleven men who had signed formal statements on the above experiences and had freely answered questions. Church literature then contained many reports of talking with these eleven witnesses. Realizing that their statements were of primary importance in verifying Joseph Smith's mission, I resolved to locate all surviving, original documents pertaining to these witnesses, whether in Latter-day Saint archives, what is now Community of Christ archives, and libraries specializing in Mormon collections or among descendants and other private sources.

What began as a serious hobby turned into decades of research, and I now have files on more than two hundred occasions when a Book of Mormon witness responded to a question or many questions about his experience with the plates. These are in the form of statements or conversations, and contact with witnesses was made during Joseph Smith's lifetime or even several decades later, since Martin Harris, John Whitmer, and David Whitmer lived until the last quarter of the

nineteenth century. Most interviewers were believers in the Book of Mormon, mainly Latter-day Saints or Reorganized Latter Day Saints, but many were essentially disinterested bystanders, such as newspaper reporters. Most of these contacts with the Book of Mormon witnesses have now been published, often in abbreviated form, but my files contain a number of unpublished interviews and are essentially a master archive on the subject.²² Included as “interviews” are written reaffirmations by Martin Harris, David Whitmer, Hyrum Smith, and John Whitmer. These accounts are often brief but move up to detailed interrogations. Many reports, especially from the Eight Witnesses, are simple affirmations that their written testimonies in the Book of Mormon are accurate.²³ By contrast, David Whitmer outlived all the witnesses and allowed detailed conversation up to his death in 1888. So we can reconstruct a comprehensive session with him, merging many questions and answers from several recorded dialogues.²⁴ Finally, as the last surviving witness, David corrected false reports that claimed that he or any other witness had denied or modified his written testimony.²⁵ Just before their deaths, each of the Three Witnesses finally reiterated his printed testimony of the Book of Mormon. Though each of the Three Witnesses had strong policy differences with Joseph Smith at some point, they never varied from their written testimony and repeated statements that they had seen the glorious angel who showed them the plates while they heard the divine voice declaring the translation of the Book of Mormon as correct.

To share a feeling for ongoing discovery, I have obtained permission from collector Brent Ashworth to share William E. McLellin’s report of his conversation with Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer

22. The fairly complete collection of David Whitmer statements is in Lyndon W. Cook, ed., *David Whitmer Interviews* (Orem, UT: Grandin Book, 1991). For mixtures of reports and surveys of interviews with all eleven witnesses, see Dan Vogel’s five-volume collection titled *Early Mormon Documents*, though I disagree with many interpretations.

23. See Richard Lloyd Anderson, “Attempts to Redefine the Experience of the Eight Witnesses of the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14/1 (2005): 18–31.

24. Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 80–82.

25. David Whitmer, *An Address to All Believers in Christ* (Richmond, MO, 1887), 8.

during the Jackson County mobbings in 1833. McLellin was converted in 1831 after hearing the Book of Mormon testimonies of witnesses David Whitmer and Hyrum Smith. Chosen an apostle in 1835, he was later affected by the counter-Joseph Smith movement in 1837–1838, when he was replaced as an apostle (D&C 118:1). Active in dissident movements after that, he held fast to the Book of Mormon and for some years sought unsuccessfully to rebuild the church around the surviving Book of Mormon witnesses. Before his death in 1883, he explained many of his doctrinal positions in well-written notebooks, most of which have been published.²⁶ But a missing 1871 notebook was recently acquired by Brent Ashworth and contains McLellin’s original handwritten recollection of confronting Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer soon after Bishop Partridge had been tarred and feathered in 1833. The armed old citizens were then hunting for Cowdery and McLellin, who met with David Whitmer in the woods near the Whitmer settlement west of Independence. McLellin here recalls his questions and their answers:

I said to them, “brethren I never have seen an open vision in my life, but you men say you have, and therefore you positively know. Now you know that our lives are in danger every hour, if the mob can only catch us. Tell me in the fear of God, is that book of Mormon true”? Cowdery looked at me with solemnity depicted in his face, and said, “Brother William, God sent his holy Angel to declare the truth of the translation of it to us, and therefore we know. And though the mob kill us, yet we must die declaring its truth.” David said, “Oliver has told you the solemn truth, for we could not be deceived. I most truly declare to you its truth!!” Said I, boys I believe you. I can see no object for you to tell me falsehood now, when our lives are endangered.²⁷

26. See Stan Larson and Samuel J. Passey, *The William E. McLellin Papers* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2007), which includes an early copy of the McLellin narrative discussed here, though the original notebook had not been located at that time.

27. “W. E. McLellan’s Book Jan. 4th 1871,” 166–67; punctuation and underlining follows the manuscript, with McLellin’s occasional strikeouts not duplicated here (see

Observing a Sacred Influence around Joseph

We now move to a topic on the edge of physical sight, the altered appearance of Joseph Smith when he was translating, dictating revelation, or speaking by inspiration. This was widely observed, though everyone present may not have seen it. Those who describe an altered appearance were believers, as far as I know, raising the possibility that an individual spiritual discernment is involved. The most spectacular Latter-day Saint parallel is the broadly reported “transfiguration” of Brigham Young before he was sustained as successor to Joseph Smith.²⁸ Of course, Joseph Smith was observed in daily life as an ordinary mortal, so I hope not to contribute to an artistic convention of surrounding him with a halo. Yet the scriptures contain accounts when special divine power brought a visible whiteness to a servant of God. For instance, when the martyr Stephen bore a final testimony, even his judges “saw his face as it had been the face of an angel” (Acts 6:15). From time to time Joseph Smith possessed not only the gift of prophecy but also the gift of visible spiritual anointing while filling his prophetic calling.

My first example is the experience of Sally Heller Conrad Bunnell, who died in Provo, Utah, in 1903. Oliver Huntington met her at an old-folks outing in 1897 and told her story in his diary as follows:

I conversed with one old lady eighty-eight years old who lived with David Whitmer when Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery were translating the Book of Mormon in the upper room of the house, and she, only a girl, saw them come down from the translating room several [times], when they looked so exceedingly white and strange that she inquired of Mrs. Whitmer

also *McLellin Papers*, 254). McLellin varied the spelling of the last syllable of his name. The Three Witnesses’ written testimony states that God’s voice declared the translation inspired and commanded them to bear record of it. The angel might have reinforced this divine message, or McLellin may have misunderstood who gave the message.

28. See Lynne Watkins Jorgensen, “The Mantle of the Prophet Joseph Passes to Brother Brigham: One Hundred Twenty-one Testimonies of a Collective Spiritual Witness,” in *Opening the Heavens*, ed. John W. Welch with Erick B. Carlson (Provo, UT: BYU Press, 2005), 373–480.

the cause of their unusual appearance, but Mrs. Whitmer was unwilling to tell the hired girl, the true cause as it was a sacred holy event connected with a holy sacred work which [was] opposed and persecuted by nearly every one who heard of it. The girl . . . finally told Mrs. Whi[t]mer that she would not stay with her unless she knew the cause of the strange looks of these men. Sister Whitmer then told her what the men were doing in the room above. . . . This satisfied the girl and opened the way to embracing the gospel. She is the mother of Stephen Bunnell of Provo, and the Bunnell family of Provo.²⁹

Years ago I learned that Sally's surviving granddaughter lived in the Provo area and had told this story to a group, so I asked my wife if she could work an interview into her busy schedule. Carma took my student assistant, Kristen Bowman, to record this interview with Pearl Bunnell Newell. Pearl, whose mind was very clear, said she was sixteen when she stayed with her grandmother about 1900, and Sally Bunnell told her this story of seeing the translators in the Whitmer home: "They would go up in the attic and stay there all day and she said that when they would come down that they would look more like heavenly beings than they did men." What Sally told her granddaughter closely fits what she told Oliver Huntington about the same time, but the granddaughter added that Mrs. Whitmer finally cautioned her hired girl "to keep all of these things secret on the account of persecution." Thus two different people who heard Sally recall her 1829 experience gave equivalent accounts.³⁰

Joseph Smith's associates related that divine inspiration was often visible upon him. Brigham Young said, "He preached by the Spirit of revelation, and taught in his council by it, and those who were acquainted with him could discover it at once, for at such times there

29. Oliver B. Huntington, journal 2, typescript, Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU, 412.

30. Carma De [de] Jong Anderson, Pearl Bunnell Newell Oral History Interview (January 1970), Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU. Glimpses of her mental clarity appear in her obituary, Provo *Daily Herald*, 21 September 1975. Some sources have a single *l* at the end of *Bunnell*.

was a peculiar clearness and transparency in his face.”³¹ Heber C. Kimball said that Joseph was “one of the most lovely men I ever saw, especially when the Spirit of God was in him, and his countenance was as white as the whitest thing you ever saw.”³² Orson Pratt said he was present in June 1831 when Doctrine and Covenants 54 was given, commanding the Colesville Branch to move from Ohio to Missouri: “Joseph was as calm as the morning sun. But he noticed a change in his countenance that he had never noticed before. When a revelation was given to him, Joseph’s face was exceedingly white, and seemed to shine.”³³ These biblical marks of divine presence came in greatest power on the Savior (Mark 9:3) but were given from time to time to the great Prophet of the Restoration, evidenced by discourses of leaders but occasionally mentioned in journals and recollections of the lesser known.

The Significance of Carthage

Because Joseph Smith’s prophetic premonitions of martyrdom are impressive, I wrote an article on this subject.³⁴ I begin with an additional source to lay groundwork for the looming events of Carthage. William Swartzell was converted in Ohio and journeyed to Missouri to learn more about Joseph Smith and the Mormon gathering. He stayed in Missouri the summer of 1838 and kept a short journal, which records the brief tragedy of a man who couldn’t handle what Elder Maxwell called discipleship. One cause was his terror at signs of upcoming hostilities between expanding Mormon settlements and

31. *Journal of Discourses*, 9:89.

32. *Journal of Discourses*, 6:35.

33. “Two Days’ Meeting at Brigham City, June 27 and 28, 1874,” *Ogden Junction*, in *Millennial Star* 36 (11 August 1874): 498. I have changed punctuation to transfer “when revelation was given to him” to the following sentence, which avoids the implication that Joseph’s change of form was singular for Pratt. Like Brigham Young, Orson said this was periodically observable: “I saw his countenance lighted up as the inspiration of the Holy Ghost rested upon him, dictating the great and most precious revelations now printed for our guide” (*Journal of Discourses*, 7:176).

34. Richard Lloyd Anderson, “Joseph Smith’s Prophecies of Martyrdom,” in *A Sesquicentennial Look at Church History: Sidney B. Sperry Symposium, January 26, 1980* (Religious Instruction, BYU, 1980), 1–14.

old residents, who were determined to keep Mormons in one county. Swartzell changed course and returned to Ohio, where he published his journal a short time later. It summarizes Joseph Smith's sermon at the end of July, a week before Mormons fought for their right to vote at the Gallatin election. Swartzell reported that Joseph "preached on prophecy," seemingly mentioned the First Vision, and concluded that his safety was secondary to the cause of the gospel: "I know that all the world is threatening my life; but I regard it not, for I am willing to die at any time when God calls for me."³⁵

We now advance Joseph's story to final imprisonment. Despite repeated letters to the governor that Carthage spelled death, he submitted to arrest on the charge of riot in ordering the suppression of the opposition newspaper, went to Carthage, posted bail, was rearrested on a questionable charge of treason, and was kept in jail for a hearing canceled because of his murder. Historians face contradictions between rumors outside of Carthage Jail and Joseph's plans inside of it. On martyrdom morning Joseph apparently had no plan to escape, jotting personal feelings at the end of a note to Emma: "I am very much resigned to my lot knowing I am Justified and have done the best that could be done."³⁶ At midday Dan Jones was entrusted with a letter asking attorney Orville Browning to represent Joseph at the treason hearing in two days, and Jones nervously rode through a crowd boiling with rumors, one of which accused him of carrying "orders for the Nauvoo Legion to come there to save the prisoners." Such speculation may have been behind the hearsay in the journal of Nauvoo Legion officer Allen Stout, who wrote that "Joseph wrote an official order to Jonathan Dunham to bring the legion and rescue him,"³⁷ adding that Dunham kept this to himself. Stout did not give his source, and Mark Hofmann even forged such an order, which influenced at least

35. William Swartzell, *Mormonism Exposed* (Pekin, OH: author, 1840), 27. The quotation continues with Joseph's survey of persecutions he had endured.

36. Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, 27 June 1844, in Jessee, *Personal Writings*, 630, with facsimile at 630–31.

37. See references and full discussion in Richard Lloyd Anderson, "Christian Ethics in Joseph Smith Biography," in *Expressions of Faith*, ed. Susan Easton Black (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1996), 164–69.

one historian to give Dunham undeserved credit for avoiding major bloodshed.³⁸

It was Joseph Smith, however, who saved countless lives by offering his own. In Carthage Jail, John Taylor and other close associates discussed options. Taylor strongly felt that the law had been manipulated unjustly and asked Joseph for authority to compel his release. Elder Taylor later wrote: “My idea was to go to Nauvoo, and collect a force sufficient,” but he added, “Brother Joseph refused.”³⁹ Two days before he was assassinated, Joseph wrote to Emma that Nauvoo’s citizens should “continue placid pacific & prayerful.” On the morning of his death, Joseph wrote her again, cautiously stating that self-defense was an innate right, but that Governor Ford would come to Nauvoo on a peaceful mission, and therefore she should tell acting commander Dunham “to instruct the people to stay at home and attend to their own business” unless summoned to a public meeting by the governor.⁴⁰

Of course, only Christ had atoning power in suffering and dying. But Joseph’s death was sacrificial in the sense that he, like Christ, did “lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). As Elder Maxwell clearly explained, Jesus said his disciples would be known by the high standard of loving others “as I have loved you” (13:34–35). Like various divine callings in life, various paths test true disciples in death. Joseph Smith proved his utter sincerity by turning back from a temporary western exile in order to lessen the risk to Nauvoo from bigoted vengeance. Trusted secretary William Clayton explained Joseph’s

38. D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994), 141, cites the forged Dunham order from Jesse’s 1984 original edition of *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*. However, Hofmann’s forgeries became widely known by his plea bargain in early 1987 and the release of transcripts of the prison interviews later that year. For specific counterfeit characteristics of the Dunham order, see Linda Sillitoe and Allen Roberts, *Salamander: The Story of the Mormon Forgery Murders*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), 561.

39. John Taylor, “The Martyrdom of Joseph Smith,” Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah, published in *History of the Church*, ed. B. H. Roberts (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1932), 7:100.

40. Quotations are from Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, 25 June 1844, and Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, 27 June 1844, both transcribed with facsimiles in Jesse, *Personal Writings*, 620, 629–30.

surrender to arrest on the day he rode to Carthage: “He expects nothing but to be massacred . . . but there appearing no alternative but he must either give himself up or the city be massacred by a lawless mob under the sanction of the governor.”⁴¹ As Joseph built Nauvoo, he built a trained legion for protection, equal to the numbers unlawfully assembling in Carthage and far superior to them in training. When Joseph’s final crisis came, the Nauvoo Legion could have saved his life. Latter-day Saints would have given their lives for the prophet. But he gave his life for them.

Military, Intellectual, and Spiritual Intelligence

In World War II, Elder Maxwell served on Okinawa. His mortar position was nearly fatally targeted, but he was divinely protected when the shelling unexpectedly ceased.⁴² Hugh Nibley served in army intelligence in Europe. He told me that just before the Battle of the Bulge, he went to his superiors with close predictions of when and where the German counterattack would begin, but his warning was ignored. His careful biography gives the sequel: Hugh was soon transferred, but within days his replacements were killed when a shell hit their building.⁴³ My service career was not as dramatic. I had long months of training as a radio-gunner in naval aircraft, and many unusual delays enabled intense gospel study for a planned mission. I had strong assurance that I would live to complete that mission. Though I never saw action, I was also guided in my service career, as many will agree who know my contributions to the postwar system of gospel presentation for nonmembers. The Navy assigned me to a search-and-rescue plane, the long-range PBY Catalina, identifiable as amphibious with over a hundred-foot wingspan and a cruising speed of only about 130 miles per hour. For offense, it was effective in anti-submarine warfare and

41. William Clayton, Journal, 24 June 1844, Church History Library. See also James B. Allen, *No Toil Nor Labor Fear: The Story of William Clayton* (Provo, UT: BYU Press, 2002), 135.

42. See Bruce C. Hafen, *A Disciple’s Life* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002), 109–10, which includes impressive phrases from Elder Maxwell’s patriarchal blessing.

43. Boyd Jay Petersen, *Hugh Nibley: A Consecrated Life* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2002), 201–2.

in reconnaissance. These planes sighted Japanese fleet groups coming from different directions at the beginning of the Battle of Midway, a major turning point in the Pacific campaigns.

My point is that intelligence wins battles. Those who deciphered radio messages were as much responsible for military success as the people who fought. Japanese codes were partially cracked before the Battle of Midway. Some of you know this part of the story. Decipherers anticipated a major attack, but some were not sure of the target. So a deceptive message was sent that the island of Midway was almost out of water, and then they monitored the Japanese reaction, which confirmed their suspicion. Success in combat depends on preparation, including serious strategies to learn what is coming. In fact, this principle applies to life itself—some sense of the future is required to make the present significant. In Nibley's case, surprised generals soon appeared in his makeshift situation room to examine the updated maps of German positions. The equivalent for Latter-day Saints is their collection of comprehensive scriptures, together with continuing prophetic declarations that may become scripture.

My life has been one among many devoted to understanding and reporting words and deeds of important religious founders. My teaching load first included Roman and Greek history and western civilization to the Renaissance. After a decade I centered on the New Testament and the early church, with a class on the Book of Mormon witnesses, and continued writing on early Christianity and Joseph Smith. My major goal has been to get the story straight, with publishing as a by-product. While I was in law school, a New England mission president accurately told his missionaries that I got results by persistence, not brilliance. The years have produced large files of primary and responsible secondary information on these fields, reflecting the ambition to compile what eyewitnesses said about crucial beginnings of ancient Christianity and its modern counterpart founded by the Prophet Joseph Smith. Speaking for myself and not in judgment of others, it is academic cowardice to chronicle the lives of Jesus and Joseph Smith without really grappling with what meant most to each—the reality of and preparation for the world to come. For some it

may be professional etiquette to avoid discussing the “truth claims” of the above religious founders. Although that divided approach is necessary in publicly financed classrooms, one of my liberties in a private university is the right not only to describe these founders’ lives but also to evaluate the credibility of their claims.

In the words of the courtroom oath, secular education tells current truth but not the whole truth. So I would not be honest about Christ or Joseph Smith without telling you how I feel after decades of studying, reflecting, and discoursing on their lives. I would speak as a whole person, both the academic investigator of historical events and a lifetime seeker of religious truth. Sir Francis Bacon supposedly said that writing produced an exact man. The disciplined historical method has made me a careful man in my religious thinking. In turn my religion has given me the highest standards of honesty. Mind and soul dictate that I mislead none, nor make empty claims of knowledge. Mind and soul also emphasize the moral duty to publicize momentous information. Our criminal law is generally based on a public sense of morality. A sanity hearing deals with some definition of responsible thinking or action, adapting the legal tradition of whether the subject knows the difference between right and wrong.

Do I know the difference between a fraud and a true prophet? I think I do. And I think I qualify as an expert witness in my work as a broad Christian historian, with certification in ancient, medieval, and reformation fields and specialization in New Testament history and Joseph Smith biography. Based on a life of persistent study of ancient and modern religions, and by every rule of evidence that I know, Christ and Joseph Smith are what they claimed to be. That is my considered professional opinion.

At this point the apostle Paul would ask, Is that all? He spoke of “the wisdom of men” and “the wisdom of God,” leaving no doubt as to which was more important (1 Corinthians 2:5–7). Considering his goal of deflating Corinthian egotism, Paul might agree that these dual wisdoms become one to the truly humble. So I must add my partial but clear experience with “the wisdom of God.” The common principles of Christ and ancient and modern prophets are workable and, when

lived, bring me highest happiness. As discussed, it is mindless to live in this world without regard for divine intelligence on what will happen after death. The apostolic call to live for immortal glory rings true in my soul. Sustained prayers in Christ's name have brought immediate peace and steady power beyond natural abilities. I have sought for the gift to discern what is true in history and in life. My mind and soul unite in certainty that Christ is our Savior and that Joseph Smith was divinely sent to bring full Christianity back to earth. All knowledge brings responsibility, especially religious knowledge. I share with you a prayer that we will well live by that knowledge, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

CHRISTMAS STORIES

John W. Welch

Review of Margaret Barker. *Christmas: The Original Story*. London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2008. xiv + 191 pp. £12.99, \$19.95.

Every Christmas, I enjoy hearing again and learning more about the scriptures, the sagas, the artworks and music, the traditions and customs, and the stories associated with the birth of the Savior. There is so much more to this pivotal event in world history than most people realize. And the strong tendency in our commercial world is to trivialize the whole celebration into something far less than it has been in previous generations, let alone what it originally was. One anchor in any scriptural library about Christmas is Raymond E. Brown's marvelous book *The Birth of the Messiah*, which exhaustively sifts and organizes hundreds of years of mainstream commentary on the birth narratives told by Matthew and Luke. With the publication of Margaret Barker's eye-opening paperback, we now can see, as we have suspected all along, that there is much more to the Christmas story than we have known before. Coming from older traditions and from long-forgotten corners of early Christian and Jewish sources, new perspectives now open up new vistas of thematic and doctrinal significance on that midnight clear. I am very happy to add Barker's book to my permanent list of Christmas must-rereads.

Latter-day Saint Connectivity

All Latter-day Saints know full well that there is more to the Christmas story than the few bits and pieces told by Matthew and Luke. Indeed, as Barker develops throughout this reader-friendly book, there were two births of Jesus. In December, the world celebrates his nativity according to the flesh, but there was also a previous, eternal birth in the spirit (p. xii). Matthew and Luke tell about the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, his incarnation in the flesh; Mark and John begin their gospels at earlier points of departure. Mark begins, “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God . . .” (Mark 1:1), taking the reader directly to the prophetic announcement from the mouth of Malachi, “Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee” (Mark 1:2, quoting Malachi 3:1). Malachi knew of a plan laid down long before any decree went out from Caesar Augustus. John takes his readers all the way back into the primordial council in heaven before the foundations of the world, where “in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was [a] God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him” (John 1:1–3). Here is another generation of the Son of God. Yet, in this world of monistic, static theological excesses, who shall proclaim this other generation? Barker is more than willing to step forward to do so.

For Barker it is of the essence that the eternal Creator came into this world, to use the language of the temple, “through the veil from the presence of God into the material world,” and “the only person who did this was, by definition, the high priest” (p. 32). The holy physical birth of the Great High Priest was prefigured, conceptualized, and made comprehensible, in symbolic part, in the holy realms of the earliest temple traditions, which always strived to connect things in heaven and things on earth.

But more than that, the sacred tradition also reaches back into a primeval childhood in the spiritual realm. Speaking of the New Testament book of Revelation, Barker observes: “John’s vision implies that Jesus had a heavenly Mother as well as a heavenly Father” (p. 40). Who this heavenly Mother might have been is unknown, but Barker

suggests that she was known anciently by other names and travails. Barker associates the “Holy Spirit” in Luke 1:35 with the ancient image of “a Queen with crown of stars” and thus sees her, in some sense, as “the Mother of the Messiah” (p. 41). In Micah 5:2–4, Barker finds a trace of an ancient tradition that the divine Mother would give—or had given?—birth to a great Shepherd of Israel.

However blurred such traces may be in the biblical record, Latter-day Saints know about these two births, even in an expanded way, from other revealed sources. That knowledge interacts vividly and resonates harmoniously on several (even if not on all) wavelengths with the Christmas carols hummed by Margaret Barker throughout this book. For Latter-day Saints, there was a premortal spiritual birth not only of Jesus but of all of us, who are also God’s children. There was a physical birth not only of him but also of us all. There needed to be a baptismal rebirth not only for him but also for all. He was and is the Great High Priest, but there were and are and forever will be many high priests. In every way, he led the way, and as Barker’s book begins to show, the Christmas story is the story of all these ways.

Much happened to and for all of us, and especially to and by Jesus, before the incarnation. Thus the “original story” of which Barker speaks is also “a story of origins.” On Christmas, one cannot afford to forget that Jesus was prepared from the foundation of the world, first-born in the spirit, foreordained, promised, and prophesied. As Barker shows in her first two chapters (“The Setting” and “Other Voices”), which set the stage for her greatest Christmas pageant ever, the birth of Jesus in the flesh was not an accident or a mere happening in the history of the world. It was an integral step in a plan of progression laid down and anticipated long before.

Latter-day Saints know, of course, from the Book of Mormon (as well as from biblical passages such as 1 Peter 1:20) that Jesus was “foreordained before the foundation of the world”; that all the prophets have known of and spoken of the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh; that he was the Jehovah of the Old Testament, as Barker strongly agrees (“When the first Christians told the story of the birth of Jesus, they were describing how Yahweh [Jehovah] the LORD, the Son of God

Most High, became incarnate,” p. 22); and that prophets have long known even some of the specifics of the manner and time of his atoning suffering (1 Peter 1:10–12). Barker points out very well that much confusion has resulted in Christianity “by failing to realize that the early Christians proclaimed Jesus as Yahweh” (p. 58). Thus, for Barker and also for Latter-day Saints, the story of Jesus’s birth began long before Gabriel’s annunciation to Mary. Equipped with their heightened awareness of these points, all Latter-day Saint readers should be able to discern many enjoyable and enlightening insights in the Yuletide feast that Barker offers her guests.

In particular, Latter-day Saint readers, who have the added perspective of the Christmas story found at the end of Helaman and in the beginning of 3 Nephi 1 in the Book of Mormon, should welcome the possibility of additional insights into the preparations for the coming of Jesus that Barker extracts from a number of extracanonical sources. In her view, many plain and precious things were lost as the Bible was being assembled, and other things were changed or added, perhaps even wrongly. As is always advised when reading the sources, one aided by the Holy Ghost may be able to discern in these texts the right from the wrong.

Temple Themes and Temple Readings

Barker uses two main quarries of building blocks in reconstructing the original Christmas story (or stories). As most New Testament commentators also do, Barker weaves into her analysis a rich array of threads—drawn from evidences about cultural backgrounds, political contexts, and biblical prophecies—as she gives form and sense to the segmented elements contained in the traditional Christmas accounts. But in addition, as she does in all of her signature works, Barker adds information from two distinctive spheres:

1. Temple themes: She points out words and phrases that appear in the New Testament’s Christmas stories that call up temple concepts and practices. For example, supporting roles in these stories are identified for temple personnel and sacred rituals, including

- angelic hosts (p. 2),
- coming through the veil to be tabernacled in the flesh (p. 32),
- swaddling clothes (pp. 75–76) and garments of skin and light (pp. 35–36),
- being anointed with the myrrh oil (p. 35),
- the secret rituals of the holy of holies and its glory that “leads into a complex web of associations that join together the high priesthood and the temple, Adam and Eve and the lost garden of Eden, and the birth of Jesus” (p. 35),
- the descent of the high priest out of the holy of holies to be seen by mortals (pp. 44–49).

More important, however, than any single temple element is the overall temple register of the sublime narrative that these stories are trying to relate to their various audiences. The common factor in the rhetorical voice of all these stories is that of supernal holiness. The good news of the most sacred birth of the Messiah, the Prophet, the Priest, and the King is communicated most effectively by setting the Christmas story in the context of the temple, the holiest place known in all the world.

2. Temple Readings: Margaret Barker also advances new interpretations and translations of words and phrases that early Christians drew into their stories of Christmas. Although these words are standard parts of the familiar vocabulary of Christmas readings, they carry with them meanings that come from an older stratum of religious history, always yielding interesting insights. Barker finds in these words evidence that the Christmas story originally was understood, at least by some people, in terms of a hidden and partially lost tradition. For example,

- Eusebius knew some Christians who read the word *mr̄hm*, “from the womb,” as *marym*, “from Mary” (p. 6).
- Isaiah 7:14 spoke of “*the* virgin,” not “*a* virgin,” in both the Hebrew and Greek (p. 42).
- The “Spirit of God” is associated with the “Spirit of Holiness” (p. 7).

- The idea of the “only son” is better conveyed with the words “dearly beloved” (p. 9).
- In Hebrew, *qdsh* can mean both “harlot” and “the holy one” (p. 29), perhaps accounting for the insults leveled against Mary and Jesus regarding his lack of normal paternity.
- In Isaiah 52:14, *mshchty* offers a play on words between *disfigured* and *anointed* (p. 29).
- The “poor” who are to be blessed by the Savior of the world are outcasts from the temple, which is thus to be restored by the Messiah, as it had been known during the First Temple period (p. 56).
- “The Lamb is wordplay for the Servant,” namely, the high priestly servant of God in approaching the throne and taking the scroll (p. 61).
- The phrase “Son of God” is now known not to be anachronistic in the Gospels in light of Dead Sea Scroll 4Q246 (p. 62).
- “When God begets the Messiah, he shall come with them [at] the head of the whole congregation of Israel,” according to 1Q28aII (p. 62).
- In the older text of Deuteronomy 32:43, “angels of God” was “sons of God,” and the Lord was one of the “sons of God” (p. 62).
- The Septuagint Greek version of Habakkuk 3:2 makes reference in the phrase “between the creatures” not to being between the ox and the ass, but between the two cherubim (p. 64).
- *Face* and *prepare* sound almost the same in Hebrew (p. 73), connecting John’s preparing the way and the Lord’s face shining upon the people.
- “Firstborn is the title for the human person who has become the presence of the LORD on earth” (p. 75).
- The Hebrew word *’ebus*, “manger,” resembles *y’bus*, “Jerusalem” (p. 76).
- Other wordplay is found between the Hebrew words for ox and prince, owner and begetter, ass and priest (p. 76).

- In Isaiah 52:7–10, the Hebrew reads, “The LORD has bared his holy arm,” but the Septuagint Greek reads, “The LORD will reveal his Holy One” (p. 88).

And so on. The book’s indexes are very useful in locating scriptures and subjects that might strike a particular reader’s fancy. To get a good feel for the main ideas in this book, I recommend reading its indexes first.

So how do these things deepen understanding of the story or stories of Christmas? Although we have been given different tellings of this story by Matthew, Luke, and others, it is the temple background that ties them all together for Margaret Barker.

Luke’s Stories

In chapter 3, Barker turns to Luke’s Christmas stories. For Luke, the dominant message of his entire gospel is the universality of salvation through Jesus Christ. He came as the Savior of the entire world, whether one reads Luke 2:14 as announcing “peace on earth, good will to all men” or “peace to all men of good will” (as it reads on some early Greek manuscripts). In Luke’s Gospel, Barker sees vestiges and vestments of two birth stories, and both have a strong universalist component.

Barker posits an early date for the writing of the Gospel of Luke, and she classifies Luke as a Jew (pp. 52–53). She believes that this Gospel originally began with the baptism of Jesus (as did and does the Gospel of Mark) and the words of the Father, “this day I have begotten you” (Luke 3:22, quoting Psalm 2:7; Barker uses the RSV), which is not the way this verse reads in the current New Testament, namely, “in thee I am well pleased.” Barker argues that baptism is an important form of birth, or rebirth, not unlike the change in status that came to the Levites, who began their temple service at age thirty, the age (not coincidentally) at which Jesus was baptized (Luke 3:23; see Numbers 4:3) (p. 51). This birth or rebirth was seen as a type of resurrection in the context of the holy of holies (p. 51). This information may account for the fact that special mention is made of Nazareth in the Gospel of Luke, for it can be associated with the Hebrew word *nazir*, “meaning

a consecrated person, someone anointed with holy oil,” and “referring to the high priest” (p. 127). But for Luke, such a rebirth is not for the high priest or for the Levites alone. This birth through baptism opens the way for all humans to become holy sons of God. Here we see humans becoming divine.

After having begun his Gospel this way, Luke soon added the story of Christ’s physical birth. Here we see a divine being becoming human. Themes of universal acclamation and recognition are found in the angelic announcement to the lowly shepherds. Jesus came even to very ordinary people, and he was recognized by them. In Luke, the people of God are seen coming to his house, being welcomed back home by the unfailing hospitality of their divine Father.

There can be no question about the presence of temple elements in Luke 1–2. Main themes throughout the story are couched in the words of the psalms, the hymns of the temple (p. 53). The story begins with Zacharias’s priesthood duty, serving in the holy of holies on the Day of Atonement, offering up prayers and incense, when the angel Gabriel appears to him in that chamber of silence to tell him of the birth of his son John, connected with a priestly blessing (pp. 53–54, 70–72). Luke goes on to record ten songs, five by human beings, five by divine beings (p. 55), including a recognition hymn (p. 66) and a “liturgical acclamation” (p. 67), which accounts for similarities in Luke’s account to Hannah’s song, which was also related to the temple and to her son Samuel being dedicated to serve there (p. 68). Sonship is found in Jesus being called the Son of the highest (p. 60) who will inherit the throne of David” (p. 91).

For Luke there is also no mistaking the point that Jesus was both human and divine. His birth narrative features two powers, justice and mercy; two names, *Yahweh* and *Elohim*; and a double recognition, “my Lord and my God.” Barker argues that such things were “represented by the two cherubim over the ark in the holy of holies” (p. 63). The list carries on. The shining of light and the face lifted up hark back to the Messianic star rising (p. 73). “The clothing of the ‘newly born’ high priest was an important part of his becoming the Son” in the Enoch literature (p. 75–76). Even the inhospitable “inn,” or *kataluma*,

“seems also to allude to the holy of holies” (p. 77), for *ta'alumah* in Hebrew refers to the hidden or secret place (p. 78).

But Jesus was not just an ordinary pilgrim to the Temple of Herod. True, Luke goes out of his way to say that Jesus was presented at the temple, but he does not say that Jesus was redeemed for the old requirement of five shekels (p. 82). Instead, Jesus brings a new revelation, a new restoration. Simeon prophesies to Mary that the child would bring division (p. 91), and at the age of twelve, Jesus amazed the temple priests with his understanding in and of the temple (pp. 91–92). Somehow Jesus knew or had learned things that were just not usually explained or discussed. Barker invites readers to see Jesus as a child of the eternal Lady, pure and undefiled Wisdom (*Sophia*).

Matthew's Story

Matthew's birth narrative is different from Luke's, but it is no less saturated with temple themes, as the reader learns in chapter 4. Temple themes are especially at home, of course, in the Jewish worlds of prophecy, priesthood, and kingship, perhaps even having once had clearer roots in the “Hebrew Gospel in the library at Caesarea,” which Jerome thought “was the original Matthew” (p. 94) but which has long since been hidden, lost, or suppressed.

Revelation was a key product of the temple in ancient Israel, and revelation dominates Matthew's Christmas story, whether in the form of long-standing prophecies or spur-of-the-moment dreams (p. 95). Barker reflects on Matthew's reporting the precise fulfillments of several prophecies, but hastens to add that this need not mean that he conveniently invented these accounts to conjure up a series of proof texts: “He was telling a story that was both symbolic and cosmological, and so the two narratives were fused” (p. 93). Much was fore-known. Thus the star (not mentioned in Luke) figures significantly in Matthew because Daniel's 490-year prophecy came to an end in 7 BC (p. 110). Everyone was counting and watching stars, for the Great Angel was to appear, “bearing the seal of the living God,” to mark the faithful with the Name which was “represented by a diagonal cross” (p. 111). In addition, the star prophecy in Numbers 24, was even more

explicitly prophetic than the Hebrew when read in the Old Greek version: “A star will arise from Jacob and a man shall rise up from Israel” (v. 17). Barker suggests that the Christmas Star of Bethlehem was not seen by observers who were in the east but was seen rising in the east (p. 114), that is, in the dawn sky (p. 113), symbolizing the coming of the messianic Morning Star (compare 2 Peter 1:19).

Royal elements are also strong in Matthew’s Gospel, which unlike Luke’s Gospel speaks of Herod, the king of the Jews, the magi, the Counselor, and the Prince of Peace. And temple elements in Matthew are consistent with Barker’s finding that Matthew writes to those “in the house” (p. 96), namely converts, whose faith was being challenged. The announcement that Jesus would save people from their sins (p. 107) also has temple overtones.

But of all the sections in Margaret Barker’s discussion of the Gospel of Matthew, I found her section on the Wise Men the most interesting and creative (pp. 115–23). Although it is possible that the Wise Men came from Mesopotamia as Zoroastrians or from India or points even farther to the east, the early Christian writer Justin Martyr said that they came from Arabia (p. 120), close to the Judean homeland. It would make sense, after all, that Jewish people would have been the ones most interested in the impending fulfillment of the Israelite prophecies concerning the coming of the Messiah.

Indeed, a thread of anticipation that ran through the times surrounding the birth of Christ was a tradition about a group of temple priests who had long ago gone into exile into Arabia awaiting their chance to return. The Jerusalem Talmud, *Ta’anit* 4.5, knew of a tradition about priests who had fled from Jerusalem and settled in Arabia after King Josiah reformed the rituals and performances of the Temple of Solomon around 625 BC (p. 121). King Herod may also have created enemies when he built his own temple, further displacing some of the older priests from the Second Temple in Jerusalem, which the Temple of Herod replaced.

Is it possible, Barker wonders, that the Magi were a part of or related to these groups of watchful priests hoping for the coming of

their Lord of Holiness? If so, their gifts could not have been more perfectly suitable, given by priests to their new High Priest.

The gift of gold would sparkle like the gold that was required in the temple. According to scripture, the doors and altar (1 Kings 7:48), the table for the bread of the Presence (1 Kings 7:48), and the lampstands and drinking vessels of the temple (1 Kings 10:21) were to be made of pure gold (p. 118). Many other implements of the temple were gold-plated. Gold was seen as incorruptible and was thought to embody the radiance of the sun. The gift of frankincense provided the fragrance required by the Priestly Code for every sacrifice “offered by fire to the Lord” (Leviticus 24:7). Its sweet smoke carried prayers up to heaven. It was burned in the temple “to invoke the presence of the Lord” (p. 118). The gift of myrrh, another resin from the life-sustaining sap of a desert tree, was a key ingredient in making the oil of anointment that imparted holiness, which oil could not be used outside the temple (Exodus 30:25–33). Myrrh had disappeared from the holy of holies (p. 120) and “had been hidden away in the time of Josiah” according to the Babylonian Talmud, *Horayoth* 12a (p. 27). It “represented Wisdom (Ben Sira 24.15)” (p. 120) and was used in preparing the dead for burial, as has long been pointed out. But more than that, Barker shows that this vial of oil was known as the “dew of resurrection” and “had anointed the royal high priests after the order of Melchizedek and transformed them into sons of God” (p. 120). Early Christians, such as Pope Leo the Great, said, “He offers myrrh, who believes that God’s only begotten son united to himself man’s true nature” (p. 120), and thus Barker speaks of “the uniting of divine and human [having] been the mystery of the myrrh oil in the holy of holies” in the ancient temple of Jerusalem (p. 120).

Old traditions also spoke about Adam receiving gold, frankincense, and myrrh from three angelic messengers so that he could offer proper sacrifices when cast out of Eden (p. 119). With these holy and exemplary implements—inherently precious, sacredly treasured, and eternally efficacious—Jesus, as the Second Adam, was prepared to offer the ultimate temple sacrifice as the new and everlasting High Priest, bringing powers and eternal life from heaven above to earth

below (p. 119). Appropriately, then, Barker points out that “the word *miqqedem* can mean ‘from ancient times’ or ‘from the east.’” Thus, when the magi came *miqqedem*, this can be seen as a sign that they came not just from the east but that, by them, “the ancient ways were being restored” (p. 119).

The Infancy Gospel of James

In chapter 5, Barker saves perhaps the best for last. In this chapter, she treats readers to a marvelous new look at the so-called Infancy Gospel of James. Little known and less read, this very early Christmas story is beginning to be taken more seriously. As Professor James Charlesworth said to me last year, “Its stock is rising.” Clearly, it was a widespread telling of the Christmas story, multiply attested before the fourth century. This story purports to be told by James, a son of Joseph by a previous wife who had died, leaving him a widower.

Barker first provides an overview of the Infancy Gospel and asks a number of penetrating questions, always eager to notice plain and precious things that have been lost even though at one time they had been very important to certain segments of the faithful Christian community. She is right when she says that it would “be a mistake to dismiss the stories . . . as fantasy or worse” (p. 129). Following her introduction, she gives a full translation of this infancy story. Readers of *Christmas: The Original Story* might do well to read this chapter first, as well as last. The eccentric, esoteric, and sacred elements that are present here provide much of the energy that fuels Barker’s interpretive machinery throughout this book. The Infancy Gospel of James combines many elements that can be found in Matthew or Luke, but here the functions and powers of the temple are even more prominent and therefore perhaps more original to the story.

This Christmas story begins with a rich man named Joachim and his wife, Anna. Because they had no children, Joachim doubled his gifts to the temple hoping that God would forgive him of whatever wrong he had done to cause their childlessness. An angel appeared to Anna and told her that she would conceive. Anna answered that whether it was a male or female child, she would offer it as a gift to

the Lord to serve him all its life. When an angel then told Joachim that his wife had conceived, he offered in the temple ten pure lambs to the priests, twelve tender calves to the elders, and one hundred kids for the people. As Joachim approached the altar, the gold plate on the high priest's turban showed Joachim that he was accepted of God and was not a sinner. When the baby was born, Anna called her Mary and turned her nursery into a holy place, promising to keep Mary pure until she was old enough to be given to the temple. At the age of three, when Mary was dedicated to the temple, she danced on the third step of the altar, and all the house of Israel loved her. Mary did not turn away from the temple when her parents entrusted her to the care of the high priest and walked away, leaving her there. She naturally felt at home in the temple. There she learned the ways and the hymns of the temple (perhaps thereby explaining how it was that Jesus knew so much about the temple at such a young age and why he quoted from the book of Psalms so spontaneously throughout his ministry).

When Mary turned twelve and passed puberty, she needed to leave the temple, and so the high priest had Zacharias call together at the temple all the widowers in the area. Out of that group, a guardian for Mary would be chosen by lot to keep her pure and continuously devoted only to God. One of the widowers who answered this call was Joseph. When his staff was selected and he became Mary's guardian, a dove flew out of his staff and landed on his head.

The priests soon decided to have a new veil of the temple woven by the women in Israel. Mary was chosen by lot to weave the purple and scarlet threads. This veil "hid the Glory of God from human eyes," and Mary's work on the veil "symbolized the process of incarnation" (pp. 142, 143). While spinning, Mary was told by the angel that she would miraculously bear the Son of the Highest. After she became pregnant, the angel assured Joseph that the child was from the Holy Spirit.

A few months later, when Joseph did not appear in the assembly of the elders, the high priest Annas visited him to see if he was all right, and while there he noticed that Mary was pregnant. To prove their innocence in this matter, both Joseph and Mary were required to appear at the temple to drink the bitter waters (see Numbers 5). When

they were exonerated by this ordeal, the high priest said, “If the Lord God has not revealed your sin, neither do I condemn you,” and he let them go.

Going with Joseph to Bethlehem to register, Mary rode on a donkey. When she began to go into labor, Joseph found a cave and left Mary there with his sons while he went to find a midwife. Joseph told her that the woman to be delivered was Mary, the one who had been brought up in the temple. The midwife came and, seeing a great light in the cave and then seeing the child, testified of the miraculous virgin birth. Barker says of this account that “the cave is presented as the holy of holies,” complete with its light brighter than the noonday sun (pp. 145, 147).

Soon the Wise Men came and Herod examined them. Following the star, they found the babe still in the cave. They gave him gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Mary hid the babe in an ox’s manger, and Herod tried to kill Jesus’s cousin John, but Elizabeth fled with him into the hills. When Elizabeth’s husband, Zacharias, would not tell where they had gone, he was killed in the temple, whereupon the panels of the temple wailed and split from top to bottom as his blood turned to stone.

From these highlights alone, readers can notice parts of the traditional Christmas story not found in the canonical gospels, such as Mary weaving, Mary riding on a donkey toward Bethlehem, and the ox in the stable. But more than that, here again the temple takes center stage, perhaps even more than in the other accounts. Having laid the foundation of temple themes in the Christmas stories of Luke and Matthew, Barker cannot be faulted for concluding: “There has been relatively little study of the *Protevangelium*. It is all too easy to dismiss, . . . but closer study shows how close it is in spirit to the earliest understanding of the Christmas story. Its influence has been enormous” (p. 150).

Concluding Thoughts

All of this is not to say that no questions or problems exist with some of the things Barker says in this book.

- She sees birth as a form of resurrection (p. 8), but it is unclear to me what to make of this.
- It is not always easy to tell where imagery ends and actual history begins for Barker, but this borderland is always fraught with perilous crossings.
- The ideas that Mary conceived by a beam of light coming into her ear (p. 59) and that she didn't see Gabriel may solve some problems, but they seem to raise others.
- I don't follow the point about the census (pp. 74–75), even if Psalm 87:6 should be understood as saying “in the census of the people, this one will be born there.”
- It may well be that Egyptian Jews had not forgotten the Lady (p. 102), but is this enough to take our minds into the Gospel of Philip and all things Egyptian?
- The story of the woman taken in adultery and brought to Jesus in the temple in John 8:1–11 might have been a parable about how the Jews wanted to kill Mary as an adulterous woman (p. 107), but this idea seems like a stretch (when did they catch her in the very act?), even if the words in John 8:11 are paralleled in the Infancy Gospel of James when she and Joseph pass the ordeal of the bitter waters as a test of suspected adultery.
- Finally, for Latter-day Saints, a birth date in the autumn of 7 BCE (p. 115) may be difficult to reconcile with the datings in 3 Nephi, notwithstanding the planetary meeting of Saturn with Jupiter, “power with righteousness,” in that year.

But be those things as they may be, my enthusiasm for this book is not diminished. Margaret Barker has become one of the most interesting topics of conversation among Latter-day Saint scholars in the recent decade, and justifiably so. Her stimulating ideas often, though not always, strike chords of powerful and beautiful harmonies with Latter-day Saint doctrines and interests.

This fascinating book on the original story of Christmas may intensify some hesitant reactions in some Latter-day Saint circles about her reconstructions of ancient Jewish and early Christian history, but I hope not. It will not be every Latter-day Saint family that

will want to give her a seat in front of their cozy fire on Christmas Eve. But all Latter-day Saints who begin with the assumption that many plain and precious things have not been preserved in the Christmas stories told in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, and who are hoping to find in their intellectual Christmas stocking not a lump of coal but some long-forgotten diadems, will rarely be disappointed as they turn the pages of this book, often with glee at the new insights that Margaret Barker brings to bear on the generative story on the birth of the Messiah.

And we thought we knew this story! As the saying goes, wise men seek him still—seeking and hoping to behold the true beginnings of the most celebrated story ever told. Thus, all Latter-day Saints who relish the multivalence of the great Jehovah as Creator, Prophet, Priest, Messiah, Savior, Son, and King, and who love to sing carols about that O holy, silent, sacred night, should take great joy in adding many things in this book to their repertoire of treasured Christmas stories.

THE MOST MISUNDERSTOOD BOOK: christopher hitchens ON THE BIBLE

William J. Hamblin

Review of Christopher Hitchens. *god is not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*. New York: Twelve, 2007. x + 307 pp., with index. \$24.99.

There is an “apparent tendency of the Almighty to reveal himself only to unlettered and quasi-historical individuals in regions of Middle Eastern wasteland.”

Christopher Hitchens, *god is not Great*, p. 98

Like most antitheists, Hitchens simply cannot countenance the Bible. The fact that the Bible is nearly universally recognized as one of the most influential books in history—transforming Western art, architecture, philosophy, science, law, literature, poetry, music, and so on—does not move Mr. Hitchens. So strongly does his anti-theistic prejudice jaundice his view of this world masterpiece that the most positive praise he can muster is to acknowledge that an occasional “lapidary phrase” or “fine verse” can be found in the Bible (p. 107). Any really good ideas, however, have been better put in other books. Even the few good parts of the Bible, you see, are now rendered superfluous by literature and philosophy (p. 283).

Hitchens’s argument with the Bible, however, is not really aesthetic but atheological. The problem for the antitheists is not that the Bible

In the title I follow hitchens’s new atheist capitalization rule that makes capitalizing proper names optional.

is taken seriously as literature, moral philosophy, or even history, but that it is taken seriously as revelation. In attempting to undermine its revelatory authority, antitheists like Hitchens often practice overkill by denouncing just about everything to do with the Bible. Whatever problems Hitchens purports to discover in the Bible in terms of historicity, disputed authorship, barbaric morality, or antiquated science can be equally found in Homer, for example. Yet we never see overwrought antitheists wringing their hands in distress and writing books exposing the supposed absurdities of the *Iliad*. Here, again, the driving force of an antitheistic ideology can be seen controlling Hitchens's paradigm and approach to the Bible.

While the Bible is undoubtedly the most widely read book in history, it is also the most widely misunderstood. Bible interpretation began almost from the time the earliest texts were written; indeed, parts of the Bible interpret earlier biblical passages, and the Dead Sea Scrolls are filled with commentaries and interpretations of the Hebrew Bible. By the time of Christ, biblical interpretation had become sophisticated and very diverse, with different schools of interpretation ultimately developing into different denominations among both Christians and Jews.¹ Unfortunately, we find nothing of this nuanced complexity in Hitchens's view of the Bible: the Old Testament is a "nightmare," and the New "evil."² Remarkably, as we shall see, Hitchens's approach to the Bible makes little attempt to come to grips with the book's original Iron Age context. While his diatribes against the Bible tell us a great deal about Hitchens, they tell us very little about the Bible itself.

