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# MORMON STUDIES *review*

VOLUME 23 • NUMBER 1 • 2011

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NEAL A. MAXWELL INSTITUTE  
FOR RELIGIOUS SCHOLARSHIP

# MORMON STUDIES --- *review*

VOLUME 23, NUMBER 1 • 2011



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NEAL A. MAXWELL INSTITUTE  
FOR RELIGIOUS SCHOLARSHIP

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BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY  
PROVO, UTAH

## MORMON STUDIES REVIEW

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# “To Cheer, to Raise, to Guide”: Twenty-Two Years of the FARMS Review

DANIEL C. PETERSON

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*The office of the scholar is to cheer, to raise, to guide men by showing them facts amidst appearances. He plies the slow, unhonored, and unpaid task of observation. . . . He is the world's eye. —Emerson<sup>1</sup>*

Nearly a quarter of a century ago, in 1988—I never really envisioned myself becoming as old as I now am—John W. Welch, the moving force in the establishment of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS) roughly a decade earlier, approached me with a question. Would I be willing to launch and edit a new annual volume reviewing books about the Book of Mormon?

I had been an enthusiastic fan of what came to be known as FARMS from its founding in 1979, but I had been unable to do much about my

enthusiasm during that time, since, from the fall of 1978 through the late summer of 1982, I had been living in Egypt and since, from the summer of 1982 to the fall of 1985, I was busy with my doctoral program at the University of California, Los Angeles. (California was a very long distance from FARMS in those days, to say nothing of Egypt. Some younger readers will find this difficult to imagine, but there was no Internet in 1979. Few people even had personal computers.)

By 1988, though, I had been on the faculty at Brigham Young University for roughly three years, and I had begun to involve myself with the work of FARMS.

Still, Jack Welch's invitation represented my first opportunity to be formally connected with FARMS. So I leaped at the chance. And, thus, the *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon*, as it was originally called, was born.

From the beginning, though, I wanted our new periodical—FARMS's *first* periodical—to

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1. Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The American Scholar,” speech given on 31 August 1837.

be more than just a simple collection of book reviews. I thought about the way I myself used the work of music critics: When I went into a music store to buy a recording of, say, Mahler's Ninth Symphony, I would first walk over to the bookshelf, if the store had one, to consult various guides to, or magazines on, classical recordings. Having familiarized myself with what the commentators had to say, I would put the guides back on the shelf and buy the version I had selected. But I never bought any of the guides. Why should I? They had served their purpose when I made my choice. For me, they had little or no intrinsic value; they were merely a means to an end.

I wanted the *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* to be something that would have value in itself, that would be worth buying and reading in its own right.

Fortunately, that goal was achieved right from the start.

I'll use as my illustration of that fact John Clark's review of F. Richard Hauck's *Deciphering the Geography of the Book of Mormon*. When I first approached Professor Clark, already a very experienced Mesoamerican archaeologist, with the proposal that he review the Hauck book, he was—to put it mildly—reluctant. He was busy, often on the road, preoccupied with digs in Chiapas, Mexico. He wasn't particularly eager to wade into the squabbles over Book of Mormon geography.

Frankly, I did not expect to receive anything from him. But then he came through, in spectacular fashion, with a marvelous review essay entitled "A Key for Evaluating Nephite Geographies."<sup>2</sup> It eventually yielded fifty-one

pages in the printed edition, complete with maps, tables, and figures. Going beyond simply reviewing a specific book, it set forth ten fundamental requirements that had to be met by any aspiring geographical model for the Book of Mormon. It was precisely the kind of thing that, just as I had hoped, would have value in itself and would be worth buying and reading in its own right. From then on, in every issue of the *Review*, there has always been at least one essay—often more than one—that has had value independent of (and sometimes much greater than) the book or other item that it was reviewing. Some of the books being reviewed provided an excuse for important contributions to the scholarship on a topic.

Another characteristic feature of the *Review* was also established with the very first issue: its willingness to be critical even of books by friends, by people on our "side." Todd Compton, a classicist and an old friend of mine from graduate-school days at UCLA, opened his review of three volumes in the Collected Works of Hugh Nibley by saying that "one approaches Hugh Nibley with a mixture of awe and anguish."<sup>3</sup> The sweep and genius of Nibley were stunning, but, Compton said, sometimes the details were a bit inaccurate. Likewise, Louis Midgley's review of the first two volumes of Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet's *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon* faulted seeming tendencies to recast our scriptures as—though, of course, no believer would actually say it this way or be less than offended at such a thought—messy and inadequate attempts to do dogmatic theology,

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2. John Clark, "A Key for Evaluating Nephite Geographies," review of *Deciphering the Geography of the Book of Mormon*, by F. Richard Hauck, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 1 (1989): 20–70. We have included in this issue of the *Review* a slightly modified version of Clark's original essay with all references to Hauck removed.

3. Todd Compton, review of *Lehi in the Desert; The World of the Jaredites; There Were Jaredites*, by Hugh Nibley; *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, by Nibley; and *Since Cumorah*, by Nibley, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 1 (1989): 114–18.

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tendencies that he saw implicit in the books he was reviewing.<sup>4</sup>

Other characteristics of the *Review* that were apparent even in the first issue included its editor's very laissez-faire attitude toward review lengths. I sought out people who I thought were qualified to have something interesting to say about the books they had been asked to review, and then I stood out of their way. I didn't tell them what approach to take nor whether to be positive or negative. I didn't even tell them how many words they had to make their points. It was probably a bit unnerving to some of them, but when they asked how long their reviews should be, I simply said that their reviews should be as long as they needed them to be in order to say what they wanted to say. Given such free rein, the *Review* has, over the years, published some quite lengthy essays. I'm happy about that.

And many of them have been my own. From the start, although my maiden effort came to only six pages,<sup>5</sup> I (and occasionally others) have written substantial editor's introductions to each issue of the *Review*. I didn't ask permission to do so, and nobody came forward to stop me. It has been a bully pulpit for more than two decades now.

There was one other factor that greatly helped to ensure the *Review's* success: Shirley Ricks. Shirley had married one of my companions from the Switzerland Zürich Mission, my longtime friend and now colleague in BYU's Department of Asian and Near Eastern Languages, Professor

Stephen Ricks. Holding a PhD herself, in studies relating to the family, she had become an editor with FARMS. Her contribution as the *Review's* production editor was essential from the very first. Meticulous at her craft, she was also the crucial person who saw to it that issues of the *Review* actually went to press and emerged for distribution. Consummately well organized, in later years she also managed to impose at least some minimal measure of discipline on wide-ranging and often hilarious *Review* editorial meetings.

The second volume of the *Review* appeared in 1990. A few new things appeared in it, harbingers of things to come. First of all, though every item contained in it was related to the Book of Mormon, not everything in it was a book review. It led off with the text of Richard Dilworth Rust's "Designed for Our Day," the annual FARMS lecture. (We have, since that time, published the texts of a number of important FARMS- and now Maxwell Institute-sponsored lectures.) It also included Daniel McKinlay's response to Alan Goff's 1989 BYU master's thesis entitled "A Hermeneutic of Sacred Texts: Historicism, Revisionism, Positivism, and the Bible and Book of Mormon."<sup>6</sup>

In addition, it contained my review of Peter Bartley's *Mormonism: The Prophet, the Book and the Cult*.<sup>7</sup> Taken with Ara Norwood's critique of Vernal Holley's attempt to derive the toponyms and the geography of the Book of Mormon from Joseph Smith's nineteenth-century environment,<sup>8</sup>

4. Louis Midgley, "Prophetic Messages or Dogmatic Theology? Commenting on the Book of Mormon: A Review Essay," review of *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon, Volume 1: First and Second Nephi*, by Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet; and *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon, Volume 2: Jacob through Mosiah*, by McConkie and Millet, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 1 (1989): 92-113.
5. Daniel C. Peterson, editor's introduction, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 1 (1989): v-x.

6. Daniel B. McKinlay, review of "A Hermeneutic of Sacred Texts: Historicism, Revisionism, Positivism, and the Bible and Book of Mormon" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1989), by Alan Goff, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 2 (1990): 86-95.
7. Daniel C. Peterson, review of *Mormonism: The Prophet, the Book and the Cult*, by Peter Bartley, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 2 (1990): 31-55.
8. L. Ara Norwood, review of *Book of Mormon Authorship: A Closer Look*, by Vernal Holley, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 1 (1989):

which appeared earlier, this represented the first in a long and continuing series of responses by me and others to what is quite accurately described as sectarian or countercult anti-Mormon literature. Though such responses have never dominated the *Review*, they have been one of its serious areas of focus and specialty over the more than two decades of its subsequent history. And gratifying anecdotal evidence suggests that at least some prominent anti-Mormon writers, who were once able to get away with just about anything (confident that their work would neither be reviewed nor noticed by serious, informed Latter-day Saint authors), found this very, very shocking.

One of my own personal favorite reviews was published in the third issue of the *Review*. Loftes Tryk's *The Best Kept Secrets in the Book of Mormon* was (unintentionally, I think) among the funniest books I had ever read, and I absolutely loved reviewing it. Any critic of the church who argues, in print, that the initials *LDS* reveal the true origin of Mormonism because they stand for "Lucifer Devil Satan" is definitely going to have my attention:

Last year, in this *Review*, I examined Peter Bartley's polemic against the Book of Mormon, and termed it "rather worthless." I had not yet read Loftes Tryk's *The Best Kept Secrets in the Book of Mormon*, which is incomparably worse. For all his many, many flaws, Peter Bartley now seems to me by contrast the Shakespeare, the Michelangelo, the Aristotle, the Einstein of anti-Mormonism. If Bartley's book is no Rolls Royce—if, indeed, it more closely resembles an engineless Studebaker sitting on grass-covered blocks behind a dilapidated barn—it is nonetheless infinitely

more sober and respectable than Loftes Tryk's literally incredible volume, a gaudily painted Volkswagen disgorging dozens of costumed clowns to the zany music of a circus calliope.<sup>9</sup>

This issue also featured one of the most memorable opening lines we've ever published, when Stephen Robinson began his review of a revisionist volume from Signature Books with "Korihor's back, and this time he's got a printing press."<sup>10</sup> One of our finest essay titles would come in volume 5 (1993): "Playing with Half a Decker," Louis Midgley's review of Dean Maurice Helland's doctoral dissertation.<sup>11</sup>

Professor Robinson's insightful response to a collection of mostly sectarian criticisms of the Book of Mormon resulted in the publisher and owner of Signature Books, George D. Smith, instructing his attorney to threaten legal action. By so doing, Smith was seeking to use the courts to silence responses to criticisms of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon rather than employing the traditional tools of scholarship, argument, and the analysis of evidence. I was determined not to be intimidated by this gambit, and I responded to this legal mischief in the next editor's introduction to the *Review*.<sup>12</sup> Subsequently,

9. Daniel C. Peterson, "A Modern *Malleus maleficarum*," review of *The Best Kept Secrets in the Book of Mormon*, by Loftes Tryk, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 3 (1991): 231–60.

10. Stephen E. Robinson, review of *The Word of God: Essays on Mormon Scripture*, ed. Dan Vogel, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 3 (1991): 312–18.

11. Louis Midgley, "Playing with Half a Decker: The Countercult Religious Tradition Confronts the Book of Mormon," review of "Meeting the Book of Mormon Challenge in Chile," by Dean Maurice Helland (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1990), *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 5 (1993): 116–71. The reference in the title is to the notorious anti-Mormon mountebank, charlatan, and demagogue Ed Decker, best known for his once-popular, sensationalizing, anti-Mormon pseudodocumentary *The God Makers*.

12. Daniel C. Peterson, "Questions to Legal Answers," *Review of Books on*

when criticisms of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon have trickled out from Signature Books, comprehensive responses have regularly appeared in the *Review*.<sup>13</sup>

There has been at least one additional effort to silence and punish financially those Latter-day Saints who even mention the name of one very litigious countercult author, let alone those who have the temerity to examine his opinions on Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. But this amusing story cannot be told here, nor can the name of this fellow even be so much as mentioned: in *Review* circles we simply refer to him as “He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named.”

The *Review* has always had an impish sense of humor and a penchant for irony and satire. This

has offended some who have, I’m convinced, quite misunderstood what was going on. But it has entertained many, and, personally, I’ll choose dry wit over dry tedium any day of the week.

With such essays in volume 4 (1992) as Matthew Roper’s review of Weldon Langfield, *The Truth about Mormonism: A Former Adherent Analyzes the LDS Faith*,<sup>14</sup> and John Gee and Michael Rhodes’s review of Charles Larson’s *By His Own Hand upon Papyrus: A New Look at the Joseph Smith Papyri*,<sup>15</sup> it was becoming clear that the *Review* was not going to limit itself solely to books about the Book of Mormon. Still, it remained heavily concentrated on such books, and every issue concluded with a comprehensive bibliography of relevant titles for the preceding year.

In 1994, the *Review* went from annual to semi-annual. The immediate impetus for this change was the publication of an anthology of mostly secularizing and reductionist essays on the Book of Mormon, largely authored by disaffected former believers and edited by Brent Lee Metcalfe, entitled *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon*.<sup>16</sup> We devoted essentially an entire issue of the *Review*—volume 6, number 1—to detailed responses to *New Approaches*. I was particularly delighted, when I was looking for somebody to respond to a chapter that argued that the population figures in the Book of Mormon were unrealistic, to come

*the Book of Mormon* 4 (1992): vii–lxxvi.

13. For an account of the relatively small yet still significant number of subsequent attacks on the faith of the Saints that have been issued by Signature Books, see Louis Midgley, “The Signature Books Saga,” *FARMS Review* 16/1 (2004): 361–406. For works reviewed after this article, see John A. Tvedtnes, “Isaiah in the Bible and the Book of Mormon,” review of “Isaiah in the Book of Mormon: Or Joseph Smith in Isaiah,” by David P. Wright, in *American Apocrypha: Essays on the Book of Mormon*, ed. Dan Vogel and Brent Lee Metcalfe, *FARMS Review* 16/2 (2004): 161–72; Ryan Parr, “Missing the Boat to Ancient America . . . Just Plain Missing the Boat,” review of *Losing a Lost Tribe: Native Americans, DNA, and the Mormon Church*, by Simon G. Southerton, *FARMS Review* 17/1 (2005): 83–106; Andrew H. Hedges and Dawson W. Hedges, “No, Dan, That’s Still Not History,” review of *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet*, by Dan Vogel, *FARMS Review* 17/1 (2005): 205–22; Alan Goff, “Dan Vogel’s Family Romance and the Book of Mormon as Smith Family Allegory,” review of *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet*, by Vogel, *FARMS Review* 17/2 (2005): 321–400; Richard N. Williams, “The Book of Mormon as Automatic Writing: Beware the *Virtus Dormitiva*,” review of “Automaticity and the Dictation of the Book of Mormon,” by Scott C. Dunn, in, *American Apocrypha*, ed. Vogel and Metcalfe, *FARMS Review* 19/1 (2007): 23–29; Gregory L. Smith, “George D. Smith’s Nauvoo Polygamy,” review of *Nauvoo Polygamy: “. . . but we called it celestial marriage,”* by George D. Smith, *FARMS Review* 20/2 (2008): 37–123; Robert B. White, “A Review of the Dust Jacket and the First Two Pages,” review of *Nauvoo Polygamy*, by Smith, *FARMS Review* 20/2 (2008): 125–29; Alan Goff, “How Should We Then Read? Reading Mormon Scripture after the Fall,” review of *Making of a Prophet*, by Vogel, *FARMS Review* 21/1 (2009): 137–78.

14. Matthew Roper, review of *The Truth about Mormonism: A Former Adherent Analyzes the LDS Faith*, by Weldon Langfield, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 4 (1992): 78–92.

15. John Gee, “A Tragedy of Errors,” review of *By His Own Hand upon Papyrus: A New Look at the Joseph Smith Papyri*, by Charles M. Larson, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 4 (1992): 93–119; and Michael D. Rhodes, “The Book of Abraham: Divinely Inspired Scripture,” review of *By His Own Hand upon Papyrus*, by Larson, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 4 (1992): 120–26.

16. Brent Lee Metcalfe, ed., *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993).

across Dr. James E. Smith, a Latter-day Saint and a professional demographer with particular expertise in the estimation of ancient populations.<sup>17</sup> I hadn't even imagined that such a person existed.

Since Metcalfe had included an essay in *New Approaches* in which he argued that the complex literary device known as chiasmus (or inverted parallelism) could have appeared in the Book of Mormon simply by accident, I was especially pleased to have included in this same issue of the *Review* Bill Hamblin's subtle and yet devastating refutation of Metcalfe's conclusion.<sup>18</sup>

I have had occasion many times since to marvel at the range and depth of talent and training that exists, and that can be called upon, among members of the church. Another notable example of this came when I was looking for someone to examine Robert D. Anderson's reductionist *Inside the Mind of Joseph Smith: Psychobiography and the Book of Mormon*. I was delighted to discover Michael D. Jibson, MD, PhD, director of residency education and clinical associate professor of psychiatry at the University of Michigan, who not only knew his stuff but also wrote so well that I'm not sure that we corrected so much as a comma in his submitted essay.<sup>19</sup>

With volume 8, in 1996, we made the first name change to the *Review*, altering it from *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* (and thus,

unfortunately, losing the wonderful acronym *ROBOTBOM*) to *FARMS Review of Books*. And, for the first time, we moved from an undifferentiated table of contents to a list of contents organized by type. For instance, the table of contents for *FARMS Review of Books* 8/1 featured items categorized under not only "Book of Mormon" but also "Books on Other Ancient Scripture," "Polemics," "Historical and Cultural Studies," "Study Aids," and "Fiction." These categories have shifted from issue to issue, according to need—the table of contents for *FARMS Review of Books* 8/2, the very next issue, was organized into "The Book of Mormon," "Other Scriptures and Ancient Texts," "Other Publications," "Publications for Children," and "Study Aids"—but they have always clearly signaled that the *Review's* concerns have broadened beyond the Book of Mormon alone. (In *FARMS Review of Books* 9/2 [1997], the category of "Mormon Studies" made its first appearance.)

Volume 11, number 2, published in 1999, was dedicated to responses to Craig L. Blomberg and Stephen E. Robinson's important book *How Wide the Divide? A Mormon and an Evangelical in Conversation*.<sup>20</sup> It even included a lengthy review essay by Paul L. Owen and Carl A. Mosser in which these two young evangelical scholars offered their own critique of Latter-day Saint doctrine.<sup>21</sup> Although there were understandable concerns among some about providing yet another platform for others to argue against the faith of Latter-day Saints, I thought it worthwhile to showcase a pair of evangelicals who, at least, sought to do so honestly, charitably, and fairly. We had, entirely with justice, been complaining

17. James E. Smith, "Nephi's Descendants? Historical Demography and the Book of Mormon," review of "Multiply Exceedingly: Book of Mormon Population Sizes," by John C. Kunich, *Sunstone* 14 (June 1990), *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994): 255–96.

18. William J. Hamblin, "An Apologist for the Critics: Brent Lee Metcalfe's Assumptions and Methodologies," review of "Apologetic and Critical Assumptions about Book of Mormon Historicity," by Brent Lee Metcalfe, *Dialogue* 26/3 (Fall 1993), *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994): 434–523.

19. Michael D. Jibson, "Korihor Speaks, or the Misinterpretation of Dreams," review of *Inside the Mind of Joseph Smith: Psychobiography and the Book of Mormon*, by Robert D. Anderson, *FARMS Review of Books* 14/1–2 (2002): 223–60.

20. Craig L. Blomberg and Stephen E. Robinson, *How Wide the Divide? A Mormon and an Evangelical in Conversation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997).

21. Paul L. Owen and Carl A. Mosser, review of *How Wide the Divide?*, by Blomberg and Robinson, *FARMS Review of Books* 11/2 (1999): 1–102.



so long about attacks on the church that were neither honest nor charitable nor fair that it seemed reasonable to celebrate, as it were, a hopeful sign of better (or, at least, less bad) things to come.<sup>22</sup>

Another of my own favorite moments in the history of the *Review*—I’ve had to skip over many, owing to constraints of time, energy, and reader patience—came when, in 2001, *Review* 13/2 published the mature Davis Bitton’s biting critical review of a 1966 essay in *Dialogue* bearing the title “Anti-Intellectualism in Mormon History”<sup>23</sup> and written by . . . the younger Davis Bitton.<sup>24</sup> (One of our editors, upon first noticing that the author of the review bore the same name as the author of the work that was being reviewed, called to warn me about the mistake. But that, of course, was the joke. The *Review*’s humor is, not uncommonly, directed at itself and its own authors.)

That issue also contained a fine article by Ari Bruening and David Paulsen examining the development of the early Mormon concept of God and looking specifically at claims that the Book of Mormon’s view of the Godhead is a form of modalism.<sup>25</sup>

Perhaps most significantly, though, volume 13, number 2, marked the appointment of two new associate editors for the *Review*.

Louis Midgley, a retired professor of political science at BYU, had earned his doctorate at Brown University and had focused his research and writing on philosophical theology and its implications for doctrines of natural law and the moral underpinnings of government. He had already contributed several important essays to the *Review*.

George Mitton had followed graduate studies in political science and public administration at Utah State University and Columbia University with a twenty-five-year career in the government of the state of Oregon, where he was mostly involved with educational planning and administration of the state’s colleges and universities. He had previously joined in writing for the *Review* substantial and complex critiques of John Brooke’s *The Refiner’s Fire: The Making of Mormon Cosmology, 1644–1844* and of D. Michael Quinn’s *Same-Sex Dynamics among Nineteenth-Century Americans: A Mormon Example*.<sup>26</sup> Since their appointment, Brothers Midgley and Mitton have been actively involved in securing, vetting, editing, and improving materials for the *Review*, as well as in writing their own essays (and sometimes editor’s introductions) for it.

In 2003, with *Review* 15/1, we saw another name change. The *FARMS Review of Books* dropped the “of Books” and became, simply, *The FARMS Review*. We had, for some time, been reviewing videos and websites and articles and theses, and even publishing freestanding essays,

22. Carl Mosser and Paul Owen were also the authors of the well-known article “Mormon Scholarship, Apologetics, and Evangelical Neglect: Losing the Battle and Not Knowing It?,” *Trinity Journal* (Fall 1998): 179–205, in which they lamented the low quality of evangelical critiques of Mormonism and called, effectively, for more competent, honest, and fair polemics on their side.

23. Davis Bitton, “Anti-Intellectualism in Mormon History,” *Dialogue* 1/3 (1966): 111–34.

24. Davis Bitton, “Mormon Anti-Intellectualism: A Reply,” review of “Anti-Intellectualism in Mormon History,” by Davis Bitton, *Dialogue* 1/3 (1966), *FARMS Review of Books* 13/2 (2001): 59–62.

25. Ari D. Bruening and David L. Paulsen, “The Development of the Mormon Understanding of God: Early Mormon Modalism and Other Myths,” review of *Mormonism and the Nature of God: A Theological Evolution, 1830–1915*, by Kurt Widmer, *FARMS Review of Books* 13/2 (2001): 109–69.

26. William J. Hamblin, Daniel C. Peterson, and George L. Mitton, “Mormon in the Fiery Furnace; Or, Loftes Tryk Goes to Cambridge,” review of *The Refiner’s Fire: The Making of Mormon Cosmology, 1644–1844*, by John L. Brooke *FARMS Review of Books* 6/2 (1994): 3–58; and George L. Mitton and Rhett S. James, “A Response to D. Michael Quinn’s Homosexual Distortion of Latter-day Saint History,” review of *Same-Sex Dynamics among Nineteenth-Century Americans: A Mormon Example*, by D. Michael Quinn, *FARMS Review of Books* 10/1 (1998): 141–263.

so the new title more accurately reflected what we were actually doing. I liked the change because it allowed the flexibility that we wanted, and because it reflected a common kind of academic-journal title exemplified by such venerable publications as *The Yale Review* and *The Sewanee Review*. I thought, wrongly as it turns out, that we had finally reached equilibrium, that we had the title we wanted, and that it would stay in place. *Review* 15/1 also saw the first “Book Notes,” relatively short and often (though not always) purely descriptive pieces on books to which we wanted to call our readers’ attention or about which we simply wanted to set out an opinion. These were often authored by one or more of the three editors—at first they were usually unattributed—but sometimes others contributed Book Notes as well. (In such cases, the authors of the notes were identified.)

In 2003, in *Review* 15/2, we began to address the then-boiling issue of Amerindian DNA and the Book of Mormon,<sup>27</sup> as well as a volume published by a retired Church Educational System instructor, written apparently while on the church payroll, attacking fundamental claims of the restoration.<sup>28</sup> As these two examples illus-

trate, when an issue seemed to warrant several essays, or when there are clearly different opinions on or approaches to a single topic, we have invited several authors to voice their opinions. In addition, we have invited several authors to respond to the same critic or criticism in several issues of the *Review*.

I could list literally scores of truly important reviews and essays published in the *Review* over the years, and I’m painfully aware of omitting many. One important exchange occurred in *Review* 19/1 (2007), when we published a critique of Latter-day Saint use of the well-known “ye are gods” passage from Psalm 82, written by the evangelical scholar Michael S. Heiser.<sup>29</sup> It was accompanied by a reply from David E. Bokovoy,<sup>30</sup> a Latter-day Saint graduate student of the Hebrew Bible at Brandeis University, which was followed by a rejoinder from Dr. Heiser.<sup>31</sup> The exchange was a model, on both sides, of civil and charitable disagreement, and a fascinating tutorial on a very interesting topic (namely, the so-called divine council) in contemporary biblical scholarship.

With *Review* 19/2, Don Brugger replaced Shirley Ricks as the *Review*’s production editor. (She had been reassigned to help complete the Collected Works of Hugh Nibley in time for the centennial

27. We began doing this with a number of essays, including Daniel C. Peterson’s editor’s introduction entitled “Of ‘Galileo Events,’ Hype, and Suppression: Or, Abusing Science and Its History,” *FARMS Review* 15/2 (2003): ix–lx; Daniel C. Peterson, “Prolegomena to the DNA Essays” (pp. 25–34); David A. McClellan, “Detecting Lehi’s Genetic Signature: Possible, Probable, or Not?” (pp. 35–90); Matthew Roper, “Nephi’s Neighbors: Book of Mormon Peoples and Pre-Columbian Populations” (pp. 91–128); Matthew Roper, “Swimming in the Gene Pool: Israelite Kinship Relations, Genes, and Genealogy” (pp. 129–64); Brian D. Stubbs, “Elusive Israel and the Numerical Dynamics of Population Mixing” (pp. 165–182); and John A. Tvedtnes, “The Charge of ‘Racism’ in the Book of Mormon” (pp. 183–197).

28. The reviews of Grant H. Palmer’s *An Insider’s View of Mormon Origins* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002) that were published in the *FARMS Review* 15/2 (2003) included a statement by the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History concerning Palmer’s book (p. 255), which was followed by Davis Bitton, “The

Charge of a Man with a Broken Lance (But Look What He Doesn’t Tell Us)” (pp. 257–71); Steven C. Harper, “Trustworthy History?” (pp. 273–307); Mark Ashurst-McGee, “A One-sided View of Mormon Origins” (309–64); and Louis Midgley, “Prying into Palmer” (365–410). Later we also published James B. Allen, “Asked and Answered: A Response to Grant H. Palmer,” *FARMS Review* 16/1 (2004): 235–85.

29. Michael S. Heiser, “You’ve Seen One *Elohim*, You’ve Seen Them All? A Critique of Mormonism’s Use of Psalm 82,” *FARMS Review* 19/1 (2007): 221–66.

30. David E. Bokovoy, “‘Ye Really Are Gods’: A Response to Michael Heiser concerning the LDS Use of Psalm 82 and the Gospel of John,” *FARMS Review* 19/1 (2007): 267–313.

31. Michael S. Heiser, “Israel’s Divine Council, Mormonism, and Evangelicalism: Clarifying the Issues and Directions for Future Study,” *FARMS Review* 19/1 (2007): 315–23.



of his birth in March 2010.) After nearly two decades, the change was a bit painful, but Don has stepped into the role admirably and with superb editorial skills, and the work proceeds.

Over the more than two decades of its existence, under its various names, the *Review* has published hundreds of pieces by well over two hundred authors. These authors, chosen because they struck the editor(s) as having something interesting, valuable, or relevant to say and the qualifications to say it, have been left free to say pretty much what they wanted, at whatever length they wanted to say it. (We have published only a quite small number of unsolicited submissions.)<sup>32</sup> They have dealt with many issues, from Amerindian DNA to recent arguments for so-called Heartland models of Book of Mormon geography that try to situate the story of the Nephites and the Jaredites entirely within the continental United States, from efforts to resuscitate the “Spalding theory” of Book of Mormon origins to sociological studies of the religiosity of American youth, from Margaret Barker’s work on ancient temple imagery to Mormon’s editorial method and the usefulness of religious history, from so-called Intelligent Design to contemporary Openness Theology, from the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* to the concept of remembrance in the scriptures and unique perspectives on the Sermon on the Mount.

I am unabashedly proud of the *Review*. The late University of Utah professor and former assistant church historian Davis Bitton once told me that, in his opinion, the best writing in the church was being published in its pages. (I agree.) And another former president of the Mormon History

Association took me aside many years ago at an MHA meeting to *complain* about the *Review*: whenever the newest issue arrived, he lamented, he had to put everything else down and read it from cover to cover, which absolutely destroyed his work schedule and his plans for the day.

By a very great distance, the *Review* has, since its first issue in 1989, been the publication of FARMS and now the Maxwell Institute most overtly willing to confront critics, most prone to engaging in controversy or polemics or overt apologetics. (These words are, it should be noted, not intrinsically negative or pejorative in normal English usage.) And yet, as I’ve already remarked, such apologetic, polemical, or controversial engagements represent only a minority portion of the *Review*’s content over the years.

Even a simple listing of some (not all) of the freestanding essays from just the past few years of the *Review* will give some sense of the range of topics it has addressed:

- Mark H. Willes, “To All the World: Reinventing the Church’s Media Businesses,” *FARMS Review* 22/2 (2010): 1-13.
- Cecil O. Samuelson, “On Becoming a Disciple-Scholar,” *FARMS Review* 20/2 (2008): 1-14.
- Bruce C. Hafen, “Reason, Faith, and the Things of Eternity,” *FARMS Review* 20/2 (2008): 15-35.
- Ronan James Head, “A Brief Survey of Ancient Near Eastern Beekeeping,” *FARMS Review* 20/1 (2008): 57-66.
- James E. Faulconer, “The Myth of the Modern; the Anti-myth of the Postmodern,” *FARMS Review* 20/1 (2008): 219-36.
- Raphael Jospe, “‘The Glory of God Is Intelligence’: A Note on Maimonides,” *FARMS Review* 19/2 (2007): 95-98.

32. In my experience, at least, academic journals typically invite people to write book reviews. Of roughly fifteen reviews I’ve written for secular journals, only one or two were initiated by me.

- Steven L. Olsen, “The Theology of Memory: Mormon Historical Consciousness,” *FARMS Review* 19/2 (2007): 25–35.
- Terryl L. Givens, “New Religious Movements and Orthodoxy: The Challenge to the Religious Mainstream,” *FARMS Review* 19/1 (2007): 201–20.
- M. Gerald Bradford, “The Study of Mormonism: A Growing Interest in Academia,” *FARMS Review* 19/1 (2007): 119–74.
- William J. Hamblin, “Sacred Writing on Metal Plates in the Ancient Mediterranean,” *FARMS Review* 19/1 (2007): 37–54.
- Stephen D. Ricks, “*Dexiosis* and *Dextrarum Iunctio*: The Sacred Handclasp in the Classical and Early Christian World,” *FARMS Review* 18/1 (2006): 431–36.
- Paul Y. Hoskisson, “Aaron’s Golden Calf,” *FARMS Review* 18/1 (2007): 375–87.
- Royal Skousen, “Conjectural Emendation in the Book of Mormon,” *FARMS Review* 18/1 (2006): 187–231.

We have reprinted slightly edited or updated essays that had previously appeared elsewhere,<sup>33</sup> when we believed that they had been neglected, and we have also published one or two older essays that had previously circulated privately.

There are treasures here, not to be missed, in these and other essays, and in literally hundreds of reviews. Fortunately, all of the contents of the *Review*, from its first issue in 1989 down to the present day, are indexed and hence easily available, at no cost, online: <http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/publications/review/>.

33. Examples include Mark Ashurst-McGee, “Moroni as Angel and as Treasure Guardian,” *FARMS Review* 18/1 (2006): 35–100; and Martin E. Marty, “We Might Know What to Do and How to Do It: On the Usefulness of the Religious Past,” *FARMS Review* 21/1 (2009): 27–44.

Now, though, we come to yet another name change. The *FARMS Review* becomes the *Mormon Studies Review*. The change, which I sincerely hope really *will* be the last one, signals the breadth of the subject matter that the *Review* has treated over the past several years. It relieves us of the obligation (which we once tried to meet but have long since abandoned) of trying to review every single item published on the Book of Mormon, however trivial, obscure, and/or insignificant. It was, however, largely compelled by the fact that, with the rise of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, the name *FARMS* is receding rapidly into the background and we didn’t want the name *The FARMS Review* to survive merely as a fossil reminder of that earlier stage of the history of the organization (particularly since the name *FARMS* has always been a bit awkward, drawing calls to our receptionists from members of 4-H clubs seeking counsel about raising pigs for competitions at the state fair).

The *Mormon Studies Review* will continue to be published semiannually, featuring reviews and essays dealing with a range of issues, most of which, in one way or another, will center on the scriptures. It will continue to defend the sacred writings of our tradition, as well as other aspects of Latter-day Saint thought and practice. The *Review* represents our commitment to scholarly excellence—we won’t hesitate to point out serious flaws, when we see them, in pro-Mormon publications as well as in the works of critics—and our deep conviction of the intellectual robustness of Latter-day Saint faith claims. Indeed, it will continue to commend them, to the best of our capacity, through vigorous and learned discourse.


We also welcome into our aging ranks a new associate editor, the energetic and prodigiously talented Canadian physician Gregory Smith.

Dr. Smith studied research physiology and English at the University of Alberta but escaped into medical school before earning his bachelor's degree. After receiving his MD, he completed his residency in family medicine at St. Mary's Hospital in Montréal, Québec. There he learned the medical vocabulary and French Canadian slang that he didn't pick up in the France Paris Mission and won the Mervyn James Robson Award for Excellence in Internal Medicine. He now practices rural family medicine in Alberta, with interests in internal medicine and psychiatry. A clinical preceptor for residents and medical students, he has been repeatedly honored for excellence in clinical teaching.

Dr. Smith has a particular research interest in Latter-day Saint plural marriage and has been published in the *Review*<sup>34</sup> (and elsewhere) on this

and other topics. His science background has also led him to write about DNA and the Book of Mormon. With twelve years of classical piano training, he is, he says, "a lifelong audiophile and owns far too many MP3 files." He further reports that he "lives happily with his one indulgent wife, three extraordinary children, and four cats."

He will be a marvelous asset to the continued progress of the *Mormon Studies Review*.

I deeply appreciate the efforts of those who have assisted in the development and production of this inaugural issue of the *Mormon Studies Review*: associate editors Lou Midgley, George Mitton, and Greg Smith; production editor Don Brugger, assisted by intern Julie Davis; editorial reviewer and typesetter Alison Coutts; and proofreaders Paula Hicken and Sandra Thorne. 

*Daniel C. Peterson (PhD, University of California at Los Angeles) is professor of Islamic studies at Brigham Young University.*

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34. Gregory L. Smith, "George D. Smith's *Nauvoo Polygamy*," review of *Nauvoo Polygamy*, by George D. Smith, *FARMS Review* 20/2 (2008): 37-123.



# *The Book of Mormon: Passport to Discipleship*

*This annual Neal A. Maxwell Institute Lecture was originally given on 10 March 2011 at Brigham Young University.*

MARILYN ARNOLD

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A couple of years ago I was in Rexburg, lecturing at BYU-Idaho. As I walked through the student center, I noticed a bulletin board featuring a poster with a catchy heading: “Come and set sail on the disciple ship.” Student leaders were being invited to sign up for a gathering at Teton Lodge. I hardly think that a Teton Lodge destination was what Elder Maxwell had in mind when he used the term *discipleship*, but I have to admire the creativity of the student who came up with that clever bit of wordplay. I suspect he or she was an English major. (We are known to take liberties with words.)

I confess that I boarded the “scholar ship” far too long before I boarded the “disciple ship.” If my destinations in those days were more intellectually demanding than the Teton Lodge, they proved to be at least as enjoyable and possibly more invigorating. Still, my ship was earthbound, and my charts were horizontal and literary rather than vertical. My destinations then were

countless library archives, conferences, and symposia across the country. I lectured all over (no surprise there, I fear!), and I wrote books, articles, and papers. More significantly, I taught students and enlisted some of them in my work. We grew together in scholarship and camaraderie and accomplishment. In a word, it was good.

It was good, yes, but it was earthbound. And then, at last, I discovered a passport on another kind of ship, a ship of the soul. A ship that had been docked right outside my door, waiting for me to board it. I had held the passport and boarding ticket all my life and didn’t know it. That passport was the Book of Mormon. It might be something else for others, but for me it was, first and foremost, the Book of Mormon. And then—it should have been no surprise—I discovered that the two “ships,” discipleship and scholarship, could travel side by side. Far from being two incompatible or mutually exclusive pursuits, the lesser one, scholarship, could embrace the

greater one, discipleship. I could journey with both simultaneously.

Bringing those two “ships” together wrought nothing short of a miracle in my life. And the older I get, the more I value the treasures aboard the “disciple ship,” and the more my goal is an ultimate rather than an earthly destination. This is not in any way to diminish the role and value of scholarship. It was that ship, after all, that gave me a highly satisfying profession, endless opportunities, and a “family” of friends across the country. And it taught me to study and think. But more important, and more pertinent to my subject this evening, the “scholar ship” gave me the maps, tools, and skills that someone like me—a *word* person—needed for steering the other ship, the “disciple ship,” onto a course of blessed understanding and unspeakable joy.

In the preface to my new book on the Book of Mormon, titled *From the Heart: Charity in the Book of Mormon*, I describe the night of soul-searching, decades ago, that impelled me to begin earnest study of the Book of Mormon. What I say there is pertinent to my subject here, and I decided to quote briefly from it:

My academic training, which was long and rigorous, was in the study of the written word. I had learned how to read and understand literary texts—narratives, essays, poetry, journals, drama. And what was the Book of Mormon but literature of the highest caliber, literature from the mind of the Lord, recorded through his chosen servants. And in English, translated only once and that directly from the Lord. . . .

I knew then, with a surety I had rarely experienced before, that it was time to turn those years of education and experience to serving something beyond my profes-

sional career. Something of greater importance. Something of eternal consequence. I knew it was time to apply my training to a more specific kind of service in the kingdom, something that reached beyond the worldly concerns of academia, else why was I blessed to receive such training? I knew it was time to study the Book of Mormon with, at the very least, the same intensity that I had devoted to the study of literary texts and lives. I also knew it was time to raise my life to a higher spiritual plane, to cast off anything superficial or incompatible with pure pursuit of divine truth in the Book of Mormon. . . .

I began studying, devouring the Book of Mormon daily, poring over every word and phrase. As I read the early chapters, I was overwhelmed with a desire to write about the book.<sup>1</sup>

That night brought me to my knees and to the realization that “the Book of Mormon was the key to my testimony” (xvi). I add that “writing the book that had its genesis in that first night of soul-searching and divine guidance was a life-altering experience” (xvii).<sup>2</sup> And indeed it was. The Book of Mormon became then, and still is, my passport to discipleship. It is the instrument the Lord used to change my heart and bring me to him with new commitment, and it is the instrument he still uses as I stumble along on my imperfect journey. But I am aboard that ship, growing, changing, celebrating with every

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1. Marilyn Arnold, *From the Heart: Charity in the Book of Mormon* (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2011), xv–xvi.

2. The book I allude to is *Sweet Is the Word: Reflections on the Book of Mormon* (American Fork, UT: Covenant, 1996). It was many wonderful years in the making.

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reading. And every reading brings new insights and increased faith.

I recognize, too, that important as my scholarly work has been to my study and teaching and writing about the Book of Mormon, such preparation is insufficient when brought alone to a sacred text. The guidance of the Spirit is absolutely essential. With that guidance, the humblest, least educated among us can read and understand and love the Book of Mormon. I am the first to admit that I am not a scholar of ancient religious history, nor of ancient writings. What I have is what all of us have—the book itself. Perhaps, however, as an English teacher and a writer for many years (I won’t say how many), I have developed a special relationship with written words, a love that has found its fullest expression in the Book of Mormon.

I write about the Book of Mormon because I *have* to; it compels me. It is the tangible force behind my faith. The second Alma knew that power. He said that “the preaching of the word . . . had had more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword, or anything else, which had happened unto them” (Alma 31:5). It was Alma’s conviction of the word’s capacity to change people that prompted him to leave the Nephite judgment seat and go forth to “preach the word of God, . . . bearing down in pure testimony” in an effort to “stir [his people ] up in remembrance of their duty” (Alma 4:19).

Nephi learns that the iron rod, seen first in Lehi’s vision and then in his own, represents the word of God, to which we must cling if we are to inherit eternal life (1 Nephi 8 and 11). I remind you that the iron rod metaphor is entirely the Lord’s, and no mortal invention. Alma’s special regard for the word, and his recognition that inspired verbal truth can change lives, is evident

in his sermon to the Zoramite castoffs. There he, too, employs metaphor in likening the word of God to a seed that we must plant in our hearts and nourish to a fulness of faith (Alma 32:28–43). Jacob reminds us that “by the power of [God’s] word man came upon the face of the earth” (Jacob 4:9). No fewer than three columns in the Book of Mormon index are devoted to “word” entries, and the list is far from complete.

One of the remarkable things about the man in whose memory we assemble tonight is his obvious love for, and skill with, words. That special gift is enhanced by his love for Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, and the church and gospel restored by that divine Son. Elder Neal A. Maxwell’s writings attest to his utter delight in language. He experiments with word combinations and carefully structures phrases and sentences to make words say a great deal in very little space. In just one address, we find such stunning images and alliterated phrases as “rhythm of the Restoration” (twice), “trail of testifying tombstones,” “slit-eyed skepticism,” “triumphant triad of truth,” and “sudden luxuriant meadows of meaning.”<sup>3</sup> Who, among ordinary mortals, before hearing it or seeing it in print, could conceive of “meaning” in terms of “luxuriant meadows”? He also urges us to “make more Mary-like choices and show less Martha-like anxiety.” Then he adds, surely with a smile, “What are calories anyway, compared to special conversations?”<sup>4</sup> (Did you catch the alliterated *c*’s even in that little addendum?)

Maybe his uncommon awareness of language made scripture and the words of prophets all that much dearer to Elder Maxwell. His sensitivity

3. Neal A. Maxwell, “The Book of Mormon: A Great Answer to ‘The Great Question,’” in *The Book of Mormon: First Nephi, the Doctrinal Foundation*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1988), 1–17.

4. Neal A. Maxwell, “The Precious Promise,” *Ensign*, April 2004, 47.



to the sounds of words, and how they resonate together, is part of the spiritual awareness of the man. And, I must add, he is never more eloquent than when he is urging us to discipleship, which ultimately became his signature subject. With every sentence he wrote, Neal Maxwell knew what he wanted to accomplish. His extraordinary gift for verbal expression is evidenced in his keen awareness of how word choice, sound, and placement can carry a thought.

In the English department we call this matching form and content. And in the hands of a master craftsman, it was mighty effective. Contrary to some popular notion, this master craftsman did not use big words and lengthy, difficult sentences. His aim was not to overwhelm us with his learning. What he did, instead of meandering as most of us do (present party included), was make every word count. President Gordon B. Hinckley mentioned this special quality in his address at Elder Maxwell's funeral:

I know of no other who spoke in such a distinctive and interesting way. When he opened his mouth we all listened. We came alive with expectation of something unusual, and we were never disappointed. . . . Each talk was a masterpiece, each book a work of art, worthy of repeated reading. I think we shall not see one like him again.<sup>5</sup>

When I read the Book of Mormon, I'm afraid I often do "English teacher" things with it. Relishing the blend of language and thought, I read for more than story line or "quotable quotes." I read for doctrine and for insight and understanding about divine purposes, expectations, and promises for Earth's children. I read to increase my faith, and I read for the utter joy of it. Like

any great literature, the Book of Mormon can be read and understood on several levels. As a reader takes that magnificent book into his or her life, absorbing it ever more deeply in mind and heart, it becomes a part of that person. Consider that nearly everything entering the dedicated reader's mind is filtered through the very language and essence of the book. And since the book is a stirring testimony of Jesus Christ, to absorb it into one's very being is to know him better and better. It is to change, it is to become a disciple.

At every level, the Book of Mormon lifts and inspires. But the more earnestly we read it and savor it, seeking to make it ours, the more meaningful it becomes and the stronger we grow in discipleship. Yes, the Book of Mormon can be approached as one might approach a fine piece of narrative literature, something that has endured through the ages and is read and revered the world over. Something known and esteemed for the beauty and strength of its language, the truth of its message, the innate nobility of its principal characters, and its capacity to yield more and more meanings and delights the closer the reading of it.

Indeed, the Book of Mormon is a great book, by every worldly test. But the real greatness of the book resides in what lies behind it. It is, in very fact, the word of God delivered to and through mortal prophets, prophets chosen by him for this most important task. How can we do any less than bring to it all the training and experience we can muster, and all the prayers and repenting and desire of which we are capable? When the Savior enjoined us to "search the scriptures" (John 5:39), I think he really meant *search*, as opposed to skim, peruse, glance at on occasion—or merely dust.

There is this thing about English teachers that drives their friends (if they have any left) crazy.

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5. *Church News*, July 31, 2004, 3; quoted in Neal A. Maxwell, *Moving in His Majesty and Power* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2004), xii.

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In addition to insisting on the proper use of the verbs *lie* and *lay*, they are compulsive close readers. They can read *Hamlet* for the fiftieth time and discover things they had missed in the previous forty-nine readings. It is a disease of the profession. This is how I am with the Book of Mormon, and so it never grows tedious or stale. I always come to it with joyous anticipation and renewed expectations of learning and insight.

Last summer, long before this lecture invitation arrived, I had decided to go at the book differently this time, deliberately considering each sentence in each verse. This would be a complete reversal of several readings in recent years, when, with dedicated Relief Society groups who read with me, I devoured the whole Book of Mormon—and led weekly discussions on it—in six weeks. Reading this way is a glorious experience, and I am lifted by it and by the enthusiasm and spiritual feast we share. But now, having finished our most recent study marathon, I turned to the first chapter of 1 Nephi and began afresh, recording in a notebook any new thoughts that came to me as I read yet again, very slowly, the precious words.

I venture to share a few random thoughts from that little journal with you, all of them composed at bedtime. (If I see some of you nodding off, I'll know it was a mistake.) Then, too, some of the supposed “new” insights may really be old insights I have forgotten. (That's one of the benefits of aging.) The Book of Mormon is both familiarly old and refreshingly new, every time I approach it. For example, my opening note on page 1 of the new journal focuses on Nephi's brief general introduction to his record, which I hadn't given much attention to before. Nephi's closing sentence makes it clear that he authored these introductory words as well as the narrative that follows. He says: “This is according to the

account of Nephi; or in other words, I, Nephi, wrote this record.”

“Why does this sentence jump out at me tonight, for the first time?” I asked myself. And then I knew. If Nephi hadn't written that last sentence, we might have assumed that Mormon had composed the introduction. After all, until the last half of the last sentence, Nephi writes in the third person, opening with these words: “An account of Lehi and his wife Sariah, and his four sons, being called, (beginning at the eldest) Laman, Lemuel, Sam, and Nephi.” We might have expected a first-person narrator to say it another way: “An account of my father Lehi, my mother Sariah, my three brothers,” and so on. You see what English teachers do? We latch onto what are molehills for normal people and happily make small mountains out of them. Then we foist them off on innocent bystanders.

In literature I am often drawn to so-called minor characters whom casual readers and critics sometimes pass by or give only scant attention to. I find that they have much to teach me, and this is true in my reading of the Book of Mormon also. Although Lehi is scarcely a minor figure in the Book of Mormon, he sometimes takes a backseat to his incredible fourth son. I refuse to leave him there. In fact, recent readings of 1 Nephi 1 have lifted Lehi off the page and given me still greater appreciation for this dynamic, courageous man whom God trusted with the destiny of a whole new nation in a faraway land. We must ask ourselves why it was Lehi, and not his contemporary Jeremiah—or even Ezekiel or Daniel—who was instructed to leave Jerusalem and later establish the chosen people in the promised land. If the abridgment of his record had not been lost, I think we would know why.

Nephi wastes no time in reporting that Lehi experienced glorious visionary events, including the opening of the heavens to a vision of God the Father, his Son, angels, and the original Twelve Apostles. Does it surprise you that Nephi immediately introduces the miraculous—just five verses into the record? The skeptical reader, already programed to doubt, might see this as preposterous and slam the book shut, never to open it again. Of course, that person would then have all the ammunition needed to compose a critical review declaring the book to be the foolish invention of an unbalanced mind. (I think I'm beginning to sound like Hugh Nibley!)

Every verse in this chapter yields amazing information, and I could probably spend the entire evening on the twenty verses in 1 Nephi 1. I'll spare you that, but one thing I must emphasize—we have only a tiny fraction of Lehi's words. In my journal I say, referencing verse 16, "Nephi notes that Lehi had written a great deal about his visions, dreams, and prophecies." In fact, Nephi refers to Lehi's writings three times in a single verse, twice explaining that he can't record them all, so vast are they:

And now I, Nephi, do not make a full account of the things which my father hath written, for he hath written many things which he saw in visions and in dreams; and he also hath written many things which he prophesied and spake unto his children, of which I shall not make a full account. (1 Nephi 1:16)

Both 16 and 17 are important verses if we are to comprehend just how prolific Lehi was and Nephi's role in dealing with his father's record. We tend to skip over the passages about Lehi's writings, and I think we should not. Nephi is

careful to add that he will not write an account of *his* "proceedings" until *after* he has abridged the record of his father (see v. 17). This postponement of his own work in order to prepare his father's affirms the importance of Lehi's writings. It also underscores the great respect Nephi shows his father throughout the narrative.

If some of us have been swayed by Laman and Lemuel's growing inclination to dismiss Lehi as an aged man out of touch with reality, we need to correct that impression. Perhaps we should look more closely at Nephi's words about his father, and perhaps we should study more intently Lehi's prophecies and teachings. We remember Lehi for his visions, but we sometimes forget that he delivered some amazing discourses near the end of his life. In fact, the first three chapters of 2 Nephi are given entirely to his teachings. They include his powerful prophecies of the promised land, his warnings and commandments to Laman and Lemuel, and his inspired discourse on the whole redemptive gospel plan, with particular emphasis on the principle of opposition in relation to agency. Lehi teaches all this magnificent doctrine and then adds prophecies from the ancient Joseph that have special implications for the latter days. Surely Lehi could stand shoulder to shoulder with many of the great Old Testament prophets.

Let's consider another father who, like Lehi, is sometimes overshadowed by an exceptional son, a son whose writings and ministry are prominent in the record. A modest man, he is seldom mentioned in talks and lessons. His son is named after him, and it is the son whom the name "Alma" generally calls to mind. But this father is as worthy of our attention and admiration as his son. His conversion is less dramatic—no angel descending to shock him to his senses. Perhaps

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that is why he doesn't capture our imagination the way the second Alma does. But it is also a measure of the man that he is converted simply by hearing the words of Abinadi and recognizing them as true. He is open to the word of salvation and open to the whisperings of the Spirit. I dearly love this man who has come to embody for me the very essence of humble discipleship.

In speaking of him, we typically call him "Alma the Elder," thereby creating a mental image of an older man. But he was not an older man, nor even a middle-aged man, when he heard Abinadi boldly prophesy and testify, at length, before wicked King Noah's court. We learn much about this man in one verse of introduction:

But there was one among them whose name was Alma, he also being a descendant of Nephi. And he was a young man, and he believed the words which Abinadi had spoken, for he knew concerning the iniquity which Abinadi had testified against them; therefore he began to plead with the king that he would not be angry with Abinadi, but suffer that he might depart in peace. (Mosiah 17:2)

Not only was Alma a young man, but he was a direct descendant of the first Nephi and therefore had the blood of prophets in his veins. He also recognized truth when he heard it. Noah, we remember, was the son of Zeniff, leader of a group who left Zarahemla to inhabit their ancestral lands. When Noah succeeded his father to the throne, he replaced Zeniff's priests with his own minions and turned to worldly indulgences and idolatry (see Mosiah 11:5-7). Unfortunately, he drew his people after him.

The amazing thing about this young priest named Alma is that he stood before King Noah,

begging him to spare Abinadi's life and allow him to leave. Now, Alma must have known Noah quite well, known him as a pompous, sinful, demanding, if sometimes cowardly, magistrate who would not look kindly on insubordination among his paid yes-men. Yet, risking his own life, Alma dared challenge the king's command that Abinadi be executed. Not only was Alma cast out, but orders were issued for his capture and execution. Alma was able to escape and hide, and most certainly under the influence of the Spirit, he wrote "all the words which Abinadi had spoken" (Mosiah 17:4). Abinadi would die for his testimony, but his words would be preserved intact and then taught by one man whose heart was changed by them. That one man was Alma.

We have ample proof that the first Alma became a great prophet, a true disciple, and a man of exceptional gifts as a teacher. Alma's story unfolds in Mosiah 18, one of my favorite chapters in all scripture. It tells what occurred at the waters of Mormon, a remote and lovely place of temporary safety where people gathered to hear the words of life taught by Alma. There this small but growing group of souls came together and formed a community of Saints; and Alma was the Lord's instrument for the miracle. I simply must quote a few passages. The beauty of the language is breathtaking as it captures the utter wonder of events at those waters and nearby woods where Alma hid during the day.

What Alma taught was "the redemption of the people, which was to be brought to pass through the power, and sufferings, and death of Christ, and his resurrection and ascension into heaven" (Mosiah 18:2). The essence of the Christian gospel, which an inspired Alma understood thoroughly even this early. He taught "privately," and people listened as he spoke of "repentance,

and redemption, and faith on the Lord” (vv. 3, 7). Bring his words into the present, and marvel at the love and faith that are to define his followers. Marvel, too, at the beautiful phrasing of the lines. What will set you apart, Alma tells those gathered, is your desire “to come into the fold of God, and to be called his people,” and your willingness “to bear one another’s burdens, that they may be light” (v. 8). Moreover, he says, you must be

willing to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort, and to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places . . . even until death, that ye may be redeemed of God, and be numbered with those of the first resurrection, that ye may have eternal life. (Mosiah 18:9)

Alma then invites them to be

baptized in the name of the Lord, as a witness before him that ye have entered into a covenant with him, that ye will serve him and keep his commandments, that he may pour out his Spirit more abundantly upon you. (v. 10)

Try to realize fully what is happening. A young man only recently serving in the apostate Noah’s court has become the Lord’s chosen emissary to revitalize faith, not only here among this small group of would-be Saints, but eventually in Zarahemla as well. Knowing that baptism is necessary for true followers of Christ, and that he, too, must be baptized and can receive authority only from on high to baptize others, Alma steps into the water and humbly seeks that authority. He is ready to consecrate himself and his life to God’s purposes. He pleads, “O Lord, pour out thy Spirit upon thy servant, that he may do this work with holiness of heart. And when he had

said these words, the Spirit of the Lord was upon him.” Feeling that holy ordination, he addresses Helam, attesting that he has “authority from the Almighty God” to baptize him. He tells Helam that in accepting baptism, Helam has “entered into a covenant to serve” God until he dies. The two of them are then “buried in the water; and they arose and came forth out of the water rejoicing, being filled with the Spirit” (Mosiah 18:12-14).

“About two hundred and four souls” are baptized at this time, and “from that time forward” they are “called the church of God, or the church of Christ.” The record emphasizes the formation of this organization “by the power and authority of God” (Mosiah 18:16-17). In reading about these blessed souls, we might overlook the fact that the community Alma created at Mormon is a revelation of his character. Steadfast he was, and filled with the pure love of Christ. His instructions to his people reveal him better than any adjectives I can call up. With his unfailing emphasis on the Savior, and on unity and love, he molded them into a holy congregation where peace and sharing and devotion were boundless. He insisted that

there should be no contention one with another, but that they should look forward with one eye, having one faith and one baptism, having their hearts knit together in unity and in love one towards another. And thus he commanded them to preach. And thus they became the children of God. (Mosiah 18:21-22)

I can’t think that the city of Enoch was more blessed.

Alma instructed these dear followers to “observe the sabbath day, and keep it holy,” and to “give thanks to the Lord their God” every day.

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They were to gather and worship at least “one day in every week,” and more when possible (Mosiah 18:23, 25). He emphasized that their priests were to be self-supporting; payment “for their labor” would be “the grace of God, that they might wax strong in the Spirit, having the knowledge of God, that they might teach with power and authority from God” (vv. 24, 26). Alma also taught that “of their own free will and good desires towards God” they were to share resources—those with more abundance giving to those with little or nothing. And this they did, “walk[ing] uprightly before God, imparting to one another both temporally and spiritually according to their needs” (vv. 27–29).

I must quote one more passage, a highly poetic one, that captures the spirit of the community that owed its very existence to one man who opened his mind, heart, and soul to his Maker. I sense a lift in Mormon’s spirits as he composed this summary passage, echoing and re-echoing his own name:

And now it came to pass that all this was done in Mormon, yea, by the waters of Mormon, in the forest that was near the waters of Mormon; yea, the place of Mormon, the waters of Mormon, the forest of Mormon, how beautiful are they to the eyes of them who there came to the knowledge of their Redeemer; yea, and how blessed are they, for they shall sing to his praise forever. (Mosiah 18:30)

Did you notice that each reference to place, waters, and forest is condensed and repeated? Truly, this is elevated poetic language, written by one very much alive both to the Spirit and to the sounds and rhythms of words and phrases. And note that all this poetry builds to the fact that

here these blessed souls “came to the knowledge of their Redeemer,” whose praises “they shall sing . . . forever.” They became disciples, in the finest sense of the word.

As I have suggested, this first Alma was divinely called to reestablish and lead the Lord’s church, first among his exiled followers and then in the larger nation after he and his people arrived safely in Zarahemla. There are several references later on to his being the appointed leader of that church. The record states that although “many churches” were established, “they were all one church, yea, even the church of God” (Mosiah 25:22). Clearly, Alma was to head them all, for “king Mosiah had given Alma the authority over the church” (26:8; see 25:19). Of course, the higher, ecclesiastical authority had to come from God himself, and it did. In fact, the Lord speaks directly to Alma, confirming that it is His church that has been established among those willing to be called by His name. (You can read the full text of the Lord’s words to Alma on one occasion in Mosiah 26:15–32.)

The Lord makes a rare and splendid promise to Alma: “Thou art my servant; and I covenant with thee that thou shalt have eternal life; and thou shalt serve me and go forth in my name” (Mosiah 26:20). Could any covenant be grander and any calling more clear? The Lord gives him authority both to judge and to forgive (see v. 29), and Alma writes all the Lord’s words “that he might judge the people of that church according to the commandments of God” (v. 33). We are told in the same chapter that “Alma did regulate all the affairs of the church” (v. 37).

One measure of the first Alma’s great faith and strength as a prophet is in his ultimate influence on his rebellious son and namesake. When the converted younger Alma leaves the judgeship

and dedicates himself solely to teaching the word of God throughout the land, he launches what would become his principal sermon with a lengthy tribute to his father. He tells who his father was and what he achieved as a devoted emissary of God. We cannot overstate the importance of the first thirteen verses of Alma 5, as they reveal the forthright, unwavering character of the first Alma. How grateful I am that this son recognized his father's accomplishments, but perhaps more than that, the kind of man he was. It is only too bad that this son wasted his early years in foolish denial of his father's holy calling, exceptional leadership, and capacity for love. This is how the younger man opens his sermon:

I, Alma, having been consecrated by my father, Alma, to be a high priest over the church of God, he having power and authority from God to do these things, behold, I say unto you that he began to establish a church . . . ; and he did baptize his brethren in the waters of Mormon. (Alma 5:3)

The second Alma then speaks of how the Lord changed the hearts of those whom the first Alma taught, "their souls," he says, being "illuminated by the light of the everlasting word." Having been "loosed" from "the bands of death . . . and the chains of hell . . . , their souls did expand, and they did sing redeeming love" (Alma 5:7, 9).

The younger man then rightly credits his father with bringing these once-alienated people to know and embrace the word of God. But first it is his father's believing heart that the younger Alma celebrates. These next verses are a revelation of the man whom we tend to forget, but whom his son can never forget:

Behold, I can tell you—did not my father Alma believe in the words which

were delivered by the mouth of Abinadi? And was he not a holy prophet? Did he not speak the words of God, and my father Alma believe them?

And according to his faith there was a mighty change wrought in his heart. . . .

And behold, he preached the word unto your fathers, and a mighty change was also wrought in their hearts, and they humbled themselves and put their trust in the true and living God. And behold, they were faithful unto the end; therefore they were saved. (Alma 5:11-13)

What a powerful testifier the first Alma was! We have many more of his son's words, but that son's ability to reach hearts with the inspired spoken word could not have been any greater than his father's.

Years later, in counseling his son Helaman, a grateful Alma recalls the role his father played in his own dramatic conversion, a conversion initiated by the visitation of a commanding angel:

As I was thus racked with torment, while I was harrowed up by the memory of my many sins, behold, I remembered also to have heard my father prophesy unto the people concerning the coming of one Jesus Christ, a Son of God, to atone for the sins of the world.

Now, as my mind caught hold upon this thought, I cried within my heart: O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me. (Alma 36:17-18)

That was the moment of the great turnaround for the younger man, and we should not underestimate his father's part in that event, having taught of Christ and now calling for a fast in his

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son's behalf, rejoicing at heaven's intervention to save his son.

There are many other Book of Mormon figures who are very dear to me, stalwarts who are perhaps too seldom called to our attention. Consider Jacob, who saw the Lord himself (see 2 Nephi 2:4), and two later Nephis and a Lehi, who were visited by angels and the voice of the Lord, who experienced miracles and performed miracles—even raising the dead. One later Nephi served the resurrected Savior as head of his church. And consider Amulek who, like Alma the father, is sometimes obscured in the shadow of Alma the son, with whom he served. We frequently quote passages from Amulek's magnificent sermon to the poverty-ridden Zoramites whom Alma had just addressed, but too often we merely credit "Alma 34" without verbally recognizing Amulek as the speaker of those words. Consider this statement, for example:

For behold, this life is the time for men to prepare to meet God; yea, behold the day of this life is the day for men to perform their labors. (Alma 34:32)

Sound familiar? How about this one:

I beseech of you that ye do not procrastinate the day of your repentance until the end; for after this day of life, which is given us to prepare for eternity, behold, if we do not improve our time while in this life, then cometh the night of darkness wherein there can be no labor performed. (Alma 34:33)

Or this one:

That same spirit which doth possess your bodies at the time that ye go out of this life, that same spirit will have power to possess your body in that eternal world. (Alma 34:34)

Before uttering these words, Amulek had spoken extensively and powerfully of the infinite atonement, clarifying the meaning of the word *infinite* when linked with *atonement*. Much earlier both Jacob and Nephi used the term *infinite* in speaking of the atonement (see 2 Nephi 9:7; 25:16), but it is Amulek who fully explains just what that means and why only Christ could accomplish it. He says, in part:

For it is expedient that there should be a great and last sacrifice; yea, not a sacrifice of man, neither of beast, neither of any manner of fowl; for it shall not be a human sacrifice; but it must be an infinite and eternal sacrifice. (Alma 34:10)

Amulek explains further that "there can be nothing which is short of an infinite atonement which will suffice for the sins of the world" (Alma 34:12) and also fulfill "the law of Moses" (v. 13). But the clincher is in the next verse, where he more pointedly links the law to the atonement of Christ:

And behold, this is the whole meaning of the law, every whit pointing to that great and last sacrifice; and that great and last sacrifice will be the Son of God, yea, infinite and eternal. (Alma 34:14)

I am grateful to Mormon for also including Amulek's words about prayer to these poor Zoramites who had been forbidden to worship in churches they helped build, and therefore apparently assumed they could no longer approach God. In what can only be described as poetry (at least by me), Amulek enjoins the outcast Zoramites to pray to the Lord wherever they are, whenever they can, over all aspects of their lives. And if they can't speak their prayers aloud, they should speak them silently. I won't cite the entire

passage, but you remember that verse after verse begins with “Cry unto him,” whether it be over crops, flocks, and household, or against enemies that threaten, or even the devil himself (see Alma 34:18–27). In closing this portion of his counsel, Amulek eloquently insists that mortals must also utter private prayers in sequestered places and in their hearts for themselves and others. Hear him:

But this is not all; ye must pour out your souls in your closets, and your secret places, and in your wilderness. (Alma 34:26)

A sidenote here: I think the word *wilderness* in this passage can refer to a barren spiritual place or condition as well as to a remote location. Amulek continues:

Yea, and when you do not cry unto the Lord, let your hearts be full, drawn out in prayer unto him continually for your welfare, and also for the welfare of those who are around you. (Alma 34:27)

Certainly Alma 34 is one of the most moving doctrinal chapters in the Book of Mormon, and all forty-one verses are devoted to Amulek’s sermon. Some might glance at verse 1 and assume this discourse to be merely a postscript to Alma’s splendid sermon on faith and the word as a seed. Believe me, it is much more than that, and Mormon must have recognized that a summary would not do. We should never forget, either, that Amulek, a once-prominent and -prosperous man in the apostate city of Ammonihah, has given up everything for the gospel—home, family, friends, worldly possessions—to join the younger Alma on a mission to bring backsliders to faith and repentance.

I urge you to return to the Book of Mormon with gladness, perhaps reading more closely, seeing even the very familiar parts of the book with new eyes. This time, too, consider the larger

context of the oft-recited quotations, and come to know the people we might overlook in our well-deserved adulation of larger-than-life figures such as the first Nephi and the second Alma.

Elder Neal Maxwell, whom I have been blessed to count as a friend, once said, “Only by searching the scriptures,” rather than merely “using them occasionally as quote books, can we begin to understand the implications as well as the declarations of the gospel.”<sup>6</sup> He also spoke on this matter in his book *“Not My Will, But Thine.”* His words, which describe the Book of Mormon metaphorically, in poet’s terms, are my conclusion:

The Book of Mormon will be with us “as long as the earth shall stand.” We need all that time to explore it, for the book is like a vast mansion with gardens, towers, courtyards, and wings. There are rooms yet to be entered, with flaming fireplaces waiting to warm us. . . . There are panels inlaid with incredible insights. . . . Yet we as Church members sometimes behave like hurried tourists, scarcely venturing beyond the entry hall.<sup>7</sup>

May all of us venture time and time again beyond the entry hall of what I regard as the greatest book ever published. For me, it is ever new. For me, it is the passport to discipleship on the most important journey of my life.📖

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6. “Called and Prepared from the Foundation of the World,” *Ensign*, May 1986, 34.

7. Neal A. Maxwell, *“Not My Will, But Thine”* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988), 33.

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# Revisiting “A Key for Evaluating Nephite Geographies”

JOHN E. CLARK

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This essay abridges my critical evaluation published twenty-two years ago of two Book of Mormon geographies by F. Richard Hauck and John L. Sorenson.<sup>1</sup> I recognized at the time that proposals for real-world (external) settings for Book of Mormon lands and cities come and go with the regularity of LDS general conferences or market forces, so what was needed was a timeless instrument for judging any geography that may come along—not just assessments of the geographies then in play. The main objective of my essay was to outline a key for assessing all external geographies based on information in the Book of Mormon, the ultimate authority on all such matters. I was exposed to M. Wells Jakeman’s Book

of Mormon geography in three classes while an undergraduate at Brigham Young University in the 1970s, but it was not a topic that much concerned me. Consequently, as a necessary step in writing a critical assessment of Hauck’s geography in light of Sorenson’s geography, I first had to spend several months reconstructing an internal geography (baseline standard) for comparative purposes. The current abridgment conserves my proposed internal geography—or key—for evaluating external Book of Mormon geographies, removes dead arguments for the geographies reviewed, and corrects some textual and illustration errors in the original essay.

It has been my experience that most members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, when confronted with a Book of Mormon geography, worry about the wrong things. Almost invariably the first question that arises is whether the geography fits the archaeology of the proposed area. This should be our second

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1. John E. Clark, “A Key for Evaluating Nephite Geographies,” *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 1 (1989): 20–70. The two books were F. Richard Hauck, *Deciphering the Geography of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988); and John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985).

question, the first being whether the geography fits the facts of the Book of Mormon—a question we all can answer without being versed in American archaeology. Only after a given geography reconciles all of the significant geographic details given in the Book of Mormon does the question of archaeological and historical detail merit attention. The Book of Mormon must be the final and most important arbiter in deciding the correctness of a given geography; otherwise we will be forever hostage to the shifting sands of expert opinion. The following is my opinion of what the Book of Mormon actually says. I focus here only on those details that allow the construction of a basic framework for a Nephite geography; I leave more detailed reconstructions to others. Of primary importance are those references that give relative distances or directions (or both) between various locations or details that allow us to make a strong inference of either distance or direction.

What I propose is an internal geography of the Book of Mormon; a guiding concern is parsimony. For example, consider the critical geographic feature: the narrow neck of land. Was it an isthmus or a corridor? The Book of Mormon indicates that “it was only the distance of a day and a half’s journey for a Nephite, on the line Bountiful and the land Desolation, from the east to the west sea” (Alma 22:32). An east sea is not explicitly mentioned. Elsewhere we learn that the Nephites fortified the narrow-neck area that ran “from the west sea, even unto the east; it being a day’s journey for a Nephite, on the line which they had fortified and stationed their armies to defend their north country” (Helaman 4:7). An east sea is not explicitly mentioned here either. Some read more into this text than is unambiguously stated. One can call into question the generally accepted

narrow-neck/isthmus correlation based on these passages. It still remains equally likely, however, that Mormons have been reading these two passages correctly all along. A non-isthmus narrow neck (read “narrow corridor”) requires too many unjustified supporting assumptions; Occam’s razor in this instance favors the isthmian alternative.

I provide below my reading of geographical passages in the Book of Mormon. I have tried to minimize the number of assumptions made about the meaning of a passage. Some inferences and guesswork are inevitable given the nature of the text. I will be explicit about these, thereby allowing others to reject those inferences that fail to meet their standards of reasoning.

My initial assumptions about the geographic references found in the Book of Mormon are (1) Assume a literal meaning. (2) Assume no scribal errors unless internal evidence indicates otherwise. (3) Assume no duplication of place-names unless the text is unambiguous on the matter. (4) Assume that all passages are internally consistent and can be reconciled. (5) Assume that uniformitarian rather than catastrophic principles apply to the actual Book of Mormon lands (i.e., that the locality where the Book of Mormon events took place was not unrecognizably altered at the time of the crucifixion, that geographic details in the small plates and in the book of Ether are therefore compatible with those in Mormon’s and Moroni’s abridgment, and that the principles of natural science that apply to today’s environments are also pertinent to Nephite lands). (6) Assume that the best internal reconstruction is one that reconciles all the data in the Book of Mormon with a minimum of additional assumptions.

## Reconstructing an Elemental Geography

During the days of Alma and General Moroni, Book of Mormon lands consisted of three sectors that could be considered Nephite, Lamanite, and former Jaredite. The depopulated Jaredite lands constituted the land northward; Nephite and Lamanite lands lay in the land southward. Nephite lands, known as the land of Zarahemla, were sandwiched between the ancient Jaredite lands to the north and the Lamanite land of Nephi to the south. A narrow neck of land divided the land northward and the land southward; thus Book of Mormon lands were shaped like an hour-glass (fig. 1). The land southward was further divided into northern and southern sectors by a narrow strip of wilderness that ran from the east sea to the west sea. Nephites inhabited the lands north of this wilderness divide, and Lamanites controlled those to the south. As evident in figure 1, Nephite lands were quadrilateral, having four sides and four corners. We could quickly estab-



Figure 1. General Features of Book of Mormon Lands.

lish the size and shape of Book of Mormon lands using simple geometry if we knew the length and direction of at least three of its four borders. And if we could link at least one important locality in Lamanite and Jaredite lands to an established point in the Nephite land of Zarahemla, we would have the basic skeletal structure of Book of Mormon lands—and a key for evaluating competing Book of Mormon geographies.

An elemental framework of Book of Mormon geography can be reconstructed with just seven points or six transects (a line connecting two of these points), as shown in figure 2. The following sections consider each transect shown in figure 2 and present the data, inferences, and conjectures used to determine the distance between each pair of localities. To anticipate my argument, the southern border of Nephite lands was considerably longer than its northern border; and the western border was much longer than the eastern border.

Before proceeding with the specifics of each transect, I need to clarify how I am treating distance and direction. I assume that the Nephite directional system was internally consistent and that this consistency persisted throughout the period of their history. I do not pretend to know how Nephite “north” relates to the north of today’s compass, and such information is irrelevant for reconstructing an internal geography. I do assume, however, that regardless of what any “real” orientation may have been, Nephite north was 180 degrees from Nephite south, and both were 90 degrees off of east and west. The directional suffix *-ward* used in the Book of Mormon is here loosely interpreted to mean “in the general direction of.” Thus I read “northward” as “in a general northerly direction.” Finally, all directions are directions from “somewhere.” I assume

the central reference point was the city of Zarahemla, located in the “center” of the land of Zarahemla (Helaman 1:24-27).

Distances in the Book of Mormon are more problematical than directions. My assessments of distance are based on travel times, whether stated, inferred, or conjectured. Distance as “time” is familiar to most of us. When asked how far it is from Provo, Utah, to Burley, Idaho, for example, I quickly respond that it is three and a half hours rather than 220 miles. If my dad is driving, the “distance” (in terms of time) is considerably less—and significantly more if my mother is driving. Similar concerns with velocity are relevant to Book of Mormon accounts. I have converted all travel times into “units of standard distance” (USD), analogous to our “miles” or “kilometers.” *The USD is based on one day’s normal travel over flat land.* Travel through mountainous or hilly “wilderness” is considered to be half of the normal standard in terms of actual linear distance covered. In other words, two days of travel through the wilderness would cover the same as-a-crow-flies distance as one day’s travel on a plain, this because of the extra vertical and lateral movement necessitated by more difficult terrain. Internal evidence in the Book of Mormon is convincing that “wilderness” refers to mountainous regions filled with wild beasts. Some Book of Mormon travel accounts involve the movement of men, women, children, animals, and food stores, while others concern armies in hot pursuit or blind retreat. For purposes of our USDs, travel of children and animals comes under the normal standard—being more susceptible to ground conditions or terrain. Army travel (war speed) is calculated at 150-200 percent of normal (or 1.5-2 times as fast). These estimates are proposed as approximations that will allow us to reconstruct

the relative length of each border of Nephite lands. My goal is to work within the limits of precision dictated by the text; all measures given here are merely approximate. I have not adjusted my estimates of distance to fit any preconceived notions of where these places may actually be. Such interplay between text and modern maps is inappropriate and results in forcing the text to fit one’s notions or desires for placement of Book of Mormon lands.

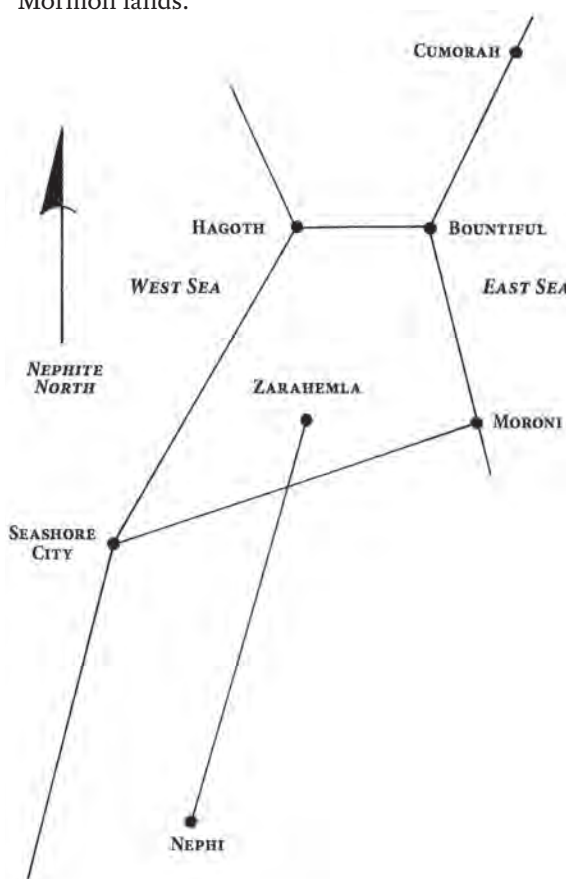


Figure 2. *Elemental Structure of Book of Mormon Lands.*

## I. Hagoth to Bountiful

I have designated the NE and NW corners of Nephite lands as “Bountiful” and “Hagoth,” respectively. These points define the east-west line that traversed the narrow neck separating the land northward from the land southward. “Hagoth” (not used as a place-name in the Book of Mormon) marks the place where Hagoth and his adventurous group embarked on their journey from the west sea to the lands northward. “Bountiful” was near the land of Bountiful and north of the city of Bountiful. This northern border of Nephite territory is one of the most poorly known and controversial transects that we will consider. As noted above, the Book of Mormon apparently specifies precise travel times for this area. But the short distances involved (one to one and a half days) cannot be squared with any known isthmus (without special conditions or travel rates being specified). The critical data for this transect are listed below numerically; inferences and conjectures are listed alphabetically.

1. The lands of Desolation and Bountiful met in the narrow neck of land that divided the land northward from the land southward (Alma 22:30–32).
2. A narrow pass or narrow passage led from the land southward to the land northward and was near the borders of the land of Desolation (Alma 50:34; 52:9; Mormon 2:29; 3:5).
  - a. “Borders” probably refers to the southern border that adjoined the land of Bountiful (see 4 and 7).
3. The narrow pass “led by the sea into the land northward, yea, by the sea, on the west and on the east” (Alma 50:34).
  - a. Both the west and east seas are referred to here.
4. The city of Desolation was in the land of Desolation near the narrow pass and perhaps near the sea or a large river that led to the sea (Mormon 3:5, 8).
5. The city of Bountiful was the northernmost (and most important) fortification of the eastern border of Nephite territory during the days of General Moroni. Its purpose was to restrict access to the land northward and to keep the Nephites from getting boxed in by the Lamanites (Alma 22:29, 33; 50:32–34; 51:28–32; 52:9; Helaman 1:23, 28; 4:6–7).
6. The city of Bountiful was less than a day’s southward march of the eastern seashore and near a wilderness to the southwest; plains lay to the south (Alma 52:20–22).
7. The “line” between the land of Bountiful and the land of Desolation ran “from the east to the west sea” and was “a day and a half’s journey for a Nephite” (Alma 22:32; see 3 Nephi 3:23).
  - a. Since the east “sea” is not specified, maybe the travel distances were not meant to be
- b. The narrow pass was close enough to each sea that its location could be described by reference to both. This suggests that the narrow pass was near the center of the narrow neck of land.<sup>2</sup>
- c. This passage, coupled with 1 and 2, is clear evidence that the narrow neck was indeed an isthmus flanked by seas, to the west and to the east.
- d. The narrow pass paralleled the flanking seas and coastlines and thus ran in a north-south direction.

2. Amalikhiah’s attempt to seize this pass and Teancum’s encounter with Morianton may suggest that the narrow pass was actually closer to the east sea (John L. Sorenson, personal communication, 1988).

from sea to sea, but from the west sea to a point to the east.

- b. The short travel times for what apparently was a significant distance suggest travel over relatively flat terrain (see section VII below).
8. The Nephite-inhabited land of Bountiful extended “even from the east unto the west sea” (Alma 22:33).
  - a. The land of Bountiful stretched across the narrow neck from the west sea and at least close to the east sea (compare 6).
9. A fortified “line” extended “from the west sea, even unto the east; it being a day’s journey for a Nephite, on the line which they had fortified” (Helaman 4:7).
  - a. The travel referred to here may pertain to only the portion of the narrow neck that was the “fortified line” (see 7a).
  - b. This probably was flat land (see 7b).
  - c. I have assumed that the journey referred to here was foot travel. If water transport was involved, the distance traveled could have been greater.
10. Hagoth built “an exceedingly large ship, on the borders of the land Bountiful, by the land Desolation, and launched it forth into the west sea, by the narrow neck which led into the land northward” (Alma 63:5).
  - a. The wording here suggests that the parallel lands of Bountiful and Desolation may not have stretched all the way to the west sea (but compare with 7, 8, and 9).
  - b. The west sea at this location may have been a natural port or embayment that would have allowed launching a large ship without difficulty.

From all of the above it seems abundantly clear that the narrow neck was an isthmus

(rather than a narrow corridor) of relatively flat lowlands (see Alma 22:32). Therefore, all travel distances should be at least normal standard, but they may have been marching (or running) distances between fortifications.<sup>3</sup> If so, 1-1.5 day’s journey would have been 2-3 USD in terms of our proposed standard measure of distance. This would have been the *minimum* width of this area.

It is noteworthy that the east “sea” or sea-shore is never specifically mentioned in conjunction with the land of Bountiful. The phrasing is consistent, regardless of which cardinal direction is specified first—“east to the west sea” (7), “east even unto the west sea” (8), and “west sea, even unto the east” (9). This suggests that the failure to mention the east “sea” is not due to mere grammatical parallelism or elliptical thought based on word order. We should, therefore, entertain the possibility that the land of Bountiful did not run all the way to the east sea. The shared border between the lands of Bountiful and Desolation, along a “line,” ran east-west to the west sea or very near to the west sea (see 10). This “line,” which was at one time fortified, could have been a natural feature of some kind, such as a river or a ridge, that would have afforded natural advantage to the Nephite forces against attack (in terms of protection or vantage).

The narrow pass appears to have crossed the line between the lands of Bountiful and Desolation and thus would have been located north of the city of Bountiful and south of the city of Desolation. Both cities were located on the eastern edge of their lands, probably within a day (USD) of the sea (see 4 and 6). The hypothetical NE point “Bountiful” of our northern transect, then, would have been located to the north and

3. Sorenson, *Ancient American Setting*, 17.



probably east of the city of Bountiful; I estimate 1 USD in both directions.

As noted, a plausible (if not probable) interpretation of the travel distances (1-1.5 days; 2-3 USD) for the narrow neck is that they refer only to the “line” from the west sea to the east. I follow this interpretation here and add at least 1 day USD to extend the eastern end of this “line” to the east sea. I consider 4 USD a reasonable estimate of the northern border of the greater land of Zarahemla. This distance is consistent with the facts of Limhi’s expedition. As Sorenson points out,<sup>4</sup> this group of explorers unknowingly passed through the narrow neck and back to Nephi in their unsuccessful search for the city of Zarahemla. The narrow neck had to have been wide enough that travelers going north-south could pass through without noticing both seas from one vantage point, including the narrow pass.

In sum, our working assumption will be that the narrow neck was oriented east-west and was about 4 USD wide.

## II. Bountiful to Moroni

Extensive data for the eastern border come from the accounts of Moroni’s campaign against Amalickiah (and later Ammoron), who attempted to break through the Nephites’ fortified line in Bountiful and gain access to the land northward. Bountiful was the northernmost and most important fortification of the Nephites’ eastern flank.

1. Moroni drove the Lamanites out of the east wilderness into their own lands to the south of the land of Zarahemla; people from Zarahemla were sent into the east wilderness “even to the borders by the seashore, and [to] possess the land” (Alma 50:7, 9) “in the borders by the seashore” (Alma 51:22).

2. The city of Moroni was founded by the east sea and “on the south by the line of the possessions of the Lamanites” (Alma 50:13).
  - a. As discussed above, a “line” could be a natural feature such as a river.
3. The city of Nephihah was founded between the cities of Moroni and Aaron (Alma 50:14).
  - a. Nephihah was westward from Moroni, and Aaron was westward from Nephihah (see section IV.4).
4. The city of Lehi was built north of Moroni by the borders of the seashore (Alma 50:15).
5. A contention arose concerning the land of Lehi and the land of Morianton “which joined upon the borders of Lehi; both of which were on the borders by the seashore.” The people of Morianton claimed part of the land of Lehi (Alma 50:25-26).
  - a. These cities would have to have been in close proximity to be fighting over land, which had to have been close enough to each city that it could be worked effectively from each (compare Alma 50:36).
6. The people of Lehi fled to the camp of Moroni; the people of Morianton fled north to the land northward. The people of Morianton were headed off at the narrow pass by Teancum and brought back to the city of Morianton (Alma 50:27-35).
  - a. The narrow pass appears to have been the most logical way to get to the land northward.
7. Amalickiah took the city of Moroni; the Nephites fled to the city of Nephihah. The people of (the city of) Lehi prepared for battle with the Lamanites (Alma 51:23-25).
  - a. The city of Nephihah was off the most direct, or easiest, route to the land northward.

4. Sorenson, *Ancient American Setting*, 17.

- b. The city of Lehi was next in line for the Lamanite attack.
  8. Amalickiah “would not suffer the Lamanites to go against the city of Nephihah to battle, but kept them down by the seashore” (Alma 51:25).
    - a. Nephihah was inland from the seashore.
  9. Nephites from Moroni, Lehi, and Morianton gathered at Nephihah to battle (Alma 51:24).
    - a. Nephihah was readily accessible from these three cities, probably northwest of Moroni (see 7a and 8b) and southwest of Lehi and Morianton.
  10. Amalickiah took the cities of Lehi, Morianton, Omner, Gid, and Mulek, “all of which were on the east borders by the seashore” (Alma 51:26), but did not take the city of Bountiful. (Mention of taking Nephihah in that verse is probably a scribal error, as it was captured much later; see Alma 59:5–11.)
  11. Teancum camped on the borders of Bountiful; Amalickiah camped “in the borders on the beach by the seashore” (Alma 51:32). Teancum killed Amalickiah; the Lamanite armies retreated to the city of Mulek (Alma 52:2).
    - a. The seashore was close to the southern border of the land of Bountiful.
    - b. This section of seashore had a beach.
  12. Teancum fortified the city of Bountiful and secured the narrow pass (Alma 52:9).
  13. There was a plain between the city of Bountiful and Mulek. From the city of Bountiful, Teancum marched to Mulek near the seashore and Moroni marched in the wilderness to the west (Alma 52:20, 22–23).
    - a. Moroni marched southward at the edge of the eastern wilderness.
  - b. The city of Bountiful was within 1 USD of the eastern seashore to the south.
  - c. There was no city between Mulek and the city of Bountiful (otherwise, the Nephite stratagem of “decoy and surround” would have had little chance of being successful; the Lamanites would not have been decoyed out of their fortress if there had been a Nephite fortress in their line of pursuit).
  14. The Nephites took Mulek by stratagem. The Lamanite armies chased Teancum’s forces “with vigor” from Mulek to the city of Bountiful in one day and started back for Mulek when they were trapped and defeated by Moroni’s and Lehi’s forces (Alma 52:21–39).
    - a. The city of Bountiful was within one day’s travel (war speed) of Mulek, or about 1.5 USD.
  15. The city of Mulek was one of the strongest Lamanite cities (Alma 53:6).
  16. After taking Mulek, the Nephites took the city of Gid (Alma 55:7–25).
    - a. Gid was the next significant city to the south of Mulek.
  17. From Gid, Moroni prepared to attack the city of Morianton (Alma 55:33).
    - a. Morianton was south of Gid.
  18. Moroni and his armies returned from a campaign at Zarahemla against the king-men and traveled eastward to the plains of Nephihah. They took the city, and the Lamanites escaped to the land of Moroni (Alma 62:18–25).
    - a. The cities of Moroni and Nephihah were east of the city of Zarahemla.
    - b. Nephihah was on a coastal plain but near the edge of the eastern wilderness, inland from the city of Moroni (see 8 and 9).
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19. Moroni went from Nephihah to Lehi; the Lamanites saw the approaching army and fled from “city to city, . . . even down upon the borders by the seashore, until they came to the land of Moroni” (Alma 62:32).
- Some smaller settlements seem to have been involved in the Lamanite retreat, but only the larger fortified cities are mentioned by name.
  - Moroni’s army traveled from a point near Nephihah to Lehi and south to Moroni in one day (war speed). Lehi and Nephihah were probably within 1 USD, and Lehi and Moroni were probably 1 USD apart; Nephihah and Moroni probably were not more than 1.5–2 USD apart.
20. The Lamanites “were all in one body in the land of Moroni” (Alma 62:33); they were “encircled about in the borders by the wilderness on the south, and in the borders by the wilderness on the east” (Alma 62:34). They were camped inside the city of Moroni (Alma 62:36). General Moroni drove the Lamanites out of the land and city of Moroni (Alma 62:38).
- The city of Moroni was not right next to the seashore but was separated by a “wilderness.” Given the setting, it may have been a swampy, lagoon-estuary “wilderness” rather than a hilly area. (The city sank beneath the sea at the time of the crucifixion; see 3 Nephi 8:9; 9:4.)
  - The seashore was close to the city of Moroni. I estimate a distance of 0.5 USD.
  - The city of Moroni was on the edge of the southern wilderness, or on the borders of Lamanite lands.
21. The sons of Helaman, Nephi, and Lehi began their missionary travels at the city of Bountiful; they traveled to Gid and then to Mulek (Helaman 5:14–15).
- They visited Gid and Mulek in reverse order of the Lamanite attack and Nephite reconquest (see 10, 14, and 16). Barring scribal error (for which there is no evidence), this missionary journey suggests that Gid was not directly in line with Mulek. One could get to Gid without going through Mulek, and on some occasions it was logical or convenient to do so.
  - Since Mulek appears to have been near the seashore, or at least in the middle of the coastal plain (see 13), this passage suggests that Gid may have been inland from Mulek.
- In summary, the Lamanite drive to the land northward along the eastern border of the land of Zarahemla proceeded from south to north. They took the cities of Moroni, Lehi, Morianton, Omner, Gid, and Mulek. Bountiful, the final obstacle in their path, withstood their attack. Later, the Lamanites took the city of Nephihah. In their counteroffensive, the Nephites regained Mulek, Gid, Nephihah, Morianton, Lehi, and Moroni and drove the Lamanites into the southern wilderness. The recapture of Omner is not mentioned, suggesting that it was inland from the main line of fortifications. I have reconstructed the settlement pattern as shown in figure 3. In the absence of specific information, I assume a distance of 1.5 USD between adjacent fortifications in a string of fortifications (the “day” or “day and a half’s journey for a Nephite”). Where we have accurate information, this appears to have been about the distance (e.g., Bountiful to Mulek). Also, 1.5 USD is just a day’s travel, or less, at war speed. Spacing fortifications this far apart would mean that every place on the fortified line would
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be within a half day’s travel from a fortification. The only question, then, is which cities constituted the fortified line. I consider them to have been Bountiful, Mulek, Gid, Morianton/Lehi, and Moroni. As Gid was probably inland from Mulek, the direct distance from Bountiful to Gid would have been less than the 3 USD expected

by this spacing. The distances of the other cities were discussed above.

In conclusion, the direct-line distance from the city of Bountiful to Moroni was about 5 USD; adding another day’s travel (the distance from the city of Bountiful to point “Bountiful”) gives us a total distance of 6 USD for the eastern transect.

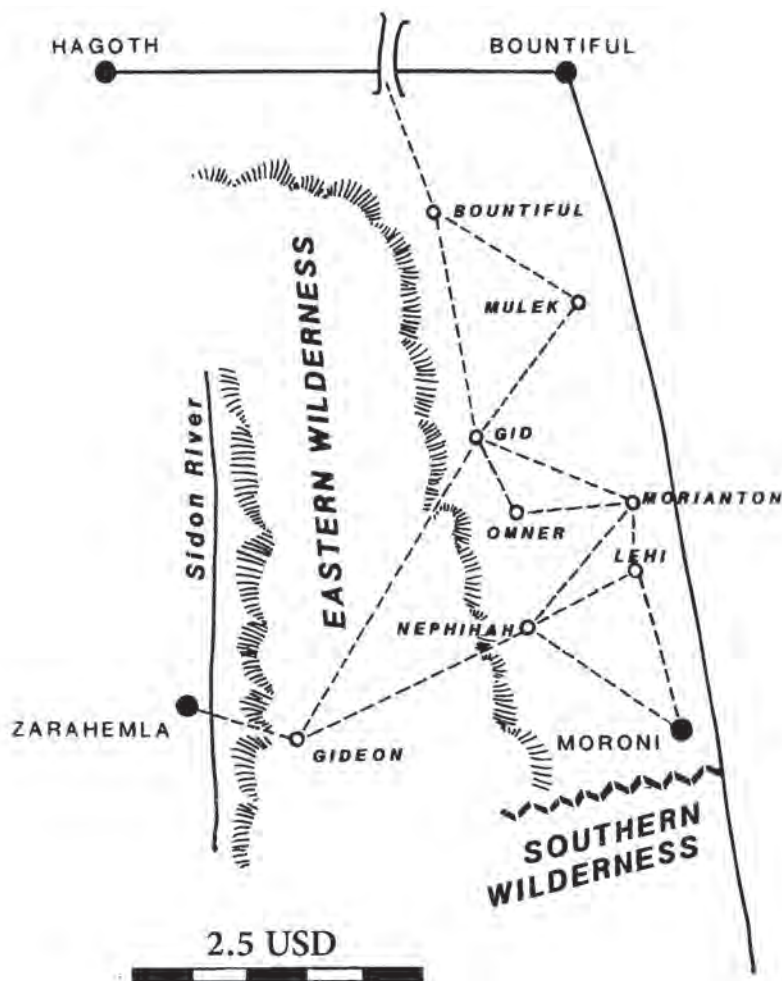


Figure 3. The Northern and Eastern Borders of Nephite Lands.

### III. Moroni to Seashore City

The city of Moroni was the eastern anchor of a string of fortified cities that stretched from the east sea to the west sea, paralleling the southern narrow strip of wilderness that separated the land of Zarahemla from the land of Nephi. The westernmost city of this chain was an unnamed city on the west coast. Calculating distances along the southern fortified line is more problematic because it crossed two wilderness zones, east and west, of unknown width. We do have clues that the eastern wilderness was wider and lower than the western wilderness (this is discussed more fully in section VII). The Sidon River Basin was thus ringed with “wilderness” on all sides. Information for estimating the length of the southern frontier comes from Helaman’s campaign in the Manti quarter and Moroni’s forced march on Zarahemla against the king-men.

1. “Helaman did march at the head of his two thousand stripling soldiers, to the support of the people in the borders of the land on the south by the west sea” (Alma 53:22). The Lamanites came into the area from “the west sea, south” (Alma 53:8).
  - a. Helaman came from the north, probably from Melek (see Alma 35:13; 53:11-16).
  - b. The Lamanites came eastward from the west coast through the western wilderness, probably through a pass (see section IV.10a).
  - c. The Lamanite attack probably continued eastward.
  - d. The seashore city may have been a Lamanite possession rather than a Nephite fortification. The political affiliation of this city does not affect our consideration of its position in calculating the distance to the west sea.
2. Helaman and his “two thousand young men” marched to the city of Judea to assist Antipus (Alma 56:9).
  - a. Helaman must have marched southward from Melek to Judea.
3. Lamanites controlled the cities of Manti, Zeezrom, Cumeni, and Antiparah (Alma 56:13-14).
  - a. These cities were probably major fortifications that we would estimate as spaced at 1.5 USD intervals (see section II). They were probably arranged from west to east in the order listed.
4. The Nephites kept spies out so the Lamanites would not pass them by night “to make an attack upon [their] other cities which were on the northward” (Alma 56:22). The cities to the north were not strong enough to withstand the Lamanites (Alma 56:23).
  - a. Nephite fortifications were north of the Lamanite-controlled cities.
  - b. Lamanite strongholds probably were strung out east-west (the captured fortified line of the Nephites).
  - c. The Nephite fortifications were close enough together that they could watch their newly fortified line and protect the weaker settlements to the north.
5. “They durst not pass by us with their whole army” (Alma 56:24). “Neither durst they march down against the city of Zarahemla; neither durst they cross the head of Sidon, over to the city of Nephihah” (Alma 56:25).
  - a. Zarahemla was at a lower elevation than the fortified cities on the southern frontier.
  - b. A route connected Nephihah, on the east coast, with the cities on the southern frontier of the Sidon River Basin.

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- c. The Lamanite-controlled cities, including Manti, were west of the Sidon.
  - 6. In a Nephite stratagem, Helaman’s army marched “near the city of Antiparah, as if [they] were going to the city beyond, in the borders by the seashore” (Alma 56:31). Antipus waited to leave Judea until Helaman was near Antiparah. The Lamanites were informed of troop movements by their spies. Helaman fled “northward” from the Lamanites (Alma 56:32–36).
    - a. The city of Antiparah was near the route to the seashore city. It was probably the westernmost city of the Lamanite-controlled strongholds in the Sidon River Basin.
    - b. Helaman’s natural course to this route to the seashore took him close to the city of Antiparah (otherwise the stratagem would not have been effective); Helaman traveled westward. Judea must have been east and somewhat north of Antiparah.
    - c. Judea was within a day’s march of Antiparah.
  - 7. The Lamanites pursued Helaman northward until night time. Antipus chased the Lamanites who were chasing Helaman. The Lamanites began their pursuit before dawn. Helaman fled into the wilderness and was hotly pursued all day until nighttime. The Lamanites chased them part of the next day until Antipus caught them from the rear.
    - a. Helaman was traveling at maximum speed for about a day and a half, probably northward along, and just inside, the edge of the western wilderness. He and his troops could have traveled 3 USD. They did not pass any cities worthy of note in that time.
    - b. If Helaman’s travel was east-west (which I doubt), through the wilderness, it would indicate a width for the western wilderness of at least 3 USD.
  - 8. The Nephites sent their prisoners to the city of Zarahemla (Alma 56:57; 57:16).
    - a. Zarahemla was on a route from Judea, undoubtedly northward.
  - 9. The Lamanites fled Antiparah to other cities (Alma 57:4). The Nephites next attacked and surrounded Cumeni. They cut off the Lamanites’ supply line and captured their provisions. The Lamanites gave up the city (Alma 57:9–12).
    - a. Cumeni was the next fortification in the line from Antiparah.
    - b. The Lamanite strongholds were adjacent to their territory to the south.
  - 10. The Lamanites arrived with new armies but were beaten back to Manti; the Nephites retained Cumeni (Alma 57:22–23).
    - a. Manti was east of Cumeni (see 9a).
  - 11. The Nephites attacked Manti; they pitched their tents on the wilderness side, “which was near to the city” on the borders of the wilderness (Alma 58:13–14).
    - a. Manti was not in the wilderness (south) but was very close to it (see also Alma 22:27).
  - 12. The Lamanites were afraid of being cut off from their supply lines; they went forth against the Nephites and were decoyed into a trap. Helaman retreated into the wilderness, and Gid and Teomner slipped in behind and took possession of Manti. Helaman’s army took a course “after having traveled much in the wilderness towards the land of Zarahemla” (Alma 58:23). At nightfall the Lamanites stopped to camp; Helaman continued
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- on to Manti by a different route. When the Lamanites learned that Manti had fallen, they fled into the wilderness (Alma 58:25-29).
- a. Helaman traveled south from Manti and made a loop (east or west) that brought him back to Manti. He was able to travel in a north-south and east-west direction within the southern wilderness.
13. The Nephites retook possession of all their cities in the southern sector. Many Lamanites fled to the east coast and were part of Ammoron's successful attack on Nephihah (Alma 59:5-8).
    - a. Coupled with the preceding data (see 12), this suggests an east-west route from Manti to Nephihah through the eastern wilderness (see also Alma 25:1-5; 43:22-24).
    - b. The southern wilderness permitted travel in a north-south direction (see section V) as well as in an east-west direction, suggesting the absence of major natural barriers that would prohibit travel.
  14. General Moroni marched from the city of Gid with a small number of men to aid Pahoran against the king-men at Zarahemla (Alma 62:3). Moroni raised "the standard of liberty in whatsoever place he did enter, and gained whatsoever force he could in all his march towards the land of Gideon." Thousands flocked to the standard "in all his march" (Alma 62:4-6).
    - a. Moroni's march took him through many unnamed places; thus he was able to press thousands into his army.
    - b. Moroni traveled westward through the eastern wilderness.
    - c. Given Moroni's purpose of raising an army en route to Zarahemla, it is unlikely he took the most direct route to Gideon.
    - d. The eastern wilderness was probably several days' march wide; a reasonable estimate for the distance from Gid, or Nephihah, would be several days USD. (Army speed through the wilderness would be about the same as normal travel on a plain.)
    - e. A route connected Gid to Gideon.
  15. Pahoran and Moroni went down to Zarahemla; they slew Pachus and the recalcitrant king-men and restored Pahoran to the judgment seat (Alma 62:7-9).
    - a. Gideon was in an upland position eastward from Zarahemla.
    - b. Gideon was the first major city to the east of the city of Zarahemla (see 16).
  16. In an earlier battle, Alma's army pursued the Amlicites from a hill east of the Sidon (and the city of Zarahemla) all day. When it grew dark, they camped in the valley of Gideon (Alma 2:17-20; 6:7).
    - a. Considered with 17 (below), Gideon could have been no more than 1.5 USD eastward from Zarahemla and the river Sidon and may have been less than 1 USD.
    - b. The hills and uplands leading to the valley of Gideon were within a half day's travel of the Sidon.
    - c. These uplands can be considered the western fringe of the eastern wilderness (see section II.1).
    - d. From the above, it follows that the Nephites had major settlements and fortifications in the zone they considered to be wilderness. (The Lamanites also inhabited the wilderness zones.)
    - e. In conjunction with 14 (above), it follows that the eastern wilderness ran from Gid
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and Nephihah to a western margin close to the river Sidon.

17. Alma’s spies followed the Lamanites to the “land of Minon, above the land of Zarahemla, in the course of the land of Nephi” and saw the armies of the Lamanites joining forces with the Amlicites (Alma 2:24).
  - a. Minon was southward from Gideon on a route that led to the land of Nephi (probably meaning the more restricted area around the city of Nephi).
  - b. Minon occupied an upland position.<sup>5</sup>
18. Later, on a missionary journey, Alma traveled southward from Gideon “away to the land of Manti.” He met the sons of Mosiah coming from the land of Nephi (Alma 17:1).
  - a. The land of Manti was southward from Gideon and probably from Minon (see 17).
  - b. The upland route from Gideon to the south was connected with the upland route from the land of Nephi to Zarahemla (see section V).
  - c. A spur of this route led down to the Sidon Basin and the city of Manti, to the west.
19. The land of Manti was located on the east and west of the Sidon, near the river’s headwaters in the southern wilderness (Alma 16:6–7; 22:27; see also 5).
  - a. The city of Manti was directly south of Zarahemla along the Sidon.
  - b. Manti may have occupied a peninsular position (if we have interpreted these east and west passages correctly and barring scribal error) between two major tributaries of the Sidon that joined downstream

from Manti as the main channel of the Sidon. Thus the Sidon could easily have been considered to be both east and west of Manti.<sup>6</sup>

20. Returning to General Moroni, he and his new battle-proven recruits marched from Zarahemla to the city of Nephihah (see section II.18).
  - a. A route connected Zarahemla and Nephihah; this undoubtedly passed through Gideon.
  - b. Nephihah was east or eastward from Zarahemla.