Although scholars have identified a number of different paradigmatic approaches to the Bible, Hitchens reduces this complexity to binary opposition: the Bible must be either utterly inerrant or

1. Alan J. Hause and Duane F. Watson, eds., *A History of Biblical Interpretation: The Ancient Period* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), and *A History of Biblical Interpretation: The Medieval through the Reformation Periods* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), with two volumes still forthcoming; Martin J. Mulder and Harry Sysling, eds., *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading, and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004). Gerald L. Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present* (InterVarsity Press, 1996), gives an overview from Christian perspective.

2. From the titles of chapters 7 and 8, pp. 97, 109.

completely bogus. No middle ground exists for an inspired though errant text. In this he is paradoxically in thrall to the fundamentalist assumptions he so vividly vilifies. That is to say, throughout his book he argues against fundamentalist presuppositions and interpretations while ignoring—or at best (and rarely) downplaying—the fact that there are many nonfundamentalist responses to the issues he raises. In this extreme position Hitchens in fact follows the *minority* of even secular scholars. Hitchens rarely engages moderate positions, thus making much of his book a straw-man exercise.

Although there are many variations in the details of interpretation, four major paradigms for biblical interpretation can be identified.³

1. The Bible is inerrant in its history, science, and spirituality; it is the literal revealed word of God.

2. The Bible is basically historical and inspired, but it is not inerrant and must be read as a document of the Iron Age Near East in which its inspired spiritual message must be contextualized.

3. The Bible, at least after the founding of the kingdom of Israel, is essentially historical but includes many nonhistorical myths and legends; its spiritual message, while potentially meaningful, is no more significant than that of other great works of literature or philosophy. (Paradigms 2 and 3 are often quite similar in their outward approach to archaeological and historical questions but differ, for example, as to whether the book of Isaiah was inspired by God or is merely a human text.)

4. The Bible is fundamentally nonhistorical; its moral message is often primitive and has been transcended in modern times, and whatever good may be found in it has been better expressed in other works of law, science, philosophy, and literature. This is the position that

3. For a moderate inerrantist approach, see Alfred J. Hoerth, *Archaeology and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998). The moderate historicist position, broadly accepted by most scholars, is outlined in William G. Dever, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know and When Did They Know It? What Archaeology Can Tell Us about the Reality of Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001); he reviews the major minimalist literature on pp. 23–52. For the minority minimalist views, broadly followed by Hitchens, see Thomas L. Thompson, *The Mythic Past: Biblical Archaeology and the Myth of Israel* (London: Basic Books, 1999).

Hitchens takes, which, it must be emphasized, is the *minority* view among biblical scholars—even if we exclude the inerrantist position (no. 1 above) from consideration.

The belief in biblical inerrancy as generally understood by Protestant fundamentalists in fact developed in the nineteenth century. It is thus rather late in the history of biblical interpretation. The reality is, however, that one does not have to believe in the inerrancy and infallibility of scripture in order to believe in God or that the Bible is inspired. Indeed, it could be argued that rejection of biblical inerrancy actually increases potential arguments in favor of inspiration.

Tradire è Tradure

There are two primary rules that one must follow when trying to understand the Bible (or, for that matter, any other text that has been translated from a foreign language). First, one must accurately understand what the text has to say, which generally entails reading the text in the original language. Second, one must contextualize the text in its original setting—that is to say, read it in the context of the culture, history, values, science, and social norms from which the text derives. Time and again Hitchens violates these two rules by misrepresenting what the biblical text has to say and reading it as if God were trying to speak directly to an early-twenty-first-century liberal atheist journalist rather than a three-thousand-year-old subsistence-level farmer or nomad. God, at least, has the good sense to adapt his message to his audience, though Hitchens regularly condemns him for daring to speak to “illiterates” (pp. 114–15, 124). (God, apparently, should have had the wisdom to at least have spoken to a *journalist*.)

Remarkably, Hitchens is overtly disdainful of the careful reading of ancient texts in their original languages. He bemoans the supposed fact that “*all* religions have staunchly resisted *any* attempt to translate their sacred texts into languages ‘understood of the people’” (p. 125, emphasis added). This is a stunningly erroneous claim, betraying almost no understanding of the history of religion. In reality, the translation of religious texts has been a major cultural phenomenon in ancient and medieval times and has steadily increased through the

present. The Bible, of course, is the most translated book in the history of the world. According to the United Bible Societies, it has been translated into 2,167 languages, with another 320 in process.⁴ And this is by no means merely a modern phenomenon. The Bible was also the most widely translated book in the ancient world. It was translated into Greek (the Septuagint, second century BC), Aramaic (Targum, by the first century BC), Old Latin (second century AD), Syriac (Peshitta, third century AD), Coptic (Egyptian, fourth century AD), Gothic (Old German, fourth century AD), Latin (Jerome's Latin Vulgate, late fourth century AD), Armenian (early fifth century AD), Ethiopic (fifth century AD), Georgian (fifth century AD), Old Nubian (by the eighth century AD), Old Slavonic (ninth century AD), and Arabic (Saadia Gaon's version, early tenth century AD).⁵ Thus, far from "staunchly resist[ing] any attempt to translate their sacred texts" (p. 125), Christians have consistently made tremendous efforts to translate their sacred books.

The translation history of Buddhist scriptures is *precisely* the same—and again, *precisely* the opposite of Hitchens's claim. The translation of Buddhist scriptures was the most widespread literary phenomenon in premodern Asia, with translations appearing in Pali, Chinese, Tibetan, Korean, Japanese, Mongolian, Cambodian, Thai, Burmese, and other languages. Indeed, one could safely say that, after trade, Buddhist religious pilgrimages and scripture translations were the major factors behind cross-cultural exchange in Asia in the premodern period. The translation of Buddhist scriptures has continued apace in modern times by organizations such as the Pali Text Society.⁶

Hitchens uses the alleged failure of Muslims to translate the Qur'an as a sort of poster child for his claims. "Only in Islam has there

4. http://www.ubs-translations.org/about_us (accessed 7 July 2009).

5. David Noel Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 6:787–851 (hereafter *ABD*), reviews the history of Bible translations from antiquity to the present. See also Bruce M. Metzger, *The Bible in Translation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001). There are also surviving fragments of ancient translations of at least part of the Bible into several Iranic languages, such as Aghouanite, Pahlevi, Iranian, and Soghdian. See Michel van Esbroeck, "Les versions orientales de la Bible: Une orientation bibliographique," in *The Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Jozef Krasovec (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 399–509.

6. <http://www.palitext.com> (accessed 29 June 2009).

been no reformation,” he assures us, “and to this day any vernacular version of the Koran must still be printed with an Arabic parallel text. This ought to arouse suspicion even in the slowest mind” (p. 125). Call me slow, but I’m not very suspicious—except of Hitchens’s own claim. The earliest translations of the Qur’an appeared within a couple of centuries of Muhammad’s death. By the tenth century there were extensive commentaries (*tafsir*) on the Qur’an in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish—the three great cultural languages of medieval Islamic civilization. These included a word-for-word grammatical analysis of the Arabic text, thereby providing translations. In the Middle Ages there were also numerous interlinear translations of the Qur’an. In addition, the Qur’an was translated by non-Muslims, largely for polemical purposes. It appeared in Greek in the ninth century, Syriac before the eleventh, and Latin in the twelfth. In fifteenth-century Muslim Granada in southern Spain there was even an Aljamrado Qur’an, a translation into Spanish written in the Arabic script. By the nineteenth century the Qur’an had been translated into Urdu, Sindhi, Punjabi, Gujarati, Tamil, Bengali, Persian, Turkish, Balochi, Brahui, Telugu, Malayan, Indonesian, Chinese, Japanese, Swahili, and other languages. The translation of the Qur’an continues in modern times, with the Saudi kingdom establishing the “King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Qur’an,” which has sponsored the publication of the Qur’an in twenty-seven languages, with many more in progress. These translations are published in both dual-language editions—with facing pages in Arabic and the translation—and, contra Hitchens, in the translated language alone.⁷

Hitchens is, of course, attempting to universalize a rather isolated phenomenon associated with very specific religious and political controversies regarding the translation of scripture during a brief period of the early Protestant Reformation in England. But even in this limited context, his argument is based on unsubstantiated assertion. “There would have been no Protestant Reformation,” he assures us,

7. Hartmut Bobzin, “Translation of the Qur’an,” in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān*, ed. Jane D. McAuliffe (Boston, MA: Brill, 2006), 5:340–58, <http://www.qurancomplex.org/default.asp?l=eng> (accessed 29 June 2009).

“if it were not for the long struggle to have the Bible rendered into ‘the Vulgate’” (p. 125). Aside from the obvious fact that the term *Vulgate* refers not to translations of the Bible into vernacular languages but to the late-fourth-century Latin translation of the Bible by Jerome,⁸ translating the Bible into German as an issue of the Reformation is found *nowhere* among Luther’s original Ninety-Five Theses. In fact, the Bible had been translated into German in the fourteenth century, and a German Bible had been printed by Gutenberg in 1466, only thirteen years after his publication of the Latin Bible in 1453! By the time Luther had nailed his theses to the door of the Wittenberg Castle Church on 31 October 1517—the act that is generally regarded as the opening salvo in the Protestant Reformation—Gutenberg’s German Bible was nearly sixty-five years old. The supposed struggle to translate the Bible into German did not have anything to do with Luther.

Turning specifically to the English Bible, various parts had likewise been translated into Anglo-Saxon from the seventh century on, with the Latin text interlined with Anglo-Saxon by the tenth century. The Venerable Bede (d. AD 735) is said to have translated the Gospel of John into Old English. The problem during most of the medieval period in the West was not that the church was attempting to suppress the translation of the Bible but that all literate persons in the early Middle Ages knew Latin, rendering translation superfluous. Priests would translate the Latin text into the vernacular languages during their sermons to the laity. Only with the rise of a literate laity *that did not know Latin* did the issue of vernacular translations of the Bible become an important one. And, even then, it was still assumed that serious biblical scholarship should be in Latin so that it could be universally read throughout Christendom. Even as late as 1305, Dante had to argue for the legitimacy of writing serious literature in Italian rather than Latin, as seen in his *De Vulgari Eloquentia* (“On Vernacular Speech”).⁹

8. Frank L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 1710.

9. Steven Botterill, ed. and trans., *Dante: De Vulgari Eloquentia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

Thus, Hitchens's claim about religious restrictions on translating scripture is, in fact, an overgeneralization drawn from a narrowly focused issue during about a century of the early English Reformation. Hitchens laments that "devout men like Wycliffe, Coverdale, and Tyndale were burned alive for even attempting early translations" (p. 125) of the Bible into vernacular literature. The most charitable interpretation of this sentence is that Hitchens is confused. Far from being burned at the stake, John Wycliffe (1330–1384) died of natural causes while hearing Catholic mass in his parish church. Miles Coverdale likewise died unburned in 1568 at the age of eighty-one. Of the three translators mentioned by Hitchens, only William Tyndale (ironically also known as Hychyns, Hitchins, or Huchyns) was burned at the stake.¹⁰ But Tyndale's execution in 1536 was as much for his opposition to Henry VIII's divorce—entailing what was viewed as a treasonous rejection of the Succession Act—as it was for his translation efforts. In other words, it was as much an act of political tyranny as it was religious oppression. As he does so often, Hitchens reductionistically generalizes from limited or even unique anecdotal examples to utterly unwarranted *universal* conclusions.

There is, however, excellent reason to insist that a complete and proper understanding of a text can only be obtained by reading it in the original language. As the Italians aptly put it: *tradire è tradure*—"to translate is to betray." As any scholar will tell you, in order to fully understand a text such as the Bible, the Qur'an, the *Dhammapada*, the *Bhagavad-Gita*, or the *Tao te Ching*, it must be read in the original language. Indeed, contra Hitchens, *all* major graduate programs in ancient or biblical studies require basic mastery of the original languages as the fundamental prerequisite to *enter* their programs.¹¹ In other words, you can't even begin to do graduate work on the Bible

10. Not wanting to put too fine a point on it—we are strongly and unequivocally opposed to burning people at the stake—Tyndale was not "burned alive" as Hitchens claims; he was strangled and his corpse was burned, which was, in fact, the typical procedure in such executions.

11. It is possible that Hitchens's own innocence of the sacred languages of the scriptures he professes to disdain can go far toward explaining his numerous flawed readings of the Bible.

until you've studied the relevant languages. Far from being a close-minded, regressive hindrance to understanding the Bible or the Qur'an as Hitchens implies, traditional insistence on reading sacred texts in the original languages is intended to preserve the meaning of the text and facilitate proper exegesis.

Historicity and the Bible

Hitchens's hypercritical rejection of the essential historicity of the biblical narratives is based fundamentally on atheological rather than historiographical grounds. Logically, it should be sufficient for Hitchens to merely reject the authenticity of the biblical claims of divine revelation. Thus, it is quite possible that Jesus may have existed and yet not have been the Son of God. It is equally possible that ancient Israelites may have believed that God intervened in their history and recorded their perceptions of that intervention in the context of the actual historical events in which they lived. (In this, by the way, they would be no different from their Assyrian, Babylonian, Egyptian, or Greek contemporaries.) If claims of supernatural events in a historical text are sufficient grounds for rejecting historicity, why does Hitchens not also reject, for example, the historicity of the Persian Wars because Herodotus describes divine revelation and intervention on behalf of the Greeks during those campaigns?¹² Only the Bible is singled out for such hypercritical rejection of its essential historicity in order to bolster the real argument: the atheological rejection of its supernatural claims.

A major flaw in Hitchens's approach is that his polemics utterly fail to properly contextualize biblical narratives. Hitchens describes the *akedah*—Abraham's "binding" or near sacrifice of his son Isaac—as "mad and gloomy" (p. 53), a "frightful" and "vile" "delusion" (p. 206). For Hitchens, "there is no softening the plain meaning of this frightful story" (p. 206) that God would require humans to sacrifice their children (pp. 109, 206–7). But is this the message the text would have conveyed to its early Iron Age readers? Quite the contrary: to an ancient

12. For example, Herodotus 1.46–55; 7.143.

reader, the story of the Akedah reveals that God *forbids* human sacrifice, accepting the substitutionary sacrifice of a ram instead. Thus, the Akedah narrative transforms both the nature and meaning of sacrifice for ancient Israelite readers when compared to the surrounding pagan societies. One will find none of the careful, nuanced biblical exegesis of Jon Levenson, for example, in Hitchens's assertions, and worse, not even a notice that such scholarship exists.¹³ Unfortunately, a properly contextualized understanding of biblical narrative is sacrificed by Hitchens on the altar of his antitheistic polemic.

Likewise, in discussing the exodus, Hitchens dogmatically asserts: "There was no flight from Egypt, no wandering in the desert . . . , and no dramatic conquest of the Promised Land. It was all, quite simply and very ineptly, made up at a much later date. No Egyptian chronicle mentions this episode either, even in passing. . . . All the Mosaic myths can be safely and easily discarded" (pp. 102–3). These narratives can be "easily discarded" by Hitchens only because he has failed to do even a superficial survey of the evidence *in favor* of the historicity of the biblical traditions. Might we suggest that Hitchens begin with Hoffmeier's *Israel in Egypt* and *Ancient Israel in Sinai*?¹⁴ It should be noted that Hoffmeier's books were not published by some small evangelical theological press but by Oxford University—hardly a bastion of regressive fundamentalist apologetics. Hitchens's claim that "no Egyptian chronicle mentions this episode [of Moses and the Israelites] either, even in passing" (p. 102) is simply polemical balderdash. Setting aside the fact that Egyptian chronicles almost *never* mention the defeat of a pharaoh—a fact that demonstrates, by the way, the superiority of biblical historicity with its very flawed and human kings—Egyptian chronicles do, in fact, mention nascent Israel in the famous "Israel

13. Jon D. Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995).

14. James K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), and *Ancient Israel in Sinai: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Wilderness Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). For a favorable analysis of the overall historicity of the Hebrew Bible traditions, see Kenneth A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006).

Stele” (or Merneptah Stele) now in the Cairo National Museum.¹⁵ It has been widely translated and photographed, and it is astonishing that Hitchens is unaware of it. It is also possible that Egyptian reliefs at the temple of Karnak in Luxor may depict early Israelites warring with Egyptians.¹⁶

Now it may be that Hoffmeier and other scholars who argue in favor of historicity are wrong in their interpretation of these matters. But even if this were so, it is irresponsible and misleading to claim, as Hitchens does, that “all the Mosaic myths can be safely and easily discarded” (p. 103). They can’t. If they are to be discarded, it can only be after careful study. This is a complex topic meriting consideration of all the evidence, for and against, with sophisticated methodology and serious thought—something you will not find in Hitchens’s brusque dismissal. It should also be emphasized that scholarly divisions over biblical historicity issues are by no means based on a party line ideological divide between believers and atheists. Agnostic William G. Dever, for example, is one of the leading proponents of essential historicity for much of the biblical narrative from the monarchic period onward, and for the authenticity of some of the conquest traditions as well.¹⁷ Unlike Hitchens, serious biblical scholars don’t simply dismiss these issues with a rhetorical wave of the hand based on their ideological predispositions.

Hitchens’s account of Joshua’s battle at Gibeon (Joshua 10) betrays a similar naïveté about the text of the Bible, ancient history, and archaeology. According to Hitchens, “the Old Testament is riddled with dreams and with astrology (the sun standing still so that Joshua can complete his massacre at a site that has never been located)” (p. 117). First, the “sun standing still” has absolutely nothing to do with astrology, which only developed in its full form centuries after the book of

15. William Hallo, *Context of Scripture* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2001–2003), 2:40–41.

16. Frank J. Yurco, “3,200-Year-Old Picture of Israelites Found in Egypt,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 16/5 (1990): 21–38.

17. William G. Dever, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know and When Did They Know It?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), and *Who Were the Early Israelites and Where Did They Come From?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006).

Joshua was written.¹⁸ But, more importantly, Hitchens claims that the site where the battle occurred, Gibeon (Joshua 10:10–12), “has never been located” (p. 117). In reality, one can find it located in *any* atlas of the Bible, which Hitchens apparently couldn’t be bothered to consult.¹⁹ Under the entry for Gibeon, the authoritative *Anchor Bible Dictionary* tells us that it was “an important city of Benjamin, now identified with modern el-Jib . . . 8 km N[orth]W[est] of Jerusalem.” Are the biblical scholars simply making this up, randomly associating ancient cities with biblical names? Quite the contrary, the site of Gibeon was conclusively identified when J. Pritchard’s excavations at el-Jib uncovered “thirty-one jar handles inscribed with the name ‘Gibeon’ (*gbcn*) in ancient Hebrew script.”²⁰ But what of the sun standing still? Isn’t that simply impossible? Perhaps. On the other hand, it may simply be a rather extravagant epic poetic device to describe the longest day of the year, the summer solstice: the term *solstice* derives from Latin *sol* (“sun”) and *sistere* (“to stand still”). But however one wishes to understand the story in Joshua, Hitchens remains confused; the story is not about astrology, and the ancient site has been clearly identified by inscriptions discovered by modern archaeology. Once again, Hitchens simply cannot be trusted to get the details right.²¹

The history of later Judaism fares no better under the pen of Mr. Hitchens. Take, for example, his discussion of “the vapid and annoying holiday known as ‘Hannukah’ [*sic*]” (p. 273). (“You’re a mean one, Mr. Hitch!”) Hitchens informs us that in celebrating Hanukkah, “the Jews borrow shamelessly from Christians in the pathetic hope of a celebration that coincides with ‘Christmas’” (p. 273). This is a remarkable achievement, considering that the origin of the festival of Hanukkah, the “dedication” of the temple, antedates Christianity—indeed, Jesus

18. Tamsyn Barton, *Ancient Astrology* (New York: Routledge, 1994); *ABD*, 1:504–7.

19. For example, Y Aharoni and M. Avi-Yonah, *The Macmillan Bible Atlas*, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1977), 44, map 56.

20. *ABD*, 2:1010, 1012.

21. Interestingly, Galileo, one of Hitchens’s supposedly secularizing heroes (p. 270), wrote an exegesis of Joshua 10 claiming that the sun’s standing still was evidence for a heliocentric rather than a geocentric universe! Eileen Reeves, “Augustine and Galileo on Reading the Heavens,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 52/4 (1991): 563–79.

himself is said to have come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of the Dedication (John 10:22)!

In a stunning case of blaming the victim, Hitchens informs us that the Maccabean revolt was an attempt to “forcibly restor[e] Mosaic fundamentalism against the many Jews . . . who had become attracted by Hellenism” (p. 273). In Hitchens’s worldview, it seems to be just another case of evil “fundamentalists” (read: Jews who wanted to follow their religious traditions) oppressing benign “true early multiculturalists” (p. 273) (read: Jews who wanted to abandon their religion and become hellenized). Note, also, the anachronistic transposition of the concepts of modern “fundamentalist” and “multiculturalist”—not necessarily antonyms, by the way—onto the ancient world.

Now, it is true that during the first centuries around the time of Christ there was a significant minority of the Jewish elites who hellenized—that is, adopted Greek culture, language, customs, and so on. This hellenization took various forms. Many Jews—like Philo and Paul—believed they could accommodate the best of Hellenistic culture while remaining authentically Jewish. Others, disregarding their Jewish roots, simply became Greeks, abandoning their unique Jewish traditions (1 Maccabees 1:13–15).²² But this alone is clearly not what caused the Maccabean revolt—after all, the Books of the Maccabees, which describe the revolt, survive only in Greek, not Hebrew, and are thus obviously products of the very hellenization that Hitchens claimed the revolt opposed.²³ The problem was not, as Hitchens declares, that fundamentalist Jews oppressed a minority of Jews who voluntarily hellenized. Rather, Antiochus IV (reigned 175–164 BC), a king of the Greek Seleucid dynasty that ruled much of the Near East in the second century BC, became the banner-bearer for the policy of *enforced* hellenization of the Jews. His anti-Jewish policies began with the plundering of the temple treasury in 169 BC (1 Maccabees 1:20–24). Two years later he captured and sacked Jerusalem, killing

22. Lee I. Levine, *Judaism and Hellenism in Antiquity: Conflict or Confluence?* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999).

23. Jonathan A. Goldstein, *I Maccabees* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976); and Daniel J. Harrington, *The Maccabean Revolt* (Wilmington, DE: M. Glazier, 1988).

many Jews and enslaving others, thereafter establishing Hitchens's "true early multiculturalists"—collaborating hellenized Jews—as new puppet rulers of the city (vv. 29–34). Antiochus then ordered, under pain of death (vv. 50, 57), that all Jewish religious practices be abolished and Jewish books burned. Circumcision as a sign of the Jewish covenant with God was forbidden: “they put to death the women who had their children circumcised, along with their families and those who circumcised them; and they hung the [circumcised] infants from their mothers’ necks” (v. 61)—a policy that might have been applauded by a second-century-BC version of Hitchens, if he is serious in his claims that circumcision is tantamount to child abuse (pp. 223–26). Antiochus also ordered that idols and sacrifices to Greek gods be established in the temple (1 Maccabees 1:41–64). He further demanded that altars to Greek gods be set up in all Jewish towns and the Jews be forced to offer sacrifice there, sending Greek officers to ensure that the orders were carried out (vv. 54–55). “True early multiculturalists” indeed. According to Hitchens, this proto-holocaust—whose intent was clearly to destroy Judaism as an independent religion and culture, an objective that included the genocide of those who resisted—was merely a matter of hellenized Jews “agree[ing] to have a temple of Zeus on the site [of the Temple of Solomon] where smoky and bloody altars used to propitiate the unsmiling deity of yore” (p. 274).

Here is Hitchens's equally bizarre description of the spark that launched the revolt. “When the father of Judah Maccabeus [i.e., Mattathias] saw a Jew about to make a Hellenic offering on the old altar, he lost no time in murdering him” (p. 274). Well, sort of. What really happened was that officers of Antiochus came to Modein, a small village to the west of Jerusalem, built an altar to Zeus, and ordered all the Jews of the village to make sacrifice to Zeus under pain of death (1 Maccabees 2:15–18, 25; 1:50, 57). (Note this was not at the “old altar” of the temple of Jerusalem; Hitchens is confused.) Mattathias, a priest and leader of the village, refused to offer sacrifice under any circumstances (vv. 19–22). A terrified member of the village, however, started to submit to this coercion (v. 23). (Note this was not a multicultural hellenized Jew voluntarily worshipping Zeus. This was a terrified man

coerced into abandoning his religion and ethnicity under threat of execution. Hitchens is again confused.) At this point Mattathias killed the renegade Jew and the Seleucid officers (vv. 24–26) and launched the revolt. Once again decontextualizing the ancient text, Hitchens calls this act “murder.” Perhaps. But in its ancient historical context, Mattathias, as priest and village leader, was fulfilling Jewish law by executing an apostate (Deuteronomy 13:7–10; 17:2–7). Now, one can argue the relative merits of the law’s death penalty for religious apostasy, but from the ancient perspective, this was not an act of “murder” as Hitchens describes it, but the legitimate execution of a traitor.

Transposing this event by analogy into modern times, imagine Nazis coming to a Jewish village in Poland, profaning the synagogue, killing resisters, sending many to camps, and then demanding that surviving Jews salute pictures of Hitler to show their loyalty to the Führer. Would Hitchens similarly condemn Jews who resisted the Nazis or killed Jewish collaborators? Now, we have no desire to be apologists for the Maccabean regime, whose war atrocities, crimes, and incompetence are manifold. But Hitchens’s description of the Maccabean revolt is such a blatant caricature that we are again forced to assume that his antitheistic bias so distorts his reading that he is simply incapable of presenting a balanced and accurate summary of biblical events. Since he has already concluded that religion is always “poisonous,” he feels perfectly free to rewrite history so that it matches his theory.

For Hitchens all this is not merely some obscure, half-forgotten event in a backwater of the Hellenistic world. He believes that if only the Maccabees had failed, the Jews would have become hellenized and Christianity would never have existed at all.²⁴ “We could have been

24. Hitchens mistakenly claims that “the Romans eventually preferred the violent and dogmatic Maccabees to the less militarized and fanatical Jews,” thereby perpetuating the “old-garb ultra-Orthodox” form of Judaism (p. 274). At this point no one should be surprised to learn that Hitchens again gets it wrong. In fact, the Romans ousted the Maccabees in favor of a highly hellenized puppet ruler, Herod the Great, who, in addition to rebuilding the Jewish temple, funded the building of pagan temples in his domain, including some to his deified patron, the Roman emperor Augustus. Peter Richardson, *Herod: King of the Jews and Friend of the Romans* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), 183–85.

spared the whole thing,” he laments. “The Jewish people might have been the carriers of philosophy instead of arid monotheism” (p. 274). Or, much more likely, the Jewish people would have simply ceased to exist, since of all the ancient Near Eastern peoples and cultures that fell under the influence of Hellenism, only the Jews and Zoroastrians have survived to the present with their ancient cultural identity intact, and this because of their unwavering devotion to their respective religions. Hitchens seems oblivious to the fact that Judaism is *not* a philosophy or a genetic ethnicity, but a *religion*. Hitchens’s belief that the world would be a better place without the existence of Judaism as a vibrant, living religion is little short of shocking in light of the horrors of anti-Semitism of the past century. I am not, I must insist, implying that I believe Hitchens to be an anti-Semite; I suggest only that his antitheistic bias so blinds him that he can’t seem to see the anti-Semitic implications of his belief—that the world would be a better place without religious Jews.

The Teachings of the Hebrew Bible

Hitchens’s quarrel with the Bible begins on its very first page. Taking his cue from Protestant fundamentalists, Hitchens maintains that the author of the Genesis creation narrative should be held accountable for its differences with the thought of Darwin and Einstein (pp. 73–96). The overall significance and meaning of the biblical account, it appears, can only be judged in relationship to its compatibility with contemporary cosmological theories—a moving target, it should be noted. I, on the other hand, find it much more likely that the author of Genesis intended to engage the cutting-edge science of his *own* day—the early Iron Age—not scientific theories that would eventually develop some 3,000 years *after* his death. If we examine Genesis from this perspective, it reveals itself as a remarkably progressive scientific work. Unlike standard contemporary early Iron Age science, Genesis maintains that the planets, sun, and moon are not gods but are creations of God and are therefore susceptible like the rest of creation to the laws of nature. The fact that we still call the planets by the names of Roman gods—Mercury, Venus, Mars,

Saturn, and Jupiter—points to the once near universality of this belief in planets-as-gods. But Genesis will have none of this, being nearly unique in ancient science for its rejection of this claim. Through this rejection, the cosmology of Genesis is as revolutionary in its own way as were later heliocentric or Newtonian theories. Indeed, all modern astronomy still rests on the foundations of the astronomical insights found in Genesis—that planets are not sentient beings but are subject to natural law. Some, we suppose, might condemn God for not spontaneously revealing to Moses that $E = mc^2$ —despite the fact that such a pronouncement would have been utterly incomprehensible to any early Iron Age reader. Others, however, might take solace in the fact that the Genesis creation narrative, when properly contextualized in its original setting, represents a major and enduring *scientific* breakthrough in its own right, in addition to its religious insights into God’s relationship to the created order and humankind.

It is not just the early Iron Age science of the Bible that Hitchens finds offensive. The morality of the Bible, which many feel is foundational to Western civilization, is to Hitchens pure barbarism. But when we read Hitchens’s claim concerning “the pitiless teachings of the god of Moses, who never mentions human solidarity and compassion at all” (p. 100), we are left to wonder if Hitchens has read the Bible he despises with any degree of earnestness whatsoever. The Hebrew Bible speaks frequently of God’s compassion and his enduring “loving-kindness” or “steadfast love.”²⁵ When Christ taught, “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39), he was, in fact, quoting the Hebrew Bible (Leviticus 19:18; see Zechariah 7:8). Furthermore, the law insists that Israelites must have compassion for foreigners as well for their own kinsmen (Exodus 22:21; Leviticus 19:34; Deuteronomy 10:19). The prophet Hosea likewise taught that God preferred “steadfast love” over “sacrifice” (Hosea 6:6). The teaching of Hosea 6:6 is commonplace throughout the Hebrew Bible, representing a standard

25. For example, Numbers 14:18; Deuteronomy 30:3; 1 Chronicles 16:34; Psalm 86:15; 112:4; 118; 145:8.

component of Jewish temple theology.²⁶ The essential idea is that the mere outward performances of the sacrificial rituals of the temple are worthless without an inward spiritual transformation of love and obedience. Hosea 6:6 is quoted by Christ in Matthew 9:13 and 12:7 and is probably alluded to in Mark 12:33 in relation to the two great commandments to love God and one's neighbor. Hitchens's claim that "the pitiless teachings of the god of Moses . . . never [mention] human solidarity and compassion at all" (p. 100) is stunningly erroneous.

For Hitchens the principles found in the law of Moses tend to be either transparently obvious (pp. 99–100) or barbarically "demented pronouncements" (p. 106). He objects to all sorts of things in the law, such as the "insanely detailed regulations governing oxes [*sic*]" (p. 100), which go on for an astonishing *five verses* (Exodus 21:28–32)! Actually, by ancient standards—for instance, when compared to the fourteen oxen regulations in Hammurabi's Code—this is notably succinct.²⁷ Considering that oxen were a major form of transportation in early agrarian Near Eastern societies, it is reasonable to expect some regulations about them; but, even if superfluous, there is nothing "insanely detailed" about it, especially when compared to our modern laws concerning vehicular manslaughter—probably the closest modern analogy. Hitchens really has no substantive point here beyond mere rhetorical bombast.

Part of the problem may be that Hitchens appears to have been reading (or more likely *not* reading) a very different Bible than the rest of us. This leads me to suspect that, like Chaucer's "doctour of phisik," Hitchens's "studie was but litel on the bible."²⁸ "Then there is the very salient question of what the commandments do *not* say," he intones. "Is it too modern to notice that there is nothing about the protection of children from cruelty, nothing about rape, nothing about slavery, and nothing about genocide?" (p. 100). Let's take each of his

26. 1 Samuel 15:22–23; Psalm 40:6–10; 51:16–17; Proverbs 15:8; 21:3, 27; Isaiah 1:11–20; 66:6; Jeremiah 7:21–26; Hosea 5:6; 6:6; 8:13; Amos 5:21–27; Micah 6:6–8.

27. Martha Tobi Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*, 2nd ed. (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 124, 127–29, 224–25, 242–52, 262–63.

28. Chaucer, "Prologue," *Canterbury Tales*, line 438.

four issues about which the Mosaic law supposedly has nothing to say: protection of children, rape, slavery, and genocide.

Only in the case of child protection laws has Hitchens got it right, but then, only partly. Children are rarely mentioned in Israelite law because the laws deal with the interrelations of adult Israelites. The relations of children to parents were largely a private matter; parents were responsible for the good behavior of their children, and children were to honor their parents (Exodus 20:12), meaning that they were to obey them. Fathers had absolute authority over children, and intractably rebellious children *could* be put to death (21:17; Leviticus 20:9). (In this, Israelite law was no different from most contemporary cultures; a Roman father, for example, had the explicit legal authority to put his children to death or sell them into slavery.)²⁹ Such regulations, however, were apparently most honored in the breach, as the story of David and his murderously rebellious son Absalom demonstrates (2 Samuel 13–19). As with all traditional societies, parents were advised to strictly discipline their children, which could include corporal punishment.³⁰ Such practices might seem harsh by modern child-rearing standards, but they were typical of nearly all pre-modern societies. The parable of the prodigal son indicates, on the other hand, that reconciliation and forgiveness were also part of the normal relationship between children and parents (Luke 15:11–32). The Bible likewise speaks frequently of parental love for children;³¹ God’s love for Israel is compared to the love of a father for his children (Jeremiah 31:20)—something that would make little sense if Israelite fathers were generally abusive tyrants. Jesus famously taught that the kingdom of heaven belonged to little children (Matthew 19:14). Thus, though the nature of ancient societies meant that child welfare laws were generally not part of public law codes, being considered private matters, compassion and love for children is clearly an integral part of the biblical tradition.

29. The Twelve Tablets, Tablet 4; see J. Andrew Borkowski and Paul du Plessis, *Textbook on Roman Law*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

30. Proverbs 13:24, 19:18, 22:15, 23:13–14, 29:17; Sirach 30:1–13.

31. For example, Psalm 103:13, 127:3; Jeremiah 31:20; Matthew 2:18; 7:9–11; Luke 9:48.

Despite Hitchens's assertion, rape is discussed in some detail in Deuteronomy 22:23–29; and, of course, the command to not commit adultery obviously includes rape. Slavery is likewise widely discussed in the Mosaic law (Exodus 21; Leviticus 25; Deuteronomy 15). The law provides the death penalty for those who kidnap people to sell them into slavery (Deuteronomy 24:7). Slaves could not be forced to work on the Sabbath (Exodus 20:10), a concept unique to the Bible, indicating that Hebrew slaves were better treated than those anywhere else in the Near East at the time. People sold into debt-slavery were to be freed after six years of servitude (21:2–4). All Israelite slaves were to be freed in the Jubilee year, thereby abolishing the possibility of perpetual servitude for the descendants of slaves (Leviticus 25:39–46). Although slaves could be beaten, a master killing a slave was considered guilty of murder and could be executed for his crime (Exodus 21:20), while a slave maimed by his master was to be freed (vv. 26–27). Runaway slaves were to be given protection and not returned to their masters (Deuteronomy 23:15–16). While we have no desire to be apologists for slavery in any form, it should be noted that the status of slaves in Hebrew law was in many ways superior to that of surrounding societies. Indeed, “we find in the Bible the first appeals in world literature to treat slaves as human beings for their own sake,”³² which eventually laid the foundation for the worldwide abolition of slavery. But whatever one thinks of biblical slavery, for Hitchens to claim that the law of Moses contains “nothing about slavery” is preposterous.

Genocide is not explicitly mentioned in the Mosaic law because the term is a relatively recent one—developed, I might add, in response to the unique nature of the genocidal atrocities of *atheistic* regimes of the twentieth century. However, laws of warfare governing the treatment of enemies are quite explicit in the Mosaic law (Deuteronomy 20:10–20; 21:10–14). During a war, cities must be given a chance to surrender; if they do, they become tributary states, but the property and lives of the citizens are protected (20:10–11). If a city resists and is captured by force, the men are massacred, the women and children enslaved, and the property becomes the spoil of the victors (vv. 12–15).

32. *ABD*, 6:65a.

Note that in its ancient context this should be viewed as a *limitation* on martial violence and the protection of noncombatants. From the modern perspective, the most problematic passage is where the Israelites are commanded to exterminate all of the six nations of the Canaanites.³³ The Amalekites were also placed under this same curse (*herem*) of utter extermination because of their treacherous attempt to exterminate the Israelites while they were sojourning in the wilderness (Exodus 17:8–17; Deuteronomy 25:17–19). This practice could certainly be classified under the modern concept of genocide. From the ancient perspective, however, the Amalekites and the Canaanite tribes were understood to have engaged in a blood feud with the Lord himself and were therefore to be exterminated. It should be emphasized that in all of this the Israelite war code follows closely the contemporary laws of war of the Near East.

In reality, however, this type of *herem* genocide seems to have rarely occurred. The Amalekites existed as a major enemy of Israel from the foundation of the nation until subdued—though not exterminated—by David (1 Samuel 30). King Saul was ordered by the prophet Samuel to kill all Amalekites captured in a battle, but he refused to do so, for which Samuel cursed him (1 Samuel 15). The city of Gibeon, of the cursed Hivite tribe, was not exterminated but made a treaty with Joshua (Joshua 9:7). The city of Jerusalem was inhabited by the cursed Jebusites (15:63; Judges 19:10; 2 Samuel 5:6) when David captured it by force; however, he did not exterminate the inhabitants since he later purchased the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite as the site for the future temple (2 Samuel 24:16, 18)—a place he could have taken by plunder during the conquest of the city. Uriah and Ahimelech, David’s mercenaries, were of the cursed Hittite tribe (1 Samuel 26:6; 2 Samuel 11:3). Solomon married Canaanite women (1 Kings 11:1–2), and Canaanites were required to provide labor for Solomon’s building projects (9:20–21). Thus the Canaanites obviously still existed and had not been exterminated by the Israelites. All surviving evidence

33. Deuteronomy 20:16–18; Numbers 31:16–18; the six nations are the Hittites (not to be confused with the Anatolian empire), Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites.

indicates that the law commanding the genocide of the Canaanites was rarely, if ever, practiced in ancient Israel. Indeed, many scholars believe that the genocide passage in Deuteronomy is, in fact, an idealized retrojection commanding the extermination of ancient peoples who no longer existed in the period when Deuteronomy was written.³⁴

Be that as it may, we have no desire to attempt to legitimize biblical genocide. Yet biblical descriptions of massacres and enslavement of defeated peoples were well within the cultural norms and laws of war of ancient Near Eastern societies. For example, the Babylonians treated the Jews precisely this way when Judea and Jerusalem were conquered in 586 BC (2 Kings 24–25; Jeremiah 52). However horrific these events may have been, they were viewed by ancient contemporaries as a legitimate exercise of military power. This is in marked contrast to the mass genocide perpetrated by atheistic regimes of the twentieth century whose practices consistently violated all the norms of modern international relations and warfare. When biblical peoples perpetrated atrocities, they did so only in the context of what were then considered justifiable acts according to contemporary laws of war. None of their contemporaries faulted them for their behavior. Thus, all of the four topics supposedly ignored by the Mosaic law are in fact dealt with in some detail.

Hitchens's view of the Sabbath commandment as "a sharp reminder to keep working and only to relax when the absolutist says so" (p. 99) again fails to contextualize the text. In its ancient setting it should be seen as a progressive and humanitarian regulation ensuring that rulers and masters gave their slaves and laborers a day of rest (Exodus 20:10)—a practice that is apparently original to the Israelites³⁵—rather than forcing them to work unremittingly. Though it goes unacknowledged, Hitchens owes his weekends and also the concept of a "right" to leisure to the God of Israel—no thanks required. Only by rhetorical

34. Many scholars associate the current form of Deuteronomy with the "book of the Law" discovered in the temple during the reign of Josiah in the late seventh century (2 Kings 23).

35. *ABD*, 5:850–51 reviews the various theories of extrabiblical origins of the Sabbath regulations, concluding that "the quest for the origin of the Sabbath outside of the O[ld] T[estament] cannot be pronounced to have been successful."

sleight of hand can Hitchens try to turn this blessing into an act of supposed tyranny.

Paradoxically, Hitchens then blames the Bible for “the notorious verses forfeiting ‘life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth’” (p. 100).³⁶ In this the Bible is merely adopting the cultural norms of the ancient Near East, for this concept appears in the Law Code of Hammurabi.³⁷ Hitchens is also unaware of the fact that biblical law was intended to set the *maximum* allowable punishment. That is to say, if someone put your eye out, the *maximum* vengeance allowed was putting his eye out—you could not kill him. The purpose of the law was to ensure that punishment fit the crime, which became the foundation for this important concept in modern law. In societies such as those of the ancient Near East, where clan and personal vengeance and blood feud were rife, the *lex talionis* (“law of retaliation”) was designed to *limit* violence. The law of Moses implied—and was so interpreted by Jewish tradition—that, except in the case of murder, monetary compensation could be offered for damages, as was frequently the case in other Near Eastern societies.³⁸ Most importantly, however, Israelite law established the principle that all people (though not slaves) were equal before the law: “you shall have one law for the foreigner and the citizen” (Leviticus 24:22). This is in sharp distinction to other traditional Near Eastern law codes in which the law often had a different application depending on social class and race.³⁹ Far from being regressive as Hitchens implies, biblical law—with its relatively humane treatment of slaves and its universal, equal application of the law—represented a significant advance over traditional personalization of justice through blood feuds and special legal status for the upper classes in ancient

36. Alluding to Exodus 21:23–25; Leviticus 24:19–22; Deuteronomy 19:21.

37. Roth, *Law Collections*, 196–201, 121.

38. Numbers 35:31–32 insists that ransom *cannot* be accepted in place of execution for murder, implying that it *can* be accepted in other cases; the law was thus interpreted as permitting monetary compensation in all cases but murder. See Adele Berlin and Marc Brettler, eds., *Jewish Study Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), notes on p. 354 and notes to Exodus 21:23–25 on p. 154; see also *ABD*, 4:321–22.

39. See Roth, *Law Collections*, for numerous examples (e.g., p. 121).

Near Eastern societies. In all of this Hitchens also ignores Jesus's interpretation of this part of the law (Matthew 5:38–42).

From all we can tell, Hitchens has apparently made no serious effort to understand the original historical meaning of the law of Moses, precisely because in his view religion is sheer lunacy and thus has *no* meaning in any ultimate sense. For him the search for meaning in religion has all the consequence of searching for meaning in the ravings of a lunatic. His failure to try to understand religion with even the slightest degree of sympathy fatally undermines his entire enterprise. His pronouncements on the meaning of the Old Testament should not be taken seriously.

Jesus and the “Evil” New Testament

There were many deranged prophets
roaming Palestine at the time [of Jesus].

Christopher Hitchens, *god is not Great*, p. 118

For Hitchens “the ‘New’ Testament exceeds the evil of the ‘Old’ one” (p. 109), a very difficult feat indeed, considering Hitchens’s scorn for the Old Testament. His basic argument is that “the case for biblical consistency or authenticity or ‘inspiration’ has been in tatters for some time, . . . and thus no ‘revelation’ can be derived from that quarter” (p. 122). Hitchens’s fundamental argument is that the New Testament is a late, garbled, and often fictional collection of documents that therefore cannot be accepted as inspired or revealed. Time and again throughout his discussion, though, Hitchens demonstrates a feeble or erroneous understanding of the New Testament, which fundamentally undermines his case.

Historicity and Reliability of the Gospels

To begin with, like the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament is, for Hitchens, merely a “crude” forgery that was “hammered together *long* after its purported events.” The notion that the Gospels could be based on eyewitness accounts is “a patently fraudulent claim.” It is an

error to assume “that the four Gospels were in any sense a historical record”; they were instead “a garbled and oral-based reconstruction undertaken some *considerable time* after the fact” (pp. 110–12).⁴⁰ There are two essential claims made here: first, that the Gospels are “garbled and oral-based” and therefore unreliable, and second, that they were only written down “long after” the purported events they describe and are therefore unreliable. Since the Gospels are late, non-eyewitness accounts, the reasoning goes, whatever they have to say can be safely dismissed, both as history and theology, let alone as inspired revelation.

Without providing any background or context, Hitchens is taking sides in a scholarly debate that has been going on for over two centuries in an attempt to discover the “historical Jesus” and understand how the Gospels came to be written. In this debate, positions range on a vast spectrum from belief that the New Testament is completely inerrant to the belief that it is completely fictional, with numerous positions between these two poles. It should be emphasized that this debate is ongoing. No universal consensus has emerged; the debate has not been resolved in Hitchens’s favor as he implies throughout his presentation. It is a very complicated intellectual field, one that Hitchens reductionistically attempts to present as a *fait accompli* supporting his atheistic prejudices.⁴¹

It is probably not coincidental that Hitchens provides no scholarly sources for his claim that the Gospels as we have them were based on “oral” accounts, since the consensus of even *secular* biblical scholars is precisely the opposite of Hitchens’s assertion. “It is almost universally agreed today,” the authoritative *Anchor Bible Dictionary* tells us, “that the ‘oral’ theory is insufficient to explain the agreements between the Synoptic Gospels.”⁴² Rather, although it is only a theory, the majority

40. Emphasis added to quotations in this paragraph.

41. For background, see *ABD*, 1:725–36; Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past & Present* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000); Donald K. McKim, ed., *Historical Handbook of Major Biblical Interpreters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998); and McKim, ed., *Dictionary of Major Biblical Interpreters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007).

42. *ABD*, 6:263b.

consensus view holds that the Gospels of Matthew and Luke used at least two *written* sources: Mark and Q (an abbreviation of the German *Quelle*, for a lost “source,” which is thought to be a written source for passages found in both Matthew and Luke but not in Mark). In addition, there is unique material found only in either Matthew or Luke but not in both.⁴³ Though there was an ongoing oral tradition of Jesus’s life and teachings, it was paralleled by a very early written tradition. As we shall see in the case of Paul, at least parts of this tradition was *written* down within less than two decades of the death of Jesus at the very latest.

Hitchens is aware of the hypothetical source Q, but in a hopelessly garbled fashion: “The book on which all four [Gospels] may possibly have been based [is] known speculatively to scholars as ‘Q’” (p. 112). Note first, that Hitchens is aware that Q is a *written* source, a “book,” which, in and of itself, directly contradicts Hitchens’s claim that the Gospels are late “garbled and oral-based reconstruction[s]” (p. 112). He simply can’t have it both ways. But Hitchens is further mistaken. He claims all four Gospels were based on Q; in reality only two are thought to have used Q: Matthew and Luke. John has nothing to do with Q, and Q is defined precisely as the material common to Matthew and Luke but *not found in Mark!* Thus we discover that Hitchens definitively rejects the historicity of the New Testament based on utterly confused misconceptions of the claims of contemporary New Testament scholars and the issues at hand. Perhaps he should reconsider.

The second flank of Hitchens’s two-pronged attack on the historicity of the New Testament is that the Gospels were written “long after” (p. 110) or a “considerable time after” (p. 112) the events they describe. The implied point here is that their late date means they could not have been written by eyewitnesses (p. 111). Of course, the Gospels of Mark and Luke do not purport to have been written by eyewitnesses, so in some ways the point is moot. Hitchens is critiquing two of the Gospels for not being something they never claimed to be. (This, by the way, is an excellent argument against the alleged

43. On the two-source theory, see *ABD*, 6:165–71, 679–82; on Q see *ABD*, 5:567–72.

fabrication of the Gospels; if people were just making up stories about Jesus, why not attribute them to famous apostles like Peter rather than to non-apostles like Mark or Luke?) But this provides us no reason to think that the information they contain is inherently unreliable. As Richard Bauckham has shown, there is good reason to believe that the Gospels are based on the accounts of eyewitnesses, even if collected in some cases by disciples of the eyewitnesses.⁴⁴ In rejecting the Gospels because of the method of their composition, Hitchens fundamentally misunderstands the nature of the transmission of oral tradition in the first century, showing himself to be hopelessly blinded by the assumptions of the twenty-first. Indeed, for students to publish the teachings of their masters was often the norm in the ancient world. In this the New Testament is no different than Plato or Xenophon writing their recollections of the teaching of Socrates.⁴⁵ The *Enneads* of Plotinus were actually edited by his disciple Porphyry.⁴⁶ The teachings of Confucius and the Buddha were both recorded by their disciples. If we were to consistently apply Hitchens's method to ancient texts, the majority would have to be dismissed out of hand. But historians don't do that in the cases of Socrates or Plotinus or Confucius. So why should we uniquely apply this untenable methodology to the teachings of Jesus?

Early Christian Literacy

Hitchens is also mistaken in his claim that all of Jesus's disciples were "illiterate" (p. 114). Presumably he is basing this claim—for which he typically provides *no* documentation—on Acts 4:13, in which Peter and John (not all the apostles) are described as *agrammatoi*, literally "unlettered." This is generally understood by modern scholars, however, not to mean that they were necessarily illiterate, but that they

44. Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006).

45. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, eds., *Plato: The Collected Dialogues* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961); Xenophon, *Conversations of Socrates*, 2nd ed. (London: Penguin, 1990).

46. Plotinus, *The Enneads*, trans. Stephen MacKenna (London: Penguin, 1991).

were untrained in the learning of the Jewish scholars of the day.⁴⁷ That is, the Jewish scholars were astonished at the theological sophistication of these men who had not been trained in their schools. There is, contra Hitchens, good evidence for literacy among early Christians. Jesus is depicted as literate since he reads scripture in the synagogue of Nazareth (Luke 14:16) and writes (John 8:6–8). Paul, the author of numerous letters, was obviously literate. Matthew, as a tax collector, almost certainly could not have performed his job were he not literate (Matthew 9:9). The apostles are also depicted as sending a letter in Acts 15:23. At least some of the disciples could apparently read the sign placed above Christ at the crucifixion (John 19:19). Since there is no reason to think that any of these incidental references to literacy would have been invented for some later insidious theological purpose, we must conclude that Hitchens is again wrong in his claim.⁴⁸ And this observation is not just trivial pedantry. Hitchens needs the disciples of Jesus to be illiterate to further distance them from the written Gospels so that he can dismiss the historicity of the Gospels. Hitchens again errs on the side of his ideology.

But let's grant, for the sake of argument, that *all* of Jesus's immediate disciples were illiterate, as Hitchens claims. So what? Does that somehow disqualify their testimony? Are illiterate people inherently less intelligent than the literate? Are illiterate people incapable of seeing events and accurately recounting them? (If I were so inclined I might envisage a new category of politically incorrect prejudice, the "readist.") Hitchens betrays a compulsion to emphasize the alleged illiteracy of religious believers, presumably as a form of denigrating their intelligence (pp. 60, 68, 98, 114–15, 124). But Hitchens fails to note that this accusation would apply with equal frequency to atheists in the era before printing. In modern Western societies with universal, free compulsory education, there is perhaps a stigma attached to

47. F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 152–53.

48. On literacy and orality in the ancient world in general, see Rosalind Thomas, *Literacy and Orality in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); and Nicholas G. L. Hammond and H. H. Scullard, eds., *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970), 868–69, 1072 (hereafter *OCD*).

illiteracy; in societies before the invention of printing, however, illiteracy was the norm, not the exception. It is rather like critiquing ancient people for not being able to drive a car or use a computer.

It is important to emphasize that, especially in times before printing, illiterate people were not necessarily ignorant or stupid. Indeed, Plato believed that writing weakened memory and true understanding since students no longer had to truly learn (that is, memorize), relying instead on texts they had browsed but did not truly understand—a critique Plato would have justifiably directed against Hitchens.⁴⁹ The point here is that, regardless of whether Plato is right or wrong about the relationship of memory, reading, and understanding, it is nonetheless quite clear that illiterate people have historically been able to memorize lengthy texts and transmit them with high degrees of overall accuracy, and that oral cultures—that is, cultures with limited literacy and, more importantly, limited numbers of expensive handwritten books—have managed to preserve huge bodies of oral tradition relatively accurately. Indeed, in many ancient societies, writing was viewed as a stopgap measure to assist young scholars in memorizing, or “writing on the tablet of their heart.”⁵⁰ This can be seen, for example, in the Jewish Mishnah and Talmud, huge collections of traditions written down only after centuries of oral transmission.⁵¹ Homer’s epics and many other works of oral poetry were preserved by bards for centuries. Even today, many Muslims memorize the entire Qur’an, believing that only by memorizing a text can one truly come to internalize and understand it.

Besides being a rather transparent attempt to depict the followers of Jesus as uneducated and gullible fools, Hitchens’s ultimate point is,

49. Plato, *Phaedrus*, 274c–275e.

50. Proverbs 7:3; Jeremiah 17:1; 2 Corinthians 3:3; see David McLain Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

51. Martin Jaffee, *Torah in the Mouth: Writing and Oral Tradition in Palestinian Judaism 200 BCE–400 CE*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451* is based on an incident in ancient China in which the Confucian scholars memorized all their texts when it became a crime to own a Confucian book under the tyrannical reign of Qin Shi in 213 BC; when the tyrant died, the books were restored from memory, though not without disputed readings.

apparently, that because the disciples were (supposedly) illiterate they could not have written the texts attributed to them; the Gospels therefore must be late and secondhand. This, however, is sheer nonsense, owing to the widespread ancient practice of dictating to professional scribes. Indeed, these “scribes” (Greek *grammateus*) formed a distinct social class in Judea in the first century and were often depicted as being opposed to Jesus, though some are mentioned as being among his followers (Matthew 13:52; 23:34).⁵² Paul, though clearly literate, dictated most of his letters to a scribe (Romans 15:22), as demonstrated by the fact that he frequently mentions writing a particular sentence as final greeting with his own hand—meaning the rest of the letter was written by a scribe.⁵³ There is no reason to assume that the disciples, even if illiterate, could not have dictated written accounts of Jesus to literate professional scribes. Indeed, Christian tradition claims precisely that Mark wrote his Gospel as Peter’s scribe.⁵⁴ Furthermore, even though some of the disciples were undoubtedly literate, it is quite probable that they dictated their recollections following contemporary custom, since trained scribes of the day could write faster and more clearly than the average nonspecialist literate person.⁵⁵

Dating the New Testament

Although again he provides neither specifics nor documentation—an extraordinarily frequent and annoying characteristic of his book—Hitchens claims that the Gospels were written long after Jesus and therefore, presumably, could not be eyewitness accounts. Note that this is again an ideological issue for Hitchens. He must distance the Gospels from the life of Jesus in order to undermine their historicity.

52. *ABD*, 5:1012–16.

53. Romans 16:22; 1 Corinthians 16:21; Galatians 6:11; Colossians 4:18; 2 Thessalonians 3:17; see E. Randolph Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing: Secretaries, Composition and Collection* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004).

54. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.39.14–17, citing a lost work of Papias.

55. On books and reading among the earliest Christian communities, see Harry Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997).

The first problem is that Hitchens exaggerates the distance between the death of Jesus and the first written documents attesting his activities and teachings. In reality, the dating of the Gospels is a matter of considerable dispute, with no consensus at hand, though the overall tendency is to date the composition of Mark to the late 60s, Matthew and Luke to the 70s (and perhaps as late as the 80s), and John to the 80s or 90s.⁵⁶ Of course, none of these dates preclude apostolic authorship; assuming John was in his twenties during the ministry of Jesus (c. AD 30), he would have been in his seventies during the 80s, and thus potentially still alive to write his Gospel.

There are, on the other hand, a number of arguments in favor of earlier dating, though one would never be able to imagine that by reading Hitchens.⁵⁷ For example, it is generally agreed by New Testament scholars that the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts were written by the same author; in fact, these texts are frequently referred to collectively as Luke-Acts.⁵⁸ Acts ends with Paul preaching in Rome for two years as a fulfillment of God's plan to bring the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 28), but it does not mention the death of Paul, which is thought to have occurred sometime between AD 62 and 65.⁵⁹ If Acts was written *after* the death of Paul, how could Luke have ignored such an important event and its implications, given that his audience would have been aware of the fact? Although various explanations have been suggested, the most obvious conclusion is that Acts was written *before* the death of Paul, that is, in the early 60s. Since the Gospel of Luke was clearly written before Acts (see Acts 1:1), this gives a date in the early sixties at the *latest* for the composition of the Gospel of Luke. And since it is widely agreed that Luke is dependent upon Mark, this gives a date for Mark in the late 50s at the *latest*. Consistently using standard historical methodology applied to most ancient texts, the

56. Basic information and extended bibliography can be found in the relevant articles in *ABD*, 3:912–31; 4:397–420, 541–57, 622–41.

57. See, for example, John A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1976).

58. *ABD*, 4:397–420.

59. 1 Clement 5:5–7; Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Ephesians 12:2, see Kirsopp Lake, *Apostolic Fathers* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1912).

obvious conclusion is that Mark was written within twenty-five years of the death of Jesus, and Luke within thirty.

In fact, the main reason consistently given for dating the Gospels to after AD 70 is that Jesus prophesies of the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem.⁶⁰ Since Jesus predicts the destruction of the temple—and, as atheists assure us, since there is no such thing as real prophecy—the Gospels must have been written *after* that destruction occurred, in other words, after AD 70. It follows that since the Gospels were written after AD 70, they could not have been written by eyewitnesses, leaving critics free to dismiss any portions of the documents they wish as later additions or interpolations. (Of course, all of this assumes that Jesus was not the real Messiah who could make a real prophecy.)

Now if a Gospel had said, “Jesus truly prophesied of the destruction of the Temple, and anyone can go to Jerusalem and see its ruins today,” we would definitively know that the text was written after the destruction of the temple. For example, when John mentions a saying of Jesus to Peter that was “said to show by what death [Peter] was to glorify God” (John 21:19), it is reasonable to assume that John is writing to an audience that already knows about the death of Peter. That is to say, John’s Gospel must have been written after the death of Peter (traditionally late in the reign of Nero, perhaps AD 64). But the Gospels present the passages on the destruction of the temple as a prophetic warning to believers, never claiming that Christ’s prophecies had been fulfilled—which would have been a natural response *if the prophecy had indeed already been fulfilled when the Gospels were written*, just as John mentions the fulfillment of Christ’s prophecy of the death of Peter.⁶¹

But let’s assume for the sake of argument that in fact Jesus was an ordinary mortal who merely believed that he was a prophet. It is nonetheless quite possible that he could simply have looked at the social unrest and rebellion brewing in Judea and correctly guessed that there would eventually be a revolt against Rome that would culminate in

60. Matthew 23:37–39; 24:1–2, 15–22; Mark 13:1–2, 14–20; Luke 13:34–35; 21:5–6, 20–24.

61. Interestingly, John mentions neither the prophecy of the destruction of the temple nor its fulfillment.

Roman victory and in the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple.⁶² Indeed, there is ample evidence that prophecies of the destruction of the temple were rather commonplace around the time of Christ.⁶³ Political pundits today—like Hitchens himself—do this type of thing all the time on TV, occasionally accurately predicting (or guessing?) elections, wars, future economic activity, and so on. Of course, many are wrong in their predictions, but some, perhaps only by chance, get it right. Are we to assume that those pundits who correctly guess the winner of an election must have made their guess *after* the election was over? In an ancient context, Jesus's correct prediction would have been viewed by his followers as a true prophecy. When Jerusalem was indeed destroyed, its destruction would have been seen by Christians as proof that Jesus was truly the Messiah. Properly understood in its ancient context, the presence of a prophecy of the destruction of the temple is insufficient grounds for dating the Gospels to after AD 70, even if one believes that Jesus was an ordinary mortal.

In all of this Hitchens is expecting more from ancient sources than it is reasonable to expect, given the tenuous nature of the survival of ancient documents. Hitchens is apparently under the delusion that there were newspapers in the ancient world that kept accurate, day-to-day accounts of all the latest events and that all such records have survived to the present in well-kept archives. In reality, neither is true. By the standard of ancient historiography, the Gospels, even if written after AD 70, are still remarkably close to the events they describe. For example, the *earliest* surviving biography of Alexander the Great, written by Diodorus, dates to nearly three centuries after Alexander's death.⁶⁴ Livy's account of the campaigns of Hannibal was written over

62. Josephus, *The Jewish War*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: Penguin, 1984), provides details of the unrest leading up to the Jewish rebellion against Rome.

63. Y. Eliav, "Prediction of the Destruction of the Herodian Temple in the Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Scrolls, and Related Texts," *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 10 (1992): 89–147; see also C. Evans, "Opposition to the Temple: Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls," in *Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 235–53.

64. Nicholas G. L. Hammond, *Three Historians of Alexander the Great* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988); A. B. Bosworth, *From Arrian to Alexander: Studies in Historical Interpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

a century and a half after the death of the Carthaginian general in 182 BC.⁶⁵ Tacitus wrote his *Annals* around AD 115; his book covers imperial Roman history from AD 14 to 68, meaning he wrote some fifty to a hundred years after the events he describes.⁶⁶ Suetonius likewise wrote his history of the Caesars in the early second century; his biography of Julius Caesar was thus written over a century and a half after the event.⁶⁷ Herodotus's non-eyewitness account of the Persian Wars was likewise written up to half a century after the events he describes.⁶⁸ Our major surviving source for the lives and teachings of most ancient philosophers is Diogenes Laertius, who wrote centuries after many of the men whose lives he records; Plutarch's famous biographies are likewise often centuries after the fact.⁶⁹ Hitchens betrays a fundamental naïveté about the nature of ancient history when he demands more from early Christian records than can reasonably be expected from any other ancient source.

Thus, when compared to other ancient texts, the proximity of the earliest New Testament accounts to the life and teachings of Jesus is quite remarkable. Our earliest Christian source, Paul's letter to the Galatians, dates to around AD 50, less than twenty years after the death of Jesus. The *latest* New Testament source for the life of Jesus, the Gospel of John (dated variously to between AD 70 and 110, from forty to seventy years after the death of Jesus), is also well within the norms for ancient historiography noted above. There are no reasonable historical grounds for contesting the historicity of Jesus; Hitchens's agnosticism on this matter is driven purely by ideology.

Which raises another important point. In his entire argument Hitchens conspicuously ignores Paul, our earliest surviving source for the life of Jesus. As Paul never quotes directly from the Gospels, his letters were written either before the Gospels were published or, at the very least, before they were widely circulated. (Likewise, on the other hand, the Gospels never quote or allude to Paul's letters, imply-

65. Livy, *The War with Hannibal* (New York: Penguin, 1972); *OCD*, 665–66, 877–79.

66. Tacitus, *The Annals of Imperial Rome* (New York: Penguin, 1989); *OCD*, 1469–70.

67. Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars* (New York: Penguin, 1989); *OCD*, 1451–52.

68. Herodotus, *OCD*, 696–98.

69. Diogenes, *OCD*, 474–75; Plutarch, *OCD*, 1200–1201.

ing that they were written before Paul's letters became widely read.) Paul's letters are generally believed to have been written in the "early and mid-50s,"⁷⁰ within twenty to twenty-five years of the ministry of Jesus. Paul clearly lived within the lifetimes of the apostles and met personally with many of them.⁷¹ Unlike Hitchens, New Testament scholars consistently use Paul as an important source for understanding the life and teachings of Jesus.⁷² From Paul we learn that Jesus was of Davidic descent (Romans 1:3), that his mission was only to Israel (Romans 15:8), that there was a last supper (1 Corinthians 11:23–26), and that Jesus was executed by crucifixion (15:3), along with various teachings such as the importance of loving one's neighbors (Romans 12:14–20).⁷³

Most notably, whatever one wishes to make of the claim, Paul makes it abundantly clear that, within less than two decades of Jesus's death, the earliest Christians believed that Jesus had been resurrected.⁷⁴ Not only that, but Paul explicitly states that he received his information about the resurrection directly from eyewitnesses Peter (Cephas) and the apostles (1 Corinthians 15:3–8). In other words, within twenty years of the death of Christ we have explicit written testimony that the eyewitness apostles were claiming that Jesus was resurrected. The essence of the resurrection narratives is clearly not a late theological invention but the very heart of earliest Christianity.⁷⁵ Hitchens's rejection of the New Testament accounts of Jesus as late

70. *ABD*, 5:192a; the seven generally accepted Pauline letters are Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon.

71. Paul's meeting with the apostles is described in Galatians 2 and Acts 15.

72. For example, see Larry Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 79–154.

73. John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press), 1:45–48, summarizes the major data about Jesus's life and teaching that can be gleaned from Paul.

74. For example, 1 Corinthians 15. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 126–33, summarizes all the evidence.

75. N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003). For an interesting debate on the subject, see Robert B. Stewart, John Dominic Crossan, and N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of Jesus: John Dominic Crossan and N. T. Wright in Dialogue* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006).

fabrications cannot be sustained using standard historiographical methodology for ancient history.

Did Jesus Even Exist?

Hitchens's hyper-skeptical approach to the New Testament means he is frequently unable to mention Jesus without inserting, with a knowing wink, the caveat that his "existence" is "highly questionable" (p. 114; compare pp. 60, 118, 119, 127). Even if Jesus did exist, Hitchens assures us that he was simply one of "many deranged prophets roaming Palestine at the time" (p. 118). Such an evaluation of Jesus's mental state may not be quite as harsh as it initially seems when we remember that, for Hitchens, all religious believers are in some way deranged. While it may be an arguable position to reject the miraculous claims associated with Jesus, historiographically speaking, it is sheer folly and methodological suicide to claim, as Hitchens repeatedly hints, that Jesus didn't even exist. Given the paucity of ancient sources, it is usually assumed that if a person is mentioned once by a single historical source, that person actually existed. Paul's authentic letters—mainly written in the 50s, within twenty-five years of the death of Christ—mention Jesus frequently. Using normal standards of historiography for ancient history, Paul's letters *alone* are sufficient to demonstrate that Jesus existed.

But in fact, by the standards of ancient history, the existence of Jesus is unusually well documented. In addition to several independent sources in the New Testament, we have non-Christian sources as well. The Roman historian Suetonius mentions that during the reign of Claudius (AD 41–54) there were "disturbances [among the Jews in Rome] at the instigation of Chrestus"—the fact that Suetonius misspells the obviously unfamiliar word indicates this cannot be a Christian interpolation.⁷⁶ Likewise, the pagan historian Tacitus tells us that during the reign of Nero (AD 54–68) there was talk in Rome of "Christ, who, during the reign of Tiberius, had been executed by the

76. Suetonius, *Claudius*, 25.4; see Robert E. Van Voorst, *Jesus Outside the New Testament: An Introduction to the Ancient Evidence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), for reviews of all early nonbiblical references to Jesus.

procurator Pontius Pilate.”⁷⁷ The Jewish historian Josephus famously mentions Jesus, James the brother of Jesus, and John the Baptist in his history of the Jews in the first century AD.⁷⁸ Although many, or even most, things about Jesus are debated, among serious scholars of the New Testament there is *absolutely no doubt* that Jesus existed. When Hitchens casts doubt on not only the divinity and miracles but also the very existence of Jesus, he is allying himself not with mainstream scholarship, as he claims, but with fringe cranks—and he does so for essentially ideological reasons. He is mistaken if he believes that such claims bolster the case for atheism among informed scholars.

Since Hitchens doubts the very existence of Jesus, it would seem superfluous to debate the virgin birth. But he can't resist—ignoring the truism that all fictional characters technically must have virgin births. Here Hitchens makes a foray into biblical linguistics with rather unsatisfactory results. Hitchens tells us, “We know that the [Hebrew] word translated as ‘virgin,’ namely *almah*, means only a young woman” (p. 115). Actually, more precisely, it means “a marriageable girl” or “a girl who is able to be married.”⁷⁹ Even more specifically, it refers to a girl who has reached puberty and is thus “marriageable.” Although it is true that the term *almah* does not *require* the referent to be a virgin (*betulah*), it is important to emphasize that, in an ancient Near Eastern cultural context, a young unmarried teenager, or *almah*, would have been *assumed* to be a virgin. This is made clear by the Septuagint—the second-century-BC Jewish translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek. The Septuagint translates the Hebrew *almah* in Isaiah 7:14 with the Greek term *parthenos*, or “virgin,” demonstrating that this was the standard conceptualization of the meaning of the term in

77. Tacitus, *Annals*, 15.44.

78. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 18.3.3; 20.199; 18.5.2. On the problem of Christian interpolations in Josephus, see Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 56–88; Steve Mason, *Josephus and the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992), 163–75; and Shlomo Pines, *An Arabic Version of the Testimonium Flavianum and Its Implications* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1971). It should perhaps be noted that no one can accuse Professor Pines, a Jew, of theological bias in this matter.

79. Ludwig Koehler, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (New York: Brill, 2001), 1:836; G. Johannes Botterweck et al., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 11:154–63.

ancient times. The Septuagint, it should be remembered, did not use the term *parthenos* to create some type of Christian apologetic, since it was translated some two centuries *before* the earliest Christian documents were written. Rather, Christians writing the New Testament quoted the Septuagint translation because they were writing in Greek and therefore used the standard Greek translation of scripture of the day.⁸⁰ Thus when Matthew 1:23 quotes Isaiah 7:14—“a virgin (*parthenos*) shall conceive”—he is not mistranslating the Hebrew to invent a new Christian doctrine as Hitchens claims; rather, he is quoting the *standard* Jewish Greek translation of his day.

Hitchens also notes that a number of other religions have tales of divine or miraculous births of their religious heroes (p. 23). Quite true. However, of the figures Hitchens mentions, only one, Genghis Khan, is, like Jesus, historically attested by contemporary literature; the rest, unlike Jesus, are legendary.⁸¹ And, as is becoming increasingly expected, Hitchens gets the story of Genghis Khan’s birth wrong.⁸² The only near-contemporary source for the life of Genghis Khan, the *Secret History of the Mongols*, does not mention anything miraculous associated with his birth.⁸³ Since Hitchens provides no source for his claim, we are unable to verify its accuracy. But if such a story exists, it is probably a late development, perhaps influenced by Buddhism or even by the Christian story of the virgin birth of Jesus, since the Kereyid tribe of the Mongol confederation was Christian. The alleged virgin birth of Genghis Khan tells us nothing about Jesus, but a great deal about Mongolian society of the thirteenth century.

80. Gerhard Kittel et al., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1967), 5:826–37; and Karen Jobes and Moisés Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic Press, 2000), 183–205.

81. Although the Buddha is a historical figure, stories of the miraculous birth of the Buddha date to several centuries after his death, not decades as in the case of Jesus.

82. Hitchens further muddles things. For example, although Huitzilopochtli’s father was a god, his mother was not a virgin; when she became pregnant her other children wanted to kill her for shame. David Carrasco, ed., *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Mesoamerican Cultures* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 2:22; more generally, see Elizabeth Hill Boone, *Incarnations of the Aztec Supernatural: The Image of Huitzilopochtli in Mexico* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1989).

83. Francis Woodman Cleaves, trans., *The Secret History of the Mongols* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 14–15.

Be that as it may, *any* type of significant influence or plagiarism in the case of the New Testament nativity stories is quite unlikely, since it is extremely dubious that the Jewish authors of the New Testament had ever even heard of most of the figures Hitchens mentions. Whatever the reason, when the New Testament authors included the story of the virgin birth of Jesus in the New Testament—whether it is actual history, sincere belief, or pure fabrication—they were certainly not plagiarizing from the stories of Huitzilopochtli, the Buddha, Krishna, or Genghis Khan. While from the perspective of comparative religions it is interesting that many religions have tales of miraculous births of heroes, the Christian story of the virgin birth must be understood within the context of Jewish scripture and tradition, not world religion. Thus the supposed point of Hitchens’s paragraph eludes us. For a serious study of the issues related to the nativity narratives, I suggest that Hitchens peruse Professor Raymond Brown’s *The Birth of the Messiah*, a volume in the prestigious Anchor Bible Reference Library.⁸⁴ The difference between Brown’s careful and scholarly exegesis and Hitchens’s haphazard flippancy is most striking.

Of course, Hitchens’s real point is not linguistic but biological: “parthenogenesis,” he asserts, “is not possible for human mammals” (p. 115). Really? I was under the apparently false impression that Hitchens was a believer in the efficacies of science. Has he not heard of *in vitro* fertilization, for example? In fact, women now can bear children that come from the fertilized eggs of other women and the sperm of complete strangers whom they have never met, let alone had sex with. In other words, with contemporary science alone, it is perfectly plausible that a woman who has never had sexual intercourse—a virgin, in other words—can conceive and bear a child. Imagine what new advances in human fertility science will occur in the next thousand or ten thousand or even million years. Contemporary scientists could have caused Mary to become pregnant without having sexual intercourse with any male. Yet Hitchens has trouble believing that God could have done it?

84. Raymond Edward Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew*, 2nd ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1993).

Hitchens's overall disdain for the life of Jesus is reflected in the fact that he can't be bothered to even get basic biblical chronology straight. "Even the stoutest defenders of the Bible story," he assures us, "now admit that if Jesus was ever born it wasn't until at least AD 4" (pp. 59–60). They do? He has obviously been reading different "stout defenders" of the Bible story than I have. The Gospel narratives agree that Jesus was born during the lifetime of Herod the Great (Matthew 2:1; Luke 1:5), who died in 4 BC.⁸⁵ Luke says that Jesus was "about thirty years old" in the fifteenth year of Tiberius (AD 27–28), making an AD 4 date impossible (Luke 3:1, 23) since Jesus would then have been about twenty-four years old in AD 28.⁸⁶ A minority of scholars have proposed an AD 6 date, associating the census mentioned in Luke with the rule of Quirinius over Syria (Luke 2:2).⁸⁷ But no one I know of argues for the birth of Jesus in AD 4. Ironically, Hitchens stands alone with his "stoutest defenders of the Bible story" in arguing for the birth of Jesus in AD 4.⁸⁸ The Jesus whom Hitchens doesn't believe in is apparently a different Jesus than the one of whom the rest of us have heard.

The Search for Historicity

Bizarrely, Hitchens seems simultaneously enthralled by both fundamentalist inerrancy and the Jesus Seminar. For Hitchens, if the Bible is not inerrant, it cannot be inspired in any way. "The one interpretation that we simply have to discard is the one that claims divine warrant for all four of [the Gospels]" (p. 112). For Hitchens all differences between Gospel accounts are inconsistencies, and any inconsistency disproves not only inspiration but even historicity. On the other hand, as any trial lawyer can tell you, inconsistencies between

85. Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 1:375–6; Hitchens is aware of this (p. 112).

86. Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 546–55, reviews the data.

87. Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 1:212–13.

88. It is possible that Hitchens simply made a typographical error using AD instead of BC; however, his overall point seems to be that the millennium had not yet occurred in the year it was celebrated (pp. 59–60). Hitchens writes that Christ wasn't born "until at least AD 4" (p. 60), a phrase that wouldn't make sense if he were thinking of 4 BC.

eyewitness accounts are to be expected, given the vagaries of perception and memory.

Ironically, Hitchens seems more impressed with the accuracy of the apocryphal and Gnostic Gospels. He claims, for example, that the “scrolls [from Nag Hammadi] were of the same period and provenance as many of the subsequently canonical and ‘authorized’ Gospels” (p. 112). We don’t want to appear too pedantic, but the Nag Hammadi texts are codices (bound books written on both sides of the page), not scrolls.⁸⁹ But, beyond that rather sophomoric error, Hitchens is simply dead wrong about the dating of the Nag Hammadi texts. All the Nag Hammadi texts are in Coptic (Egyptian written in a modified Greek alphabet), a written language that did not even exist in the first century AD when the Gospels were written. The surviving Coptic manuscripts of the Nag Hammadi collection date to the mid-fourth century AD. While the Nag Hammadi books are generally thought to be later copies and translations of earlier books, “the precise dates of the composition of these texts are uncertain, but most are from the second and third centuries CE. All were originally written in Greek and translated into Coptic.”⁹⁰ In other words, the *earliest* of the Nag Hammadi texts date to nearly a century after Jesus and thus were clearly written after the *latest* books of the New Testament texts. Most Nag Hammadi texts date to between one and a half and two centuries after Jesus. The very earliest of the Nag Hammadi texts may overlap with the very latest of the New Testament texts, but, as a whole, the Nag Hammadi books are a century or two *younger* than the New Testament. Once again, Hitchens simply has it wrong. Most scholars (though not all) would agree with Professor Meier’s conclusion. After surveying all known early material about Jesus, he concluded: “The four canonical Gospels turn out to be the only large documents containing significant blocks of material relevant to the quest for the historical Jesus.”⁹¹ The one exception may be

89. This distinction is an important one, with serious implications for the nature of early Christian communities and their use of books and scripture; see Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts*, 43–94.

90. Marvin W. Meyer, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures: The International Edition* (New York: HarperOne, 2007), xi.

91. Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 139; he surveys the evidence from pages 41 to 166.

the Gospel of Thomas, which some scholars date to the first century, *perhaps* as early as the writing of the canonical Gospels. However, this early date is hotly disputed, with many scholars dating it to the mid-second century, and dependent upon the canonical Gospels. No consensus on the dating of this document seems at hand.⁹²

While Hitchens is remarkably credulous when it comes to the non-canonical Gospels, he is conversely hyper-skeptical when it comes to the historicity of the Gospels. (Methodologically speaking, it is necessary to maintain a single consistent approach to all ancient texts, religious or nonreligious, canonical or noncanonical.) The reason for this is plain. Hitchens believes that a late date for the Gospels and an early date for the Nag Hammadi texts both undermine arguments for the historicity of the Gospels. Whereas Hitchens stands nearly alone in his belief that the Nag Hammadi Gospels are “fractionally more credible” than the canonical Gospels (p. 113), he is far more dubious about canonical texts. For example, he notes, following Bart (not Barton!) Ehrman,⁹³ that the story of the woman taken in adultery (John 8:3–11) was “scribbled into the canon long after the fact” (pp. 120–21). Hitchens has it half right. It is true that this passage is not found in the earliest surviving manuscripts of John.⁹⁴ Unfortunately, but probably not coincidentally, for Hitchens the story stops there. It shouldn’t. Hitchens’s only cited source on this matter, Bart Ehrman, goes on to note: “Most scholars think that it was probably a well-known story circulating in the oral tradition about Jesus.”⁹⁵ Why didn’t Hitchens tell his readers about this? It is a mere sentence away from the passage from Ehrman that Hitchens does quote (p. 122).

92. *ABD*, 6:535–40.

93. Hitchens’s general sloppiness is betrayed by the fact that he consistently misspells the name as “Barton Ehrman” (pp. 120, 142, 298), <http://bartdehrman.com> (accessed 2 July 2009). Hitchens gets the name right, however, on p. 290.

94. Hitchens is referencing Bart D. Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005), 63–65; see Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1971), 219–22, where Metzger reviews the specific manuscript evidence; see also Raymond Edward Brown, trans. and ed., *The Gospel According to John* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 1:335–36.

95. Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, 65.

Of course, Ehrman's real point undermines Hitchens's claim; but Hitchens does not distinguish between textual criticism (deciding which readings are original in a given manuscript) and historicity (deciding which events really took place). It is perfectly possible that the most ancient manuscripts of the Gospels contain nonhistorical stories or teachings attributed to Jesus and that later oral traditions contain authentic recollections of Jesus. Thus the story of Jesus and the adulteress could be an authentic tale of Jesus that happens to have been added late to the Gospel of John. Professor Raymond Brown, for example, maintains that "a good case can be argued that the story . . . is truly ancient."⁹⁶ Indeed, the story seems to have been known to Papias, writing around AD 130, who attributes it to the now lost *Gospel of the Hebrews*.⁹⁷ Professor Bruce Metzger, one of the leading authorities on the textual history of the New Testament, agrees that "the account has all the earmarks of historical veracity."⁹⁸ So it is quite possibly an authentic ancient tale of Jesus, consistent with his other teachings on forgiveness, that was transmitted orally for a while and then eventually added to the Gospel of John.

But what if this incident is an entirely fictitious tale? Is that sufficient grounds to reject the historicity of *everything* about Jesus found in John, and—as Hitchens would have us do—even to doubt Jesus's very existence? Hitchens seems to think so. Immediately after his discussion of this passage from John, he concludes that "the case for biblical consistency or authenticity or 'inspiration' has been in tatters for some time . . . and thus no 'revelation' can be derived from that quarter" (p. 122). In reality, even if the story of the woman taken in adultery were fiction, almost everything else in the book of John *is* attested in the earliest manuscripts of that book.⁹⁹ The crucial thing to note is that the presence of a few interpolations or inauthentic stories does

96. Brown, *Gospel According to John*, 1:335.

97. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.39.17, quoting a lost work of Papias; see Everett Ferguson, ed., *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, 2nd ed. (New York: Garland, 1990), 2:866; on the *Gospel of the Hebrews*, see *ABD*, 3:105–6.

98. Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 220.

99. Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998).

not undermine the authenticity of the entire document. Garbled or even fabricated stories are told about everyone, undoubtedly including Mr. Hitchens himself. Should we doubt the existence of Mr. Hitchens because undoubtedly apocryphal tales have been told about him and are even believed by many? Biblical scholars have long known that it is necessary to carefully evaluate individual texts and stories rather than to accept them all as inerrant or reject them all as completely bogus. This Manichaeian all-or-nothing approach to religious texts is the *least* fruitful approach Hitchens could have taken; unfortunately it is the one he chose.

Various Annoying Tidbits

This section will review a number of unsubstantiated and sometimes even preposterous claims made by Hitchens in his forays into biblical studies. Although they seldom actually rise to the level of a coherent argument, they nonetheless merit some attention as exemplars of the tendentious sophistry he employs in his attacks on religion.

Hitchens has a rather strange understanding of what it means to be a Christian. Jesus's "illiterate living disciples left us no record and in any event could not have been 'Christians,' since they were never to read these later books in which Christians must affirm belief" (p. 114). To claim as Hitchens does here that the immediate disciples of Christ cannot be Christians is, quite frankly, laughable. The New Testament itself tells us that in the early 40s "in Antioch the disciples were for the first time called Christians."¹⁰⁰ It is thus obvious that the use of the term *Christian* antedated the writing of the New Testament, since the New Testament itself uses the term. At any rate, this is not a serious argument but a rather juvenile name game meant to annoy evangelical Christians.

In the same passage Hitchens further asserts that the earliest disciples "had no idea that anyone would ever found a church on their master's announcements" (p. 114). In fact, the Greek word for "church," *ekklesia* (better translated "assembly"), occurs numerous times in the New Testament as well as the Septuagint. Christ himself

100. Acts 11:26; see Acts 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16.

famously spoke of founding a “church” (Matthew 16:18). Thus on the face of it Hitchens’s claim is manifestly untrue. The earliest Christian communities are regularly described as churches (e.g., Acts 5:11; 8:1). In our earliest Christian documents, the letters of Paul, Christ is said to be the “head of the church” (Ephesians 5:23) that, according to Hitchens, none of the earliest Christians believed Christ would found. When Paul wrote to Christians in Thessalonica, he addressed them as “the church of the Thessalonians” (1 Thessalonians 1:1). Only by ignoring *all* the earliest evidence we have can Hitchens make such a preposterous claim.

He notes in passing, and without even a whiff of a reference, that “no ‘stable’ is ever mentioned” in the Bethlehem nativity narratives (p. 114). The King James Version, which Hitchens said he used (p. 98), mentions a “manger,” not a “stable” (Luke 2:7, 12), so it’s not clear what the issue is here—that there are popular misconceptions about what the Bible says? This is hardly disputable, as Hitchens’s own misconceptions amply demonstrate. But in reality the Greek term used by Luke, *fatne*, means, precisely, “manger,” “stall,” or “stable.”¹⁰¹ Hitchens simply gets it wrong.

Hitchens claims that “in a short passage of only one Gospel . . . the rabbis . . . *call* for the guilt in the blood of Jesus to descend upon all their subsequent generations” (p. 116). While it is true that only Matthew recounts the mob shouting, “His blood be on us and on our children” (Matthew 27:25), all the Gospels agree that anti-Jesus factions among the Jews plotted and facilitated his arrest.¹⁰² There is no real reason to doubt the historicity of this broader claim since Jesus was clearly arrested and executed and nearly everyone who was *pro or anti-Jesus* at this period was a Jew. It is no more remarkable than the equally obvious fact that the Greeks killed Socrates or that the British executed Nathan Hale. Is Hitchens trying to say that there weren’t Jewish factions opposed to Jesus, just as most of Jesus’s followers were

101. William Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1957), 862a.

102. Matthew 26:57–68; 27:1–2, 15–23; Mark 14:53–65; 15:1, 6–14; Luke 22:54–71; 23:17–23; John 19:4–15.

also Jews? Furthermore, it can also hardly be an objection that one Gospel contains unique material not found in the others. In the first place, this is true of all ancient historical records. (If we needed multiple attestations before accepting the historicity of an event or person, most of ancient history would have to be rejected out of hand.) It is patently obvious that the brief descriptions in the Gospels of the trial and execution of Jesus—an event that went on for hours—can't contain complete transcripts of everything that occurred, as the Gospel writers themselves recognized (John 21:25). But even so, Hitchens again gets the details wrong. It was not the rabbis but the populace as a whole who were interacting with Pilate in a type of ancient *acclamatio*, a loud public clamor for or against a policy, person, or event. This was a type of populist voting decided by whichever faction could shout the loudest. Nor does the text claim that the bloodguilt would “descend upon all their subsequent generations” (p. 116), as Hitchens asserts. Rather, it says “on our children,” technically meaning only one generation. In the biblical context, this undoubtedly harks back to the idea that the “iniquity of parents” rests upon their children, but only to the “third and the fourth generation of those that reject me” (Exodus 20:6). But all of this is rather moot since Christ himself asked the Father to forgive his persecutors, and thus, for Christians, rendering whatever guilt might have theoretically existed null and void (Luke 23:34). That some later Christian denominations—not all—invented a nonbiblical doctrine that all Jews, everywhere and at all times, were equally guilty of deicide (the “killing of God”) doesn't really tell us anything about the New Testament *per se*, though it tells us a great deal about anti-Semitism among later Christians. It is rather absurd for Hitchens to blame later misinterpretations of the Bible on the original authors. Certainly I don't blame the authors of the Gospels for the way Hitchens misunderstands them!

Hitchens is similarly confused about the formation of the New Testament canon. He assures us that “early church councils . . . decided which Gospels were ‘synoptic’ and which were ‘apocryphal’” (p. 117). That the invention of this false dichotomy between synoptic and apocryphal is not merely a passing blunder on Hitchens's part is shown

by the fact that he elsewhere again uses the two terms as if they were antonyms (p. 118). Let us render some assistance; the word he likely wants is *canonical*, not *synoptic*. Aside from the fact that the term *synoptic* was invented in 1776 in Johann Jakob Griesbach's *Synopsis*,¹⁰³ and thus had nothing to do with the church councils, *synoptic* does not mean "orthodox" or "accepted by the church," as Hitchens uses it. *Synoptic* (from Greek "with the same view or perspective") is a technical term used to describe the relationship between Matthew, Mark, and Luke—the fact that they share many parallels in both wording and order of presentation. John, with a great deal of unique material, is *not* a synoptic Gospel, though it is *canonical*. In the New Testament context, *Apocrypha* is another modern category defining texts that contain stories about New Testament figures but that are not part of the canon and are generally thought to be later compositions.¹⁰⁴

In point of fact, early Christians, rightly or wrongly, accepted many apocryphal texts as authentic history, though not as *canonical* scripture. For example, the traditional names and number of the "three" wise men are found only in the apocryphal texts, not in the New Testament itself.¹⁰⁵ Apocryphal texts were thus not rejected as useless and pernicious; rather, the initial distinction was between those texts that could be read in church as part of liturgical services (the canon) and those that could not (now called the Apocrypha). Indeed, apocryphal texts have survived to the present largely because they were transmitted by Christians who wanted to read them.

Hitchens's understanding of the formation of the canon of the New Testament is equally confused; it was not established by an authoritarian decree of the church councils, but by a long and complex process covering several centuries.¹⁰⁶ The finalization of

103. McKim, *Major Biblical Interpreters*, 321.

104. *ABD*, 1:294–7. These texts are readily available in English translation: James K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); the Nag Hammadi texts, some of which could be classified as apocryphal, can be found in Meyer, *Nag Hammadi Scriptures*.

105. Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 198–200.

106. On the history of the canonization of the New Testament, see Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders, eds., *The Canon Debate* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson,

the canon list by church councils was the *end* of the process, not the beginning. “By the close of the second century,” a century and a half before the first councils, “lists begin to be drawn up of books that had come to be regarded as authoritative Christian Scriptures,” such as the Muratorian Canon.¹⁰⁷ Irenaeus of Lyon, for example, writing in the late second century, famously insisted that there were only four authentic Gospels, the same ones we have in our canon today.¹⁰⁸ The first canonical list of the New Testament giving precisely the books in our current Bible comes from Athanasius in AD 367, while “the first council that accepted the present canon of the books of the New Testament was the Synod of Hippo Regius in North Africa (AD 393).”¹⁰⁹ Hitchens understands neither the substance nor the process of the canonization of the New Testament, nor does he grasp its significance.

Conclusion

Given the numerous problems with Hitchens’s discussion of the Bible, we will perhaps be forgiven for seeing a bit of self-deception in his claim that his presentation is “fair and open-minded” (p. 115). It is quite clear that Hitchens’s understanding of biblical studies is flawed at best. He consistently misrepresents what the Bible has to say, fails to contextualize biblical narratives in their original historical settings, implies unanimity among biblical scholars on quite controversial positions, and fails to provide any evidence for alternative scholarly positions, or even to acknowledge that such positions exist at all. In

2002); and David L. Dungan, *Constantine’s Bible: Politics and the Making of the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006).

107. Bruce Manning Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 191, more generally 191–201.

108. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3.11.8; see Metzger, *Canon of the New Testament*, 153–56.

109. Metzger, *Canon of the New Testament*, 210–12, 314. Metzger (pp. 305–15) provides a helpful appendix giving the major canon lists through the fourth century; only two of twelve derive from synods. Not wishing to be overly pedantic, I note the distinction between synods (local or regional assemblies) and ecumenical councils of the entire church. The earliest canon lists created by assemblies were made by synods, not councils: Frank L. Cross, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 422.

reality, biblical studies is a complicated field, with a wide range of subtle nuances and different interpretations; for Hitchens, it is sufficient to dismiss the most extreme, literalistic, and inerrantist *interpretations* of the Bible to demonstrate not only that the Bible *itself* is thoroughly flawed, false, and poisonous but that God does not exist. Hitchens's understanding of the Bible is at the level of a confused undergraduate. His musings on such matters should not be taken seriously, and should certainly not be seen as reasonable grounds for rejecting belief in God.

STILLBORN: A PARODY OF LATTER-DAY SAINT FAITH

Blair Dee Hodges

Review of Shawn McCraney. *I Was a Born-Again Mormon: Moving Toward Christian Authenticity*. New York: Alatheia Press, 2003 (reprinted with modifications in April 2007). xx + 358 pp., with bibliography. \$9.99.

In this self-published book, Shawn McCraney describes his alienation from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints before becoming a born-again Christian. He tells of a period of deep anguish as a Latter-day Saint in the 1980s, and though he continued attending his church meetings, he felt increasingly separated from God. By 1997 he was having difficulty keeping a steady job and sustaining his marriage because of an addiction to prescription drugs and alcohol. He felt he had “lost all connection to the God [he] once longed to know.” He yearned for meaning and peace. One afternoon while driving, he heard a radio preacher discuss sin and rebirth. McCraney became convinced he had been a sinner since birth and could do nothing to merit a place in God’s kingdom. As a Latter-day Saint, he thought obeying the gospel meant following a set of rules in order to earn salvation. Suddenly he realized for the first time that Christ was more than an “intellectual necessity” and that he “really, truly *needed*” a Savior. He prayed for forgiveness and asked Christ to come into his heart. “Nothing tangible or metaphysical occurred,” so he told the Lord he would wait for a response. His mind then flashed back to several events in his life showing he had not been an “authentic

Christian.” He felt like a new person and was not worried about how he would reconcile this spiritual rebirth with his membership in the Church of Jesus Christ (pp. 71–73, 79, emphasis in original).

Aftermath of Regeneration

Feeling increasingly alienated from the Church of Jesus Christ, McCraney sank deeper into sin and despair. What he describes as his moral “backsliding” deepened despite his emotionally profound regeneration. He could not overcome “his sinful nature and just live righteously.” He wondered “if this was how a born again life was supposed to be lived, meaning, all a person has to do is claim Jesus as a personal Savior and then go on sinning like there is no tomorrow.” At the same time, he felt he “was unconditionally saved by the blood of Jesus Christ and that [he] had a place with God because of Him.” Being “saved” didn’t rid him of temptation; he still “didn’t have the will to stop living in opposition to this truth.” The weight of what he describes as his “failures as a forgiven Christian came very close to drowning [him] in the sewage of [his] soul” (pp. 88–89).

McCraney reports that in 2002, at least four years after being “saved,” he requested excommunication from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In addition to his own moral failures, he offers a number of reasons, including “some serious disagreements” he had with “key doctrinal positions the Church maintained.” If he were to decide to again become a Latter-day Saint, he wanted to do so “on his own terms.” He describes “two hours of some rather intense and even heated debate” in a disciplinary council that resulted in what he says he desired and deserved: excommunication (pp. 89–90).

Why a Book?

According to the back cover of *I Was a Born-Again Mormon*, McCraney has answered the following questions: “Can a Latter-day Saint experience spiritual rebirth? Will Christians and Latter-day Saints ever unite? Why does anti-Mormon literature generally fail? How can someone tell if they’ve been born-again? What is the theo-

logical basis for LDS beliefs?” Readers are then promised that they will “discover some of the best answers to these questions and many more in the pages of *Born-Again Mormon*.”

The book is McCraney’s “unadulterated expose” [*sic*] of his “personal failures as an unregenerated Latter-day Saint” (p. ix)¹ and his experience in becoming a born-again Christian. He sees a “universal need” for the book because “most Latter-day Saints have no idea what spiritual rebirth actually means and therefore, having never experienced it, can only deny its reality and/or describe it as false” (p. xvii). McCraney intends to “illustrate some of the inherent problems faced by members of the Church who love Mormonism but need more to thrive spiritually than the rites, demands, and culture it provides” (p. ix). He seeks to “introduce all Latter-day Saints to the God-given gift of undeniable spiritual rebirth that comes through true faith in the Lord Jesus Christ” (p. xviii). He hopes “to help Born-Again believers appreciate and support positive aspects of the LDS Church while simultaneously (but politely) rejecting any doctrine or practice contrary to biblical truth and authentic Christian beliefs” (p. vii). He reaches out to those still “spiritually yearning about their place with God; who silently question many of the doctrines, practices or cultural expectations present in the Church *today*, but who remain active out of fear, personal comfort, and even family continuity” (p. xiii, emphasis in original).

Born-Again Mormon was first issued in 2003, a year after McCraney was excommunicated. An additional and slightly revised printing, renamed *I Was a Born-Again Mormon*, appeared in 2007. The title change, McCraney says, was intended “to clear it up for whining Christians and cynical LDS that I am no longer a member of the church—but the title retails [*sic*] the idea that I was born-again WHILE in the LDS Church.”²

1. Like the entire first printing of McCraney’s book, the first twenty pages of the reprinting are not paginated. Of necessity, I have assigned roman numerals to these pages, beginning with the title page and continuing through the prologue (pp. viii–xi) and introduction (pp. xii–xx).

2. McCraney, e-mail message to author, 20 August 2008.

Despite endorsements from several evangelicals, including Pastor Chuck Smith of Calvary Chapel and also Professor Craig J. Hazen of Biola University, it appears that criticism by various evangelical countercult ministries led to changes in the second printing. Ed Decker warns conservative Protestants to

be *very very* cautious. . . When you claim to be a born again Mormon but still bow at the altar of a man/god who lives with his many wives on the planet near the great star kolob and your jesus is the brother of lucifer and was voted on to be the savior by a council of gods... and you make no public stand on these essential differences... God is NOT being served here. If he did make such a stand, he would not be a Mormon, He would be excommunicated.. He is there to be used as an example of the Mormons being just like Christians..someone who is born again and also a Mormon... Bless him.. but he is going to get burned ... and that is before judgment.. Pray for him by all means.. support him with \$\$ by no means. He may sound very much like a real born again person and I don't suggest he isn't but he is making perfect landings at the wrong airport.³

Glenn Evans, of the anti-Mormon Institute for Religious Research, claims that “McCraney’s syncretism of Christianity and Mormonism . . . does not give a balanced or accurate view of either Christianity or Mormonism.” Despite making many of the same objections to the Church of Jesus Christ that McCraney makes in his book, Evans wonders “whether [McCraney] is correct in thinking that a person can be saved by placing their faith in the Jesus Christ presented by the Mormon Church.” Though McCraney criticizes a straw man of the “Mormon Jesus,” Evans still finds McCraney to be far *too* Mormon.⁴

3. Ed Decker, “Comments from those who minister to Mormons regarding Shawn McCraney’s ministry,” 17 October 2006, <http://www.mazeministry.com/mormonism/misc/boardmeeting.htm> (accessed 8 April 2009), faulty capitalization and punctuation per original. Decker did not realize that McCraney had been excommunicated.

4. Glenn Evans, “Born Again [*sic*] Mormon: Moving Toward Christian Authenticity,” <http://www.irr.org/mit/born-again-mormon-br.html> (accessed 8 April 2009).