In estimating the length of the southern defensive line, we lack information for a direct route from Moroni to Manti and the city by the seashore. We can get a close approximation, however, by summing the western half (Manti to the seashore city) with the eastern half (Zarahemla to Moroni). The logic for doing this is that Manti and Zarahemla are on a direct north-south line defined by the course of the river Sidon. Lines or transects that are perpendicular to the same line should be parallel.

As mentioned, we are using the 1.5 USD estimate for the spacing of the Manti-Zeezrom-Cumeni-Antiparah chain. The failure to mention a Nephite counteroffensive against the city of Zeezrom may indicate that it was offset from the direct east-west line. We relied on similar reasoning in our placement of the east coast cities of Omner and Gid, and for consistency of argument we apply the same standard to Zeezrom. Of necessity, Zeezrom must have been offset to the south, given the circumstances of the war. Therefore, the projected 1.5 USD between Manti-Zeezrom and Zeezrom-Cumeni would not have con-

5. Sorenson (personal communication, 1988) believes that I have misplaced Minon; he argues that it was on the west side of the Sidon, upriver from Zarahemla. This placement does not affect our calculation of the length of the Nephi-Zarahemla transect.

6. J. Nile Washburn, *Book of Mormon Lands and Times* (Salt Lake City: Horizon, 1974), 97.



stituted 3 USD of linear east-west distance, but would have been less, as shown in figure 4. I estimate 2.5 USD between Manti and Cumeni. From Cumeni to Antiparah would have been another 1.5 USD, but this was probably not directly east-west along our hypothetical Moroni-Seashore City transect. The circumstances of the Nephites' decoy-and-surround stratagem against the city of Antiparah suggest that it may have been slightly northward from the Manti-Cumeni line, as I have shown in figure 4. The remainder of the line to the seashore city requires even more guesswork. Antiparah was close to the western wilderness and to the route or "pass" through this wilderness. As the western wilderness appears to have been more narrow than the eastern wilderness (see section VII), which we estimate at 2.5 USD, I consider 1.5 USD a reasonable estimate for the width of the western wilderness. I calculate another day's normal travel from the western fringe of the western wilderness to the seashore, or only 0.5 USD from the edge of the wilderness to the seashore city. Thus our estimated distance from Manti to the west seashore is 6.5 USD.

In the previous section (II), we calculated the distance from the east sea, slightly east of the city of Moroni, to the city of Nephihah to be 2 USD (see fig. 3). We estimated an additional 2 USD of direct-line distance from Nephihah (probably directly south of Gid) through the eastern wilderness to the city of Gideon (see 14d) and another 1-1.5 USD to the city of Zarahemla (see 16a), located north of Manti and east of Moroni (see 14-16, 20; Alma 31:3; 51:22). Thus our best guess of the distance of the eastern half of the southern transect is 5 USD.<sup>7</sup> This gives us a ballpark figure

of 11.5 USD for the Moroni-Seashore City transect. If the city of Zarahemla was directly west of the city of Moroni (as indicated by General Moroni's travels) and Manti was directly south of Zarahemla (as indicated by Alma's travels), then 11.5 USD would underestimate the distance from Moroni to Manti (which would be the long side of the Manti-Zarahemla-Moroni triangle). But given the imprecision in our directional information, our estimates of the width of wildernesses, and our estimates of the distance and placement of Nephite fortifications, we cannot justify the extra distance (1 USD).

#### IV. Seashore City to Hagoth

The information in the Book of Mormon is too inadequate for even guessing the distance of this western transect; the Nephites largely ignored this coast. The only other coastal city we know of is Joshua, occupied by General Mormon's army in their doomed retreat from the land of Zarahemla to their final stand at the hill Cumorah (Mormon 2:6). As an approximation of the length of the western border, we can estimate the distance from Zeezrom (which may have been the southernmost Nephite fortification; see figure 4 and section III) to Hagoth, or to the Hagoth-Bountiful transect (fig. 2). The key to this reconstruction is the city of Melek, which appears to have been a well-protected city west of the city of Zarahemla. The people of Ammon (Anti-Nephi-Lehis) were sent from the land of Jer-shon (on the east coast, south of the city of Bountiful) to Melek (Alma 27:22; 35:13). This movement accomplished a dual purpose. It gave Moroni and his army room to defend the east coast from Amalickiah's attack, and it secured the people of

7. Sorenson (personal communication, 1988) suggests that the distance between Moroni and Manti was greater than what I have estimated. The account of the Lamanite attack on Manti (Alma 43) is convincing

evidence of his interpretation. The Manti-Seashore City transect could have been 3-4 USD wider than I show in figures 3, 4, and 6.



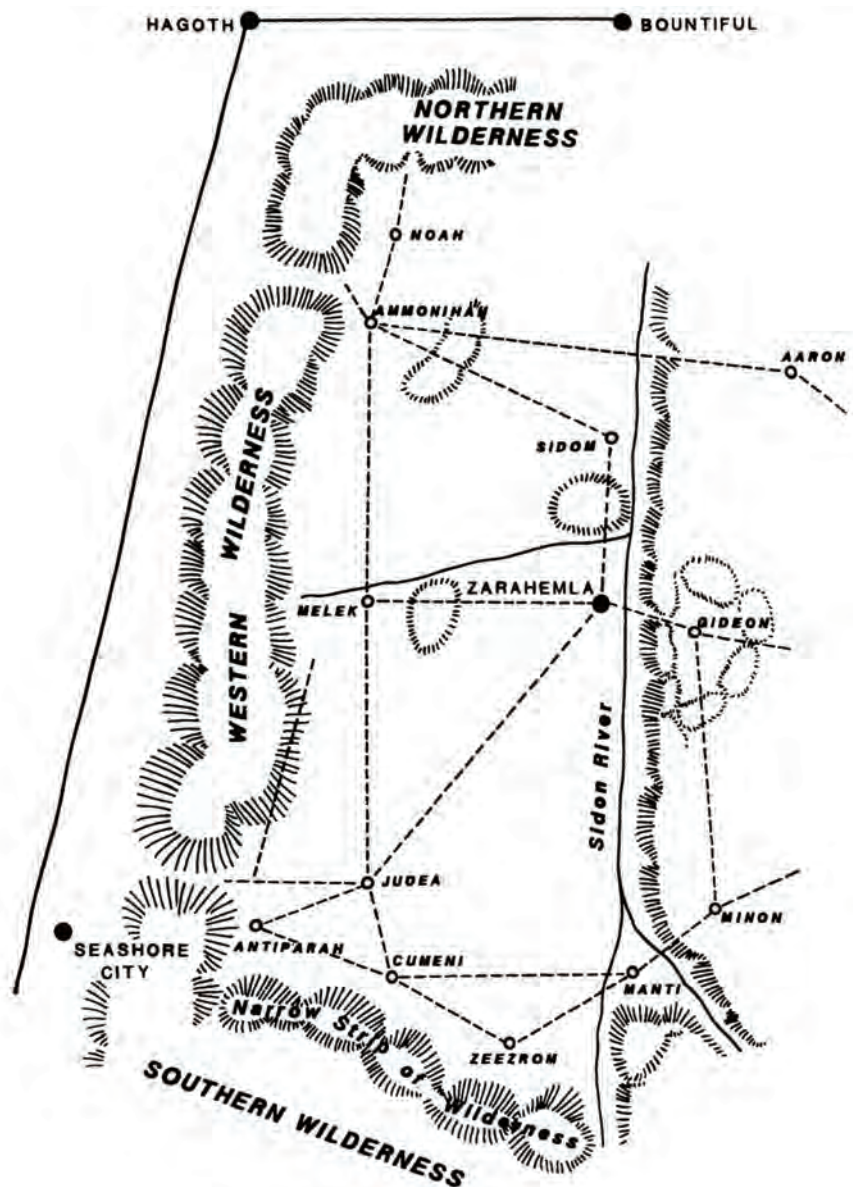


Figure 4. The Southern and Western Borders of Nephite Lands.

Ammon, sworn pacifists, in the heart of the land of Zarahemla, away from the battle zone. Judea was probably at least several days' march south of Melek (see section III.1, 7a). Helaman's northward flight before the Lamanite army at Antipa-

rah suggests a long stretch without a Nephite city worthy of mention (see section III.7a). (I consider it more probable that the journey of Helaman's army in the wilderness was along the edge of the western wilderness and in a northerly direc-

tion—from which they, like their Lamanite pursuers, dared not turn “to the right nor to the left” [Alma 56:37, 40]—rather than toward the sea-shore.) Thus I estimate at least 3 USD for the minimum distance from Melek south to Judea. The data listed below allow the reconstruction of the northern half of this transect; see figure 4.

1. Alma left the city of Zarahemla “and took his journey over into the land of Melek, on the west of the river Sidon, on the west by the borders of the wilderness” (Alma 8:3).
  - a. Melek lay west of the city of Zarahemla and near the eastern edge of the western wilderness.
  - b. The route from Melek went “over” higher ground, probably a large hill or range of hills.
  - c. Melek was probably at a higher elevation than the city of Zarahemla.
2. People came to Alma “throughout all the borders of the land which was by the wilderness side. And they were baptized throughout all the land” (Alma 8:5).
  - a. Melek was the major settlement in this area of the “wilderness side.”
  - b. As other data in the Book of Mormon indicate that Alma baptized by immersion (Mosiah 18:14–15), there may have been a good water source near Melek.
  - c. Given its location at the edge of an upland wilderness, the water source was probably a river that ran past Melek eastward toward the Sidon.
3. Alma departed Melek and traveled “three days’ journey on the north of the land of Melek; and he came to a city which was called Ammonihah” (Alma 8:6).
  - a. As both of these cities appear to be in the Sidon Basin, the land was probably relatively flat; Alma’s three days’ travel can be considered as 3 USD.
  - b. Ammonihah was north of Melek.
4. Cast out of Ammonihah, Alma “took his journey towards the city which was called Aaron” (Alma 8:13).
  - a. A route connected the cities of Aaron and Ammonihah.
  - b. The route was probably not westward (the wilderness side) or southward (the land Alma had just passed through).
5. Alma returned to Ammonihah and “entered the city by another way, yea, by the way which is on the south of the city of Ammonihah” (Alma 8:18).
  - a. Alma had not entered (or been cast out of) this southern entrance on his previous visit; he may have exited north of the city.
  - b. The preceding suggests that Aaron was north or east of Ammonihah. But we know that it had to have been adjacent to the land of Nephiah (Alma 50:13–14); therefore, Aaron was located eastward of Ammonihah.
6. Alma and Amulek left Ammonihah and “came out even into the land of Sidom,” where they found all the people who had fled Ammonihah (Alma 15:1).
  - a. Ammonihah and Sidom were probably adjacent cities.
  - b. There were enough room and resources (land) at Sidom to absorb the influx of the Ammonihah refugees.
  - c. The trip from Ammonihah to Sidom may have required travel up and over an upland area, hence the phrase “come out.”<sup>8</sup>

8. See Sorenson, *Ancient American Setting*, 201, for a discussion of this point.

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- d. Sidom may not have been on the Ammonihah-Aaron route (see 4).
  - e. Sidom was probably eastward from Ammonihah. Melek lay to the south and Noah to the north (see 10 below).
7. Alma baptized Zeezrom and many others in the land of Sidom (Alma 15:12-14).
    - a. Again, this suggests ready surface water such as a river.
    - b. Travel eastward from Ammonihah would have been toward the river Sidon.
    - c. It is quite likely that Sidom was on the river Sidon.<sup>9</sup>
    - d. Given Alma’s travels to this point (Zarahemla-Melek-Ammonihah-Sidom), Sidom would have been north of the city of Zarahemla.
  8. Alma and Amulek left Sidom and “came over to the land of Zarahemla” and the city of Zarahemla (Alma 15:18).
    - a. The route from Sidom to Zarahemla led over higher ground.
    - b. This route was probably southward from Sidom (see 7d).
  9. Lamanite armies “had come in upon the wilderness side, into the borders of the land, even into the city of Ammonihah” (Alma 16:2). The Lamanites completely “destroyed the people who were in the city of Ammonihah, and also some around the borders of Noah” (Alma 16:3).
    - a. The Lamanites came up the west coast and crossed the western wilderness from west to east, probably through a pass (see 10).
    - b. Ammonihah was on the interior side of this wilderness; hence the Lamanite attack came without warning.
  - c. Noah was the city in closest proximity to Ammonihah.
  - d. Given 9c, Sidom and Aaron were more distant from Ammonihah and probably in a direction that would not have led past Noah.
  - e. Noah was probably within 1-1.5 USD of Ammonihah.
  10. The Lamanites approached the rebuilt and fortified city of Ammonihah and were repulsed (Alma 49:1-11). They “retreated into the wilderness, and took their camp and marched towards the land of Noah” (Alma 49:12). They “marched forward to the land of Noah with a firm determination.” Noah had been a weak city but was now fortified more than Ammonihah (Alma 49:13-14).
    - a. The Lamanites repeated their same point-specific traverse of the western wilderness, coming from the west coast to Ammonihah. This repeated eastward traverse of the western wilderness suggests a special route (see also section III.6 and Mormon 1:10; 2:3-6). All known travel through the western wilderness tended east-west, suggesting that north-south travel was not feasible. (The probable exception is Helaman [section III.6-7], who was probably just traveling through the edge of the wilderness.) All of these data suggest a formidable wilderness that could be traversed only through a few passes. (This would explain why Melek, located on the eastern edge of the western wilderness, could be considered a secure position for the people of Ammon.) The western wilderness was clearly more impenetrable than the wildernesses on the south and east.
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9. See Sorenson, *Ancient American Setting*, 205, for detailed discussion of this possibility.

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- b. The Lamanite retreat from Ammonihah took them back to the wilderness (westward) from which they marched to Noah.
  - c. From all of the above, the most probable location for Noah was north of Ammonihah. (We have no mention of it on Alma's journey to Ammonihah from the south.)
  - d. Had Noah been east of Ammonihah, the Lamanites would not have had to retreat to the wilderness side of Ammonihah (assuming that there was not another wilderness east of Ammonihah).
  - e. Given 10d and 9d, the cities of Sidom and Aaron were likely located eastward from Ammonihah, as suggested (see 6a and 4b).
  - f. Our 1.5 USD rule between fortified cities does not apply to Noah. It was a weak city, undoubtedly under the protection of Ammonihah. Thus 1 USD between it and Ammonihah is a better estimate.
11. The land of Zarahemla had a northern wilderness area (not specifically described as such) that lay between Noah and the lower narrow-neck area (see Alma 22:31; Mormon 3-5).
- a. It follows that Noah was still some distance from the narrow neck. I estimate 2 USD as a ballpark figure. This would include the distance from Noah to the southern fringe of the northern wilderness, the wilderness itself, and travel from the northern foot of the wilderness to our Hagoth-Bountiful line (see section VII). Our 2 USD is a minimal estimate; obviously, the distance could be much greater. I am assuming, however, that the northern wilderness was not significantly wider than the eastern wilderness that we estimated at 2.5 USD.
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We are now in a position to estimate the length of the western border, along the "wilderness side," of the land of Zarahemla. This is shown in figure 4. The estimated total length is 11 USD, or about the same estimated length as the southern border.

## V. Nephi to Zarahemla

The central travel route of the Book of Mormon was that connecting the Nephite capital of Zarahemla to the city of Nephi, the capital city of the Lamanites. Of all the transects considered here, this route is the best documented. The route passed inland over the narrow strip of wilderness that separated the land of Zarahemla and the land of Nephi, which I have been calling the southern wilderness (from a Nephite/Zarahemla perspective).

1. Mosiah<sub>1</sub> and his group departed the land of Nephi and went into the wilderness; they were "led by the power of his [God's] arm, through the wilderness until they came down into the land which is called the land of Zarahemla" (Omni 12-13).
    - a. Mosiah<sub>1</sub> relied on divine guidance to travel to Zarahemla.
    - b. The land of Zarahemla was at a lower elevation than the land of Nephi and the southern wilderness.
  2. King Mosiah<sub>2</sub> was desirous to know "concerning the people who went up to dwell in the land of Lehi-Nephi, or in the city of Lehi-Nephi; for his people had heard nothing from them from the time they left the land of Zarahemla" (Mosiah 7:1).
    - a. The land of Nephi was "up" from the land of Zarahemla.
    - b. There was no contact between the two lands.
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3. Zeniff led a party from Zarahemla “to go up to the land” of Nephi; they traveled many days through the wilderness (Mosiah 9:3).
    - a. The wilderness between Zarahemla and Nephi was many days wide.
  4. Mosiah<sub>2</sub> granted sixteen strong men that they “might go up to the land of Lehi-Nephi, to inquire concerning their brethren” (Mosiah 7:2). Ammon led the group up to Nephi (Mosiah 7:3). “And now, they knew not the course they should travel in the wilderness to go up to the land of Lehi-Nephi; therefore they wandered many days in the wilderness, even forty days did they wander” (Mosiah 7:4).
    - a. There had been no communication between the people of these two capitals.
    - b. The wilderness was such that it was easy to get lost. This suggests a labyrinthian arrangement that allowed travel in all directions.
    - c. Forty days of wilderness travel (20 USD) is a high estimate for the distance between Nephi and Zarahemla.
  5. After forty days they came to a hill north of the land of Shilom, and from there they went down to Nephi (Mosiah 7:5-6).
    - a. Nephi was located in a highland valley; the wilderness to the north of the city of Nephi was “up” from the city.
  6. King Limhi sent forty-three people into the wilderness to search for Zarahemla: “And they were lost in the wilderness for the space of many days, yet they were diligent, and found not the land of Zarahemla but returned to this land, having traveled in a land among many waters, having discovered a land which was covered with bones of men, and of beasts, and was also covered with ruins of buildings of every kind” (Mosiah 8:7-8). King Limhi had sent “a small number of men to search for the land of Zarahemla; but they could not find it, and they were lost in the wilderness.” They found a land covered with bones and thought it was Zarahemla, so they returned to Nephi (Mosiah 21:25-26). They brought back the Jaredite record as a testimony of what they had seen (Mosiah 8:9).
    - a. The Limhi party obviously got to the land northward near the area of final destruction of the Jaredite people, or the hill Ramah (the Cumorah of the Nephites).
    - b. They did not know the route to Zarahemla.
    - c. They apparently passed through the narrow neck of land without realizing it.
    - d. They must have traveled through the area the Nephites called the eastern wilderness. Any other northward route would have taken them through the Sidon Basin (near the west sea) or along the east sea. They did not know the route to Zarahemla, but they must have known at least three key facts concerning it: that it lay to the north, that it was an inland river valley, and that a wide wilderness separated Zarahemla and Nephi.
    - e. Given the preceding, we suspect that the eastern wilderness was quite wide and, at this time, sparsely populated.
    - f. Sorenson suggests that the Limhi party must also have had a general idea of the distance between Nephi and Zarahemla,<sup>10</sup> in which case they would not have traveled much more than twice the expected distance. This would place the hill
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10. Sorenson, *Ancient American Setting*, 140.



Ramah/Cumorah in the southern part of the land northward.

7. Limhi and his people escaped from Nephi with women, children, flocks, and herds and traveled “round about the land of Shilom in the wilderness, and bent their course towards the land of Zarahemla, being led by Ammon and his brethren” (Mosiah 22:8, 11). “And after being many days in the wilderness they arrived in the land of Zarahemla” (Mosiah 22:13).
  - a. The land of Shilom was north of the city of Nephi.
  - b. Zarahemla was “many days” from Nephi, even when the route was known—assuming that Ammon discovered the route during his wanderings to Nephi.
8. The Lamanite army chased Limhi’s group into the wilderness, but they got lost after they pursued them for two days (Mosiah 22:15–16).
  - a. It was easy to get lost, even when the trail was fresh; the route from Nephi to Zarahemla was not obvious.
9. The Lamanite army that had followed Limhi “had been lost in the wilderness for many days” (Mosiah 23:30); they stumbled onto the wicked priests of King Noah in the land of Amulon (Mosiah 23:31). The people of Amulon and the Lamanites searched for Nephi, and they came upon Alma’s group at Helam (Mosiah 23:35).
  - a. The wilderness was a virtual maze; the Lamanites could not even find their way back home after only two days’ travel in the wilderness.
  - b. The mutual aid of the people of Amulon and the Lamanites was a case of the blind leading the blind. The wilderness must have been such that people could walk in circles.
- c. This wilderness area was not populated, or was only sparsely populated, at this time. (They could not ask anyone directions for the way back.)
10. Alma and his group had “fled eight days’ journey into the wilderness” to escape the armies of King Noah who were searching for them in the land of Mormon, and they arrived in Helam. They took their grain and flocks (Mosiah 23:1–3).
  - a. This travel distance is wilderness speed and thus is only 4 USD or less.
11. The land of Mormon was in the “borders of the land” of Nephi (Mosiah 18:4; Alma 5:3).
  - a. Mormon was located on the edge of the territory immediately surrounding the capital of Nephi. It was probably not more than 1–1.5 USD from Nephi.
12. Mormon was near a “fountain of pure water.” Alma hid there from the searches of the army of King Noah; people gathered from the city of Nephi to hear Alma speak, and many were baptized (Mosiah 18:5–16). Alma and his group departed into the wilderness from the waters of Mormon.
  - a. The waters of Mormon were in close proximity to the lesser land of Nephi.
13. Alma and his followers escaped Helam by night. They took flocks and grain and departed into the wilderness, “and when they had traveled all day they pitched their tents in a valley” that they called Alma (Mosiah 24:18, 20).
  - a. This travel distance is also wilderness speed and is only 0.5 USD.

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- b. Given all the baggage that Alma’s party packed around, my USD estimates may be inflated.
  - 14. Alma and his group fled the valley of Alma and went into the wilderness. “And after they had been in the wilderness twelve days they arrived in the land of Zarahemla” (Mosiah 24:24–25).
    - a. The land of Zarahemla was not the same as the city of Zarahemla; the city must have been some additional distance removed.
    - b. We standardize this travel distance, as before, to 6 USD.
  - 15. The Lamanites could not follow Alma past the valley of Alma, owing to divine intervention (Mosiah 24:23).
  - 16. The sons of Mosiah went up to the land of Nephi to preach; “they journeyed many days in the wilderness” (Alma 17:8–9).
    - a. These eager missionaries should have had adequate travel instructions as to the route; it was still “many days” of travel.
  - 17. On their return trip to Zarahemla, the sons of Mosiah met Alma as he was “journeying from the land of Gideon southward, away to the land of Manti” (Alma 17:1; 27:15–16).
  - 18. Nephi and his small party fled “into the wilderness” from the land of first inheritance “and did journey in the wilderness for the space of many days” until they came to the place they called Nephi (2 Nephi 5:5–8).
    - a. Nephi was a favorable place for settlement.
    - b. We know that Nephi was a highland valley (see 5). Thus Nephi’s trip from the coast involved at least some travel eastward (see 19).
  - 19. The Lamanites lived in the wilderness “on the west, in the land of Nephi; yea, and also on the west of the land of Zarahemla, in the borders by the seashore, and on the west in the land of Nephi, in the place of their fathers’ first inheritance, and thus bordering along by the seashore” (Alma 22:28).
    - a. The west coast of the land southward was extensive, consisting of three parts: the area west of the land of Zarahemla, the area west in the land of Nephi, and the area of the Nephites’ landing.
    - b. The area of first inheritance was south of the land of Nephi.
    - c. Given 19b, Nephi’s many days’ journey to the land of Nephi (see 18) was probably mostly northward.
    - d. It is probable, therefore, that the highland valley of Nephi was closer to the west coast than to the east coast since much of the travel appears to have been northward rather than eastward. (The east coast is not mentioned in accounts of Lamanite lands, other than the area just south of the city of Moroni.)
    - e. The Lamanites inhabited the wilderness areas and at one time occupied the wildernesses to the east, west, and south of the Nephites.
  - 20. Jerusalem was “a great city” “joining the borders of Mormon” (Alma 21:1–2). Jerusalem, Onihah, and Mocum were submerged under water at the time of the Lord’s crucifixion—“waters have I caused to come up in the stead thereof” (3 Nephi 9:7). Compare this to the very different phrasing for the city of Moroni: That “great city Moroni have I caused to be sunk in the depths of the sea” (3 Nephi 8:9; 9:4).
    - a. Jerusalem was near the waters of Mormon.
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- b. This must have been a very large body of water to be able to rise and cover a whole city, and possibly three cities.
- c. This body of water was located near Nephi, and vice versa, in a highland area; it therefore must be a large lake.<sup>11</sup>
- d. The three most obvious points of these passages are that (1) it was a long journey from Nephi to Zarahemla (2) through wilderness lands (3) in which it was easy to become lost and “wander.” The best information on distance comes from Alma’s account; his group traveled twenty-one days from the waters of Mormon to the land of Zarahemla. It is unlikely, however, that this represents direct lineal distance. In their journey to Helam, for example, it was not their intention to go to Zarahemla, and we cannot reasonably presume that they traveled in that direction during this eight-day leg of their trek. The total distance would have been 10.5 USD by our measure. I have reduced this to an estimated 9 USD between the land of Zarahemla and Nephi (assuming that the waters of Mormon were within 1 to 1.5 USD of Nephi). On the other hand, I assume that the point where they entered the “land of Zarahemla” was still some distance from the city of Zarahemla. I have taken the point of Alma’s reunion with the sons of Mosiah as a likely candidate for this entrance. This would still have been 2 USD from the city of Zarahemla.

The city of Helam and the valley of Alma were plotted with the assumption that the city of Nephi was near the west coast (see Alma 22:28). I have also assumed that the waters of Mormon

were to the west of the city of Nephi (fig. 5). This assumption does not affect the placement of the city of Nephi on our transect, but rather only the placement of Helam and Alma. Our general picture of the size and shape of Book of Mormon lands is not affected by this assumption.

## VI. Bountiful to Cumorah

The information on this transect is less precise than that for all other transects. We know that the hill Cumorah was known as the hill Ramah to the Jaredites and was near the area of their final destruction (Ether 15:11). We know that the hill Cumorah was “in a land of many waters, rivers, and fountains” (Mormon 6:4), undoubtedly the same area visited by Limhi’s party that had “traveled in a land among many waters, having discovered a land which was covered with bones of men” (Mosiah 8:8), a land with “large bodies of water and many rivers” (Helaman 3:4). This was “an exceedingly great distance” from the land of Nephi (Helaman 3:4). The land near Cumorah was probably also the destination of Morianton’s group who fled past Bountiful for the land northward, “which was covered with large bodies of water” (Alma 50:29). We also learn from the Jaredite account that the hill Cumorah was near the eastern seashore (Ether 9:3; also 14:12–13, 26). Mormon and his army had retreated northward from the city of Desolation, past the city of Teancum (Mormon 4:3) and other cities, before they came to Cumorah.

From all the above we know that Cumorah was north of Desolation and near the seashore. It had to have been at least 3 USD north of point “Bountiful,” given Mormon’s retreat through the seashore city of Teancum—assuming our 1.5 USD rule for the spacing of major fortifications. We placed Desolation 1 USD from our Desolation/

11. Sorenson, *Ancient American Setting*, 176.

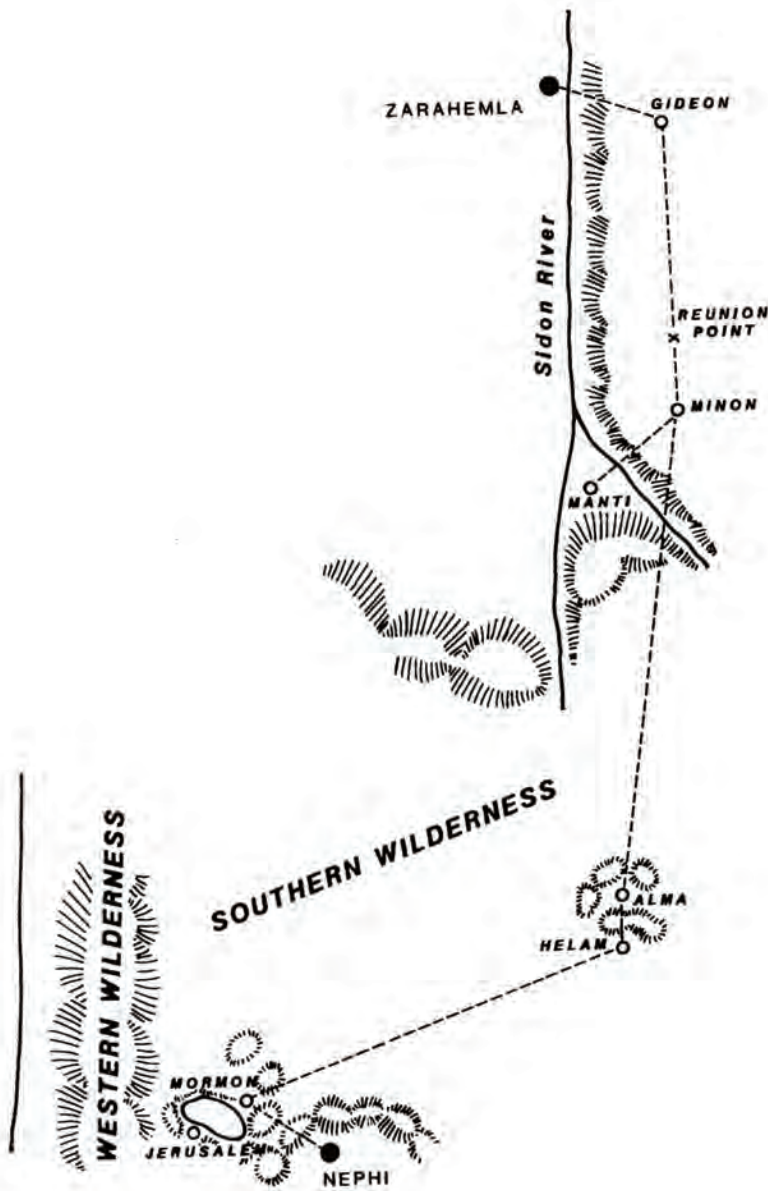


Figure 5. The Nephi-Zarahemla Transect.

Bountiful line. I have assumed that Cumorah was several days' USD from the point of our last firm data (somewhere north of Teancum). This gives us an estimated 6 USD, or the same distance

from our hypothetical point “Bountiful” as the southernmost Nephite city of the eastern coast, Moroni. Obviously, the hill Cumorah could have been much farther north than this. But as noted

(section V.6f), the facts of the Limhi expedition suggest that the hill Cumorah would be in the southern part of the land northward—as does the story of Morianton’s group. Finally, the name *Desolation* undoubtedly derives from the evidences of the Jaredite destruction (Alma 22:30). As we have seen, this was the land just north of the narrow neck. For all these reasons, I have placed the hill Cumorah as shown in figures 2, 6, and 7.

## VII. A Relative Geography of the Wilderness

As apparent in the preceding discussion, several of the measures of distance depend on our assessment of the various wilderness areas. It will be worthwhile to consider them in more detail here. These wildernesses are considered to be upland areas of mountains or hills. Wilderness surrounded the Sidon River Basin and the lesser land of Zarahemla on all four sides. Of these, the northern wilderness is the most poorly known and is not specified by name. It was from this northern wilderness that the Lamanites launched their final and decisive offensive against the Nephites who were in the land of Desolation in the land northward. The Lamanites came “down” upon the Nephites, and the Nephites went “up” to battle the Lamanites (Mormon 3–5). Keeping in mind that directions relate to one’s own point of reference, we read that the people of Zarahemla landed near the land of Desolation (Alma 22:30) and “came from there up into the south wilderness” (Alma 22:31). This “south wilderness” would have been north of the city of Zarahemla, the place that they finally settled. Therefore, from the perspective of the later Nephites, this area would have been a northern wilderness. In precise terms, the real situation was probably

somewhat more complicated. We know that the southern border of Nephite lands was two to three times wider than the northern border in the narrow neck. We also know that the western wilderness and eastern wilderness ran north-south, paralleling the western and eastern coastlines. Given the restricted northern border, these two wildernesses must have converged near the narrow neck and north of the city of Zarahemla. This area would have been considered a northern wilderness only for those traveling north within the Sidon Basin; for those traveling along the coasts, it would have been the northernmost part of the western or eastern wilderness.

The key to our relative geography of the wilderness is the western wilderness known as Hermounts (Alma 2:34–37). We saw previously that the western wilderness stretched from the Nephite lands southward to the place of the Nephites’ landing on the western coast, a place south of the land of Nephi (Alma 22:28). This sounds like a mountain chain that paralleled the western coastline (fig. 6). We saw previously that the Nephites did not inhabit this wilderness zone or the narrow coastal plain to the west. The western wilderness was apparently a natural barrier of such magnitude that it provided protection against attack. This was true except of the points where natural routes lead through the wilderness; I argued above that these were passes through the wilderness. As noted, all travel within this wilderness tended in an east-west direction—in contrast with the other wilderness areas. I take this as evidence that travel in a north-south direction was not feasible under normal conditions. All the above suggests that the western wilderness was higher than the other wilderness zones. This wilderness also seems to have been near the borders of the west sea (Alma 22:28). Unlike the eastern

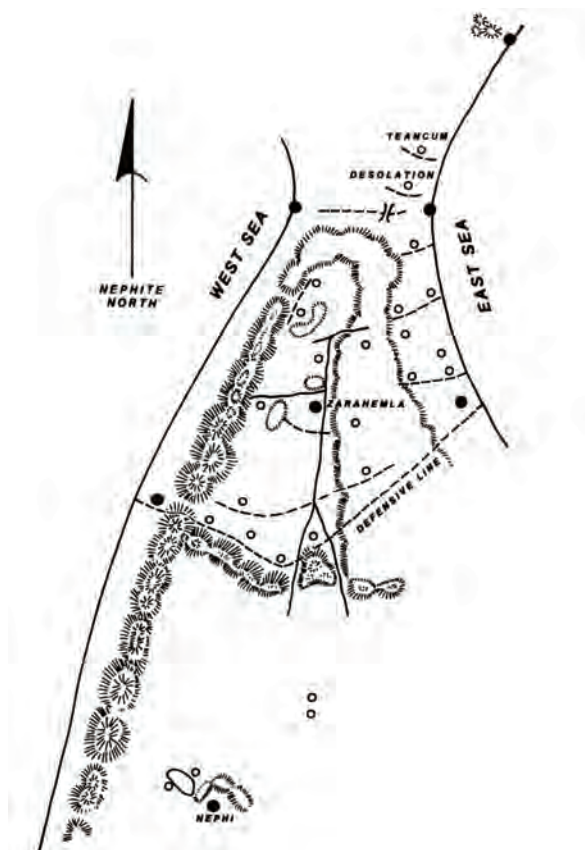


Figure 6. Nephite Lands and Defense System.

coast, no plains are mentioned for the west coast, suggesting that the mountains dropped quickly to the coast. If it was a high mountain range, it must have also been relatively narrow. I therefore consider it to have been the most narrow of all the wilderness zones. All of these features would have made the western wilderness a prominent and obvious feature of the landscape, and one having great military value. It is doubtless significant that this is the only wilderness given a specific name, the wilderness of Hermounts. Names for natural features are rare in the Book of Mormon. We have generally interpreted the presence of a name to indicate a prominent feature (e.g., hill Cumorah, river Sidon, waters of Mormon).

I take as my working assumption, then, that the western wilderness was higher and narrower than all the others. This wilderness, however, apparently did not extend to the narrow neck of land. This means that the western wilderness must have sloped down toward the narrow neck. Also, the western wilderness logically had to converge with the eastern wilderness (to form our northern wilderness) before they reached the narrow neck. Each of these wilderness zones probably also became more narrow as it sloped down to the narrow neck. If true, it follows that the easiest passes through the wilderness of Hermounts would have been in the north rather than in the south. The repeated Lamanite attacks on the city of Ammonihah (see fig. 4) make sense in this regard. These northern passes would have been lower and shorter.

We saw in the discussion of the Nephi-Zarahemla transect that the southern wilderness was a bewildering labyrinth of possible travel routes. Also, it was at least 9 USD wide, undoubtedly the widest of the four wilderness zones surrounding Zarahemla. But this wilderness was also referred to as a narrow strip of wilderness that ran from the “sea east even to the sea west” (Alma 22:27), a curious description for the widest strip of wilderness in Book of Mormon lands. The narrow strip probably was the northern fringe (immediately bordering the Nephite land of Zarahemla) of this greater southern wilderness. This seems clear in the description of Ammon’s group that “departed out of the land, and came into the wilderness which divided the land of Nephi from the land of Zarahemla, and came over near the borders of the land” (Alma 27:14; see 47:29). This suggests that they went “over” a final, narrow strip of wilderness before dropping down into the land of Zarahemla. If the narrow strip

of wilderness was immediately south of the land of Zarahemla, it would explain why Lamanite forces consistently entered the southern borders of Nephite lands near the city of Manti (Alma 16:6; 43:22–24), which was located at the head of the Sidon (Alma 22:27). The Sidon had its headwaters in the southern wilderness (Alma 16:6); one logical route or pass into the southern borders of Nephite lands would have been down this river pass. It may have been favored because the narrow strip of wilderness offered natural protection and prohibited travel into the Sidon Basin.

The remainder of the southern wilderness must have been uniformly difficult, with possibilities of travel in many directions, no impassable obstacles in any particular direction, and no major landmarks to guide those who became lost. This would have been a very different kind of wilderness than Hermounts and probably the narrow strip of wilderness. The southern wilderness adjoined the upland region that the Nephites called the eastern wilderness near the borders of the land of Antionum, or near the city of Moroni (Alma 31:3).

The eastern wilderness appears to have been similar to the southern wilderness. We have seen that the eastern wilderness was settled by the Nephites. It also must have been quite wide. Again, we have the testament of the Limhi party. The eastern wilderness is the only logical place where they could have traveled and not have either discovered Zarahemla or realized they were lost. I am assuming here that this group of travelers would have realized that they were lost had they traveled near one of the seas. They must have been searching for a large inland basin drained by a major river. Sight of an ocean would have been sure evidence that they were lost and/or should travel inland. General Moroni's travel

from Gid to Gideon also suggests a wide wilderness. We saw earlier that the eastern coast was an area with at least several plains (near Bountiful and Nephihah).<sup>12</sup> In contrast with the western wilderness, this suggests a more gradual drop to the sea. All this evidence indicates an eastern wilderness that was lower and wider than the western wilderness. Travel through the eastern wilderness was both east-west and north-south. It was also settled by the Nephites—indicating a rather hospitable “wilderness.”

The only detail we have of the northern wilderness is that it existed. We lack information that would indicate its width. But it must have been relatively low, given its proximity to the lowlands of the narrow neck. As noted, most of what we have been calling the northern wilderness was probably the northern end of the eastern wilderness (as suggested in the data about the city of Bountiful). I assume, therefore, that it was most like the eastern wilderness in terms of its potential for settlement and travel. It was apparently heavily populated during the days of General Mormon, as evident in the Lamanites' attacks against the Nephite stronghold at Desolation (Mormon 3:7; 4:2, 13, 19).

I have used all of this relative information about Book of Mormon wildernesses in completing our general map of Nephite lands shown in figures 6 and 7.

## VIII. A Question of Seas

The critical reader at this point may be wondering why no north sea or south sea is shown in any of the figures. There are two references in the Book of Mormon that mention or appear to allude to these seas. In Helaman 3:8 we read that

12. Sorenson, *Ancient American Setting*, 39.



the Nephites “did multiply and spread, and did go forth from the land southward to the land northward, and did spread insomuch that they began to cover the face of the whole earth, from the sea south to the sea north, from the sea west to the sea east.” Support for this statement comes from the description of the narrow neck. “And now, it was only the distance of a day and a half’s journey for a Nephite, on the line Bountiful and the land Desolation, from the east to the west sea; and thus the land of Nephi and the land of Zarahemla were nearly surrounded by water, there being a small neck of land between the land northward and the land southward” (Alma 22:32). There is much more, and less, in these passages than meets the eye, and they deserve special attention.

A careful reading of these two passages will show that they are talking about two different things. The first refers to the land northward *and* the land southward; the second is in reference to the land southward *only*, comprising the land of Zarahemla and the land of Nephi. It is also clear that the second passage refers to the east sea and the west sea on both sides of an isthmus. A similar passage describes the founding of the city of Lib in the narrow-neck area: “And they built a great city by the narrow neck of land, by the place where the sea divides the land” (Ether 10:20). This is also a clear reference to an isthmus and perhaps a large river running into the east sea across the narrow neck, thus “dividing the land” (see 3 Nephi 19:10–13 and section I.4).

The solution to this problem may be quite simple. The passage in Helaman may have been meant in a metaphorical rather than a literal way. Explaining away difficult passages as metaphors goes against one of my guiding assumptions for dealing with the text, but in this case I think it is well justified. North and south sea probably

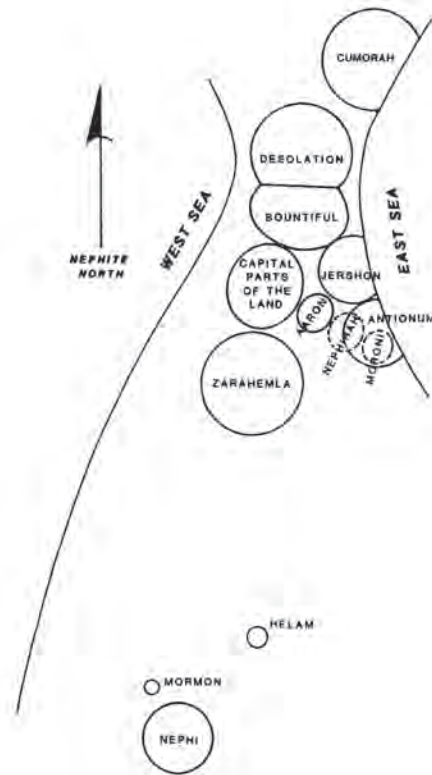


Figure 7. *Some Book of Mormon Lands.*

have no more concrete meaning than the phrases “whole earth” (Alma 36:7; Helaman 11:6; 14:22; 3 Nephi 8:12, 17) and “as numerous as the sands of the sea” (Alma 2:27; Mormon 1:7). Mormon waxes poetic whenever describing the Nephites’ peaceful golden age of uninterrupted population growth and expansion. This is understandable given the circumstances under which he wrote and his knowledge of the certain doom of his people. It is interesting that in a parallel passage describing the same sort of population expansion, no north or south sea is mentioned: “And thus it did come to pass that the people of Nephi began to prosper again in the land, and began to build up their waste places, and began to multiply and spread, even until they did cover the whole face

of the land, both on the northward and on the southward, from the sea west to the sea east” (Helaman 11:20).

I am convinced that the reference to a north sea and a south sea is devoid of any concrete geographical content. All specific references or allusions to Book of Mormon seas are only to the east and west seas. Any geography that tries to accommodate a north and south sea, I think, is doomed to fail. But we cannot dismiss the reference to these seas out of hand. If they are metaphorical, what was the metaphor?

Figure 8 shows a conceptualization of Nephite lands. The city of Zarahemla and the lands immediately surrounding it were the “center” (Helaman 1:24–27) or “heart” (Alma 60:19; Helaman 1:18) of the land (fig. 7). The surrounding lands, to the various wildernesses, were considered quarters of the land. A Bountiful quarter (Alma 52:10, 13; 53:8; 58:35) and a Manti quarter (43:26; 56:1–2, 9; 58:30) are mentioned. Moroni was another “part” of the land (Alma 59:6). We lack information on the eastern quarter; my designation of “Melek” is merely my best guess.

We have seen that the Nephite lands were surrounded by wilderness on every side. And, conceptually, beyond each wilderness lay a sea to the south, north, west, and east. Thus the land was conceived as surrounded by seas or floating on one large sea. The land was divided into a center and four quarters. Each quarter duplicated the others. The quartering of the land was not the way most of us would do it, by making a cross following the cardinal directions, but was a cross as

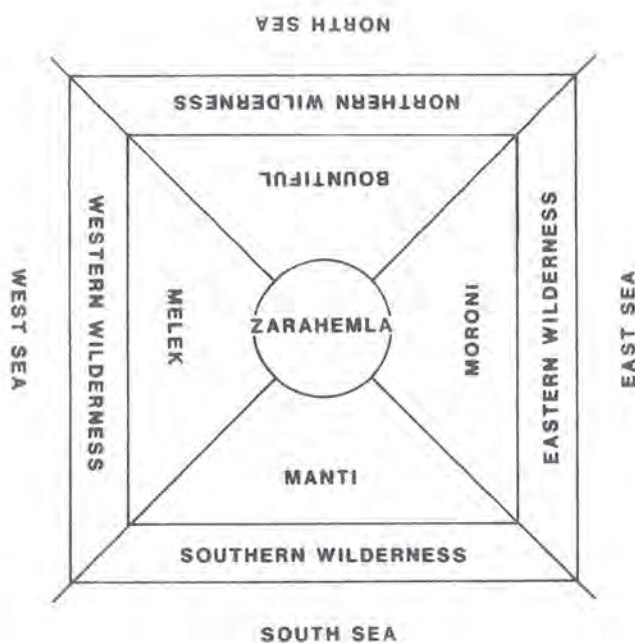


Figure 8. *The Conceptualized Nephite World.*

shown in figure 8. Such a conception of the world would not be out of place in the Middle East at the time of Lehi; and it is remarkably close to the Mesoamerican view of their world. It is not my purpose here, however, to discuss the Nephites’ concept of their universe; others are more qualified for this task than I. The main point is that the reference to north and south seas fits nicely into the Mesoamerican scene as part of a metaphor for the whole earth and was probably used in a metaphorical sense in the Book of Mormon.

## Ten Points of Nephite Geography

The data needed to plot the six transects of our elemental geography have given us a rather complete view of Nephite lands, but we have essentially ignored the details of Lamanite and Jaredite lands. In previous discussion I listed the data for the convenience of those who want to rethink the



elementary internal geography proposed here or to evaluate any of the many external Book of Mormon geographies now available. I have reduced the information in preceding sections down to a scorecard of ten points that can be used to judge the plausibility of any proposed external geography.

1. I am convinced that the narrow neck of land was an isthmus flanked by an east sea and a west sea. It separated the land northward from the land southward.
2. The known coastlines of the land southward varied significantly in length. The western sea bordered the land of Zarahemla, the land of Nephi, and the land of the Nephites' first inheritance. The eastern sea, however, is known to have bordered only the land of Zarahemla. This gives us at least three times as much western coastline as eastern coastline known to have been used by the Nephites and Lamanites.
3. As noted, there were also important differences in the wildernesses. The eastern wilderness appears to have been much wider and lower than the western wilderness. The southern wilderness was much wider than the eastern wilderness. The northernmost portion of the southern wilderness was the narrow strip of wilderness. There was also a wilderness to the north of the city of Zarahemla.
4. The cities of Zarahemla and Nephi were in large valleys. Zarahemla was in a large river basin; Nephi was located in a highland valley. The Zarahemla Basin was much larger than the valley of the city of Nephi.
5. The river Sidon drained the Zarahemla Basin; it ran northward from its headwaters in the southern wilderness, just south of Manti. We lack information on the Sidon's course north of Zarahemla. Given the relative elevations of the eastern and western wildernesses, the Sidon most likely drained into the east sea. As noted, the Sidon skirted the western flanks of the eastern wilderness. The Zarahemla Basin was at least several USD wide west of the Sidon.
6. The information for the waters of Mormon suggests that it was a highland lake of significant size. It was also located within a day or two (USD) of Nephi.
7. Zarahemla was located in a large basin drained by a large river. Zarahemla was near the center of the land and was surrounded by Nephite fortifications that protected the center. There were also wilderness or upland areas in all four directions from Zarahemla. Zarahemla was about three weeks' travel from the capital city of Nephi located to the south. The key Nephite fortification of Bountiful lay several days' travel to the north.
8. Nephi was three weeks' travel south of Zarahemla in a highland valley; it was also near a large lake, the waters of Mormon.
9. Bountiful was north of Zarahemla and near the narrow neck of land. It guarded the route to the land northward. Bountiful was only about five days' travel from Moroni.
10. Cumorah was in the land northward near the eastern seashore. It was probably not more than six to eight days' travel from the city of Bountiful and may have been considerably less.

I have argued above that there are two tests for a valid and satisfactory geography—the first test being the more important. This does not mean, however, that a geography that meets this first test is necessarily correct. The second test will be to evaluate it against the backdrop of its proposed

ancient American setting. The simple expectation is that the archaeological sites identified as Book of Mormon cities should be in the right place (in relation to all the rest) and date to the right period of time. Moreover, they should have the features

mentioned for them in the Book of Mormon, such as walls, ditches, temples, and towers.❏

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# Nephi as Scribe

*Abstract: Nephi was a younger son of a wealthy family. As one who might not inherit his father's business, it is possible that he was trained for another profession. One of the high-status professions open to him would have been a scribe. Beyond the fact that Nephi produced at least three written works (1 Nephi, 2 Nephi, and the nonextant large-plate book of Lehi), there are other evidences in his writing that betray the kind of training scribes received. His early professional training may have been an important preparation for his later role in establishing his people as a true people of the book.*

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Nephi was a man of the New World, but he was shaped by his upbringing in the Old World, where he was the youngest son in a wealthy Jerusalem family. We understand that he was raised in a wealthy family because he and his brothers were able to amass what appears to have been a substantial fortune consisting of “our gold, and our silver, and our precious things” (1 Nephi 3:22). It was large enough to fuel Laban’s greed, if not his cooperation. It is probable that, as part of Joseph’s lineage (5:14), Lehi’s grandparents or perhaps great-grandparents had been among the refugees who fled the kingdom when it was conquered by the Assyrians in 722 BC.<sup>1</sup> Lehi appears to have retained his ancestral lands in Israel and likely collected rent on them.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to probably receiving income from his ancestral lands, Lehi was likely employed in some form of commerce that increased his wealth. Hugh Nibley suggested that Lehi gained his wealth as a caravaner, trading in wine, oil, figs, and honey,<sup>3</sup> but John Tvedtnes challenged that hypothesis and suggested there was better evidence that Lehi was involved in metal-smithing. Most of Tvedtnes’s evidence concerns Nephi’s familiarity with metalworking, not his father’s. For example, Nephi was given detailed instructions on how to build a ship but apparently not on how to make the needed tools. Nephi simply asks the Lord, “Whither shall I go that I may find ore to molten, that I may make tools to construct the ship after the manner which thou hast shown unto me?” (1 Nephi 17:9). After arriving in the New World, he listed in his record useful

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1. Jeffrey R. Chadwick, “Lehi’s House at Jerusalem and the Land of His Inheritance,” in *Glimpses of Lehi’s Jerusalem*, ed. John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely, and Jo Ann H. Seely (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004), 87.

2. Chadwick, “Lehi’s House at Jerusalem,” 117.

3. Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert; The World of the Jaredites; There Were Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 35–37.

animals and also “all manner of ore, both of gold, and of silver, and of copper” (18:25)—presumably because the metals were also useful. He taught his New World people metalworking (2 Nephi 5:15–17).<sup>4</sup>

Although the evidence for metalworking in the family is heavily based on information specific to Nephi, it still points to Lehi’s occupation.<sup>5</sup> Jeffrey Chadwick adds important information that more surely demonstrates Lehi’s involvement:

Lehi left behind gold and silver, two precious metals likely to have been used in expert jewelry smithing. While the population at large often utilized silver as money, in the form of cut pieces and small jewelry (no coins were in use in Judah during Iron Age II), to possess gold was very rare—gold was not used as a medium of common monetary exchange. For Lehi to possess both gold and silver suggests that he worked with gold, which in turn suggests gold smithing.<sup>6</sup>

The combination of metalsmithing and collecting rent from ancestral lands in Samaria would have enabled Lehi and his family to approach Jerusalem’s upper class.<sup>7</sup>

It is no surprise that Nephi would have learned something from his father’s trade, but that may not be the most important defining aspect of his personal education. Nephi was a fourth son, not a first son. The family business was destined for

Laman, the eldest. Although Nephi may have learned metalsmithing from his father, I suggest that he formally trained for a different profession.

The most important evidence that Nephi was trained for a different profession is so obvious that it is easily missed: Nephi could read and write. Unlike our modern expectation of literacy, illiteracy (or, perhaps better stated, nonliteracy) was the norm in ancient Israel. Although it is difficult to ascertain the extent of literacy in ancient Israel, an interesting letter gives us a glimpse of the situation. The Lachish letters were ostraca (scraps of pottery used for writing) written to and from military leaders apparently preparing for Nebuchadnezzar’s invasion (around 590 BC). That invasion eventually resulted in the fall of Jerusalem, the Babylonian exile, and of course, Lehi and his family’s departure for the New World. A military commander sent the following response to his superior:

Your servant Hoshayahu (hereby) reports to my lord Ya’ush. May YHWH give you good news. . . . And now, please explain to your servant the meaning of the letter which my lord sent to your servant yesterday evening. For your servant has been sick at heart ever since you sent (that letter) to your servant. In it my lord said: “Don’t you know how to read a letter?” As (Y)HWH lives, no one has ever tried to read *me* a letter! Moreover, whenever any letter comes to me and I have read it, I can repeat it down to the smallest detail.<sup>8</sup>

The fact that letters were exchanged clearly points to some literacy. However, the superior’s

4. John A. Tvedtnes, *The Most Correct Book: Insights from a Book of Mormon Scholar* (Salt Lake City: Cornerstone, 1999), 94–95.

5. Tvedtnes, *Most Correct Book*, 94–98.

6. Chadwick, “Lehi’s House at Jerusalem,” 114. Chadwick proposes ten reasons to see Lehi as a metalsmith (114–17), all but the first of which deal with Nephi rather than Lehi. We simply have better information for Nephi and the best explanation for Nephi’s expertise is that of his father.

7. Chadwick, “Lehi’s House at Jerusalem,” 117.

8. J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986), 418. See also Wikipedia, s.v. “Lachish Letters,” last modified 27 November 2010, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lachish\\_letters#cite\\_note-1](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lachish_letters#cite_note-1).

expectation was that the recipient might not be able to read. Rather, it was assumed that the letter would be read to the recipient. The subordinate's reply reflected justifiable pride in his ability to read. In addition to highlighting the typical expectations of illiteracy, however, this letter also tells us that even in a culture with some literacy, it was essentially only an adjunct to orality, not a replacement for it. The subordinate also declares that when "I have read it, I can repeat it down to the smallest detail." There is no indication that the record itself would be referenced, but rather that the function of the writing was to provide the information that would then be remembered without the written copy.<sup>9</sup>

Nephi's writings have no such parallel expectation of orality. They are documents that were meant to be read rather than memorized. They were to be preserved and perhaps consulted by his descendants. They were open-ended in the sense that future writers would continue to add to the text. The plates of Nephi were a continually aggregated cultural memory. The length and complexity of Nephi's two texts point to the work of a trained scribe. An untrained, semiliterate person would not have been sufficiently competent to attempt such a record.<sup>10</sup>

Being a scribe entailed much more than simply learning to read and write. It was a specific type of education following similar lines in each of the Middle Eastern traditions. The great civilizations of Egypt and Mesopotamia had scribal schools.<sup>11</sup> Indirect evidence confirms the presence of scribal education in Israel and Judah.<sup>12</sup> Only the higher social classes were acceptable sources of scribes.<sup>13</sup> Nephi's social status would have allowed him the opportunity to be trained as a scribe.

The scribal schools' curriculum covered a range of topics, from languages, classic texts, and the interpretation of texts, to public speaking. Karel van der Toorn describes the language component of such training:

Instruction in the idiom of particular professions and written genres could be seen as part of the larger program of language instruction. The linguistic skills of the scribes would normally have included the mastery of one or more foreign languages. Around 700, the officials of King Hezekiah were able to conduct a conversation in Aramaic, which to the common people was incomprehensible (2 Kings 18:26). In addition to Aramaic, the scribal program may have taught other languages as well, such as Egyptian and, later, Greek. In the words of Ben Sira, the accomplished scribe "will travel through the lands of foreign nations"

9. Karel van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 12: "In order for the message to reach its destination, however, the written text needed a voice. Texts were for the ears rather than the eyes. . . . Even such a mundane form of written communication as the letter usually required the intervention of someone who read its contents to the addressee. A messenger did not deliver the letter like a mailman; he announced its message, and the written letter served as aide-mémoire and means of verification."

10. The result of less scribal training seems apparent near the end of the small plates record, where a number of writers add brief entries to the book of Omni. Perhaps this brevity indicates that, as much as having little to say, the writers did not have the training that would have provided them with more to say.

11. Van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture*, 68-69.

12. Van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture*, 96-104.

13. Van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture*, 105: "In view of their social-economic situation, the Levitical scribes can be likened to civil servants with no financial worries. They could apparently afford to pay for the education of their children; for them, a tuition fee consisting of a large sum of silver was not prohibitive. While it is conceivable that mere copyists and lower clerks were drawn from the lower strata of society, scribes belonged to what we would call the upper middle class" (internal quotation omitted).

to increase his knowledge (Sir 39:4). Such exploits presume that training in foreign languages was part of the scribal education.<sup>14</sup>

That such skill in linguistics and writing systems existed in Israel receives confirmation from a number of artifacts from Canaan that exhibit Egyptian hieratic writing. In light of these findings, Orly Goldwasser, head of Egyptology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, suggests that Egyptian scribes in Canaan trained local scribes in the art:

After the decline of the Egyptian Empire . . . many Egyptians, or Egyptian-trained Canaanite scribes lost their means of existence, and may have offered their scribal and administrative knowledge to the new powers rising in the area, first the Philistines and then the Israelites. . . . We would like to suggest that these Egyptian or Egyptian-trained scribes, cut off from their homeland, well acquainted with Egyptian decorum as well as the Canaanite language, educated local scribes, who in their turn passed on their knowledge to their successors.<sup>15</sup>

The text on an artifact found at Lachish contains the Egyptian title “scribe.” This bolsters the idea that there was an Egyptian scribal tradition in Judah.<sup>16</sup>

The presence of a scribal tradition that dealt with both the Egyptian language and one (or more) of its writing systems may provide a spe-

cific cultural background to explain the enigmatic references in Nephi’s introduction:

I, Nephi, having been born of goodly parents, therefore I was taught somewhat in all the learning of my father. . . . Yea, I make a record in the language of my father, which consists of *the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians*. (1 Nephi 1:1-2)

Hugh Nibley first noticed and highlighted that Nephi’s proficiency with Egyptian was the result of having been *taught*.<sup>17</sup> Many Latter-day Saint scholars have suggested that “a record in the language of [Nephi’s] father, which consists of the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians” may have been an Egyptian script encoding Hebrew language.<sup>18</sup> Evidence does exist to indicate that this kind of mixing of script and language took place. John Tvedtnes and Stephen Ricks provide some examples:

[There] are Israelite documents from the ninth to sixth centuries B.C., from which we learn that the Israelites adopted the Egyptian hieratic numerals and mingled

17. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert; The World of the Jaredites; There Were Jaredites*,

13. Nibley references Mosiah 1:4, which specifically speaks of Lehi “having been taught in the language of the Egyptians.” While the text has Lehi as the one receiving this education, I suggest that this is due to the late reference. Mosiah is using this example over four hundred years later. It would not be surprising that after so much time the reference to the learned one might have been reassigned to the Old World patriarch rather than to Nephi, the New World king.

18. John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1985), 74-76; Sorenson, “The Book of Mormon as a Mesoamerican Record,” in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997), 443 (however, Sorenson notes that Hugh Nibley and Robert F. Smith see both the language and the script as Egyptian, 507 n. 121); Daniel C. Peterson, “Is the Book of Mormon True? Notes on the Debate,” in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997), 150-52; and Tvedtnes, *Most Correct Book*, 22-24. However, Nibley, in *Lehi in the Desert; The World of the Jaredites; There Were Jaredites*, 15, disagrees that Nephi was referring to Hebrew language written with Egyptian characters.

14. Van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture*, 100.

15. John S. Thompson, “Lehi and Egypt,” in Welch, Seely, and Seely, *Glimpses of Lehi’s Jerusalem*, 267. The quotation is from Orly Goldwasser, “An Egyptian Scribe from Lachish and the Hieratic Tradition of the Hebrew Kingdoms,” *Tel Aviv* 18 (1991): 248-53.

16. Thompson, “Lehi and Egypt,” 266.



them with Hebrew text. More important, however, are Hebrew and Aramaic texts—languages used by the Jews of Lehi’s time—that are written in Egyptian characters. One of these is *Papyrus Amherst* 63, a document written in Egyptian demotic and dating to the second century B.C. The document had, like the Dead Sea Scrolls, been preserved in an earthen jar and was discovered in Thebes, Egypt, during the second half of the nineteenth century. For years, Egyptologists struggled with the text but could make no sense of it. The letters were clear, but they did not form intelligible words. In 1944, Raymond Bowman of the University of Chicago realized that, while the script is Egyptian, the underlying language is Aramaic.<sup>19</sup>

Although understanding that Nephi may have been trained as a scribe does not entirely clarify what he meant by “the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians,” it does provide a context in which those two aspects of language fit naturally together in a written document, and a single person might have the necessary linguistic skill to creatively use a script to represent the phonetics of a different language. We might expect one who was minimally literate to be able to write his native language with his native script, but not to exhibit the learning necessary to combine the phonetics of one language with a symbolic representation typically used for a different language.

In addition to languages, the curriculum of a scribal school included studying important cultural texts. Essentially the same Mesopotamian

list of texts has been found in diverse locations, suggesting that these texts formed a standard curriculum for different scribal schools.<sup>20</sup> Egyptian scribes similarly worked with and often memorized many of their classic texts.<sup>21</sup> For the Israelites, van der Toorn notes, “The scholars of Israel were no exception to the common pattern: they were scribes who had specialized in the classic texts, which in their case made them scholars of the Torah.”<sup>22</sup>

Perhaps Nephi’s respect for and frequent citation of Isaiah were a direct result of a scribal school’s emphasis on Isaiah. Van der Toorn suggests that the presence of multiple copies of Deuteronomy, Isaiah, and the Psalms among the Dead Sea Scrolls is an “indication of their position in the scribal curriculum.”<sup>23</sup> Everything Nephi wrote attests to his intimate familiarity with Isaiah, a familiarity that may have been the result of his study of Isaiah as a classic text.

Positing scribal training for Nephi gives a new context and explanation for many of the features of 1 Nephi (and to a lesser degree 2 Nephi). Particularly in 1 Nephi, Nephi constructs his text for a purpose greater than simply telling his story. This function is an important qualifier for the text since an autobiographical text would have been a very unusual document for a scribe to produce in the ancient Near East.<sup>24</sup> As will be shown,

20. Van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture*, 57–58.

21. Van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture*, 68.

22. Van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture*, 81.

23. Van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture*, 102.

24. Van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture*, 101–2: “The secondary phase of the scribal program was devoted to the study of the classics. . . . To find out which classics had the greatest place in the scribal curriculum, we may look at the library of Qumran. About 25 percent of the Dead Sea Scrolls are scriptural. Except for the book of Esther, all books of the Hebrew Bible are represented by at least one copy. The three books represented by the most manuscripts are Psalms, Deuteronomy, and Isaiah” (the technical nomenclature of the scrolls has been omitted). See van der Toorn’s discussion on p. 189.

19. John A. Tvedtnes and Stephen D. Ricks, “Jewish and Other Semitic Texts Written in Egyptian Characters,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5/2 (1996): 159–60.

Nephi created a text that made a point in a form that followed scribal traditions.

The book of 1 Nephi is argument for ethnogenesis; that is, it is a document designed to establish and legitimize a new people. In creating this text, Nephi followed the Near Eastern tradition for the content of such texts. Ann Killebrew lays out the basic form:

Following Hedwig Wolfram's definition, the process of ethnogenesis that forms the core ideology of a group often comprises three characteristic features: (1) a story or stories of a primordial deed, which can include the crossing of a sea or river, an impressive victory against all odds over an enemy, or combinations of similar "miraculous" stories (e.g., the exodus); (2) a group that undergoes a religious experience or change in cult as a result of the primordial deed (e.g., reception of the Ten Commandments and worship of Yahweh); and (3) the existence of an ancestral enemy or enemies that cement group cohesion (e.g., most notably the Canaanites and Philistines). These basic elements form the key themes in the biblical narrative about the emergence of early Israel.<sup>25</sup>

Although it is possible that this was a subconscious model,<sup>26</sup> the skill with which Nephi crafts his story to communicate these acceptable justifications

for ethnogenesis points to an educated background that at least taught the texts that exemplified these ideas. Nephi identified and justified himself as the prophet (and also king) of the new people by providing an accepted *mythos* for a new people. It was no longer an Old World Israel but a New World Israel. The departure of his family from a destroyed Jerusalem included crossing an ocean, the quintessential primordial deed. This new people received their scriptural record through the conflict with and defeat of Laban. Once in the New World, this New Israel is defined against a specific "ancestral" enemy in the Lamanites. The cultural requirements of establishing a new people are completely and rather directly defined.

Creating a new people was not Nephi's only problem. Although his kingly role had been thrust upon him by the people (2 Nephi 5:18), Nephi had to justify the necessity for a new king apart from the king of Old World Judah. Moreover, he had to establish himself as a legitimate king. Traditionally, the king should have been a first son. Nephi should not have been king according to typical expectations.

Nephi resolved that potential issue with a precedent from the Torah.<sup>27</sup> He painted himself as the literary parallel to Joseph of Egypt, who was similarly a younger son that rose to rule over his brothers. Joseph of Egypt had a dream in which Yahweh confirmed Joseph's future as the ruler over his brothers (Genesis 37:5-10). Nephi's authorization came in a revelation that he would rule over his brethren (1 Nephi 2:19-22).<sup>28</sup> When Joseph told his brothers of his dream, they were

25. Ann E. Killebrew, *Biblical Peoples and Ethnicity: An Archaeological Study of Egyptians, Canaanites, Philistines, and Early Israel, 1300-1100 B.C.E.*, Society of Biblical Literature Archaeology and Biblical Studies, ed. Andrew G. Vaughn (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 9:149.

26. Alan Dundes, "The Hero Pattern and the Life of Jesus," in *In Quest of the Hero* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 190, discusses how common patterned expectations molded the biography of Abraham Lincoln to the "hero" pattern. See also Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977), for the socially defined structure that underlies Russian folktales.

27. Van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture*, 137-41, discusses the way that scribes used the established texts in the creation of new ones.

28. Although Joseph had a dream and Nephi a revelation, there was only the slightest conceptual difference between the two, both being communications of Yahweh's will to man.

## Parallels between Exodus and 1 Nephi

Incident	Exodus	1 Nephi
The call to the responsible leader through a revelation accompanied by fire	3:2-4	1:6
The despoiling of the Egyptians and the taking of some of Laban's possessions	12:35-36	4:38
Deliverance on the other side of a water barrier	14:22-30	17:8; 18:8-23
An extended period of wandering	16:35	17:4
Complaints along the way	15:24	2:11-12; 5:2-3; 16:20, 25, 35-38; 17:17-22
Outright rebellion	(see Numbers 16:1-35; 25:1-3)	7:6-16; 18:9-21
New law that was to govern the Lord's people	20:2-17	2:20-24*

\* S. Kent Brown, "The Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 30/3 (Summer 1990): 112. I have reorganized his insights into table form. This table also appears in Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007-08), 1:45.

angry with him and attempted to kill him (Genesis 37:5, 18). When Nephi told his brothers, they too were angry (1 Nephi 16:38), and eventually they attempted to kill him (2 Nephi 5:2).<sup>29</sup> Nephi not only had to know the story of Joseph well, but he had to have the literary training to effectively apply it to the new situation recorded in his text.

Unlike the ethnogenetic parallels or his justification for his kingship, Nephi had no cultural pressure that required him to select the story of Israel's exodus as a model for his family's exodus from Jerusalem. Nevertheless, he described his family's journey in a way that made the literary parallel unmistakable to one who understood the scriptural account.

A more subtle use of a scriptural model is Nephi's application of the David and Goliath story as a backdrop and perhaps justification for his encounter with Laban. Ben McGuire

29. In paralleling his story with that of Joseph of Egypt, Nephi was still constrained by the specific events. He was not inventing history but simply telling history in a way that used the scriptural model to enhance his purpose in creating the record.

sees Nephi and Laban as antagonists paralleling David and Goliath:

Both protagonists cite miracles as the basis for their faith. David cites instances from his own life, and Nephi cites one from the history of Israel and one from his own life. They each then conclude by remarking that just as God performed those miracles, God will deliver them from the hand of their antagonists. . . .

A second thematic parallel also occurs in David's suggestion that "thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them." This suggests (prophetically) that what happened to the lion and the bear will also happen to the Philistine. In Nephi's parallel account, he speaks of a similar fate awaiting Laban: "The Lord is able to deliver us, even as our fathers, and to destroy Laban, even as the Egyptians." . . .

Another thematic parallel here is that David claims to be killing Goliath so that "all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel." In Nephi's account, Laban is killed so that Nephi's posterity will know the God of Israel. . . .

Both narrative units then end with the death of the antagonist and the subsequent removal and keeping of his armor.<sup>30</sup>

Thus we see that Nephi's mastery of scriptural texts was sufficient that he could recast them as models for a new historical event.

30. Ben McGuire, "Nephi and Goliath: A Case Study of Literary Allusion in the Book of Mormon," *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 18/1 (2009): 20–22.

Once scribal students mastered the fundamental texts, they were trained in the exegesis of those texts.<sup>31</sup> This tradition is evidenced in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Robert Eisenman explains how this attribute of the scribal industry functioned in the Dead Sea Scrolls:

A *peshet* is a commentary—at Qumran, a commentary on a well-known biblical passage, usually from the Prophets, but also from Psalms and sometimes even other biblical books like Genesis, Leviticus, or Deuteronomy. The important thing is that the underlying biblical passage being interpreted should be seen as fraught with significance in relation to the ideology or history of the Scroll Community. Often this takes the form of citing a biblical passage or quotation out of context or even sometimes slightly altered, followed by the words, "*peshet*" or "*peshet ha-davar*," meaning "its interpretation" or "the interpretation of the passage is". The text then proceeds to give an idiosyncratic interpretation having to do with the history or ideology of the group, with particular reference to contemporary events.<sup>32</sup>

Nephi not only includes passages from Isaiah but also uses Isaiah as a foundation and springboard for his own revelation. As with the *pesharim*, the scripture served as the springboard for a text that applied that scripture to a current situation. In his final farewell revelation in 2 Nephi 25–30, Nephi wrote his prophecy using the previously inserted Isaiah texts as a thematic foundation. What Nephi begins in chapter 25 is not an expla-

31. Van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture*, 58.

32. Robert Eisenman, *James the Brother of Jesus: The Key to Unlocking the Secrets of Early Christianity and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 80–81.

nation of Isaiah<sup>33</sup> but rather an expansion of Isaiah. Nephi tells us, “I proceed with mine own prophecy, according to my plainness” (v. 7). His purpose in writing is to discuss his vision, not Isaiah’s meaning. The elements of this vision are so closely aligned with those of Nephi’s vision of the tree of life that it is virtually certain that it is that vision he is referring to. However, whereas his earlier recounting of that vision was placed in the context of his family’s exodus, the version in chapters 25–30 is grounded more deeply in revered prophecy. Isaiah becomes the conceptual framework for Nephi’s new explanation of his seminal vision. Thus Nephi’s talent with exegesis was such that he could view the same vision from two different perspectives. In the latter he used scriptural text to continually support his visionary understanding.

Nephi underscores his position as explicator of scripture and revelation in other ways. When occasion warrants, he easily turns to scripture to support his position. When his brothers’ resolve fails them in the quest for the brass plates, Nephi turns to a scriptural text that he likens to their task. He recounts the Lord’s destruction of Pharaoh’s army during Israel’s exodus (1 Nephi 4:2–3). Scribes often incorporated previous texts into their new works. Rather than copying, how-

ever, they relied on their memory of the texts.<sup>34</sup> Although Nephi was writing this long after the actual event, there is every reason to believe that he was capable of such extemporaneous citation and explication of scriptural texts.

If the Mesoamerican cultural context behind the Book of Mormon is correct, then when King Nephi desires to enhance the integration of the indigenous population into his new Israelite city, he has Jacob preach a sermon based on a text from Isaiah that indicates that Gentiles will come to the aid of Israel.<sup>35</sup> Jacob specifically notes that he speaks at Nephi’s direction and tells his audience: “I would speak unto you concerning things which are, and which are to come; wherefore, I will read you the words of Isaiah. And they are the words which my brother has desired that I should speak unto you. And I speak unto you for your sakes, that ye may learn and glorify the name of your God” (2 Nephi 6:2, 4). Nephi intended that the words of Isaiah, a prophet who prophesied more than one hundred years earlier about an event in Israel’s future, should be “for [the Nephites’] sakes.” It was a pointed lesson taken from scripture and applied to a living situation. It was something that one might have expected from one with scribal training.

It is in the light of such training that we might reconsider 1 Nephi 15:21–28:

And it came to pass that they did speak unto me again, saying: What meaneth this thing which our father saw in a dream? What meaneth the tree which he saw?

33. Typical LDS language describing what Nephi does with Isaiah is found in Daniel H. Ludlow, *A Companion to Your Study of the Old Testament* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 283: “Nephi then provides an inspired commentary for six chapters (2 Ne. 25–30) on the meaning of the teachings of Isaiah.” See also Victor L. Ludlow, *Unlocking Isaiah in the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 199: “Nephi then adds his own prophetic commentary on Isaiah’s words (2 Nephi 25–32). Nephi’s inspired commentary provides wonderful insights as we study the words of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon.” While Nephi is certainly commenting and using Isaiah as the basis for those comments, he is not giving us a commentary on Isaiah. He is using Isaiah’s writings as “likened” texts to support the meaning of the vision that is his real intent in writing.

34. Van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture*, 117.

35. Gardner, *Second Witness*, 2:130–31. John Gee and Matthew Roper presented virtually the same argument at the thirty-second Sidney B. Sperry Symposium, “I Did Liken All Scriptures unto Us’: Early Nephite Understandings of Isaiah and Implications for ‘Others’ in the Land,” in *The Fulness of the Gospel: Foundational Teachings from the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 55–56.

And I said unto them: It was a representation of the tree of life. And they said unto me: What meaneth the rod of iron which our father saw, that led to the tree? And I said unto them that it was the word of God; and whoso would hearken unto the word of God, and would hold fast unto it, they would never perish; neither could the temptations and the fiery darts of the adversary overpower them unto blindness, to lead them away to destruction. Wherefore, I, Nephi, did exhort them to give heed unto the word of the Lord; yea, I did exhort them with all the energies of my soul, and with all the faculty which I possessed, that they would give heed to the word of God and remember to keep his commandments always in all things. And they said unto me: What meaneth the river of water which our father saw? And I said unto them that the water which my father saw was filthiness; and so much was his mind swallowed up in other things that he beheld not the filthiness of the water. And I said unto them that it was an awful gulf, which separated the wicked from the tree of life, and also from the saints of God.

In these verses our typical reading has a clueless Laman and Lemuel coming to their spiritual younger brother who understands and explains the dream to them. But this reading misses an important cultural perspective that colors the nature of the event. Why didn't Laman and Lemuel understand? The most likely answer is not that they were simply spiritually blind.<sup>36</sup> The

answer is more likely to be found in the symbolic nature of the vision. Laman and Lemuel had no training in the interpretation of the symbolic content of dreams.<sup>37</sup> Therefore they heard but did not understand.

Nevertheless, in spite of their culturally assigned superiority over a younger brother, and in spite of particular animosities, they did not feel uncomfortable coming to Nephi for an explanation. The logical but undeclared reason that Laman and Lemuel would think to approach Nephi (as perhaps opposed to their father) would be Nephi's training. If Nephi had been trained as a scribe, then they would naturally come to him for an explication. In van der Toorn's words: "The true scribe . . . has learned to see what others could not see even if they were given the ability to read."<sup>38</sup>

If we posit some scribal training as part of Nephi's background, the nature of his text takes on new depths and fresh perspectives. First Nephi in particular demonstrates a significant number of features that are best explained as the result of formal scribal training. Even in 2 Nephi, which I have suggested was less planned and structured than 1 Nephi,<sup>39</sup> Nephi's training provides connections between Isaiah and his own experience as he writes. Both the very presence and the nature of the two books we have from Nephi point to

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rather that these were lessons that had to be explained by the Master (Matthew 13:11-17; 15:15; Mark 4:2, 11-13, 33; Luke 8:10). This practice is aptly summed up in Mark 4:34: "But without a parable spake he not unto them: and when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples." Allegorical or symbolic themes were expected to be interpreted by one who was better able to understand them.

36. In the New Testament, the apostles and others constantly ask Jesus for the meaning of his parables (Matthew 13:36; 15:15; Mark 4:10-13, 34; Luke 8:9; John 10:6). The intent of these New Testament passages is to demonstrate not that there were those who didn't understand, but

37. Lehi may not have had scribal training, but he was the one receiving the symbolic visions. This presumes that they were given in terms that he understood. Nephi does not initially understand them either, and his comprehension is the direct result of being taught—this time by an angel (1 Nephi 11).

38. Van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture*, 106.

39. Gardner, *Second Witness*, 2:324-25.

his formal training as a scribe prior to his family's departure from Jerusalem.❏

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# A New Resource on the Book of Moses

Review of Jeffrey M. Bradshaw. *In God's Image and Likeness: Ancient and Modern Perspectives on the Book of Moses*. Salt Lake City: Eborn, 2010. xxxvi + 1101 pp., with appendix, bibliography, color plates, and indexes. \$49.99 hardcover (one volume), \$19.95 per volume softcover (three volumes).

BRIAN M. HAUGLID

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Commentaries on the Pearl of Great Price have steadily appeared ever since Milton R. Hunter's *Pearl of Great Price Commentary* first became available in 1948.<sup>1</sup> However, Jeffrey M. Bradshaw has produced the first commentary solely devoted to the Book of Moses in his book *In God's Image and Likeness*.

Bradshaw brings together a wide variety of ancient texts from traditions such as Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, as well as modern views from Latter-day Saint authorities and scholars that the author correlates to select portions of the Book of Moses. This large volume begins with a roughly five-page preface with endnotes (pp. xxi-xxxv) in which the author mentions his opportunity to take a yearlong sabbatical in France to work on the commentary project (p. xxi). He explains how his

"awakening to the literary beauty of scripture" was facilitated by his mentor Arthur Henry King, who taught him to recite scripture out loud while looking for literary nuances (p. xxiii). He references Margaret Barker's argument for contextualizing scripture (p. xxiv) and ends with an injunction to search for revelation in understanding scripture (p. xxv).

An eighteen-page introduction with endnotes (pp. 1-31) considers the relationship between the Book of Moses, the book of Genesis, and the Joseph Smith Translation (JST) and discusses their common or variant readings. Bradshaw also provides an excerpt from the seminal *Joseph Smith's New Translation of the Bible: Original Manuscripts* on the chronology of the production of the Book of Moses.<sup>2</sup>

The introduction also includes a section on how to use the book. After explaining the

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1. Milton R. Hunter, *Pearl of Great Price Commentary: A Selection from the Revelations, Translations, and Narrations of Joseph Smith, First Prophet, Seer, and Revelator to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Stevens and Wallis, 1948).

2. Scott H. Faulring, Kent P. Jackson, and Robert J. Matthews, eds., *Joseph Smith's New Translation of the Bible: Original Manuscripts* (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2004).

threefold meaning of the book's title phrase, "In God's Image and Likeness" (pp. 10–11), Bradshaw outlines the book's arrangement and provides reasoning for his use of illustrations, which he inserts throughout the book to provide an added dimension to the many topics presented. It is in this section that the author describes how to follow the intricate system of gleanings, footnotes, and endnotes used extensively throughout the book.

In the final section of the introduction, entitled "On the Use of Ancient Texts," Bradshaw discusses methodological questions concerning the use of ancient texts. He acknowledges the difficulties and possible trappings of varying contexts and transmission issues when employing ancient texts to enhance scriptural understandings. He explains that his approach in this book is to include as much of the ancient and modern commentary as possible as a study resource (p. 17) to aid in better understanding the Book of Moses. For the most part the author's methodology combines two long-standing approaches in Latter-day Saint scholarship: (1) provide authoritative statements from General Authorities or commentary by scholars on select verses of scripture, and (2) include material from ancient texts for parallelistic comparison.

The next section of the book is the main commentary and comprises six chapters (pp. 33–509) divided according to the first six chapters of the Book of Moses (i.e., Moses 1–6:12). I was quite disappointed to learn that the commentary ends abruptly at Moses 6:12. How this decision was arrived at eludes me, but in my opinion the book would have been a lot stronger had it included the entire Book of Moses.

Each chapter of this commentary begins with a brief overview in which the historical background to the reception of the chapter (related

to the JST) and its general outline are discussed. After a few general themes related to the chapter are explored, the text block for the chapter and commentary follow. For the commentary, the author identifies certain words or phrases in select verses that ostensibly can be enriched or paralleled using ancient texts or modern commentary. The book has some very thoughtful insights in the chapter overviews and commentary. In the overviews, I particularly liked the discussions of the literary structure of Moses 1 (pp. 36–37) and the nature of Eden before the fall (pp. 141–44). I also liked the theme entitled "The Nakedness and the Clothing of Adam and Eve" (pp. 234–40).

Many of the insights from ancient sources in the commentary are very interesting. They are also utilized according to the author's promise of including as many as possible. In the end I can see how the commentary can be helpful in a comparative study, but in my view one must also be cautious with parallels. I did find a few instances where I believe the author misread some of the sources and misapplied them as parallels. One example of a misreading and misapplication I found seems to be Bradshaw's effort to identify the phrase "caught up" in Moses 1:1 (p. 42). He first notes examples from the scriptures of others who have been "caught up," such as Paul and Nephi in 2 Corinthians 12:2 and 1 Nephi 11:1, respectively. He then introduces a later statement of Nephi's that "upon the wings of his Spirit hath my body been carried away upon exceedingly high mountains" (2 Nephi 4:25) and links the phrase "wings of his Spirit" to Abraham being "raised up to heaven on the wings of a bird," found in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*.

The actual passage Bradshaw refers to from the *Apocalypse of Abraham* 12:7–10 reads as follows:

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And the angel said to me, "Abraham." And I said, "Here I am." And he said to me, "Slaughter all these and divide the animals exactly into halves. But do not cut the birds apart. And give them to the men whom I will show you standing beside you, for they are the altar on the mountain, to offer sacrifice to the Eternal One. The turtle-dove and the pigeon you will give to me, for I will ascend on the wings of the birds to show you (what) is in the heavens, on the earth and in the sea, in the abyss, and in the lower depths, in the garden of Eden and in its rivers, in the fullness of the universe. And you will see its circles in all."<sup>3</sup>

First, Bradshaw writes the phrase "wings of a bird," which should actually be "wings of the birds," as it appears in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*. Second, although the key word *wings* may give some force to the parallel, equating the "Spirit" with "birds," in my view, is a stretch. Does a close examination of this passage, in fact, justify asserting that the phrase "wings of the birds" parallels "wings of his Spirit"? From the context of the passage, the "birds" motif appears not to be strongly connected to the notion of the "Spirit" but is a metaphor indicating the ability to swiftly move about or travel, that is, to the heavens, the earth, the sea, and the abyss, and so on. And who is it that travels swiftly like birds? Here, third, it is not Abraham who ascends to heaven on the "wings of the birds" (which is the main force of the parallel) but the angel to whom Abraham is talking.

Certainly not every use of ancient texts in this volume demonstrates a misreading or misapplication, but the above exemplifies problems that can

happen when reading through a large number of texts. Mining thousands of pages of ancient (or modern) texts presents a significant challenge for anyone undertaking this kind of project. Thus it should be no surprise that errors occur.

A definite challenge arises in deciding which phrases in ancient texts should be applied to certain verses in the Book of Moses. Should the context of the chosen portion of the ancient text align with the context of the phrase or verse of scripture to which it is compared? If so, what criteria should be followed to make sure that the context of the ancient text can be validated? And when a valid parallel is found, what does that mean? Does it somehow authenticate that portion of scripture to which it is compared? In general, Bradshaw provides no analysis in the commentary that answers these questions. And, quite frankly, it would be near impossible to do so without expanding the project into many volumes. The author's main purpose is simply to provide an environment in which to enrich one's study of the Book of Moses.

After each chapter of commentary, Bradshaw provides "gleanings," or excerpted quotations from various authors (Latter-day Saints and others) that provide additional information. These gleanings come from a variety of ancient or modern authors such as Philo, at-Tabataba'i, Juanita Brooks, C. Terry Warner, Elder Dallin H. Oaks, C. S. Lewis, Brigham Young, and, of course, Hugh Nibley. The gleanings can be as short as one sentence or several pages long. Although some of the gleanings were interesting, I admit that I did not always understand how some of them related to the Book of Moses.

The rest of the book (pp. 510-1101) contains various types of resources. In the section entitled "Excursus" (pp. 510-783), the author supplies

3. Ryszard Rubinkiewicz, "Apocalypse of Abraham," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 1:695. I used the same source Bradshaw used.


fifty-five essays on various topics such as “Science and Mormonism,” “The Circle and the Square,” and “The Five Lost Things of the Temple.” Again, although some of these articles were interesting, I was a bit stymied trying to figure out how these essays directly related to the Book of Moses. To me they seemed to deal with mostly tangential topics.

An appendix (pp. 785–803) also contains ancillary materials such as the “BYU Evolution Packet” put together in 1992, an essay on how the packet was put together, and other materials on the origin of man. An annotated bibliography of ancient texts related to the Book of Moses and JST Genesis (pp. 805–908) provides a modicum of contextualization for the ancient sources used in the book, which includes some useful charts. The book ends with references to modern LDS and other sources used in the volume (pp. 911–1009), a selection of beautiful color plates of artwork used in the book (pp. 1010–39), and helpful indexes (pp. 1041–1101) to figures, scriptures, statements of latter-day prophets, and topics.

There is always room for improvement in any project of this scope. Here are a few weaknesses that attracted my attention: (1) It is not a complete commentary of the Book of Moses (it treats the text only up to Moses 6:12). (2) The notes can be very long and laborious to read. (3) The notation system can sometimes be quite difficult to follow. There are both endnotes and even footnotes to the endnotes throughout the book. (4) Except for the commentary chapters, most of the material in the book (especially the “gleanings” and “excurses”) is not about the actual Book of Moses itself, but is instead a collection of ancillary materials of various topics that seemingly arise in the Book of Moses. (5) A clear, consistent editorial style, such as Chicago or Turabian, is not followed in the book. Sometimes references to

cited books and such are shortened, making it difficult to ascertain the source without going to the full reference in the back of the book. In my view, more editing needed to be done to weed out superfluous or overlong references.

Bradshaw has done a great service in providing such a large array of material to supplement one’s study of the Book of Moses. But it should also be understood that this vast amount of material is subjectively put together and does not follow any methodology of scholarly restraint. This, in and of itself, does not make this a bad book, but readers should be cautious in accepting that every insight or comparison presented in the book is valid or of equal importance. In addition, although Bradshaw does not argue that parallels give authenticity to the scripture, readers should be wary of concluding that one can “prove” the scriptures by finding parallels. Perhaps the book’s real value in using so many ancient sources will not be so much in authenticating the truthfulness of the Book of Moses as in authenticating its antiquity.

As far as fulfilling the purposes the author intended, that is, providing a wealth of information from both ancient and modern sources for those who wish to study the Book of Moses, I think this book is a success. It should be noted, however, that except for the actual commentary, the book is mostly a potpourri of materials loosely related to the Book of Moses rather than a cohesive presentation on the Book of Moses itself. In my view, the value of this book lies in its usefulness as a select commentary on Moses 1:1–6:12 and as a reference or sourcebook on various topics that appear to emerge from the Book of Moses. 

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# *Shattered Glass: The Traditions of Mormon Same-Sex Marriage Advocates Encounter Boyd K. Packer*

*Abstract: President Boyd K. Packer's October 2010 general conference address met with criticism from people opposed to the stance of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on same-sex marriage and homosexual acts. Critics portrayed President Packer's printed clarification of his words as backing down under pressure. Six of his past addresses are reviewed here, demonstrating that the clarification matches his past teachings. Critics' claims about President Packer's views are also shown to be inconsistent with his published views over many years. The reaction of Mormons for Marriage (M4M), a group of Latter-day Saints dedicated to opposing the church's stance on California Proposition 8, is examined. Despite promising to avoid any criticism of the church and its leaders, M4M is shown to indulge in both. M4M also recommends materials hostile to the church, its leaders, and its standard of morality. Examples of M4M's scriptural and doctrinal justifications of its stance are also examined. The critics' arguments in favor of altering Latter-day Saint teaching regarding homosexual acts are critiqued.*

GREGORY L. SMITH

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*There is perhaps no phenomenon which contains so much destructive feeling as "moral indignation," which permits envy or hate to be acted out under the guise of virtue.*

Erich Fromm, *Man for Himself*<sup>1</sup>

"Why do we need prophets today?" While serving in Paris, France, my missionary companions and I liked this question since we had what we thought was a pretty good answer. I never had anyone disagree with it: "Because

God loves us as much as he loved his children in times past. And we face questions, challenges, and situations that are different from those of the past, so we need his guidance today."

What our answer did not include, I've since decided, was at least as important: prophets were rarely welcomed, even among the covenant people who paid homage to past prophets or the idea of prophetic guidance (Luke 11:45-54). With relatively few exceptions, prophets were regarded as out of touch, reactionary, pessimistic, and overly critical—a drain on morale, unwilling to read the

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1. Erich Fromm, *Man for Himself: An Inquiry into the Psychology of Ethics* (New York: Rinehart, 1947), 235.

political writing on the wall, obstinately refusing to mince words, avoid hurt feelings, or get with the times. And they were human and mortal, with all the consequent failings and idiosyncrasies that their listeners could not help but notice, especially if they were looking.

In more downcast moments, I could also have told my French friends that even in the latter days this difficulty would remain. A hostile Babylon had, as one might expect, little use for a Palmyra prophet. But even of the relatively few called out into the kingdom, many found a living prophet irksome and ultimately intolerable. This would lead Joseph to say (with an almost-audible sigh):

But there has been a great difficulty in getting anything into the heads of this generation. It has been like splitting hemlock knots with a corn-dodger for a wedge, and a pumpkin for a beetle. Even the Saints are slow to understand.

I have tried for a number of years to get the minds of the Saints prepared to receive the things of God; but we frequently see some of them, after suffering all they have for the work of God, will fly to pieces like glass as soon as anything comes that is contrary to their traditions.<sup>2</sup>

Despite nearly two centuries and a far more experienced LDS Church membership, the sound of shattering glass has been heard again. I refer to the church's recent support of California's Proposition 8 and to related issues regarding homosexuality.

## An Ideal Test Case?

If nothing else, the religious response to homosexuality would serve as a good illustration for my French investigators. Unlike some modern prophetic counsel—such as the necessary and repeated warnings against drugs, debt, pornography, or domestic abuse—the church's warning against homosexual behavior does not strike a skeptical world as mere “common sense.” (My French friends who knew their Voltaire might remark that prophets' warnings against drugs, debt, and the rest are necessary only because “common sense is not very common.”)<sup>3</sup> And, granted, these more prosaic matters do not, *in extremis*, likely require prophetic witness to be persuasive. A financial adviser, medical doctor, or social worker would likely say the same.

By contrast, it is difficult to think of a better example of the need for modern prophetic guidance than homosexuality, which has usually been seen as nothing but a dangerous perversion and subversive threat to the social order. Thankfully, recent years have seen at least some of the casual cruelty and unthinking disdain inflicted upon this subset of God's children become less acceptable. Even yet there is clearly work to do—for example, in opposing verbal and physical violence—that no one of goodwill would oppose. And our present broad cultural awareness of the past costs of racism and the exploitation of women, for example, has happily led many to search themselves for other lingering prejudices.

We are now confronted, however, not only with the relatively unobjectionable idea that private behavior between consenting adults in a

2. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1980), 6:184–85; also in Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, ed. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book 1976), 331 (spelling modernized).

3. “Le sens commun est fort rare.” F.-M. Arouet de Voltaire, *Dictionnaire Philosophique Portatif: nouvelle édition avec des notes* (Amsterdam: Varberg, 1765), 2:276. This is a happy case where the English wordplay on *common* improves upon the original.



pluralistic society ought not to be criminalized, but also with some people insisting that society's view and treatment of marriage itself is overdue for extensive modification. Whatever the merits of same-sex marriage, even its staunchest advocates would grant, I think, that this would represent a radical change in Western society. Good and conscientious people have argued persuasively on both sides of the issue from a host of perspectives: ethical, religious, sociological, biological, psychological, and legal. And yet, when all has been argued, the law of unintended consequences must surely have its due. No unaided mortal can say with certainty—or, I suspect, much justified confidence at all—where the proposed redefinition of marriage would ultimately lead us. We cannot predict what the stock market will do in a week or ten years,<sup>4</sup> and yet the advocates of marital change blithely assure us that the far more complex human factors of sociology and history will all work out for the best, say, two generations hence.

Humans often find themselves in such situations, of course. But if marriage is a thing devoutly and properly to be desired by a homosexual couple, then all must grant that it is something of enormous worth and consequence. One does not fight in the courts, the public square, or the streets for a triviality. To deny marriage to the deserving would, then, be cruel; to tamper with and damage it (even with the best of intentions) would be likewise unconscionable.

Furthermore, homosexuality touches numerous deep and vital human matters—it invokes intimacy, self-understanding, belonging, and social role. All the great religious traditions would insist, I think, that these are central issues

about which faith is to guide us. Many traditions would see these issues as having both earthly and eternal import. We have, in short, in homosexuality a case tailor-made for demonstrating the benefits of prophetic guidance, if such exists: the stakes are high; both perspectives have ardent, well-meaning proponents; and the pervasive consequences of either choice will be both serious and irrevocable.

### President Packer's October 2010 Address

As a result, I have been most interested in the reaction to President Boyd K. Packer's address in the October 2010 general conference.<sup>5</sup> Coming as it did on the heels of a hard-fought campaign in California regarding same-sex marriage, President Packer's speech on sexual morality served as a flashpoint for what nineteenth-century Latter-day Saints would have perhaps called "Gentile" resentment. This much I would have expected, but I have been intrigued and bemused by the reaction and rhetoric of those relatively few members of the church who have chosen to publicly oppose the church's position. A detailed analysis of the social and legal arguments regarding Proposition 8 I leave to others—in part because, as I note above, such advocacy is ultimately inconclusive. I here concern myself with how some among the Latter-day Saints and their allies used President Packer's address to oppose the church and express grievances.

4. Nassim Taleb, *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable* (New York: Random House, 2007).

5. Boyd K. Packer, "Cleansing the Inner Vessel," *Ensign*, November 2010, 74–77. As discussed below, the spoken version of the talk was edited to clarify the speaker's intent. I shall refer to the spoken version as "Packer-2010A" and the published, written version as "Packer-2010B." Both the original audio and edited versions are available on the church's website at <http://lds.org/general-conference/2010/10/cleansing-the-inner-vessel?lang=eng&media=audio> (accessed 5 April 2011).

Various sections of President Packer's address were criticized by both the media and disgruntled Latter-day Saints. One section, however, received the lion's share of the attention:

Some suppose that they were preset and cannot overcome what they feel are inborn tendencies toward the impure and unnatural. Not so! Why would our Heavenly Father do that to anyone? Remember, He is our Heavenly Father. [Packer-2010A, 9:00–9:20]

Those hostile to the church's legal agenda and religious teachings concluded overwhelmingly that President Packer was teaching that (a) homosexual tendencies, attractions, or temptations were not in-born or innate; and (b) one can always expect to be free of such temptations or desires in this life if one lives the gospel.<sup>6</sup>

This reading led swiftly to complaints that such teaching was at variance with that expressed by the church and other leaders,<sup>7</sup> such as when

Elder Dallin H. Oaks noted that “the Church does not have a position on the causes of any of these susceptibilities or inclinations, including those related to same-gender attraction.”<sup>8</sup> (It should not escape us that the early and persistent effort to place President Packer beyond the pale of orthodoxy on this point had an added advantage: if one could dismiss some of his remarks as “unofficial” or in error, it would be that much easier to dispense with the rest. If he cannot be trusted to get this detail right, ran the subtext, then his remarks are merely opinion, hardly binding upon members, and evidence that the General Authorities do not agree among themselves.<sup>9</sup> Such a distinction would have little meaning to a nonmember, but to those within the church seeking to discredit President Packer's remarks while retaining their own bona fides as faithful, believing members, such a stance was crucial.)

6. Even in early 2011, Packer-2010A was still being quoted in an op-ed piece by a Mormon “Transhumanist” as an example of “dismissing scientific findings” (R. Dennis Hansen, “Anti-science sentiments among religious leaders and apostasy,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, 5 February 2011, <http://www.sltrib.com/sltrib/opinion/51138147-82/science-evolution-leaders-organic.html.csp>). As will be seen, President Packer's talk made no reference to matters about which science can legitimately express an opinion. See also “LDS Church Conference: Being Pro-Gay Marriage Is Like Opposing the Law of Gravity,” *God Discussion*, 4 October 2010, <http://www.goddiscussion.com/32994/lds-church-conference-being-pro-gay-marriage-is-like-opposing-the-law-of-gravity/>; and Michael Aaron, “Packer says homosexuality second only to murder, denial of Holy Ghost,” *QSaltLake*, 4 April 2011, <http://qsaltlake.com/2011/04/04/packer-says-homosexuality-second-only-to-murder-denial-of-holy-ghost/>.

7. “Elder Packer is a hardliner on the subject,” wrote one commentator. “This is his point of view on the homosexuality issue. He has spoken on it before and believes homosexuality is unnatural. Other general authorities as well as bishops, stake presidents who all are good people and inspired can see this issue differently. . . . So despite what seems like a very hardline by Elder Packer and even tacit approval by the First Presidency, the issue has room for different points of view.” Chris, 4 October 2010 (11:38 AM), comment on Laura [Compton], “Why

would God allow his children to be born homosexual?,” *Mormons for Marriage*, 3 October 2010, <http://mormonsformarriage.com/?p=293>.

8. Dallin H. Oaks and Lance B. Wickman, “Same Gender Attraction,” interview with Church Public Affairs, 2006, accessed 8 February 2011, <http://beta-newsroom.lds.org/official-statement/same-gender-attraction>.

9. David Melson, the president of Affirmation, used this tactic explicitly: “Among the twelve (Apostles) there are some that would like to see gays and lesbians welcomed into full fellowship, but Packer is not one of them.” Melson was further characterized as claiming that “the general authorities he has spoken with oppose Packer's views” since “there's almost a uniform opinion among the general authorities that full acceptance is going to happen. . . . I'm encouraged, but the church does not move quickly on these things” (Aaron, “Packer says homosexuality second only to murder”). Contrary to Melson's assertion, President Packer has never advocated that those with homosexual inclinations not be “welcomed into full fellowship.” No LDS Church leader has taught, however, that “full acceptance” requires that the church allow a member's decision to engage in homosexual acts to go unaddressed. “There is a difference between what one *is* and what one *does*. What one *is* may deserve unlimited tolerance; what one *does*, only a measured amount.” Boyd K. Packer, *The Things of the Soul* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1997), 83 (emphasis in original); see also Boyd K. Packer, “Covenants,” *Ensign*, November 1990, 84–86.

Whether their initial reading was accurate is, of course, the first question we must address. The church's official spokesman announced following the conference that "each speaker has the opportunity to make any edits necessary to clarify differences between what was written and what was delivered or to clarify the speaker's intent. President Packer has simply clarified his intent."<sup>10</sup> One might expect that the church's announcement that President Packer had been misunderstood would reassure. The print version read:

Some suppose that they were preset and cannot overcome what they feel are inborn temptations toward the impure and unnatural. Not so! Remember, God is our Heavenly Father. [Packer-2010B]

Far from settling concerns, those hostile to the church's stance crowed that this was simply evidence that their outcry and pressure had made someone back down: "If the church thought this would soften their words, I think they will find it will backfire, again," wrote one.<sup>11</sup> Some compared the clarification to "rewriting reality," a reference to the remaking of history in Orwell's 1984.<sup>12</sup> (Commentators did not, however, explain how a public announcement to the media was intended to hide the alteration—especially when the original audio remains readily available on the church's website. Evil conspiracies are not usually this clumsy.)

The aforementioned initial reading of President Packer's remarks is certainly a possible one. CNN described him as saying that "any attraction between people of the same sex can—with enough faith—be changed," and noted that "when the LDS Church first posted the transcript of Packer's speech, critics went wild—saying the transcript didn't match his spoken words, that the words were changed to lessen the insult."<sup>13</sup> As it happens, however, President Packer has an extensive publication record on homosexuality—and, as we will now see, the edited version of his conference talk matches precisely what he has always taught. Far from backpedaling, the edited version is a smooth continuation of principles that he has taught for over thirty years.

## Past and Present Teachings

There are at least six talks in which President Packer has addressed homosexual or other sexual sin.<sup>14</sup> I here highlight several themes that directly contradict the interpretation by critics—both within and outside of the church—of the 2010 conference address. These themes also confirm that the clarification was precisely that—a clarification—rather than a recantation made under

10. Scott Taylor, "Mormon church clarifies intent of President Boyd K. Packer's talk," *Deseret News*, 8 October 2010, <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/700072230/Mormon-church-clarifies-intent-of-President-Boyd-K-Packers-talk.html>.

11. James, 8 October 2010 (2:13 PM), comment on "Edits to Boyd K. Packer's talk," *Mormons for Marriage*, 7 October 2010, <http://mormonsformarriage.com/?p=299>.

12. Molly, 8 October 2010 (10:17 AM), and Phoug, 8 October 2010 (7:01 AM), comments on "Edits to Boyd K. Packer's talk."

13. Jessica Ravitz, "Mormon leader's remarks spark outcry on same-sex issues," CNN Belief Blog, 12 October 2010 (10:19 AM), <http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2010/10/12/mormon-leaders-remarks-spark-outcry-on-same-sex-issues/?hpt=T2>.

14. In the discussion that follows, I will denominate each talk "Packer," followed by the date of delivery: Packer-1978, Packer-1990, etc. In all cases, italics are in the original and any bold emphasis has been added by me. The talks are [1] "To The One," address given to twelve-stake fireside, Brigham Young University, 5 March 1978, reprinted in *That All May Be Edified* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982), 186–200 [Packer-1978]; [2] "Covenants," *Ensign*, November 1990, 84–86 [Packer-1990]; [3] "The Brilliant Morning of Forgiveness," *Ensign*, November 1995, 18–21 [Packer-1995]; [4] "Ye Are The Temple of God," *Ensign*, November 2000, 72–74 [Packer-2000]; [5] "The Standard of Truth Has Been Erected," *Ensign*, November 2003, 24–27 [Packer-2003]; and [6] "I Will Remember Your Sins No More," *Ensign*, May 2006, 25–28 [Packer-2006].

pressure. Not every talk addresses every theme, but their collective message is unambiguous and unmistakable. When a talk is first cited, I include a quotation in the footnote which justifies my decision to read his remarks as referring, at least in part, to homosexual temptations or acts.