McCraney stresses the unity among “biblical Christians” yet grants that “divergent opinions on the small stuff are allowed in the body of Christ—as long as the core beliefs are maintained” (p. 221). Though evangelicals tend to talk about unity on essentials among the various denominations they assume make up the body of Christ, the criticism McCraney has received from some countercult ministries indicates an undercurrent of disagreement on important aspects of faith.⁵ For example, McCraney’s belief that a faithful Latter-day Saint *can* be born again—that is, in an evangelical sense—and remain in the Church of Jesus Christ has been questioned by Eric Johnson of Mormon Research Ministries. Such a possibility represents “the complete antithesis of biblical orthodoxy. This idea is just as strange as Paul recommending that new Christians continue worshipping at the Temple of Dianna [*sic*] while simultaneously fellowshipping in a Christian community.” Though Johnson grants that McCraney has been regenerated, he asserts the book itself is “unried, unprovable, and even sometimes unbiblical. I think he needs to revisit the very idea that it is possible to be born again while remaining Mormon. This idea makes no biblical sense at all and should be rejected as a plausible evangelistic strategy.”⁶

Following such criticism, McCraney, when he revised the book for the second edition, became more adamant about what happens when a Latter-day Saint is *truly* born again: the person either ceases membership in the Church of Jesus Christ or continues attending only to help others become regenerated. In the first printing of his book, McCraney says that the result of a Latter-day Saint’s emotional rebirth “in terms of worship, fellowship, or membership is between the regenerated soul and the Lord” (“Introduction,” p. xi). In the second printing he adds,

5. For an introduction to the sometimes radical differences among evangelicals, even on what constitutes a core belief, see Louis Midgley, “On Caliban Mischief,” *FARMS Review* 15/1 (2003): xi–xxxv.

6. Eric Johnson, review of *I Was a Born-Again Mormon: Moving Toward Christian Authenticity*, by Shawn McCraney, <http://www.mrm.org/topics/reviews/born-again-mormon-moving-toward-christian-authenticity> (accessed 2 November 2008). For more reviews from evangelicals, see 4witness.org/ldsnews/bornagainmormon.php (accessed 13 August 2008).

“From my experience, however, I am fairly certain as to where He will lead every believer in the end” (p. xv). And further: “We do not make an issue of what church a reborn-Christian attends [*sic*]. This being said, we do acknowledge the importance of hearing the Word of God taught in a worshipful setting, and recommend that all believers ultimately choose to belong to a religion that feeds them spiritually—that is, through the hearing of His divine Word” (p. xiv). To his claim that he wrote *Born-Again Mormon* to support “those born-again Saints who might choose to remain active in the Church while working to bring other members . . . to the Lord” (p. xviii), McCraney has added in the second printing, “Admittedly, this is a far-fetched concept. But the Lord sometimes works in mysterious ways” (p. xviii).⁷

McCraney grants that he has “an agenda”—one that is “out in the open and aimed at bringing Latter-day Saints to the Lord by attacking erroneous doctrines and practices and not the physical church they have grown to love” (p. viii). Yet he denies that he is anti-Mormon (e.g., p. xiii n. 4). This is largely a distinction without a difference, however, though he makes efforts to distinguish his approach from those he labels “anti-Mormon.”⁸

An Extended Exit Narrative

In 2001 and 2002 McCraney published pieces in *Sunstone* magazine but did not relate an account of his spiritual rebirth until he published *Born-Again Mormon* in 2003.⁹ He then trained for pastoral ministry at the Calvary Chapel School of Ministry and began host-

7. The largest textual addition to the second printing of McCraney’s book is an expansion of what he considers the differences between his approach to the Church of Jesus Christ and those approaches he labels “anti-Mormon” (see pp. 270–78).

8. See pp. 60–61 for his own use of the label *anti-Mormon* to describe evangelizing methods and a literature that “Jesus would . . . [not] approve of.” This distinction will be discussed below.

9. See Shawn McCraney, “Unthinkable!” *Sunstone*, November 2001, 18–19, and “Alternative Subculture,” *Sunstone*, December 2002, 2. He has also participated in various *Sunstone* symposia. He presented a paper entitled “On the Verge: Will Mormonism Become Christian?” on 14 August 2004 at the *Sunstone* Symposium in Salt Lake City and another paper entitled “The Difficult Balancing Act of Being a Born Again [*sic*] Mormon” on 17 April 2004. He also participated in a *Sunstone* panel discussion in Salt Lake City

ing a television program in Utah called *Heart of the Matter*. He now serves as pastor of Calvary Campus and leads ministries in Salt Lake City and Logan. He tends to repeat the same message—namely, how his experience of being born again led him to discover that the Church of Jesus Christ is not Christian. He then calls for Latter-day Saints individually and the Church of Jesus Christ collectively to become Christian.

McCraney's account closely follows what Seth R. Payne calls the "ex-Mormon exit narrative," which often mirrors the "captivity narratives" described by sociologists.¹⁰ *I Was a Born-Again Mormon* echoes previous evangelical critics who, as Payne explains,

find the modern LDS Church subversive on mostly theological grounds. They reason that because the beliefs and practices of the Church are so beyond what could be considered traditional Christianity, that individual Mormons are in spiritual danger and that their eternal souls are in jeopardy. Consequently, these groups are generally formed [into] ministries to help "witness to Mormons" about the "real Jesus" in an effort to bring them out of Mormonism.¹¹

McCraney includes each characteristic Payne identifies in his study of ex-Mormon exit narratives. First, to "establish credibility,"¹² exit narratives typically list various credentials and church experiences in order to legitimize the story as coming from an authentic insider. McCraney makes certain to do so often (e.g., pp. 35 and 38, where he lists various callings and length of membership). Second, "the apology"¹³ explains why the person's membership was retained for so long and points out that the person had been unaware of cer-

that considered the question, "How 'Christian' Should Mormonism Strive to Be?" on 14 August 2004.

10. Seth R. Payne, "Purposeful Strangers: A Study of the Ex-Mormon Narrative," delivered at the Sunstone Symposium in Salt Lake City, Utah, on 9 August 2008. Payne's published presentation is found at <http://www.mormonstudies.net/pdf/strangers.pdf> (accessed 20 February 2009).

11. Payne, "Purposeful Strangers," 10–11.

12. Payne, "Purposeful Strangers," 18.

13. Payne, "Purposeful Strangers," 19.

tain historical or doctrinal controversies. McCraney attributes his church membership to his upbringing (p. 35) and recalls feeling “the Spirit” at church meetings (p. 56), but he later considers such experiences to be nothing but mere human emotions that should not be trusted (pp. 333–34). Third, the narratives include the “laundry list” of “doctrinal/historical problems.”¹⁴ These points establish what ex-Mormons see as the obvious falsehood of Mormonism. McCraney devotes the second part of his book to these issues, for instance, the alleged Mormon belief that “Mary was a virgin up until the time she had holy sexual relations with God Himself” (p. 243). According to McCraney, Latter-day Saints almost never talk about Jesus. This remarkable and incorrect claim is made repeatedly (see pp. 260–61). According to Payne, the final element, “the testimony,” consists of “an expression of gratitude for new-found freedoms or beliefs.”¹⁵ In McCraney’s narrative, most church members are described as “tired, struggling, heavy, and dull” (p. 285), drawn into the trap by “the most appealing humanistic religion on earth” (p. 237). Relief is found in becoming regenerated as understood by McCraney’s interpretation of the Bible.

By following this narrative pattern, McCraney’s book offers nothing particularly new, aside from personal experiences that constitute his more interesting (though largely unverifiable) points. Much of the book is clouded with borrowed or flawed interpretations of Latter-day Saint doctrine and history as understood by McCraney and often couched in remembered conversations.

In both printings McCraney quotes from a poem by Walt Whitman (1819–1892): “The words of my book nothing, the drift of it everything” (p. vi).¹⁶ This language is intended to “tell readers not to take every line as absolute fact but to take the drift of the book seriously.” This is one reason McCraney says he decided not to include page numbers in the first printing, but he now believes the strategy

14. Payne, “Purposeful Strangers,” 24.

15. Payne, “Purposeful Strangers,” 27. There are many more examples of each of these characteristics throughout McCraney’s book.

16. The line is from “Shut Not Your Doors, &c,” which appears in Whitman’s collection *Leaves of Grass*.

“didn’t work [because] the complaints outweighed the attempt so we changed it to normalcy.”¹⁷ The revised printing is paginated except for, as already noted, the first twenty pages. The book also now has a larger and more readable font. Unfortunately, most of the numerous typographical and factual errors have been perpetuated. Because the drift matters more to McCraney than precise details, he explains: “Mistakes are not a concern for me. I don’t mind imperfect work. I am imperfect [*sic*] therefore so will my work be imperfect.”¹⁸ Despite its flaws, the drift of the book provides some insight into McCraney’s personal apostasy and the struggle some may have grasping an “authentic Christianity.”¹⁹

From “Stalwart” to “Apostate”

McCraney describes his own spiritual crisis as resulting from an excessively legalistic approach to the gospel. This resulted in frustration, depression, a strong sense of personal hypocrisy, and, ultimately, apostasy. McCraney’s mother is described as an active Latter-day Saint who, we are told, never “really [bought] into all the doctrines and theologies that the Church stalwarts claim are so important” (p. 38). His father joined the church in order to help raise his children and then virtually ceased activity once his last child was married (p. 37). Strongly playing on stereotypes, McCraney observes, “By acknowledging my father’s and mother’s relative weakness in the faith, some LDS readers will automatically assume that . . . if I had experienced a *proper* LDS upbringing, which would have included a dedicated, strong priesthood-holding father, and a scripture-toting, Book of

17. McCraney, e-mail message to author, 20 August 2008.

18. McCraney, e-mail message to author, 20 August 2008.

19. Throughout this review I employ *apostate* and *apostasy* in their technical sense. As Payne explains: “Recent ex-Mormon narratives . . . focus on the description of a fundamental shift away from what is perceived as rigid literalism to an unbounded scientific [or evangelical] rationality. In this sense, members of the emerging ex-Mormon movement should be sociologically considered apostates although I hesitate to employ this label due to the extremely negative connotations this word has within the LDS community. . . . I use this word purely in a technical sense and in no way intend to attach inherent negative connotations to its meaning” (Payne, “Purposeful Strangers,” 3–4).

Mormon quoting [*sic*] mother, I would undoubtedly be stronger in the Church and not so inclined to constantly examine and question it.” However, he tells readers it is “dangerous to categorically make such an assessment and consider it certain” (p. 38).²⁰

“I cannot recall a time when I did not desperately yearn to truly know God,” McCraney reflects, “and when I did not possess a tremendous and natural inclination toward mischief, rebellion, and sin” (p. 39). Given great latitude in his youth to run free in Southern California, he found himself falling in with “wild boys and loose girls” and becoming caught up in “sex, drugs, and rock and roll” while still remaining socially active in the church. He “could not spend any amount of time with members who believed themselves holy and not walk away finding them just as sinful” as he was, only in different ways. Among the Saints, he encountered “gossiping, lying, judging, anger, violence, hypocrisy, selfishness, stinginess, and a host of other sinful attributes found in the souls of unsaved men and women” (pp. 40–41). And the few times McCraney mentions the kindness of a particular Latter-day Saint leader or friend, he does not connect such charitable actions with their faith in Christ (e.g., p. 69).

McCraney recalls enjoying his reputation as a rebel and marveling at how many members “longed for [his] come-uppance” (p. 41). By age nineteen his wild life had left him empty, and he decided to straighten up by serving a full-time Latter-day Saint mission. He vowed to use “every minute of the mission to truly fix [himself]” by strictly following missionary rules. He started to feel good about himself but overreached: “I eventually found myself arrogantly believing that, because I was behaving well and doing some things well, I myself had become a good person” (pp. 42–43). McCraney asserts that his pride resulted from obedience to rules and that his outward appearance of goodness was only a facade. “Remember,” he warns, “Hitler hated burlesque, wouldn’t touch alcohol, demanded a clean, scrubbed appearance,

20. Such caution is absent when McCraney directly attributes Joseph Smith’s religious concepts to his upbringing and the influence of his father and mother. He attributes Smith’s religious thought to familial influence, borrowing the interpretations of C. Jess Groesbeck, Grant Palmer, D. Michael Quinn, Craig Hazen, and others (pp. 123–37).

and sought to elevate every aspect of the human condition through outward strictures. But this didn't make the Nazis holy in the least" (p. 44).²¹ These observations recall his earlier explanation of sin in which he posits that "human beings have the need . . . to conform to all sorts of outward expectations in an attempt to gain social acceptance and make themselves look and feel good" (p. 9).

Somewhat surprisingly, McCraney sees nothing insidious about Latter-day Saint missionary efforts; he even grants that some missionaries might discover the Lord through their service, though he did not. He recalls leaving the mission field feeling sanctified from sin and worthy to enter God's presence solely through his own efforts and service. He firmly believed, "as many LDS leaders and friends had explained, that the sacrifice of Jesus was there to pick up any slack or sin I might have forgotten to take care of, but that I had essentially paved my own road to heaven" (p. 44). Nevertheless, his feelings of being a righteous Saint quickly faded when he returned from his mission. "After two or three hours of exposure to the licentious world, I was confronted with the ridiculousness of my ever thinking I . . . had become good while on the mission. . . . I was very aware that my heart had not changed at all" (p. 47).

McCraney believed that the best way to avoid his sinful lusts was through marriage. A day after returning from his mission, he was engaged to be married (p. 48). Within six months he was sealed to his wife, Mary, in the Los Angeles Temple, and a year and a half later they had their first daughter. He meticulously reports that, after moving to Richmond, Utah, they continued to attend the temple and church meetings regularly, pay tithes, keep the Word of Wisdom, and serve in various callings. Perhaps some of McCraney's earlier confidence about being a good person had returned. Yet he still felt something was wrong. "I knew what I was inside, my *real* self, my *true* soul, the churning creature who cried out desperately to really know the Lord, not just a person who acted as if he did" (p. 49). This self-desperation became an obsession when McCraney was called to serve as elders quorum president in a student ward at Brigham Young University. He

21. See p. 342 for another comparison of Latter-day Saints to Hitler.

would make sure his quorum achieved 100 percent home teaching by personally visiting any missed homes each month, sometimes more than once, frantically knocking on doors and leaving notes, even on Halloween night. Despite reaching his goal, he felt like he “continued to *do*, instead of *be*,” explaining, “I sought to do everything I could to have God approve of my soul. If pleasing the Lord meant killing myself in the attempt to obey Him then so be it” (pp. 51–52). McCraney admits this approach was far too extreme for many Latter-day Saints. Yet how could anything less than 100 percent please God? He wondered why some members would run to the store for a gallon of milk on Sunday or why some Saints were “so darn mean” instead of being filled with love. While focusing increasingly on the failures of others, he “pressed on in the faith, zealously adhering to the Church and its standards . . . [and becoming] more legalistic, less patient, and mean-spirited to anyone who wouldn’t see things the way” he understood them. “Outwardly I was pious. Inwardly, a phony” (pp. 53–55).

Spending all his free time reading church books, he found the gospel intellectually fulfilling, which to him meant “there was an answer or doctrine for nearly every problem or situation that rose up under the theological sun” (p. 58). He “firmly believed that the Church’s teachings were infallible and were capable of leading all souls back to God” (p. 55)—all souls, perhaps, but his own. “When I looked at my soul, heart, mind, and nature, I could not see myself as pleasing to God,” he recalls. “The whole theological construct was failing me.” Though he believed he had not committed any sin that would explain his negative feelings, he nevertheless realized he was “living a lie”—actively involved in the church but still a “failure who possessed a sinful heart.” Church leaders and friends advised him to continue to attend church, study the scriptures, and pray, assuring him that the Holy Ghost would eventually give him peace (pp. 55–57). No such peace came. Hounded by feelings of personal inadequacy, McCraney left BYU without graduating in 1987.²² The family soon moved back to California, and he took up a full-time job. He began investigating Mormon history in order to find, he admits, problems with the church that would justify his own shortcomings.

22. McCraney, e-mail message to author, 10 June 2009.

“I was young and in denial,” he reflects. “The real problem lay within me.” Despite this concession, he still claims “there is much to question regarding the Church, its history and its early leaders” (p. 59). For a year he waded through anti-Mormon²³ literature and consequently “lost all [his] desire to even pursue the idea of God” (p. 61). “After having believed that the Church was true and the only way to God, and then pushing myself to the point where I questioned everything about it, I discovered that I had nothing inside upon which I could rely. . . . I was left to a state of complete spiritual weakness. . . . Unable to trust the institution any longer, I turned, like so many others, to the world for solace and support” (p. 63).

After unearthing from his study of Mormon history what he considered to be “enough damning evidence against the Church to send it packing all the way back to 1820,” McCraney sought to share it with as many members as he could. Most with whom he spoke were uninterested in his findings, preferring to believe that reasonable explanations existed (pp. 59–60). Feeling alone, McCraney suffered “a major crisis of faith. . . . My mind wandered. Maybe God lived in the human heart and I had no reason to change. Maybe *I* was God! Maybe God was an elephant in the cosmos. Maybe God is just an idea—real in the sense that we cling to it, but not in the sense that He literally exists. I became unsure about what I knew and especially in how I thought I could know anything. I was . . . adrift” (pp. 61–62).

“Desperate and Angry”

McCraney describes a deep sense of betrayal and anger inside those who lose their faith and feel cheated by the institutional church. He recalls wandering in “human sophistries, launching a self-guided search through secularism, philosophical thought, and the lulling haze of fictional romanticism.” He recounts having a glance at “the philosophical cathedrals of Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Kant, Hume, Hegel, Marx, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Sartre.” He often left work early to spend afternoons reading, a habit of absenteeism that he

23. *Anti-Mormon* here is McCraney’s term; it will be discussed further in this review.

could indulge—even though it repeatedly cost him his employment—by learning how to “‘job-hop’ as a means of financial survival.” He toyed with Communism. He sought answers to questions about the meaning of life by becoming absorbed in Buddhism, Islam, pantheism, Judaism, secular humanism, and art. He even tried to write the great American novel. “I had gotten to the point where I would have fallen down and worshipped a dancing golden monkey if it could have provided me with genuine peace [and] a new heart” (pp. 63–67).

By 1990 he had become “increasingly agitated and aggressive, but also depressed and even dangerously suicidal.” He “fully embraced humanism,” which became his ideology for the next seven years. He lashed out at members of his extended family when they made even the slightest “reference to God or good, mocking their every allegiance to religion” (p. 67).

Amazingly, despite all of his inner conflict, McCraney says he remained “outwardly active in the Church,” even serving on a stake high council, as a high priests group instructor, and in a bishopric. Receiving these calls during this time of “faithless-faith” caused him to realize that “no matter what people inwardly believe while a member of the Church, they will always be accepted, and at times even respected, as long as they look . . . , speak . . . , and act LDS” (p. 68). He recalls receiving support from caring leaders and members—so long as he acted the part of a faithful member, which bothered him tremendously (p. 70). He also believed that many members of the church were intolerant and hypocritical. When a friend from work gave McCraney a letter explaining her own experience of becoming a born-again Christian, he saw her as something of a “Jesus Freak” but decided to share the letter with a missionary preparation class he was teaching, only to see an “institutional and aggressive” attack from class members who mocked the Bible and proclaimed the author of the letter to be destined for hell (pp. 77–78).

Eventually, “in a desperate effort to ease the pain of [his] cankered soul,” McCraney “turned to secretly abusing alcohol and prescription drugs . . . as a way to numb and self-medicate [his] pounding pain.” In all his anxious searching he felt he had poured his whole heart out

only to find nothing but a shell. The resulting pain was “all-consuming.” He frankly acknowledges that much of this turmoil would have been avoided had he “simply clung to the Church, its programs and directives. . . . Had I possessed the will and nature to honestly live the LDS way of life, I would never have had a problem with any of these personal issues. . . . Desperate and angry, . . . I was a spiritually, emotionally, and socially broken man” (pp. 69–71).

It was at this point that McCraney heard the aforementioned radio sermon that convinced him that nothing he could ever do would give him peace; only Jesus as Lord and Savior could do that. For five more years he remained an ostensibly active Latter-day Saint while trying to reconcile his newfound spiritual life with his membership in the Church of Jesus Christ, but ultimately he found this impossible.²⁴ He bought *Here I Stand*, a book on the life of Martin Luther by Roland H. Bainton. “Words cannot describe the connection and resonance I felt toward Luther and his tumultuous search for truth. . . . I felt as if I had personally undergone (and now shared) in the same sort of spiritual transformation” (p. 80). This detail underscores his intent in authoring *I Was a Born-Again Mormon*. He seems to picture himself as a Luther pointing the way for the Church of Jesus Christ, a kind of reformer calling an apostate group to repentance.²⁵ Yet he is

24. Absent from the book are any details of McCraney’s seeking refuge within the pages of *Sunstone* magazine, as mentioned above. In 2001 *Sunstone* published a short story of his that described a seminary class he taught in which the students were judging an absent member as being a “slut.” He tried explaining to the class that everyone is a sinner but became frustrated when the class did not catch on. See Shawn Aaron McCraney, “Unthinkable!” *Sunstone*, November 2001, 18–19.

25. McCraney compared himself to Martin Luther again during the question-and-answer segment of his 2004 *Sunstone* Symposium paper “On the Verge: Will Mormonism Become Christian?” He explained that by requesting excommunication from the Church of Jesus Christ he hoped to return and be baptized a member as a new Christian. He even calls *Sunstone* to repentance: “*Sunstone*—the magazine, its supporters, symposiums, and direct attempts to explore ‘Mormon experience, scholarship, issues, and art’—is but a liberal mirror of the conservative LDS experience. Further, it seems to be mainly supported by socially disaffected and/or frustrated people who, either through some sort of doctrinal grind or resentment at not being called to leadership, really just want to belong. In other words, if a person cannot be one of the elect, he or she should join or form a subculture that essentially mirrors what the elect are doing and call it ‘alternative but holy.’” He concluded that “only 3.75 percent” of the last issue was “true to the *SUNSTONE*

careful not to claim a divine special revelation. “This is not the dream or vision of some pseudo-prophet type. I have received no visions, dreams, or revelations. *Born-Again Mormon* is not a book I hold up as divinely inspired or infallible” (p. 346).

They Leave the Church but Cannot Leave It Alone

McCraney claims that “the *least* egregious infraction of Church law is the failure to act LDS while the *most* serious action a member can take and the one that draws the heaviest retribution from defenders of the faith is speaking up about the Church, its doctrine, or its leaders in a critical way—or even asking questions” (p. 69). Because the Saints place a heavy emphasis on testifying to their faith (and hence on their encounters with God), joined in community with the testimonies of others, statements challenging faith are often perceived as threatening. Professor of literature and religion Terryl L. Givens describes a paradox of Latter-day Saint certainty and also searching: “Mormons are admonished to ‘get their own testimonies,’ and not live by borrowed light. But immersion in a culture so saturated in the rhetoric of certainty inevitably produces the pressure to express, if not the reality to have, personal conviction; and it produces a socially reinforced confidence about those convictions. Perhaps this explains in part the proclivity of disaffected Mormons so frequently to react with bitterness and feelings of betrayal. It explains why people can leave the church but not leave it alone.”²⁶

Perhaps it also explains why the Saints are tempted to vilify those who manifest antagonism toward the Church of Jesus Christ. McCraney remembers having heard “local leaders and higher [saying] ‘They leave the Church, but they won’t leave it alone’” (p. 63). This is commonly said of those disaffected former Saints who publish criti-

I have come to love, which coincidentally (or not) is about the same percentage of love I have left for the Church as a whole since my youth. What a shame. What a damn shame.” McCraney, “Alternative Subculture,” letter to the editor, *Sunstone*, December 2002, 2.

26. Terryl L. Givens, *People of Paradox: A History of Mormon Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 275.

cism or actively attack their former faith.²⁷ It is *not* true in every case that one who leaves the church will never thereafter “leave it alone.” Some are perfectly capable of ceasing church activity without attacking the church. Those who cannot leave it alone often do so loudly, however. Like McCraney, some feel compelled to warn others about continued participation in (or becoming involved with) Mormonism, and some actively seek confrontation by ridiculing former friends and church members. The Internet offers a new avenue for detractors to anonymously criticize the faith of those who still believe. There are entire online communities, “cyberwards” of sorts, complete with testimony bearing of the falseness of the Mormon cult (or the “Morg,” as it is sometimes called) and even general conferences.²⁸ At times feelings of disgust or contempt are apparent when apostates vent about their former faith. Social critic Eric Hoffer offered what might serve as an explanation:

We always look for allies when we hate. . . . Whence come these unreasonable hatreds, and why their unifying effect? They are an expression of a desperate effort to suppress an awareness

27. Apparently, the saying was coined by Neal A. Maxwell in his 1979 book *All These Things Shall Give Thee Experience* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979), 108. He repeated the saying elsewhere, including in general conference addresses (see “The Net Gathers of Every Kind,” *Ensign*, November 1980, 14; “Becometh As a Child,” *Ensign*, May 1996, 68; “Remember How Merciful the Lord Hath Been,” *Ensign*, May 2004, 44). The phrase is conceptually tied with an account in which Joseph Smith asserted that once someone has joined the church that person has left neutral ground forever (see Daniel Tyler, “Recollections of the Prophet Joseph Smith,” *Juvenile Instructor*, 15 August 1892, 492). Both the phrase and the story have since received a fair amount of notice in various church publications and general conference addresses. See, for example, Hyrum and Helen Andrus, ed., *They Knew the Prophet: Personal Accounts from Over 100 People Who Knew Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1976), 53–55; Truman G. Madsen, *Joseph Smith the Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1989), 52–53; *Book of Mormon Student Manual: Religion 121 and 122* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 1996), 95; James E. Faust, “Enriching Family Life,” *Ensign*, May 1983, 40; Glenn L. Pace, “Follow the Prophet,” *Ensign*, May 1989, 25; and Mary Ellen W. Smoot, “Steadfast and Immovable,” *Ensign*, November 2001, 91.

28. Payne noted some of the unique vocabulary these online communities have developed, often reflecting a “captivity narrative” theme complete with names like “Reformed Former Mormons” or using terms like *escaped* or *recovered* (Payne, “Purposeful Strangers,” 2–3).

of our inadequacy, worthlessness, guilt and other shortcomings of the self. Self-contempt is here transmuted into hatred of others—and there is a most determined and persistent effort to mask this switch. Obviously, the most effective way of doing this is to find others, as many as possible, who hate as we do. . . . Much of our proselytizing consists in infecting others not with our brand of faith but with our particular brand of unreasonable hatred.²⁹

The word *hate* here could also be read as *hurt*, and some Latter-day Saints would do well to recognize there are former members who carry real pain resulting from apostasy, alienation, and loss of faith. Some carry the pain quietly, others more vocally. Clearly not all former Mormons are miserable or angry; some report feelings of peace and release upon losing their faith, while others continue to emotionally struggle. Whether fueled by hate or hurt, McCraney points to the reaction that apostates or doubters may receive from still-believing Saints as causing strong feelings of isolation, a sense of betrayal, and worry over familial relationships. At times apostates may experience direct hostility. This hostility is neither a Christlike response nor an effective approach in helping resolve concerns (nor is the hostility unique to Latter-day Saints). Historian Richard Bushman adequately describes the problem:

Often church leaders, parents, and friends do not understand the force [of critical accounts]. Not knowing how to respond, they react defensively. They are inclined to dismiss all the evidence as anti-Mormon or of the devil. “Stop reading these things if they upset you so much,” the inquirer is told. Or “go

29. Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements* (New York City: Harper and Row, 1956), 88. McCraney recommends and refers to Hoffer’s book several times. “Eric Hoffer, aka, the longshoreman philosopher, wrote an insightful but fairly despairing book. . . . I highly recommend this book to anyone seeking to understand the psychology of people and their relationships to mass movements. Unfortunately, Hoffer is an atheist and can be quite acerbic in his approach to life. . . . For every page of Hoffer, however, I recommend a chapter or two of the New Testament and some considerable time in earnest prayer” (p. 101 n. 39).

back to the familiar formula: scriptures, prayer, church attendance.” The troubled person may have been doing all of these things sincerely, perhaps even desperately. He or she feels the world is falling apart. Everything these inquirers put their trust in starts to crumble. They want guidance more than ever in their lives, but they don’t seem to get it. The facts that have been presented to them challenge almost everything they believe.³⁰

Reacting to doubt with hostility, indifference, or accusations of unworthiness can be destructive to both faith and relationships. In light of how McCraney discusses his own drug and alcohol abuse, he seems to believe that some Saints inevitably attribute apostasy to sin. He is quick to explain at the outset of the book that in presenting such an “unadulterated expose” [*sic*] he risks “jeopardizing the small amount of credibility more anonymous authors generally enjoy” (p. ix). While there is scriptural warrant that various sins *can* lead to apostasy,³¹ there is also abundant scriptural precedence indicating that, if such were invariably the case, there would be no faith in God—for example, “All we like sheep have gone astray” (Isaiah 53:6) and “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

30. Richard L. Bushman, “Introduction to ‘Joseph Smith and His Critics’ Seminar,” *Life On Gold Plates*, <http://www.lifeongoldplates.com/2008/08/bushmans-introduction-to-joseph-smith.html> (accessed 20 August 2008). See also Robert D. Hales, “Christian Courage: The Price of Discipleship,” *Ensign*, November 2008, 72–75: “To . . . all who seek to know how we should respond to our accusers, I reply, we *love* them. Whatever their race, creed, religion, or political persuasion, if we follow Christ and show forth His courage, we must love them. We do not feel we are *better than* they are. Rather, we desire with our love to show them a *better way*—the way of Jesus Christ.” See also Henry B. Eyring, “Helping a Student in a Moment of Doubt,” in Eyring, *To Draw Closer to God: A Collection of Discourses* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 135–57.

31. “And thus we can plainly discern, that after a people have been once enlightened by the Spirit of God, and have had great knowledge of things pertaining to righteousness, and then have fallen away into sin and transgression, they become more hardened, and thus their state becomes worse than though they had never known these things” (Alma 24:30; see Doctrine and Covenants 93:38–39). I believe taking these verses universally is problematic, unless doubt or loss of faith *itself* is argued to be sin.

Grace and Works

McCraney is “convinced that there are far too many Latter-day Saints needlessly suffering under the thumb of religious indoctrination, faulty theology, and legalistic ideas of what God expects of her or him” (p. 115). He points to Saints who misunderstand or overlook Christ’s atonement by believing they can work their own way to perfection as he once did. He contends that the faith of the Saints is “based on the logical premise of the universal balance,” in which sin tips the scale toward damnation while righteousness tips it toward salvation. In pursuing this straw-man argument, McCraney holds that “the supreme sacrifice of Jesus Christ becomes unnecessary since positive behaviors and deeds have the potential to do the ‘balancing’ required by God.” Latter-day Saints “have arrogantly taken the duty of justification (or payment) for sin upon themselves . . . and either purposefully or inadvertently reject God’s perfect offering for human sin” (pp. 13–14).

In a parable McCraney created, Latter-day Saints view Jesus as the head janitor of a “large and beautiful school” where most students earnestly avoid making messes and are “so diligent, in fact, that they scrub their own desks and floor at the end of every day.” The filthier students who wish to avoid embarrassment “usually try to clean their own mess up before anyone else at the school sees it.” Sometimes they succeed, but other times they make the mess much worse in the attempt, and this is when “Jesus the Janitor is called. Of course He quickly shows up and graciously cleans away the entire mess, . . . but there are a whole bunch of conditions attached to His service to ensure that the mess will be removed entirely” (pp. 261–62).

Because Latter-day Saints believe that the motivation behind behavior matters (see Moroni 7:6–10; Matthew 6:1–6), this flawed understanding can result in stress, depression, and resignation for some or pride and hypocrisy for others. For McCraney, such an approach resulted in all of the above, ultimately leaving him spiritually stillborn.

Certainly some church members needlessly suffer from an incorrect or limited understanding of gospel doctrine. This is evidenced by a

host of conference talks, magazine articles, and books that point out the Saints' dependence upon divine mercy. Just months before McCraney's born-again experience, Elder Jeffery R. Holland delivered a general conference message in which he reached out to those like McCraney

who are carrying heavy burdens and feeling private pain, who are walking through the dark valleys of this world's tribulation. Some may be desperately worried about a husband or a wife or a child, worried about their health or their happiness or their faithfulness in keeping the commandments. Some are living with physical pain, or emotional pain, or disabilities that come with age. Some are troubled as to how to make ends meet financially, and some ache with the private loneliness of an empty house or an empty room or simply empty arms.³²

The message was simple: "In the world we shall have tribulation, but we are to be of good cheer. Christ has overcome the world." Elder Holland denies that the Saints are to overcome sin and sorrow on their own. Being yoked with Christ makes one's burden light (Matthew 11:28–30), though some lifting and pulling is still required on the part of the faithful. Trying to pull the load alone brings disaster.

In his book *Following Christ*, Stephen E. Robinson points out that Protestants "mistakenly suppose the Latter-day Saints are working to be saved, and, unfortunately, so do some of our own people. . . . If we focus too much attention on the final accomplishment of our eternal goal, on becoming someday what our Father is, it is possible to undervalue or even overlook Christ's saving work, to glorify our own efforts instead and feel we are 'saving ourselves.'"³³ McCraney views any recent Latter-day Saint emphasis on grace as evidence that the doctrine of the church is shifting, rather than representing a reemphasis of a doctrine that the church has taught since 1830. Although the topics of grace and works in Latter-day Saint thought have received

32. Jeffrey R. Holland, "The Peaceable Things of the Kingdom," *Ensign*, November 1996, 82.

33. Stephen E. Robinson, *Following Christ: The Parable of the Divers and More Good News* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1995), 69–70.

different emphases over time, both have always maintained a place in Latter-day Saint soteriology in relation to the atonement of Jesus Christ. Given all that the church's leaders have said on grace and works, it will not do for critics like McCraney to claim that Latter-day Saints misunderstand, ignore, or disbelieve the atonement of Christ or that they are taught to independently perfect themselves.³⁴

McCraney rightly notes that Latter-day Saints differentiate between salvation and exaltation (p. 32 n. 23). Salvation, which is ultimately granted to nearly all of God's children, is typically understood to include a person's resurrection from death and eventual attainment of a degree of glory in the hereafter. Exaltation is reserved for those who attain the highest possible degree of glory. The scriptures are clear that our relationship with God is contingent upon the mercy of Jesus Christ. In contrast, McCraney's view is stunted: "To Born-Again Mormons, salvation means living with God in heaven. End of story. Granted, Born-Again Mormons acknowledge that God will award different 'crowns' based on the works of the regenerated spirit involved, but these works are recognized only because of what people do *after* they are spiritually born again and not before" (p. 32 n. 23). Perhaps these "crowns" are parallel to the Latter-day Saint concept of degrees of glory, though McCraney makes no connection and is not clear if the works of a regenerated spirit depend upon an individual's agency. McCraney views Latter-day Saint conditions for exaltation as mere items on a legalistic checklist—that is, by doing enough good, people compensate for the bad they do, an approach that McCraney calls "the old, [*sic*] 'try and please Dad' trick" (p. 102). This so-called universal balance theory was denounced by Elder Dallin H. Oaks:

34. For a survey of Latter-day Saint sources since Joseph Smith that discuss the role of grace, see David L. Paulsen and Cory G. Walker, "Work, Worship, and Grace," *FARMS Review* 18/2 (2006): 83–176. One of McCraney's underlying themes is that the Church of Jesus Christ is bent on becoming "more Christian" and his mission is to spur that development forward. For discussion of related theological developments in Christianity in general, see Truman G. Madsen, "Are Christians Mormon?" *BYU Studies* 15/1 (1974): 1–20; and David L. Paulsen, "Are Christians Mormon? Reassessing Joseph Smith's Theology in His Bicentennial," *BYU Studies* 45/1 (2006): 35–128.

The Final Judgment is not just an evaluation of a sum total of good and evil acts—what we have *done*. It is an acknowledgment of the final effect of our acts and thoughts—what we have *become*. It is not enough for anyone just to go through the motions. The commandments, ordinances, and covenants of the gospel are not a list of deposits required to be made in some heavenly account. The gospel of Jesus Christ is a plan that shows us how to become what our Heavenly Father desires us to become.³⁵

McCraney ironically appeals to the same language that Elder Oaks and others have employed to demonstrate that human works are involved in the process of salvation:

We must also remember that Jesus said, “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven . . .” (Matt 7:21–23). The fruits or “works” Jesus was speaking of were the fruits of Love that exude from those who have been spiritually born again. They do not necessarily mean a preponderance of earthly accomplishments and deeds that can be tallied and recorded. (p. 323)

But the scriptures, for the Saints, insist that good works necessarily follow repentance as the fruit of love prompted by God and are not mere items on a checklist. In fact, the scriptures warn that such hoop-jumping constitutes placing one’s trust in “dead works” while “denying the mercies of Christ” (e.g., Moroni 8:23, which refers specifically to the “dead work” of infant baptism).

Myths of Spiritual Rebirth

McCraney has a list of characteristics that he associates with genuine spiritual rebirth (pp. 112–15). Much of his description easily aligns with what Latter-day Saints believe, though he notes no similarities. He holds that spiritual rebirth leads to a stronger desire to praise God

35. Dallin H. Oaks, “The Challenge to Become,” *Ensign*, November 2000, 32–34.

for blessings and also a yearning to share the gospel. Desire for sin and worldliness decreases as strength to overcome temptations increases. Charitable acts will be prompted by God's grace, causing the believer to bear the fruit of good works. These descriptions, as well as direct references to being born of the Spirit, are found repeatedly in Latter-day Saint scripture.³⁶

The book of Enos sets forth the process and result of being truly born again. After feeling convicted of his personal sins and acknowledging them by repenting with faith in the Messiah, Enos is filled with forgiveness, gratitude to God, and a powerful love and concern for others:

And my soul hungered; and I kneeled down before my Maker, and I cried unto him in mighty prayer and supplication for mine own soul. . . . And there came a voice unto me, saying: Enos, thy sins are forgiven thee, and thou shalt be blessed. . . . And I said: Lord, how is it done? And he said unto me: Because of thy faith in Christ, whom thou hast never before heard nor seen. . . . Wherefore, go to, thy faith hath made thee whole. Now, it came to pass that when I had heard these words I began to feel a desire for the welfare of my brethren, the Nephites; wherefore, I did pour out my whole soul unto God for them. . . . And I prayed unto him with many long strugglings for my brethren, the Lamanites. And it came to pass that after I had prayed and labored with all diligence, the Lord said unto me: I will grant unto thee according to thy desires, because of thy faith. (Enos 1:4–12)

McCraney also addresses several myths (his term) regarding the process of spiritual rebirth. For example, he denies—as would any Latter-day Saint who recalls the conversion experiences of Paul and Alma the Younger—that a person must be “worthy” in order to be

36. See, for example, Mosiah 2:4; Alma 38:12; 3 Nephi 12:6; Moroni 7:47–48; 8:26. King Benjamin's sermon in Mosiah 2–5 includes language describing the necessary rebirth. For references to being born again, see Mosiah 27:24–25, 28; Alma 5:14, 49; 7:14; 36:5, 23–24, 26; Doctrine and Covenants 5:16.

born again (p. 108). But he quickly parts ways with the Saints when he indicts them for believing that personal worthiness is usually a precondition for having the continuing influence of the Holy Ghost. McCraney finds this belief particularly galling. After hearing a young Latter-day Saint woman give a talk in church on that subject, he “had to actually pray for strength to refrain from attacking her well-intended ignorance after the meeting” (p. 110).

Another myth that McCraney chooses to rebut is the idea that spiritual rebirth is always instantaneous. Declaring a time, date, and place of one’s spiritual rebirth is like casting pearls before swine, he says, since uninitiated people will view the claim as “suspect and even farcical when described like an auto accident” (p. 107). As for the myth that a moment of spiritual rebirth automatically makes a person perfect, “this is a doctrine straight from the heart of hell” (p. 111). Although born-again Mormons have a decreased desire for sin, they “will continue . . . to make mistakes and yes, commit sins.” What is important, McCraney avers, is that “the *response* to sin is very different than it was when they were unregenerated”—that is, now they “peacefully see all people as failing in the flesh and, with patience and love, accept the . . . [other] born-again as forgiven works in progress” (pp. 111–12, emphasis in original). One danger McCraney sees in the idea of instantaneous regeneration is that it sets up unrealistic expectations. His own born-again experience was followed by backsliding because, he says, he neglected to study the Bible, pray, and fellowship with other Christians (i.e., non-Mormons).³⁷ His failures were devastating: “I . . . found myself in a far deeper spiritual pit than I had been before I ever knew the Lord” (p. 88).

Another myth McCraney counters is that merely saying a “sinner’s prayer” produces spiritual rebirth. In fact, in his view (based on Paul’s sudden, unasked-for conversion) *nothing* a sinner can do carries influence here since only God decides “when, how, where and if [spiritual rebirth] will ever occur in the heart of one of his creations”

37. Throughout the book, McCraney repeatedly asserts that Mormons are not Christians. For a solid critique of this view, see Daniel C. Peterson and Stephen D. Ricks, *Offenders for a Word* (Salt Lake City: Aspen Books, 1992).

(p. 105). Indeed, this issue of human agency is ambiguous throughout the book. One might ask McCraney why God does not simply cause all his creations to call on him *now*. Whereas Latter-day Saint doctrine clearly includes grace *and* works, God *and* man, and divine will *and* human agency in the process of salvation, McCraney insists it must be one or the other but vacillates by claiming, “Born-Again Mormons recognize salient arguments from both Calvin and Arminius and stand on biblically sound theology regarding salvation” without explaining exactly what that means or how it is possible (p. 152 n. 83). McCraney’s soteriology is logically untenable and presents a solid double standard:

There is no act, deed, amount of money, service, work, diligence, ordinance, attendance, temple rite, testimony, or self-sacrificial offering of any kind that could ever take any part of restoring fallen humanity to the presence of God. I cannot emphasize this point too emphatically. Such faithless acts or attitudes aren’t needed, aren’t worthy, and would never meet the demands of perfect justice that God demands for sin and rebellion. Few human ideologies more readily mock God, religious or otherwise, than for human beings to think they could ever do anything to contribute to the suffering, sacrifice, payment or atonement of sin Jesus gave on the cross. And yet it happens all the time. (p. 30)

After removing human will from the salvation equation, he then describes *what one must do* in order to be saved: “First, resign yourself to the fact that you are a sinner. . . . Next, ask out loud for Jesus to take over your sins and life. . . . Tell God that you accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior of your life and that you turn your will and ways over to Him” (p. 116).

In order to be meaningful, these actions would require the agency and action of the believer, an impossibility from a Calvinistic stance in which God saves his elect through irresistible grace, the entire process from beginning to end being directly caused by God alone. In short, McCraney tells readers they can do *nothing* in order to be saved and then tells them exactly *what* they must do to be saved. This

double standard is captured in one sentence: “We are not at all in control of the situation but we must relinquish control to God” (p. 105). I cannot see how it is possible to relinquish what one never possessed. McCraney must either categorically state that true salvation by grace involves absolutely no effort, choice, or works on the part of the saved or recognize that his disagreement with Latter-day Saint doctrine is only quantitative, not qualitative.³⁸ As David Paulsen succinctly points out, “The idea of God asking that we do something before the fullness of his blessings is conferred is quite common in Christendom, even if it is believed that all he asks is that we accept Christ as our personal Savior.”³⁹

From a Latter-day Saint view, the acknowledgment of individual agency makes a truly loving relationship between God and human-kind possible, a relationship wherein humans are more than mere creatures that God, in his mysterious wisdom, elects to save or damn. Rather, they are God’s children to whom he freely offers love and from whom he desires love in return. Certainly such a relationship seems to contradict the omnipotent, immovable God of the creeds because it limits his power. This limitation is beautifully and tragically represented by Jesus Christ’s lament atop the Mount of Olives overlooking the city where his own had rejected his offer of love:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! (Matthew 23:37, emphasis added)

McCraney believes it is difficult if not impossible for Latter-day Saints to actually extend love to God in this way. “More often than not,” he says, “Latter-day Saints have difficulty turning their total heart to God because they are so accustomed to taking matters into

38. For a thorough discussion of free will, grace, and salvation, see Blake T. Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought: The Attributes of God* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2001), 391–429.

39. Paulsen and Walker, “Work, Worship, and Grace,” 97.

their own hands. . . . This is partly due to the theological idea . . . that Man is really good at heart instead of constantly prone to self-interest, pride, anger, and other evils of the spirit.” Because of this view, McCraney asserts that “there really is no great push, focus, or purpose for spiritual rebirth among the Saints. In the same vein, I’ve yet to hear a reasonable explanation of why Jesus said that we must be born-again, if we were born good or without a sinful spirit in the first place” (p. 106). His question can be avoided altogether once one understands that Latter-day Saints do not deny that they are fallen and must wrestle with the flesh and yield to the Spirit, relying “wholly upon the merits of [Christ]” in order to, through his grace, put off the natural man (2 Nephi 31:19; see Mosiah 3:19).

The Failure of Anti-Mormonism

“By no measure can *Born-Again Mormon* be considered ‘anti-Mormon literature,’” McCraney asserts, because he has “purposefully omitted anything that attacks the Church through its unique history or the failures of its founders” (p. xiii). When earlier in his apostasy he consulted books critical of Latter-day Saint history and doctrine and then attempted to spread the “damning evidence,” he found most members unmoved and content to adhere to their presumably wrong-headed beliefs for entirely self-serving reasons (pp. 59–60). He then recognized “inherent difficulties” with anti-Mormon literature:

First, it does not lead to anyone’s feeling good about themselves (relative to the religion), and since most people generally only want to feel good about that to which they give their time and allegiance, it is highly ineffective to attack Latter-day Saints in this way. Second, I came to see that most genuinely anti-Mormon literature has been written to embarrass the Church and its members, so as a means of discovering absolute truth it is inferior. Finally, anti-Mormon literature . . . generally does as much to unify the Saints as to destroy them. Certainly there are casualties from the stuff, but more

often than not, Latter-day Saints . . . rally to the banner of the cause.” (pp. 60–61)⁴⁰

This led him to conclude that “most anti-Mormon efforts would not be the tool the Lord Jesus would resort to or approve of. If I was going to get to know Him, Mormon or not, it would have to be through other means” (p. 61).

Critics who attack the Book of Mormon are wasting their time, McCraney declares, explaining that

for reasons still unclear, most writers who attack the authenticity and/or origins of the Book of Mormon do so on some of its more inconsequential aspects and fail to see the book for what it really was *intended* to be: a second witness of Jesus Christ.

And while thousands of books, articles, and pamphlets have attacked the Book of Mormon, its author, and its origins, most of them go to great lengths to prove it false through comparative studies that are inconclusive, subjective, and generally not very important to people who join or remain active in the Church. . . . What they all fail to understand is that it is not facts or true academic research that makes people accept the Book of Mormon, but it is their *desire* to find, know and please God; their *desire* to do good; their *desire* to belong to a worthy cause that overwhelmingly guides their religious lives and families. (pp. 174–75, emphasis in original)

It is true that Latter-day Saints generally believe a spiritual witness of the Book of Mormon to be more important than material proofs in the form of archaeology or otherwise. Still, in spite of this admission, McCraney attacks the authenticity and origins of the Book of Mormon on some of its more inconsequential aspects and fails to

40. “If you let us alone, we will do it a little more leisurely; but if you persecute us, we will sit up nights to preach the Gospel.” Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 2:320. For an interesting overview of the reaction some members of the church have to anti-Mormon literature and criticism, as well as recommendations for dealing with various criticism, see Michael R. Ash, *Shaken Faith Syndrome: Strengthening One’s Testimony in the Face of Criticism and Doubt* (Redding, CA: FAIR, 2008).

investigate the book for what it was *intended* to be: a second witness of Jesus Christ. He claims that the Book of Mormon is the product of Joseph Smith's environment, imagination, and the King James Version of the Bible (pp. 149–77, 187–280).⁴¹

Another problem McCraney found with much of the anti-Mormon literature he read was that it was simply too far-fetched:

Anti-Mormon authors tend to depict young Joseph Smith as indolent, lazy and oriented toward get-rich-quick schemes. These characterizations are unfair since the majority of all teenage boys are typically lazy, indolent and interested in get-rich-quick schemes. . . . Had he actually lived up to even half of the character assassinations leveled at him, it is doubtful that he would have had any followers at all. It's time for anti-Mormon writers and speakers—if they are truly to be considered Christian—to take another approach in enlightening Latter-day Saints. (pp. 121–22)

In spite of these problems, McCraney still borrows most of his historical material from Grant Palmer, Dan Vogel, D. Michael Quinn, and Craig Hazen in describing Joseph Smith as a well-intentioned fraud (pp. 119–48).

McCraney appears to believe his approach is something new. Perhaps it is, as far as many evangelical criticisms are concerned. There are unique strains of criticism coming from both secular and sectarian approaches, some depicting Joseph Smith as “demon-possessed” and others seeing him as a scoundrel or a “pious fraud.” McCraney's approach is an interesting hybrid of both—a rigid, fundamentalist approach to the Bible but a naturalistic, more secular approach to the

41. McCraney insists that “the Book of Mormon is no more threatening to Christianity than any biblically based piece of fictional literature, and no less impressive in its claims of Jesus Christ as Savior of the world. . . . No, it cannot in any way be considered holy writ or canon. No, it is not the work of the ancient inhabitants of the Americas. . . . But Born-Again Mormons place [it] on the same shelf as any work of fiction that seeks to exalt Jesus as the author of human salvation.” “The rub,” McCraney explains, citing Dan Vogel's *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004), is that instead of admitting he wrote it to solve the religious controversies of his day, Joseph Smith lied about having received it from God (pp. 175–76).

Book of Mormon as an inspiring fiction and Joseph Smith as a pious fraud rather than an evil and false prophet. “*Born-Again Mormon* is not a regurgitation of early LDS history or an expose [*sic*] on the life and times of Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, Porter Rockwell or any other significant LDS figure of the past” (p. xiii). “I do discuss the early life of Joseph Smith but omit anything that could be considered an ‘anti-Mormon attack.’ I only recount those circumstances which I believe contributed greatly to the make-up of the man” (p. xiii n. 4).

Why does McCraney include so much “damning” information on Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon if he feels that such an approach is ineffective in other anti-Mormon literature? He does so, he says, to keep people informed in their faith. However, he defines faith as independent of *and* reliant upon natural evidence, whichever best suits his case at any given time (pp. 183–84). “No group or person is truly making a choice or exercising faith when she or he avoids the facts of a matter,” he claims. “They are only choosing to believe what they want. It is imperative that every Born-Again Mormon search for himself or herself all that he or she can find about the Church, its history and its doctrine before they decide to reject it, re-embrace it, or attack it. Factual evidence is there, Saints of Latter-days, but it must be sought, sorted, admitted, and understood in context and ultimately digested before anyone can deny or accept the truth that the Church proclaims” (pp. 141–42).

There have been many responses to the historical interpretation McCraney advances, and I join him in encouraging Latter-day Saints to be well informed on the history of the church. But such investigative rigor, according to McCraney, need not apply outside Mormonism, especially in regard to the Bible: “Some people might argue that the same examination should occur when considering the tenets of Christianity. But the comparison is not a good one. As mentioned earlier, the Bible stands firmly on a foundation of historical, genetic and linguistic proofs and supports while the Book of Mormon, the keystone to the LDS faith, stands on nothing. Informed belief is good. Ignorant belief is merely an extension of ignorance” (p. 344). It remains unclear how the continued existence and verifiability of the

city of Jerusalem proves the resurrection of Christ or any other biblical miracle. Even so, in *I Was a Born-Again Mormon* all of the Bible's claims are foregone conclusions solidly verified, as is McCraney's overconfident claim that nothing in the Book of Mormon indicates ancient origin.⁴² While questioning the Book of Mormon is seen as imperative, doing the same with the Bible is evidence of a fallen, unredeemed nature: "Born-Again Mormons study the Bible and trust solely in the truths it provides the world. . . . When people from the alleys of higher criticism attempt to discredit the Bible and shake believers loose from its fruitful bows [*sic*], we see it as an attempt of the unregenerated to impose their limited views on the human soul" (pp. 219–20).

Finally, McCraney aptly recognizes that some anti-Mormon material is extremely offensive to active Latter-day Saints when it ridicules their sacred temple rituals. While drawing parallels between a

42. According to McCraney, "the Book of Mormon has yet to find one single linguistic, historical, genetic, or geographical material support. In fact, there have only been material discoveries that refute Book of Mormon claims" (p. 184). For "authoritative insights into recent scientific findings," he sends his readers to a deeply flawed DVD entitled *DNA versus the Book of Mormon*, created by Living Hope Ministries. For reviews of the film, see FAIR's topical guide at www.fairlds.org/apol/ai195.html and also a number of essays on DNA issues and the Book of Mormon in *FARMS Review* 15/2 (2003) and 18/1 (2006). McCraney avoids any mention of scholarship that puts the Book of Mormon on a solid footing geographically, archaeologically, linguistically, culturally, and so on. For one convenient source that covers much of this ground, see Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch, eds., *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002). On the discovery of the name *NHM* on altars in southern Arabia that date to Lehi's time and corroborate the historicity of the place-name *Nahom* in the Book of Mormon, see S. Kent Brown, "The Place Which Was Called Nahom?: New Light from Ancient Yemen," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8/1 (1999): 66–68; and Warren P. Aston, "Newly Found Altars from Nahom," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 10/2 (2001): 57–61. For a review of archaeological findings over the past fifty years that increasingly support the historicity of the Book of Mormon and that augur well for future discoveries, see John E. Clark, "Archaeology, Relics, and Book of Mormon Relics," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14/2 (2006): 38–49. An important overview of these issues is Terryl L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). In stating that "the Church, in association with Brigham Young University, has an entire department called [FARMS] . . . that has, on occasion, been consumed with the idea that it can present and/or locate infallible material proofs that will somehow legitimize the Church's claims on the historic [*sic*] veracity of the Book of Mormon" (p. 182), McCraney falsely implies skepticism on the part of the Church of Jesus Christ and BYU.

dream by Joseph Smith Sr. and the Book of Mormon, he stops short, explaining “there are parallels to other LDS rites practiced today which, out of respect, will not be mentioned here” (p. 135). To his credit, McCraney respectfully avoids discussing the temple in detail, other than hinting at ties to Masonry (p. 210), claiming that temples are no longer needed for Christians (pp. 218–19), and noting that changes were made to the temple ceremony in 1990 (p. 259).

Shawn’s Army

McCraney believes that he has identified the proper approach to converting Latter-day Saints and that other efforts by anti-Mormon ministries are flawed. *Born-Again Mormon* was written largely as a guide to help born-again Mormons proselyte fellow Latter-day Saints to be born again themselves. One interesting aspect of McCraney’s story that is absent from his book is his desire to lead the charge of born-again Mormons by attempting to rejoin the Church of Jesus Christ. An excerpt from his Web site that has since been removed explained:

The bornagainmormon [*sic*] mission is to bring other members of the Church to Jesus. I’m convinced that part of this mission is for me to be rebaptized in the Church as a Christian and ONLY as a Christian. I’ve met with our kind Stake president many times regarding the subject. I’ve committed to be active, serve, keep the commandments, keep my mouth shut and even shut my website down (if commanded) but they will not let me re-join because I will not accept Joseph Smith nor will I acknowledge that the LDS Church is the ONLY true Church on the face of the earth. This whole concept is difficult for many Christian’s [*sic*] to understand let alone Latter-day Saints. But bottom line, I am a doctrinal Christian through and through—who appreciates the earthly organization of the Church. God willing, this ministry will help other Latter-day Saints know the Lord in the same living way.⁴³

43. This explanation can still be seen at www.4witness.org/ldsnews/bornagainmormon.php (accessed 5 June 2009). In his Sunstone presentation “On the Verge” (at the

McCraney also believes that

in time, Born-Again Mormons will play a significant role in completely eliminating the superfluous human made [*sic*] aspects of Mormonism. . . . As Born-Again Mormons gather in number and strength, it is anticipated that the present Church . . . will become less esoteric in its religious adherence and more biblically inclined. . . . Eventually all the peculiar practices and beliefs which presently serve as important doctrines of salvation to the Saints will begin to fade in the light of biblical truth and open praise for the Lord. (pp. 283–84)

Although McCraney claims that “a Born-Again Mormon does not attach any religious affiliation, ordinance, or denominational demands to salvation through Jesus Christ” (p. 289) and that his book similarly “is not concerned about religious forms, titles, or dogmatic claims” (p. 291), he repeatedly asserts that regeneration will result in a correct view of the Bible and in the acquisition of Christian attributes that are consistent with the new affiliation, denominational demands, and dogmatic positions he now espouses (p. 335). A born-again Mormon, he insists, will recognize the Bible as “God’s only divine written Word” (p. 289). “Most stalwart Latter-day Saints,” on the other hand, are simply incapable of truly understanding the Bible (p. 226).⁴⁴ Even the vocabulary of a genuinely saved Saint will change (p. 286 n. 138). McCraney believes that “the unintended but natural tendency to use words and phrases common to reborn Christians (e.g. Jesus, God, the Word, the Word of God, Lord, Praise God, blessed)” is a sign of true spiritual rebirth (p. 114).

55:40 mark), McCraney describes this attempt at rebaptism in order to “rejoin the Church as a Christian.”

44. McCraney emphasizes that “the greatest obstacle” preventing a Latter-day Saint from becoming born again is “the LDS view of the Bible” (p. 178). Thus, a “general discounting of the Bible and its authority as God’s Word” encourages a “literal and selective” approach to the Bible that only serves the interests of Latter-day Saints (p. 208). This was Joseph Smith’s “greatest disservice” and “most damaging act,” leading Latter-day Saints to “distrust and even mock the holy Word of God” (p. 210). In addition to not substantiating these claims, McCraney does not adequately explain why his understanding of the Bible is superior to that of Latter-day Saints.

McCraney advises “Born-Again Mormons” who wish to remain in the church to never be disruptive in church meetings but to enlighten others only in private. If teaching in church, they are to “adapt the Church-prescribed material to fit biblical truth without fanfare or attention” (pp. 290–91). McCraney seems to hope that his efforts will lead to a subtle integration of Latter-day Saints individually and then collectively into some portion of the evangelical movement, which he sees as authentic Christianity. This course correction would require denying the authenticity of the Book of Mormon, the prophetic calling of Joseph Smith, and all other distinguishing Latter-day Saint beliefs. In this way the Saints could become part of McCraney’s “Body of Christ.”

This is the point of *Born-Again Mormon*: to patiently and peacefully get members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to give Jesus a real, straightforward, holding-nothing-back try. To take Him from the footnotes of theology and place Him in their hearts. When they do, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints will become a Church of Jesus Christ of Born-Again Believers, and millions of individuals, along with their families, will freely and openly give praise to God Almighty for the gift of new life instead of the constant manta [*sic*] of praise to the man. (p. 288)

In the end, I must agree with McCraney’s brother, who, after seeing the book, told Shawn that the title *Born-Again Mormon* is redundant. Although McCraney concedes that “there are plenty of Latter-day Saints who have genuinely been spiritually regenerated by God through their faith on Jesus Christ,” he maintains that most of the Saints “do not possess any semblance of the true, spiritual rebirth which is universally found throughout millions of denominationally divergent Christian believers worldwide.” To him this is “a gigantic (and wholly avoidable) religious and spiritual tragedy” that he aims to set right (p. xviii).

Whatever else one might say about the problematic aspects of *I Was a Born-Again Mormon*, at least McCraney’s overall desire for

Latter-day Saints to become truly born again can be welcomed by them, though a Latter-day Saint understanding of the actual process differs from McCraney's personal views:

And the Lord said . . . : Marvel not that all mankind, yea, men and women, all nations, kindreds, tongues and people, must be born again; yea, born of God, changed from their carnal and fallen state, to a state of righteousness, being redeemed of God, becoming his sons and daughters; . . . and unless they do this, they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God. (Mosiah 27:25–26)

Missing that inheritance *would* be a tragedy.

TWO MORE WAVES

Grant Hardy

Review of Robert A. Rees and Eugene England, eds. *The Reader's Book of Mormon*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2008. 7 vols. in boxed set. 1048 pp. \$40.00.

Review of *The Book of Mormon*. Translated by Joseph Smith. Introduction by Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp. New York: Penguin Classics, 2008. xxxii + 602 pp. \$15.00.

Over twenty years ago, President Ezra Taft Benson issued a call to “flood the earth with the Book of Mormon.”¹ Since that time millions of copies have been printed and distributed, but the real challenge is not just getting copies into people’s hands; rather, it is persuading them to open the book and actually read it. While the standard blue missionary edition is inexpensive and ubiquitous, its evenly spaced, undulating verses—bobbing over an undercurrent of dense cross-references—have sometimes proven daunting to would-be-readers, particularly when the narrative itself includes scores of oddly named characters, multiple story lines, and chronological flashbacks, all set within an intricate, unfamiliar geography. When you add to this an archaic, somewhat awkward writing style, the result is a book that is readily recognized but seldom read. Even Latter-day Saints have at times found reading the Nephite record a struggle or a chore, and as for outsiders, Daniel Walker Howe’s recent comments in his Pulitzer Prize-winning *What Hath God Wrought* are probably an accurate

1. Ezra Taft Benson, “Flooding the Earth with the Book of Mormon,” *Ensign*, November 1988, 4.

assessment: “The Book of Mormon should rank among the great achievements of American literature, but it has never been accorded the status it deserves, since Mormons deny Joseph Smith’s authorship, and non-Mormons, dismissing the work as a fraud, have been more likely to ridicule than read it.”² Despite the fact that most readers of the *Review* can testify to the spiritual and literary power of the Book of Mormon, these qualities are not readily evident to everyone, and absent a strong religious motivation, many outsiders will see little reason to bother with this literary curiosity.

The situation with the Bible might be similar, but publishers—recognizing that people read the Bible for different reasons—have flooded the market with hundreds of specialized editions, from the *NLT Life Recovery Bible* and the *NCV Livin’ Out Your Faith Bible* to the *NIV Power of a Praying Woman Devotional Bible*, the *TNIV Faithgirlz! Bible*, and the *NKJV Lighting the Way Home Family Bible* (with illustrations by Thomas Kinkade). Surely there is an element of overkill here, mixed with a healthy regard for profit, but Christians have been eager to repackage the Bible in order to reach ever-broader and more diverse audiences, and they have done so very successfully. Perhaps there is a lesson here for lovers of the Book of Mormon. Once someone has thumbed through the blue missionary version and set it aside, there is little reason to give it a second thought later, whereas a new edition, emphasizing particular features, might be intriguing enough to warrant another look.

Starting in the 1990s, Latter-day Saints began to publish new versions of the Book of Mormon with alternative formatting. These include Donald Parry’s *Book of Mormon Text Reformatted According to Parallelistic Patterns* (FARMS, 1992),³ Thomas Valletta’s *Book of Mormon for Latter-day Saint Families* (Bookcraft, 1999), *The Book of Mormon: Heirloom Edition* (Deseret Book, 2001), *The Book of Mormon: Family Heritage Edition* (Covenant, 2003), my own *Book*

2. Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815–1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 314.

3. Revised edition published as *Poetic Parallelisms in the Book of Mormon: The Complete Text Reformatted* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, Brigham Young University, 2007).

of *Mormon: A Reader's Edition* (University of Illinois Press, 2003), and the Doubleday edition of the Book of Mormon (2004). It might appear that in scripture publishing, as in so much else, Latter-day Saints are following the lead of evangelical Christian marketers, and indeed there is ample precedent. In 1920, when the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints first printed the Book of Mormon in verses arranged into double columns with chapter headings and footnotes, it was simply adopting the conventions of the King James Bible. The implicit message of the formatting was “This is holy scripture, just like the Bible.”

Nowadays, however, the King James Version is no longer the most widely used English Bible (the New International Version, which has been outselling the KJV since the 1980s, is the new standard Bible for most American Christians, including my most religiously conservative students here in North Carolina).⁴ I cannot speak for other recent editors of the Book of Mormon, but one of my goals was to replicate what the church did in 1920, that is, to present Latter-day Saint scripture in a familiar biblical form, which today means the paragraphs, quotation marks, and poetic stanzas that characterize every modern translation. The strong, pervasive editing of Nephi, Mormon, and Moroni—which is unlike anything found in the Bible—makes this modern-style formatting even more appropriate for the Book of Mormon. The page layout of the current official edition (1981) no longer sends the message “This is scripture” and in fact probably constitutes a discouragement rather than an invitation to many potential readers, even those who

4. Gordon D. Fee and Mark L. Strauss, *How to Choose a Translation for All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding and Using Bible Versions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 149. Despite stiff competition from other modern translations, the New International Version has swept the field with more than 300 million copies distributed since its publication in 1978 (Eric Gorski, “Top-selling Bible in North America to be Revised,” Associated Press article, 1 September 2009). A news release from April 2008 reported that in a survey conducted by the National Association of Evangelicals, an organization that claims to represent 40 million evangelical Christians, two-thirds of participating leaders named the NIV as their preferred Bible (www.christianpost.com/article/20080411/niv-bible-tops-list-by-evangelical-leaders/index.html, accessed 30 September 2009). Even the Gideons, famous for providing free Bibles to hotel rooms, recognize that King James English no longer speaks to Americans and have consequently started distributing other translations.

already revere the Bible. This is an issue that may someday need to be addressed. Those who want to expand the audience for the Book of Mormon will continue to repackage the sacred text into volumes they hope readers will find convenient and intriguing.

Two recent publications have taken up this challenge in quite different ways. Signature's *Reader's Book of Mormon*, edited by Robert Rees and the late Eugene England, divides the Book of Mormon into seven small paperback volumes, each of which begins with a personal essay (a form much beloved by England) written by a prominent Latter-day Saint author reflecting on the themes and meaning of the chapters that follow. The format was explicitly intended to mirror the enormously popular Pocket Canons published by Canongate (in the United Kingdom) and Grove/Atlantic (in the United States) beginning in 1999, in which individual books of the Bible in the King James Version are paired with introductions by writers such as E. L. Doctorow, Charles Frazier, Doris Lessing, A. S. Byatt, P. D. James, Bono, and the Dalai Lama. The second example, Penguin's Book of Mormon, with an introduction by Laurie Maffly-Kipp, takes the familiar form of the renowned Penguin Classics series. Rees and England's edition is the more ambitious of the two projects, though I suspect that the Penguin volume will, in the end, be more successful. We can assess these works on two criteria—how they handle the text of the Book of Mormon and how well they realize the goals they have set for themselves. We can also ask whether they offer anything to Latter-day Saints who are quite comfortable with their standard copies of the scriptures, the ones they have marked up for years.

Textual Issues and Readability

Both of these new editions had to confront an obstacle unknown to Bible publishers, namely, the fact that the text of the Book of Mormon is relatively fixed. While every new biblical translation can lay claim to authentically representing the best Hebrew and Greek texts in some way or another, the words of the English Book of Mormon were revealed to Joseph Smith and any updating of the language must be authorized by the church. For example, there were enough concerns

about paraphrases like Timothy Wilson's *Mormon's Story* (1993) and Lynn Matthews Anderson's *Easy-to-Read Book of Mormon* (1995, though circulating in electronic form before then) to elicit a warning from Salt Lake:

From time to time there are those who wish to rewrite the Book of Mormon into familiar or modern English. We discourage this type of publication and call attention to the fact that the Book of Mormon was translated "by the gift and power of God," who has declared that "it is true." (Book of Mormon title page; D&C 17:6.) The Prophet Joseph Smith said that the Book of Mormon was "the most correct of any book on earth." (*History of the Church*, 4:461.) It contains "the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ." (D&C 20:9.)

When a sacred text is translated into another language or rewritten into more familiar language, there are substantial risks that this process may introduce doctrinal errors or obscure evidence of its ancient origin. To guard against these risks, the First Presidency and Council of the Twelve give close personal supervision to the translation of scriptures from English into other languages and have not authorized efforts to express the doctrinal content of the Book of Mormon in familiar or modern English.⁵

This means that, although there have been numerous changes in the text of the Book of Mormon over the past 180 years (nearly all grammatical or stylistic in nature), at any particular time only the current official version is canonical. So given these significant textual constraints, how does one repackaging the Book of Mormon to reach a wider audience? How might someone make the Nephite scripture fresh and engaging, without changing the words (or running afoul of the church's legitimate interest in preserving the purity of the text and its doctrine)?

5. "Modern-Language Editions of the Book of Mormon Discouraged," *Ensign*, April 1993, 74. See also Lynn Matthews Anderson, "Delighting in Plainness: Issues Surrounding a Simple Modern English Book of Mormon," *Sunstone*, March 1993, 20–29.

The first thing to recognize is that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints asserts copyright ownership of the official 1981 text, and consequently, publishers unaffiliated with the church have to use other editions. In my case, I reproduced the 1920 version, now in the public domain. I was happy to do so because the editing for the 1981 text was rather light—it differs from the 1920 edition by only about 150 words (out of nearly 270,000)—and because it would mark my reader’s edition as a study aid rather than a rival to the canonical version. Rees and England have instead opted to use the 1830 edition:

The text reprinted in this series comes from the first edition (1830) and retains its nineteenth-century usage; although a few glaring typesetting flaws have been corrected, no attempt has been made to regularize grammar and spelling. This should make reading the Book of Mormon a new adventure, hopefully full of possibilities for deeper insights into the layers of meanings and messages contained therein. (1:vii)

This is a defensible choice. The 1830 text is the “original” publication, and with its full paragraphs, longer chapters (identified by Roman numerals), and lack of verse numbers, it certainly looks different from what Latter-day Saints typically see in their personal scripture study. Furthermore, there has been something of a faithful, countercultural tradition of reading the 1830 edition, at least since it became more widely available with Wilford Wood’s reprinting of it in 1958.⁶ For instance, Hugh Nibley once pronounced the first edition “the most readable,” noting that “for years this writer [Nibley himself] used only the first edition in his classes, and it is still by far the best. It is full of mistakes, but they are obvious ones.”⁷ Similarly, Eugene England, as he was conceptualizing this project, wrote to contributors in 2000, saying, “I have been rereading the Book of Mormon in the original

6. Wilford C. Wood, ed., *Joseph Smith Begins His Work* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1958). The RLDS Church published a facsimile edition in 1970, and Deseret Book followed suit in 1980. There are now some half-dozen 1830 versions in print (including one for Kindle), and the 1830 text is widely available on the Internet.

7. Hugh Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 4. This book first appeared in 1967.

edition over the summer, and it has been enlightening and very moving” (1:ix).

So what is it like to read the 1830 version of the Book of Mormon? Sometimes it is jarring, in a good way, just to see familiar words in a different place on the page. Both the longer chapters (the current chapter divisions were introduced in 1879) and the elimination of verse designations foster reading in context and longer reading sessions. In addition, the inability to easily locate particular phrases provides a strong disincentive for proof-texting (indeed, passages quoted in the individual introductions of the Signature edition appear without references, though page numbers would have been helpful). I suspect that Latter-day Saints who read the Book of Mormon in this new edition—with its traditional format—will see new things in the stories and sermons, details that had previously escaped their notice. However, the extended chapters and paragraphs call for greater concentration and a longer attention span than is usual for contemporary readers. It is easy to get lost in the sea of undifferentiated words. A few specific observations follow.

Original Chapters

Royal Skousen argues that the 1830 chapter divisions represent demarcations that were on the gold plates.⁸ This means that the original chapters may reflect the ways in which Nephi, Mormon, and Moroni themselves understood and organized their narratives. Reading 2 Nephi IX (modern chaps. 16–22 = Isaiah 6–12) as a single chapter brings out the themes of God’s judgment and subsequent offers of salvation to recalcitrant Israel; Alma XVI (Alma 30–35; 28 pages in the Rees/England edition!) links Korihor with the Zoramites and emphasizes the connections between Alma’s and Amulek’s sermons at Antionum; Alma XIX (Alma 39–42) encourages readers to perceive all of Alma’s words to Corianton as a single, extended argument; and Helaman V (Helaman 13–16) gives us the entirety of Samuel the Lamanite’s prophecies, as well as the reaction

8. Royal Skousen, “Translating the Book of Mormon: Evidence from the Original Manuscript,” in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins* ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997), 85.

of the people of Zarahemla, in a single sweep. We might also note that Orson Pratt's modern chapter breaks not only created new disjunctions in the narrative, but also regularly erased pauses in the original text. For instance, in 1830 there were chapter shifts between what is now 1 Nephi 19:21 and 19:22, and between Mosiah 13:24–25, Mosiah 28:19–20, Alma 13:9–10, 3 Nephi 21:21–22, 3 Nephi 23:13–14, 3 Nephi 26:5–6, and 3 Nephi 27:22–23.

1830 Paragraphs

Unlike the chapter divisions, the paragraphing of the first edition was not indicated in either the original or printer's manuscript. In fact, the non-Mormon typesetter, John H. Gilbert, later recalled that "every chapter . . . was one solid paragraph, without a punctuation mark, from beginning to end," and it was he who added both the punctuation and the paragraphing to the 1830 printing.⁹ Unfortunately, he edited according to nineteenth-century tastes, and the result (faithfully reproduced by Rees and England) is both overpunctuated with commas and underparagraphed with blocks of text that sometimes go on for pages. The paragraphing is rather naïve—as might be expected from someone who had never seen the text before and was anxious to get a printing job done. In general, Gilbert used "it came to pass" as a paragraph marker, and he started a new paragraph at every occurrence (except when it appeared in consecutive sentences), even when there was no shift in topic.

Thumbing through Rees and England's volume is like looking at a facsimile of the 1830 edition, where regular indentations followed by "and it came to pass" is the most eye-catching feature of the book. The same paragraphing was retained until the text was printed in separate verses in 1879, and it is no wonder that Mark Twain, encountering the Book of Mormon in Gilbert's paragraphs, famously joked of Joseph

9. Gilbert's entire memorandum (dated 8 September 1892) is reproduced in Royal Skousen, "John Gilbert's 1892 Account of the 1830 Printing of the Book of Mormon," in *The Disciple as Witness: Essays on Latter-day Saint History and Doctrine in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks, Donald W. Parry, and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000). The statement is on p. 402 (p. 3 of Gilbert's memorandum). Or see Dan Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996–2003), 2:544.

Smith that “and it came to pass’ was his pet [i.e., his favorite]. If he had left that out, his Bible would have been only a pamphlet.”¹⁰ Gilbert’s method works well enough for 1 Nephi, where “and it came to pass” is fairly common, but when the genre shifts from narrative to sermon or direct discourse, the strings of words without a break can seem nearly interminable. In 2 Nephi I the first paragraph is four and a half pages long, and the second is two and a half; Alma’s famous exclamation “O that I were an angel” comes midway through a three-and-a-half-page paragraph (vol. 4:117; Alma 29:1); two entire chapters in the standard edition are presented as a single six-page paragraph (6:6–12; Helaman 14–15); and Jesus’s recital of the Sermon on the Mount in 3 Nephi begins rather unobtrusively three-quarters of the way through a four-page paragraph (6:55; 3 Nephi 12:3).

Deviations from the Text

Given their fidelity to the 1830 chapters and paragraphs, I was surprised by Rees and England’s deletions of text. It comes as a bit of a shock when the book begins with “I, Nephi, having been born of goodly parents . . .” without either Moroni’s title page or Nephi’s introduction to his first book. In fact, nearly all of the original headnotes to both entire books and specific chapters are missing (e.g., 1 Nephi, 2 Nephi, Alma, Alma III, V, VII, XII, XIII, XVII, XVIII, XIX, Helaman, Helaman III, 3 Nephi, 4 Nephi, and Moroni IX). It was clearly an editorial decision to delete the words that John Gilbert had set in italics—perhaps as an attempt to “make the reading of the text fresh for readers” (1:ix)—but those words appear in the original manuscript and thus were apparently on the gold plates. To delete them seems unwarranted, particularly when the omission makes it difficult to follow the narrative. For instance, in both Alma XVIII (chap. 38) and XIX (chaps. 39–42) Alma is addressing his sons, but in the former chapter Shiblon’s name is mentioned only once apart from the headnote, and in the later chapter Corianton’s name is never mentioned. The title page and the headnotes are integral to the book’s

10. Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad; Roughing It* (New York: Library of America, 1984), 617. *Roughing It* was first published in 1872.

coherence. (I personally would have also included the testimonies of the Three and the Eight Witnesses.)

Nonstandard Usage

The 1830 text is characterized by an awkwardness of language that will no doubt be fresh to most unsuspecting readers, but it may also prove distracting. The ungainly aspects include a great deal of subject-verb disagreement (such as “the tender mercies of the Lord is over all,” 1:3–4), shifting tenses (“Behold, we have took of their wine, and brought it with us,” 5:57), run-ons abetted by odd (over-) uses of commas (“ye shall write these sayings, after that I am gone, that if it so be that my people at Jerusalem, they which have seen me, and been with me in my ministry, . . . [the sentence continues for several more lines],” 6:65), archaic verb forms (*a journeying*, *shew*), inconsistent spellings (*deliteth* and *delighteth* just two lines apart, 1:93; “all things had become *knew/new*,” also just two lines apart, 6:63), and nonstandard spellings such as *adultry*, *Camorah* (4:67, 7:22), and *as suredly* (for *as surely*, 7:92).

Rees and England note that they have corrected “a few glaring typesetting flaws” (1:vii), but they have still left plenty for readers to discover on their own, such as “arrest” the scriptures instead of “wrest” (4:56; Alma 13:20), “Gadianton the nobler” instead of “robber” (5:106; Helaman 3:23); “hoops” for “hoofs” (6:79; 3 Nephi 20:19); “with healings in his wings” rather than “healing” (6:91; 3 Nephi 25:2), and “eye singled” instead of “single” (7:28; Mormon 8:15). And as is often the case with large typesetting projects, Signature occasionally introduces brand-new errors into the 1830 text: “bound with the hands of iniquity” rather than the original “bands of iniquity” (3:72; Mosiah 23:12) and “and now blessed were they” instead of “how blessed were they” (7:3; 4 Nephi 1:8).

As one progresses through the text, these quirks can become less bothersome, but since nearly every page offers up an example of one kind or another, the 1830 version tends to bring out one’s inner proof-reader. For many, stumbling over the oddities of the presentation will prove a distraction from the contents of the book, which is unfortunate since the Book of Mormon is, in many ways, an impressive narra-

tive. The 1830 text combines a rather rigorous composition (in which Nephite writers keep track of hundreds of names and places, present tightly crafted theological arguments, offer internal textual allusions, and track the passing years precisely) with an idiom that suggests the humbleness of folk art. The result is something like listening to physics lectures delivered by a professor with a thick Southern drawl. The overall impact seems to highlight the nineteenth-century, homespun nature of the book's origins rather than its claims as an ancient record (though as Royal Skousen has shown, the original language of the Book of Mormon was not exactly that of Joseph Smith's America, or even the King James Bible).¹¹

There are various explanations for the Book of Mormon's awkward language, and indeed there are times when readers may want to focus on that feature in as much detail as possible (a type of analysis that will be facilitated by Royal Skousen's recent Yale edition);¹² but for a publication that seeks to "make reading the Book of Mormon a new adventure" (1:vii), the 1830 text is probably not ideal. In reprinting that early version, the editors have, I think, unwittingly encouraged their most careful readers to adopt a critical, perhaps even condescending, attitude to the words in front of them, although those who make it all the way through the book may respond not with suspicion but rather with unmitigated gratitude that some committee has revised the official edition by cleaning up the messiness that makes a proofreading stance nearly irresistible. If the commitments of Rees and England had been to the Book of Mormon itself rather than to the 1830 edition as a kind of period piece, their version could have benefited immensely from doing a little more with the text. They might have rearranged it into shorter, more intelligent paragraphs, fixed a greater percentage of the typographical mistakes, and regularized the grammar and spelling.

11. 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; see also his "Archaic Vocabulary of the Book of Mormon," *Insights* 25/5 (2005).

12. Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

Or, alternatively, they might have simply used the 1840 edition, which is what Laurie Maffly-Kipp did. This allows her to present an authentic, historical version of the Book of Mormon that is nevertheless much easier to read. As she explains:

The Penguin Classics edition of the Book of Mormon is based on the 1840 edition published by Joseph Smith Jr. in Nauvoo, Illinois. This was the last edition that Smith himself edited. Smith labored over the text, correcting grammatical errors and changing the words that he thought had been copied incorrectly. This version was chosen for the Penguin Classics edition because it makes for a cleaner text than the original 1830 edition (of which, as one will recall, there were hundreds of different copies), and because it is the one that seems closest to the understanding of Joseph Smith Jr. at the height of his leadership of the Latter-day Saints. (p. xxxi)¹³

This seems to me a better choice (even if it does nothing about the long paragraphs). Maffly-Kipp is interested in presenting the Book of Mormon as a piece of American history, so she takes fewer liberties with the text than Rees and England do, and she has left the updating to Smith himself. Apparently many of the things that seem strange to readers today also bothered the Prophet, and in the second and third editions (1837 and 1840), he made pervasive changes. As noted earlier, however, these were virtually all matters of grammar and spelling, with only a handful of substantive revisions—for example, “mother of the son of God” (1 Nephi 11:18), “yea, even *the Son of the Eternal Father*” (1 Nephi 11:21; 13:40; compare 11:32), “*or out of the waters of Baptism*” (1 Nephi 20:1), “king Benjamin/Mosiah” (Mosiah

13. The description of “hundreds of different copies” is a bit puzzling, but Maffly-Kipp elsewhere explained that because “uncorrected sheets were also kept as part of the [1830] print run . . . nearly each of the copies was unique and contained slightly different versions of the text” (p. xiv). As Latter-day Saint scholar Janet Jenson has noted, “With just the 41 changes so far discovered, it is mathematically possible that each of the 5,000 copies [of the first edition] could be unique.” See her “Variations Between Copies of the First Edition of the Book of Mormon,” *BYU Studies* 13/2 (1973), 215. For the 1837 edition, Smith corrected scribal errors by consulting the printer’s manuscript; in 1840 he examined the original manuscript as well.

21:28), and “the Son <of> the Only Begotten of the Father” (Alma 5:48; 13:9). Maffly-Kipp comments on just one such revision: “*white/pure* and delightsome people” (2 Nephi 30:6), which gained some notoriety when the 1981 edition returned to Smith’s 1840 reading of “pure” (pp. 31–32). So the Penguin volume offers a fresh look (at least for Latter-day Saints) in that it retains the original chapters and paragraphs, while eliminating a high proportion of the textual annoyances likely to be perceived by contemporary readers.

The original 1840 edition included a fair number of obvious typographical errors, and Penguin has corrected most of these. Among those missed, however, are the following:

misspellings—testimoney (p. 93), plainness (p. 120), repententh (p. 167), perservation (p. 253), stubbornness (p. 319), stired (p. 430), iniquity (p. 451), and Isarel (p. 557)

wrong words—“precious unto saw” for “precious unto him” (p. 139), “the time . . . is not for distant . . . yet I trust their remaineth” (p. 173), “but own that they may foresee” rather than “but now that they may foresee” (p. 217) “I say unto, yea” (pp. 320, 321), and “give need” instead of “give heed” (p. 335)

dittography—“in the the repentance” (p. 270), “after the the manner” (p. 375), “I could not not make a full account” (p. 555)

Despite the number of errors listed here, however, the Penguin edition has a couple thousand fewer grammatical and textual problems than the Signature edition does. The references above are all to 1840 typos that have been retained, but as might be expected, a few new mistakes have crept into the text, including these: “be broker [broken] and be snared” (p. 93); “How [Howl], O gate; cry O city” (p. 101); “curry [carry] them forth unto the remnant of our seed” (p. 116); “now, O Kin [King]” (p. 204); and “are specter [a respecer] to persons” (p. 592). Any suspicious readings can be easily checked against a very handy online facsimile of the 1840 edition.¹⁴

14. <http://bookofmormononline.net/1840> (accessed 5 October 2009).

Introductions and the Impact of Design

According to Robert Rees's general introduction, the Signature edition was intended as (1) a tribute to Eugene England, who initiated the project in 2000 and then tragically died the next year, and (2) a means by which readers might be moved "to read the book more deeply and more personally, to let their experience and inspiration enlighten their own and others' readings of the text, to keep the book alive in the minds and hearts of all who come to it openly" (1:xv). As to the first of these goals, let me note that Eugene England is certainly deserving of remembrance and commemoration (full disclosure: Gene came into my life at a critical juncture and was soon thereafter a professor in the class in which I met my wife. I will be eternally grateful for that experience, and there have been many times in the eight years since his passing when I have longed to talk with him). Posthumous literary projects are always difficult endeavors, and Robert Rees has been a true friend in seeing this one through to its conclusion, even though, as he notes, had Gene lived on he might well have chosen to do things differently. More than anything, I miss Gene's voice in these volumes. I wish that Rees would have included a few excerpts that convey Gene's love for the Book of Mormon, perhaps something from his introduction to *Converted to Christ through the Book of Mormon* (Deseret Book, 1989).

What we do hear, however, are the voices of Gene's friends in the personal essays at the beginning of each volume. This juxtaposition of private musings and public canon is the primary way in which the Signature edition attempts to foster "deep insights into the layers of meanings and messages" of the Book of Mormon (1:vii). So does it work? It is often moving to hear people speak candidly of their lives and the way they have been affected by the Book of Mormon. (I know that these essays are meant to be read, but the nature of the genre makes it seem as if they were overheard.) The overall effect, however, is more akin to a testimony meeting—albeit in an exceptionally well-spoken, thoughtful ward—than an academic experience. The focus is always on feelings, anecdotes, homilies, and modern applications rather than on the text itself, which is inevitably loosely paraphrased.

As might be expected, some essays are stronger than others. I enjoyed William Wilson's stories of service in light of King Benjamin's address and Alma's call at the Waters of Mormon to bear one another's burdens. And it was a pleasure to hear from someone (Linda Hoffman Kimball) who first encountered the Book of Mormon as an adult.

If analyzed critically, though, most of the essays are less than entirely satisfying. For instance, Susan Howe vividly describes two African converts who had immigrated to Britain and wonders how "the journey of Lehi and his family might be useful to them as a spiritual guide" (1:xxii). I wish that she had asked them directly, since they were all in the same London ward together. Claudia Bushman shares, refreshingly, some of her frustrations with the Book of Mormon: the sparseness of the record, the dullness of the battles, and the fact that the editors omitted "descriptions of everyday life, which would have brought the lives of these strange people closer to us" (2:xxi). Yet when she frankly confesses that "the beauties of Isaiah elude me," we might wonder if she was the best choice to introduce Second Nephi. And not a single essayist comments on what difference reading the 1830 edition made to his or her understanding of the Book of Mormon. But again, this would be the wrong attitude to take in testimony meeting, and it's probably the wrong approach to these small volumes. They are lovely expressions of faith and a fitting tribute to Gene England (though the belated nature of the project gives it a "passing of a generation" feel—several of the contributors grew up in the 1930s and the youngest were born around 1950).

As a whole, Signature's *Reader's Book of Mormon* is probably less successful than the Pocket Canons it emulates. Aside from Latter-day Saints, devout Christians who care about the meaning of scripture tend to gravitate toward modern translations, while nonbelievers, viewing the Bible primarily as literature, much prefer the King James Version with its sonorous cadences and seventeenth-century phrasing. This explains the popularity of the Pocket Canons, which were aimed at reintroducing the Bible to the religiously indifferent, but reintroducing it as great literature. Thus in each small volume a literary introduction leads directly into a literary rendering of scripture.

The volumes of the *Reader's Book of Mormon*, by contrast, pair evocative essays with a version of the text that is considerably less literary than the one Latter-day Saints are used to reading. And it is hard to imagine the appeal to either lapsed Mormons or non-Mormons, who are faced with a text that is either less polished than they remember or less graceful than almost anything they have ever read.

Yet there is one way in which the Signature edition is a triumph. As with the Pocket Canons, the individual volumes are marvelously designed. Ron Stucki does not receive any mention in the general introduction, but the covers that he created are magnificent.¹⁵ Each features a striking black-and-white photograph that responds in some way to the introductory essay. A hammer pounds out a metal plate for “Big Lessons from Little Books” (2 Nephi IV–Words of Mormon), a beggar clutching a plastic cup represents “In the Service of Our Fellow Beings” (Mosiah), and overgrown ancient ruins herald “Last Words” (4 Nephi–Moroni).¹⁶ To my mind, these illustrations nearly always capture something of the tone and content of the Book of Mormon

15. Stucki, who has been a designer at Deseret Book and also with the 2002 Winter Olympics, is now senior designer at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota.

16. I have two quibbles here. The first is that the covers should have listed the chapters inside by Roman numerals for consistency. For example, “Alma 20–Helaman 4” really means “Alma XX–Helaman IV,” or in the Arabic numerals associated with modern chapter divisions, Alma 43–Helaman 12. The second, more consequential, complaint is that I would have divided the volumes in different places. The first ends with 2 Nephi III (2 Nephi 4). It would have been better to conclude with 2 Nephi 5, in which Nephi brings his narrative to a close with a brief editorial comment (vv. 29–34). After that chapter, Nephi’s writings consist entirely of preaching and prophecy; he never tells another story either from his own life or from the history of his people. Similarly, I would have kept Alma XX (Alma 43–44) in the fourth volume. Presumably England and Rees thought that the account of the Zoramite war belonged in the second half of Alma, with the rest of the war chapters, but this is a mistake. Not only does chapter 44 complete the original book of Alma (“And thus ended the record of Alma, which was wrote [sic] upon the plates of Nephi,” Alma 44:24), it also provides the conclusion for the conversion stories of both the people of Ammon and the Zoramites (key narratives of vol. 4). The Amalickiahite war that begins in Alma 46 is a separate conflict, and it seems more appropriate to begin the “Nephites at War” volume with a prophecy of annihilation rather than with a stunning victory. On the other hand, I quite liked the division of the book of Helaman. It made sense to add Helaman 1–12 to the end of Alma and then include the prophecies of Samuel the Lamanite (Helaman 13–16) with the account of their fulfillment at the time of Jesus’s birth and death in 3 Nephi.

chapters inside. The entire set of seven volumes is enclosed within a handsome slipcase executed in black and gold. As much as anything inside, the appealing size of these small books, combined with the exquisite covers, makes them very inviting to potential readers. For instance, my young son, a somewhat reluctant reader, thought he could make it through these volumes one at a time (with the promise of a Book of Mormon action figure at the end of each), and he was even willing to take them to school with him since they don't exactly look like scriptures—an important consideration when your entire school has fewer than half a dozen Latter-day Saint students.

The Penguin Book of Mormon is much less ambitious than the Signature edition—no restructuring of the text, no talk of “lessons for our own lives” or making “reading the Book of Mormon a new adventure” (both phrases are from the brief note at the beginning of each of the Signature volumes)—and consequently its intentions are more fully realized. There is a certain dignity in simply reprinting the 1840 text, with most of the typos corrected, as an American classic. Perhaps because the Signature edition was produced by Mormons for Mormons, they could virtually ignore Joseph Smith and concentrate instead on the Nephite narratives. Indeed, Joseph's name appears nowhere on the covers or the opening pages (I think there is only a single reference to him in the entire work, on p. x of vol. 1). By contrast, Laurie Maffly-Kipp puts Joseph Smith front and center in an introduction that does an admirable job of situating the Book of Mormon in its modern American context. She provides the sort of comprehensive overview that outsiders need, including information on the structure of the text, its production, early reactions to it, and its place in contemporary Mormonism. While her discussions of the Book of Mormon in relation to the Bible, theories of the origins of American Indians, and claims of modern revelation break no new ground, she is generally well-informed and reliable. The tone of her introduction is religiously neutral and academic, as befits someone in the Religious Studies Department at the University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill, and although Maffly-Kipp is not herself a believer, the Penguin edition is nevertheless very respectful of the book's religious claims. She refers

to Smith as the “author/translator” (p. vii), but the cover, graced by the familiar C. C. A. Christensen depiction of Moroni and Joseph Smith at the Hill Cumorah, simply reads “Translated by Joseph Smith, Jr.”

A few of the details from Maffly-Kipp’s introduction are not quite right, as when she asserts that “the Lamanites kill off Mormon and his son Moroni” (p. ix), even though the latter event is nowhere mentioned in the Book of Mormon. Similarly, Joseph Smith did not exactly “announce that he was a prophet chosen by God” in the 1830 title page (p. xiv), the phrase “verily I say unto you” is not pervasive (p. xx; aside from two instances, it is used exclusively by Jesus in 3 Nephi), the introduction to the official 1981 edition is hardly “substantial” (p. xxiv), and Ether never speaks of a “new Bible” (p. xxv). Such criticisms can be multiplied, but the Book of Mormon is a complex text and it is difficult to get everything right. Even the authors of the Signature essays, who know the Book of Mormon well, occasionally get confused (there were not “three days of light” at the Savior’s birth, 1:xiv; it is Moroni, not Mormon, who says, “I speak unto you as if ye were present,” 3:xxi; and the stripling warriors never fought under Moroni’s command, 4:xvi). What is important is that Maffly-Kipp does a credible job in trying to account for the book’s original appeal and in explaining why it should matter to readers today, especially those who are neither Latter-day Saints nor investigators.

It is worth noting that the Penguin edition is entirely a non-Mormon production, probably the first since James O. Wright’s 1858 version (which was also, coincidentally, a reprint of the 1840 text). But where Wright’s was clearly a speculative venture aimed at making money, publishing the Book of Mormon as part of the Penguin Classics series is a recognition of the book’s cultural and historical significance. Unfortunately, for anyone not particularly interested in testing its religious claims, six hundred pages of dense printing and long paragraphs may be intimidating, especially without any additional aids to untangle the complicated narrative such as dates, chapter summaries, an index of names, references for biblical quotations, or indications of where overlapping stories in Mosiah intersect or the long flashbacks in Alma begin and end. (The only concessions to

modern readers are changes in the running heads at the top of pages, where we find “The Third Book of Nephi” and “The Fourth Book of Nephi” instead of the original 1840 heads: “Book of Nephi” and “Book of Nephi.”)¹⁷ Nevertheless, Maffly-Kipp makes a strong case that “for any reader wanting to learn more about the history of American religion, the Book of Mormon is an indispensable document” (p. viii).

The volume’s design fits the Penguin Classics model exactly, which in itself is a wonderful thing. This means that in bookstores all over the country, browsers will encounter the Book of Mormon as the equivalent of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Upanishads, the Dhammapada, the Tao Te Ching, the Ramayana, the Bhagavad Gita, Augustine’s *Confessions*, Thomas Aquinas’s selected writings, the Qur’an, and selections from the Talmud—all of which have been recently published in the same format. This is heady company, and Latter-day Saints should be thrilled to see their scriptures packaged in this manner. The editors at Penguin cannot have had President Benson’s charge in mind, yet their edition seeks to make the Book of Mormon accessible to more people, and there are many potential readers who will be more comfortable with a Penguin Classic than with an obviously denominational publication offered by two eager young missionaries. Not everyone interested in religion or history is looking for a conversion experience, and as believers ourselves, we should have enough confidence in the text to welcome any and all comers, even if they are mostly interested in “an intriguing window into religious life in the early nineteenth-century United States” (p. vii).

The Penguin edition would also be good for Mormons who are looking for a change from their ordinary patterns of scripture reading. They might find it enjoyable, or even enlightening, to go through the Book of Mormon in the form it took in Joseph Smith’s day; and as I noted above, as a historic edition for reading, the 1840 text beats the 1830 hands down. This would not simply be an exercise in nostalgia; seeing familiar words and phrases in the context of paragraphs and

17. A couple of the other running heads have been changed as well: the 1840 “Book of Jacob” and “Book of Alma” are now “The Book of Jacob, the Brother of Nephi” and “The Book of Alma, the Son of Alma.”

longer chapters will guarantee new insights. Reading comprehension comes from linking words to words and sentences to sentences. As we are forced to make sense of the text anew, apart from the customary versification, there are hundreds of connections, contrasts, implications, and meanings waiting to be discovered.

As Latter-day Saints continue in their efforts to flood the earth with the Book of Mormon, these two new editions represent small waves. They take very different approaches—one sees the book as a work of literature and spiritual guidance, while the other perceives it as a crucial document in American religious history—but both recognize the Book of Mormon as scripture. For this reason, both publications ought to be welcomed and celebrated. The more people who read the Book of Mormon, for whatever reason, the better. In comparing them head to head, Signature's *Reader's Book of Mormon*, with its remarkable design, has its uses, but the Penguin edition is a milestone marking the increasing academic interest in and respect for the Book of Mormon. I like to think that President Benson would have been pleased.

“WITH WHAT MEASURE”?

Brant A. Gardner

Review of John L. Lund. *Mesoamerica and the Book of Mormon: Is This the Place?* Orem, UT: Granite, 2007. xvi + 286 pp. \$20.00.

If any man have ears to hear, let him hear. And he said unto them, Take heed what ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you: and unto you that hear shall more be given. (Mark 4:23–24)

When I bought my copy of *Mesoamerica and the Book of Mormon: Is This the Place?* I believe it was still warm from the presses. The author had brought some newly printed copies with him for a presentation he gave in 2007. He was fun to listen to, perhaps the most frenetic speaker I have heard. His book continues the friendly and faithful tone of his oral presentation, though we may be thankful that we can peruse the book at a more leisurely pace.

John Lund has conducted several tours to Mesoamerica, the area that he believes encompasses the lands of the Book of Mormon. Various statements in the book suggest that his impetus for writing may partly have been to provide the tour groups with something heavier than photographs with which to remember their tour.¹ The tone in places

1. His first chapter, “The Spirit of Place,” suggests the value of walking in historic places. Later he notes that “there are people in nearly every LDS stake in the United States especially that have traveled to Mesoamerica on a Book of Mormon cruise or land tour” (p. 257). While an orientation to tours is detectable in his book, it is not obtrusive.

also suggests that the book freezes in print some of the oral presentations he has given many times to tour groups. *Mesoamerica and the Book of Mormon* is an easy read and is entirely designed to bolster one's faith in the Book of Mormon. For the nonspecialist believer, "proofs" of the Book of Mormon come on virtually every page.²

If I have written the previous paragraph well enough, a reader should now expect a sentence that begins with "But . . ." That *but* is the difficult part of reviewing the work of any faithful Latter-day Saint who writes about the Book of Mormon and Mesoamerica. I am also a believer who would like to have proofs of the Book of Mormon jump out at me, and Lund clearly shares my belief in the historicity as well as the spiritual power of the Book of Mormon.³

This personal conflict between admiration for his desires and my familiarity with his subject is the reason I began with the scripture from Mark, whose version of this saying is slightly different from the more familiar one in Matthew 7:1–2 (also 3 Nephi 14:1–2): "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." Matthew's version seems to come as a warning: If I review harshly, I deserve a harsh review of what I have written (I am likening scriptures here). I see Mark's version of the saying as a little more positive because the context is not judging but rather accepting knowledge. Matthew seems to play it safe while Mark says to drink deep and learn new things. However, Mark also tells us to make sure that what we learn is of sufficient quality that it serves as a foundation on which we can learn more. I like Mark better—at least I like the way I read Mark better. In my reading, we measure not with fear of how we are to be measured, but we measure as part of the process of making sure that what we hear is worth learning.