1. *It may be necessary to resist such temptation for a lifetime.*

Contrary to the claim that Packer-2010A taught that any inclination to homosexual sin could be eliminated, numerous of his past addresses teach that such temptations may persist throughout one's entire life and must be resisted:

- Establish a resolute conviction that **you will resist for a lifetime, if necessary**, any deviate thought or deviate action. Do not respond to those feelings. . . . [I]f they have to be evicted ten thousand times, never surrender to them. . . . No spiritual wonder drug that I know of will do it. The cure rests in following for a long period of time, and thereafter continually, some very basic, simple rules for moral and spiritual health. [Packer-1978]<sup>15</sup>
- Some have resisted temptation but never seem to be free from it. Do not yield! Cultivate the spiritual strength to resist—**all of your life, if need be**. [Packer-1990]<sup>16</sup>
- You may wonder why God does not seem to hear your pleading prayers and erase these temptations. When you know the gospel plan, you will understand that the condi-

tions of our mortal probation require that we be left to choose. That test is the purpose of life. While these addictions may have devoured, for a time, your sense of morality or quenched the spirit within you, it is never too late. **You may not be able, simply by choice, to free yourself at once from unworthy feelings.** You can choose to give up the immoral expression of them. [Packer-1990]

- How all can be repaired, we do not know. **It may not all be accomplished in this life.** [Packer-1995]<sup>17</sup>
- That may be a struggle from which you will **not be free in this life.** [Packer-2000]<sup>18</sup>

Even the initial form of Packer-2010A makes the intended meaning clear in context. Immediately after the citation that caused such consternation, President Packer went on to say, “Paul promised that ‘God . . . will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it’ (1 Corinthians 10:13)” [Packer-2010A and -2010B]. The appeal to Paul makes it clear that when Packer-2010A refers to those who believe that they “cannot overcome what they feel are inborn tendencies toward the impure and unnatural,” he is talking about sinful acts, rather than the existence or persistence of temptation to sin, which we must sometimes

15. “I speak to those few, those very few, who may be subject to homosexual temptations” (p. 187).

16. “My message is to you who are tempted either to promote, to enter, or to remain in a life-style which violates your covenants and will one day bring sorrow to you and to those who love you. . . . Among them [spiritually destructive life-styles] are abortion, the gay-lesbian movement, and drug addiction” (p. 84).

17. “Save for those few who defect to perdition after having known a fullness, there is no habit, no addiction, no rebellion, no transgression, no offense exempted from the promise of complete forgiveness. . . . There are some transgressions which require a discipline which will bring about the relief that comes with the morning of forgiveness. If your mistakes have been grievous ones, go to your bishop. . . . We cannot, as a church, approve unworthy conduct or accept into full fellowship individuals who live or who teach standards that are grossly in violation of that which the Lord requires of Latter-day Saints” (pp. 19, 20).

18. “With some few, there is the temptation which seems nearly overpowering for man to be attracted to man or woman to woman” (p. 73).

simply “bear.” He goes on: “There is also an age-old excuse: ‘The devil made me do it.’ Not so! He can deceive you and mislead you, but he does not have the power to force you or anyone else to transgress or to keep you in transgression” [Packer-2010A and -2010B].

President Packer also invoked the same scriptural argument in Packer-2000:

When any **unworthy desires press into your mind, fight them, resist them, control them** (see James 4:6-8; 2 Ne. 9:39; Mosiah 3:19). The Apostle Paul taught, “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (1 Cor. 10:13; see also D&C 62:1).

Thirty-three years ago, Elder Packer drew a frank analogy between those engaged in the difficult process of breaking from same-sex behavior and a major surgical operation to correct a life-threatening condition. As always, he focused on behavior since “the solution to this problem rests with the ‘thou shalt’ and the ‘thou shalt not’”:

[Surgical patients] count it quite worthwhile to submit to treatment, however painful. They struggle through long periods of recuperation and sometimes must be content with a limited life-style thereafter, in some cases in order just to live. Is it not reasonable that recuperation from this disorder might be somewhat comparable? [Packer-1978]

In the same talk, he noted that his audience “will have to grow away from [their] problem with undeviating—notice that word—undeviat-

ing determination.” Since the situation is compared to a patient who might have to accept “a limited life-style thereafter . . . in order just to live,” and this requires “undeviating determination,” it is hard to believe that the same speaker believes (as the critics claim) that temptation and inclination will necessarily cease. On the contrary, President Packer’s earlier writings are completely congruent with the clarifying edits made to Packer-2010B and his intent in the context of Packer-2010A.

2. *Acting on sexual temptation is not inevitable.*

- It is not unchangeable. It is not locked in. One **does not just have to yield to it and live with it**. . . . If you are one of the few who are subject to this temptation, do not be misled into believing that you are a captive to it. That is false doctrine! . . . You have a God-given right to be free and to choose. **Refuse the unnatural; choose the moral way**. You will know, then, where you are going. Ahead is but the struggle to get there. Do not try merely to discard a bad habit or a bad thought. Replace it. [Packer-1978]
- A tempter will claim that such impulses cannot be changed and **should not be resisted**. [Packer-1990]
- If you consent, the adversary can take control of your thoughts and lead you carefully toward a habit and to an addiction, convincing you that immoral, unnatural **behavior** is a fixed part of your nature. [Packer-1995]
- The angels of the devil convince some that they are born to a life from which they cannot escape and are **compelled to live in sin**. The most wicked of lies is that

they cannot change and repent and that they will not be forgiven. That cannot be true. They have forgotten the Atonement of Christ. [Packer-2006]<sup>19</sup>

Temptation does not lead inevitably to acts, and all six talks emphasize that experiencing temptation is not sin, as outlined below.

3. *Unsought feelings, thoughts, or temptations are not sins—immoral acts and encouraging such acts are.*

- Is sexual perversion wrong? There appears to be a consensus in the world that it is natural, to one degree or another, for a percentage of the population. Therefore, we must accept it as all right. . . . The answer: It is not all right. It is wrong! It is not desirable; it is unnatural; it is abnormal; it is an affliction. **When practiced**, it is immoral. It is a transgression. [Packer-1978]
- You **may not be able, simply by choice**, to free yourself at once from unworthy feelings. You can choose to give up the **immoral expression** of them. [Packer-1990]
- We cannot, as a church, approve **unworthy conduct** or accept into full fellowship individuals who **live or who teach** standards that are grossly in violation of that which the Lord requires of Latter-day Saints. [Packer-1995]
- With some few, there is the temptation which seems nearly overpowering for man to be attracted to man or woman to

woman. . . . **If you do not act on temptations, you need feel no guilt.** [Packer-2000]

- In the Church, one is **not condemned for tendencies or temptations**. One is held accountable for transgression. (See D&C 101:78; A of F 1:2.) **If you do not act on unworthy persuasions**, you will neither be condemned nor be subject to Church discipline. [Packer-2003]<sup>20</sup>
- If you are bound by a habit or an addiction that is unworthy, you must stop conduct that is harmful. Angels will coach you, and priesthood leaders will guide you through those difficult times. . . . You can, if you will, **break the habits** and conquer an addiction and come away from that which is not worthy of any member of the Church. [Packer-2010B]

President Packer has also emphasized that the causes of such temptations are not known to church leaders, and he cautioned against believing there is any “quick fix.” Significantly, and contrary to the critics’ interpretation, he also endorses the idea that one may inherit a tendency to such acts and dismisses the idea that most people consciously choose homosexual temptation:

4. *There is no quick fix, and the causes are not usually known.*

- **I do not know of any quick spiritual cure-all** . . . [to] instantly kill this kind of temptation—or any other kind, for that matter. [Packer-1978]

19. “Challenges of pornography, gender confusion, immorality, child abuse, drug addiction, and all the rest are everywhere. There is no way to escape from their influence. Some are led by curiosity into temptation, then into experimentation, and some become trapped in addiction” (p. 27).

20. “There are words we would rather not say. They describe things that we would rather not think about. But you are inescapably exposed to temptations in connection with fornication, adultery, pornography, prostitution, perversion, lust, abuse, the unnatural, and all that grows from them. . . . Some work through political, social, and legal channels to redefine morality and marriage into something unrestrained, unnatural, and forbidden” (p. 25).



- Psychologists and psychiatrists have struggled for generations to find the cause. Many have searched with resolute dedication and have studied everything that might have a bearing on it—parent-child relationships, **inherited tendencies**, **environmental influences**, and a hundred and one other things. These things and many, many more remain on the scope. **They either have some important effect on this problem, or they are affected in important ways by this problem.** [Packer-1978]<sup>21</sup>
- It is hard to believe that any individual would, by a clear, conscious decision or by a pattern of them, **choose** a course of deviation. **It is much more subtle than that.** [Packer-1978]
- We receive letters pleading for help, asking why should some be tormented by desires which lead toward addiction or perversion. They seek desperately for some logical explanation as to why they should have a **compelling attraction**, **even a predisposition**, toward things that are destructive and forbidden. Why, they ask, does this happen to me? It is not fair! They suppose that it is not fair that others are not afflicted with the same temptations. They write that **their bishop could not answer the “why,” nor could he nullify their addiction or erase the tendency. . . . It is not likely that a bishop**

**can tell you what causes these conditions or why you are afflicted, nor can he erase the temptation.** But he can tell you what is right and what is wrong. If you know right from wrong, you have a place to begin. That is the point at which individual choice becomes operative. [Packer-1990]<sup>22</sup>

And, finally, despite critics’ shrill insistence to the contrary, President Packer nowhere teaches that those who succumb to sin should be ostracized, mistreated, or rejected.

*5. Those who sin are beloved and not rejected.*

- Oh, if I could only convince you that you are a son or a daughter of Almighty God! You have a righteous spiritual power—an inheritance that you have hardly touched. You have an Elder Brother who is your Advocate, your Strength, your Protector, your Mediator, your Physician. Of Him I bear witness. The Lord loves you! You are a child of God. Face the sunlight of truth. The shadows of discouragement, of disappointment, of deviation will be cast behind you. . . . God bless you, the one. You are loved of Him and of His servants. [Packer-1978]
- Now, in a spirit of sympathy and love, I speak to you who may be struggling against temptations for which there is no moral expression. . . . While these addictions may have devoured, for a

21. This paragraph ought to be illuminating for those who claim that President Packer rejects the role of “inherited tendencies,” since he offers it as one example of things that have an import effect *on* the problem. (I presume that inherited tendencies would not be thought to be affected *by* the problem, except in time-travel science fiction.) Again, it is clear that his concern and emphasis is acts, rather than temptation, orientation, or desires.

22. Contrast this statement with the mind reading of one former member: “Elder Packer has been itching to give this speech for years and he has had plenty of time to figure out how to succinctly say that Same Sex Attraction isn’t a choice.” Dave Hoen, 6 October 2010 (3:02 PM), comment on Compton, “Why would God allow . . . ?” Far from “itching to give this speech for years,” President Packer *has* given this speech for years—and he has always insisted that the choice lies in how one responds to the temptation.



time, your sense of morality or quenched the spirit within you, it is never too late. [Packer-1990]

- Pure Christian love, the love of Christ, does not presuppose approval of all conduct. Surely the ordinary experiences of parenthood teach that one can be consumed with love for another and yet be unable to approve unworthy conduct. [Packer-2000]
- We understand why some feel we reject them. That is not true. We *do not* reject you, only immoral behavior. We *cannot* reject you, for you are the sons and daughters of God. We *will not* reject you, because we love you. [Packer-2003]

In sum, the critics ask us to believe something quite extraordinary—that President Packer chose to alter his teaching and perspective, expressed for over thirty years, only to be forced after the fact to censor himself because of pressure from the public or displeasure from his apostolic colleagues for violating the current “party line.”

## Mormons for Marriage

Critics outside the church would be unlikely to know of President Packer’s consistency of message on these points. But one might expect that believing church members would give an apostle the benefit of the doubt. And wouldn’t they likely be better informed—or have the means to become so?

Mormons for Marriage (hereafter M4M) was founded to “support . . . marriage equality for all, and stands in respectful opposition to California Proposition 8.” Laura Compton of California manages the group’s website, has been described as its “founder” or “co-founder,”<sup>23</sup> and has appar-

ently often acted as spokesperson for the group.<sup>24</sup> The website does not describe other officers of the group or how it is governed. One of the group’s goals is “to share our perspectives on both homosexuality and gay marriage with other Mormons who are meaningfully exploring the issue for the first time.”<sup>25</sup> M4M expends considerable intellectual effort on such questions—the website was quick to post a critical text analysis of the differences between Packer-2010A and -2010B.<sup>26</sup> Laura Compton also excerpted all references to homosexuality in the church’s new administrative handbooks.<sup>27</sup> Yet it is curious that despite its pretensions to providing an informed and “respectful”<sup>28</sup> discussion of such issues, M4M ignores President Packer’s extensive past teaching on the subject when glossing 2010A, though it is all readily accessible. “Many listeners got the distinct impression,” Compton tells us, “that

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Church Pressure,” Religion Dispatches, 18 February 2011, <http://www.religiondispatches.org/dispatches/joannabrooks/4265/pro-gay-marriage-mormon-keeps-faith-despite-church-pressure/>; and Jennifer Dobner, “Interfaith leader calls gay marriage legal issue,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, 28 September 2010, <http://www.sltrib.com/sltrib/home/50068662-76/marriage-church-gaddy-gay.html.csp>.

24. See, for example, “Atheists United Standing with Mormons for Marriage,” accessed 19 February 2011, <http://www.atheistsunited.org/home/press-releases/116-atheists-united-standing-with-mormons-for-marriage>; Karen Grigsby Bates, “Mormons Divided On Same-Sex Marriage Issue,” *National Public Radio (NPR)*, 3 November 2008, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=96405866>; Seba Martinez, “AP Story Features Mormon Supporter of Marriage Equality,” *Affirmation*, 6 October 2008, [http://www.affirmation.org/news/2008\\_057.shtml](http://www.affirmation.org/news/2008_057.shtml); and Diana Samuels, “Memorial held for gay Mormon who committed suicide in Los Altos,” *San Jose Mercury News*, 26 February 2010, <http://www.rickcross.com/reference/mormon/mormon680.html>.

25. Admin, “About,” post to Mormons for Marriage, 16 July 2008, [http://mormonsformarriage.com/?page\\_id=2](http://mormonsformarriage.com/?page_id=2).

26. “Edits to Boyd K. Packer’s talk,” post to Mormons for Marriage, 7 October 2010.

27. Laura [Compton], “Latest LDS Instructions on GLBT Issues,” post to Mormons for Marriage, 12 November 2010 (2:49 PM), <http://mormonsformarriage.com/?p=395>.

28. Admin, “About,” post to Mormons for Marriage, 16 July 2008.

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23. Joanna Brooks, “Pro-Gay Marriage Mormon Keeps Faith Despite

Elder Packer was suggesting homosexuality is a choice. While that may be what he believes or understands, it is not in line with current church teachings which indicate General Authorities do not know what causes homosexuality.”<sup>29</sup> Many may well have had such an impression—helped, it must be said, by relentless insistence on that reading by Compton and others:

You know, we can sit here and debate until the cows come home about whether or not Elder Packer meant to single out gays/lesbians in his talk, but that’s not really what matters.

Whether or not he intended to single out people, many got the message that he did so intend.

As a teacher, he should know that if students are not understanding the lessons, it is the teacher’s fault and responsibility to fix the problem.<sup>30</sup>

All teachers certainly have the responsibility to be clear. Compton ignores, however, that a hostile reading can often manufacture grounds for offense. Anyone with any experience knows that people often hear what they want to hear—and nowhere is this more true than when being told that their behavior must change. In the case of Packer-2010A, even when a clarification *was* made, the “students” still didn’t accept this as a clarification of initial intent at all, but as evidence that President Packer was out of step with his colleagues and acting the “hardline” role. M4M still isn’t happy with the talk, in either version. If listeners did misunderstand, one might expect a group with M4M’s stated objectives to help

calm fears by analyzing President Packer’s past remarks. But it didn’t.

M4M announces on its website that “no criticism of the church or its leadership will be tolerated.”<sup>31</sup> The site uses a moderation system so posts cannot be read until approved by Compton or another administrator.<sup>32</sup> Thus, M4M exercises complete control over what appears on its site and has the control to refuse to publish material that it regards as unsuitable.

It is understandable—and even praiseworthy—that a group that purports to speak for believing members of the church, and wishes to persuade other members, would establish such a rule. But as I read what Compton and her fellow contributors wrote, I found it increasingly hard to regard this “rule” as anything more than a fig leaf to draw in the unwary, or as a sop to any conscience that might be unnerved by an attack on the church or its leaders. M4M “tolerates” such statements as Compton’s insistence that “the Church definitely has a long, LONG way to go.”<sup>33</sup> This strikes me as criticism. It certainly isn’t praise, nor is her claim that the church is “trying to impose LDS moral standards on the rest of the community.”<sup>34</sup> These are not isolated slips; the

29. Laura [Compton], 8 October 2010 (7:53 AM), comment on “Edits to Boyd K. Packer’s talk.”

30. Laura [Compton], 15 October 2010 (9:51 PM), comment on Compton, “Why would God allow . . . ?”

31. Admin, “Welcome to Mormons for Marriage,” post to Mormons for Marriage, 16 July 2008.

32. Compton, 11 October 2010 (1:22 PM), comment on “Edits to Boyd K. Packer’s talk”; see also “We would like to remind readers that comments are moderated and that civil debate is both expected and required,” introduction to “Why I Supported Prop 8,” Mormons for Marriage, 18 January 2011 (2:47 PM), <http://mormonsformarriage.com/?p=432>.

33. Laura [Compton], 13 November 2010 (9:58 AM), comment on “Latest LDS Instructions on GLBT Issues.”

34. Compton, 11 October 2010 (1:22 PM), comment on “Edits to Boyd K. Packer’s talk.” I here defer discussing the fact that virtually all law involves the imposition of some moral standard. Advocating for either “yes” or “no” on Proposition 8 requires the assumption of a moral stance and the desire that it be implemented. Even the claim that one should not impose one’s morality on others is an attempt to make one’s own moral beliefs normative.

church's error, evil, or corruption is a recurrent theme that goes unmoderated or uncontested by Compton, who is praised for "standing up against the Church of LDS' lies about our GLBT friends, fellow citizens and fellow believers."<sup>35</sup> "Laura is my prophet today," writes another.<sup>36</sup> But as for the church:

- "The LDS Church will never give homosexuals an equal status."<sup>37</sup>
- "Homosexuality is not a crime, and God doesn't condemn it."<sup>38</sup>
- "Most [gays] will decide it [the church and its teachings] is all b.s. and will finally come to their senses and leave before that point."<sup>39</sup>
- "There are many accepting, welcoming and affirming churches. Walk away from the bigotry [in the LDS faith] and into the arms of kindness. As Laura points out, there is no need to remain where one is degraded."<sup>40</sup> [This was the last post on the thread; Compton did nothing to correct or moderate this interpretation.]
- "The church shouldn't have gotten involved in [Prop 8]."<sup>41</sup>

35. Fiona, 4 October 2010 (9:55 AM), comment on Compton, "Why would God allow . . . ?"

36. Claire, 3 October 2010 (7:46 PM), comment on Compton, "Why would God allow . . . ?"

37. CowboyII, 13 November 2010 (9:46 AM), comment on "Latest LDS Instructions on GLBT Issues."

38. Anon for now, 14 October 2010 (11:35 PM), comment on "An answer to prayer," Mormons for Marriage, <http://mormonsformarriage.com/?p=383>. The author self-identifies as bisexual and indicates that God wanted her to be in a same-sex relationship with another woman.

39. Dave Hoen, 3 October 2010 (1:16 PM), comment on "LDS Church Response to HRC," Mormons for Marriage, <http://mormonsformarriage.com/?p=378>.

40. Fiona, 15 November 2010 (9:47 AM), comment on "LDS Church Response to HRC."

41. Heather, 8 October 2010 (1:48 PM), comment on "Edits to Boyd K. Packer's talk."

- "The church is not inspired. The Book of Mormon is not true. (I left the church a year ago because I found the Book of Mormon to be completely false.) And now I see this ridiculous gay/lesbian issue being raised—it is exactly what I would expect from a false church. It's a repeat from the church's anti-black garbage. When will people learn the truth?"<sup>42</sup>

Readers are assured by Compton, furthermore, that at M4M "we avoid personal attacks."<sup>43</sup> Avoiding personal attacks and not tolerating attacks on church leaders apparently do not encompass such remarks as the following (all made on threads in which Compton—who apparently has full moderating powers—participated):

- Packer's statement is "laughable and pure hypocrisy"; "That statement by Elder Oaks is extremely disingenuous. . . . Probably not a good example of honesty."<sup>44</sup>
- Packer "not so very long ago, advocated for beating up gay people"; "If President Packer is a prophet, I'm the Queen of Sheba, a prima donna at the Metropolitan Opera and an astronaut."<sup>45</sup>
- Packer's talk puts "fear in people's hearts . . . [and] achieves nothing but rigid, paralyzed spirits. Whatever light that is intermingled is quic[k]ly snuffed out with the dark thoughts being promoted."<sup>46</sup>

42. Chris, 5 October 2010 (10:24 AM), comment on Compton, "Why would God allow . . . ?"

43. Laura [Compton], 4 October 2010 (9:55 PM), comment on Compton, "Why would God allow . . . ?"

44. Dave Hoen, comment on "Edits to Boyd K. Packer's talk," 8 October 2010 (11:00 AM); and comment on "Two Decades of Mixed-Orientation Marriages," Mormons for Marriage, 19 January 2011 (7:54 PM), <http://mormonsformarriage.com/?p=427>.

45. Fiona, 5 October 2010 (3:07 PM); 7 October 2010 (2:22 PM), comments on Compton, "Why would God allow . . . ?"

46. Sheri, 8 October 2010 (4:30 PM), comment on "Edits to Boyd K.

- Packer “reinforced prejudice and discrimination of LGBT people. I find that to be morally wrong and unworthy of anyone claiming to be a true follower of Christ[']s teachings and philosophy.”<sup>47</sup>
- “Christ can’t talk to President Packer or anyone else if they won’t open their hearts to the possibility that their own deeply held opinions are not correct.”<sup>48</sup>
- “I am not really interested in reading another shame-based talk by Elder Packer. . . . It is unfortunate that when Elder Packer is given this topic to talk about his words are so rife with negativity and shame.”<sup>49</sup>
- Those who support the church’s stance are told, “Words like yours (and Elder Packer’s) are why five young people killed themselves last week.”<sup>50</sup>
- “I viscerously [*sic*] hope that the next young man who cannot be stopped from killing himself does it on Boyd K. Packer’s front steps.”<sup>51</sup>
- “The leadership seems more vested in their and the Church’s image than the countless young members who wanted nothing more than to feel loved, accepted and whole and relief and found death their only option.”<sup>52</sup>

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Packer’s talk.”

47. Debbi, 13 October 2010 (4:11 PM), comment on “Edits to Boyd K. Packer’s talk.”

48. Melody, 3 October 2010 (6:58 PM), comment on Compton, “Why would God allow . . . ?”

49. Benjamin, 3 October 2010 (10:53 PM), comment on Compton, “Why would God allow . . . ?”

50. Fiona, 4 October 2010 (9:55 AM), comment on Compton, “Why would God allow . . . ?”

51. Buck Jeppson, 4 October 2010 (12:09 PM), comment on Compton, “Why would God allow . . . ?”

52. Rob, 23 October 2010 (2:51 AM), comment on Compton, “Why would God allow . . . ?”

- “You can bet that Boyd Packer’s speech will bring about many additional suicides of young Mormons. If God judged us not on our good works but instead on how much sorrow we’ve brought into the world, I have no doubt that Boyd K. Packer and a few others of the Twelve would be cast into the deepest darkest depths of Outer Darkness.”<sup>53</sup>

Compton cautions new members that “we do not call into question the righteousness or membership standing of other posters.”<sup>54</sup> But even this protection is denied to apostles, as the above citations (and many others) demonstrate—including a long satire in which President Packer’s “To Young Men Only” talk about masturbation was lampooned.<sup>55</sup>

One poster went so far as to associate President Packer with Matthew 18:6/Mark 9:42/Luke 17:2: “Bro Packer caused me considera[bl]e pain and self loathing because of [t]he philosophies mingle[d] with scripture. . . . Bro Packer . . . may just have a millstone waiting for him.” The author concluded magnanimously, “But that will be God’s decision.”<sup>56</sup> More often than not, however, the posters at M4M do not feel the need to defer judgment to a later day or higher court, while the moderators apparently do not enforce their stated policy of avoiding personal attacks and refraining from criticism of the church or its leaders.

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53. Dave Hoen, 4 October 2010 (5:11 PM), comment on Compton, “Why would God allow . . . ?”

54. Laura [Compton], 4 October 2010 (9:55 PM), comment on Compton, “Why would God allow . . . ?”

55. Bitherwack, 5 October 2010 (12:45 PM), comment on Compton, “Why would God allow . . . ?”

56. Rob, 23 October 2010 (2:51 AM), comment on Compton, “Why would God allow . . . ?”

At one point in the discussion, Compton did intervene to chastise a poster. The poster had made remarks in favor of the church but had typed part of her message in all capital letters, to which Compton replied: “Stop shouting. Not only is it rude and irritating, it makes it harder for people to read.”<sup>57</sup> At M4M, violations of netiquette are rude and merit reproof, but attacks on the apostles do not get quite the same attention, notwithstanding M4M’s stated policies

### Preaching to the Choir?

One should also not mistake M4M as an exercise in merely preaching to the choir. Several posters wrote that they were new converts who were delighted to find others who share their doubts about the church’s stance on homosexual acts: “I’m so glad to have found this site!” wrote one. “As a pretty new convert to the church, this issue has been one of the hardest things for me to reconcile. As someone who is a big advocate for gay marriage and for my many gay and lesbian friends, I’ve had a difficult time trying to balance what I believe to be true spiritually and what I believe to be right morally.”<sup>58</sup> Another wrote:

I too am a convert. Ever since joining the church in 2005, the one thing that has plagued my conscience and caused me to question my testimony is the church’s stance on homosexuality and gay marriage. . . . I cannot imagine how painful it would feel to have my church tell me that my love for my husband was sinful. How could love ever be a sin? I am so glad to have found this site and to be able to read

the thoughts of others who are also supportive of our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters. My sincerest hope is that one day, we can open the minds and hearts of those who are not, so that we may all be allowed to love without fear of persecution.<sup>59</sup>

If the above poster’s husband fell in love with her next-door neighbor, she might understand how “love could ever be a sin”—or more accurately, how feelings of love could lead to a sinful act. We note too how quickly teaching that homosexual conduct is sinful becomes “persecution.” And at least one member has not missed the implications of M4M’s stance and arguments:

I honestly felt like I could never return to church, that I would strip off my garments and never wear them again. But I realize now, that without people like us, things will never change. We must continue to attend, continue to be strong and faithful members, so that one day, our opinions will be heard. . . . So that one day, one of us, or one of our family members, will be called as a prophet or an apostle, and one day, we can make things right.<sup>60</sup>

After the smoke-screen claim that M4M will not tolerate personal attacks or criticism of the church and its leaders, it was refreshing to have the implications spelled out clearly and forthrightly: the prophets and apostles are wrong and are leading members astray, we need a grassroots movement of “people like us” to change things, and when someone right-thinking is finally called to church leadership, the damage can be undone.

57. Laura [Compton], 5 October 2010 (5:21 PM), comment on Compton, “Why would God allow . . . ?”

58. Newconvertkim, 4 October 2010 (1:07 PM), comment on Compton, “Why would God allow . . . ?”

59. Angela, 4 October 2010 (2:19 PM), comment on Compton, “Why would God allow . . . ?”

60. Emily, 4 October 2010 (8:57 AM), comment on Compton, “Why would God allow . . . ?”

## Homosexuality and the Priesthood Ban

M4M likes to invoke the “progressive LDS Church members in the 1960s and 1970s [who] had an opportunity to speak out on the denial of priesthood to blacks.”<sup>61</sup> This recurrent trope<sup>62</sup> argues that just as the priesthood was withheld from blacks because of cultural bias or prophetic error, and then justified by dubious theology, so too the right to marry (or at least have some worthy sexual outlet) has been wrongly denied to homosexuals. Despite the historical problems that plague it, this analogy seems to be appealing because M4M can appear enlightened while its opponents are cast in the role of racists.

The differences in the two cases outweigh the similarities. As I have demonstrated above at length, it is the homosexual act that has long been of concern to the church and President Packer. The church did not dispute the right of black citizens to constitutional protections and equality; the church has likewise supported non-discrimination legislation for homosexuals.<sup>63</sup> In the case of same-sex marriage, the entire debate is about whether public and social recognition of marriage between the same gender is a right at

all.<sup>64</sup> Those critics who harp incessantly on the church’s supposed attempt to deny others’ “civil rights” make for good sound bites but beg the question spectacularly.

Further imperiling the analogy, whereas Joseph Smith permitted the ordination of some black members,<sup>65</sup> there is, by contrast, no evidence that he or any other prophet or apostle endorsed homosexual acts (despite the dreadful effort of D. Michael Quinn to argue otherwise in *Same-Sex Dynamics among Nineteenth-Century Americans: A Mormon Example*).<sup>66</sup> Scripture is likewise univocal

61. Admin, “About,” post to Mormons for Marriage, 16 July 2008.

62. Laura [Compton], 6 October 2010 (2:01 PM), comment on Compton, “Why would God allow . . . ?”

63. “The focus of the Church’s involvement is specifically same-sex marriage and its consequences. The Church does not object to rights (already established in California) regarding hospitalization and medical care, fair housing and employment rights, or probate rights, so long as these do not infringe on the integrity of the family or the constitutional rights of churches and their adherents to administer and practice their religion free from government interference.” Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, “The Divine Institution of Marriage,” 13 August 2008, <http://newsroom.lds.org/article/the-divine-institution-of-marriage>. See also Michael Otterson, “Statement Given to Salt Lake City Council on Nondiscrimination Ordinances,” 10 November 2009, <http://newsroom.lds.org/article/statement-given-to-salt-lake-city-council-on-nondiscrimination-ordinances>.

64. In 1963 Hugh B. Brown of the First Presidency said in general conference: “We would like it to be known that there is in this Church no doctrine, belief, or practice that is intended to deny the enjoyment of full civil rights by any person regardless of race, color, or creed. We again say, as we have said many times before, that we believe that all men are the children of the same God and that it is a moral evil for any person or group of persons to deny to any human being the right to gainful employment, to full educational opportunity, and to every privilege of citizenship, just as it is a moral evil to deny him the right to worship according to the dictates of his own conscience. We have consistently and persistently upheld the Constitution of the United States, and as far as we are concerned that means upholding the constitutional rights of every citizen of the United States. We call upon all men everywhere, both within and outside the Church, to commit themselves to the establishment of full civil equality for all of God’s children. Anything less than this defeats our high ideal of the brotherhood of man” (in Conference Report, October 1963, 91). In 1969 the First Presidency issued an official statement: “We believe the Negro, as well as those of other races, should have his full constitutional privileges as a member of society, and we hope that members of the Church everywhere will do their part as citizens to see these rights are held inviolate” (*Improvement Era*, February 1970, 70).

65. Newell G. Bringhurst, “Elijah Abel and the Changing Status of Blacks Within Mormonism,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 12/2 (Summer 1979): 23–31.

66. D. Michael Quinn, *Same-Sex Dynamics among Nineteenth-Century Americans* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996). See Klaus J. Hansen, “Quinn’speak,” review of *Same-Sex Dynamics*, by D. Michael Quinn, *FARMS Review of Books* 10/1 (1998): 132–40; and George L. Mitton and Rhett S. James, “A Response to D. Michael Quinn’s Homosexual Distortion of Latter-day Saint History,” *FARMS Review of Books* 10/1 (1998): 141–263. Quinn’s effort seems to have fallen “stillborn from the press”; I have not seen its arguments invoked during the Proposition 8 debate. At the least, such an approach has



in condemning same-sex acts,<sup>67</sup> while the use of uniquely LDS scripture to justify the priesthood ban was a relatively late development.<sup>68</sup>

Most telling, however, is the manner in which the priesthood ban and teachings on homosexual acts integrate with Latter-day Saint theology. The priesthood ban was always something of an anomaly. My own review of the matter leads me to agree with Elders Jeffrey R. Holland and Dallin H. Oaks: the rationales and justifications offered for the ban were often “inadequate and/or wrong,”<sup>69</sup> for some sought to “put reasons

not been widespread.

67. It is doubtful that biblical authors conceptualized sexual orientation as the modern West has done. Same-gender sexual acts are, however, never portrayed in a positive light (see, in context, such scriptures as Genesis 13:13; 18:20; 19:5; Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Deuteronomy 23:17; 29:23; 32:32; Judges 19:22; 1 Kings 14:24; 15:12; 22:46; 2 Kings 23:7; Isaiah 1:9; 3:9; 13:19; Jeremiah 23:14; 49:18; Lamentations 4:6; Ezekiel 16:48; Amos 4:11; Zephaniah 2:9; Matthew 10:15; 11:23; Mark 6:11; Luke 10:12; 17:29; Romans 1:27; 9:29; 1 Corinthians 6:9; 1 Timothy 1:10; 2 Timothy 3:3; 2 Peter 2:6, 10; Jude 1:7; and Revelation 11:8). At best, advocates of licit homosexual acts could argue that scripture simply does not address the types of relationships they envisage—this would, however, only further highlight the absolute necessity of prophetic guidance on the matter. The scriptural texts would seem, at the least, to put a fairly high burden of proof upon those who argue that such acts carry no moral opprobrium.

68. Latter-day Saint attitudes on this point generally echoed those of contemporaries: “With very little effort one can duplicate the Mormon arguments to the most specific detail from these contemporary non-Mormon sources,” and this includes the use of biblical proof texts. Lester E. Bush Jr., “Mormonism’s Negro Doctrine: An Historical Overview,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 8/1 (Spring 1973): 15–16; see also pp. 26–27. The use of uniquely LDS scripture to justify the ban dates from B. H. Roberts, *The Contributor* (1885), 6:296–7 (Bush, “Mormonism’s Negro Doctrine,” pp. 34–35; Bush also notes a possible earlier allusion to this idea in 1880 by Erastus Snow in *Journal of Discourses*, 21:370). Bush asks, “Why wasn’t the Pearl of Great Price invoked earlier on this matter? Most probably there was no need. The notion that the Negroes were descended from Cain and Ham was initially common enough knowledge that no ‘proof’ or corroboration of this connection had been necessary” (“Mormonism’s Negro Doctrine,” p. 36). Following Roberts’ work, an explanation based on the Pearl of Great Price was used extensively.

69. Jeffrey R. Holland, interview, 4 March 2006, <http://www.pbs.org/>

to [the ban that] turned out to be spectacularly wrong.”<sup>70</sup> Still, I cannot help but see these explanations as a backhanded compliment to Latter-day Saint theology and those who offered them. The tendency to push explanations for the ban back to premortal acts (e.g., “less valiant in the pre-existence”) illustrates that those who offered such explanations realized there was at least the appearance of injustice. For the Saints, actions matter far more than words. Everyone can repent, no one is predestined to damnation or salvation, and “men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam’s transgression” (Articles of Faith 1:2). It therefore made little sense to deny a blessing to someone because of an ancestor’s act. Thus, aside from confessing that they did not know why the ban was in place (a less-than-appealing apologetic!),<sup>71</sup> one of the few consistent positions available to leaders and members appealed to choices made before birth.<sup>72</sup>

mormons/interviews/holland.html.

70. Dallin H. Oaks, interview with Associated Press, *Daily Herald* (Provo, UT), 5 June 1988.

71. Leaders who have indicated they did not know the reason for the ban include Gordon B. Hinckley, “We Stand for Something: President Gordon B. Hinckley,” *On the Record, Sunstone* 21/4 (December 1998): 71; Jeffrey R. Holland (see n. 69); Dallin H. Oaks (see n. 70); Boyd K. Packer (see n. 72); Alexander Morrison, quoted in Edward L. Kimball, *Lengthen Your Stride: The Presidency of Spencer W. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005), 239, citing Alexander Morrison, Salt Lake City local news station KTVX, channel 4, 8 June 1998.

72. President Packer observed: “There have been great things that hit the Church in . . . an effort to destroy it. We have had puzzling things. We had the matter of the priesthood being withheld from a part of the human family. That seemed so inconsistent with the rest of human life and humanity and the doctrines and tolerance. We couldn’t figure that out. That’s gone now, but why was it there? I’m not sure, but I do know this: it had the effect of keeping us out of [most of Africa] until we were ready and mature enough, and they were ready and mature enough. Looking back it is easy to see things that you don’t see looking forward.” Boyd K. Packer, “Lessons from Gospel Experiences,” new mission presidents’ seminar, 25 June 2008, disc 4, track 12, 0:00–0:54.



This dynamic is light-years away from the prohibition of same-sex acts from Genesis to the present. The faith of the Saints centers on the family and a view of the afterlife that necessitates exalted husbands and wives.<sup>73</sup> Commandments against same-sex acts—or against any other sexual act outside the husband-wife relationship—are foundational, never revoked or varied, exhaustively repeated by ancient and modern prophets and apostles, and plainly congruent with broader Latter-day Saint teachings.

Could same-sex acts be accommodated by some later revelation and expanded understanding that M4M clearly hopes will come? In the realm of pure theory, much is possible. But in practice doing so would be a far more radical reconstruction than the ending of the priesthood ban—if anything, lifting the ban *resolved* a long-standing, poorly understood tension in Latter-day Saint practice. A sudden endorsement of same-sex acts would almost surely cause more theological tangles than it would unravel.

I wonder what M4M thinks the appropriate action for blacks in the pre-1978 church should have been. Should they have been encouraged by “progressive members” to ignore the ban and exercise the priesthood functions they had been denied? Should church members have published public denunciations of the prophets? Should the apostles of the 1970s have gotten the President Packer Treatment and been castigated as unchristian, immoral, worthy of damnation, guilty of causing suicides, and all the rest? Even if we grant the extraordinarily dubious contention that the church will one day receive a revelation permitting same-gender marriages and sexual acts,

ought those so inclined to take matters into their own hands in the meantime, confident that God will one day justify them? If so, why have prophets at all? If not, then the moral standard—about which every apostle and prophet has been and remains in complete agreement—must be upheld and urged by all members.

## Opposition to the Church’s Moral Standard

M4M includes links to PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays),<sup>74</sup> whose booklet *Be Yourself* reassures teenagers that they can have a same-sex marriage and adopt children.<sup>75</sup> In addition to PFLAG, Compton and M4M also recommend that readers consult Affirmation,<sup>76</sup> which tells youth that

we know from experience with [LDS] church leaders that they are hardly in a position to be giving counsel on sexual issues. Their shameful teachings and actions over the years reveals [sic] their willingness to remain ignorant and cover up truth when it comes to homosexuality. There are too many victims and examples to deny this reality.”<sup>77</sup>

In a similar vein, Affirmation’s pamphlet *For the Strength of Gay Youth* tells Latter-day Saint teens or young adults who engage in homosexual activity that they need to

73. Julie B. Beck, “Teaching the Doctrine of the Family,” broadcast to seminary and institute of religion teachers, 4 August 2009; reprinted in *Ensign*, March 2011, 12–17.

74. “Help and Support—General,” right sidebar, Mormons for Marriage, accessed 8 February 2011, <http://mormonsformarriage.com/>.

75. PFLAG, *Be Yourself: Questions & Answers for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual & Transgender Youth*, 17–18, <http://community.pflag.org/Page.aspx?pid=594>.

76. Laura [Compton], “Come Out, Take Action,” post for “National Coming Out Day,” Mormons for Marriage, 10 October 2010, <http://mormonsformarriage.com/?p=308>.

77. “Youth Frequently Asked Questions,” Affirmation, accessed 8 February 2011, [http://www.affirmation.org/youth/youth\\_faq.shtml](http://www.affirmation.org/youth/youth_faq.shtml).

realize that doing something sexual with another person doesn't mean it's the end of the world. Even if you are active in the Church and wish to remain so, life will go on. We are human beings and human beings are sexual beings. God created us this way, so even He understands that humans will be sexual, even at times when they don't expect to be. Regardless of the reason, remember that guilt and shame are useless emotions.<sup>78</sup>

Most church members might agree that shame serves little purpose, but guilt is an exceedingly useful emotion for correcting sin—as M4M and other apologists for licit homosexual acts tacitly acknowledge when they seek to use guilt to induce church members and leaders to “do the right thing.”

God made us sexual, so if we act sexually guilt is useless—this is not a robust conclusion. It is so thin that one is tempted to wonder if this is really the best Affirmation could do. God also gave us mouths and speech, but “even so the tongue is a little member . . . [and] a fire, a world of iniquity . . . that . . . defileth the whole body” if it is unbridled (James 3:2, 5-6). It is hard to believe that even Affirmation truly believes that shame and guilt are useless “regardless of the reason”—surely those who, say, beat homosexuals ought to feel shame or guilt. (Not incidentally, those who feel no remorse or guilt are diagnosed as sociopaths. Would Affirmation also affirm that disorder?)

78. Aaron Cloward, *For the Strength of Gay Youth: A Guide for Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Mormon Youth and Young Adults*, accessed 2 May 2011, [http://www.affirmation.org/youth/for\\_the\\_strength.shtml](http://www.affirmation.org/youth/for_the_strength.shtml). President Packer has noted, “There are organizations which . . . justify immoral conduct and bind the chains of addiction or perversion ever tighter. Do not affiliate with such an organization. If you have already, withdraw from it” (Packer-1990).

A study of the messages it posts and the resources it recommends quickly makes it clear that M4M's thin end of the wedge is political opposition to the church's involvement in Proposition 8 and (more laudably) opposition to the mistreatment of homosexuals. But that agenda soon morphs into a platform for opposing the church's teachings on the immorality of homosexual acts—whatever the intent of M4M's founders. While the sites recommended have some useful advice for those with homosexual tendencies, and their friends and families, they are not fundamentally friendly to the church's standard of morality. A link to the church's resources on same-sex attraction is conspicuously, if not surprisingly, absent.<sup>79</sup>

M4M also highlighted the story of a man who claims that God answered his prayers, confirmed he was to be homosexual, and guided him to “the man that would become my life partner.”<sup>80</sup> Tellingly, this comment was promoted to its own post, which perhaps coincidentally allowed M4M to feature the author's extensive citation from D. Michael Quinn's attack on President Packer's probity, reminding readers that this would let them “make up their own minds as to what this General Authority is really like.”<sup>81</sup>

Compton has told the media, “It's not easy when you find yourself on the opposite side of the fence from the men you believe are prophets, seers and revelators. But I don't have to agree with somebody 100 percent in order to sustain them, to recognize their wisdom, to acknowledge them as leaders and assume their good intentions.”<sup>82</sup> It

79. Such resources are available at <http://providentliving.org/ses/media/articles/0,11275,2875-1---59,00.html> (accessed 6 April 2011).

80. Bob25, 14 October 2010 (3:38 PM), comment on “Edits to Boyd K. Packer's talk.”

81. Bob25, “An answer to prayer,” post to Mormons for Marriage, 14 October 2010, <http://mormonsformarriage.com/?p=383>.

82. Peggy Fletcher Stack, “Some LDS conservatives now at odds with

is difficult to see much recognition of wisdom or any assumption that President Packer meant well in M4M's posts. (Those who mean well are not usually damned with a millstone around their necks, for example.) There is also little attempt to acknowledge, much less promote, the leadership of the apostles on sexual matters. Materials hostile to the church's teachings on sexual morality are recommended, while church materials are not even mentioned. I wonder how sustained President Packer would feel were he to read what M4M produces under Compton's supervision.

Compton goes on to argue that "scriptures and church history are jam-packed [*sic*] with humans who make mistakes, disagree, debate and understand the gospel differently," which is presumably how she rationalizes her activities online and in the media. Yet, I think she will search in vain for any scriptural license to undermine the prophets' teachings on sexual morality or to criticize and malign God's representatives as she and those who follow her have done. But, as we will now see, careful attention to scriptural texts is not one of M4M's strengths.

### Wresting the Scriptures

Compton asks readers, "Why would God allow his children to be born homosexual? Because God loves all his children, none is better—or worse—than another. 'And God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.'"<sup>83</sup>

Such a jejune analysis, while perhaps not surprising, is disappointingly thin on logic and scriptural rigor. (As we have seen, President Packer was asking why God would make people

unable to resist temptation.) No one disputes that God loves all his children; he is no respecter of persons (2 Chronicles 19:7; Acts 10:34; Romans 2:11; Ephesians 6:9; 1 Peter 1:17; Moroni 8:12; D&C 1:35). A reading that implies divine endorsement of homosexual acts, however, must pass too lightly over the fact that creation was declared "very good" *after* the creation of two genders who were given the command to "be fruitful and multiply," but *before* the fall of Adam and advent of a telestial world (Genesis 1:28–31). The context does little to justify homosexual attraction or acts as either directly caused by God or desired by him—unless one argues that Adam and Eve had homosexual desires in Eden. There are innumerable things that God now permits in a telestial world—babies born deformed or mentally handicapped, people with genetic predispositions to violence or alcoholism, Huntington's disease or schizophrenia—that only a sadist or fool would call desirable or "good" as final goals or states.<sup>84</sup> While being thus afflicted is neither a sign that God does not love us nor a cause for moral condemnation, the fact that God permits such states can hardly be used as an endorsement of them. How would Compton react, I wonder, if I suggested that God allows the existence of homophobia—and that it therefore ought to be approved or even encouraged since God loves homophobes just as much as everyone else, and besides, everything that God has made is "very good"? Compton wants to cry that all is not well in Zion and yet ironically insists that all is well in the telestial world—at least as it pertains to sexual orientation.

their church," Salt Lake Tribune, 28 April 2011, accessed 5 August 2011, <http://www.sltrib.com/csp/cms/sites/sltrib/pages/printer-friendly.csp?id=51716530>.

83. Compton, "Why would God allow . . . ?"

84. This is not to deny that trials, weaknesses, temptation, or suffering can be used by God to further his good purposes in our behalf. This dynamic is at the heart of the mortal experience: "In his plan, God 'permits' many things of which He clearly does not approve." Neal A. Maxwell, *Lord, Increase Our Faith* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1994), 43.

Compton elsewhere asks, by analogy, “Because if my heterosexuality is unnatural and sinful, and if it is a central part of who I am and it is always with me, then I am unnatural and sinful and how could God make me unnatural and sinful but make you natural and innocent?”<sup>85</sup>

The question presupposes that God “makes” people homosexual—yet, as Compton often insists, the prophets do not know the cause(s) of homosexual desires. And neither does she. No one does. There are many deviations from the ideal and the norm in a telestial world. God may permit these under the operation of natural law, but it does not follow that he applauds them or decrees their occurrence. We simply do not know.

“How could God make me born blind?” one could ask with equal cogency. To be blind comes not from sin but, as with everything, “that the works of God might be manifest” in the lives of the blind (John 9:3). The cause is irrelevant.<sup>86</sup> The blind man ultimately receives healing and wholeness from Jesus—but Jesus does not respond to his predicament by endorsing blindness as just another kind of equally valued sightedness. There can be no doubt but God and Jesus prefer that the blind have sight—if not now, then in the resurrection (Psalm 146:8; Isaiah 35:5; Matthew 11:5; Luke 4:18; Mosiah 3:5; Alma 40:23; 3 Nephi 17:9). To be blind is a potential tragedy, a trial, a real deprivation that deserves sympathy, support, and reassurance—but not by defining

sight as optional (Leviticus 19:14; Deuteronomy 27:18). Nor are the blind exempt from the moral laws that bind us all, even if it is more difficult for them to keep some commandments.<sup>87</sup> And none need feel smug or relieved, for all of us will be painfully “blind” in some way.

Compton insists on conflating acts with one’s nature: “I don’t become heterosexual by engaging in sex (‘or anything like unto it’), my heterosexuality is part of who I am.” But when church leaders speak against homosexuality, they are clearly speaking against homosexual *acts*, not an inherited or acquired state of being or desires.<sup>88</sup> Compton is speaking past them. Sadly, M4M seems to usually want to ignore the *behavioral* focus of the church’s teachings (but the organization’s website links to web resources such as Affirmation and PFLAG that explicitly undermine those teachings). This tendency needlessly obscures one of the great strengths of LDS doctrine: we are not our desires, and our desires can be checkreined and remade through Christ via the exercise of moral agency (2 Nephi 2:26; Moroni 7:12–26).

We would be either naïve or unreflective to conclude that sexuality is the only aspect of ourselves that is both omnipresent and a complicated mix of the exalted and the base. Despite Compton’s claim, in LDS theology God didn’t make me “natural and innocent” and someone

85. Laura [Compton], 11 October 2010 (9:12 AM), comment on Compton, “Why would God allow . . . ?”

86. I here use the metaphor of blindness as a way of gesturing at all sorts of losses, unfulfilled plans, failed longings, promises unrealized, and the universal experience of being a stranger and pilgrim, far from home. This is not an attempt to argue that homosexual desire or any other urge without a moral outlet should be reduced to a model of disease or physical defect (though there may be value in such models for at least some—and some certainly experience it thus, at least in part).

87. For example, the blind might be more tempted to steal because earning a living is more difficult. On the other hand, the blind might be less subject to some temptations (e.g., pornographic magazines probably hold less allure).

88. See Oaks and Wickman, “Same Gender Attraction” (see n. 8); Dallin H. Oaks, “Same-Gender Attraction,” *Ensign*, October 1995, 9; Jeffrey R. Holland, “Helping Those Who Struggle with Same-Gender Attraction,” *Ensign*, October 2007, 42–45; Bruce C. Hafen, “Elder Bruce C. Hafen Speaks on Same-Sex Attraction,” report of address given to Evergreen International annual conference, 19 September 2009, <http://newsroom.lds.org/article/elder-bruce-c-hafen-speaks-on-same-sex-attraction>.

else “unnatural and sinful.” We are all a complex “compound in one,” torn by both noble and base desires. Who can trace the origin of the least of these, even in ourselves? I cannot. The natural man is an enemy to God—and always will be unless we yield to Christ’s yoke, which both frees and constrains us (Mosiah 3:19; Matthew 11:29–30). And a key aspect of that yielding lies in being “willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him” (Mosiah 3:19)—not a description calculated to promise ease or freedom from frustration. The struggle of the homosexual Christian is a minor-key variation on the major theme that runs through every life’s score.

## Discipleship

Compton is not alone at M4M in engaging in a tendentious exegesis of Genesis. “Those who would suggest celibacy,” rather than homosexual acts, should “read what God & Jehovah thought about that after finding Adam alone in the Garden of Eden,” we are told.<sup>89</sup> True, the scripture tells us that “it is not good that the man should be alone” (Genesis 2:18). We learn again that not all conditions that obtain in mortality are desirable or pleasant, but this hardly justifies an abandonment of chastity. As President Packer warned more than three decades ago:

We can do many things that are very personal, but these need not be selfish. For instance, it need not be a selfish thing to study and improve your mind, to develop your talents, or to perfect the physical body. These can be very unselfish if the motive is ultimately to bless others. But

there is something different about the power of procreation. There is something that has never been fully explained that makes it dangerous indeed to regard it as something given to us, for us. [Packer-1978]

The author of this M4M entry has, however, put his finger on an important point. I admire Ronald Rolheiser’s formulation enormously:

There are less obvious manifestations of poverty, violence, and injustice. Celibacy by conscription is one of them. Anyone who because of unwanted circumstance (physical unattractiveness, emotional instability, advanced age, geographical separation, frigidity or uptightness, bad history, or simply bad luck) is effectively blocked from enjoying sexual consummation is a victim of a most painful poverty. This is particularly true today in a culture that so idealises sexual intimacy and the right sexual relationship. The universe works in pairs, from the birds through to humanity. To sleep alone is to be poor. To sleep alone is to be stigmatised. To sleep alone is to be outside the norm for human intimacy and to feel acutely the sting of that. To sleep alone, as Thomas Merton once put it, is to live in a loneliness that God himself condemned [i.e., Genesis 2:18].<sup>90</sup>

This poverty is even sharper for those who can expect no moral consummation of their homosexual desires, and it is brought painfully to the fore in a church whose faith exalts marriage and the family. As Rolheiser goes on to explain,

89. Rob, 23 October 2010 (2:51 AM), comment on Compton, “Why would God allow . . . ?”

90. Ronald Rolheiser, *Seeking Spirituality: Guidelines for a Christian Spirituality for the Twenty-First Century* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1998), 199. Rolheiser is a Canadian Roman Catholic priest, member of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

we deceive ourselves if we think that this is a unique or unusual circumstance:

Once we have accepted that we are fundamentally dis-eased in that nothing in this life will ever fully complete us, we need then give up our messianic expectations and demands. Hence, we must stop expecting that somewhere, sometime, in some place, we will meet just the right person, the right situation, or the right combination of circumstances so that we can be completely happy. We will stop demanding that our spouses, families, friends, and jobs give us what only God can give us, clear-cut pure joy. . . .