Is *Mesoamerica and the Book of Mormon* a book for which we should have ears to hear? Is it one from which we can drink deeply and

2. While he does not express his aim as "proving" the Book of Mormon, Lund nevertheless implies that it is part of his intent: "Another purpose in writing this book is to examine some key historical claims of the Book of Mormon" (p. 3).

3. Lund makes his testimony explicit on pp. 267–68. Even without that explicit statement, this is a book of testimony. On that level it meets its goals.

learn? Or is it a shallow sip? If we are truly interested in understanding the real people who lived the stories contained in the cornerstone of our religion, we need, and deserve, strong stuff.

The Measure with Which I Mete

In judging attempts to compare the text of the Book of Mormon to a real-world time and place, I draw on those scholarly disciplines that provide tools designed for that purpose: history, anthropology, archaeology, and linguistics. Those are the disciplines that arm us to discover, analyze, and make sense of the data pertaining to peoples of the past. They are the tools that help us understand how texts relate to the real-world remains of the people who produced them. It is because I desire to measure with the tools of academia that I have difficulties with Lund's book.

Lund judges and dismisses the tools I hold invaluable—or, perhaps more accurately, the scholars who use them. An antagonism for the world of scholarship is a leitmotif in Lund's book.⁴ This disdain for academia is so strong that near the end of the book there is actually a section entitled "Academic Arrogance" (pp. 238–41). One statement in that section reads as follows: "This would be laughable except for the arrogant mentalities which still persist in the large and spacious buildings we call institutions of higher education" (p. 239). I cannot

4. Following are a few of the sentences exhibiting disdain for scholarship. Admittedly, they are shorn of context, but I believe they portray the feeling of that context. They might describe a few scholars, but the sweeping generalization certainly overstates the case. "There are those in academia who would have you believe that you are not sophisticated enough to recognize the similarities or differences between ancient scripts" (p. 73). "This idea will be scoffed at and ridiculed by the same arrogant group of dogmatic scholars who maintained for a hundred years that there were no pre-Columbian maritime crossings and who now finally admit to it" (p. 81). "Once a scientist sells his soul for a particular hypothesis and refuses to be open to contrary information, he is no longer committed to the truth and becomes a dogmatist" (p. 218). "Why is it that the most dogmatic seem to be those who are the least scientific? Of all the sciences, the fields of anthropology, archaeology, religion and history are the least scientific and can scarcely be called a science because they cannot field test or laboratory test their hypotheses" (p. 220). "Passionate assertion is a poor substitute for good science. This is another problem that afflicts many in all the sciences, and, in particular, archaeologists, historians, and anthropologists" (p. 244).

conceive even attempting a correlation between the Book of Mormon and Mesoamerica without a firm grounding in the accumulated knowledge those institutions of higher education have collected. Such an opinion creates a tension in his analysis when he uses some of those same scholars' work to build his own case.⁵

Lund, describing his understanding of the legendary and mythological material surrounding the Aztec deity Quetzalcoatl, prefaces his discussion by saying, "Many in the scholarly community see the native records of Mesoamerica as tainted by the Christian priests and therefore of little value" (p. 181). Then, referring to the *Popol Vuh* and *Title of the Lords of Totonicapán*, he says, "A disservice and a great injustice have been done to the Quiché in being discounted so whimsically by the scientific community" (p. 196). This is an issue with which I have some experience. I have written an examination of how the native lore was altered by the presence and interests of the Christian Spaniards—or, in Lund's words, "tainted by the Christian priests."⁶ I have also written a much longer analysis specifically addressing the problems with the Christian-seeming elements of the Quetzalcoatl material.⁷ Having been through the evidence, I believe that these texts must be used with caution and that much of the Christianlike content in them is the result of post-Conquest cultural contamination. This may place me in the category of scholars for whom Lund has little use. I can state with confidence that this does not mean that we see the documents as having little value or that they are discounted whimsically. What Lund disparages is the result of careful examination of a wide range of evidence.

5. For example, Michael Coe has been quite vocal about not seeing a case for the Book of Mormon in Mesoamerica. The transcript of an interview with him for the television production of *The Mormons* is found at <http://www.pbs.org/mormons/interviews/coe.html> (accessed 14 August 2009). Yet Lund quotes him eleven times (pp. 69, 97, 98, 104 [twice], 120, 141, 155, 158, 169, 227) from two different books.

6. Brant A. Gardner, "The Impact of the Spanish upon the Record of Native Oral Tradition Among the Nahua," *Aztlan E-Journal*, <http://web.ku.edu/~hoopes/aztlan/> (accessed August 2009). The link is currently broken; a copy of the paper is in my possession.

7. Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: An Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2008), 5:353–95.

Good Beginnings: Unfulfilled Expectations

Mesoamerica and the Book of Mormon begins well. Lund introduces his theme by pointing out that “the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has not taken a position at this time regarding the geography of the Book of Mormon. The absence of a position should not be interpreted as support for, or opposition to, any other statement made by Church members” (p. xv). This is the right way to situate a search into the historical setting of the Book of Mormon. It is a task to be guided by the text and the best of our understanding. Our quest has not been decided by revelation.

The first four chapters (pp. 1–64) contain Lund’s argument for a Mesoamerican location for Book of Mormon events. In addition to proposing a Mesoamerican geography, he explains why that particular geographic correlation is superior to alternatives that have been proposed for South America and the Great Lakes Region (see pp. 9–17). One of the underpinnings of Lund’s take on a Mesoamerican location for the Book of Mormon is his insistence that he is following Joseph Smith’s geographical correlation. This is curious in light of his introductory statement that there is no defined position on Book of Mormon geography. He lays out his perspective:

There are and will be sincere LDS scholars who disagree with the basic premise that Joseph Smith is an unimpeachable source. Some have taken a point of view that a prophet is only a prophet when he is speaking as a prophet. And unless he says, “thus saith the Lord,” his words, though respected, are nonetheless his opinion. Relegating Joseph’s statements to opinion gives them permission to pursue their own theories about the geography of the Book of Mormon. Also, since the Church has no official position on the subject, they are free to speculate. Obviously, I have taken a different stance in regards to the statements of Joseph Smith. Without declaring every word that Joseph wrote or spoke as revelation, there is still merit in sustaining Joseph’s opinion over that of someone less acquainted with the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. (p. 11)

This literalism dictates some of the specific features of Lund's geography. He takes as a prophetic utterance the statement that Lehi landed a little south of the Isthmus of Darien (p. 23), and he insists that Joseph Smith unequivocally declared the location of Zarahemla (p. 26). Of course, other comments by Joseph Smith have been used to support a completely different geography, an issue Lund does not discuss.⁸

Latter-day Saint archaeologist John E. Clark wrote the article on Book of Mormon geography for the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*. He provides an important context for using Joseph Smith as an authority on Book of Mormon geography:

Three statements sometimes attributed to the Prophet Joseph Smith are often cited as evidence of an official Church position. An 1836 statement asserts that "Lehi and his company . . . landed on the continent of South America, in Chili [*sic*], thirty degrees, south latitude." This view was accepted by Orson Pratt and printed in the footnotes to the 1879 edition of the Book of Mormon, but insufficient evidence exists to clearly attribute it to Joseph Smith.

In 1842 an editorial in the Church newspaper claimed that "Lehi . . . landed a little south of the Isthmus of Darien [Panama]." This would move the location of Lehi's land-

8. In a fascinating subplot of the quest to claim Joseph Smith's prophetic statements as firm support for a particular geography, we have the recent DVD published by Rod Meldrum that posits Joseph Smith as an unimpeachable source but disagrees on which of his statements are authoritative. Meldrum questions the very quotations upon which Lund rests his case. See Rod Meldrum, "What Did the Prophet, Joseph Smith, Know about Book of Mormon Geography?" <http://www.bookofmormonevidence.org/FAQ.php> (accessed 14 October 2009).

It is an ideological tug-of-war that is best resolved by understanding that Joseph Smith did not receive revelation on the subject but developed his understanding as he gained knowledge of the world. This is the reason that church authorities have no official position on Book of Mormon geography, as Lund points out in the introduction to this book, cited above. This view is delineated in Kenneth W. Godfrey, "What Is the Significance of Zeph in the Study of Book of Mormon Geography?" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8/2 (1999): 75–76. See also John L. Sorenson and Matthew Roper, "Before DNA," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12/1 (2003): 11–13; and John A. Widstoe, "Is Book of Mormon Geography Known?" in *A Book of Mormon Treasury: Selections from the Pages of the Improvement Era* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1959), 127–30.

ing some 3,000 miles north of the proposed site in Chile. Although Joseph Smith had assumed editorial responsibility for the paper by this time, it is not known whether this statement originated with him or even represented his views. Two weeks later, another editorial appeared in the *Times and Seasons* that, in effect, constituted a book review of *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan*, by John Lloyd Stephens. This was the first accessible book in English containing detailed descriptions and drawings of ancient Mayan ruins. Excerpts from it were included in the *Times and Seasons*, along with the comment that “it will not be a bad plan to compare Mr. Stephens’ ruined cities with those in the Book of Mormon: light cleaves to light, and facts are supported by facts. The truth injures no one.”⁹

Lund accepts the second two statements, but not the first. He does not tell us why. Even with the second, however, he accepts it only as the landing place, reconciling the *landing* a little south of the Isthmus of Darien with the Central American location of the ruins that Joseph identified by having Lehi’s clan move through the Isthmus of Panama (historically Darien) and into Central America after at least one planting season but prior to the Lehi’s death (pp. 23–25). That is a journey of 1,100 miles. There is nothing that really recommends this reading save for the desire to follow Joseph’s declarations. Lund understands the conceptual problem of landing 1,100 miles away from where the Lord eventually wanted to locate them. “I have often wondered why they didn’t settle where they first landed near Panama, and why the Lord did not have them sail directly to the Land of First Inheritance? Did they need more trials in a wilderness or was the Lord teaching them how to survive in the New World? We may never know, and it may not matter” (p. 25).

Lund continues to follow Joseph’s identification of not only the Central American region in general that Stephens described but also

9. John E. Clark, “Book of Mormon Geography,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 1:178. In the quotation, internal references have been removed.

some of the specific cities in that region. For example, Lund tells us that “Joseph Smith named Palenque and Quiriguá as Book of Mormon cities” (section heading, p. 27). He neglects to mention that the *Times and Seasons* editor specifically said, “We are not going to declare positively that the ruins of Quirigua are those of Zarahemla, but when the land and the stones, and the books tell the story so plain, we are of opinion, that it would require more proof than the Jews could bring to prove the disciples stole the body of Jesus from the tomb, to prove that the ruins of the city in question, are not one of those referred to in the Book of Mormon.”¹⁰ This is certainly a strong claim, but it falls short of declaring the matter to be prophetically revealed. Perhaps because I agree with Lund’s selection of Mesoamerica as a plausible location for the Book of Mormon, I find the first sixty-four pages the best of the book. I disagree with several of the specifics, but then I am no geographer.

The next phase of the book is where I want Lund to provide information that will support the geography he favors—data about the historical and cultural time and place that will put flesh on the people mentioned in the Book of Mormon. I want him to fulfill the promise of his early statement that “geography helps in understanding history” (p. 2). I fully agree with that sentiment. Once we have a geographic location, we can compare the text to known cultural and historical details. Done well, such grounding should teach us things that we otherwise would not know.

Unfortunately, it is precisely at this point that I have problems with Lund’s book. There are at least two categories of problems. The first is that he is simply wrong in some of the information he presents. The second is that he often presents unwarranted conclusions from the data, sometimes because the data is questionable and sometimes because the conclusions are a distortion of the underlying data. I will provide a few representative examples.

10. “Zarahemla,” *Times and Seasons*, 15 September 1842 (November 1841–October 1842), vol. 3, no. 23, p. 927, retrieved from *GospelLink 2001 CD* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000).

Measured Accuracy

Lund has led numerous tours to Mesoamerica, and one would expect him to be familiar with at least the major Mesoamerican cultures. Yet he gets basic facts wrong. For example, he provides a drawing of a “thin gold plate’ with hieroglyphic writing” (p. 83), which is reproduced with a similar caption on the back cover. The original is certainly a thin gold plate, although it is too late to have any relevance for the Book of Mormon. The larger issue is the suggestion that this artifact supports the Book of Mormon. This view may explain why Lund says the gold plate has hieroglyphic writing around the edges, though there is no writing on the piece at all.¹¹ Instead, there is art around the rim (compare this with the writing on the rim of the stone piece on p. 163). Unfortunately, there will be readers who, unfamiliar with Maya glyphs, will assume that the art on the gold plate is writing.

Regarding a drawing of two men from the Codex Nuttall (p. 150), the caption tells us that they are in “Fattening Pens from Codex Nuttall.” The figures are certainly from Codex Nuttall, but they are not in “fattening pens.” Rather, the men are dead.¹² That error in visual identification suggests that Mesoamerican human sacrifice was motivated by a desire for better meals rather than religious feeling. Lund asserts that another scene from the Codex Nuttall represents slaves, but the image is upside down and does not depict slaves at all (p. 169). “Right side up,” explains Diane Wirth, “it is a representation of supernatural beings descending from the night sky, holding weapons. For example, the Mixtec, who painted the Codex Nuttall, believed that shooting stars were supernaturals shooting their arrows at the earth.”¹³

Lund makes similar errors in handling the textual data. Mesoamericanists would not conflate the Aztec deities Tezcatlipoca and Huitzilopochtli as he does: “Tezcatlipoca’s other title was Huitzilopochtli

11. Diane Wirth called this example to my attention. Personal communication, 17 August 2009. E-mail and document in my possession.

12. Diane Wirth recognized the convention and noted the problem in her 17 August 2009 communication with me.

13. Wirth, personal communication, 17 August 2009.

or Hummingbird of the Left, a blood thirsty war god” (p. 183). Huitzilopochtli is not a name for Tezcatlipoca.¹⁴

A zeal to emphasize the deity Quetzalcoatl seems to have led to this statement: “The greatest temples in Mesoamerica were dedicated to Quetzalcoatl. Cholula was the city of Quetzalcoatl” (p. 187). Lund is correct that Quetzalcoatl was the patron god of Cholula and that his temple in Cholula was the most impressive of the city. However, that is probably the only time that a temple of Quetzalcoatl was the “greatest” in any Mesoamerican city. Teotihuacan has a Temple of the Feathered Serpent, but it is much smaller than the impressive temples we call the Temple of the Sun and the Temple of the Moon, both of which occupy not only more visual space but also more important locations. Among the Aztecs, the temple to Quetzalcoatl was dwarfed by the dual-shrined temple to Tlaloc and Huitzilopochtli. These examples represent basic information. They are the kind of mistakes that should not be made regarding the cultures and history of Mesoamerica.

Measured Interpretations

Lund does not adequately qualify some of the data he uses, and sometimes he misuses such data. After mentioning Edward Herbert Thompson’s discussion of “light-skinned, blue-eyed Chanes, People of the Serpent” (pp. 111–13), he arranges quotations from Thompson in parallel with quotations from the Book of Mormon (pp. 113–16). Lund assumes that this story corroborates the Book of Mormon. It does not. Thompson is relating a story that he wrote down in 1932, at the very beginnings of modern archaeology. Data from those early efforts must be carefully considered. Subsequent work with native legends and the ways they have been altered by the extreme cultural impact of the

14. Wirth, personal communication, 17 August 2009. Perhaps Lund remembers that in *Historia de los Mexicanos por sus pinturas*, in *Teogonía e Historia de los Mexicanos*, ed. Ángel María Garibay Kintana (Mexico City: Editorial Porrúa, 1973), 23–24, *Huitzilopochtli* is listed as a name for one of the four Tezcatlipocas. There is no indication that he is familiar with this particular source. My analysis of the comparative material strongly suggests that Huitzilopochtli’s name is intrusive in the story and represents a late development. It represents Huitzilopochtli in the place of a Tezcatlipoca image, but not as being the same as Tezcatlipoca.

Conquest shows that Thompson's piece is a very late amalgamation of stories.¹⁵ This information should not be used in a discussion of the ancient Maya.¹⁶

Lund adapts information in his effort to corroborate the Book of Mormon. This is evident in his use of DNA studies. The back cover states, "A DNA study by Emory University, accepted by the Smithsonian, acknowledges that some Native Americans have ancestry in common with peoples in modern Israel and the Mediterranean area." These sentiments seem to reflect Lund's views and are the kind of thing some believing Saints want to hear. Lund seems to promise that DNA studies, which cannot be shown to disprove the Book of Mormon,¹⁷ actually demonstrate its truth. DNA studies, correctly understood, do not pose the problem that some have suggested.¹⁸

15. Lund may accept this source because he rejects the position that there have been corruptions of native legends.

16. Lund seems to believe that there was a pigmentation difference between light-skinned and dark-skinned peoples in the Book of Mormon. My own investigation of what the Book of Mormon actually says on this subject suggests that it is rather a religious metaphor for righteousness and unrighteousness and has nothing to do with pigmentation. See Gardner, *Second Witness*, 2:108–22.

17. The current contention that DNA studies disprove the Book of Mormon began with 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. It has been continued in Simon G. Southerton, *Losing a Lost Tribe: Native Americans, DNA, and the Mormon Church* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004).

The responses of Latter-day Saint scholars have been consistent in clarifying the issues and underlining the fact that DNA cannot be used against the Book of Mormon (or, at least at present, for it). See John M. Butler, "A Few Thoughts from a Believing DNA Scientist," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12/1 (2003): 36–37; Butler, "Addressing Questions Surrounding the Book of Mormon and DNA Research," *FARMS Review* 18/1 (2006): 101–8; David A. McClellan, "Detecting Lehi's Genetic Signature: Possible, Probable, or Not?" *FARMS Review* 15/2 (2003): 35–90; Matthew Roper, "Swimming in the Gene Pool: Israelite Kinship Relations, Genes, and Genealogy," *FARMS Review* 15/2 (2003): 129–64; and Brian D. Stubbs, "Elusive Israel and the Numerical Dynamics of Population Mixing," *FARMS Review* 15/2 (2003): 165–82. These studies and related ones have been reprinted in Daniel C. Peterson, ed., *The Book of Mormon and DNA Research: Essays from the FARMS Review and the Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2008).

18. Accurate information about the claims made for and against the Book of Mormon with respect to DNA may be found at <http://en.fairmormon.org/DNA> (accessed

Lund's use of certain data is problematic because that data comes from the wrong time and wrong place. The marker he mentions is found in the north-central United States, not in Mesoamerica. The data also indicates that the marker arrived far too early to have anything to do with the Book of Mormon. But Lund downplays this fact: "The Brown study has a time reference of 9,500 years ago. From the Bible's point of view the tribes of Israel came from Abraham, and Abraham came through the lineage of Shem, who was Noah's son. Semite is the term used to describe the descendants of Shem. Were there Semites in America thousands of years ago? If Semites found their way to America around 7,500 BC, could they also have found their way later around 600 BC?" (p. 232). But geneticists have not come to the conclusion that there was a migration of Semites to America either 9,500 years ago or more recently. Lund's discussion obscures this fact and introduces his own desired interpretation of data to suit his purpose. Latter-day Saints, of course, believe that a group from Israel did migrate to the Americas in 600 BC. The evidence is in the Book of Mormon. The evidence is not, however, in DNA.

Another statement on the back cover asserts, "Scientists now agree with accounts in the Book of Mormon that the Americas were settled by multiple maritime crossings of the Pacific and Atlantic oceans; not by the Siberian Land Bridge only." In the book Lund makes a similar claim: "No single event in the last hundred years may yet prove to be as significant for scholars as the demise of the 'Siberian Land Bridge Only' theory. It was not until his 6th edition of *The Maya* in 1999 that Michael Coe admitted that the Americas may have been settled by maritime crossings of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. He confessed 'the first Americans may well have taken a maritime route'" (p. 227). Lund's selective quoting here underlines the distance between his source and his conclusion. Here is the longer text from which he quotes:

In spite of over six decades of research there is little agreement among archaeologists as to when the first settlement of

14 October 2009). This includes the information on haplotype X that Lund and others have used to suggest that DNA supports the Book of Mormon.

the New World took place. Some geologists have held that the initial colonization of this hemisphere must have been made by Siberian peoples crossing over the Bering Strait land bridge at about 14,000 years ago, during the last maximum of the Pleistocene when sea level was far lower than it is today. Yet long before this, boats must have been available to the peoples of Eurasia, for recent evidence shows that Australia, which was never connected to Asia by a land bridge, was settled as far back as 50,000 years ago. The presence or absence of a land bridge from Siberia to Alaska is thus not necessarily relevant to the problem, for the first Americans may well have taken a maritime route.¹⁹

The sentence Lund quotes is certainly contained in that paragraph. He uses it to support an acceptance of transoceanic contacts during Book of Mormon times, but Coe indicates that the possibility is relevant to the earliest colonization of the Americas rather than later. Coe also indicates that there is “little agreement,” while Lund declares a victory for the idea of multiple transoceanic voyages. Coe appears to highlight the word *may* in his statement, while Lund recasts the explicit *may* into a “confession.”

The idea of the diffusion of cultural content is still a battleground. In January 2000, Marc K. Stengel wrote a piece for the *Atlantic Monthly* entitled “The Diffusionists Have Landed.”²⁰ Robert R. Fox

19. Michael D. Coe, *The Maya*, 6th ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999), 41. See D. Andrew Merriwether, “A Mitochondrial Perspective on the Peopling of the New World,” in *The First Americans: The Pleistocene Colonization of the New World*, ed. Nina G. Jablonski (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 295, for a short overview of seven different views of how the peopling of the Americas may be explained.

20. Marc K. Stengel, “The Diffusionists Have Landed,” *Atlantic Monthly* (January 2000), <http://www.theatlantic.com/issues/2000/01/001stengel.htm> (accessed 14 October 2009). Lund sees diffusion as an issue related to the Book of Mormon. “There is a one hundred and fifty year old battle between diffusionists and evolutionists, and the Book of Mormon is in the middle of it” (p. 225). “Like it or not, when it comes to ancient American cultures, Mormons are diffusionists” (p. 225). Concerning this last statement, I firmly believe in the Book of Mormon’s place in the real world. I also believe that place was in Mesoamerica. I am not, however, a diffusionist. The issue is not simply one of contact between the Old and New Worlds, but the nature of the cultural communication. Diffusionists assume that cultural content of the Old World informed (and often believe

wrote a letter to the magazine to clarify the position of the diffusionists among the academic community:

As the moderator of a recent museum symposium on diffusionism, I took particular interest in Marc K. Stengel's article "The Diffusionists Have Landed" (January *Atlantic*). The symposium, held at the Johnson-Humrickhouse Museum, in Coshocton, Ohio, focused on the Newark Holy Stones, a collection of stone tablets bearing Hebrew inscriptions which were found in Ohio in 1860. The symposium featured professional and avocational speakers on both sides of the issue, including J. Huston McCulloch, who was mentioned in Stengel's article.

Many diffusionist scholars continue to allege that their evidence simply does not get a fair hearing from archaeologists in the academic mainstream. Some even allege a conspiracy on the part of the academic mainstream to maintain the status quo (the motives for this, though, remain unclear). It is true that in some fields certain individuals and institutions have held undue influence that has served to stifle new interpretations and paradigms. On the other hand, I know of no practicing archaeologist who would not love to uncover convincing evidence of pre-Columbian Old World contact in a firm archaeological context. This is the major difference between many avocational diffusionists and mainstream scholars: the use of scientific methods and archaeological context. Most diffusionists have run roughshod over scientific method in making their claims. The accusation that mainstream scholars are hidebound by narrow-minded world views is in itself narrow-minded. Many diffusionists are themselves guilty of failing to consider alternative explanations. An old sword with a short Welsh inscription found in a Kentucky cave without controlled excavation or archaeological context is insuffi-

that it heavily informed) New World culture. I do not see that transference of cultural content. Personally, I see Book of Mormon peoples receiving more than they contributed.

cient evidence from which to conclude that King Arthur and his court emigrated to North America.²¹

According to Lund, “only among the diehards who have made their science into a religion does the ‘Siberian Land Bridge Only’ theory continue to thrive” (p. 227). This misrepresents the evidence and the academic climate concerning possible cultural contacts that might have occurred after the first prehistoric immigration of humans into the Americas. It appears that Lund himself is among those who Fox indicates have “run roughshod over scientific method in making their claims.”

Measured Conclusion

I advise those interested in finding Mesoamerica in the Book of Mormon to follow Mark’s admonition to “take heed what ye hear” (Mark 4:24). We are, of course, interested in learning more about the Book of Mormon. We really want to hear that there is strong evidence that supports our belief. If readers are not familiar with Mesoamerican culture and history, they will find Lund’s book faith-promoting. If they are familiar with Mesoamerica, it will be disappointing. Mark tells us that if we hear well, we will receive more (v. 24). Thus, if we hear solid information about the Book of Mormon, we have a firm foundation on which to expand our understanding. On the contrary, if those whose faith is already on a shaky foundation hear and accept conclusions from less-than-adequate evidence, their faith may slide away completely when those ideas are shown to be confused.

Listen carefully. Measure with appropriate standards. If we are careful and build the case for the Book of Mormon on the best evidence and with the best available scholarly standards, we can augment our spiritual understanding of the Book of Mormon with a human understanding of the people whose history is chronicled therein.

21. Robert R. Fox, “Letters,” *Atlantic Monthly*, May 2000, www.theatlantic.com/issues/2000/05/letters.htm#diffusion (accessed 6 October 2009).

LEHI AND LOCAL COLOR

Stephen D. Ricks

Review of S. Kent Brown and Peter Johnson, eds. *Journey of Faith: From Jerusalem to the Promised Land*. Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute, Brigham Young University, 2006. x + 172 pp., with appendixes. \$29.95.

Perhaps the most popular and influential publication of FARMS is John Sorenson's *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*.¹ In this book Sorenson gives classic expression to the "limited geography" hypothesis: the Book of Mormon takes place not on the American continents stretching from Tierra del Fuego to Hudson Bay, but in a very restricted area in what is now southern Mexico and Central America. So influential has Sorenson's book become that subsequent studies on Book of Mormon geography have widely (though by no means universally) accepted Sorenson's thesis and argue for settings for the Book of Mormon that are within fifty to one hundred miles of the location proposed by Sorenson. *Journey of Faith*, edited by S. Kent Brown and Peter Johnson, could well be subtitled *An Ancient Near Eastern Setting for the Book of Mormon*. Brown and Johnson argue convincingly for an ancient Near Eastern background for Lehi's journey in the desert and also for their sojourn in Bountiful before setting sail for the land of promise.

1. John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1985).

Journey of Faith is a companion volume to the informative and deeply moving documentary movie of the same name, filmed on location in the cities and deserts of the Middle East. In this generously illustrated volume—and in poetic fashion—chapters dealing with the background story of the filming are interspersed with others that include the content of the documentary and quotations from an array of scholars and other specialists interviewed for that production.

The great American archaeologist and orientalist William F. Albright gives criteria for determining the historical plausibility of the Middle Egyptian *Tale of Sinuhe*, which Albright considers to be “‘a substantially true account of life in its milieu’ on the grounds (1) that its ‘local color [is] extremely plausible,’ (2) it describes a ‘state of social organization’ which ‘agrees exactly with our present archaeological and documentary evidence,’ (3) ‘the Amorite personal names contained in the story are satisfactory for that period and region,’ and (4) ‘finally, there is nothing unreasonable in the story itself.’”² Hugh Nibley asks about the story of Lehi: “Does it correctly reflect ‘the cultural horizon and religious and social ideas and practices of the time’? Does it have authentic historical and geographical background? Is the *mise-en-scène* mythical, highly imaginative, or extravagantly improbable? Is its local color correct, and are its proper names convincing?”³ First Nephi in the Book of Mormon, as detailed in *Journey of Faith*—possessing plausible local color, plausible social organization, plausible proper names, and a plausible story line—fits Albright’s criteria as “a substantially true account of life in its milieu.” Some of what I draw for this discussion is from *Journey of Faith*, some from other sources.

Plausible Proper Names

I begin this discussion of the historical plausibility of the book of 1 Nephi with a rather extensive consideration of its use of proper

2. Hugh W. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert; The World of the Jaredites; There Were Jaredites*, ed. John W. Welch, Darrell L. Matthews, and Stephen R. Callister (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 3.

3. William F. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1942), 64, cited in Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 4.

names, all of which, I hope to demonstrate, are plausible for the ancient Near East in the mid–first millennium BC.

Nephi (1 Nephi 1:1). A Phoenician inscription discovered at Elephantine contains the personal name *KNPY*. Frank L. Benz, in his important study on Phoenician and Punic personal names, sees the name *KNPY* as the Phoenician form of *K3-nfr.w*, a genuine Egyptian personal name.⁴ (In the period of the late Egyptian language, dating after 1,000 BC, the final *r* of *nfr*—pronounced “Nefer” or “Noufer”—came to be pronounced as an *i* or *y*, thus “Nefi.”) The name element *NPY* seems to be the Semitic transcription of either the Egyptian *nfr*, a common element of Egyptian personal names, or the Egyptian *Nfw*, meaning “captain.”⁵ The middle *p* in Phoenician or Hebrew would have been pronounced as an *f* sound, so the vocalization of *NPY* as *Nephi* poses no problem. “One may confidently conclude,” observes John Gee, “whether from *Nfr* or *Nfw*, the name *Nephi* is an attested Egyptian name.”⁶

Lehi (1 Nephi 1:4). This proper noun derives from a root meaning “jawbone.” It is used as a place-name in the Bible, specifically in Judges 15:9, 14, 17, and 19. In verse 17 the name appears in the combination *Ramath-lehi*, meaning “Jawbone Heights” or “Heights of Lehi.”⁷

4. Frank L. Benz, *Personal Names in the Phoenician and Punic Inscriptions: A Catalog, Grammatical Study and Glossary of Elements* (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1972), 192. See Hermann Ranke, *Die ägyptischen Personennamen* (Glückstadt, Germany: Augustin, 1935–77), 1:340.

5. John Gee, “Four Suggestions on the Origin of the Name *Nephi*,” in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 1.

6. Gee, “Four Suggestions on the Origin of the Name *Nephi*,” 3.

7. There has been considerable discussion about the meaning of *Lehi* as a proper name in ancient Israel and in the Book of Mormon. Paul Hoskisson is cautious about accepting the name *Lehi* as the equivalent of the Hebrew term *leḥī* since, he believes, “personal names containing parts of the body are rare in all the ancient Semitic languages.” He derives *Lehi* from the Hebrew *l-ḥy*, “(belonging) to/for the living one.” Paul Y. Hoskisson, “Lehi and Sariah,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9/1 (2000): 31. However, John A. Tvedtnes responds that “names beginning with prepositions (the *l-* in this case) are even more rare.” Further, Tvedtnes lists several “personal names deriving from body parts”: *Shechem* (“back, shoulder”), occurring as a personal name fifty-four times in scripture; *Rosh* (“head”), occurring once in Genesis 46:21; *Bohan* (“thumb”), occurring twice in Joshua 15:6 and 18:17; and *Seir* (“hair”), occurring twice in Genesis

Personal names occasionally appear as elements in place-names in the Old Testament. For example, *Rameses* or *Raamses* (from the Egyptian *pr-r^c-ms-sw*, “domain of Rameses”) was the name of the royal residence of the Ramesside kings in the Egyptian delta.⁸

Sariah (1 Nephi 2:5). According to Jeffrey Chadwick, the personal name *Sariah* is mentioned in the Aramaic papyri of Elephantine and appears in Papyrus #22 (also called Cowley #22 or C-22) in Arthur E. Cowley’s *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.*⁹ Although the language of the documents is Aramaic, Cowley observes that the names are in fact Hebrew. Line 4 of C-22 lists the personal name as *šry[h br]t hws^c br hrmn*, which may be vocalized as *Sariah barat Hoshea bar Harman* and translated as “Sariah daughter of Hoshea son of Harman.” Cowley was obliged to reconstruct part of the text, supplying the final *h* of *Sariah* and the initial *b-r* of *barat*, but the spacing of the letters is reasonable, and the reconstructed text established by Cowley is in all probability accurate. “The extant final *t* of *barat* assures us,” observes Chadwick, “that the person was a daughter, not a son, and, after the letters *b-r* are supplied, there is only room for one additional letter—the final *h* of *Sariah*.” Further, although *Seraiah* (or *Sariah*) is not attested as a woman’s name in the Old Testament, it is mentioned therein nineteen times (in reference to nine persons) as a man’s name. Still, its attestation with a high degree of likelihood in the Elephantine Papyri as a Hebrew woman’s name, along with the

36:20–21. John A. Tvedtnes, “Lehi and Sariah Comments,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9/1 (2000): 37. See further Jeffrey R. Chadwick, “The Names *Lehi* and *Sariah*—Language and Meaning,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9/1 (2000): 32–34; and Dana M. Pike, “Response to Paul Hoskisson’s ‘Lehi and Sariah,’” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9/1 (2000): 35–36. Paul Hoskisson, in a personal communication, notes that while *Shechem* is used numerous times in scripture, only three people are involved, and it is not clear that they are not named after the city, which predates them. *Rosh* is also questionable as a personal name according to Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, trans. M. E. J. Richardson (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1994–2000), s.v. “Rosh III.” *Bohan* is also, like *Shechem*, a place-name in territory belonging to non-Israelites.

8. Ronald W. Pierce, “Rameses,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 4:39.

9. Jeffrey R. Chadwick, “Sariah in the Elephantine Papyri,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2/2 (1993): 196–98.

interchangeability of men's and women's names in ancient Israel¹⁰ and elsewhere,¹¹ make it probable that *śryh* was an interchangeable man's and woman's name in Israelite tradition of the first millennium BC.

Laman (1 Nephi 2:5). *LMN* was a proper name mentioned in a Lihyanite inscription.¹² Lihyanite was a language spoken (and written) in the ancient northwest Arabian Peninsula in the mid-first millennium BC. It is quite possible that Lehi chose this name and the name *Lemuel* as a result of his contact with Arabian names during his travels along the incense route.

Lemuel (1 Nephi 2:5). *Lemuel, King of Massa* is a man's name mentioned in Proverbs 31:1. *Massa* was the name of the seventh son of Ishmael, apparently the eponymous head of an Arabian tribe mentioned in Genesis 25:14. An inscription of Tiglath-Pileser III, dating from 745 to 722 BC, mentions that tribes from the region of northern Arabia, including "the inhabitants of *Mas'a*, of Tema" brought him tribute.¹³ A text from the sixth century BC mentions the presence of the Massa' tribe in the area between al-Jauf and Tayma' (Tema) in northern Arabia.¹⁴ The tribe of Massa may also be connected with the *Masanoi* of the Arabian desert, mentioned by Ptolemy in his *Geography*.¹⁵

Sam (1 Nephi 2:5). The proper name *Sam* may have an Israelite origin. Research indicates that it is "attested on a bronze ring-mounted

10. For example, *Abijah* is an Israelite man's name (*Abiah* in 1 Chronicles 6:28 and 7:8, *Abijah* in 2 Chronicles 11:20 and 13:2) as well as a woman's name—the name of Hezekiah's mother (2 Chronicles 29:1). In the latter case, the name is given as *Abi* in 2 Kings 18:2, which is "no doubt a contraction of *Abijah*." Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 1:5.

11. Consider, for example, the interchangeable names *Dana*, *Jordan*, *Kim*, *Leslie*, *Madison*, *Morgan*, *Robin*, *Shirley*, *Stac(e)y*, and *Tracy* in the Anglo-American tradition of naming.

12. G. Lankester Harding, *An Index and Concordance of Pre-Islamic Arabian Names and Inscriptions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 520.

13. James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 283.

14. Frederick V. Winnett, *Ancient Records from North Arabia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), 90–91, 101–2.

15. Ptolemy, *Geography* 5.18.2.

seal dated to the seventh century BC.”¹⁶ This word could be pronounced as “Shem” or with a lateralized *s* (originally pronounced like the Welsh *ll* but later pronounced as *s*).¹⁷ However, there were certain dialect variations in the pronunciation of this sound. For example, the Ephraimites—a tribe of Joseph and closely related to the family of Lehi and Ishmael—were unable to pronounce the word *shibboleth* properly, saying *sibboleth* instead (see Judges 12:4–6).

Laban (1 Nephi 3:3). Laban, the erstwhile custodian of the brass plates, had a very self-respecting Aramaic/Hebrew personal name mentioned first of all in the book of Genesis (24:29).

Ishmael (1 Nephi 7:2). The Hebrew name *Ishmael* means “God will hear” (see Genesis 16:11). In 1 Nephi we learn that he and his five daughters and at least two sons accompany Lehi (perhaps connected to them by marriage) into the wilderness and thence to the promised land. According to Erastus Snow, Ishmael was a descendant of Ephraim (while Lehi was a descendant of Manasseh).¹⁸ He was buried at Nahom.

Shazer (1 Nephi 16:13–14). Nibley notes that the term *shajer* is common in Palestinian place-names and that it means “trees,” with the variants *Sajur*, *Shaghur*, and *Segor* all said to represent a collection of trees. Nibley also mentions “a famous water hole in South Arabia, called *Shisur* by [Bertram] Thomas and *Shisar* by Philby.”¹⁹ A ruined city called *Shisur* and a permanent spring exist ninety miles northwest of Salalah in Oman on the frankincense route.²⁰

Nahom (1 Nephi 16:34). Nahom was the place where Ishmael was buried. Strikingly, *Nahom* is also a place-name in the Arabian

16. John A. Tvedtnes, John Gee, and Matthew Roper, “Book of Mormon Names Attested in Ancient Hebrew Inscriptions,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9/1 (2000): 51.

17. On the lateralized *s* in the Semitic languages in general, see Richard C. Steiner, *The Case for Fricative-Laterals in Proto-Semitic* (New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 1977).

18. Erastus Snow, in *Journal of Discourses*, 23:184.

19. Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 78–79, citing Bertram Thomas, *Arabia Felix: Across the “Empty Quarter” of Arabia* (New York: Scribner, 1932), 136–37; and Harry S. J. B. Philby, *The Empty Quarter* (New York: Holt, 1933), 231.

20. Juris Zarins, “Atlantis of the Sands,” *Archaeology* 50/3 (1997): 52.

Peninsula. Carsten Niebuhr, an eighteenth-century German surveyor, geographer, and writer who journeyed through the Arabian Peninsula in the latter half of the eighteenth century,²¹ produced a map giving the name *Nehhm* to a location in Yemen north of Sana‘a, the present-day capital.²² This place was also anciently the traditional site of graves, hence the appropriateness of Ishmael’s burial there. In Hebrew *nāham* means “to groan”; in the South Arabian dialects *nahama* means “to dress stone.”²³

Irreantum (1 Nephi 17:5). Paul Hoskisson, in a brief article on the etymology of the name *Irreantum*, notes that the reason why 3 percent of the names given in the Book of Mormon are included with their meanings is that the Nephites, whose native spoken language was Hebrew and whose written language (or script) was Egyptian, would have been unable to understand the meaning of these words. “The only rational reason,” observes Hoskisson, “for Nephi to include both the transliteration and translation is that he did not expect his audience to immediately grasp the meaning of *Irreantum*, because it was not a readily recognizable Nephite word.”²⁴ The word is quite likely South Arabian or South Semitic in origin. The root *RWY has a basic meaning connected with watering and is related to another word, *‘rwy* (pronounced either “*arway*” or “*irway*”). The Semitic suffix element *-an* indicates a place suffix.²⁵ Finally, the Semitic root

21. For details of the Danish expedition to the Arabian Peninsula (Niebuhr accompanied this group), see Thorkild Hansen, *Arabia Felix: The Danish Expedition of 1761–1767*, trans. James and Kathleen McFarlane (London: Collins, 1964).

22. S. Kent Brown, “‘The Place That Was Called Nahom’: New Light from Ancient Yemen,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8/1 (1999): 67.

23. Francis Brown, Samuel R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974), 625, citing Proverbs 5:11 and Ezekiel 24:23 for “the groan of a sufferer”; Stephen D. Ricks, *Lexicon of Inscriptional Qatabanian* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1989), 103; compare Joan Copeland Biella, *Dictionary of Old South Arabic, Sabaean Dialect* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982).

24. Paul Y. Hoskisson (with the assistance of Brian M. Hauglid and John Gee), “Irreanteum,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 11 (2002): 90–93.

25. With this compare the extensive number of place-names ending in *-ōn* in ancient Hebrew given in Wilhelm Borée, *Die alten Ortsnamen Palästinas*, 2nd ed. (Hildesheim: Olms, 1968), 57–62; see also Anson F. Rainey, “Toponymics of Eretz-Israel,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 231 (1978): 4–5, wherein Rainey calls *-ōn* an “appellative” suffix that describes “some feature or aspect of the site.”

*TM, meaning “whole, complete, abundant; abundance; entirety,” is appended to the end of the word. The resultant form, which may be read *Irwayantum/Arwayantum*, has the meaning “place of abundant water, many waters.”

Jacob (1 Nephi 18:7) and **Joseph** (1 Nephi 18:7). The personal names *Jacob* and *Joseph*, given to two of Lehi’s sons who were born during the wilderness sojourn, are venerable Hebrew names of patriarchal figures.

Lehi’s sons thus bear names from three possibly distinct traditions: three (*Sam*, *Jacob*, and *Joseph*) may be of Israelite origin, two (*Laman* and *Lemuel*) may be of Arabian provenance, and one (*Nephi*) may be of Egyptian background, suggesting the strong possibility of Lehi’s acquaintance with these names as an experienced and knowledgeable traveling merchant, and also indicating the direction of his travels—along the incense route (which may have given rise to the names *Laman* and *Lemuel*) and to and from Egypt.²⁶

Plausible Story Line and Local Color

The book of 1 Nephi is a sober account of life and circumstances in sixth-century-BC Jerusalem and in the desert, and all of the details dealt with in the book—metallurgy and toolmaking,²⁷ Nephi’s metal bow,²⁸ gold plates, ships and shipbuilding, incense culture and the incense trade,²⁹ and the voyage to the promised land—are a far cry

26. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 34–35.

27. John L. Sorenson, in “Metals and Metallurgy Relating to the Book of Mormon Text” (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1992), provides an extensive bibliography of sources on metallurgy in the Old World.

28. See Alan Goff and John W. Welch, “Nephi’s Bows and Arrows,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 41–43; William J. Hamblin, “The Bow and Arrow in the Book of Mormon,” in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 365–99; and Nahum Waldman, Alan Goff, and John W. Welch, “The Breaking of the Bow” (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1983).

29. John L. Sorenson, “Incense-Burning and ‘Seer’ Stones in Ancient Mesoamerica: New Evidence of Migrations of Biblical Peoples to the New World” and “New Evidence of Migration of Biblical People to the New World,” *University Archaeological Society Newsletter* 21 (July 1954).

from the fantastic, if also perennially entertaining, tales from the *Arabian Nights*. The opening scene of the Book of Mormon is set in an era of uncertainty and confusion, with one side supporting the Egyptian cause, the other (including Jeremiah) arguing for submission to the Babylonians. Lehi takes a universally unpopular stance: Jerusalem would be destroyed.

Plausible Social Organization

“The Book of Mormon,” observes John Welch in *Journey of Faith*, “begins with a family, but more precisely with a couple, Lehi and Sariah” (p. 55). This story of a family in the wilderness—with a family dynamic of tension between the stoic and the whiners, the convinced and the uncommitted, sharpened and exacerbated by bitter toils in the desert—rings true. The uncommitted brothers, Laman and Lemuel, griped when asked by their father to retrieve the plates from Jerusalem, returned to the city willingly, if not enthusiastically, when asked to go there to obtain wives.

With its plausible story line, local color, social organization, and proper names, the book of 1 Nephi tells the story of a group of messianic Israelites who left Jerusalem around 600 BC and went into the desert to escape the corruption, decadence, and destruction of Jerusalem. While one cannot prove the correctness of the account through empirical means, its plausibility can but enhance its claims of authenticity. *Journey of Faith* does triple duty: it tells about the filming of the documentary, it is a sourcebook of quotations from the documentary, and it also relates in sober, straightforward, and plausible fashion the story of the journey of Lehi and Sariah’s family from Jerusalem to Bountiful and thence to the promised land.

MYTH, MEMORY, AND “MANUSCRIPT FOUND”

Matthew Roper

More than a century ago, the *American Historical Magazine* published a series of articles by a Salt Lake City attorney, Theodore Schroeder, in support of the Spalding-Rigdon theory of Book of Mormon origins.¹ In the introduction to a four-part rebuttal to those articles, Brigham H. Roberts confessed, “When one undertakes at this late day a serious discussion of the Spaulding² theory of the origin of The Book of Mormon, he instinctively feels inclined to begin with an apology to his readers.” Surprised that any serious critic of the Book of Mormon would undertake a defense of that moribund theory, Roberts wondered, “Is it not really about time to dismiss all that?”³ While Roberts’s puzzlement may be shared by contemporary readers, his detailed response to Schroeder’s work underscores the need to occasionally review and revisit the arguments of the past. In 1977 Lester Bush predicted that we can reasonably expect that new variants of the Spalding theory will, “like the influenza, reemerge

1. Theodore Schroeder, “The Origin of the Book of Mormon,” *American Historical Magazine* 1/5 (September 1906): 380–96; 1/6 (November 1906): 518–33; 2/1 (January 1907): 57–76; 2/3 (May 1907): 213–30.

2. Solomon Spalding’s name is sometimes spelled *Spaulding*.

3. Brigham H. Roberts, “The Origin of the Book of Mormon (A Reply to Mr. Theodore Schroeder),” *American Historical Magazine* 3/5 (September 1908): 441, 443; see also pp. 441–68; 3/6 (November 1908): 551–80; 4/1 (January 1909): 22–44; 4/2 (March 1909): 168–96.

every now and then.”⁴ That this prediction has proved accurate can be seen in recent outbreaks spread by Dale Broadhurst,⁵ Wayne Cowdrey, Howard Davis, Arthur Vanick,⁶ and Craig Criddle,⁷ to name just a few. The most recent manifestation of this malady can be seen in an attempt by several researchers at Stanford University to utilize word-print analysis in support of the theory.⁸

In a previous article, I discussed the early appeal of the Spalding-Rigdon theory and its rejection by most students of the Book of Mormon today.⁹ A chief reason for that rejection was the 1884 rediscovery of the original Spalding manuscript, which was first recovered by Doctor Philastus Hurlbut in 1833 and entrusted to E. D. Howe in 1834. When interviewed, neighbors and acquaintances of Solomon Spalding in Conneaut, Ohio, remembered that the hapless former minister had written a story more than twenty years earlier that they claimed resembled the Book of Mormon narrative. In an effort to investigate this claim, Hurlbut traveled to New York, where he obtained a manuscript from a trunk belonging to Spalding’s widow. Hurlbut was disappointed to discover that the manuscript was inconsistent with the recollections of Spalding’s neighbors. Subsequently, some of Spalding’s neighbors claimed, and Spalding-theory advocates argued for, a hypothetical second Spalding story on ancient America called “Manuscript Found.” As for the document recovered

4. Lester E. Bush, “The Spalding Theory: Then and Now,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 10 (Autumn 1977): 63.

5. See the voluminous collection of Spalding research materials made available by Dale Broadhurst at <http://solomonspalding.com/index3.htm> (accessed 4 November 2009).

6. Wayne L. Cowdrey, Howard A. Davis, and Arthur Vanick, *Who Really Wrote the Book of Mormon? The Spalding Enigma* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2005). See my review of this book, “The Mythical ‘Manuscript Found,’” *FARMS Review* 17/2 (2005): 7–140.

7. Craig Criddle, “Sidney Rigdon: Creating the Book of Mormon,” <http://sidneyrigdon.com/criddle/rigdon1.htm> (accessed 4 November 2009).

8. Matthew L. Jockers, Daniela M. Witten, and Craig S. Criddle, “Reassessing authorship of the *Book of Mormon* using delta and nearest shrunken centroid classification,” *Literary and Linguistic Computing* 23/4 (2008): 465–91. A detailed treatment of the Stanford study will be forthcoming.

9. Matthew Roper, “Mythical ‘Manuscript Found,’” *FARMS Review* 17/2 (2005): 7–140.

by Hurlbut (known as “Manuscript Story—Conneaut Creek,” now housed at Oberlin College), it was claimed to be an earlier, discarded version of “Manuscript Found.”¹⁰ Although rejected by most scholars, variants of this theory persist today.

It was the rediscovery of an authentic Spalding manuscript, perhaps more than any other factor, that has led most students of Book of Mormon origins to reject the myth of “Manuscript Found.” I will explain why. My comments should be seen as an extension of my earlier discussion and will focus on the question of a second Spalding manuscript. I will explore this question in connection with the following issues: (1) the recollections of the story by Spalding’s former neighbors, (2) the suppression of that document by E. D. Howe, (3) the local Conneaut background of the Spalding tale itself, (4) the implications of the testimony from Spalding’s own family, (5) Spalding’s interest in the question of Israelite origins, (6) the idea of an Asiatic crossing to the Americas, (7) the influence of the writings of Jedediah Morse, (8) biblical style in Spalding’s writings, (9) confusion and contradiction in the later Conneaut testimony, (10) the influence of the classics on Spalding, and (11) the claimed similarity between the names in Spalding’s manuscript and those found in the Book of Mormon.

Manuscript Remembered

Analysis of the statements provided to Hurlbut by former Spalding neighbors shows that they accurately recalled many genuine elements of “Manuscript Story.” They remembered a fictional history of a lost group of ancient people, some of whom were “officers” from the Old World who traveled by sea and settled in the Americas. After their arrival, they traveled by land to a region where they encountered a civilized group of Native Americans, some of them very large. The narrative purports to be a translation of an ancient manuscript buried in the ground that is an account of the Mound Builders who once lived in Spalding’s vicinity and left behind various antiquities. Interspersed

10. Kent P. Jackson, ed., *Manuscript Found: The Complete Original “Spaulding Manuscript” by Solomon Spaulding* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1996).

with humorous passages, it relates the manners, customs, and something of the arts and sciences of the people. It gives an account of two main groups of people, describing contentions between their chiefs, their warlike nature, and bloody battles in which the ground was covered with the slain, who were then buried in large heaps or mounds. In terms of content, it is a story about a “manuscript found.” All of these elements are consistent with the document known today as “Manuscript Story—Conneaut Creek.”

When confronted with Spalding’s Conneaut manuscript, some former neighbors reportedly claimed that it bore “no resemblance” to the manuscript they had previously described.¹¹ However, if we compare the 1833 statements of Spalding’s neighbors to “Manuscript Story,” it is clear that those descriptions *do* in fact resemble genuine elements of that story, elements that those people later denied existed. That they would deny *any* resemblance between “Manuscript Story” and their earlier descriptions of Spalding’s tale casts doubt on those denials and supports the view that the claim of a second Spalding tale was a post hoc attempt to save face.¹²

Manuscript Suppressed

In 1834 Howe argued that “Manuscript Found” was not the manuscript retrieved by Hurlbut in December 1833 but a second, now-missing Spalding story on ancient America. Howe insisted it was *this* hypothetical tale and not “Manuscript Story” that was remembered by Spalding’s Conneaut acquaintances and that resembled the Book of Mormon. In 1839, however, Spalding’s widow stated that “Manuscript Found” had been carefully preserved in a trunk until entrusted to the care of Hurlbut, who gave the manuscript to Howe. Although not a witness to the existence of a second Spalding manuscript, Howe had possession of “Manuscript Story” at the time he wrote *Mormonism Unveiled*. The fact that the manuscript first entrusted to Hurlbut and

11. E. 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), 288.

12. Roper, “Mythical ‘Manuscript Found,’” 35–42.

then Howe was never published or returned to Spalding's family, and subsequently went missing while in Howe's possession, suggests that this document was downplayed if not deliberately suppressed. In 1834, left with the problematic statements collected earlier by Hurlbut and unable to obtain the kind of document that might appear to have provided source material for the Book of Mormon, Howe was forced to either argue for a second Spalding tale or abandon the theory altogether.

Howe's published description of the manuscript in his possession was also inadequate and misleading. He omitted important details about the story that would have undermined his argument for a second Spalding story, such as the fact that the manuscript purported to give an account of the builders of the Ohio mounds; described the laws, arts, manners, and customs of the people in question; and recorded serious wars between rival groups—elements that would have recalled the 1833 statements collected by Hurlbut. After years as a local lightning rod of anti-Mormon opposition, Howe sold the *Painesville Telegraph* in 1835 in order to pursue other endeavors. In later years, however, the disappearance of the Spalding manuscript from Howe's possession became somewhat of a scandal. Subsequent Spalding investigators simply would not let the matter die. In a letter to Howe in 1879, Rev. Robert Patterson Jr. grilled Howe about the matter:

5. Did Mr. Hurlbut inform you that the manuscript was to be compared with the Mormon Bible and was then to be returned to Mrs. Davison? 6. Did you inform Mrs. Davison that this document was not the "Manuscript Found"? Or did Mr. Hurlbut so inform her? If neither, why was she not informed? And if informed, how long after the receipt of the manuscript was she written to? And what (if any) was her reply? 7. Why was not the manuscript returned, as promised by Hurlbut? Would not this have been the surest, speediest,

and almost the only way of enlisting her in an effort to secure for you the real “Manuscript Found”?¹³

In response to Patterson’s questions, Howe claimed that Hurlbut never told him anything about returning the manuscript and that since it obviously had nothing to do with the Book of Mormon, it was, in his view, of no further use.¹⁴ Obviously irritated by a controversy that continued to haunt him decades after thinking he had left the matter behind, the aging Howe stated to another correspondent in 1881 that

I think there has been much mist thrown around the whole subject of the origin of the Mormon Bible and the “Manuscript Found,” by several statements that have been made by those who have been endeavoring to solve the problem after sleeping quietly for half a century. Every effort was made to unravel the mystery at the time, when nearly all the parties were on earth, and the result published at the time, and I think it all folly to try to dig out anything more.¹⁵

Patterson was puzzled and frustrated by Howe’s reluctance to pursue the matter. In a letter to a sympathetic James Cobb, Patterson vented:

One thing that is inexplicable in this whole history is Mr. E. D. Howe’s seeming indifference in so important a part of his case as the absolute proof of plagiarism. Why should he have rested satisfied with Hurlbut’s statement, without any attempt by correspondence with Mrs. Davison or Mr. Clarke to discover where the real “Manuscript Found” could be? At that early day its fate could have been traced with comparative ease. If any of the Clarke family had given the veritable MS.

13. Robert Patterson Jr. to E. D. Howe, 12 September 1879, Theodore Albert Schroeder Papers, box 2, folder 1, Wisconsin Historical Society Library, Madison, Wisconsin.

14. E. D. Howe to Robert Patterson Jr., 24 September 1879, Theodore Albert Schroeder Papers, box 2, folder 1, Wisconsin Historical Society Library, Madison, Wisconsin.

15. E. D. Howe to T. W. Smith, Painesville, Ohio, 26 July 1881, in Charles A. Shook, *The True Origin of the Book of Mormon* (Cincinnati, OH: Standard, 1914), 76.

to Hurlbut this important fact could have been indisputably established in a few days’ time, whilst the first sheets of Howe’s book were passing through the slow hand-press of those early days. . . . As this plagiarism was the pivotal point on which Howe’s demonstration of fraud, even to the Mormons themselves, turned—why was he at the time so indifferent to it? And why has he ever since appeared so careless in regard to it—even on his own theory that Hurlbut told the truth? To me it is an insoluble conundrum.¹⁶

Howe’s reluctance to pursue the matter is understandable in light of his previous efforts to downplay the significance of “Manuscript Story,” necessary in order to bolster the theory of another manuscript. It seems never to have occurred to Patterson that the assumption of a second Spalding story on ancient America might be mistaken altogether.

Local Background of the Spalding Tale

When did Spalding write his Conneaut tale? The statements of Spalding’s acquaintances yield clues. Aaron Wright spoke ambiguously of his introduction to Spalding’s story without specifying how long this was after Spalding’s first arrival in the neighborhood.¹⁷ Oliver Smith noted Spalding’s land speculations in the region: “While engaged in this business, he boarded at my house, in all nearly six months. All his leisure hours were occupied in writing a historical novel.”¹⁸ Smith, like Wright, failed to indicate if this was shortly after Smith’s own arrival at Conneaut or later. Other statements are more helpful on the timing. Henry Lake, who arrived in Conneaut, Ohio, near the first of January 1811, stated, “Soon after my arrival, I formed a co-partnership with Solomon Spalding, for the purpose of rebuilding a forge which he had commenced a year or two before. He very

16. Robert Patterson Jr. to James T. Cobb, 29 March 1881, in “James Thornton Cobb: The Don Quixote of Deseret,” <http://solomonspalding.com/SRP/saga/saga10a.htm> (accessed 29 October 2009).

17. Aaron Wright statement, August 1833, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 284.

18. Oliver Smith statement, August 1833, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 284–85.

frequently read to me from a manuscript which he was writing, which he entitled the ‘Manuscript Found,’ and which he represented as being found in this town.”¹⁹ This statement and a contract between Spalding and Lake dated 8 March 1811 indicate that Lake became acquainted with Spalding’s story after arriving in the region and likely after the two formed their partnership.²⁰ John Miller dated his first recollection of Spalding’s manuscript to an unspecified period of several months in 1811, when he was employed by Lake and Spalding in the rebuilding of the forge and boarded at Spalding’s house.²¹ That would be no earlier than March of that year. Nahum Howard dated his first acquaintance with Spalding to December 1810 and claimed that after that date he saw Spalding frequently and was introduced to his writings.²² Artemus Cunningham stated that he visited Spalding in October 1811 and, over a period of two days, became acquainted with Spalding’s story.²³ Taken together, the 1833 testimonies suggest that Spalding may have commenced his initial writing on the Conneaut story in early 1811.

Statements from family members and other acquaintances, however, associate Spalding’s tale with events of the War of 1812. According to Spalding’s widow, “This was about the year 1812. Hull’s surrender at Detroit, occurred near the same time, and I recollect the date well from that circumstance.”²⁴ John and Martha Spalding also dated Spalding’s writing efforts to late 1812, shortly before his departure for Pittsburgh, as do Matilda McKinstry, Abner Jackson, and Josiah Spalding. In 1855 Josiah prepared a statement describing early events of his life and his activities in connection with his brother Solomon: “We soon after went into a large speculation in new land in Pennsylvania and Ohio, and after

19. Henry Lake statement, September 1833, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 281–82.

20. Henry Lake and Solomon Spalding Agreement, 8 March 1811, “Spalding Studies: Ohio Sources, Part 3, Aaron Wright and Henry Lake Documents,” <http://solomonspalding.com/SRP/saga2/Ashtab3.htm> (accessed 29 October 2009).

21. John Miller statement, September 1833, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 282–83.

22. Nahum Howard statement, August 1833, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 285–86.

23. Artemus Cunningham statement, 1833, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 286–87.

24. Matilda Spalding Davison statement, 1 April 1839, in “Mormonism,” *Boston Recorder*, 19 April 1839.

a few years he moved out there with his wife.” According to Josiah, during his residence at Conneaut, Solomon

sold a large amount of land on credit principally to people in Ohio. The war that broke out with England seriously affected that country. That circumstance, with some other misfortunes that happened, placed us in difficult circumstances. We were under the necessity to make great sacrifices to pay our debts. I went to see my brother, and staid with him for some time. I found him unwell, and something low in spirits. He began to compose his novel.²⁵

The United States declared war on Great Britain on 18 June 1812. Josiah would have visited Solomon sometime later since the reason for his visit was to address the financial difficulties exacerbated by the war. It was then that Josiah became acquainted with his brother’s story, which was—judging by his description—similar if not identical to the first half of “Manuscript Story.” Significantly, Josiah’s description of the tale leaves off before the commencement of the climactic war in Spalding’s narrative, suggesting that his brother had not yet written that portion of the manuscript.

During the remainder of 1812, American forces experienced a series of military setbacks that threatened the land along the Great

25. Josiah Spalding statement, 6 January 1855, in Samuel J. Spalding, *Spalding Memorial: A Genealogical History of Edward Spalding of Massachusetts Bay, and His Descendants* (Boston: Alfred Mudge & Son, 1872), 160–62. “Spalding’s manuscript,” suggests Traci Thomas, “could be said to reflect certain New England attitudes toward America’s declaration of war against Great Britain. Many New Englanders felt that the American involvement in the war would be beneficial for France but certainly not for the economy of the United States.” She argues that Spalding’s story of an unnecessary, wasteful, and ultimately destructive war between civilized pre-Columbian Americans can be read as “a reflection of contemporary New England concerns about the motivations and influences of powerful central government leaders.” Traci Thomas, “‘Brought Forth at Some Future Day’: Historical Narratives in the Book of Mormon, *View of the Hebrews*, and *Manuscript Found*,” in *Archive of Restoration Culture: Summer Fellows’ Papers 2000–2002*, ed. Richard Lyman Bushman (Provo, UT: Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History, Brigham Young University, 2005), 5.

Lakes. This included the surrender of General Hull's forces to the British on 16 August.

General Hull's surrender in 1812 at Detroit, whereby the British obtained possession of that commander's army and the Territory of Michigan, left the whole northern frontier exposed to the incursions of the English, who also had undisputed control of Lake Erie. The settlements along its shore were, therefore, kept in a continued state of agitation and alarm.

The country had been actually devastated as far east as the Huron River, and the inhabitants either murdered or driven from their homes before a sufficient force could be collected to arrest their progress. To repel this invasion the whole effective force of the country had been called into the field, leaving the new settlements in an exposed and defenseless condition. Knowing the widespread consternation among the settlers, the British vessels took delight in sailing along the coast, firing cannon, and making other sundry demonstrations of hostility in order to increase the alarm of the inhabitants.

They had in two or three instances effected a landing from their vessels in small parties, killed some cattle, and possessed themselves of some other articles of plunder of more or less value.

Tidings were frequently arriving from the seat of war, and it was not uncommon for the people to be called out of their beds at the dead of night to hear exaggerated accounts of the murders and cruelties of the Indians engaged in assisting the enemy.²⁶

These turbulent local events along the northern Ohio and Pennsylvania border region may find echoes in "Manuscript Story."²⁷ Near the end of Spalding's tale, local villagers flee from their town to a

26. William W. Williams, *History of Ashtabula County Ohio, with Illustrations and Biographical Sketches of Its Pioneers and Most Prominent Men* (Philadelphia: Williams Brothers, 1878), 157–58.

27. Broadhurst, "Spalding Studies: Ohio Sources, Part 4, Solomon Spalding Documents," <http://solomonspalding.com/SRP/saga2/Ashtab4.htm> (accessed 29 October 2009).

nearby fort while their community is looted and burned. Later, enemy forces gain access to the fort and massacre many refugees.²⁸ Local histories highlight the confusion and the sometimes mistaken but understandable fears of local residents during this time. For example, on the night of 11 August 1812, villagers near Spalding's home were frightened by the false report of a force of British soldiers and their Indian allies landing near the village. Fearing for their lives and afraid that the settlement might be looted and burned, some of the villagers fled over Conneaut Creek to one of the mounds known locally as "Fort Hill."

The younger children, and some of the women, were carried over on the shoulders of men. One rather portly lady was being thus transported on the back of her husband, who was but a small man, and lost his footing on a slippery rock in the centre of the stream, and he and his precious cargo were submerged in the current; and as the little man occupied the nether position he was nearly drowned before he could shift his ballast, and get his head above it and the water.²⁹

These echoes of the local war hysteria from mid-August through the end of 1812 make it unlikely that Spalding abandoned "Manuscript Story" at that time for another. Josiah visited his brother in the summer of 1812, sometime *after* 18 June but likely left *before* the events in mid-August. Josiah's description of "Manuscript Story," as noted above, suggests that the war chapters were not yet written at the time of his visit. Spalding left Conneaut for Pittsburgh in the fall of 1812, probably by the end of October if not before.³⁰ If the war chapters in

28. Solomon Spalding, "Manuscript Story" (unpublished), 159–63, as transcribed in Jackson, *Manuscript Found*, 115–18. In subsequent references, "Manuscript Story" is abbreviated as "MS." Spelling, punctuation, and capitalization have been modernized for this article.

29. Williams, *History of Ashtabula County*, 158. Broadhurst suggests that Spalding may have been familiar with this event and drafted a more humorous variation, which appears in "Manuscript Story."

30. Broadhurst notes that on 4 November of that year, one William F. Miller, to whom Spalding owed a large debt, went before the Ashtabula Court of Common Pleas in an attempt to lay claim upon what was left of Spalding's assets. Spalding seems to have left town before this occurred. Broadhurst, "Spalding Studies: Ohio Sources, Part 3, Aaron

“Manuscript Story” were inspired by local events, they must have been written sometime *after* mid-August, leaving about two and a half months before Spalding fled Conneaut for Pittsburgh. That does not leave much time for crafting an entirely new story. Additionally, if “Manuscript Story” is not a first draft but a revision of the story, then at least two drafts of this story were written between the end of summer and the end of October.³¹ Given the unsettling times, Spalding’s health problems, and other concerns, is it reasonable to see the former minister abandoning his old story at this time to craft an entirely new one? Advocates of the Spalding theory since E. D. Howe have claimed that “Manuscript Story” was only a first draft that was later abandoned for another, altogether different story called “Manuscript Found,” but the chronological evidence suggests that Spalding was most likely still fiddling with a draft of “Manuscript Story” at the time he left Ohio and that he had only one tale to show for his previous efforts at Conneaut.

There are indications that Spalding did very little work on his story after this time. Spalding’s widow related that following their departure from Conneaut in late 1812, her husband visited Robert Patterson Sr. in Pittsburgh regarding the possibility of publishing his manuscript. She said that Patterson “informed Mr. S. that if he would make out a title page and preface, he would publish it and it might be a source of profit. *This Mr. S. refused to do for reasons which I cannot now state.*”³² Spalding’s daughter, Matilda McKinstry, reported that Patterson advised her father to “*polish it up, finish it, and you will make money out of it.*”³³ The remark that, besides requiring a title

Wright and Henry Lake Documents,” <http://SolomonSpalding.com/SRP/Saga2/Ashtab3.htm> (accessed 29 October 2009).

31. “The hastily scribbled manuscript now on file at Oberlin College is not a first draft. It contains deleted and rewritten sections out-of-place among its pages and has some segments which show the calm hand of a copyist, complete with instances of a copyist’s dittographic mistakes.” Broadhurst, “Solomon Spalding of Ashford, Connecticut: The Spalding Saga, Episode 1,” <http://solomonspalding.com/SRP/saga/saga01a.htm> (accessed 25 April 2009).

32. Matilda Spalding Davison statement, 1839, emphasis added.

33. Matilda Spalding McKinstry statement, cited in an anonymous article titled “The Book of Mormon,” *Scribner’s Monthly*, August 1880, 615. The statement is dated 3 April 1880.

page and preface, Spalding's manuscript was unfinished and in need of "polish" suggests the rough-hewn nature of the manuscript shown to Patterson. Two years after the publication of McKinstry's account, Redick McKee, a neighbor of Spalding's during his final years in Amity, visited McKinstry in October 1882 and questioned her about her father's meeting with Patterson in Pittsburgh. McKinstry recalled her mother telling her of Patterson's suggestion that "Mr. Spaulding should write *a brief preface, and perhaps a chapter or two in concluding the romance, giving a little more elaborate description of the Indian mounds in Ohio*. Her mother," McKinstry told McKee, "thought he was engaged in doing that at the time I was living with the family at Amity."³⁴ That description again fits "Manuscript Story."

After about two years in Pittsburgh, Spalding and his family moved to Amity, Pennsylvania. The few sources that recall Spalding's final years in the town suggest that he may have engaged in occasional revision and correction of his old manuscript. Several residents remember reading or hearing Spalding read and explain his story but give little indication that he was crafting a new one.³⁵ In his several statements, Joseph Miller Sr. speaks only of Spalding's manuscript writing as something done *before* his arrival in Amity. He speaks of "papers which he said he *had* written" as if it were in the past (1869).³⁶ Redick McKee indicated that Spalding continued to dabble with the old story.

34. Redick McKee, "From a Veteran Ruling Elder," *Pittsburgh Presbyterian Banner*, 15 November 1882.

35. "He used to *read* select portions of these papers to amuse us of evenings" (Joseph Miller Sr. statement, *Washington (PA) Reporter*, 7 April 1869); "Mr. S. seemed to take delight in *reading* from his manuscript . . . for the entertainment of his frequent visitors, heard him *read* most if not all of it, and had frequent conversations with him about it" (Joseph Miller [Sr.], "The Book of Mormon," *Pittsburgh Telegraph*, 6 February 1879); "often heard him *read* from what he called his MS. . . . Mr. Spaulding would *read* from his MSS to entertain us" (Joseph Miller [Sr.] to Mrs. Ellen E. Dickinson, 13 February 1882); "I *read*, or *heard him read*, many wonderful and amusing passages" (Redick McKee, 14 April 1869, in "Solomon Spalding Again," *Washington (PA) Reporter*, 21 April 1869), emphasis added.

36. Joseph Miller Sr. statement, 26 March 1869, *Washington (PA) Reporter*, 7 April 1869. "He said he *wrote* the papers as a novel" (1869); "He said he *wrote* it to pass away the time when he was unwell. . . . He told me that he *wrote* it for a novel" (Joseph Miller Sr. statement, 26 March 1869), emphasis added.

In 1869, he recalled, “I recollect quite well Mr. Spalding spending much time in writing on sheets of paper torn out of an old book.”³⁷ What was the nature of Spalding’s writing activity at this time? In 1879 McKee stated, “I also understood he was then *occasionally re-writing, correcting*, and he thought improving *some* passages descriptive of his supposed battles.”³⁸ It makes sense to see Spalding *editing* his earlier work in Amity rather than fabricating an entirely different story, which he would then have to get Patterson to accept. McKee’s recollection suggests the limited nature of Spalding’s activity during his final years of poor health. The work on his story at that time was “occasional” and said to include only “some” of the battle passages. This does not sound like a major revision. The evidence describes a Spalding manuscript in Pittsburgh and Amity that was still unfinished and in need of polish, requiring not only a title page and a brief preface or introduction but also an additional chapter or two giving a better description of the mounds and concluding the story. This is also consistent with the state of “Manuscript Story,” which is likewise unfinished and badly in need of polish and breaks off in the middle of the destructive war. It also shows evidence of revision and editing in the very places described. On page 152 of the manuscript, an entire paragraph describing a circular burial mound in which the bodies of the fallen dead were interred is crossed out and revised.³⁹ This is what one would expect if, as the above testimony indicates, Spalding was occasionally correcting and revising that portion of the narrative to discuss the final battles and the mounds. It also suggests that it was still “Manuscript Found” and not some hypothetical second story that was the focus of his concern in the final years of his life.⁴⁰

37. Redick McKee, “Solomon Spalding Again,” *Washington (PA) Reporter*, 21 April 1869. In a later statement McKee recalled occasionally visiting Spalding in his room, finding him at a table reading and writing.

38. Redick McKee to Robert Patterson Jr., 15 April 1879, in Boyd Crumrine, “Solomon Spalding and the Book of Mormon,” *History of Washington County, Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Everts, 1882), 432, emphasis added.

39. MS, 152, in Jackson, 110.

40. In order to support the theory that “Manuscript Found” was a second story, distinct from “Manuscript Story,” Cowdrey, Davis, and Vanick note that Miller and McKee claimed that the document they saw Spalding correcting in Amity was written on fools-

Testimony from the Spalding Family

Before the rediscovery of “Manuscript Story” in 1884, all members of Solomon Spalding’s family who provided testimony (John Spalding, Martha Spalding, Matilda Davison Spalding, Josiah Spalding, and Matilda McKinstry) mention only one Spalding story on ancient America. They place the writing of this story during the War of 1812 and identify that work as “Manuscript Found.” This is particularly interesting in the case of Josiah, who was not interviewed by Spalding investigators and who was unfamiliar with the Book of Mormon. His description of his brother’s story, as it stood in the summer of 1812, lacks the suspicious names and phrases of the 1833 testimony and is remarkably close to “Manuscript Story.”⁴¹

The Spalding Manuscript and the Argument for Israelite Origins

In their 1833 testimony, several former neighbors of Spalding’s claimed that the Conneaut story involved the lost tribes of Israel. According to John Spalding, his brother endeavored “to show that the American Indians are descendants of the Jews, or the lost tribes.”⁴² John’s wife, Martha, remembered that “he [Solomon] had for many years contended that the aborigines of America were descendants of some of the lost tribes of Israel, and this idea he carried out in the book in question.”⁴³ According to Henry Lake, “this book represented the American Indians as the descendants of the lost tribes.”⁴⁴ Aaron

cap paper (Crowdrey, Davis, and Vanick, *Who Really Wrote the Book of Mormon?* 90–92). The authors accept the preponderance of historical evidence that Hurlbut obtained only one manuscript written by Solomon Spalding and that this document was “Manuscript Story” (ibid., 59), yet they insist that the late recollections of Miller and McKee must be taken as definitive evidence for a second Spalding manuscript. The problem here is that Benjamin Winchester in another late recollection also described “Manuscript Story” as having been written on “foolscap,” which tends to undermine the authors’ argument. In light of the above, I argued that these late references to “foolscap” may simply reflect a broader usage of the term than the authors had considered (Roper, “Mythical ‘Manuscript Found,’” 28).

41. Roper, “Mythical ‘Manuscript Found,’” 84–86.

42. John Spalding statement, 1833, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 279.

43. Martha Spalding statement, 1833, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 280.

44. Henry Lake statement, September 1833, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 282.

Wright claimed that Spalding's manuscript was a history "of the lost tribes of Israel, purporting that they were the first settlers of America, and that the Indians were their descendants."⁴⁵ It has been assumed by advocates of the Spalding theory that "Manuscript Story" could not have been the document remembered by Spalding's neighbors because it contains a story of Roman sailors arriving in America rather than a story about the lost tribes of Israel. The Israelite story, as the argument goes, must have been a later and different version of the earlier tale that Spalding abandoned. However, a closer reading of "Manuscript Story" suggests that it does support the theory of Israelite origins—but implicitly rather than explicitly.

Spalding's work differed from that of other advocates of Israelite origins in that it was a work of fiction rather than a treatise like those of James Adair,⁴⁶ Elias Boudinot,⁴⁷ and Ethan Smith.⁴⁸ Spalding wrote much of his narrative from the imagined first-person perspective of the Roman castaway Fabius, who describes the characteristics, beliefs, and practices of pre-Columbian Americans and provides commentary and observations but never *explicitly* links them with Israel. Yet for the reader, these descriptions do evoke the arguments for an Israelite origin, even if they are not explicitly stated.⁴⁹

45. Aaron Wright statement, September 1833, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 284.

46. James Adair, *The History of the American Indians* (1775; repr., London: Edward and Charles Dilly, 1930).

47. Elias Boudinot, *A Star in the West; or, A Humble Attempt to Discover the Long Lost Tribes of Israel* (Trenton, NJ: Fenton, Hutchinson, and Dunham, 1816).

48. Ethan Smith, *A View of the Hebrews*, 2nd ed. (Poultney, VT: Smith and Shute, 1825).

49. One of the main commanders toward the end of Spalding's story bears the name Hanock. Hanock was the firstborn son of Reuben and the name of an important clan of that tribe, who were known for their military prowess previous to their captivity with the ten tribes by the Assyrians (1 Chronicles 5:3–6, 18–22, 25–26). Other commanders that might recall biblical names include Lamock (compare *Lamech* in Genesis 4:18–24; 1 Chronicles 1:3), Hamelick (compare with *Amalek* in Exodus 17:8), Sambal (compare *Sanballat* in Nehemiah 2:10), and Sabamah (compare *Sibmah* in Isaiah 16:8–9). One of the most destructive battles toward the end of Spalding's story is called the battle of Geheno, a name that suggests the Hebrew word *Gehenna*.

A Chosen People

Early advocates of Hebrew origins frequently cited evidence that Native Americans, like ancient Israel, viewed themselves as a chosen people.⁵⁰ In Spalding's story, Fabius and his fellow Romans witness an annual festival in which the chief of the Delewans expresses their belief that they are the "favorite children of the great and good Spirit."⁵¹

A Knowledge of Writing

In Spalding's fictional story, Lobaska, the mysterious visitor from the west, is credited with introducing significant elements of culture and civilization among the Native Americans, including the art of writing. Fabius discusses the origins of writing, believed to have originated in Egypt and Chaldea. He rejects the theory of independent invention and suggests that it is most probable that the knowledge of writing was "communicated from one nation to the other." He then describes the practice of writing among Native Americans.⁵² The implication is that the knowledge of writing that preserved and conveyed these teachings had been communicated to pre-Columbian Americans from a people who had once lived in Egypt or Mesopotamia. "In all their large towns and cities they have deposited under the care of a priest a sacred roll which contains the tenets of their theology and a description of their religious ceremonies. This order of men publish comments upon these sacred writings; they publish some tracts on moral philosophy and some containing a collection of proverbs and the wise sayings of their sages."⁵³ This description reminds one of the Hebrew scriptures, which were also carefully preserved and which recorded the religious practices, proverbs, and wisdom of ancient Israel.

Native American and Israelite Beliefs

Early writers who argued for an Israelite origin for Native Americans often focused on Indian beliefs that, in their view,

50. Adair, *History of the American Indians*, 34–36; Boudinot, *Star in the West*, 192–93; Smith, *View of the Hebrews*, 99.

51. MS, 23, in Jackson, 16.

52. MS, 51–52, in Jackson, 31–33.

53. MS, 53, in Jackson, 33.

compared favorably with those of ancient Israel. Typical in such comparisons were the ideas that (1) there is a supreme being or a Great Spirit who is the creator,⁵⁴ (2) there is a devil,⁵⁵ (3) there are angels or spirits,⁵⁶ (4) the soul is immortal,⁵⁷ and (5) there are rewards for good and evil in the afterlife.⁵⁸ Variations on each of these beliefs are also found in Spalding's description of the pre-Columbian beliefs of the fictional Kentucks and the Sciotans. A few examples follow. Regarding belief in a supreme creator, Fabius describes the theology of the Ohons, written in their sacred roll, as including belief in "an intelligent, omnipotent Being, who is self-existent and infinitely good and benevolent" and who is a creator and "presides over the universe and has a perfect knowledge of all things."⁵⁹ The lawgiver Lobaska, using familiar biblical language, teaches the people that they should view "all mankind as brothers and sisters," explaining, "You have all derived your existence from the Great Father of Spirits; you are his children and belong to his great family"⁶⁰ (see Hebrews 12:9; Numbers 16:22; 27:16). Concerning the devil, Spalding says his people believed in "another great, intelligent being who is self-existent and possessed of great power but not of omnipotence. He is filled with infinite malice against the good Being and exerts all his subtlety and power to ruin His works."⁶¹ As far as belief in angels or spirits goes, Spalding states that the Supreme Being "formed seven sons" who were "his principal agents to manage the affairs of his empire."⁶² The Jewish Apocrypha speaks of "seven holy angels, which present the prayers of the saints, and which go in and out before the glory of the Holy One" (Tobit 12:15). In Spalding's story the people believe that the supreme being "formed the bodies of men from matter. Into each body he infused a particle of his own spiritual

54. Smith, *View of the Hebrews*, 98–107.

55. Smith, *View of the Hebrews*, 99, 104, 139, 155.

56. Adair, *History of the American Indians*, 38; Smith, *View of the Hebrews*, 98–99, 106, 155.

57. Smith, *View of the Hebrews*, 101, 158.

58. Smith, *View of the Hebrews*, 103, 108, 164–65.

59. MS, 56, in Jackson, 35.

60. MS, 79, 81, in Jackson, 50–51.

61. MS, 56–57, in Jackson, 35, 37.

62. MS, 56, in Jackson, 35.

substance, in consequence of which man in his first formation was inclined to benevolence and goodness." Those who live righteously will, in the afterlife, be able to "pass through any part of the universe and are invisible to mortal eyes. Their place of residence is on a vast plain which is beautified with magnificent buildings, with trees, fruits, and flowers. No imagination can paint the delights, the felicity of the righteous." Those who live wickedly will be denied such privileges. "Their souls, naked and incapable of seeing light, dwell in darkness and are tormented with the keenest anguish. . . . Now, O man, attend to thy duty and thou shalt escape the portion of the wicked and enjoy the delights of the righteous."⁶³

Israelite Laws

Like those in the Bible (e.g., Ecclesiastes 12:13; Isaiah 57:1–2; Revelation 14:13), the people in Spalding's story were taught to keep the commandments and were promised that happiness would attend them in the afterlife if they did so. "Be attentive, O man, to the words of truth which have been recorded and pay respect to all the commandments which have been written for your observance."⁶⁴ They were not to kill, a crime that was punishable by death, as it was under the law of Moses⁶⁵ (Exodus 20:13; 21:12). They were not to commit adultery⁶⁶ (20:14) or to steal (v. 15). Like the ancient Israelites who were commanded "Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbor, neither rob him" (Leviticus 19:13), Spalding's ancient Americans were taught "Defraud not thy neighbor, nor suffer thy hands secretly to convey his property from him."⁶⁷ "The thief is compelled to make ample restitution"⁶⁸

63. MS, 56–58, in Jackson, 35, 37.

64. MS, 64–65, in Jackson, 40. "The good Being, looking upon his unhappy offspring with infinite love and compassion, made a decree that if mankind would reduce their passions and appetites under the government of reason he should enjoy blessings in this world and be completely happy after his soul quits his body" (MS, 57, in Jackson, 37).

65. "No crime is so horrid as maliciously to destroy the life of man" (MS, 58, in Jackson, 37). "Murder alone was punished with death" (MS, 99, in Jackson, 64).

66. "Preserve thy body from the contamination of lust and remember that the seduction of thy neighbor's wife would be a great crime" (MS, 58, in Jackson, 37).

67. MS, 58, in Jackson, 37.

68. MS, 99, in Jackson, 64.

(Leviticus 6:4–5). They were to honor father and mother⁶⁹ (Exodus 20:12); show kindness and respect to the stranger, the poor, and the aged;⁷⁰ and to treat their neighbor as they would treat themselves⁷¹ (Leviticus 19:18). Judges were not to accept bribes or be oppressive, but were to be concerned with the welfare of the people⁷² (Exodus 23:8; Leviticus 19:15). Like ancient Israel, they could pronounce blessings and curses⁷³ (Deuteronomy 28:2, 15). Polygamy was permitted, provided each wife was equally cared for⁷⁴ (Exodus 21:10). Humility was taught; idleness, envy, malice, and contention were discouraged; and pride was condemned.⁷⁵

Israelite Practices and Ceremonies

Early advocates for Israelite origins often compared what they observed of Native American festivals and religious practices with what they understood of similar Jewish practices in ancient Israel. These writers portrayed the former as corrupted versions of the latter: “The Indian system is derived from the moral, ceremonial, and judicial laws of the Hebrews, though now but a faint copy of the divine original.”⁷⁶ Spalding takes a similar approach in his novel. Fabius describes an annual harvest and atonement festival in September in which the Delewans sacrifice and burn two black dogs and then slaughter two white dogs, which the people then eat. The sacrifice of the dogs is considered a “solemn expiatory sacrifice,” during which the people pray for forgiveness of their sins. “The solemnities are ended and in their

69. “Treat with kindness and reverence thy parents. Forsake them not in old age, nor let their cheeks be furrowed with tears for the want of bread” (MS, 58, in Jackson, 38).

70. “Let the stranger find an hospitable resting place under thy roof. Give him to eat from thy portion, that when he departs he may bless thee and go on his way rejoicing” (MS, 60, in Jackson, 38).

71. “Hold out the hand of kindness and friendship to thy neighbor; consider him when reduced to indigence and distress. He is as dear to the great and good Being as what thou art. To afford him relief will be pleasing to thy Maker and an expression of thy gratitude” (MS, 59, in Jackson, 38).

72. “Let rulers consult the welfare of the people and not aggrandize themselves by oppression and base bribes” (MS, 59, in Jackson, 38).

73. MS, 97, in Jackson, 63.

74. MS, 58, in Jackson, 37.

75. MS, 59–60, 62, 100, in Jackson, 38–39, 65.

76. Adair, *History of the American Indians*, 227.

opinion their poor souls are completely whitewashed and every stain entirely effaced."⁷⁷ At other times the people are also to pray and give thanks to God⁷⁸ and to confess their sins and ask for forgiveness.⁷⁹ "Once in three months," they are commanded, "ye shall hold a great festival in every city and town and your priests shall sacrifice an elk as a token that your sins deserve punishment, but that the divine mercy has banished them into shades of forgetfulness."⁸⁰ Spalding's people observe a Sabbath day that takes place on the eighth day rather than the sixth as in ancient Israel. "It is ordained that on every eighth day ye lay aside all unnecessary labor; that ye meet in convenient numbers and form assemblies. That in each assembly a learned holy man shall preside, who shall lead your devotions and explain this sacred roll and give you such instruction as shall promote your happiness in this life and in the life to come."⁸¹ Such references in Spalding's story are clear references to Israelite practices.

Priesthood

As part of the religious order described in Spalding's story, Lobaska has his son appointed high priest, a hereditary office among the eldest sons in his family with four other priests as his assistants. These religious leaders were to advise the rulers and preside over all the other priests in the kingdom to see that they faithfully performed their office and responsibilities.⁸² The priesthood structure resembled

77. MS, 22–26, in Jackson, 16–18.

78. "He requires us to supplicate His favors and when received, to express our gratitude" (MS, 62, in Jackson, 39).

79. "As our passions and appetites often get the ascendance of reason, we are therefore bound to confess our faults and implore forgiveness" (MS, 62–63, in Jackson, 39). "Let your earnest prayers ascend for pardon & your transgressions will flee away" (MS, 24, in Jackson, 16).

80. MS, 63, in Jackson, 40.

81. MS, 63, in Jackson, 39–40.

82. "In order that the priests and instructors of learning may know and perform their duty for the benefit of civilization, morality, and religion, Lambon, the third son of Labaska, shall preside over them and shall have the title of High Priest. And the office shall be hereditary in the eldest males of his family successively. There shall be associated with him four priests as his assistants. They shall exercise a jurisdiction over all the priests of the empire and shall see that they faithfully perform the duties of their office. They shall attend to the instructors of learning and shall direct that a suitable number are

the hereditary Aaronic Priesthood among the Israelites in the wilderness. The Israelites initially had Aaron as their high priest, assisted by his four sons, who presided over the other priests and Levites (Numbers 3:2–3). As in ancient Israel, the priests in Spalding’s tale received support from the offerings of the people.⁸³

Prophets

Spalding’s story tells of Lobaska’s arrival from a far-off country in the west. Able to do miraculous things, this enigmatic leader is, like Moses, both a revelator and a lawgiver. It was “generally believed that he held conversation with celestial beings, and always acted under the influence of divine inspiration.”⁸⁴ The laws and teachings he gave to the people were reportedly

revealed to him in several interviews which he had been permitted to have with the second son of the great and good Being. The people did not long hesitate, but received as sacred and divine truth every word which he taught them. They forsook their old religion, which was a confused medley of idolatry and superstitious nonsense, and embraced a religion more sublime and consistent and more fraught with sentiments which would promote the happiness of mankind in this world.⁸⁵

Hundreds of years later there are false prophets among the people who use deceptive means to lead the people into war. One of these prophets uses a stone through which he falsely claims to see hidden things. The stone appears to be a negative version of the Urim and Thummim possessed by the high priest in ancient Israel.⁸⁶

provided throughout the empire. It shall likewise be their duty at all suitable times and places to instruct rulers and people in the duties of their respective stations” (MS, 87–88, in Jackson, 55–56).

83. “The people shall make contributions, in proportion to their wealth, for the support of their priests” (MS, 88, in Jackson, 56).

84. MS, 68, in Jackson, 45.

85. MS, 70–71, in Jackson, 46.

86. MS, 126, in Jackson, 89–90.

An Asiatic Crossing

In their 1833 statements, several of Spalding’s neighbors recalled a journey by land as well as by sea in Spalding’s manuscript. In 1878 Daniel Tyler related information he had gathered decades earlier from fellow Latter-day Saint convert and neighbor Erastus Rudd, who had known Spalding when he lived in Conneaut⁸⁷ and “in whose house much of the romance was formerly written.” Rudd informed Tyler that “a superannuated Presbyterian preacher, Solomon Spaulding by name, had written a romance on a few mounds at the above named village, pretending that the ten tribes crossed from the eastern hemisphere via Behring Straits to this continent, and that said mounds were built by a portion of them, to bury the dead after some hard fighting.”⁸⁸ In 1880 another former neighbor of Spalding’s, Abner Jackson, provided similar recollections from 1812.⁸⁹ Consistent with Tyler’s testimony, he recalled that the Spalding story depicts Israel’s lost tribes wandering up through Asia and crossing the Bering Strait.⁹⁰ This detail has led Spalding advocates to conclude that Spalding must have written more than one story while he lived in Conneaut.⁹¹ Yet a closer reading of “Manuscript Story” suggests that these later recollections are consistent with the document and do not require the existence of a second Conneaut story.

Reasoning that the world must be round, the fictional narrator of Spalding’s romance, shipwrecked in the Americas, concludes that it might be possible to travel far enough west to eventually reach his land of origin in Europe. “On what principle,” he asks, “can we account for

87. Rudd died during the Zion’s Camp journey in 1834.

88. Daniel Tyler, “The Spauldin[g] Story,” *Deseret Evening News*, 16 January 1878.

89. Abner Jackson statement, 20 December 1880, in “The Book of Mormon,” *Washington (PA) Daily Evening Reporter*, 7 January 1881. Jackson provided his statement after reading Matilda McKinstry’s recollections published earlier that year.

90. Abner Jackson statement, 20 December 1880. Benjamin Winchester spoke of another unnamed Jackson who refused to provide testimony to Hurlbut supporting the Spalding theory because “there was no agreement between them.” Benjamin Winchester, *The Origin of the Spalding Story, Concerning Manuscript Found; with a Short Biography of Dr. P. Hulbert* (Philadelphia: Brown, Bicking & Guilpert, 1840), 8–9. This again would be consistent with the evidence given above.

91. Cowdrey, Davis, and Vanick, *Who Really Wrote the Book of Mormon?* 77.

the emigration of the ancestors of those innumerable hords of human beings that possess this Continent? Their tradition tells them that they emigrated from the westward. From this I draw the conclusion that the sea, if any, which intervenes between the two Continants at the westward is not so extensive, but that it may be safely navigated.”⁹² Later, Spalding also tells the story of the lawgiver Lobaska, who introduced the art of writing, metallurgy, and other significant elements of civilization. This innovator is also said to have come from a country “at a great <distance> from the westward.”⁹³ The testimony of Tyler and Jackson, as well as the earlier 1833 testimony referencing a journey to the Americas by land, is explainable without recourse to a hypothetical second Conneaut story.

Morse as a Source

In 1880 Abner Jackson recalled, “A note in Morse’s Geography suggested it as a possibility that our Indians were descendants of the lost tribes of Israel. Said Morse, they might have wandered through Asia up to Behring’s Strait, and across the Strait to this continent.”⁹⁴ This apparent reference to Jedediah Morse offers additional evidence for the existence of only one Spalding manuscript. Although Morse did discuss the theory that Native Americans migrated from Asia across the Bering Strait to North America, contrary to Jackson’s recollection, Morse did not link this theory to the lost ten tribes of Israel. Morse wrote several popular geographical works, and Spalding was likely acquainted with at least one of them. Morse’s *The American Universal Geography* appeared in several popular American editions, including a third edition in 1796.⁹⁵ A similar work, *The History*

92. MS, 33, in Jackson, 22–23.

93. MS, 65, in Jackson, 41.

94. Abner Jackson statement, 20 December 1880.

95. Jedediah Morse, *The American Universal Geography, or, A View of the Present State of all the Empires, Kingdoms, States and Republics in the Known World, and of the United States of America in Particular*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Isaiah Thomas and Ebenezer T. Andrews, 1796).

of America, was also well known, with a third edition in 1798.⁹⁶ A comparison of *Universal Geography* and “Manuscript Story” suggests that Jackson was correct about Morse’s influence on Spalding’s tale. Confirmation of Jackson’s recollection on this point is shown in the comparisons below.

Morse’s Possible Influence on Spalding

Morse’s *Geography*

Spalding’s “Manuscript Story”

<p>In the interior parts of America various monuments of art have been found, which discover greater ingenuity in their construction, than the present generation of Indians appear to possess.—Two miles west of the Genessee river, in the State of New York, we have been informed, are the remains of an ancient Indian Fort. (p. 96)</p>	<p>Near the west Bank of the Coneaught River there are the remains of an ancient fort. As I was walking and forming vario[us] conjectures respecting the character situation & numbers of those people, who far exceeded the present race of Indians in works of art & ingenuity. (p. 1)</p>
<p>The earth is now universally considered a planet. . . . The number of planets in the solar system is seven. (p. 26)</p>	<p>Thus I reasoned respecting the solar system of which the earth is a part. (p. 30)</p>
<p>[According to the Ptolemaic system] the earth is immoveably fixed in the centre of the universe and all other bodies revolve around it. (p. 26)</p>	<p>Provided the earth is stationary, according to the present system of philosophy—then the sun, the moon & the planets, being at <an> immence distance & from the earth—must perform their revolutions. (p. 30)</p>

96. Jedidiah Morse, *The History of America, in Two Books* (Philadelphia: Thomas Dobson, 1798).

<p>With Ptolemy he supposed the earth to be at rest in the centre of the universe, and the sun, planets, and fixed stars to revolve about it. (p. 27)</p>	
<p>But though the fixed stars are placed at such immense distances from us. (p. 33)</p>	
<p>The true system of the world is generally denominated the Capernican or solar system. (p. 26)</p>	<p>Whereas, if according to the P<I>atonic <other> system, the earth is a globe—& the sun is stationary. (p. 30)</p>
<p>It supposes the sun to be in the centre of the system, and all the planets to move round him in the order already mentioned. (p. 28)</p>	
<p>The fundamental principles of geography are the spherical figure of the earth. (p. 34)</p>	<p>The earth therefore must be of a spherical form <a Globe>. (p. 33)</p>
<p>The globular figure of the earth. . . . A sphere literally signifies a ball or globe. (p. 37)</p>	<p>The earth is a globe. (p. 30)</p>
<p>Planets revolving with the rest about the sun as their common centre. (p. 26)</p>	<p>We behold the Sun suspended by omnipotence & all the planets moving round him as their common center. (p. 31)</p>
<p>It supposes the sun to be in the centre of the system, and all the planets to move round him in the order already mentioned. (p. 28)</p>	
<p>The astonishing harmony which prevails among the several parts prove it to have been the work of a divine hand; and that nothing less than infinite wisdom could have planned so beautiful a fabric. (p. 30)</p>	<p>Displaying the transcend<ant> wisdom of its almighty Architect—for in this, we behold the sun suspended by omnipotence & all the planets moving round him as their common center in exact [or]der & harmony. (p. 31)</p>

<p>It completes its revolution round the sun once in a year, and occasions the difference in the length of days and nights, and the agreeable variety in the seasons. (p. 36)</p>	<p>In this we can easily account for days & nights & the different seasons of the year. (p. 31)</p>
<p>The first inhabitants of America might pass there in vessels by sea, or travel by land or by ice. 1. They might either pass there in vessels designedly, if the distance by water were but small, or be carried upon it accidentally by favourable winds. 2. They might pass by land, on the supposition of the union of the continents. 3. They might also make that passage over the ice of some frozen arm of the sea. The ancestors of the nations which peopled <i>Anahuac</i> (now called New Spain) might pass . . . from the most eastern parts of Asia, to the most western parts of America. (p. 81)</p>	<p>Perhaps this is a part of the eastern Continent, or perhaps only a narrow strip of Ocean intervenes? (p. 32)</p> <p>From this I draw the conclusion—that the sea <if any> which intervenes between the two Continents at the westward is not so extensive, but that it may safely be navigated. (p. 33; note that Spalding, like Morse, expresses uncertainty about a land bridge)</p>
<p>This conclusion is founded on the constant and general tradition of those nations, which unanimously say, that their ancestors came into Anuhuac from the countries of the north and north west. (p. 81)</p>	<p>On what principle can we account for for the emigration of the ancestors of those innumerable hords of human beings that possess this Continent? Their tradition tells them that they emigrated from the westward. (p. 33)</p>

<p>“A tradition prevails among the Indians in general, that all Indians came from the west.” This is a confirmation of the opinion that this second class of Indians, of whom we have been speaking, and of which the Six Nations make a part, came over from the north east of Asia, to the north west coast of America, whence they migrated south towards Mexico, and eastward into the present territory of the United States. (p. 97)</p>	
<p>In a journey made by the Spaniards in 1606, from New Mexico unto the river which they call <i>Tizon</i>, 600 miles from the Province towards the north west, they found there some large edifices, and met with some Indians who spoke the Mexican language, and who told them, that a few days journey from that river, towards the north, was the kingdom of Tollan, and many other inhabited places, whence the Mexicans migrated. In fact, the whole people of <i>Anahuac</i> have usually affirmed, that towards the north, were the kingdoms of and provinces of Tollan, Aztlan, Copalla and several others. (p. 81)</p>	<p><We are also informed by some of the> natives, that at the distance of about fifteen days journey in <a> northwesterly course there is a great River which runs in a south westerly direction, they cannot tell how far—& that along the banks of this river there are great towns & mighty <kings> & a people who live in a state of civilization. (p. 33)</p>

<p>Judging of the ancient Indians from the traditionary accounts of them, and ruins we have been describing, we are led to conceive of them as more civilized, ingenious, and war-like people than their descendants at the present time. We are at a loss for the causes of their degeneracy. (p. 97)</p>	<p>Their customs manners, Laws, government & religion all demonstrate that they must have originated from some other nation & have but a very distant affinity with their savage neighbors. (p. 40)</p>
<p>Their religion, their government, their laws and their customs, . . . their ancient government, their laws, and their arts evidently demonstrate that they suffered no want of genius. (p. 88)</p>	
<p>As to the second class of American Indians, who formerly inhabited, and who yet inhabit Mexico and the country south of the lakes and west of the Mississippi, and who came over, as we have supposed, from the north east parts of Asia; they seem, from whatever cause, to be advanced somewhat higher, in the scale of human beings, than the South Americans, if we except the Peruvians. (p. 88)</p>	

In sum, the fact that (1) Jackson remembered only one manuscript, one that he called “Manuscript Found” and dated to about 1812; (2) most of the other elements he mentioned find echoes in “Manuscript Story”; and (3) “Manuscript Story” shows evidence of Morse’s influence all favor the conclusion that there was only one Spalding manuscript of any significance previous to Spalding’s departure from Conneaut in 1812.