[In Gethsemane] we see the necessary connection between suffering and faith, the necessary connection between sweating blood in a garden and keeping our commitments and our integrity. Nobody will ever remain faithful in a marriage, a vocation, a friendship, a family, a job, or just to his or her own integrity without sometimes sweating blood in a garden.<sup>91</sup>

We Latter-day Saints likewise have to work out our own covenant relationship with God and what he communicates through his servants, the prophets, whom we covenant to sustain.<sup>92</sup> This lifelong proposition is another garden where blood will inevitably be sweat out as we individually work out our salvation “with fear and trembling” (Mormon 9:27).

Compton explains that “some of the things [President Packer] said, and the way he said them,

were hurtful to GLBT Mormons and their friends and family.”<sup>93</sup> Let us cheerfully grant that all ought to avoid every offense as best they can.<sup>94</sup> Yet I wonder if Compton has considered that the attacks, ridicule, and caricature that M4M serves up (and enables) are at least as hurtful to her fellow citizens of the body of Christ, whose apostles are maligned and whose church is relentlessly criticized.

“If we’re just going to keep fighting . . . how is that pleasing to God?” she asks in the press.<sup>95</sup> Are we then to conclude that she thinks the behavior on M4M’s website is “pleasing to God”? Or that it isn’t fighting? We cannot control what others do, but Compton could do her part if she wants fighting to stop—she can simply cease her public disagreement with the prophets and stop lecturing those who choose to agree with them. I, for one, see no reason for prophets to be silent simply because their counsel makes Compton and a few others uncomfortable. Her plea requires that the prophets change their stance and cease to advise—or that she do so. One could be forgiven for mistakenly concluding that she had nothing to do with the fighting at all since she addresses the press as an aggrieved party and voice of conciliation: *If only the fighting could stop! God doesn’t like fighting!* As innumerable mothers have pointed out to their own children, it takes two to quarrel.

How are unity and God’s purposes achieved by telling the press that she “see[s] a lot of people [in LDS congregations] really sitting back and thinking maybe we do need to have some open

91. Rolheiser, *Seeking Spirituality*, 97, 210.

92. I do not believe that “sustaining” requires that we always agree with apostles and prophets. But it does moderate and modulate what our response to any disagreement will be, and whether or how we might publicize it.

93. Compton, 11 October 2010 (1:22 PM), comment on “Edits to Boyd K. Packer’s talk.”

94. All of us ought also to refrain from *taking* offense, especially when none is intended. See Neil L. Andersen, “Never Leave Him,” *Ensign*, November 2010, 39–41.

95. Martinez, “AP Story Features Mormon Supporter of Marriage Equality” (see n. 18).



hearts and open minds”—with the clear implication that those who disagree with Compton or her agenda (including, but not limited to, the prophets) have closed minds and hearts?<sup>96</sup> The Proposition 8 rhetoric caused “huge rifts in California congregations,”<sup>97</sup> according to her. Should she consider attacks upon and misrepresentation of an apostle as somehow conducive to bridging such rifts?

As a physician, it is often my task to give patients unpleasant news. I have told smoking parents that their habit is responsible for their child’s worsening asthma; I have told alcoholics that they must abstain completely or die; I have told stroke victims that they are unsafe to drive; I have told the morbidly obese that their calories are killing them. And, sad to say, despite all the care of which I was capable, and despite all my reserves of charity and compassion, some of these patients have not been grateful for my message. I have told them things they did not wish to hear. They have been hurt, angry, and insistent that I did not know what I was talking about, or they have taken refuge in the claim that they had “always been this way,” and so I should leave well enough alone. I had never faced their particular burden, so what did I know? It was not fair that they had a condition that restricted them while others were free.

It would often be much more comfortable for everyone if I were to say nothing, or mouth platitudes, or focus on all the many things that are *not* killing people. But doctors—like spiritual apostolic physicians, I suspect—have duties they cannot shirk. If my patients do not like what they hear, they might choose to remain silent or leave my practice. Likewise, those who differ with the

united voice of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve might disagree silently or leave the church. But as long as patients are in my office, I am bound to tell them the truth (no matter how much they argue or resent it or blame me) despite the more pleasant and seductive voices that assure them that all will be well.<sup>98</sup> Mountebanks and quacks in every field always have an easier time of it, for they are not constrained by the cold iron facts of a fallen world.

Although everything in that fallen world is assuredly not “very good,” our hands, feet, and eyes surely are. And yet even these treasures must sometimes be abandoned upon the altar:

Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire. (Matthew 18:8-9)<sup>99</sup>

Halt and maimed we all will be, in some way. “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross” (Matthew 16:24), said Jesus, who knew a thing or two about crosses. Since Jesus declared that those who “loveth father or mother more than me [are] not worthy of me” (10:37), can we expect that he will make an exception for gay partners? “He that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy

96. Dobner, “Interfaith leader calls gay marriage legal issue” (see n. 17).

97. Bates, “Mormons Divided On Same-Sex Marriage Issue” (see n. 18).

98. I also, like apostles, have a moral duty to advocate for measures that, in my judgment, best serve public health and well-being—such as universal childhood vaccination—even when passionate voices who would never darken the door of my practice oppose me.

99. This same idea is invoked in Elder Dallin H. Oaks’s account of Aron Ralston’s decision to sever his own arm. See “Desire,” *Ensign*, May 2011, 42.



of me” (v. 38). I appreciate the obvious sympathy that M4M manifests to those who struggle and suffer so profoundly. But what shall it profit a man if he gains a whole world free from guilt, bullying, and cruel talk if he loses his own soul?

### “Therefore, What?”—A Postscript

A purely academic review would likely end here. Elder Holland has remarked, however, that President Packer’s response to instruction or exhortation is often to ask, “Therefore, what?”<sup>100</sup> I suspect, then, that President Packer would tell me that as an aspiring disciple of the Master, I have a duty to conclude with my own answer to his question, though unlike him I can speak only for myself.

*Therefore*—Nonmembers who hope that M4M’s stance represents the way of the future, or a viable “alternative interpretation” of the Church of Jesus Christ’s attitude toward same-sex acts, should prepare themselves for disappointment. The media should realize that M4M’s is a fringe approach unlikely to gain traction among believing, practicing members.

*Therefore*—M4M’s founders ought to either apologize and clean up their conduct online and in the media or be honest enough to concede that their behavior is not consistent with their purported aim to publicly oppose the church’s political activities while refraining from criticism of the church and its leaders. It is not clear to me that such a goal is feasible; it is, however, abundantly clear that M4M has failed to achieve it. If they intend to continue as at present, they ought at least to have the decency to admit that they *are*

criticizing the church and its leaders. The issue is simply one of integrity.

I have mentioned Compton specifically because of her leadership role, media prominence, and willingness to forgo anonymity. Others are at least equally at fault.<sup>101</sup> By our fruits we are known (Luke 6:43–45). With no more authority than accrues to “fellowcitizens with the saints” (Ephesians 2:19; D&C 20:53–54), I urge all who have erred to repent privately and publicly (Mosiah 27:35; D&C 42:90–92), trusting that God will be as merciful to them in their errors as he is to me in mine. If they choose not to, or insist they have done nothing wrong, the proximate and eternal consequences will be tragic, but not unexpected.

Little intellectual or spiritual respect is due the decision to purchase a courtyard, post a sign that reads “Absolutely No Stoning Will Be Tolerated,” and then invite all comers to toss their missiles at apostolic targets under cover of pseudonyms or anonymity. I grow even less sympathetic when in the press the same proprietors then bemoan the sudden epidemic of discord, and piously hope it will end soon—especially, we must add, when they inspect each projectile prior to its launch and are at pains to point out that their “no stoning” policy has prevented the use


100. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Teaching, Preaching, Healing,” address given at Church Educational System religious educators conference, 8 August 2000; adapted in *Ensign*, January 2003, 37.

101. Elder Neal A. Maxwell wisely observed, “There is such a thing as a subtle mob of bystanders—not a mob that cries aloud, ‘Barrabas,’ nor a mob that obviously holds the cloak of those who are throwing stones (Matthew 27:21; Acts 7:58). Rather, it is a different kind of mob, one which cleverly goes along with a bad trend and even goads on the activists and egoists, seeming not to care what the wrongdoer does as long as he is smooth and cool. Worse still, such subtle mobs are a collection of silent proxy givers. The onlookers might not actually do themselves what the offender does, but they enjoy the vicarious emotions without sensing any seeming accountability. Moreover, such enablers can then quickly slink away when the apogee of acting out is over.” Neal A. Maxwell, *The Promise of Discipleship* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2001), 15–16. The anonymity and wide reach of the Internet is well suited to such tactics.

of some heavier or more jagged weapons.<sup>102</sup> Were I to add that the rocks are followed by assurances that Compton and Co. sustain their targets as prophets, seers, and revelators (even without agreeing with them 100 percent), readers might mistake an ironic reality for bad melodrama.<sup>103</sup> Would that it were.

*Therefore*—members of the church ought not to conclude from the existence and misleading rhetoric of the few at M4M that they are on theologically or spiritually safe ground in winking at, encouraging, or engaging in same-sex behavior. Those drawn to M4M ought to seri-

ously ask themselves and the Lord whether they can in good conscience support an organization that has not scrupled to provide a forum to attack apostles, the church, and its doctrines while claiming this will not be the forum's practice. It bears remembering that those who left the tree of life for Lehi's great and spacious building—which represents "the world and the wisdom thereof" and the "vain imaginations and the pride of the children of men" (1 Nephi 11:35; 12:18)—derided their former fellows but could not typically strike at Jesus directly (8:27–28, 33). Instead, they "gathered together to fight against the twelve apostles of the Lamb" (11:35; see v. 36).

If I were to help stone a man (or hold cloaks while others did so), I hope I would have the gumption to pick up the rock myself and hurl it in the full light of day—and then take the consequences. 

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102. "People who cannot moderate themselves will receive assistance from our volunteers"; "There has been an unusual amount of rancor in the discussions this week (and that's only counting what's been reflected by the posts which have made it through the moderation process)." Laura [Compton], 4 October 2010 (9:55 pm), comment on "Why would God allow . . . ?"; Laura [Compton], 11 October 2011 (1:22 pm), comment on "Edits to Boyd K. Packer's talk." Given what made it through moderation (see the section herein titled "Mormons for Marriage"), one wonders what, if any, extremes were excluded. And given that Compton noted the "rancor" and accompanying behavior, why did she permit these if "no criticism of the church or its leadership will be tolerated" (see n. 31 herein)?

103. See note 82 and associated main text.



# *Examining a Misapplication of Nearest Shrunk Centroid Classification to Investigate Book of Mormon Authorship*

*Review of 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.*

PAUL J. FIELDS, G. BRUCE SCHAALJE, AND MATTHEW ROPER

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*Editor's note: The above-referenced essay by Jockers, Witten, and Criddle (hereafter Criddle and associates) was answered by G. Bruce Schaalje, Paul J. Fields, Matthew Roper, and Gregory L. Snow in a technical paper entitled "Extended nearest shrunken centroid classification: A new method for open-set authorship attribution of texts of varying sizes," Literary and Linguistic Computing 26/1 (2011): 71-88. We have invited Fields, Schaalje, and Roper to provide both a popularization of this important essay and a brief history of efforts to use what is called stylometry to identify the authors of disputed texts. In addition, because Professor Criddle has been involved in efforts to resuscitate the Spalding-Rigdon theory of Book of Mormon authorship, Roper and Fields were also invited to comment on that rather moribund explanation in a separate essay that immediately follows this one.*

In 1834 the first anti-Mormon book was published in Ohio by E. D. Howe. Relying on testimony claimed to have been gathered by

D. P. Hurlbut, a disgruntled former member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and sworn enemy to Joseph Smith, Howe argued that the Book of Mormon was based on an unpublished fictional tale by an unsuccessful amateur novelist, Solomon Spalding. Spalding lived in Conneaut, Ohio, between 1809 and 1812. Howe claimed that Sidney Rigdon somehow acquired Spalding's unpublished manuscript and added religious material, thereby concocting the Book of Mormon.<sup>1</sup>

The 1884 recovery of an original Spalding manuscript bearing little resemblance to the Book of Mormon led most critics to abandon the Spalding-Rigdon conspiracy theory.<sup>2</sup> This manuscript is

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1. E. D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled* . . . (Painesville, OH, 1834). For an overview of the Spalding theory, see Matthew Roper, "The Mythical 'Manuscript Found,'" *FARMS Review* 17/2 (2005): 7-140; and Roper, "Myth, Memory, and 'Manuscript Found,'" *FARMS Review* 21/2 (2009): 179-223.

2. Most Latter-day Saint and non-Latter-day Saint students of the issue have concluded that even if "Manuscript Story" was not the

known today variously as “Manuscript Story” or the “Oberlin manuscript.” Today, among those who reject Joseph Smith’s explanation of the Book of Mormon, a majority see Joseph Smith alone as responsible for the text and believe that the Spalding theory sheds no light on Book of Mormon origins. A minority of these critics continue to argue that the Book of Mormon was based on a hypothesized second or third, now-lost Spalding manuscript, though even the existence of such a manuscript has never been proved.<sup>3</sup>

A recent article by three Stanford researchers—Matthew Jockers, Daniela Witten, and Craig Criddle—is the latest in a series of stylometric investigations of Book of Mormon authorship.<sup>4</sup> The Criddle and associates study applies a statistical methodology developed for genomics research,<sup>5</sup> known as Nearest Shrunken Centroid (NSC) classification, to the question of Book of Mormon authorship. In contrast to previous wordprint studies, Criddle’s team concluded that the majority of the chapters in the Book of Mormon were written by either Solomon

Spalding or Sidney Rigdon: “The NSC results are consistent with the Spalding-Rigdon theory of authorship,” and “our findings are consistent with historical scholarship indicating a central role for Rigdon in securing and modifying a now-missing Spalding manuscript” (p. 482). Although they claim to have discovered evidence for smaller contributions from Parley P. Pratt and Oliver Cowdery, the authors “find strong support for the Spalding-Rigdon theory of authorship. In all the data, we find Rigdon as a unifying force. His signal dominates the book, and where other candidates are more probable, Rigdon is hiding in the shadows” (p. 483).

We here examine the stylometric analysis presented by Criddle and associates. We first review past attempts—stylometric and otherwise—to analyze Joseph’s writing style. We review the strengths and weaknesses of those attempts and assess past authors’ success in meeting objections to their findings. We then address the validity of Criddle and associates’ methodology, its utility in dealing with questions of authorship in general, and its application to authorship of the Book of Mormon in particular. Lastly, we present the findings of our study extending the NSC methodology, which shows the naïveté and invalidity of Criddle and associates’ efforts to add a mathematical patina to an untenable historical hypothesis that has been long abandoned by virtually all serious scholars, whether believers or skeptics.

## Prelude to Stylometry: Joseph Smith’s Writing Style

In 1976 Elinore Partridge performed a study of the characteristics of Joseph Smith’s writing style. She also studied the writings of several of his closest associates—Sidney Rigdon, Frederick G. Williams,

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only version of Spalding’s tale, the story would not have differed substantially in content and style from the Oberlin document. Roper argues that “Manuscript Story” can be seen as fictional apologetic for the theory that the Indians were the lost ten tribes. See Roper, “Myth, Memory, and ‘Manuscript Found,’” 193–200.

3. Roper argues that elements in the 1833 testimony collected by Hurlbut and later testimony from other Conneaut associates of Spalding, which some Spalding theorists take as evidence for additional manuscript sources for the Book of Mormon, are more plausibly accounted for as describing elements of the Oberlin story. See Roper, “Myth, Memory, and ‘Manuscript Found,’” 179–223. Roper and Fields examine the misuse of historical evidence by Criddle and associates in the essay that immediately follows this one.
  4. 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.
  5. Genomics is a branch of molecular biology concerned with researching the structure, function, evolution, and mapping of the entire DNA sequences of organisms.
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Parley P. Pratt, Oliver Cowdery, and Willard Richards. Partridge detected a characteristic tone in the Prophet's writings.

In contrast to the dark visions of Calvinism and the dry, rational theology of Unitarianism, Joseph Smith's pronouncements emphasize the wonder of existence and the love of humanity. Likewise, in contrast to the threats of wrath, judgment, and damnation, which one can find in the statements of some of the early church leaders, there is an undercurrent of understanding and compassion in those of Joseph Smith. Moments of discouragement and anger do occur; however, even at times when he laments the state of mankind, he tempers the observations with trust in God, love for his family, and hope for the future. The love of others, the pleasure in variety, and the joy in living which is apparent in the language of Joseph Smith give us some real sense, I believe, of what he must have been like as a leader and a friend.<sup>6</sup>

Partridge also found significant "markers" of Joseph Smith's style that distinguish his writing from that of other Latter-day Saint leaders of his day. These include a tendency to form a structure of "interconnected sentences joined, like links in a chain, by simple conjunctions," a characteristic that she found could often be detected even after Joseph's work had been edited by others.<sup>7</sup>

Joseph Smith's writing is characteristically marked by a series of related ideas joined by simple conjunctions: *and*, *but*, *for*. In his handwritten manuscripts, he used nei-

ther punctuation nor capitalization as sentence markers. When his writing has been edited, or when someone else wrote words which he dictated, the result is an unusually large number of sentences beginning with *for*, *and*, or *but* (almost three out of five sentences). On the other hand, Sidney Rigdon seldom used these conjunctions, and almost never used them at the beginning of sentences; on the average, only about one in twenty sentences begins with *and*, *for*, *but*. Rigdon's sentences frequently begin with participial or prepositional phrases; for example, 'Having shown . . .' 'From the foregoing we learn . . .' which is a structure Joseph Smith seldom used. Sidney Rigdon regularly used phrases such as 'in order that,' 'so that,' or 'the fact that,' to introduce and link ideas. Joseph Smith almost invariably uses 'that' or 'this' instead. Joseph Smith's images and examples are concrete, specific, and well-detailed, while Sidney Rigdon's tend to be abstract and generalized.<sup>8</sup>

Partridge also noted Joseph Smith's use of "pronouns and demonstratives which require specific referents" and the use of a "series of modifying phrases which must be attached to other words," features that she notes "suggest a personality used to seeing things as an interconnected whole rather than as separate parts."<sup>9</sup> She saw this as evidence that "Joseph Smith is more comfortable with the spoken than with the written language. The long interrelated sentences, with no clear stopping point, are typical of an oral style. The

6. Elinore H. Partridge, "Characteristics of Joseph Smith's Style and Notes on the Authorship of the Lectures on Faith," *Task Papers in LDS History* 14 (December 1976), 20.

7. Partridge, "Characteristics of Joseph Smith's Style," 5.

8. Partridge, "Characteristics of Joseph Smith's Style," 23.

9. Partridge, "Characteristics of Joseph Smith's Style," 6, 7.

occasional repetitions or awkward constructions also indicate that he is writing as he speaks.”<sup>10</sup>

Interestingly, Partridge also detected evidence that some elements of Joseph Smith’s style could be found even in works that he oversaw or directed others to write for him.

Joseph Smith’s influence can be seen in many of the works which he did not actually write himself. For example, I see signs of his collaboration in the *Lectures on Faith*. The sermons and discourses published in the *Times & Seasons* and parts of the *History of the Church* have obviously been well polished and heavily edited; however, in details and in general structures of the sentences, it is possible to identify characteristics of Joseph Smith’s style. Even when a scribe has obviously altered sentence structure to conform to a more standard, written style (that is, with definite marks of punctuation, capitalization, and clearer divisions between sentences), the interrelationships and internal references characteristic of Joseph Smith’s style remain. Occasionally, there are certain images and examples which indicate that a reported version of a sermon or speech has managed to capture the essential ideas and illustrations of Joseph Smith, although the language may have been dramatically altered.<sup>11</sup>

Partridge’s findings suggest that there are distinct and significant differences between the writing styles of Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon. Consequently, analyses of the writing styles exhibited in the text of the Book of Mormon

might provide insights into the question of the book’s authorship and particularly into Rigdon’s alleged role in its origin.

## Stylometry and the Book of Mormon

Stylometry uses statistical techniques to quantitatively describe the characteristics of an author’s writing style. It is based on the fundamental premise that authors write with distinctive word-use habits. For example, one commonly used method measures the frequency with which an author uses or does not use certain words or groupings of words. Identifying the word-use patterns in a text of unknown or questioned authorship and then comparing those patterns with the patterns in texts of known authorship can provide supporting evidence for or against an assertion of authorship. Although the proper term for this type of analysis is *stylometry*, the term *word-print analysis* is also sometimes used (in a loose comparison to fingerprint analysis). However, an author’s writing style is not nearly as precise, distinctive, unalterable, or unchanging as his or her fingerprints, and so the latter term is a potentially misleading exaggeration.

Over the last thirty years, researchers have conducted five major and several minor stylometric studies of the Book of Mormon. We will describe the major studies by Larsen et al., Hilton, Holmes, Criddle et al., and Schaalje et al.

## First Study: Word-Frequency Analysis

In 1980 Wayne Larsen, Alvin Rencher, and Tim Layton examined word frequencies in a precedent-setting analysis of the Book of Mormon.<sup>12</sup> As

10. Partridge, “Characteristics of Joseph Smith’s Style,” 13.

11. Partridge, “Characteristics of Joseph Smith’s Style,” 15.

12. Wayne A. Larsen, Alvin C. Rencher, and Tim Layton, “Who Wrote the Book of Mormon? An Analysis of Wordprints,” *BYU Studies* 20/3 (1980): 225–51; reprinted in Noel B. Reynolds, ed., *Book of Mormon Authorship: New Light on Ancient Origins* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1982), 157–88.



indicators of writing style, they used *noncontextual words*—the words that play a grammatical role in forming the structure of a message but do not provide the information content of the message. Examples are *a, an, but, however, the, to, with,* and *without*. These words are also called *function words* since by themselves they do not convey the author's message but, rather, provide the framework for the author's message. Studying the function words in a text can indicate an author's personal manner of expressing his or her ideas since they do not indicate what the author says but the way he or she says it.

The Larsen et al. researchers used three statistical techniques—Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA), Cluster Analysis (CA), and Linear Discriminant Analysis (LDA)—to test for differences in the frequencies of noncontextual words. MANOVA is a method of testing for homogeneity (degree of similarity) within groups of items. CA is a method that can identify which items are closest to each other among all items compared. LDA is a method for determining a set of mathematical functions (discriminant functions) that can be used to classify items into categories based on their characteristics. The three methods produced consistently congruent results, which are highlighted below using LDA to summarize the findings.

In stylometric analysis, LDA can compare the word-frequency profile in a block of text to the profile of each candidate author and then assign that block of text to the author with the most similar style. It does this by measuring how closely the word profile in the test block matches the average word profile of each author. A plot of the test texts using the discriminant functions as the axes of the graph can display how well the texts correspond to each author.

In the Larsen et al. study, the researchers segmented the entire text of the Book of Mormon into 2,000-word text blocks aligned with each of the twenty-one purported authors in the book. Then they tested whether there was evidence that the text blocks displayed a consistent style across the blocks (indicative of one author for all the texts) or whether there was evidence of differing styles (congruent with the claim that the Book of Mormon texts came from different writers).

For comparison they also examined texts from Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, and Solomon Spalding, along with texts from Oliver Cowdery, Parley P. Pratt, and W. W. Phelps, all of whom they referred to collectively as “nineteenth-century authors.”

Larsen's team showed that the text blocks from the Book of Mormon were consistently classified as separate from those of the nineteenth-century authors. This is shown in figure 1. Further, they showed that each Book of Mormon author is consistently similar to himself but consistently different from the other authors. This is illustrated in figure 2, which shows the texts grouped into separate clusters by author. For simplicity in illustrating the results, figure 2 shows the clusters for only Nephi, Alma, and Mormon—the three major authors in the Book of Mormon. Joseph Smith's cluster is also shown in figure 2, and it stands apart from the Nephi, Alma, and Mormon clusters.

After repeatedly analyzing all the texts and all the candidate authors, Larsen's team found the statistical evidence of differences between the writings of the purported authors to be striking. They concluded that “distinct authorship styles can be readily distinguished within the Book of

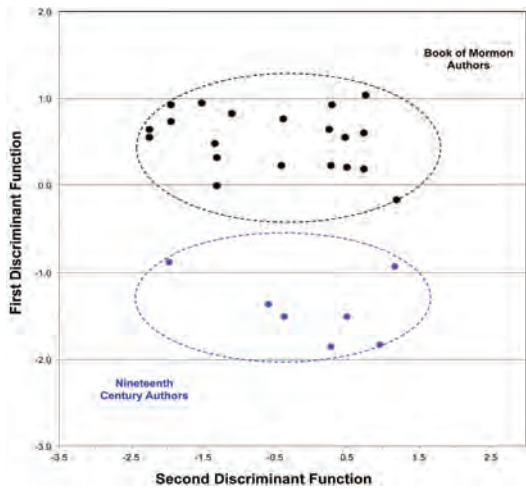


Fig. 1. Text clusters of Book of Mormon authors and a group of nineteenth-century authors. Based on linear discriminant analysis, the writing styles of Book of Mormon authors and nineteenth-century authors are distinctively different.

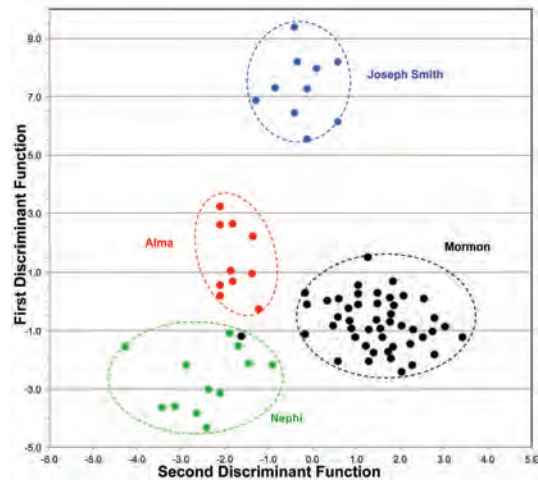


Fig. 2. Text clusters of major Book of Mormon authors and Joseph Smith. Linear discriminant analysis indicates that the writing styles of major Book of Mormon authors are distinguishable from each other and clearly distinguishable from Joseph Smith's writing style.

Mormon, and the nineteenth-century authors do not resemble Book of Mormon authors in style.”<sup>13</sup>

D. James Croft, a statistician at the University of Utah, raised several questions in critique of the Larsen et al. analysis.<sup>14</sup> In essence he asked the following:

1. Is the basic assumption of stylometrics—that authors' writing styles can be characterized by measurable features—valid?
2. Does the modern Book of Mormon edition used by Larsen et al. exhibit the same stylistic patterns as those in the original 1830 edition?
3. Was the phrase “and it came to pass that” recognized by Larsen et al. as a possible

indicator of content differences rather than author differences?

4. Were the results of the analysis due to style differences among the purported authors or to topic differences among the texts?

When Croft's review of the Larsen et al. study was published, it was accompanied by a well-reasoned reply by the researchers to all the issues he raised.<sup>15</sup> We offer here some additional analysis in further rebuttal.

Croft's first point—the validity of stylometry—has been answered by the continuing and increasingly successful use of stylometric methods similar to those employed by Larsen's team. The methodology has been validated repeatedly and is a well-accepted analytical approach in

13. Larsen, Rencher, and Layton, “Analysis of Wordprints,” 240.

14. D. James Croft, “Book of Mormon ‘Wordprints’ Reexamined,” *Sunstone*, March–April 1981, 15–21.

15. Wayne A. Larsen and Alvin C. Rencher, “Response to Book of Mormon ‘Wordprints’ Reexamined,” *Sunstone*, March–April 1981, 23–26.

literary analysis. Even other critics of the Larsen et al. study, such as David Holmes,<sup>16</sup> do not dispute the validity of the methodology. However, most stylometry practitioners would agree with Croft that the methodology has limitations and that it is only as valid as the stylistic measures used in the analysis.

Croft's second point—the use of a modern edition of the Book of Mormon—turns out to be a nonissue when we examine the effects of editorial changes to the book. Figure 3 overlays plots of word-use frequencies from sequential 5,000-word blocks of both the 1830 and 1980 editions of the Book of Mormon. The editorial changes to the Book of Mormon over 150 years appear to have been made nearly proportional throughout the book since the patterns present in one edition are almost exactly reproduced in the other. For the main purpose of the Larsen et al. study, it did not matter which edition the researchers used.

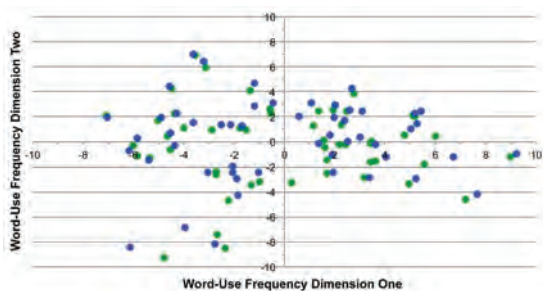


Fig. 3. Comparison of word-use frequencies in the 1830 and 1980 editions of the Book of Mormon. Texts from the 1830 edition are shown as green dots, and texts from the 1980 edition are shown as blue dots. For every green dot, there is a corresponding blue dot in close proximity for the same block of text, indicating close similarity between the two editions.

Croft's third point—the possible effect of the frequently occurring phrase “and it came to pass”—is insightful. However, subsequent studies we have conducted showed no detectable differences in the results of stylometric analyses that include the words in the phrase “and it came to pass” as separate words, treat the phrase as one word, or delete those words entirely from the frequency counts when they occur in that phrase.

Croft's fourth point—results due to style or topic differences—is well-taken. The consistent difference between writings attributed to Mormon and those attributed to Nephi or Alma could be due to content differences instead of stylistic differences, since Mormon's writings tend to be historical narrative while Nephi's and Alma's writings tend to be doctrinal discourse. However, there can be little question that the Larsen et al. study showed, at a minimum, that the texts purported to be written by Nephi and Alma exhibit internally consistent but highly distinct authorship styles as measured by their use of noncontextual words, even though both authors were discussing the same topics.

Other criticisms of the Larsen et al. study have come forward more recently. The 2008 paper by Criddle and associates questioned the Larsen et al. approach of grouping verses and partial verses into blocks of words “based on their understanding of speakers (or characters) in the *Book of Mormon*” (p. 467). However, this criticism is misguided since such grouping was appropriate given that Larsen's team was testing a hypothesis of multiple authorship. A second point raised by Criddle and associates was that even if the texts were carefully grouped, they might be “composites containing different fractional contributions from different nineteenth-century authors” (p. 467). Although this could be true, the

16. David I. Holmes, “A Stylometric Analysis of Mormon Scripture and Related Texts,” *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society, Series A* 155 (1992): 91–120.

consistent clustering of writings due to purported Book of Mormon speakers would imply a remarkable compositing process, a process in which the different nineteenth-century authors contributed consistent but different proportions of text for each of the purported authors. Finally, Criddle and associates state that biblical-sounding words such as *behold*, *forth*, *lest*, *nay*, *O*, *unto*, *wherefore*, and *yea* might account for observed differences between Book of Mormon text blocks and the text blocks of the nineteenth-century authors in the study. However, the Larsen et al. study did not use those words, so perhaps Criddle and associates misread the word lists used by Larsen et al. We discuss in detail the paper by Criddle and associates later in this article.

On the whole, even after the thoughtful criticism of the Larsen et al. study is accounted for, the results of that early study continue to provide persuasive support for the claim that the Book of Mormon is the work of multiple authors and not the work of any of the likely nineteenth-century candidates.

## Second Study: Word-Pattern Ratios Analysis

In a subsequent study, John Hilton took a different approach to studying stylometric patterns in the Book of Mormon.<sup>17</sup> Intrigued but uncertain of the Larsen et al. results, Hilton set out to see if he could replicate their results using a study designed to accommodate Croft's criticisms. Rather than noncontextual word frequencies as in Larsen et al., Hilton used "noncontextual word-pattern ratios." Word-pattern ratios

measure the rates an author uses words in four categories:

1. Specific words in key positions of sentences (e.g., *the* as the first word of a sentence)
2. Specific words adjacent to certain parts of speech (e.g., *and* followed by an adjective)
3. Collocations of words (e.g., *and* followed by *the*)
4. Proportionate pairs of words (e.g., *no* and *not*, *all* and *any*)

Hilton used the sixty-five word-pattern ratios developed by A. Q. Morton that he had shown to be useful in authorship studies for other religious texts as well as secular texts.<sup>18</sup> One of the advantages of using word-pattern ratios is that the potentially problematic phrase "and it came to pass" can only partly affect one of the sixty-five word-pattern ratios, so its impact on the analysis was negligible in Hilton's approach.

Using primarily the printer's manuscript of the Book of Mormon, Hilton applied his procedure to 5,000-word blocks of text to ensure the reliability of the style measures since in larger text blocks an author's writing habits and stylistic propensities should assert themselves more strongly than in smaller texts. He compared texts attributed only to Nephi or Alma to control for topic differences and then texts known to be authored by Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, or Solomon Spalding. He compared each author to himself and then each author to every other author. The result demonstrated that the stylistic patterns in the Nephi, Alma, Smith, Cowdery, and Spalding texts were consistent within themselves but distinctly different from one another.

17. John L. Hilton, "On Verifying Wordprint Studies: Book of Mormon Authorship," *BYU Studies* 30/3 (Summer 1990): 89–108; reprinted in Noel B. Reynolds, *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: Evidence for Ancient Origins* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997), 225–53.

18. A. Q. Morton, *Literary Detection: How to Prove Authorship and Fraud in Literature and Documents* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1978).

This evidence argues strongly for the assertion that the Nephi and Alma texts were written by different authors, and against the idea that Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, or Solomon Spaulding was the author of the Nephi or Alma texts. Hilton stated:

It is statistically indefensible to propose Joseph Smith or Oliver Cowdery or Solomon Spaulding as the author of the 30,000 words from the Book of Mormon manuscript texts attributed to Nephi and Alma. Additionally these two Book of Mormon writers have wordprints unique to themselves and measure statistically independent from each other in the same fashion that other uncontested authors do. Therefore, the Book of Mormon measures [as being] multiauthored, with authorship consistent to its own internal claims.<sup>19</sup>

Hilton's results corroborated the Larsen et al. results even though Hilton used an entirely different technique.

### Third Study: Vocabulary Richness Analysis

In 1992 David Holmes published the results of a stylometric analysis of the Book of Mormon using another approach, one he had developed as a doctoral student. He attempted to show that measures of "vocabulary richness" could be used for authorship attribution.<sup>20</sup> Vocabulary richness measures attempt to quantify an author's style based on his or her lexical variety in word choices. As stylistic features, Holmes computed a standardized measure of once-used words, a standardized measure of twice-used words, a measure of lexical repetitiveness, and two

estimated parameters for a theoretical model of word frequencies in writing. The first three measures were calculated for the total vocabulary in the texts, while the last two were calculated for nouns only.

Holmes compiled fourteen 10,000-word blocks assigned to six Book of Mormon authors, combined sections 1 through 51 of the Doctrine and Covenants into three 10,000-word blocks, combined an assortment of writings by Joseph Smith into three 6,000-word blocks, included the Book of Abraham from the Pearl of Great Price as one text, and extracted three 12,000-word blocks from Isaiah. He then used Principal Components Analysis (PCA) to search for separations among the clusters of texts.

PCA takes a set of multidimensional points and projects them into two dimensions. As an analogy, imagine the outline of a three-dimensional object such as a pencil projected by an overhead projector onto a flat, two-dimensional screen. Its projected image could look like a dot or like an arrow, depending whether the pencil is oriented vertically or horizontally. The PCA procedure determines how to rotate a set of points so the greatest separation among the points can be seen. This is a useful way to visually explore the data in two dimensions for possible relationships among points in many dimensions. The first and second principal components define the two-dimensional space.

Using PCA applied to the vocabulary richness measures, Holmes found that the Joseph Smith texts clustered together, the Isaiah texts clustered together, and all but three of the other texts clustered together. Figure 4 presents a PCA plot of Holmes's results. From this he concluded that the writings of Mormon, Lehi, Nephi, Jacob, and Moroni were not stylistically different.

19. Hilton, "On Verifying Wordprint Studies," 101.

20. See note 16.



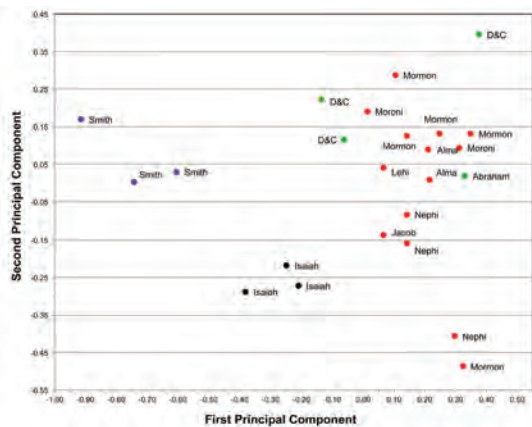


Fig. 4. Holmes's PCA plot based on vocabulary richness measures. Although texts from Joseph Smith and Isaiah are easily distinguishable from Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price texts, Holmes's method could not distinguish among the purported authors within the Book of Mormon nor in comparison to the other scriptural texts.

Subsequent research has shown that Holmes's vocabulary richness stylistic measures are weak discriminators of authorship. For example, when testing texts of *undisputed* authorship, correct classification rates were 96 percent using non-contextual word frequencies, 92 percent for non-contextual word-pattern ratios, but only 23 percent for vocabulary richness measures.<sup>21</sup> In statistical terms, a method's ability to find differences is called "power." A weak discriminator, such as the vocabulary richness measure, can lack the power to find differences even when they are present.

When a method *cannot find differences that are known to exist* in the data, and then subsequently does not find a difference between two items, such a result is not convincing evidence that no true difference exists between those items.

Consequently, the correct interpretation of Holmes's finding is not that "there are no differences among the tested authors," but rather that he "found no evidence of difference." Not finding evidence of difference may therefore say little about the *subject* of the test but can be an indication of the test's inadequacy. This was the case for Holmes's Book of Mormon study—he was using a technique with low power. Such a situation is analogous to using a low-powered microscope when a high-powered instrument is needed: his "instrument" was inadequate for the research he was attempting, leaving him unable to discern features that were, in fact, present.

Although in concept vocabulary richness analysis seems like it should be useful, in practice it has been shown to be unreliable. In fact, after his early work in stylometrics, Holmes subsequently discontinued the use of vocabulary richness measures and employed other techniques in his work. We conclude that the Holmes study serves only to show the limitations of vocabulary richness analysis, while providing no insight into the question of Book of Mormon authorship.

#### Fourth Study: Nearest Shrunken Centroid Analysis

Sixteen years after the Holmes study, Matthew Jockers, Daniela Witten, and Craig Criddle tried to take an innovative approach to authorship attribution by applying an analytical method developed for the classification of tumors in genomics research.<sup>22</sup> The technique is called Nearest Shrunken Centroid (NSC) classification. It takes a set of items of known origin(s) and compares them to a set of items of unknown origin(s) by determining the distances between the centers

21. G. Bruce Schaalje, John L. Hilton, and John B. Archer, "Comparative Power of Three Author-Attribution Techniques for Differentiating Authors," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 6/1 (1997): 47–63.

22. Jockers, Witten, and Criddle, "Reassessing Authorship of the *Book of Mormon*," 465–91.

(centroids) of the groups of items. The technique seeks to identify the centroids that are nearest to each other. “Shrinkage” is a statistical technique to combine all available information in a way that can reduce the uncertainty in estimating the distances between the centroids. The distance between the centroids is considered a surrogate for similarity. When centroids are relatively close to each other, this is taken to indicate relative similarity. Conversely, when the centroids are relatively far apart, this is taken to indicate relative dissimilarity. NSC calculates the probability of relative similarity.

When applied to stylometry, NSC develops a classification rule based on stylistic characteristics—such as word frequencies—in a set of texts with known authorship and then uses that classification rule to assign texts of questioned authorship to the author whose style is closest. The closer a test text of an unknown author is to the centroid of a known author’s texts, the greater the likelihood that the writing style exhibited in the test text matches the writing style of the known author. The analysis is complex since each word frequency is a dimension in which “distance” must be measured. If a researcher uses one hundred word frequencies, the analysis is a one-hundred-dimensional problem.

Criddle and associates applied NSC to the Book of Mormon in an attempt to find evidence in support of the Spalding-Rigdon theory. Their set of texts for candidate authors included Solomon Spalding, Sidney Rigdon, Parley P. Pratt, and Oliver Cowdery. They also included Isaiah and Malachi (combined as one author) as a positive control and Joel Barlow and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (nineteenth-century authors) as negative controls. The texts varied widely in length from 114 to 17,797 words. Their test texts were

the individual chapters of the Book of Mormon, which varied in length from 95 to 3,752 words.

As stylistic features, Criddle and associates used the relative frequencies of the most common 110 words in the Book of Mormon that were used at least once by each candidate author. Although their list contained mainly function words, they retained some lexical words as well. From their analysis they concluded that the evidence showed with high probability that Spalding and Rigdon were the principal authors of the Book of Mormon.

However, there were very significant problems with this study. We will discuss the following problems:

- Failing to include Joseph Smith as a candidate author
- Misapplying a closed-set technique for an open-set problem
- Confusing “closest” to mean “close”
- Misinterpreting relative probabilities as absolute probabilities
- Ignoring a high rate of false classifications
- Using circular statistical thinking
- Disregarding statistical problems of homogeneity and multiplicity
- Confounding the primary candidate author’s differing writing styles

### Failing to Include Joseph Smith as a Candidate Author

Considering the lack of unanimity on the question of Book of Mormon authorship, even among critics, it is strikingly odd that Criddle and associates would choose to exclude Joseph Smith from the list of potential authors. A substantial majority of critics favor some version of the Joseph Smith composition theory, which sees Joseph Smith as the book’s author. Latter-day



Saints, on the other hand, who understand the Book of Mormon as divinely revealed scripture, acknowledge Joseph Smith as a human mediator of the revealed word (2 Nephi 31:3; D&C 1:24) and may be interested in the degree to which the Prophet's language may have influenced the translation of the text. Consequently, the question of Joseph Smith's influence on the text of the Book of Mormon is one of considerable interest to both Latter-day Saints and non-Latter-day Saint students of religion.

In an attempt to justify this significant omission, Criddle and associates noted that Joseph Smith usually dictated his writings to others. They cite Dean Jessee, the leading authority on Joseph Smith's personal writings, who explains (like Partridge above) that Joseph Smith appears to have been much more comfortable as a speaker than a writer and that, consequently, the majority of his writings are not in his own hand but in that of scribes (p. 469). However, Criddle and associates make the astonishing assertion that even Joseph Smith's holographic writings—those written *in his own hand*—are unreliable examples of Joseph's written style. "In the case of Joseph Smith, we do not believe that even the small number of letters written in his own hand can be reasonably attributed to him. Moreover, were we to concede the reliability of these few letters, we would still not have enough text to constitute an ample sample of known authorship" (p. 486). The authors make two claims: (1) that the writings of Joseph Smith in his own hand are not a reliable source of data reflecting his writing style and (2) that there are not enough of these writings to utilize in a wordprint study. The first claim is mystifying, and the second claim is unjustified.

First, their hyperskepticism about Joseph Smith's holographic writings is not supported by

historians. Dean Jessee, whom they cite in support of this claim, states: "The real importance of Joseph Smith's holographic writings (the writings he produced with his own hand) lies in their being his expression of his own thoughts and attitudes, his own contemplations and reflections. They not only reveal idiosyncrasies of his education and literary orientation but also clearly reflect his inner makeup and state of mind—his moods and feelings. Furthermore, they provide a framework for judging his religious claims."<sup>23</sup> In a separate article, Jessee explains, "One of the best avenues, which is undistorted by clerical and editorial barriers" for studying Joseph Smith as a speaker and a writer, "is the Prophet's holographic writings—those materials produced by his own hand and hence by his own mind."<sup>24</sup> Writing that captures an author's "inner makeup and state of mind" is essential when performing a stylometric analysis.

The authors' second claim—that even if one wanted to use holographic material from Joseph Smith there would not be enough to be useful—seems disingenuous, given that they use samples from other candidate authors with sizes as small as only 114 words (p. 471). Available holographic material potentially includes (1) holographic portions of Joseph Smith's 1832 history (1,016 words);<sup>25</sup> (2) portions of Smith's 1832–34 Kirtland, Ohio, Journal (1,589 words);<sup>26</sup> (3) portions of his

23. Dean C. Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002), 5.

24. Dean C. Jessee, "Priceless Words and Fallible Memories: Joseph Smith as Seen in the Effort to Preserve His Discourses," *BYU Studies* 31/2 (Spring 1991): 33.

25. "This document is the earliest extant attempt by the Prophet to write a history of his life, and his only autobiographical work containing his own handwriting," Dean C. Jessee, ed., *The Papers of Joseph Smith, Volume 1: Autobiographical and Historical Writings* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 1.

26. "Despite its brevity, this first journal contains more of JS's

1835–36 Kirtland, Ohio, journal, which contains seven entries (four manuscript pages) in his own hand (529 words);<sup>27</sup> (4) three letters partly in the hand of Joseph Smith and partly in the hand of another writer (899 words);<sup>28</sup> and (5) twenty-four letters entirely written in Joseph Smith’s handwriting totaling over 12,039 words.<sup>29</sup> While these holographic texts are small in quantity when compared to the entire corpus of historical documents dictated by or prepared under the direction of Joseph Smith, it seems reasonable to expect that a

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handwriting than do any of his other journals. Almost half of the entries in the journal were written either entirely or primarily by JS himself; some of the remainder were apparently dictated. His openly expressed hopes and concerns, prayers and blessings, and observations on his own state of mind are a rich source of insight into spiritual and emotional dimensions of JS’s personality.” Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman, eds., *The Joseph Smith Papers: Journals, Volume 1, 1832–1839* (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2008), 4.

27. Jessee, Esplin, and Bushman, *Joseph Smith Papers*, 1:55.

28. Joseph Smith to William W. Phelps, 27 November 1832 (700 words); Joseph Smith to Henry G. Sherwood, 7 November 1839 (58 words); Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, 27 June 1844 (142 words). The numbers in parentheses indicate the number of words in these letters written in Joseph Smith’s hand.

29. Those written entirely in Joseph Smith’s hand include the following: Joseph Smith to Hyrum Smith, 3–4 March 1831 (915 words); Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, 6 June 1832 (950 words); Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, 13 October 1832 (983 words); Joseph Smith to Newell K. Whitney, 1833/1834 (130 words); Joseph Smith to William W. Phelps, 18 August 1833 (2,366 words); Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, 19 May 1834 (415 words); Joseph Smith to Almira Scobey, 2 June 1835 (134 words); Joseph Smith to Sally Phelps, 20 July 1835 (284 words); Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, 4 November 1838 (907 words); Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, 12 November 1838 (580 words); Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, 1 December 1838 (64 words); Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, 21 March 1839 (676 words); Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, 4 April 1839 (1,037 words); Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, 9 November 1839 (326 words); Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, 20 January 1840 (274 words); Joseph Smith to the Wilkinson Family, February 1840 (103 words); Joseph Smith to Newell K. Whitney, 12 December 1840 (65 words); Joseph Smith “Agreement,” 14 May 1841 (211 words); Joseph Smith to Ebenezer Robinson, 24 February 1842 (30 words); Joseph Smith “Resolution,” 5 March 1842 (53 words); Joseph Smith to the Whitneys, 18 August 1842 (469 words); Joseph Smith to Lucien Adams, 2 October 1843 (92 words); Joseph Smith to William Clayton, 9 December 1843 (48 words); Joseph Smith to Barbara Matilda Neff, May 1844 (927 words).

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serious researcher would use these materials and could thereby obtain a reliable and adequate sample for the purposes of authorship analysis.

After the paper by Criddle and associates was published and this most obvious error in their analysis was pointed out, Matthew Jockers attempted to justify the error in an unpublished manuscript. A review and analysis of that manuscript is provided in the appendix to this paper.

### Misapplying a Closed-Set Technique for an Open-Set Problem

In their study, Criddle and associates treat the set of candidate authors as a “closed set,” assuming that they knew with certainty that the true author was one of the authors in their candidate set. Although such an assumption would be appropriate when using NSC in the genomic studies for which it was originally developed, this is not appropriate in most authorship attribution studies. The case of *The Federalist Papers* is a situation where the true author was known to be in the candidate set—the twelve disputed articles were written by either Alexander Hamilton or James Madison, and by no one else. Such a well-defined closed-set problem as *The Federalist Papers* is a rarity in authorship attribution studies.

Although Criddle and associates show that NSC performed well in an analysis of *The Federalist Papers*, this is to be expected when applying a closed-set procedure to a closed-set problem. The case of the Book of Mormon is clearly not the same type of problem. In their study, Criddle and associates did not allow for the possibility that the Book of Mormon was a translation of writings authored many centuries ago, nor (as discussed in the previous section) did they consider the option that most secular critics deem most plausible: that Joseph Smith himself was the

author. Not allowing for either possibility prejudiced their study's results from the start.

To understand the consequences of naively applying the NSC classification technique indiscriminately, let's consider four cases in which we use a closed set of candidate authors when clearly an open-set should be used.

First, if we naively apply NSC to *The Federalist Papers* using Criddle and associates' set of candidate authors and using their way of interpreting the results, we find with 99 percent probability that Sidney Rigdon wrote thirty-four of *The Federalist Papers* published in 1788, before he was even born (he was born in 1793). If we ignore important potential authors, Criddle and associates' technique will mislead us with a high level of confidence in a misattribution.

Next, if we propose that the Spalding-Rigdon theory applies to the King James Bible as well as to the Book of Mormon and then naively apply NSC to the Bible using Criddle and associates' closed set of authors, we find with 99 percent probability that Sidney Rigdon wrote about 30 percent of the Bible. If one wishes to attach any validity to Criddle and associates' finding about Rigdon as an author of the Book of Mormon, he or she must also attach the same level of validity to Rigdon's authorship of the Bible.

Similarly, if we concoct the absurd scenario that one or more of a closed set of five early anti-Mormon writers—Alexander Campbell (1831), Eber D. Howe (1834), Daniel Kidder (1842), Tyler Parsons (1841), and Walter Scott (1841)—wrote the Book of Mormon, when we naively apply NSC as Criddle and associates did in their study, we find that Parsons was the principal author of the Book of Mormon since NSC attributed 65 percent of the chapters to him with greater than 99 percent probability.

Finally, applying that naive approach to the paper under review and using its candidate set of authors, we find with 99 percent probability that Oliver Cowdery (who died in 1850) wrote the Jockers, Witten, and Criddle paper published in 2008. Clearly, this approach produces absurd results when naively employed unless Criddle and associates are willing to disavow authorship of their own paper!

We can see from these examples how easily researchers could deceive themselves into thinking they had found evidence in support of a hypothesized authorship attribution regardless of how impossible or baseless it might be. We can illustrate this graphically with an additional seemingly plausible example. Let us propose that the Book of Mormon was written by either Solomon Spalding or James Fenimore Cooper, the author of *Last of the Mohicans*. We base this conjecture on the simple facts that both authors lived during the same time period (Spalding 1761–1816 and Cooper 1789–1851), both wrote their documents prior to the publication of the Book of Mormon in 1830 (Spalding's "Manuscript Story" circa 1800 and Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans* in 1826), both wrote in the same genre (historical fiction), both used the same geographic setting for their stories (northeastern North America), and, most importantly, both used Native Americans as their subject matter. Now, since the Spalding-Rigdon theory alleges that Spalding's work was the basis for the historical narrative in the Book of Mormon with Rigdon contributing the doctrinal content, and since Rigdon is not included in our Spalding-Cooper theory, we test our theory by examining the writing styles in only the chapters of the Book of Mormon that are primarily historical in nature. We use the same noncontextual words as

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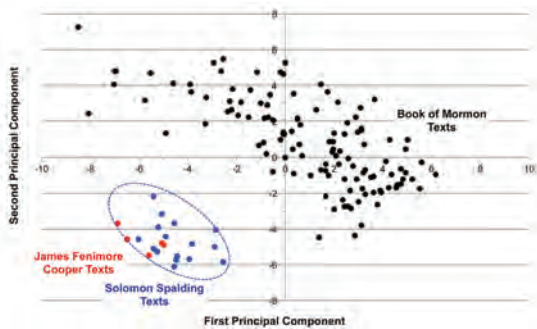


Fig. 5. PCA plot of the Spalding-Cooper theory of Book of Mormon authorship. The word-use frequency clusters from texts by Solomon Spalding and James Fenimore Cooper are more similar to each other than to texts from the Book of Mormon. Spalding's "Manuscript Story" is no more similar to the Book of Mormon than is Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans*.