That Old Biblical Style

In support of the claim that “Manuscript Found” was a later version of Spalding’s story distinct from “Manuscript Story,” Spalding advocates point to testimony from Spalding’s former neighbors in Conneaut that the manuscript, as they remembered it, was written in an ancient or biblical style. In 1833 Artemus Cunningham described the manuscript he saw in late 1811 as one in which Spalding “had adopted the ancient, or scripture style of writing.”⁹⁷ Similarly, John and Martha Spalding described the manuscript they saw in 1812 as being written in “the old style” or “the old obsolete style.” John and Martha Spalding and Henry Lake claimed that Spalding made frequent use of the phrase “it came to pass.” In describing “Manuscript Story” in 1834, E. D. Howe claimed it was “written in a modern style.” According to Howe, when it was shown to several of those who had provided testimony to Hurlbut, they admitted that the manuscript was Spalding’s but now claimed it was merely an early draft and that in the later Conneaut version Spalding had written “in the old scripture style, in order that it might appear more ancient.”⁹⁸

Historians should be suspicious of Howe’s self-interested assessment of Spalding’s writing style since it was merely asserted and not demonstrated. With his disappointment upon finding “Manuscript Story” only to learn that it could not be the source for the Book of Mormon, Howe needed there to be a second version. Howe’s quick dismissal of “Manuscript Story,” his failure to publish it or otherwise make it available for examination, and his subsequent suppression of the only Spalding narrative on ancient America ever proved to have existed should invite caution in accepting his inadequate description of the document.

Other Spalding neighbors provided a more conservative description. They recalled that Spalding wrote in an “old” style, but they did not remember any specific phrases such as “it came to pass.” In 1839 Spalding’s widow recalled that he had given his story “an air of antiq-

97. Artemus Cunningham statement, 1833, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 286.

98. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 288.

uity” by writing “in *the most ancient style*, and as the *Old Testament* is the most ancient book in the world, he imitated its style as nearly as possible.” Her husband’s story, she affirmed, was simply “an historical romance, with the addition of *a few pious expressions and extracts from the sacred Scriptures.*”⁹⁹ Having read “only a few pages,” Robert Patterson Sr. (to whom Spalding submitted his manuscript for publication in Pittsburgh) described the manuscript as “a singular work, chiefly in the *style of our English translation of the Bible.*”¹⁰⁰ Consistent with Matilda Spalding Davison’s statement, Josiah Spalding, who examined the manuscript in mid-1812, said the story “would agree in sentiment and *style* with *very ancient writings.*”¹⁰¹ Josiah’s description, however, is consistent with the contents of “Manuscript Story” and suggests that, in their later descriptions of Spalding’s manuscript, some of these witnesses exaggerated the so-called biblical style, which may have been much less pervasive than Spalding advocates would later claim.

One must, of course, ask what Spalding’s neighbors meant by an ancient, obsolete, or scriptural style. For some nineteenth-century readers, such descriptions could conceivably refer to any writing with an air of antiquity. Do they refer to biblical quotations or to formal, antiquated words and phrases like those in the King James translation?¹⁰² Spalding did use antiquated words and phrases in “Manuscript Story,” though not consistently, and he quoted or paraphrased biblical passages. While this evidence seems to amount to less than the statements of John and Martha Spalding and Henry Lake would suggest, it fits well with Matilda Spalding’s description of a fictional romance “with the addition of a few pious expressions and extracts from the sacred Scriptures.”

99. Matilda Spalding Davison statement, 1839, emphasis added.

100. Robert Patterson statement, 1842.

101. Josiah Spalding statement, 1855.

102. “Manuscript Story” includes the words *ye, thy, thou, hath, hath prepared, he who hath, let, and let not* and such formalized phrases as *forsake not, break forth, say not, thou art, thy maker, suffer not, hark ye, hail ye, partake, partake not, attend O friends, be attentive O man, and Now O man attend to thy duty.*

Biblical Language in “Manuscript Story”

Bible (King James Version)	“Manuscript Story”
But there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding. (Job 32:8)	A voice from on high hath penetrated my soul & the inspiration of the Almighty hath bid me proclaim. (p. 9)
Have mercy upon me, O God , according to thy lovingkindness : according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies . (Psalm 51:1)	They extoled the loving-kindness & tender mercies of their God . (p. 9)
Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies . (Psalm 103:4)	
But Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked . (Deuteronomy 32:15)	She sunk after him his heels kicked against the wind like Jeshuran waked fat . (p. 28)
Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears , that I might weep day and night. (Jeremiah 9:1)	O that my head were waters & my eyes a fountain of tears . (p. 30)
That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation , who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast. (Hebrews 6:18–19)	She brings in her train Hope —that celestial Godes, that sure & strong anchor —that dispencer of comfort & pleasing anticipation . (p. 30)
The Lord shall roar from on high , and utter his voice . (Jeremiah 25:30)	A voice from on high . (p. 9)
Woe unto the wicked! it shall be ill with him. (Isaiah 3:11)	But wo unto you wicked . (p. 23)

<p>This is <i>the portion of a wicked</i> man from God, and the heritage appointed unto him by God. (Job 20:29; also 27:13; 11:20; Psalm 141:10)</p>	<p>Thou shalt escape <i>the portion of the wicked</i>. (p. 58)</p>
<p><i>Pardon my transgression</i>. (Job 7:21)</p>	<p><i>Pardon</i> & your <i>transgressions</i>. (p. 24)</p>
<p><i>Gall and wormwood</i>. (Deuteronomy 29:18; Jeremiah 9:15; 23:15; Lamentations 3:19)</p>	<p><i>Gawl & wormwood</i>. (p. 24)</p>
<p>Thine own friend, and thy father’s friend, forsake not. (Proverbs 27:10)</p>	<p>Be grateful for all favours & forsake not thy friend in adversity. (p. 58)</p>
<p>Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth. (Psalm 71:9)</p>	<p>Forsake them not in old age. (p. 58)</p>
<p>Be ye not unequally <i>yoked together</i>. (2 Corinthians 6:14)</p>	<p>Being <i>yoked together</i> the husband & wife ought to draw in the same direction. (p. 59)</p>
<p>Charity vaunteth not itself, is <i>not puffed up</i>. (1 Corinthians 13:4)</p>	<p>Pride was <i>not</i> bloated & <i>puffed up</i>. (p. 100)</p>
<p>Shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? (Hebrews 12:9)</p>	<p>You have all derived your existence from the great father of Spirits—you are his children & belong to his great family. (p. 79)</p>
<p>For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named. (Ephesians 3:14–15)</p>	
<p>When all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse. (Deuteronomy 30:1)</p>	<p>Blessings will attend you, if ye fulfill—but Curses, if ye transgress. (p. 97)</p>

All these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God. (Deuteronomy 28:2)	
If thou wilt not hearken . . . all these curses shall come upon thee. (Deuteronomy 28:15)	

Confusion and Contradiction in Later Conneaut Testimony

John Spalding, who provided a statement to Hurlbut in 1833, provided another description of his brother's Conneaut tale in 1851:

The American continent was colonized by Lehi, the son of Japheth, who sailed from Chaldea soon after the great dispersion, and landed near the isthmus of Darien. Lehi's descendants, who were styled Jaredites, spread gradually to the north, bearing with them the remains of antediluvian science, and building those cities the ruins of which we see in Central America, and the fortifications which are scattered along the Cordilleras.

Long after this, Nephi, of the tribe of Joseph, emigrated to America with a large portion of the ten tribes whom Shalmanezar led away from Palestine, and scattered among the Midian cities. This remnant of Joseph was soon after its arrival divided into two nations, the Nephites and the Lamanites. These nations made war constantly against each other, and in the year A. D. 420, a great battle was fought in western New-York, which terminated in the destruction of the armies of both the belligerent parties, and the annihilation of their power. One man only was left; Moroni, the son of Mormon, who hid the records of the Nephites near Conneaut, Ohio, previously at his death.¹⁰³

103. "The Yankee Mahomet," *American Whig Review* 7 (1851): 554. Several of Spalding's former neighbors indicated that the lost tribes in Spalding's story departed

Spalding theory proponents sometimes take this statement as evidence for another Spalding manuscript that was closer to the Book of Mormon narrative. There are, however, problems with this argument. First, in 1833 John Spalding placed his recollection of the manuscript to a time shortly before his brother’s departure from Ohio in 1812. This was about the same time that Josiah Spalding visited Conneaut in an attempt to help resolve some of the Spalding family’s financial difficulties caused by the outbreak of the War of 1812. Like Spalding’s widow and daughter and Abner Jackson, Josiah knew of only one manuscript—the one they all called “Manuscript Found”—yet Josiah’s description of the manuscript he saw in the summer of 1812 matches very well the contents of “Manuscript Story.” In neither his 1833 statements nor his later one in 1851 does John Spalding give any indication that Solomon Spalding had written more than one story, and in both 1833 and 1851 he calls the story “Manuscript Found.”

Second, John Spalding’s 1851 statement contradicts his earlier one. In his 1833 statement Lehi and Nephi are said to have been leaders of the lost tribes during their journey to America. Spalding’s manuscript “gave a detailed account of their journey from Jerusalem, by land and sea, till they arrived in America, under the command of Nephi and Lehi.” Nephi and Lehi, according to Martha Spalding’s 1833 statement, “were officers of the company which first came off from Jerusalem.” Thus the 1833 testimony asserts that Spalding’s manuscript mentions only one pre-Columbian migration from Jerusalem to the Americas. In his 1851 statement, however, John recalls two different migrations separated by millennia. “The American continent was colonized by Lehi, the son of Japheth, who sailed from Chaldea soon after the great dispersion.” How this can be reconciled with his earlier statement and that of his wife in which Nephi and Lehi are said to have been Israelites leaving Jerusalem at the same time is not explained. John Spalding’s 1833 statement, which recalls a manuscript from late 1812,

from Jerusalem. But even when they lived in the land of Israel before their captivity, the ten tribes never lived in Jerusalem. If one assumes that they left Jerusalem after their captivity, it makes even less sense since that would have needlessly taken them from Medea or Mesopotamia back through the lands they had lived in.

says that the Nephites and Lamanites in Spalding's manuscript were responsible for the relics and antiquities evidencing pre-Columbian civilization. In 1851 John attributed the artifactual remains not to Nephi's group but to the earlier group from the time of the dispersion, a group he associates with the Book of Mormon Jaredites. In 1851 John Spalding said that the group led by "Lehi son of Japheth" arrived in America and "spread gradually to the north, bearing with them the remains of the ante-deluvian science, and building those cities the ruins of which we see in Central America, in the fortifications which are scattered along the Cordilleras." Contrarily, in 1833 John Spalding and other witnesses said that Spalding's manuscript attributed the remains of pre-Columbian civilization to the Nephites and Lamanites.

Further, in 1833 John and Martha Spalding and other former neighbors stated that the purpose of Solomon Spalding's book was to show that the Indians were descendants of the lost tribes of Israel. However, according to John's 1851 statement, Lehi's group could not have been Israelite since reference to the dispersion dates the group to a period far earlier than Lehi's time. Moreover, the group is not destroyed, while everyone involved in the later migration *is* Israelite and is annihilated in battle except for the survivor, Moroni. If John Spalding's 1851 testimony is accurate, how can the Indians be said to be descendants of the lost tribes of Israel? Spalding die-hards attempt to reconcile such difficulties by positing further hypothetical manuscripts, but for all of his creativity, John Spalding, in two separate statements, mentions only one.

Influence of the Classics

In 1839 Solomon Spalding's widow remembered that her late husband "was enabled from his acquaintance with the classics and ancient history, to introduce many singular names, which were particularly noted by the people and could be easily recognized by them."¹⁰⁴ This description is consistent with "Manuscript Found," which contains

104. Matilda Spalding Davison statement, 1839.

many unique names—including some of a classical variety such as Fabius, Constantine, Lucian, Crito, and Trojanus—and makes reference to various matters of ancient history.

Similar Names and the Contamination of Memory

Spalding’s Conneaut story does have many unusual names, but the claims of former Conneaut neighbors that the Book of Mormon is full of names borrowed from Spalding have always seemed questionable.¹⁰⁵ Those who claimed similarity between Book of Mormon names and those remembered from Spalding’s manuscript could recall only a handful of names and tended to remember the same ones. Out of a potential 240 Book of Mormon personal names or place-names, the combined memories of eight of Spalding’s former neighbors recalled only seven (*Nephi, Lehi, Nephites, Lamanites, Laban, Moroni, Zarahemla*). If these recollections were at all accurate, why were only these few names remembered? Could the names *Nephi, Nephites*, and *Lamanites* have been suggested by the interviewer? It is possible, however, that after twenty years or more, some of Spalding’s former neighbors may have confused the name *Lamesa* in “Manuscript Story” with Book of Mormon names like *Laman, Lamanite*, or *Lamoni*. *Moonrod* might have suggested the name *Moroni*, a name John N. Miller claimed to remember. *Hamelick* might have been confused with *Amlici, Amalek*, or *Amalickiah*. Henry Lake may have confused *Labanco* with *Laban*.¹⁰⁶ “It would not be surprising,” wrote George Gibson in 1886, “if the shadowy resemblance of a few names . . . should after this long lapse of time persuade them that one was based upon the other.”¹⁰⁷

I suspect that, in addition to the suggestion of these names, Hurlbut’s influence on the 1833 Conneaut testimony can also be seen in the selection of who was interviewed. After initially interviewing and questioning the witnesses, Hurlbut seems to have imposed his own language and structure into the testimony, possibly drafting the

105. Roper, “Mythical ‘Manuscript Found,’” 81–84.

106. Roper, “Mythical ‘Manuscript Found,’” 37.

107. George Gibson, “The Origin of a Great Delusion,” *New Princeton Review* 61/5 (September 1886): 214–15.

statements himself before having the witnesses sign them. While this does not necessarily mean that Hurlbut deliberately tried to mislead those he interviewed, it arouses suspicion as to the accuracy of the details that really matter in the Spalding theory, such as the recollection of names, phrases such as “it came to pass,” and specifics of the story that are compared with the Book of Mormon. Advocates of the Spalding theory argue that false accretions on these recollections of earlier events are unlikely to have occurred without the knowledge of the witnesses. How could they have confused the Book of Mormon narrative with Spalding’s story if they were not the same? If Hurlbut or later interviewers had misrepresented the testimony intentionally or even unintentionally, would not the witnesses have said so?

Research by psychologists has shown how memories are often distorted in various ways. One form of memory distortion occurs when people confuse or conflate separate activities and events that have similarities but actually occurred at different times. “An event that occurs after (or before) some event of interest may later be retrieved as if it were an event of interest. . . . This can occur through leading questions or misleading statements in interviews” that can distort the accurate retrieval of the memory. “People sometimes remember events as having occurred in one situation when they actually occurred in another context.”¹⁰⁸ According to Elizabeth Loftus, “When people experience some actual event—say a crime or an accident—they often later acquire new information about the event. This new information can contaminate the memory. This can happen when the person talks with other people, is exposed to media coverage about the event, or is asked leading questions.”¹⁰⁹ Since Spalding’s “Manuscript Story” and the Book of Mormon share very general similarities, it would not be surprising if the witnesses conflated their twenty-year-old recollections of the Spalding tale with more recent and contemporary ideas about Mormonism and the Book of Mormon.

108. Henry L. Roediger and Kathleen B. McDermott, “Distortions of Memory,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Memory*, ed. Endel Tulving and Fergus I. M. Craik (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 153–54.

109. Elizabeth F. Loftus, “Memory Faults and Fixes,” *Issues in Science and Technology* (Summer 2002): 43.

Although Spalding advocates argue that the witnesses would have recognized and then corrected such distortions, studies suggest that this is often not the case. Even a well-meaning but zealous interviewer, convinced of the correctness of his theory, may unintentionally influence and even contaminate details remembered by a subject or witness by simply phrasing the questions of the interview in a leading way, without the subject of the interview realizing that such distortion has occurred.

A 14-year-old boy was instructed to recall details over 5 days regarding four events involving his mother and older brother, of which one was false (as verified by his family). The fictitious event involved the boy having been lost in a particular shopping mall when he was 5 years old and being rescued by an elderly man. *Over time, even though given an option to state that he could not remember, the boy began to recall more and more details about the fictitious event in his writings. In a subsequent interview, he rated the false event as more likely to have occurred than all but one of the true events and was unable to identify which event was the false one. During debriefing, he was reluctant to believe the truth.*

Using a similar methodology, Loftus and Pickrell (1995) gave undergraduate students a mix of true and false events and asked them to recall details over several days. They found that 6 out of 24 participants erroneously believed part or all of the false event.¹¹⁰

These and other studies indicate that "suggestion can lead to rich false memories"; moreover, "just because a memory report is expressed with confidence, detail, and emotion does not necessarily mean the underlying event actually happened."¹¹¹ Memory research

110. Amy Tsai, Elizabeth Loftus, and Danielle Polage, "Current Directions in False-Memory Research," in *False-Memory Creation in Children and Adults: Theory, Research, and Implications*, ed. David F. Bjorklund (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2000), 33, emphasis added.

111. Elizabeth Loftus, "Make-Believe Memories," *American Psychologist* 58/11 (2003): 871.

also indicates that “repeated, suggestive conversation by authoritative and credible figures can lead to the creation of memories for false events.”¹¹² Brainerd and Reyna note that “eyewitnesses may be prone to rely on external supports to enrich their fragmentary memories. Of particular concern, leading questions and suggestive statements may cause eyewitnesses to add suggested details to their memories that cohere with the gist of their experience, including details that are false and could result in the prosecution of innocent defendants.”¹¹³ Hence the danger of sincere but false accusation based on distorted memories. “The most effective situation for the creation of a false memory appears to be one in which the person is given a reason to believe the event happened (because a relative backs up the story or because a therapist says it must have happened) and is then pressured over multiple sessions to believe the memory. . . . However, milder forms of pressure, such as the act of imagining the false event, can sway assessments of the likelihood of the event; repetitive sessions can be done by self-report diaries or by a third party; and in the absence of repetitive sessions, a single strong authoritative source can be sufficient to create belief in false events.”¹¹⁴ Memory studies often focus on recollections of recent events; however, “long delays since the event, many suggestions occurring during the interval, repeated recounting of the event (often with tacit demands to go beyond what the person remembers and to guess)” can exacerbate the distortion.¹¹⁵

In light of such findings, it is illuminating to examine the testimony of Spalding’s daughter, Matilda McKinstry, who in later years claimed that the Book of Mormon was largely based on Spalding’s tale. Speaking of the events leading to her mother’s 1839 statement and to her own subsequent involvement in the controversy,

112. Tsai, Loftus, and Polage, “False-Memory Research,” 35.

113. C. J. Brainerd and V. F. Reyna, *The Science of False Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 34.

114. Tsai, Loftus, and Polage, “False-Memory Research,” 43.

115. Roediger and McDermott, “Distortions of Memory,” 158. The earliest recollections of Spalding’s manuscript were gathered more than twenty years after the fact. Other testimony is much later. This does not necessarily mean that late testimony is always wrong or unreliable, but it does suggest the need for caution and independent corroboration whenever possible.

McKinstry explained, “We *heard*, not long after she came to live with me, . . . something of Mormonism, and *the report* that it had been taken from my father’s ‘Manuscript Found’; and *then came to us direct an account* of the Mormon meeting at Conneaut, Ohio.” After this, “there was *a great deal of talk* and *a great deal published* at this time about Mormonism all over the country.” After these initial reports,

Hurlburt came to my house at Monson to see my mother, who told us that he had been sent by a committee to procure the “Manuscript Found,” written by the Reverend Solomon Spaulding, so as to compare it with the Mormon Bible. He presented a letter to my mother from my uncle, William H. Sabine, of Onondaga Valley, in which he requested her to loan this manuscript to Hurlburt, as he (my uncle) was desirous “to uproot” (as he expressed it) “this Mormon fraud.” Hurlburt represented that he had been a convert to Mormonism, but had given it up, and through the “Manuscript Found” wished to expose its wickedness. . . . She did not like his appearance and mistrusted his motives; *but having great respect for her brother’s wishes and opinions, she reluctantly consented to his request.*

Several things are obvious from McKinstry’s testimony. First, she and her mother had already, previous to Hurlbut’s visit, heard several rumors and reports of the Spalding theory and its possible relation to Mormonism. Second, it is also clear that the widow and her daughter experienced a certain degree of pressure to support Hurlbut’s endeavor, even though it went against the widow’s personal inclination—pressure, which memory studies suggest can lead to distortion.

While *we had no personal knowledge* that the Mormon Bible was taken from the “Manuscript Found,” there were many evidences to us that it was, and that *Hurlbut and others at the time thought so. A convincing proof to us of this belief was that my uncle, William H. Sabine, had undoubtedly read the manuscript while it was in his house, and his faith that its production*

*would show to the world that the Mormon Bible had been taken from it, or was the same with slight alterations.*¹¹⁶

Here we have a situation that seems ripe for memory distortion. Not only were there early rumors and speculation and discussion about the subject, “Doctor” Hurlbut had been sent by a special “committee” to find out the truth and *uncles* John Spalding and William Sabine apparently thought there was a connection.

These influences seem to have been a factor not only in allowing Hurlbut to borrow the manuscript but also in influencing McKinstry’s recollections of the story. In her 1880 testimony, McKinstry claimed that she remembered several names from Spalding’s manuscript: “Some of the names that he mentioned while reading to these people I have never forgotten. They are as fresh to me to-day as though I heard them yesterday. They were ‘Mormon,’ ‘Maroni,’ ‘Lamenite,’ ‘Nephi.’”¹¹⁷ In an 1882 interview, Edmund Kelly interviewed McKinstry and asked her, “When did you first think about the names in the Book of Mormon and the manuscript agreeing?” To this she responded: “My attention was first called to it by some parties who asked me if I did not remember it, and then I remembered that they were.”¹¹⁸ While there is no doubt that McKinstry remembered something of her father’s old story, it seems likely that, under the circumstances, the Book of Mormon names were supplied in the questions asked by the interviewer.

The Book of Mormon and the success of early proponents of its message in northwestern Pennsylvania in the early 1830s was a puzzle and a challenge to that community—in their view a scandal and a mystery that demanded an explanation. It seems likely that, previous to Hurlbut’s activities in the neighborhood, some of Spalding’s former friends began to associate the Book of Mormon with what they

116. Matilda Spalding McKinstry statement, 3 April 1880, 616, emphasis added.

117. Matilda Spalding McKinstry statement, 3 April 1880, 615.

118. E. L. Kelly interview with Matilda McKinstry, 4 April 1882, in *Public Discussion of the Issues between the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and the Church of Christ [Disciples] held in Kirtland, Ohio . . .* (Lamoni, IA: Herald Publishing House, 1913), 82, emphasis added.

remembered of the Spalding tale more than twenty years before.¹¹⁹ Both stories spoke of an ancient migration to the Americas from the Old World, Indian origins, the development of a pre-Columbian culture, and warfare between rival factions. Such broad similarities would be enough for the uncritical investigator to consider a link between the two. Once they had begun to associate the Book of Mormon with Spalding’s story, it would be easy to imagine that the names in both stories were the same.

One measure of a good explanation is how much it explains. The foregoing discussion suggests that the theory of a second Spalding story that differed substantially from “Manuscript Story” offers very little as an explanation of the Book of Mormon narrative. When we examine the collective testimony of Solomon Spalding’s former Conneaut neighbors and acquaintances, we are left with little in those recollections that supports a hypothetical second Spalding story, even if we were to accept the dubious post hoc claims of those who first proffered that theory. As the accompanying chart suggests, with the exception of a few questionable names and phrases, there is very little that was “remembered” by Conneaut residents that cannot be accounted for in the document known today as “Manuscript Story.”

Elements in Conneaut Testimony (1833–1880) Found in “Manuscript Story”

Elements Remembered by Neighbors	Elements in “Manuscript Story”
A manuscript found	Yes
A manuscript found in a mound or cave	Yes
A fictional history	Yes
Mound-Builders	Yes

119. Not all of Spalding’s former neighbors believed that there was a relationship between Spalding’s yarn and the Book of Mormon. See Roper, “Mythical ‘Manuscript Found,’” 73–77.

First settlers or settlement of America	Yes
Officers	Yes
Journey by land	Yes
Journey by sea	Yes
Reflections on sufferings	Yes
Philosophical discussion	Yes
Astronomy	Yes
Morse's influence	Yes
Indian migrants from Old World	Yes
Departure from Jerusalem	No
Humorous passages	Yes
Crossing of Bering Strait from Asia	Yes
Influence of classics	Yes
Interesting names	Yes
Pious expressions	Yes
Arts, sciences, laws, civilization	Yes
Manners and customs	Yes
Advanced culture	Yes
Forts	Yes
Warlike people	Yes
Large people	Yes
Priests, teachers, education	Yes
Cultivation of land	Yes
Two main groups	Yes
Contention between groups	Yes
Terrible wars	Yes
Many people slain	Yes
Extermination	Yes
Dead buried in mounds	Yes
Similar names	Lamesa = Laman, Lamanite Moonrod = Moroni Labanko = Laban Hamelick = Amlici, Amalickiah, Amalek, etc.
Lost tribes of Israel	Implicit

Personal Names:	
Nephi	No
Lehi	No
Laban	No
Mormon	No
Moroni or Maroni	No
Group Names:	
Nephites	No
Lamanites	No
Jaredites	No
Place-Names:	
Jerusalem	No
Zarahemla	No
"It came to pass"	No
Title of Story: "Manuscript' Found"	No
Old, ancient, or biblical writing style	Some

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.

BOOK NOTES

Mark A. Noll and Carolyn Nystrom. *Is the Reformation Over? An Evangelical Assessment of Contemporary Roman Catholicism*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008. 272 pp., with annotated bibliography of further reading and index. \$21.99 (paperback).

Mark Noll, a prominent historian, and Carolyn Nystrom, a journalist, describe both the past quarrels and recent shifts in evangelical-Catholic relations, with attention to the dreary past where Protestants have a sordid history of hostility toward Roman Catholicism. They begin with an account of the post-Reformation antagonism between the two communities and then describe the changes in Catholicism since the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), as well as formal and informal negotiations between Catholics and Protestants. The negotiations discussed by Noll and Nystrom include official Roman Catholic dialogues with Disciples of Christ (pp. 76, 81–82), Anglicans (pp. 77–78), Methodists (pp. 78–79), Pentecostals (p. 80), Reformed (p. 80), Lutherans (p. 81), evangelicals (p. 82), and Baptists (p. 83). The authors offer a rather positive assessment of the results of these efforts to see what could be agreed upon, with the ultimate goal being unity (see pp. 83–114).

Noll and Nystrom focus on the negotiations leading to publication of four joint public statements (see pp. 153–78) generated by a group known as Evangelicals and Catholics Together (ECT). They examine these statements in detail, as well as the mixed reaction of evangelicals to these endeavors. ECT appears to have begun as a response by Protestants and Catholics who shared a political ideology, but it soon morphed beyond that initial impulse. The ECT negotiations rest on and manifest significant changes in the relations of Protestants and

Catholics. In the 1950s Catholics were told not to attend Billy Graham's meetings, and Graham despised Catholics. But by the 1980s Catholics were participating in Graham's "crusades" and Graham had shifted radically away from his earlier stance toward Catholics. Much has changed since Vatican II. There has been, as Noll and Nystrom demonstrate, at least a modest reconciliation, though there are still serious differences. Noll and Nystrom's book is a fine source of information on the recent history of evangelical-Catholic relations, especially on how things have changed at the level of cultural elites since Vatican II. Latter-day Saints can learn much about sophisticated Protestant and Roman Catholic theological wrangling from this volume.

Has there really been a rapprochement? Is unity possible, especially given the anarchy that is Protestantism? On the crucial question of justification by faith alone, Noll and Nystrom aver that "Catholics and evangelicals now believe approximately the same thing" (p. 232). Much equivocation is hidden in the word *approximately* since Catholics still insist that sanctification and justification are a long process of rebirth and extend even beyond the grave, given that purgatory is still believed to often be necessary to complete the process. What Noll and Nystrom seem to mean is that churchmen and theologians have been able to issue cautious, diplomatic statements on this issue. Does this appearance of agreement signal the end of the Reformation? In coming to a series of very tentative conclusions, Noll and Nystrom do not entirely slight the profound differences that remain but tend to either downplay or ignore their significance.

The joint statements produced by ECT, which are described in some detail, have yielded a spectrum of responses ranging from full acceptance to outright rejection. Noll and Nystrom mention the negative responses to ECT by the bizarre Jack Chick (pp. 73–74, 187), but they neglect to mention such belligerent anti-Catholics as "Dr." James White and Dave Hunt, who make a living blasting away at Roman Catholics. Noll and Nystrom also call attention to the prominent evangelicals who have "gone home to Rome" (p. 200). These include Thomas Howard (pp. 200–201), Dennis Martin (pp. 201–2), Peter Kreeft (pp. 202–3), and Kimberly Hahn (pp. 203–5), but Francis

Beckwith could be added to the list. Noll and Nystrom also recognize that Calvin and Luther were fond of some Roman Catholic theologians (pp. 50–55), “above all, Augustine” (p. 51, compare pp. 195, 232). They stress the common ground shared by Catholics and Protestants.

The Roman Catholic Church after Vatican II “articulates positions on salvation—even on justification by faith—that are closer to the main teachings of the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation than are the beliefs of many Protestants, indeed, of many evangelical Protestants. Strange as it may seem to put it this way, the ECT documents present what can only be called a classically orthodox depiction of Christian salvation, primarily because they emphasize and build upon these official Catholic teachings” (p. 180). Noll and Nystrom argue that since there is no longer an essential difference between evangelicals and Catholics on this key issue, “if it is true, as was repeated frequently by Protestants conscious of their anchorage in Martin Luther or John Calvin, that *iustificatio articulus stantis vel cadentis ecclesiae* (justification is the article on which the church stands or falls), then the Reformation is over” (p. 232). But this opinion seems flawed. One reason is that the carefully crafted diplomatic language of statements arising from exchanges between evangelicals and Roman Catholics both obscures real differences and does not and cannot speak for the anarchy that is Protestantism—certainly not for those who worship on Sundays.

In addition, Noll and Nystrom ignore N. T. Wright’s views on justification. Wright has impeccable evangelical credentials. He argues that the apostle Paul did not teach what Augustine, Luther, and Calvin claim, namely, that justification is the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to sinners when they confess Jesus. Noll and Nystrom assume that evangelicals are right in their understanding of justification and that Catholics have been inching toward an essentially Protestant understanding. Whatever the seeming similarities, as set out in the language of ECT, some profound differences remain. Noll and Nystrom point out that serious disagreements remain over questions of the church, and hence the papacy and magisterium (for example, the role of Mary in the divine economy, the sacraments, and

mandatory celibacy for priests). These are all church-related issues. According to Noll and Nystrom, “the central difference that continues to separate evangelicals and Catholics is not Scripture, justification by faith, the pope, Mary, the sacraments, or clerical celibacy—though the central difference is reflected in differences on these matters—but the nature of the church” (p. 237).

Catholics believe that Jesus established a visible, institutionalized extension of his own ministry and committed to it some of his power and prerogatives, including the forgiveness of sins and the consecration of the host in the mass, while Protestants tend to believe that the church has no such prerogatives. Instead, the church, for evangelicals, tends to be seen as consisting of those who are already justified by an alien “imputed righteousness” at the moment of conversion. Thus the church is only a fellowship of those who claim to have been justified in their sinful state, and not the fellowship of saints understood as those called out of the world by a covenant with God.

Noll and Nystrom include a useful guide to further reading from both Protestant and Catholic assessments of the various competing positions. This is a fine addition to the book. They describe, for example, Norman L. Geisler and Ralph E. McKenzie’s *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals* (1995) as “an especially solid and fair reading of modern Catholic theology, which takes into account developments since the Second Vatican Council” (p. 256).

Louis Midgley

John L. Sorenson and Carl L. Johannessen. *World Trade and Biological Exchanges before 1492.* New York and Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2009. viii + 593 pp. \$39.95 (hardcover), \$29.95 (paperback).

In this substantial book, emeritus BYU professor of anthropology and prominent Book of Mormon scholar John L. Sorenson teams up with an emeritus professor of biogeography at the University of Oregon to argue that the pre-Columbian “New World” was far from isolated and that, in fact, maritime trade between the Americas and the “Old World” was continuous from a very early period. Ancient sailors transported plants and animals (and diseases) to and from the

Americas—for instance, the authors provide eighty-four examples of Old World plants taken from the Western Hemisphere for cultivation in the Eastern Hemisphere—and did so very deliberately (except, of course, for the diseases).

Separate chapters discuss the topics “Plant Evidence,” “Microfauna” (including bacteria and viruses), and “Other Fauna” (including dogs, chickens, and the “lesser mealworm”). These are followed by short summaries and conclusions, and then by a massive 366-page appendix entitled “Detailed Documentation,” which takes the form of an alphabetized and annotated list of the species and provides the basis for the book’s argument. Appendix 2 offers a list of the species “ordered by uses,” while appendix 3 supplies species of American plants in South Asia arranged by “evidence type.” The volume contains sixteen illustrations, seven tables, a 66-page bibliography, an index of species, and an index of authors.

Although this volume neither mentions the Book of Mormon nor directly addresses Latter-day Saints, the relevance of Sorenson and Johannessen’s thesis to the claims of the Book of Mormon should be immediately obvious: If they are right, the old argument that the Book of Mormon cannot possibly be true because there were no oceanic crossings before 1492, when Columbus “sailed the ocean blue”—or, at least, before Bjarni Herjólfsson blundered upon “Vinland” in AD 985 or 986 and then told Leifr Eiríksson about it—is false. If their detailed and meticulously documented argument is correct, it can no longer be maintained that civilization emerged in the New World pristinely independent, in a state, virtually, of clinical quarantine. “No man is an island, entire of itself,” wrote the great English poet John Donne (d. 1631). Nor, probably, is any culture or civilization.

Daniel C. Peterson

Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman, gen. eds.; Robin Scott Jensen, Robert J. Woodford, and Steven C. Harper, vol. eds. *The Joseph Smith Papers: Revelations and Translations, Manuscript Revelation Books*, facsimile ed. Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2009. xliii + 707 pp., with two

appendixes, chronology, scribal directory, and additional reference material. \$99.95 (hardcover).

The facsimile edition of this first volume in the Revelations and Translations series is a magnificent second volume in the long-awaited Joseph Smith Papers Project, currently being undertaken under the remarkably able direction of Elder Marlin K. Jensen, Church Historian and Recorder. The contents of this volume reflect scrupulous attention to the highest editorial standards, years of labor, and the considerable resources of Larry H. and Gail Miller that made it possible to assemble people with the necessary academic and professional skills. *Revelations and Translations* is a stunning volume—immense, weighty, and expensive. It consists essentially of two manuscripts—Revelation Book 1 (the manuscript for the Book of Commandments) and Revelation Book 2 (the Kirtland Revelation Book), supplemented by other manuscripts where possible (for example, the “Appendix” intended for the Book of Commandments is included in Revelation Book 1). All of this is augmented by an array of scholarly apparatus and explanation.

Revelations and Translations covers the years 1828 to 1834, when the one known as “Joseph the Seer” was dictating a host of revelations. It includes the recently discovered manuscript for the Book of Commandments—Revelation Book 1, which contains 117 separate items. And, with some duplication, Revelation Book 2 contains 53 items. These are both published with high-quality color photographs on the verso and, on the recto, very carefully prepared line-by-line transcripts of each manuscript, including every stray mark. All the editorial changes are carefully identified in the transcript and are coded by the name of the scribe who made the change. These manuscripts contain a large number of changes, not at all unlike those one might expect on a manuscript taken by dictation and then being readied for publication. Joseph Smith sought whatever help he could find among his associates in preparing these textual materials for publication. Every mark on manuscript pages is carefully reproduced (see, for example, pp. 389–91). Joseph insisted that others exercise care not to

alter the meaning of the revelations as they strove to polish them for publication. He, of course, adjusted and modified them as he saw fit.

Revelations and Translations has an introduction, a volume introduction, and a series introduction. To further assist the reader, there is a full description of the editorial method and a note on the photographic facsimiles. Of course, the core of the volume is found in Revelation Books 1 and 2. What new information do they provide? The reader immediately notes that Joseph Smith is addressed by the Lord as “Joseph the Seer” (p. 9 and elsewhere). This seems to remind the reader that Joseph began his career as a seer by employing in some way, either at first the interpreters (see Mosiah 8:13–18) or his own seer stone. Only later did he receive revelations without the aid of an interpreting device. It is not clear why the little “prefaces” to the early revelations were not published as part of the revelation. Their inclusion would perhaps have made it clear to the Saints that being a “Seer” came prior to our current tendency to see Joseph only as a prophet (see Mosiah 8:15). There are, it seems, bits of information in *Revelations and Translations* that enlarge and complicate the horizon with which we are familiar. What is often not remembered is that a number of the earliest revelations were *seen* by Joseph in his seer stone, as witnessed by his scribes and others.

The first published version of what we now know as the Doctrine and Covenants—that is, the Book of Commandments—seems to have been drawn from Revelation Book 1 (pp. 8–405). The Saints now have available for the first time the manuscript from which one of their unique scriptures was published. The preface to the Book of Commandments (see pp. 223–27), which was dictated by Joseph Smith in Hiram, Ohio, on 1 November 1831 and serves as the first section of the Doctrine and Covenants, declares that the revelations it introduces are from God and are given to those who choose to serve the Lord “in their weakness after the manner of their Language that they might come to understanding & in as much as they erred it might be made known & in as much as they sought wisdom it might be instructed & in as much as they sinned they might be chastened that they might repent & in as much as they were humble they might

be made strong & blessed from on high” (p. 225). Is this the language of covenant blessing? If so, then the language with which the preface to the Book of Commandments begins takes on added significance, since the Saints are asked to “hearken” to the voice of the Lord, whose words are being set forth in some unexplained way through young Joseph Smith. For him to have dictated this language in the voice of Jesus Christ is a strange and wonderful thing. Readers are now privileged to almost hear Joseph speaking those words to his scribes and in the presence of others. This is a rich blessing to the faithful.

Since the Church of Jesus Christ is so intimately linked to concrete historical events, it is a profound blessing that the textual materials, even or especially in their weakness, have been preserved, uncovered, and now made available to the Saints and other interested parties. What is now available, of course, changes details but not the substance of the prophetic messages, though critics, if the past is any indication, may see in *Revelations and Translations* something that can be used to try to explain away the miracle of the gift we have from God. They may do this by talking about how this publication must challenge and even unravel the faith of the Saints. They may insist that in the past some of the Brethren, without access to the materials so lovingly collected by those serving as Church Historian and Recorder, either denied or did not stress in general conference and elsewhere the complex way in which the revelations were recorded and published. Or they may complain that the Brethren have downplayed the changes that one can see scribbled throughout these manuscripts. The fact that there are what most often amount to editorial efforts to polish and perfect the revelations prior to their publication (and in subsequent editions) should not be made the grounds for additional complaints that the faith of the Saints rests on sandy foundations, unless one is inclined to believe that the absence of immediate perfection on trivial matters demonstrates some profound problem with the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Such an opinion merely manifests a sectarian or secular fundamentalism that the Saints should learn to eschew.

Whereas the initial volume of the Joseph Smith Papers Project (*Journals: Volume 1, 1832–1839*) contained items already readily available

in several editions to both professional historians and the public generally, this truly wonderful facsimile version of the manuscript revelation books makes available much textual material previously unavailable. The manuscript that constitutes Revelation Book 1 appears to have been in the possession of Elder Joseph Fielding Smith as early as 1907. It went into the vault of the First Presidency in 1970 and resurfaced in 2005. Its careful preservation and now expert publication make this wonderful text available for all to study and savor.

Louis Midgley

Frederick M. Huchel. *The Cosmic Ring Dance of the Angels: An Early Christian Rite of the Temple.* Frithurex Athenaeum, 2009. xiii + 173 pp., with index. \$16.99 (paperback at <http://www.lulu.com>).

Frederick Huchel, an independent Latter-day Saint scholar, has published a remarkable monograph on a topic that is surely of cosmic importance. Inspired and motivated by Hugh Nibley's notable essay "The Early Christian Prayer Circle," Huchel has continued research on many aspects of this practice related to the ancient temple, gathering evidence of its significance among the early Christians, as well as its influence earlier and in many times and places. Anciently, the prayer circle is attested in the Old Testament and in Babylonia, Assyria, Egypt, and elsewhere. Although an understanding of the practice all but disappeared in the West, Huchel shows its influence on many customs and practices, so that the traces of it make it "nearly ubiquitous."

The cosmic ring dance was a prayer circle intended to place its participants in a ritual that had its counterpart with the angels in heaven, and its richest fulfillment provided an opening of the heavens with a vision of God and the worship of the angels. Huchel summarizes:

In examining what can be reconstructed of the liturgy of the First Temple, and its apparent restoration in early Christianity, no loss can be more significant—or more poignant—than the loss of the sacred choral ring dance, which was seen to mirror the cosmic circle dance of the orders of the concourses of angels, in their concentric heavenly spheres—a dance which had the effect of opening up a conduit from the Holy of Holies, up through the

planetary spheres, and unfolded a view of God Most High upon his celestial throne, in the highest Heaven. (p. 1)

Huchel explains how the ritual has a relationship to the heavenly ascent, or the visions of heaven experienced by prophets such as Isaiah, Ezekiel, John, Enoch, and Joseph Smith. A glance at some of the sub-headings in the book will illustrate the range of study: “The Cosmic Dance,” “Before Christianity,” “The Circle Dance and the Crucifixion,” “The Form of the Dance,” “Scattered Fragments,” “The Music of the Temple—and of the Spheres,” “The Byzantine *Choros*,” “The May-pole Dance,” “Asherah,” “The Living Creatures and the Wheels,” “The Order of Heaven,” “The Objective of the Circle Dance of Prayer,” and “The Dance and the Heavens.” Importantly, Huchel’s discussion of how the ancients viewed the heavens and the cosmos helps put in perspective their astronomical concepts related to the heavenly order.

In conclusion, Huchel discusses the importance of the prayer circle for Latter-day Saints, showing its influence on Joseph Smith and his followers, especially in experiences during the dedication of the temple at Kirtland, Ohio. Huchel was invited to speak on this theme at the May 2009 symposium in London of the Temple Study Group, established by Margaret Barker and others. His address was essentially an abbreviated version of the present study.

George L. Mitton

Terryl L. Givens. *When Souls Had Wings: Pre-mortal Existence in Western Thought.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. x + 388, with index. \$29.95 (hardcover).

Terryl Givens has published a small shelf of books and a number of interesting and important essays. These have made him a primary figure in Mormon studies. Much of his work has been published by Oxford University Press. He entered Mormon studies with a fine study of literary anti-Mormonism entitled *Viper on the Hearth: Mormons, Myths, and the Construction of Heresy* (Oxford, 1997). This comes the closest to constituting a history of anti-Mormonism, a crucially important topic that Latter-day Saint historians have avoided for reasons that are understandable if not laudable. *Viper* was eventually

followed by what is clearly the best single book currently available on the Book of Mormon: *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion* (Oxford, 2002). The next book by Givens from Oxford was *People of Paradox: A History of Mormon Culture* (Oxford, 2007). His recent book *The Book of Mormon: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2009) is a stunning accomplishment. With *When Souls Had Wings*, released three months earlier than its 2010 copyright date, Givens has moved beyond a strictly Latter-day Saint topic.

The arguments set out in *When Souls Had Wings* should, of course, be of interest to the Saints since belief in the premortal existence of souls is central to their faith. Givens demonstrates that the idea of pre-existence is not a quirky one known only to Latter-day Saints or found only in a very few places and times. Rather, versions of the belief are widespread. In addition, in some versions of this belief, the premortal existence of the soul links our being here below with the idea that we are sent here for a testing experience to arm us for further adventures in the future. For Latter-day Saints who are conditioned to believe that certain crucial elements of their faith have few if any parallels in antiquity, except perhaps with biblical peoples, *When Souls Had Wings* should be a pleasant eye-opener and even faith-deepener.

Whatever quibbles one might have with the selection and interpretation of the exotic literature from which Givens assembles his vast and impressive collection of belief in a preexistence of the human soul (or even with the inevitable lacunae in his collection), this is an important, interesting, and impressive collection of materials.

Latter-day Saints should realize that Givens does not begin with the version of this belief that comes from Joseph Smith. Instead, he mentions this midway through his book (pp. 212–20). He emphasizes that “Smith made a career of promulgating ideas that were outrageous affronts to Christian orthodoxies—his radical critique of conventional notions of God’s sovereignty,” which is a crucial part of the Latter-day Saint belief in a preexistence, “was no exception” (p. 213). Givens deftly sketches the other heresies, or what are seen as dangerous heresies from the intellectual horizon of classical theism, which ended up scrubbing from the

hearts and minds of early Christians a belief in the preexistence of their souls. He explains why classical theism, with its extreme stress on the absolute sovereignty of God, could not tolerate the idea of preexistence of souls—namely, because the mere existence of anything other than the absolute God of classical theism would undermine what is attributed to that simple, timeless, self-sufficient, impassive, absolute, infinite Being that created everything out of nothing, including time and space. This is exactly not the kind of deity that is the object of the faith of the Saints. The basic outlines of the arguments Givens sets out should be familiar to Latter-day Saints. But the reasons he offers for how radically Joseph’s version of Christian faith differs from classical theism and hence also from creedal Christianity are somewhat novel, if they are not entirely new.

The survey Givens provides begins with fragments found in the poetry of very ancient Mesopotamian mythology and poetry as set out in Akkadian (see pp. 9–20). After briefly setting out the ancient Near Eastern roots of the belief, Givens describes its classical varieties as found in the pre-Socratics (pp. 21–26) and then Plato (pp. 26–37). He describes the early Christian versions of a belief in a premortal existence of souls, as well as the specifically Jewish version set out by Philo of Alexandria (pp. 39–70).

Givens next traces the profound influence on early Christianity of a version of Platonism generated in Alexandria and spread widely among Christian apologists and then churchmen and theologians (pp. 71–98). His attention is focused on beliefs in a premortal existence of souls as set forth in Plato’s highly enigmatic and even esoteric dialogues, which Givens sees as relatively straightforward when compared with the later Neoplatonic philosophy that comes into play with the church fathers—that is, specifically Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria (pp. 83–87). Givens sees the end of a belief in preexistence stemming directly from the first great Latin Christian writer, Tertullian, who railed and ranted against Platonists and demanded to know exactly what Athens had to do with Jerusalem (see headnote on p. 71 and the subtle and interesting discussion on pp. 87–90). Instead of picturing Tertullian as essentially challenging the coherence of efforts to meld the method of phi-

losophy—that is, the search for knowledge of First Things by unaided human reason—with prophetic wisdom, as others have done, Givens sees Tertullian as challenging the Platonic notion of a preexistence of souls when he inveighs against Plato and philosophers.

Givens sees Augustine’s shifting opinions (see pp. 99–122), which were heavily influenced by Neoplatonism, as a struggle over the preexistence of souls, which eventually led to an anathema on such a belief. Givens does not see Augustine’s affection for a version of Platonism as a tool with which he could eliminate the even then popular beliefs among Christians in a preexistence of souls as well as a corporeal deity.

Without describing the riches found in the entire book, one can say that Givens is able to identify a host of different and even conflicting versions of belief in the preexistence of souls. And he is also able to offer a learned and intriguing commentary on the struggle, especially in Christian circles over preexistence. What should be most interesting for both Latter-day Saints and sectarian Christians is the extent to which the preexistence of souls was a popular belief in the primitive Christian church and how it lingered among Christians, as well as how late and for what reasons Christian theologians abandoned the belief. The urge to turn God into an unconditional, ultimate, absolute Wholly Other ground for existing things, including human beings, seems to have been the reason for the rejection of the preexistence of souls by both theologians and churchmen of various stripes. The urge to emphasize the otherness of God, as well as his absolute power, and the total depravity of human beings, has gotten in the way of a coherent theodicy, which could account for a loving God and both moral and natural evil, which the non-absolutizing belief in the preexistence of souls affords the believer. The stress on God being Wholly Other also seems to explain that decline in the idea of *theosis* that was prominent among the earliest followers of Jesus and that persisted in curiously truncated form right down to Calvin, which was so much the core of the faith of writers like C. S. Lewis.

When Souls Had Wings is remarkably lucid and learned; it is highly recommended.

Louis Midgley

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EDITOR'S PICKS

*The Joseph Smith Papers: Revelations and Translations,
Manuscript Revelation Books*

Margaret Barker, *Christmas: The Original Story*

Terryl L. Givens, *When Souls Had Wings: Pre-mortal
Existence in Western Thought*

S. Kent Brown and Peter Johnson, eds., *Journey of Faith:
From Jerusalem to the Promised Land*

Michael R. Ash, *Of Faith and Reason: 80 Evidences
Supporting the Prophet Joseph Smith*

Frederick M. Huchel, *The Cosmic Ring Dance of the Angels:
An Early Christian Rite of the Temple*



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