Criddle and associates to determine the word-use frequencies in the texts.

Figure 5 presents a principal components plot of the Book of Mormon texts along with Spalding's "Manuscript Story" texts and Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans* texts. We can easily see that the writing styles of nineteenth-century authors Spalding and Cooper are more similar to each other than they are to the writing styles exhibited in the Book of Mormon. It is also obvious that Spalding is not a better candidate author for the Book of Mormon than Cooper, who we know did not contribute to the Book of Mormon. In fact, in the context of the Book of Mormon, Spalding is more likely to have written *Last of the Mohicans* than he is to have influenced the writings in the Book of Mormon!

From the examples above, it is clear that when any potpourri of authors is collected and then a closed-set procedure is used to assess attribution, the style of at least one of the candidate authors will always be identified as "closest to" the style of the author of the test text. It is also equally clear that "closest to" (a relative comparison) does

not necessarily mean "close to" (an absolute comparison), and therefore caution is always necessary in interpreting the results.

### Confusing "Closest" to Mean "Close"

The logic of Criddle and associates' approach is no different than asking, "Choosing among Boston, New York, and Chicago, which city is closest to Los Angeles?" and then, upon finding that there is a 99 percent probability that Chicago is the closest, concluding that "Chicago is the city in the United States that is closest to Los Angeles." In addition, finding that one city of three candidate cities is "closest" to some target city does not mean the cities are necessarily "close" to each other. Just as Chicago might be closest to Los Angeles given the closed set consisting of Chicago, New York, and Boston, certainly Chicago is not closest given the open set of Chicago, New York, Boston, or any other city in the United States.

Also, since Chicago and Los Angeles are half a continent apart, few people would say they are "close" to each other, let alone that they are the same city. In similar fashion, Criddle and associates assert that when, according to their calculations, the writing style in a test text is "closest" to one author's style, then the two styles are "close." In fact, they imply that the styles are close enough to be considered identical. This is nonsense.

### Misinterpreting Relative Probabilities as Absolute Probabilities

Since the NSC technique is a closed-set analysis technique, the probabilities of closeness of writing style calculated by Criddle and associates can be interpreted only as relative probabilities. That is to say, the probabilities are only relative to the authors in the closed set of candidate authors. Yet Criddle and associates present their calculations

as absolute probabilities, which would require that all possible outcomes had been included in the computations. They obviously misinterpreted the probabilities as saying, for example, that there is a greater than 99 percent chance that Rigdon wrote a particular text, when the correct interpretation is that there is a greater than 99 percent chance that Rigdon's writing style is closer to the style exhibited in a particular text *compared to the other author candidates used in the analysis*. They give the false impression that their 99 percent computation is an absolute measure applicable to all possible candidates, when it applies only to the specific set of authors they choose to include.

### Ignoring a High Rate of False Classifications

In determining the reliability of an analytical technique, a researcher will use "positive controls" and "negative controls." In a stylometric analysis, authors will be included in the candidate set who are known to have contributed some of the test texts. These serve as positive controls to test if the method can identify authors for whom some texts should be attributed. Conversely, authors will be included in the candidate set who are known not to have contributed any of the test texts. These serve as negative controls to determine whether the method can exclude authors to whom texts should not be attributed. In the Criddle and associates study, texts by Isaiah and Malachi were composited together into one set of texts to use as a positive control since those ancient prophets had definitely authored some of the chapters in the Book of Mormon. Similarly, texts by Joel Barlow and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow were included as negative controls since those poets had definitely not authored any of the chapters.

Although the NSC technique was able to exclude Barlow and Longfellow, it did poorly with Isaiah and Malachi. NSC correctly classified twenty of twenty-one Isaiah and Malachi chapters, but it misclassified forty-two other chapters as being authored by Isaiah and Malachi. A technique that makes twice as many false classifications as correct classifications for the control texts cannot possibly be considered to be a reliable technique. Consequently, whatever other classifications it produced must be viewed as unreliable and uninterpretable. It is astonishing that Criddle and associates ignored their technique's high rate of false classifications.

### Using Circular Statistical Thinking

Statistical methods are not foolproof and must be used correctly to produce reliable results. For example, if a statistical method is used to fit a straight line to a set of data for two variables,  $x$  and  $y$ , the method will give a straight line even if the data follow a curved pattern (see fig. 6). To deal with this issue, an assessment of the data relative to a proposed model should be carried out before fitting the model, and a confirmatory goodness-of-fit test should be done after fitting. Concluding that a straight-line model is appropriate simply because a straight line can be fit to a data set is obviously fallacious circular reasoning. Justifying straight-line predictions of  $y$  from values of  $x$  by saying that the predictions are correct *assuming* the straight-line model to be correct could lead to grossly incorrect predictions.

Criddle and associates made exactly this kind of mistake in their stylometric analysis. Without checking the fit, they assumed that every chapter of the Book of Mormon was written by one of their seven candidate authors (Rigdon, Spalding, Cowdery, Pratt, Isaiah/Malachi, Longfellow, and

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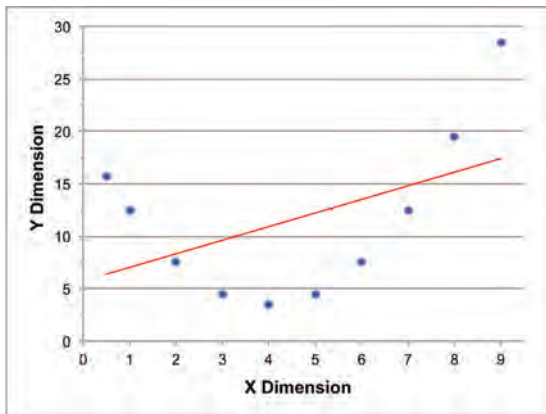


Fig. 6. A straight-line model fit to curved data. Just because a model can be fit to the data does not mean that it is the appropriate representation of the data. A researcher cannot assume that the model fits the data. He or she must demonstrate the model's appropriateness by a goodness-of-fit test.

Barlow). Then, using NSC to assign each of the Book of Mormon chapters to one of their set of authors, they concluded that since almost all of the noncontrol chapters were assigned to one of the noncontrol authors, they had discovered “strong support for the Spalding-Rigdon theory of authorship.” However, they had simply forced a model on the data and then circularly concluded that agreement of the predictions with their model provided evidence for their model.

Just because a model can be mathematically fit to some set of data does not mean it is the right model for the data. Neglecting to check whether the data were actually consistent with the model applied to them is a serious mistake, whether due to ignorance, inexperience, or willful blindness. Such verification is not easy to do with highly multivariate data such as stylometric data, but it is nonetheless necessary if one wishes a reliable analysis with interpretable results.

## Disregarding Statistical Problems of Homogeneity and Multiplicity

Criddle and associates disregarded two fundamental statistical issues in their analysis: homogeneity of variance and multiplicity in hypothesis testing. The NSC procedure employed by them assumes that the variance<sup>30</sup> of the word frequencies in the text blocks is the same (homogenous) for all of the text blocks. However, the text blocks in their study ranged in size from about one hundred words to more than fifteen thousand words. The variances calculated in text blocks spanning such a wide range will produce widely differing variance estimates. Criddle and associates did not realize that the NSC results will have questionable reliability when the homogeneity of variance assumption is violated.

Further, the study simultaneously classified 239 chapters from the Book of Mormon into seven authorship categories in a single statistical procedure. In such situations of multiple simultaneous classifications (multiplicity), some of the calculated probabilities will appear to be unusually large even though they were simply the result of chance. The probability that a text should be associated with a certain candidate author versus another can be overstated. For example, a text on the stylistic fringe of an author's cluster of texts can stray into a nearby author's cluster and appear to be closer to that author rather than the true author. Consequently, classification probability results must be interpreted collectively rather than individually so as not to overinterpret the results. Criddle and associates did not account for the multiplicity effect of classifying a large set of test texts when interpreting their results.

30. Variance is a measure of the dispersion or inconsistency among multiple observations of the same phenomena.



## Confounding the Primary Candidate Author's Differing Writing Styles

Finally, Criddle and associates assumed that an author's writing style is constant throughout his or her lifetime. They should have investigated this assumption, particularly for their prime candidate. If they had, they would have discovered that the Rigdon texts written prior to 1846 show evidence of being systematically different from those written after 1863. Most notably, while both sets of texts are distant from the Book of Mormon chapters, Rigdon's post-1863 writings are closer to the Book of Mormon than his pre-1846 writings. This is illustrated in figure 7.

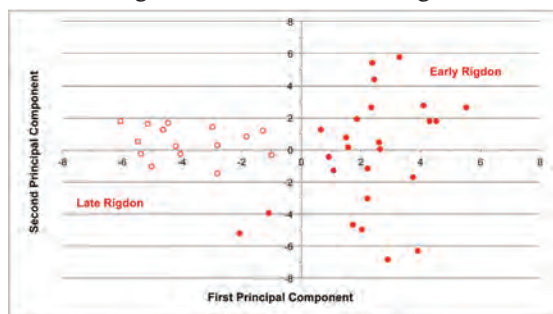


Fig. 7. PCA plot of early and late Rigdon texts. The early Rigdon texts were written before 1846 and are shown as solid red dots. The late Rigdon texts were written after 1863 and are shown as open red dots. The two clusters do not overlap, suggesting strongly that Rigdon's early writing style had evolved into another style later in his life.

If Rigdon had been involved somehow in composing the Book of Mormon, the "early Rigdon" rather than the "late Rigdon" texts would be closer to the Book of Mormon chapters. The opposite is the case, and this clearly contradicts the Spalding-Rigdon theory for Book of Mormon authorship. The existence of two distinct Rigdon styles makes interpreting Criddle and associates' results highly problematic. Since they composited texts containing Rigdon's two differing

writing styles, they blur what they call "Rigdon's signal." Whatever "signal" might have been present in the texts contained two styles rather than one distinguishable style. Because the Rigdon writing style closest to the Book of Mormon was chronologically disjointed from the book's publication, whatever "signal" that Criddle and associates thought they had found was a signal that came into existence over thirty years too late to support their contention. (If anything, the results might suggest that Book of Mormon language and style influenced Rigdon's later style, and not the other way around.)

## Fifth Study: Extended Nearest Shrunken Centroid Analysis

Most recently, in a new study we developed a modification to the closed-set Nearest Shrunken Centroid classification method (NSC) to enable it to be applied to open-set classification problems—Extended Nearest Shrunken Centroid (ENSC) classification.<sup>31</sup> The open-set modification allows for the existence of an unknown candidate author with a distribution of characteristic features nominally consistent with the test text and incorporates this possibility into the calculation of the probabilities that the writing styles are similar. Without including the possibility of an unknown author, if the candidate set does not include the true author (using a closed-set approach for an open-set situation), the calculated probabilities can be grossly overstated and lead to entirely erroneous interpretations. The ENSC technique also accounts for differences in text sizes and for the effect of multiple simultaneous comparisons.

31. G. Bruce Schaalje, Paul J. Fields, Matthew Roper, and Gregory L. Snow, "Extended nearest shrunken centroid classification: A new method for open-set authorship attribution of texts of varying sizes," *Literary and Linguistic Computing* 26/1 (2011): 71–88.

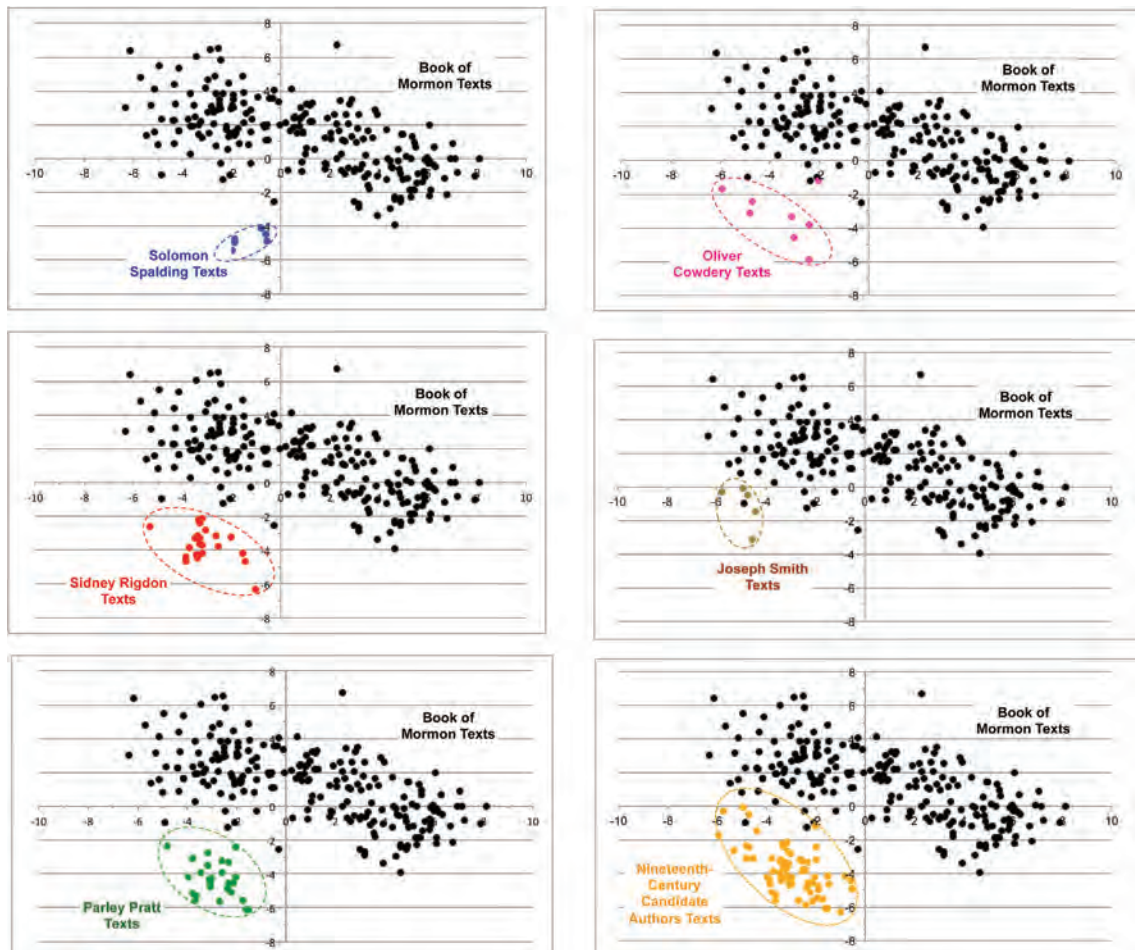


Fig. 8. PCA plots of the Book of Mormon texts and the nineteenth-century candidate authors' texts. In each plot the first principal component is the horizontal axis, and the second principal component is the vertical axis. Taken individually, among the candidate authors the Spalding and Rigdon texts are the least similar to the Book of Mormon texts. Collectively the nineteenth-century authors' writing styles are more similar to each other than to the writing styles evident in the Book of Mormon.

In applying this technique, we used the same 110 characteristic words as in the Criddle and associates study, as well as their chapter-by-chapter designation of text blocks from the Book of Mormon. However, we used only the “early Rigdon” texts to represent Rigdon’s style and included Joseph Smith as a candidate author along with the possibility of an unknown author.

The open-set ENSC method produced far different results than those reported by Criddle and associates.

To illustrate the results, first we present in figure 8 plots showing the Book of Mormon texts along with the texts from the candidate authors. The 110 dimensions of the word frequencies have been projected into a two-dimensional space defined by the first two principal components.

Author with the Closest Writing Style	Proportion of Book of Mormon Chapters Assigned to Each Candidate Author		
	Using NSC	Using NSC with Joseph Smith	Using ENSC
Solomon Spalding	22%	15%	1%
Sidney Rigdon	39%	40%	7%
Oliver Cowdery	8%	2%	1%
Parley Pratt	4%	2%	0%
Isaiah & Malachi	26%	29%	15%
Henry Longfellow	1%	0%	Not Included
Joel Barlow	0%	0%	Not Included
Joseph Smith	Not Included	12%	3%
<b>Someone Else</b>	<b>Not Included</b>	<b>Not Included</b>	<b>73%</b>

Fig. 9. Comparison of the proportion of Book of Mormon chapters assigned to the candidate authors by each analytical technique. Although the closed-set NSC technique assigns a majority of chapters to Spalding and Rigdon within a constrained set of candidate authors, when allowing for the possibility that the candidate set is incomplete, the open-set ENSC technique assigns an even larger majority of the chapters to an author who was not included in the candidate set—"Someone Else."

The sequence of plots shows the clusters of texts for each author individually in relation to the Book of Mormon texts. Overall, it can be seen that in all cases the candidate authors' texts cluster separately from the Book of Mormon texts. Further inspection shows that Solomon Spalding's cluster is actually the farthest away from the Book of Mormon, with Sidney Rigdon's cluster almost as far removed. Parley Pratt's cluster is grouped with Spalding and Rigdon.

Next we can see in figure 8 that Oliver Cowdery's and Joseph Smith's clusters are closer to the Book of Mormon cluster than Spalding's or Rigdon's, thus confirming Criddle and associates' error in not including Joseph Smith in their set of candidate authors. Finally, we note that, as a

group, the nineteenth-century authors are far more like each other in writing style than they are like the writers of the Book of Mormon.

Next we present in figure 9 a comparison of the probability results of applying NSC and ENSC to the Book of Mormon texts. It is important to remember that the mathematics in these analyses is not asking, "Who wrote these texts?" The mathematics is asking, "Which texts have the most similar patterns?" The naively applied NSC method estimates that 61 percent of the chapters in the Book of Mormon are most similar in style to texts written by Spalding or Rigdon, without Joseph Smith included as a candidate author. When Joseph Smith is included, the Spalding-Rigdon chapter-attribution proportion drops to

Author with the Closest Writing Style	Proportion of Book of Mormon Chapters Assigned to Each Candidate Author	
	Using NSC	Using ENSC
Solomon Spalding	0%	0%
Sidney Rigdon	12%	0%
Oliver Cowdery	61%	4%
Parley Pratt	3%	0%
Joseph Smith	24%	3%
<b>Someone Else</b>	<b>Not Included</b>	<b>93%</b>

Fig. 10. Comparison of the proportion of Book of Mormon chapters assigned to the candidate authors with the control authors removed. Without the control authors in the candidate author set, the closed-set NSC technique assigns only 12 percent of the chapters to Spalding and Rigdon, while the open-set ENSC technique assigns nearly all of the chapters to “Someone Else.”

55 percent. But properly addressing the analysis as an open-set problem using the ENSC method, the Spalding-Rigdon proportion of the chapters is a mere 8 percent, and we find that 73 percent of the chapters are attributed to “Someone Else” other than the candidate set of authors.

However, for completeness we need to take the analysis one step further. The control authors are only useful to demonstrate the reliability of the analytical technique. So, after doing preliminary tests, Criddle and associates should have removed the control authors (Longfellow, Barlow, and Isaiah/Malachi) to make their final probability computations. To complete the study properly, after showing the reliability of ENSC, we excluded the control authors, included Joseph Smith as a candidate author, and used only the “early” Sidney Rigdon texts as Criddle and associates should have done. When we did so, we found that NSC assigns only

12 percent to Spalding-Rigdon while assigning 61 percent of the chapters of the Book of Mormon to Cowdery. These results are shown in figure 10. Therefore, even when naively using NSC, Criddle and associates should have concluded that the evidence does not support the Spalding-

Rigdon theory without including Cowdery as the primary actor in their theory.

As also shown in figure 10, ENSC assigns 0 percent of the Book of Mormon chapters to Spalding-Rigdon, 4 percent to Cowdery, 3 percent to Smith, and 93 percent to “Someone Else,” indicating that the writing styles of the candidate authors show very little resemblance to the writing styles in the Book of Mormon. Finding that the writing styles of Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery are perhaps slightly evident in the Book of Mormon texts is not inconsistent with the claim that Joseph translated the entire book with Oliver acting as his scribe, and that Oliver’s hand transcribed the final manuscript for the printer in preparation for its first publication.

These results confirm that the Criddle and associates study was fatally flawed in concept and execution. Contrary to their contention, stylometric evidence does not provide credible support for the claim that the writing styles exhibited in the Book of Mormon match their candidate authors—Spalding, Rigdon, Pratt, or Cowdery. In fact, the evidence supports the claim that *someone other than their candidate authors wrote the book*. This is

true even when Joseph Smith is considered as a candidate author.

Therefore, based on these findings, we conclude that Criddle and associates have greatly exaggerated their claim to have calculated astronomical odds in favor of Spalding-Rigdon authorship of the Book of Mormon. The results of a properly conducted stylometric analysis are consistent with the Larsen et al. and Hilton results: stylometric evidence does not support the Spalding-Rigdon theory of Book of Mormon authorship.

Although conceptually attractive, NSC classification has limited applicability in stylometric analysis. The ENSC method is far better suited for the analytical challenges faced by researchers investigating open-set attribution questions.

## Conclusion

In sum, an authorship attribution study requires the consistent, coherent, and congruent conjunction of historical, biographical, and stylometric evidence to support the conjecture of a writer as the author of a text with disputed authorship. Such a combination of mutually supporting evidence was not set forth by Criddle and associates.<sup>32</sup> Even as a stylometric analysis the Criddle and associates study is invalid since they made a fundamental error in their study design by considering Book of Mormon authorship to be a closed-set problem and then making the logical error of saying the results exclude any other possible authorship, when in fact the researchers had not even allowed for the possibility of other authors in their study design. The open-set possibility is sometimes called the “none of the above”

possibility, and in authorship attribution studies an open set is more often the case than not.

The Criddle and associates study used the Nearest Shrunken Centroid (NSC) classification method in an attempt to find evidence in support of the Spalding-Rigdon theory. However, their study design was fundamentally flawed. Although NSC is a sound classification technique, the Criddle and associates study was an unsuitable and mistaken use of the technique. The compounding effect of at least eight major errors rendered their results utterly meaningless.

The paper’s statistical methodology was innovative but misapplied because they failed to realize the need to use an open-set procedure and they did not account for the statistical complications of applying a genomics technique to stylometric analysis.

We conclude that Criddle and associates’ research methodology applied to the long-discredited Spalding-Rigdon theory is fatally flawed and does not provide any new insights into Book of Mormon authorship. Sidney Rigdon did not write the Book of Mormon.

## Appendix: Exposing a Methodological Lapse

In an unpublished manuscript,<sup>33</sup> Matthew Jockers attempts to justify the research decision not to include Joseph Smith as a candidate author of the Book of Mormon in the study by Jockers, Witten, and Criddle reported in *Literary and Linguistic Computing* in 2008.<sup>34</sup> Jockers might

32. The contextual evidence does not warrant considering Sidney Rigdon as a viable candidate as the author of the Book of Mormon, as Matthew Roper and Paul Fields discuss in the essay that follows.

33. Matthew L. Jockers, “Testing Authorship in the Personal Writings of Joseph Smith Using NSC Classification,” 2011, accessed 28 July 2011, <http://www.stanford.edu/~mjockers/pubs/SmithNSCAnalysis.pdf>.

34. 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.



well seek to justify this decision since this methodological lapse alone is fatal to the credibility of the published paper. As we will see, this effort at after-the-fact justification on the basis that Smith's "personal writings reveal a great deal of stylistic variation" is nothing but self-serving special pleading.

First of all, "a great deal of stylistic variation" is hardly a basis upon which to exclude an author as a candidate, especially when that person is listed as the sole "author" on the first printed edition of the book. Further, all historical accounts corroborate Smith's claim that he dictated the book to scribes word by word.<sup>35</sup> No one else can reasonably be suggested as the prime candidate for authorship. All other candidates must be considered as secondary candidates at best.

Jockers states that "the Smith material is too heterogeneous [highly variable] to be considered a genuine sample of Smith's style." High variability certainly makes stylometric analysis difficult, but that cannot be used as a reason to exclude the most likely author as a candidate. If the analytical method is not capable of handling high variability, then Jockers should acknowledge his method's weakness, abandon it, and find a more capable method. This is how statistical analysis ought to proceed. Further, if he is only interested in studying easy problems, then he should acknowledge his preference, abandon the difficult problem, and find an easier problem to study.

In addition, Jockers offers no basis for what constitutes "too heterogeneous." The reader wants to ask, "Compared to whom? According to what scale of measurement?" Jockers does not say. Nor does he say why high variability in an author's style indicates that a writing sample is

not genuine. Jockers has no grounds upon which to make such a comparative statement without showing that the other candidate authors had a consistent style while Smith did not, and that the other candidates' texts are reliable indicators of style while Smith's are not. He fails to do so, and so this claim is nothing but his own impression of the problem, with no mathematical basis behind it.

With the intent of filling in the gap caused by the exclusion of Joseph Smith as a candidate author in the published study, Jockers compiled in his unpublished study a set of twenty-four documents ranging in size from a mere 112 words to 2,300 words in Smith's handwriting. These he used to characterize Smith's style using his previous methodology. As the test set he compiled ninety-six documents ranging from 105 to 10,927 words dictated by Smith to twenty-three different scribes. He added to this set 219 texts by the candidate authors in the published paper—Spalding, Rigdon, Cowdery, Pratt, Isaiah/Malachi, Longfellow, and Barlow.

Using cluster analysis to group texts with similar style and to separate texts with differing styles, Jockers found style variations—as one would expect—among the texts dictated to different scribes. However, he does not show that the relative differences in any way distort or mask Joseph Smith's style within the documents. So his analysis provides no useful information.

Next he applied NSC using the published study's closed-set candidate authors. He reports that with a set of 106 words he could distinguish among these authors, but he was able to achieve an error rate no lower than 13 percent. This is an extraordinarily high error rate. For *The Federalist Papers* he reported a 0 percent error rate. *The Federalist Papers* is a closed-set problem, as are

35. See the following essay by Matthew Roper, which discusses this historical context.



Joseph Smith's writings, so the error rates could reasonably be expected to be about the same. This unacceptably and anomalously high error rate should have indicated either that he did not have enough words in the stylistic feature set or that he did not have a set of truly useful distinguishing words. Ignoring this obvious weakness, he proceeded to apply his method anyway. The results are predictable but useless.

For reasons that he does not explain, Jockers considered Spalding, who had died in 1816, when Joseph Smith was still a boy, to be a viable author for Smith's personal writings. In his results, some of the ninety-six Smith documents were attributed to Spalding, who could not have had anything to do with Joseph Smith's writings since none of the Rigdon-Spalding theorists have yet managed to bring Spalding back from the dead to compose the Prophet's diaries. Instead of seeing a big red flag telling him that his method was not informative, Jockers asserts that Joseph Smith was so influenced by Spalding that even his letters to his wife and his diary entries were modeled after Spalding. This is clearly a flawed conclusion. In addition, there is no historical evidence to support the claim that Cowdery, more than being just Joseph's scribe, was instead the author of Joseph's writings. But Jockers's theory requires that Cowdery was more likely the author of Joseph Smith's known writings than Joseph Smith himself. Apparently any data point, no matter how incongruous, can be marshaled to support a version of the Spalding-Rigdon theory, requiring ad hoc fixes.

Jockers states that there is "a curious stylistic affinity between the style of Spalding and the style of the personal writings" of Joseph Smith. There is nothing curious about it at all. The style measurement is not real. If a "Spalding signal"

shows up so prominently (as Jockers claims) in texts that Spalding could not possibly have written, then any assertion that his style is contained in other texts of questioned authorship is obviously invalid. Whatever Jockers measured must have been nothing more than noise. His "Spalding signal" is just "Spalding noise"—to which his biases tune his own ear.

Let's look at more details in his results. His method says that 14 percent of the ninety-six Joseph Smith documents were written by Spalding, Longfellow, Barlow, or Isaiah/Malachi. Going further, 10 percent were written by dead people—Spalding and Isaiah/Malachi. A method that produces such unreliable results is obviously useless.

Of the ninety-six documents in Jockers's test set, only twelve can be used to compare the possible effect of Joseph Smith's scribes on the documents attributed to his authorship. These twelve documents involve other individuals acting as Joseph's scribe: Cowdery (eight instances), Rigdon (three), and Pratt (one) acted as Joseph's scribes. For these documents, Jockers's results indicate the following:

1. None of the twelve were attributed to Joseph Smith. So either Joseph Smith did not dictate any of the documents attributed to his authorship (i.e., personal letters and personal diary entries)—an unlikely scenario—or Jockers's method is worthless.
  2. In the case of Rigdon as scribe, all of his written documents were attributed by Jockers to Pratt. So either Rigdon inexplicably wrote in Pratt's style when he was Joseph's scribe or Jockers's method is not informative.
  3. In the case of Pratt as scribe, the only document tested by Jockers was attributed to Pratt. So either a single text of only 123
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words (a short paragraph) is too small to reflect anything other than the style of the hand holding the pen or Jockers's method is not capable of identifying the true author.

4. In the case of Cowdery as scribe, two documents were attributed to Cowdery, two to Rigdon, two to Pratt, and two to other candidates. So either Cowdery was such a literary genius that he could write in his own style and mimic with equal ease the style of two of his friends, plus the style of a renowned poet and two Old Testament prophets for no useful purpose, or Jockers's method produces meaningless results.

Jockers's conclusions are an attempt to justify his methodological irregularities by claiming either that (a) Joseph Smith somehow did not write any of the documents (even those written

in his own hand) or that (b) his writings are inadmissible as evidence of his personal writing style because of "stylistic variation" and thus need not be considered. If Jockers is admitting that his methodology is incapable of dealing with "stylistic variation," then he is admitting that his method is inadequate for stylistic analysis.❧

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# *The Historical Case against Sidney Rigdon's Authorship of the Book of Mormon*

*Review of 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.*

MATTHEW ROPER AND PAUL J. FIELDS

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**T**he effort by Jockers, Witten, and Criddle<sup>1</sup> to support the Spalding-Rigdon hypothesis of Book of Mormon authorship using stylometric analysis collapses under numerous methodological flaws, as demonstrated in the immediately preceding essay.<sup>2</sup> The aim of this review is to evaluate Criddle and associates' study from a historical perspective since much of their approach depends on assumptions and interpretations of relevant historical data.

In a separate review of Jockers's unpublished effort to justify some of his methodological lapses,<sup>3</sup>

it was shown that even a statistical analysis can be thrown off course by wishful thinking, special pleading, and the investigator's refusal to set aside his or her biases, beliefs, and preferences. With researchers like Criddle and associates so committed to achieving their desired outcome, the more malleable materials of historiography provide a welcome respite from the rigors of mathematics. Here one's desires, biases, and preconceptions can be given full rein.

It is telling and troubling that Criddle and associates appeal to "historical scholarship" that supports "a central role for Rigdon . . . [and] a now-missing Spalding manuscript" (p. 482). Few historians—whether friendly or hostile to the truth claims of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—believe that the historical data support the Spalding manuscript hypothesis. This is a crucial point since a stylometric analysis has no meaning unless there is a priori justification for considering a proposed author as a viable

1. Hereafter referred to as Criddle and associates.
  2. See, in this issue of the *Review*, Paul J. Fields, G. Bruce Schaallje, and Matthew Roper, "Examining a Misapplication of Nearest Shrunken Centroid Classification to Investigate Book of Mormon Authorship." Also, for an overview of the Spalding theory, see Matthew Roper, "The Mythical 'Manuscript Found,'" *FARMS Review* 17/2 (2005): 7–140; and Roper, "Myth, Memory, and 'Manuscript Found,'" *FARMS Review* 21/2 (2009): 179–223.
  3. See "Appendix: Exposing a Methodological Lapse," herein at the end of Fields, Schaallje, and Roper, "Examining a Misapplication of Nearest Shrunken Centroid Classification."
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candidate. Without supporting historical and biographical evidence, the results of the analysis are nothing more than a mathematical exercise and cannot constitute a persuasive argument for authorship attribution.

We will first review several historical claims relating to the Spalding-Rigdon theory, including the historically problematic claims that Rigdon had a knowledge of the Book of Mormon and of Spalding's writings previous to his conversion to Mormonism in late 1830. We will also explore some of the implications of Rigdon's beliefs, practices, and known writings in connection with the Book of Mormon, as well as the claim that Rigdon met Joseph Smith before December 1830. We will next discuss Criddle and associates' use of problematic historical sources and evidence relating to the dictation of the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon and the implications it raises for the Spalding-Rigdon theory. We will show that this evidence is inconsistent with the theory that Rigdon wrote the Book of Mormon or that he could have been responsible for its production.

### Sidney Rigdon and the Book of Mormon

Sidney Rigdon's introduction to the Book of Mormon and his public conversion to Mormonism long after the book's publication pose obvious challenges for proponents of the Spalding-Rigdon theory. In October 1830, Oliver Cowdery accompanied Parley P. Pratt, Ziba Peterson, and Peter Whitmer on a mission to Missouri, intending to preach to the Lamanites (Doctrine and Covenants 28:14; 32). While passing through northern Ohio, these missionaries stopped in Mentor, where they introduced Sidney Rigdon to the Book of Mormon. Rigdon, although initially resistant, eventually accepted the Book of Mormon and was baptized. Those

who witnessed the reformist preacher's first encounter with early missionaries indicate that Rigdon at first had some difficulty accepting the book. In his own recollection of these events, Rigdon himself said he initially "felt very much prejudiced at the assertion" that the Book of Mormon was a revelation from God.<sup>4</sup> Pratt said that Rigdon "was much surprised, and it was with much persuasion and argument, that he was prevailed on to read it, and after he had read it, he had a great struggle of mind, before he fully believed and embraced it."<sup>5</sup> Rigdon's daughter Nancy Rigdon Ellis was eight years old at the time of these events. In an interview with E. L. and W. H. Kelley in 1884, she said she remembered the event "because of the contest which soon arose between her father and Pratt and Cowdery, over the Book of Mormon." She stated: "I saw them hand him the book, and I am as positive as can be that he never saw it before. He read it and examined it for about an hour and then threw it down, and said he did not believe a word in it."<sup>6</sup> Rigdon must have known that acceptance of the Book of Mormon would mean losing both the home recently built by his Mentor congregation and the support of many who had been his followers, friends, and religious associates for years. The life adjustment necessitated by his conversion seems to have been a difficult trial for the proud man.

Rigdon's initial response to the book as remembered by friends and family is consistent with his claim that he was not responsible for its origin or involved in its coming forth. That conclusion

4. "History of Joseph Smith," *Times and Seasons*, 15 August 1843, 289–90.

5. Parley P. Pratt, *Mormonism Unveiled* . . . (New York: O. Pratt and E. Fordham, 1838), 41.

6. Nancy Rigdon Ellis, interview with E. L. Kelley and W. H. Kelley, 14 May 1884, in *The History of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints* (Independence, MO: Herald House, 1967), 4:451–52.

is further strengthened by evidence that some of Rigdon's previous practices and beliefs as a reformist preacher conflicted with those he encountered in the Book of Mormon. Reuben Harmon, a resident of Kirtland at this time, recalled hearing Rigdon preach a sermon following his acceptance of the Book of Mormon. "He said he had been preaching wrong doctrine, and asked their forgiveness. He said he should address them no more in public. He wept freely through his sermon."<sup>7</sup> Harmon also stated: "I heard Sidney Rigdon [give] the last speech that he made while he officiated as a Disciple preacher. He said he had been mistaken all his life-time, and he quit preaching and went into Mr. Morley's field and went to plowing. . . . He did not go to preaching right away after he left the Disciple church. I heard him make the remark that he never expected to speak in public again."<sup>8</sup> Following his own baptism and ordination, he would in fact preach again, but Harmon's recollection suggests that the transition from Disciple to Latter-day Saint was not an easy one and that there were significant elements of the Book of Mormon that conflicted with Rigdon's previous religious practices and beliefs. One significant area likely had to do with the issue of divine authority.

Sidney Rigdon, like Alexander Campbell and Walter Scott, had baptized followers but did not claim divine authority for this practice beyond biblical precedent. This apparent rejection of the need for a divine restoration of authority to

perform ordinances such as baptism was troubling to those who were initially sympathetic to Campbellite teachings but who later believed the Book of Mormon and joined the Saints. Eliza R. Snow described her earlier associations with the Campbellites: "During my brief attachment to that church I was deeply interested in the study of the ancient Prophets, in which I was assisted by the erudite A. Campbell, Walter Scott whose acquaintance I made, but more particularly (by) Sidney Rigdon who was a frequent visitor at my father's house." Like many other Christians who were seeking a restoration, Snow had sought to understand the biblical prophecies concerning the latter days and the millennium and looked for a return to original Christian teachings among these Campbellite teachers, but she found that something was still lacking: "Some told me one thing and some another; but there was no Peter, 'endowed from on high.' I heard Alexander Campbell advocate the literal meaning of the Scriptures—listened to him with deep interest—hoped his new life led to a fulness—was baptized, and soon learned that, as well they might, he and his followers disclaimed all authority, and my baptism was of no consequence."<sup>9</sup> This absence of divine authority was apparent to others as well. John Murdock had been attracted to the teachings of Campbell and Rigdon, but he said that he eventually became disillusioned by Campbell's rejection of modern spiritual gifts. Murdock asked, "Where is the man to commence the work of baptizing? or where shall he get his authority? Can he go to those who are out of the way and obtain authority? . . . The only way the authority can be obtained is, the Lord

7. Reuben P. Harmon statement, quoted in *Naked Truths about Mormonism* 1/2 (April 1888): 1.

8. Reuben P. Harmon interview, 8 March 1884, 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, Beginning February 12, and Closing March 8, 1884 . . .* (Lamoni, IA: Herald Publishing House, 1913), 392.

9. Eliza R. Snow, "Sketch of My Life," in *Eliza R. Snow, an Immortal: Selected Writings of Eliza R. Snow* (Salt Lake City: Nicolas G. Morgan Sr. Foundation, 1957), 5.



must either send an angel to baptize the first man, or he must give a special command to someone to baptize another.”<sup>10</sup> Parley P. Pratt wrote of his religious searching prior to encountering Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon:

About this time one Mr. Sidney Rigdon came into the neighborhood as a preacher, and it was rumored that he was a kind of Reformed Baptist, who, with Mr. Alexander Campbell, of Virginia, a Mr. Scott, and some other gifted men, had dissented from the regular Baptists, from whom they differed much in doctrine. At length I went to hear him, and what was my astonishment when I found he preached faith in Jesus Christ, repentance towards God, and baptism for remission of sins, with the promise of the gift of the Holy Ghost to all who would come forward, with all their hearts, and obey this doctrine! Here was the *ancient gospel* in due form. Here were the very principles which I had discovered years before; but could find no one to minister in. But still **one great link was wanting** to complete the chain of the ancient order of things; and that was, **the authority to minister in holy things—the apostleship, the power which should accompany the form**. This thought occurred to me as soon as I heard Mr. Rigdon make proclamation of the gospel.

Peter proclaimed this gospel, and baptized for remission of sins, and promised the gift of the Holy Ghost, because he was commissioned so to do by a crucified and risen

Saviour. But who is Mr. Rigdon? Who is Mr. Campbell? Who commissioned them? Who baptized them for remission of sins? Who ordained them to stand up as Peter? Of course they were baptized by the Baptists, and ordained by them, and yet they had now left them because they did not administer the true gospel. And it was plain that the Baptists could not claim the apostolic office by succession, in a regular, unbroken chain from the Apostles of old, preserving the gospel in its purity, and the ordinances unchanged, from the very fact that they were now living in the perversion of some, and the entire neglect of others of these ordinances; this being the very ground of difference between the old Baptists and these Reformers. Again, these Reformers claimed no new commission by revelation, or vision from the Lord, while they had not the least shadow of claim by succession. It might be said, then, with propriety: “Peter I know, and Paul I know, but who are ye?” However, we were thankful for even the forms of truth, as none could claim the power, and authority, and gifts of the Holy Ghost—at least so far as we knew.<sup>11</sup>

These comments highlight an important distinction between the pre-Mormon beliefs of Sidney Rigdon and those found in the Book of Mormon. Rigdon and other Reformers believed that the Bible provided sufficient warrant to baptize, while the Book of Mormon teaches that baptism and other sacred ordinances in the church can only be done by divine authority bestowed by God or his duly authorized representatives. This

10. John Murdock, “An Abridged Record of the Life of John Murdock, taken from his journal by himself,” John Murdock Journal, typescript, BYU Archives, 4–10.

11. Parley P. Pratt, *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 13–14.

is illustrated by the account of King Limhi's people, who believed in the words of Alma but lacked an authorized representative who could baptize them: "And it came to pass that king Limhi and many of his people were desirous to be baptized; but there was none in the land that had authority from God. And Ammon declined from doing this thing, considering himself an unworthy servant" (Mosiah 21:33). Limhi's people could not be baptized without authority from God, yet such a lack of divine authority would not have stopped Reformers like Campbell, Scott, or Rigdon from administering baptism. The twelve Nephite disciples received authority to baptize directly from the resurrected Jesus and not from earlier scripture or the community of believers (3 Nephi 11:21-26; 12:1). The specific granting of divine authority to mortals is a recurrent element in the resurrected Lord's ministry at the Book of Mormon's climax (3 Nephi 18:5, 36-37; 20:4; 4 Nephi 1:5). If Rigdon were the author of the Book of Mormon and he hoped to form a new church, why would he contradict what the Book of Mormon teaches about baptizing without divine authority?

Rigdon denied any connection with the origin of the Book of Mormon. Several residents near New Portage, Medina County, Ohio, remembered a discourse by Rigdon that appears to have been given at the high point of the anti-Mormon excitement associated with Philastus Hurlbut's 1834 activities. Phineas, Hiel, and Mary D. Bronson recalled:

In the spring of 1833 or 1834, at the house of Samuel Baker, near New Portage, Medina county, Ohio, we, whose signatures are affixed, did hear Elder Sidney Rigdon, in the presence of a large congregation, say he had been informed that some in the neighborhood had accused him of being the

instigator of the Book of Mormon. Standing in the door-way, there being many standing in the door-yard, he, holding up the Book of Mormon, said, "I testify in the presence of this congregation, and before God and all the Holy Angels up yonder, (pointing towards heaven), before whom I expect to give account at the judgment day, that I never saw a sentence of the Book of Mormon, I never penned a sentence of the Book of Mormon, I never knew that there was such a book in existence as the Book of Mormon, until it was presented to me by Parley P. Pratt, in the form that it now is."<sup>12</sup>

Rigdon condemned E. D. Howe's book, the first to propose the Spalding theory, as a "book of falsehoods."<sup>13</sup> Just before leaving Kirtland for Missouri, Rigdon testified that he had nothing to do with the origin of the Book of Mormon. Reuben Harmon recalled that "Sidney Rigdon at the time he made his last speech here, said that he knew nothing about the Book of Mormon until it was presented to him by Oliver Cowdery and Parley Pratt. I never heard of the Spaulding story until it was sprung on me."<sup>14</sup> In 1839 Rigdon stated that he had never heard of Spalding or his manuscript until the theory had been advanced by Philastus Hurlbut some five years earlier. In a letter to the

12. Statement by Phineas Bronson, Hiel Bronson, and Mary D. Bronson, quoted in Rudolph Etzenhouser, *From Palmyra, New York, 1830, to Independence, Missouri, 1894* (Independence, MO: Ensign Publishing House, 1894), 388. An 1834 date would make sense in the context of the Hurlbut anti-Mormon excitement leading up to the apostate's trial in April of that year. If this were the spring of 1833, Rigdon would not have been responding to Hurlbut, who was still a member of the church until June of that year, but may have been responding to earlier claims circulating since early 1831 that he was responsible for the Book of Mormon.

13. Sidney Rigdon to Oliver Cowdery, April 1836, *Latter-day Saint Messenger and Advocate*, April 1836, 299.

14. Reuben P. Harmon statement, 10 June 1884, in *Public Discussion of the Issues . . .*, 393.

*Quincy Whig* in response to a recent article asserting his connection with Spalding, Rigdon dismissed the claim as a “moonshine story” and said that he was “entirely indebted to this production” for the “knowledge of [Spalding’s] earthly existence, . . . for surely until Doctor Philastus Hulburt [*sic*] informed me that such a being lived, at some former period, I had not the most distant knowledge of his existence.”<sup>15</sup> Between 1831 and 1844, Rigdon was a prominent leader in the church, but he became alienated from Joseph Smith after the troubles in Missouri. Following Joseph Smith’s death in 1844, Rigdon unsuccessfully sought appointment as the Prophet’s successor, refused to follow the apostolic leadership, and for a time led a small group of dissenters. After his excommunication, Rigdon expressed bitterness toward Joseph Smith, claiming he was a fallen prophet and denouncing the practice of plural marriage and the leadership of the Twelve. He continued until his death in 1876, however, to maintain that he had nothing to do with the origin of the Book of Mormon.

According to the Spalding-Rigdon theory, Sidney Rigdon spent years of time, deception, and effort forging a lengthy work of fiction in the hopes of using that book as a tool to found a religious scheme. If so, then it is strange that he rarely used it. Rigdon’s published writings between 1830 and 1846 reveal a writer preoccupied with the need for continuing revelation, miracles, gifts, and prophecies of the latter days, the restoration, and the millennium, but not, interestingly enough, with the Book of Mormon. Rigdon traveled with Joseph Smith in late December 1831 and January 1832 on a brief mission in which he publicly spoke on the subject of the Book of

Mormon and defended it.<sup>16</sup> He clearly believed the book to be true and was willing to defend it, but he rarely if ever quoted from it or used the text to defend and support his arguments. When he mentioned the Book of Mormon at all, it was in a general context of decrying critics or denying having had anything to do with its origin. This is particularly noteworthy in contrast to the writings of W. W. Phelps, for example, who seems to have been infatuated with the Book of Mormon, speaking of it and citing it frequently. Rigdon’s relative neglect of the Book of Mormon would be surprising had he been responsible for its production.

Following the death of his daughter Eliza in 1846, Rigdon seems to have become increasingly unstable and erratic in his behavior, leading to increased alienation from former friends and supporters. His interest in religious things, however, appears not to have been dampened. A collection of purported revelations written between 1863 and 1876 provides a window into some of Rigdon’s beliefs and teachings during the last thirteen years of his life. These writings show a man who still believed in the Book of Mormon and had an affinity for certain restorationist and millennialist ideas, yet they also reveal a man who, sadly, had an inflated view of his own importance and who believed that nearly everyone else but him had gone astray. Sometimes the Book of Mormon is mentioned or alluded to, but it is rarely quoted or used to defend Rigdon’s teachings. These writings seem strangely disconnected from the content and style of the Book of Mormon. Instead, they contain material that is extraneous to the Book of Mormon story. One purported revelation, for example, claims that

15. Sidney Rigdon to the editors of the *Quincy Whig*, 27 May 1839, *Quincy Whig*, 8 June 1839. “Doctor” was Hurlbut’s given name.

16. Sidney Rigdon, “To the Public,” *Ohio Star*, 15 December 1831 and 12 January 1832.

the Esquimauxs (Eskimos) are descendants of Joseph the son of Lehi, something about which the Book of Mormon is silent.<sup>17</sup> Also, instead of quoting Book of Mormon prophecies, other Rigdon revelations turn them on their head. The Book of Mormon contains prophecies of the biblical Joseph and, like the Bible, speaks highly of the patriarch; but according to another purported Rigdon revelation, the biblical Joseph was in reality a wicked man who sought power and worldly fame and became lifted up in pride because of the prophecies about his latter-day namesake.<sup>18</sup> The biblical Joseph's prophecy in the Book of Mormon concerning the "spokesman" for the seer is anachronistically applied to Rigdon rather than to Oliver Cowdery.<sup>19</sup> Rigdon's descriptions of the sealed portion of the plates likewise contradict the scriptural text.<sup>20</sup> Rigdon's

later religious writings reflect teachings that require contradictory changes, additions, or revisions to the Book of Mormon to make it fit his later self-serving, iconoclastic, and confused ideology. This dynamic seems inconsistent with the claim that Rigdon was the author of the Book of Mormon.

### Sidney Rigdon and Joseph Smith

The Spalding-Rigdon theory posits an early connection not only between Rigdon and the writings of Solomon Spalding but also between Rigdon and Joseph Smith before the Book of Mormon was published. Such a claim is inconsistent with solid historical evidence that Rigdon did not meet Joseph Smith until he traveled from Kirtland, Ohio, to Fayette, New York, in December 1830. Sometime before his return to Ohio, Rigdon also met W. W. Phelps, a newspaper editor who would later join the church. In a letter to E. D. Howe on 15 January 1831, Phelps wrote, "I had ten hours discourse with a man from your state, named Sidney Rigdon, a convert to its doctrines, and he declared it was true, and he knew it by the power of the Holy Ghost, which was again given to man in preparation for the millennium."<sup>21</sup> "Early in 1831," wrote Parley P. Pratt, who had first introduced the Book of Mormon to Rigdon several months before, "Mr. Rigdon

17. Revelation to Sidney Rigdon, February 1870 (section 58), in *Book of the Revelations of Jesus Christ to the Children of Zion . . .*, Stephen Post Collection, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, MS 1418 Book A, 92–94.

18. Revelation to Sidney Rigdon, October 1868 (section 42), in *Book of the Revelations of Jesus Christ to the Children of Zion . . .*, Book A, 68–70.

19. Revelation to Sidney Rigdon, October 1872 (section 70), in *Book of the Revelations of Jesus Christ to the Children of Zion . . .*, Book A, 110–18. The prophecy in 2 Nephi speaks of a spokesman who was to "write the writing of the fruit of thy loins, unto the fruit of thy loins; and the spokesman of thy loins shall declare it" (2 Nephi 3:18). After the Book of Mormon was published and the church was restored, Rigdon was called to be a spokesman to Joseph Smith in expounding scriptures (D&C 100:9–11; 124:104), but this was a separate calling in connection with receiving Joseph Smith as a revelator that had nothing to do with the prophecy in 2 Nephi 3 concerning the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. Rigdon's writing, as noted above, suggests that he seldom wrote about or quoted from the Book of Mormon.

20. Revelation to Sidney Rigdon, October 1868 (section 42), in *Book of the Revelations of Jesus Christ to the Children of Zion . . .*, Book A, 68–70. Rigdon claimed to know the contents of the sealed portion of the Book of Mormon, but Moroni said that these things were not to be revealed: "The things which are sealed shall not be delivered in the day of the wickedness and abominations of the people" (2 Nephi 27:8; see Ether 4:6). This was a condition that in Rigdon's view still clearly prevailed. Rigdon also claimed that the sealed portion was

the history of Zion from the coming forth of the Book of Mormon to the end and recounts the apostasy and corruption of Joseph Smith and the Church of Jesus Christ. According to Nephi, "The book shall be sealed; and in the book shall be a revelation from God, from the beginning of the world to the ending thereof" (2 Nephi 27:7), and the words that are sealed "reveal all things from the foundation of the world unto the end thereof" (v. 10). Rigdon claimed that the sealed portion of the Book of Mormon contained prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and other prophets, but Moroni indicates that what was sealed was a revelation to the brother of Jared, who lived long before these other prophets (Ether 3:22–28; 4:4–7).

21. W. W. Phelps to E. D. Howe, 15 January 1831, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled . . .* (Painesville, OH, 1834), 274.

having been ordained, under our hands, visited elder J. Smith, Jr., in the state of New-York, for the first time; and from that time forth, rumor began to circulate, that he (Rigdon) was the author of the Book of Mormon. The Spaulding story never was dreamed of until several years afterwards.”<sup>22</sup> The theory that Rigdon was responsible for the origin of the Book of Mormon did not arise until early 1831, several months after Rigdon had joined the church and only after he had traveled to New York and met Joseph Smith for the first time. The dearth of primary evidence to the contrary has always been a major weakness in the Spaulding-Rigdon theory.

Some Spaulding advocates argue, however, that Sidney Rigdon may have secretly visited Joseph Smith in New York previous to 1830, but this conflicts with the testimony of friends and family of Joseph Smith, who stated that they did not become acquainted with Rigdon until he visited them at Fayette in December 1830.

After living in Harmony, Pennsylvania, Joseph and Emma Smith and Oliver Cowdery moved to Fayette, New York, where they lived with the Whitmer family. It was there that much of the Book of Mormon translation took place, and the Prophet and his family remained there until their move to Ohio in early 1831. As described above, following his 1830 baptism in Ohio, Rigdon visited New York in December 1830, where he was the subject of the revelation now known as Doctrine and Covenants 35. In 1879 Emma Smith was asked when she first met Sidney Rigdon. She responded: “I was residing at father Whitmer’s, when I first saw Sidney Rigdon. . . . The Book of Mormon had been translated and published some time before. Parley P. Pratt had united with the Church before I knew Sidney Rigdon, or heard

of him. At the time the Book of Mormon was translated there was no church organized, and Rigdon did not become acquainted with Joseph and me till after the Church was established in 1830. How long after that I do not know but it was some time.”<sup>23</sup> According to Joseph’s brother William Smith, Rigdon “was never at my father’s house to see my brother until after the book was published. If he had wanted to see Joseph at that time and remained very long, he would have had to be in the field rolling logs or carrying brush.”<sup>24</sup> Joseph’s younger sister Katherine likewise affirmed:

Prior to the latter part of the year A.D. 1830, there was no person who visited with or was an acquaintance of ~~brother Joseph~~ <or called upon the> said family or any member thereof, to my knowledge, by the name of Sidney Rigdon; nor was such person known to the family or any member thereof to my knowledge, until the last part of the year AD. 1830, or the first part of the year, 1831, and Sometime after the organization of the Church of Jesus Christ by Joseph Smith jr. and Several months after the publication of the Book of Mormon. That I remember the time when Sidney Rigdon came to my father’s place and it was after the removal of my father from Waterloo, N.Y. to Kirtland, Ohio.<sup>25</sup>

David Whitmer’s testimony is also consistent with that of the Smiths. Whitmer testified that he did not meet Rigdon until after Rigdon joined the church: “Neither Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, Martin Harris or myself ever met Sydney Rigdon

22. Pratt, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 42.

23. Dan Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996), 1:541.

24. Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:506.

25. Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:520.

until after the Book of Mormon was in print. I know this of my own personal knowledge, being with Joseph Smith, in Seneca County, N[ew] Y[ork], in the winter of 1830, when Sydney Rigdon and Edward Partridge came from Kirtland, Ohio, to see Joseph Smith, and where Rigdon and Partridge saw Joseph Smith for the first time in their lives.”<sup>26</sup>

### Supposition to Bolster the Theory

Criddle and associates suggest that Oliver Cowdery may have been the intermediary between the hypothetical conspirators. Previous to his association with Joseph Smith in 1829, they claim, “Oliver Cowdery worked as a traveling salesman, selling books and pamphlets.” They even suggest that the chiasm in Alma 36 might be explained through the influence of Oliver Cowdery (p. 489).<sup>27</sup> The claim that Oliver was a

book and pamphlet peddler in the mid-1820s is not supported by documents from the 1820s but is based on later recollections from two newspaper editors—recollections that, upon examination, seem to confuse a newspaperman named Benjamin Franklin Cowdery with Oliver.<sup>28</sup> Criddle and associates also speculate that Parley P. Pratt may have been a go-between as well (p. 480), but there is no historical evidence that Pratt knew Rigdon before 1829 or that Pratt knew Joseph Smith before his conversion in late 1830.<sup>29</sup>

Doctrine and Covenants, the Book of Abraham, and Joseph Smith’s personal correspondence, which have previously been suggested by some as evidence for Joseph Smith’s knowledge of the form, “supply no statistical evidence either that Joseph knew about chiasmus or that God revealed chiasmus to Joseph without his knowledge.” Other proposed examples failing the test of intentionality include passages from *Green Eggs and Ham*, “Hickory Dickory Dock,” *INFORMIX Guide*, John Taylor’s *Mediation and Atonement*, the *Popul Vuh*, and Strangite texts. Based on their analysis, Edwards and Edwards conclude, “Our admissibility tests establish the intentionality of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon and refute the claim that Joseph’s modern writings demonstrate his awareness of chiasmus. If Joseph Smith was indeed unaware of chiasmus, then its presence in the Book of Mormon stands as evidence of its authenticity” (Boyd F. Edwards and W. Farrell Edwards, “When Are Chiasms Admissible as Evidence?” *BYU Studies* 49/4 [2010]: 153).

28. Larry E. Morris, “Oliver Cowdery’s Vermont Years and the Origins of Mormonism,” *BYU Studies* 39/1 (2000): 120–21.

29. *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, 12–23. Pratt recounted the events surrounding his conversion in his autobiography. In October 1827 a newly married Parley P. Pratt moved from his home in Canaan, New York, to settle on a farm in northern Ohio, where his wife sometimes taught school. In 1829 Sidney Rigdon began to preach in their neighborhood, and Pratt was impressed with Rigdon’s restorationist ideas. In August 1830, seeking to follow the Savior’s admonition to forsake all to follow Christ, Pratt decided to sell his Ohio farm and return to his former home in New York, where he intended to preach full-time. At Buffalo, New York, Pratt purchased passage to Albany along the Erie Canal with the intention of returning to Canaan. When the boat passed through Rochester, however, he felt impressed to stop there and preach for a while, sending his wife on ahead to their intended home. In a small town near Rochester, while preparing to preach, he heard reports about the Book of Mormon that caught his interest. He obtained a copy of the book. “As I read, the spirit of the Lord was upon me, and I knew and comprehended that the book was true” (p. 20). Hoping to learn more about Joseph Smith, he walked to Manchester, where he met Hyrum Smith, who

26. David Whitmer, *An Address to All Believers in Christ* (Richmond, MO: David Whitmer, 1887), 11. See David Whitmer, interview with Joseph Smith III, 4 April 1882, in Lyndon W. Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews: A Restoration Witness* (Orem, UT: Grandin Book Company, 1991), 89.

27. Criddle and associates reference a 2004 study that found a high statistical probability that the chiasm in Alma 36 was a deliberate one (Boyd F. Edwards and W. Farrell Edwards, “Does Chiasmus Appear in the Book of Mormon by Chance?” *BYU Studies* 43/2 [2004]: 103–30). Attributing a knowledge of chiasmus to Oliver Cowdery, they cite the work of John W. Welch (“How Much Was Known about Chiasmus in 1829 When the Book of Mormon Was Translated?” *FARMS Review* 15/1 [2003]: 47–80). While chiasmus was not entirely unknown in nineteenth-century literature before 1830 (when the Book of Mormon was published), Welch’s research suggested that it is extremely unlikely that Joseph Smith or his close associates knew about chiasmus before 1830. Some critics have claimed that examples of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon are unintentional. Others, persuaded by evidence of intentionality, have argued that chiasms are also found in Joseph Smith’s personal writings and in the writings of some of his contemporaries. In a more recent study, Edwards and Edwards applied further statistical analysis to the question in an effort to measure the likelihood of such claims. They found strong evidence that the chiasms in Leviticus 24 in the Bible and Alma 36 in the Book of Mormon were intentional and that their respective authors must have had a knowledge of this literary form. Their analysis also indicates that purported examples from the



## Questionable Sources

Criddle and associates give little attention to primary historical sources that contradict their theory and instead lend undeserved credence to historical sources of questionable reliability. For example, they write that, around 1826 or 1827, “Rigdon is reported to have collaborated with ‘two or three different persons’ in adjacent places to create the Book of Mormon” (p. 480). In a footnote on page 489, they state, “In Bainbridge [Ohio], Rigdon reportedly became involved in what appears to be ‘automatic writing’: using a séance-like process to create the Book of Mormon.” The authors’ description seems to suggest that this report is historically credible. In fact, the source is an obscure article published in 1880 in *The New Northwest*, an Oregon paper, and they insist that the article provides “evidence pointing to Bainbridge as the likely location for production of the [hypothetical] 1827 version of the Book of Mormon” (p. 489). The article reported the claims of O. P. Henry, who said that his mother “lived in the family of Sidney Rigdon prior to her marriage in 1827,” more than fifty-three years earlier.

There was in the family what is now called a “writing medium,” also several others in adjacent places, and the Mormon Bible was written by two or three different persons by an automatic power which they believed was inspiration direct from God, the same as produced the original Jewish Bible and Christian New Testament. Mr. H. believes that Sidney Rigdon furnished Joseph Smith with these manuscripts, and that the story of the “hieroglyphics” was a fabrication to make the credulous take

hold of the mystery; that Rigdon, having learned, beyond a doubt, that the so-called dead could communicate to the living, considered himself duly authorized by Jehovah to found a new church, under divine guidance similar to that of Confucius, Moses, Jesus, Mohammed, Swedenborg, Calvin, Luther or Wesley, all of whom believed in and taught the ministration of spirits.<sup>30</sup>

The text of the Book of Mormon, according to this report, was not to be attributed to Solomon Spalding, or even to Sidney Rigdon, but was purportedly dictated by several unnamed individuals: one in the Rigdon family and several others at undisclosed locations. This cohort of multiple unnamed writers in Bainbridge and elsewhere dictated the text through a process that Mr. Henry informs us his mother considered “automatic” writing—the same process, we are helpfully informed, by which the “Jewish Bible and Christian New Testament” were given. Oddly, neither Mr. Henry nor his venerable mother (the former associate of unnamed spirit mediums for whom *he* speaks) has any knowledge of Rigdon’s authorship of the text, but Mr. Henry tells us what he certainly “believes” to be true, and no doubt would like to prove—that Rigdon, wanting to form a new religion, by some means gathered up the now-missing written fruit of these varied and scattered dictations (which were “automatically” produced by unnamed individuals) and somehow conveyed them to Joseph Smith Jr., who eventually published them as the Book of Mormon. For lack of a better term, we may as well call this variant of the automatic writing

accompanied Pratt to Fayette so he could meet Joseph Smith and join the church.

30. “The Mormon Bible,” *The New Northwest* (Portland, OR), 9 September 1880.

explanation the multi-medium theory of Book of Mormon origins.

The writer of this 1880 article, interestingly enough, did not claim that Rigdon himself engaged in automatic writing to produce the Book of Mormon, but that *others* did so. The writer went on to speculate that Rigdon thereafter made such writings available to Joseph Smith. This would make Rigdon a go-between rather than an author himself. Despite its late date, complete lack of any contemporary or confirmatory evidence, its second- or thirdhand nature, and its invocation of unnamed actors, this theory nevertheless seems to undermine rather than support Criddle and associates' case for Rigdon as a Book of Mormon author. Shortly after the appearance of the above article, an editorialist for the *Deseret News* found the attempt to explain away the Book of Mormon as a product of spiritualism a little amusing. "If this new theory," he observed, "should be caught up by preachers and editors, desperate for some plausible pretense to account for the Book of Mormon, they will have to drop forever the hackneyed and thoroughly riddled old fable called the Spalding theory."<sup>31</sup> Dale Broadhurst, a recent enthusiast of the Spalding-Rigdon theory, does not share that point of view. "Evidently it did not occur to the LDS critics, that Sidney Rigdon's 'automatic writing' might be accounted for by mental illness, more readily than by recourse to the spiritualist 'medium business.'"<sup>32</sup> However,

it is not clear that the claim of "mental illness," whatever one means by that term, does any more to explain the Book of Mormon than does automatic writing.<sup>33</sup> And, whatever Rigdon's mental problems, the 1880 account nowhere describes him as an author at all, but merely as a conduit of *others'* work to Joseph Smith. Broadhurst and Criddle's team will have to seek elsewhere for historically credible evidence making Rigdon a Book of Mormon author. And without a historically plausible reason to posit Rigdon as author, a stylistic analysis of his known works with the Book of Mormon is pointless. Stylometry cannot hope to detect Rigdon's role as a courier for anonymous automatic writers.

## The Book of Mormon: A Dictated Text

Criddle and associates view Joseph Smith's use of a seer stone with a skeptical eye (p. 487),<sup>34</sup>

*Scientific Study of Religion* 38/2 (1999): 288.

31. "A New Theory," *Deseret News*, 22 September 1880.

32. <http://www.sidneyrigdon.com/dbroadhu/NW/miscnw04.htm> (accessed 1 August 2011). Sociologist Rodney Stark, well known for his research on Mormonism and other new religious movements, observes, "There have been precious few examples for which there is any persuasive evidence that the founder of a new religious movement had any symptoms of mental problems," and "few of the apparently sane recipients of revelations were frauds. Too many made personal sacrifices utterly incompatible with such an assessment." Rodney Stark, "A Theory of Revelations," *Journal for the*

33. See Scott C. Dunn, "Spirit Writing: Another Look at the Book of Mormon," *Sunstone*, June 1985, 17-26; reprinted as "Automaticity and the Dictation of the Book of Mormon," in Dan Vogel and Brent Lee Metcalfe, eds., *American Apocrypha: Essays on the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), 17-46; Robert A. Rees, "The Book of Mormon and Automatic Writing," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 15/1 (2006): 4-17, 68-70; and Richard N. Williams, "The Book of Mormon as Automatic Writing: Beware the *Virtus Dormitiva*," *FARMS Review* 19/1 (2007): 23-29. "Traditional skeptics," notes Richard Williams, "often ask believers to give up a belief in a miracle in the face of a simpler and more reliable explanation." But the automatic writing theory is an explanation that explains nothing. It essentially asks that one reject Joseph Smith's story "in favor of an explanation that is less empirical, more occult, and more arcane than the belief itself." Williams, "Book of Mormon as Automatic Writing," 29.

34. Their claim that Joseph Smith "was prosecuted successfully in a court of law" for the practice of using a seer stone in searching for buried treasure is inaccurate. The actual charge appears to have been for being a "disorderly person," a misdemeanor of which Joseph Smith was acquitted (Gordon A. Madsen, "Joseph Smith's 1826 Trial: The Legal Setting," *BYU Studies* 30/2 [Spring 1990]: 91-108). The central issue is not whether or not Joseph Smith used seer stones, but whether he admitted to deliberate deception. The best historical evidence does not support that view, and many of Joseph Smith's closest associates were convinced that he had the gift of seership.

but they do not confront the difficulties that historical evidence for a dictated Book of Mormon manuscript poses to the Spalding-Rigdon theory. The Spalding-Rigdon theory suggests that Rigdon stole and then plagiarized a Spalding manuscript—not the known and clearly unrelated “Manuscript Story,” but a second, hypothetical manuscript that supplied the historical content of the Book of Mormon. This theory further suggests that Rigdon combined Spalding’s second manuscript of historical material with additional “religious” or theological content to create a third, more lengthy manuscript that constituted the text of the Book of Mormon. Under this theory, Rigdon went to a lot of trouble and effort to fabricate a lengthy document that he was then somehow able to convey to Joseph Smith from Ohio to New York. The original text of the Book of Mormon, however, was not written in the hand of Sidney Rigdon. It was, according to the testimony of those who observed the process, dictated by Joseph Smith to several scribes. Those who observed Joseph Smith during these activities reported that

- when dictating the text of the Book of Mormon, he would place the seer stone or Nephite interpreters in a hat;
- he would look into the hat, covering his face to obscure the surrounding light of the room;
- he would dictate for hours at a time within plain sight of others in the house;
- when dictating the text while looking in the hat, he did not use books, manuscripts, or notes of any kind;
- he would often spell out difficult names that the scribe could not spell; and

- when he began a new session of dictation, he would begin where he had previously stopped without a prompting or reminder.<sup>35</sup>

If we are to argue, as Criddle and associates do, that Joseph Smith had somehow obtained a copy of Rigdon’s manuscript, we must also acknowledge that he did not, according to first-hand historical testimony, make use of it during the dictation. This is a matter that is difficult to reconcile with the Spalding-Rigdon theory. If a hypothetical Spalding-Rigdon manuscript were the source of the Book of Mormon, Joseph would have been required to memorize that lengthy and complex document before dictating the text to his scribes. So the problem is not simply one of getting Rigdon’s (hypothetical) manuscript to Joseph Smith (with or without the hypothetical automatic writers), even if he could have done so. Instead, this theory requires the relatively uneducated Joseph Smith to become familiar enough with Rigdon’s manuscript that he could dictate for hours on end without notes or prompting of any kind, with sufficient command of its details that he could dictate the spelling of unfamiliar names.

This fatal difficulty has led some critics to dismiss the primary historical testimony regarding the dictation altogether rather than abandon their theory. Textual evidence from the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon is consistent, however, with the witness testimony concerning the dictation. “By any measure,” writes historian Richard Bushman, “transcription was a miraculous process, calling for a huge leap of faith to believe, yet, paradoxically, it is more in harmony

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35. Royal Skousen, “Translating the Book of Mormon: Evidence from the Original Manuscript,” in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997), 61–93; and Royal Skousen, ed., *The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Extant Text* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2001).


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with the young Joseph of the historical record” than are other explanations.<sup>36</sup>

## Conclusion

In sum, an authorship attribution study requires the consistent, coherent, and congruent conjunction of historical, biographical, and stylometric evidence to support the conjecture of a writer as the author of a text with disputed authorship. Such a combination of mutually supporting evidence has not been set forth by Criddle and associates. Even before statistical evidence can be considered, the historical context must make plausible the claim to be tested.

The stylometric analysis by Jockers, Witten, and Criddle is not the “knockout punch” that some Spalding-Rigdon theorists thought it might be. Its incomplete treatment of the historical material, which plays a big role in how they

later justified their mistaken use of a closed-set method, ignores a plethora of evidence that disagrees with the Spalding-Rigdon theory. Its literature review was so overtly dismissive of work associated with Mormon researchers that the authors missed the chance to benefit from previous findings, both when designing their study and interpreting their results. From a historical perspective, the Spalding-Rigdon theory is nothing but conjecture supported by imagination and special pleading since it requires the invocation of hypothetical manuscripts for which there is no evidence and events that are not only unattested in the historical record but also contradicted by it. Sidney Rigdon did not write the Book of Mormon. Joseph Smith’s description of the book’s origin remains the only explanation not contradicted by valid, reliable evidence, both historical and stylometric. 

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36. Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 72. For a discussion and useful collection of relevant documents relating to the translation of the Book of Mormon, see John W. Welch, “The Miraculous Translation of the Book of Mormon,” in *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820–1844*, ed. John W. Welch and Erick B. Carlson (Provo, UT: BYU Press, 2005), 77–213.



# Raising Kane

Review of Matthew J. Grow. *"Liberty to the Downtrodden": Thomas L. Kane, Romantic Reformer*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009. xx + 348 pp., with index. \$40.00.

RICHARD E. BENNETT

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Every so often a book appears that promises to stand the test of time as a classic in Mormon history. This is one of those books. His 2006 dissertation at the University of Notre Dame made into a handsome monograph, Matthew Grow's *"Liberty to the Downtrodden": Thomas L. Kane, Romantic Reformer*, published by Yale University Press, is yet further evidence that the effort to purchase, preserve, and disseminate primary manuscript material—in this case the recovery of the Thomas and Elizabeth Kane Papers by Brigham Young University's Harold B. Lee Library—is worth every penny. The world of scholarship owes David Whittaker, curator of the library's L. Tom Perry Special Collections, a debt of gratitude for having acquired the splendid Kane Collection. Without such collections, books such as this one would be impossible.

Thomas Leiper Kane (1822–1883), arguably “the most important non-Mormon in Mormon history” (p. xx), has long been revered as the great “friend

of the Mormons” during some of their most challenging times in the nineteenth century. These included the daunting trials of the Mormon exodus west from Nauvoo, Illinois, to the Rocky Mountains in 1846–47; the dangerous hardships brought on by the Utah War of 1857; and the later, bitter acrimony that developed between a faith doggedly bent on practicing plural marriage and those determined to bring it down. Without Kane acting as trusted mediator, conciliator, and peacemaker, these chapters in Mormon history may well have been marred with greater misunderstanding, prejudice, and bloodshed.

*"Liberty to the Downtrodden"* is a very extensive, highly interpretive, and richly documented cultural biography that paints Kane within the tenor of his time—a crusading Man of La Mancha, a romantic reformer determined to change a myriad of perceived social injustices, such as capital punishment, discrimination against women, and prejudice against religious minorities. The



book may be conveniently divided into two principal parts: (1) Kane's role as defender of the downtrodden generally and his unusual sensitivity to social injustices wherever he found them, and (2) his unique role in defending and explaining one of America's most despised and misunderstood religions—Mormonism. The book is at its best when dealing with the latter subject, but Kane's interests in confronting what he saw as social ills and injustices give balance, perspective, and consistency to a most colorful life.

The book begins with Thomas L. Kane's birth and childhood into a *nouveau riche* Philadelphia home. His father, John Kintzing Kane, became attorney general and U.S. district judge in Philadelphia, and his much more famous brother, Eliza Kane, eventually garnered national fame for his Arctic explorations in search of the vanished British explorer Sir John Franklin. When twenty-two years of age, Thomas Kane was admitted to the Pennsylvania bar, but by disposition he was more a wanderer and a crusader than a lawyer. Born into a very religious home and later married to a British-born and deeply Christian woman, Kane was ever ambivalent in his own faith. In part this seems to have resulted from his early exposure to the positivism of Auguste Comte, who saw Christianity, and especially evangelical Protestant Christianity, as "surrogate religion," a poor substitute for altruism. Kane "disdained everything he perceived as religious fanaticism" (p. 33), and he was in and out of churches his entire life. He was offended by evangelical interpretations. He felt too that many Christian faiths "exalted form over substance and materialism over reforming society's ills" (p. 34).

Grow shows a consistency in Kane's lifelong crusading spirit, whether pursuing equal rights for women, supporting the abolition of capital

punishment, or eradicating slavery, a consistency that nevertheless changed party lines over time. For years Kane was a member of the reform wing of the Northern Democratic Party, whose "alternative vision" (p. 30) for reform was opposed to that of the better-known evangelical Whig crusaders of the time. With the Compromise of 1850 and the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, Kane eventually became an abolishment Republican and a supporter of Abraham Lincoln, but he never turned his back on the South and its culture of honor. Grow shows how Kane broke with his father on the enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law passed in 1850 (his father even sentenced him to jail on one occasion).

Chapters 11 and 12 offer a study of Kane's little-known service in the Civil War and his postwar reform activities in Pennsylvania up until his death in 1883. Though nationally known as a peacemaker and a supporter of the South, Kane was the first Pennsylvanian to enlist for military service. Participating in various theaters of action, including Gettysburg, Kane suffered three battle wounds, which, combined with his ever-delicate health and sickly disposition, plagued him for the rest of his life. These two chapters, while a welcome addition to our understanding of Kane, are also the weakest in the book; they seem almost hurried and appear somewhat incomplete. There is too little explanation of why Kane, though given the honorific titles of lieutenant colonel and, later, brigadier general, was not voted to lead his regiments. Likewise there is an undeveloped hint of his excessive drinking habits (his brother Pat was an alcoholic), which may explain his postwar interest in temperance. Similarly, I would like more about Kane's business and railroad-building interests after the war.

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The strength of Grow's book, and surely the primary reason why BYU purchased the Kane Papers, is its contribution to Mormon history, a contribution here devotedly and critically analyzed in three segments: (1) Kane's first meeting with the Mormons in 1846, his involvement with the call-up of the Mormon Battalion (chap. 4), and the subsequent publication of his 1850 discourse on the suffering Latter-day Saints at Nauvoo and at Winter Quarters, near present-day Omaha, Nebraska (chap. 5); (2) his vitally important participation in negotiating a peaceful conclusion to the Utah War of 1857 (chaps. 9 and 10); and (3) his efforts to defend and explain the beliefs and motives of the Mormons during the acerbic anti-polygamy "raid" campaign of the 1870s and 1880s (chap. 13).

Historians have long known of Kane's positive dual role in persuading President James K. Polk, on the one hand, to invite a Mormon battalion to serve in the Mexican-American War in June 1846, while on the other hand convincing the Mormon rank and file to accept the offer. Grow is right in arguing that rather than being an imposition on the Mormons, as the myth has long asserted, the invitation came in answer to their own clandestine efforts in Washington to secure government assistance in practically any form. Less well known, and amply covered here, is Kane's original desire to promote his own political ambitions in California and to keep the Mormons from aligning themselves with Great Britain (p. 52). Grow argues that Kane became convinced of their essential goodness and sincerity—"men more open to reason & truth plainly stated I have never seen" (p. 64)—especially after they had nursed him back to health after a terrible sickness. Their sufferings steeled his roving idealities and soaring sentiments into a deep admiration for

an entire people and a settled resolve to be their friend and assist them whenever possible. He found his life's mission among the Mormons at the Missouri in 1846 and returned to Philadelphia "a changed man" (p. 71). If a sign of fine history is to show character development and transformation, "*Liberty to the Downtrodden*" excels in following the changes in Kane's outlook, perspective, and priorities. Once back home, Kane, ever the publicist, tried hard and with considerable success to transform the negative Mormon image in the East with his famous 1850 lecture describing the suffering of the Saints at Winter Quarters and Nauvoo, which was published in pamphlet form.

Shedding even more light on Mormon history are chapters 8 and 9 on the "Utah Expedition," or Utah War of 1857. These chapters are, in many ways, the heart of the book. Convinced that President Buchanan's ill-begotten expedition to put down the supposed Mormon rebellion would culminate in unnecessary bloodshed, a restless Kane once again headed west. At his own expense and with only informal support from the president, Kane traveled by sea to Latin America, across the jungles of Panama long before there was a canal, again by ship to Los Angeles, and finally overland east on horseback to Salt Lake City. Arriving in the nick of time, he brokered a peace between General Sidney Johnston's Union Army and the Mormons, some thirty thousand of whom were then evacuating their Salt Lake City homes and preparing for guerrilla warfare. Trusted by both sides, this "Napoleon of Peace" averted a catastrophe. Grow successfully explores how Kane ingeniously played one party against the other, apologizing without clear authority on behalf of the president for conducting a campaign miserably misinformed, while portraying Brigham Young as a struggling peacemaker among Mormon zealots

(pp. 164–70). Kane’s crucial intervention resulted in the army’s abandoning a military assault, a government “pardon” of Mormon aims and defensive maneuvers in exchange for accepting Alfred Cumming as the new territorial governor in place of Brigham Young, and the creation of a permanent U.S. military camp in the Salt Lake Valley.

The third and final episode of Kane’s support of the Mormons came during the nation’s strident attacks on polygamy, or so-called raid period of the 1870s and 1880s, a defense made all the more remarkable considering his staunch opposition to plural marriage. Indeed, Kane had long viewed even monogamous marriage as a barrier to women’s equality. Yet Kane and Brigham Young’s friendship and mutual respect, although tested by the 1852 announcement sanctioning plural marriage, could not be broken. In dispelling the long-standing myth that Kane converted to Mormonism, Grow does show that Kane and his wife received Mormon patriarchal blessings and that Kane may have been baptized for the recovery of his health when once again taken sick and nursed back to health by the Mormon people.

In his final chapter, “Anti-Anti-Polygamy,” Grow discusses the fascinating 1872 tour by Thomas and Elizabeth Kane of Mormon settlements in Utah and the publication of Elizabeth’s book, *Twelve Mormon Homes*, with its candid, close-up view of Mormon polygamy that, while not complimentary, shows a certain sympathy and understanding of a people she also came to respect. This last chapter also discusses, but does not sufficiently develop, Kane’s involvement in redrawing Brigham Young’s personal will aimed at extricating his private properties from those of the church, his influence on Brigham Young with respect to eventually establishing Mormon colo-

nies in Mexico, and the development of church-sponsored schools of higher education in Utah.


Are there flaws in this biography? Perhaps. While there is much on Kane’s father, there is too little on the influence of his mother, Jane Leiper Kane. Grow’s Civil War chapter does not develop Kane’s military tactics well enough, and there is more on the culture of honor than on battle strategies. Grow’s treatment of Kane’s learning about plural marriage well after 1852 is hard to believe considering Kane’s sojourn with the Mormons at Winter Quarters in 1846 and 1847, when the practice was then coming out in the open. He was a keen observer of everyone and everything around him, and it taxes the imagination that he did not know of this peculiarity earlier. Grow’s research into published secondary sources on Mormon history, while adequate, may not compare with his expertise in primary research. One cannot resist the impression that the work trails off at the end, with insufficient consideration of Kane’s influence on Brigham Young in his declining years. And, inexplicably, why would so good a book lack a bibliography? If this is a trend among modern publishers, it does no one a favor.

Such deficiencies notwithstanding, this is a wonderful piece of scholarship, well written, handsomely crafted, and abundantly documented. The attention given to Kane’s wife, Elizabeth, and her changing attitudes amid unchanging convictions is a real strength to the work. The influence Elisha Kane had on his younger brother makes for fascinating reading and a ready piece for psychological discussion. Kane’s efforts at promoting a positive image of the Mormons from 1848 to 1852, before the public announcement encouraging plural marriage, sheds much new light and convincingly demonstrates that much of America was beginning to understand and appreciate this

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peculiar people. Perhaps best of all is Grow's careful study of how Kane brokered the peace between a frustrated U.S. Army and an overly defensive people preparing for war. *"Liberty to the Downtrodden"* will stand as an excellent example of how archival research can so fully inform modern historical writing and how a detailed

and comprehensive dissertation can still be made into a very readable biography. 

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# Out of Obscurity: The Story of Nibley's "Beyond Politics"

LOUIS MIDGLEY AND SHIRLEY S. RICKS

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One of the major accomplishments of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship and its predecessors has been the assembling and careful editing of the vast collection of Hugh Nibley's books, essays, and addresses and then making them available in the Collected Works of Hugh Nibley series, which recently reached its climax with volume 19, *One Eternal Round*. However, an address entitled "Beyond Politics," which was one of his more popular addresses, is missing from the Collected Works. This paper was read to students and faculty in Brigham Young University's Political Science Department on 26 October 1973. In 1974 it appeared in *BYU Studies*.<sup>1</sup> But Hugh objected to

its inclusion in the section on politics in a miscellaneous collection of essays entitled *Brother Brigham Challenges the Saints*.<sup>2</sup>

Why would Hugh write a note to Shirley Ricks, then readying that volume of the Collected Works, strongly objecting to the reprinting of this popular article therein? We have a theory that might explain this fact. After presenting this speech, Nibley handed his copy to Louis Midgley, who intended to see it published in *BYU Studies*. Hugh's wife, Phyllis, also provided what she believed was a slightly more robust version of "Beyond Politics." She suggested that the two versions be melded together and a clean copy be given to her husband. This was done. But when the essay appeared in print, Hugh was troubled

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1. Hugh Nibley, "Beyond Politics," *BYU Studies* 15/1 (1974): 3-28. This essay was subsequently reprinted, with a new introductory paragraph written by Nibley, in *Nibley on the Timely and the Timeless: Classic Essays of Hugh W. Nibley*, foreword by Truman G. Madsen (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1978), 279-305. It is this version, with only slight corrections, that we have reprinted here.

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We have included in italics the brief introduction to this essay that Nibley provided for *Nibley on the Timely and the Timeless*.

2. *Brother Brigham Challenges the Saints*, ed. Don E. Norton and Shirley S. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1994). Part 2, "Politics," is found on pages 105-297.



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because he thought that some editor had made him appear foolish. He had spotted a tiny mistake in a classical allusion, which much annoyed him. He blamed the mistake on those responsible for *BYU Studies*. But, it turned out, the tiny mistake was in the original manuscript. We believe that this amusing incident may have lodged in Hugh’s memory and twenty years later could have been the grounds for his unwillingness to have “Beyond Politics” reprinted. Be that as it may, on the manuscript version of “Beyond Politics” that Shirley Ricks provided him, Hugh wrote the following: “This dull article should not

be reprinted!” Signed “H. N.”<sup>3</sup> And so it was to be, until now. 

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3. Editors had hoped that the speech could be published in a later volume of the *Collected Works*, but the right fit never came along.

# Beyond Politics

HUGH NIBLEY

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*In most languages the Church is designated as that of the last days, and so this speech, which is only a pastiche of quotations from its founders, is unblushingly apocalyptic. Did our grandparents overreact to signs of the times? For many years a stock cartoon in sophisticated magazines has poked fun at the barefoot, bearded character in the long nightshirt carrying a placard calling all to “Repent, for the End Is at Hand.” But where is the joke? Ask the smart people who thought up the funny pictures and captions: Where are they now?*

*For all of us as individuals, the fashion of this world passeth away; but the Big Bang is something else. How near is that? Should we be concerned at all? The problem may be stated in the form of a little dialogue:*

*We: Dear Father, whenever the end is scheduled to be, can’t you give us an extension of time?*

*He: Willingly. But tell me first, what will you do with it?*

*We: Well . . . ah . . . we will go on doing pretty much what we have been doing; after all, isn’t that why we are asking for an extension?*

*He: And isn’t that exactly why I want to end it soon—because you show no inclination to change? Why should I reverse the order of nature so that you can go on doing the very things I want to put an end to?*

*We: But is what we are doing so terribly wrong? The economy seems sound enough. Why shouldn’t we go on doing the things which have made this country great?*

*He: Haven’t I made it clear enough to you what kind of greatness I expect of my offspring? Forget the*

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*on the Timely and the Timeless* (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1978) and in the second edition of that volume in 2004. It is reprinted here with minor technical editing.

*statistics; you are capable of better things—your stirring commercials don't impress me in the least.*

*We: But why should we repent when all we are doing is what each considers to be for the best good of himself and the nation?*

*He: Because it is not you but I who decide what that shall be, and I have told you a hundred times what is best for you individually and collectively—and that is repentance, no matter who you are.*

*We: We find your inference objectionable, Sir, quite unacceptable.*

*He: I know.<sup>1</sup>*

My story goes back to the beginning, and to some very basic propositions. This world was organized in the light of infinite knowledge and experience and after due thought and discussion to offer multiple facilities to an endless variety of creatures and especially to be the home and dominion of a godlike race who would take good care of it and have joy therein. Being a highly favored breed, much was expected of them, and their qualifications for advancement were to be put to the test by allowing an adversary, a common enemy to God and man, to tempt them and try them. It was decided before even the world was that if man should yield to this temptation and thus lower his defenses and make himself vulnerable to repeated attacks of the adversary, steps would immediately be taken to put into operation a prearranged plan to restore him to his former status.<sup>2</sup>

1. [This first part did not appear in the *BYU Studies* version but was likely Nibley's introduction to the address. —Eds.]

2. When man yielded to the temptations of the adversary, certain drastic corrections had to be made; the original plan and design for the use of the earth would not be scrapped at any rate, since it is not only the best but the only plan that will work here. No, the original plan was to be preserved as a beacon, and the minute fallen man realized his fallen state, every inducement would be given him to turn his back on that condition and make his way back to the presence of God and to the only kind of life that is endurable

What God tells us in effect is “Now that you have fallen and forfeited your paradise by deliberately, knowingly disobeying me, I will give you another chance, a chance to get back to that paradise by deliberately and knowingly obeying me. To get back where you were and beyond, you must repent—forever give up doing it your way and decide to live by the law of God, or by the law of obedience, which means doing it my way.” Adam agreed to do it God's way, though Satan lost no time in trying to sell him on another plan. Adam's own children and their posterity, however, chose to achieve salvation *their* way, not God's way, and ever since then there has been trouble. The Lord Jesus Christ told the young Joseph Smith in the first vision that men were no longer doing things his way, that as a result that way was no longer upon the earth, but it was about to be brought again: “I was answered that I must join *none* of them, for they were all wrong; . . . that *all* their creeds were an abomination in his sight; that those professors were *all* corrupt” (Joseph Smith—History 1:19, emphasis added). The Lord's actual words were (according to the 1832 version in the handwriting of Frederick G. Williams) “Behold the world lieth in sin at this time and *none* doeth good *no not one* . . . and mine anger is kindling against the inhabitants of the earth to visit them according to this ungodliness.”<sup>3</sup> The message of the restored gospel is that one phase of the earth's existence is coming to a close, and another phase, a phase in which God's will will be done on earth as it is in heaven, is about to become the order of life on earth.

throughout eternity.

3. The 1832 recital of the first vision as dictated by Joseph Smith to Frederick G. Williams. See Milton V. Backman Jr., *Joseph Smith's First Vision* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1971), 157, emphasis added; compare Dean C. Jessee, “The Early Accounts of Joseph Smith's First Vision,” *BYU Studies* 9/3 (1969): 280.

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Politics, as practiced on earth, belongs to the ways of men; it is the essential activity of the city—the city of man, not the city of God. As used by the Greek writers, the *polis* is “the community or body of citizens”—that is, a body of citizens not taking orders from anyone else. *Politeia* is “a well-ordered government, a commonwealth.” Politics, *ta politika*, is concern for the social order, things done civilly or courteously, “the weal of the state.” In practice the emphasis has been on civility. Thus in modern Greek, civilization is *polittismos*, a civilized person is *polittismenos*, etc. Even at a superficial view, if it is not God’s way, it is still not all bad, and we can understand why God approves of men engaging in politics and even encourages the Saints, at times, to participate.

The problem of conflicting obligations to the city of man and the city of God is basic to every dispensation of the gospel. We have Abraham in Egypt, Joseph in Egypt, Moses in Egypt, not as enslaved subjects but as top government officials, high in the favor of Pharaoh, serving him faithfully for years until the inevitable showdown. The classic treatment of the theme is found in the book of Daniel. Daniel’s three friends were not only in high favor with the king—he made them his special advisers, his right-hand men (Daniel 1:19–20)—for years they served him devotedly and they owed all they had to him. Daniel was made, next to the king himself, the highest official in the state, and he showed all respect and reverence to Darius. But then in each case came the showdown: jealous and ambitious men contrived special laws forcing the king’s hand and forcing the king’s favorites to take a public stand between serving God and serving the king. In each case it was nothing more than a public gesture of loyalty, which anyone might make without hypocrisy. The three young men who bowed

to the king each day were asked to bow to his image when the band played in the Plain of Dura at a great public testimonial of loyalty. Why not? Didn’t they owe all to the king? It was only a symbol! Yet here they drew the line—they would be thrown into a fiery furnace rather than make this one simple concession. Daniel insisted on continuing with his private prayers after a bit of trick legislation, a mere technicality, had made them illegal for one month. The king pleaded with him, but to no avail; Daniel chose the lion’s den. In all this there is not a trace of jaunty defiance or moral superiority on either side: the king is worried sick—he refuses to eat or listen to music, he can’t sleep, and before daybreak there he is outside the lion’s den, biting his nails and asking Daniel if he is all right, and Daniel respectfully wishes him good morning: “O king, live for ever” (Daniel 6:21). Nebuchadnezzar personally appeals to the three young men to change their minds, but they cannot change their position, and he cannot change his. The moral is clear: The children of God can work well with the men of the world, and bestow great blessings by their services, but there comes a time when one must draw the line and make a choice between the two governments. Such a choice was forced on the Mormons very early, and a very hard choice it was, but they did not flinch before it. “We will go along with you as far as we can; but where we can’t we won’t,” and no hard feelings.

The question arises, If we decide to do things God’s way, will not all discussion cease? How could there be a discussion with God? Who would disagree with him? If we go back to our basic creation story, we are neither surprised nor shocked to hear that there was free discussion in heaven in the presence of God at the time of the creation, when some suggested one plan and some another.

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“In the beginning was the *Logos* [counsel, discussion], and the *Logos* was in the presence of God, and all things were done according to it” (John 1:1, author’s translation). Satan was not cast out for disagreeing, but for attempting to resort to violence when he found himself outvoted. If we cannot clearly conceive of the type of discussion that goes on in the courts on high, we have some instructive instances of God’s condescending to discuss things with men here on earth. “Come *now*, and let us reason together” (Isaiah 1:18, emphasis added), he invites the children of Israel. Accordingly, Abraham and Ezra both dared, humbly and apologetically, but still stubbornly, to protest what they considered, in the light of their limited understanding, unkind treatment of some of God’s children. They just could not see why the Lord did or allowed certain things. So he patiently explained the situation to them, and then they understood. Enoch just couldn’t see the justification for the mass destruction of his fellows by the coming flood; he too was stubborn about it: “And as Enoch saw this, he had bitterness of soul, and wept over his brethren, and said unto the heavens: *I will refuse to be comforted*; but the Lord said unto Enoch: Lift up your heart, and be glad; and look” (Moses 7:44).

God did not hold it against these men that they questioned him, but loved them for it: it was because they were the friends of men, even at what they thought was the terrible risk of offending him, that they became friends of God. The Lord was not above discussing matters with the brother of Jared, who protested that there was a serious defect in the vessels constructed according to the prescribed design: “Behold there is no light in them. . . . Wilt thou suffer that we shall cross this great water in darkness?” (Ether 2:22). Instead of blasting the man on the spot for his

impudence, the Lord very reasonably asked the brother of Jared: “What will ye that I should do that ye may have light in your vessels?” (Ether 2:23). So they talked it over and, as a result, the brother of Jared prepared some beautiful fused quartz that was as clear as glass but could not shine by itself. Again he went to the Lord, almost obliterated with humility, but still reminding the Lord that he was only following orders: “We know that thou art holy and dwellest in the heavens, and that we are unworthy before thee; because of the fall our natures have become evil continually [a vivid reminder of the gulf between the two ways—that our ways are not God’s ways]; nevertheless, O Lord, thou hast given us a commandment that we must call upon thee, that from thee we may receive according to our desires” (Ether 3:2). So he screws up his courage and asks the Lord to do him a favor: “Touch these stones, O Lord, with thy finger, . . . that they may shine forth in darkness” (Ether 3:4). The sight of God’s finger quite overpowered the brother of Jared, knocked him flat, and that led to another discussion in which the Lord explained certain things to him at length. Moroni, recording these things, also recalls, “I have seen Jesus, and . . . he hath talked with me face to face, and . . . he told me in plain humility, even as a man telleth another in mine own language, concerning these things” (Ether 12:39).

Note the significant concept of humility set forth here—humility is not a feeling of awe and reverence and personal unworthiness in the presence of overpowering majesty. Anyone, even the bloody Khan of the Steppes, confesses to being humble in the presence of God. Plain humility is reverence and respect in the presence of the lowest, not the highest, of God’s creatures. Brigham Young said he often felt overawed in the presence

of little children or any of his fellowmen—for in them he saw the image of his maker. Even so, God is willing to discuss things with men as an equal “in their weakness, after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding” (D&C 1:24). Note that God, far from demanding blind obedience, wants us to *understand* his commandments.

A discussion with God is not a case of agreeing or disagreeing with him—who is in a position to do that?—but of understanding him. What Abraham and Ezra and Enoch asked was “Why?” Socrates showed that teaching is a dialogue, a discussion. As long as the learner is in the dark, he *should* protest and argue and question, for that is the best way to bring problems into focus, while the teacher patiently and cheerfully explains, delighted that his pupil has enough interest and understanding to raise questions—the more passionate, the more promising. There is a place for discussion and participation in the government of the kingdom; it is *men* who love absolute monarchies; it was the Israelites, the Jaredites, the Nephites who asked God to give them a king, overriding the objections of his prophets who warned them against the step. Leaders of the Church have repeatedly taught that earthly rulers exercise their authority illegitimately; that the only legitimate authority upon the earth is that which is founded and recognized by God, whose *right* it is to rule.<sup>4</sup>

As John Taylor points out, it is the priesthood that should rule: “Some people ask, ‘What is Priesthood?’ I answer, ‘It is the legitimate rule of God, whether in the heavens or on the earth’; and it is the only legitimate power that has a right to rule upon the earth; and when the will of God

is done on earth as it is in the heavens, no other power will bear rule.”<sup>5</sup>

Politics, at best, is the free discussion of people running their own common affairs. Until men are willing to accept God’s way, he is willing that they should do their best on that lower level and even encourages them in such activity. “All regularly organized and well established governments,” said Joseph Smith, “have certain laws . . . [that] are good, equitable and just, [and] ought to be binding upon the individual who admits this.”<sup>6</sup> At the same time, “It is not our intention . . . to place the law of man on a parallel with the law of *heaven*; because we do *not* consider that it is formed in the same wisdom and propriety; . . . it is [not] sufficient in itself to bestow anything on man in *comparison* with the law of heaven, even should it promise it.”<sup>7</sup> In an important statement in 1903, the First Presidency of the Church said that the Church

does not attempt to exercise the powers of a secular government, but its influence and effects are to strengthen and promote fidelity to the law and loyalty to the nation where its followers reside. . . . It is solely an ecclesiastical organization. It is separate and distinct from the state. It does not interfere with any earthly government. . . . The Church, therefore, instructs in things temporal as well as things spiritual. . . . But it does not infringe upon the liberty of the individual or encroach upon the domain of the state. . . . The Church does not dictate a member’s business, his politics or his personal affairs. It never tells a citizen what occupation he

4. See John Taylor and Orson Pratt, in *Journal of Discourses*, 1:221–33; 8:101–6, respectively.

5. *Journal of Discourses*, 5:187.

6. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 49.

7. Smith, *Teachings*, 50 (emphasis added).



shall follow, whom he shall vote for or with which party he shall affiliate. . . .

Sermons, dissertations and arguments by preachers and writers in the Church concerning the Kingdom of God that *is to be*, are *not* to be understood as relating to the *present*. If they . . . convey the idea that the dominion *to come* is to be exercised *now*, the claim is incorrect.

Meantime:

Every member of the organization in every place is absolutely free as a citizen. . . . In proclaiming “the kingdom of heaven’s at hand,” we have the most intense and fervent convictions of our mission and calling. . . . But we do not and will not attempt to force them upon others, or to control or dominate any of their affairs, individual or national.<sup>8</sup>

It is precisely because we never for a moment think of the two systems as competing with each other that we can make the most of the one until the other is established. They are in the same game, they are in the same arena, though both have rules and both require qualities of character in their players.

The governments of men and their laws are completely *different* from those of God. “We do not attempt to place the law of man on a parallel with the law of heaven; but . . . the laws of man are binding upon man.”<sup>9</sup>

When God establishes his way among men it is by special divine messengers who come to men well prepared, “of strong faith and a firm mind in every form of godliness” (Moroni 7:30). Every

restoration of the gospel has been accomplished through a series of heavenly visitations and glorious manifestations, with the divine plan fully and explicitly set forth for that dispensation, with all the divine authority and revealed knowledge necessary to establish the kingdom at that time. But since Satan is given explicit permission to tempt men and to try them, it is not long before a familiar trend begins to appear, a weakening of the structure as discussion deteriorates into power politics and political skulduggery:

Christ . . . proposed to make a covenant with them [the Jews], but they rejected Him and His proposals. . . . The Gentiles received the covenant, . . . but the Gentiles have not continued . . . but have departed from the faith . . . and have become high-minded, and have not feared; therefore, but few of them will be gathered.<sup>10</sup>

Man departed from the first teachings, or instructions which he received from heaven in the first age, and refused by his disobedience to be governed by them. Consequently, he formed such laws as best suited his own mind, or as he supposed, were best adapted to his situation. But that God has influenced man more or less . . . in the formation of law . . . we have no hesitancy in believing. . . . And though man in his own supposed wisdom would not admit the influence of a power superior to his own, yet . . . God has instructed man to form wise and wholesome laws, since he had departed from Him and refused to be governed by those laws which God had given by His own voice from on high in the beginning.<sup>11</sup>

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8. Cited in James R. Clark, ed., *Messages of the First Presidency* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1970), 4:79, 82 (emphasis added).

9. Smith, *Teachings*, 51–52, compare p. 50.

10. Smith, *Teachings*, 14–15.

11. Smith, *Teachings*, 57.

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Here we learn that over against the perfect way of life which God proposes for us and entirely removed from that way are all the other ways that men have proposed for themselves. These last are not equally good or bad, but some are much better than others, and God encourages and even assists men in adopting the best ones.

There is, then, virtue in politics even at the human level. The energy, the dedication, courage, loyalty, selflessness, zeal and industry, the intelligence that have gone into the political actions of men are immense, and the excitement, color, dash, and humor bring out some of the best in human nature. But as we have just noted, there are various levels at which the political dialogue takes place—all the way from *The Federalist Papers* to the local crackpot's letters to the editor; and many arenas and different forms of the game, differing as widely as a chess match from a slugging contest. Let us by all means retain the drive and dedication of politics, but do we still need the placards and the bands, the serpentine parades, funny hats, confetti, squabbling committees, canned speeches, shopworn clichés, patriotic exhibitionism, Madison Avenue slogans—to say nothing of bitter invective, the poisonous rhetoric, the dirty tricks and shady deals, payoffs, betrayals, the blighted loyalties, the scheming young men on the make, the Gadianton loyalty, the manipulated ovations and contrived confusion of the last hurrah? The furiously mounting infusion of green stuff into the political carnival in our day is enough to show that the spontaneity is not there, and even if some of it may remain, those running the show know very well from tried and tested statistics that all that sort of thing is to be got with money—lots and lots of money—and with nothing else.

An important part of the message of the restored gospel is that God's way has now been restored to the earth and is available to men; and that there is no excuse for their not embracing it inasmuch as it is entirely within their capacity to receive it and live by it, beginning, of course, with a complete turning away from their own ways:

I think that it is high time for a Christian world to awake out of sleep, and cry mightily to that God, day and night, whose anger we have justly incurred. . . . I step forth into the field [said the Prophet] to tell you what the *Lord* is doing, and *what you must do* . . . in these last days. . . .

. . . I will proceed to tell you what the *Lord* requires of all people, high and low, . . . in order that they may . . . escape the judgments of God, which are almost ready to burst upon the nations of the earth. Repent of all your sins.<sup>12</sup>

Even at its best, man's way is not God's way:

Some may pretend to say that the world in this age is fast increasing in righteousness; that the dark ages of superstition and blindness have passed, . . . the gloomy cloud is burst, and the Gospel is shining . . . [and] carried to divers nations of the earth [etc.]. . . .

But a moment's candid reflection . . . is sufficient for every candid man to draw a conclusion *in his own mind whether this is the order of heaven or not*.<sup>13</sup>

The best of human laws leaves every man free to engage in his own pursuit of happiness,<sup>14</sup> without

12. Smith, *Teachings*, 14, 16 (emphasis added).

13. Smith, *Teachings*, 48-49 (emphasis added).

14. At best man's laws are negative—"Congress shall make no law . . ."

presuming for a moment to tell him where that happiness lies; that is the very thing the laws of God can guarantee. At *best*, the political prize is negative.

Important in the record of the dispensations is that when men depart from God's way and substitute their own ways in its place, they usually do not admit that that is what they are doing. Often they do not deliberately or even consciously substitute their ways for God's ways. On the contrary, they easily and largely convince themselves that *their way is God's way*. "The apostasy described in the New Testament is not *desertion* of the cause, but *perversion* of it, a process by which 'the righteous are removed, and none perceives it.'"<sup>15</sup> The wedding of the Christian church and the Roman state was a venture in political dialectics, a restatement of the age-old political exercise of demonstrating that our way is God's way. "There's such divinity doth hedge a king"—*vox populi, vox Dei*, etc. The Lord told the apostles that in time "whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service" (John 16:2). The horrible fiasco of the Crusades went forward under the mandate of the *Deus Vult*—God wills it: it is his idea; the Inquisition was carried out by selfless men "for the greater glory of God."<sup>16</sup> In every

age we find the worldly powers hypnotized by the image of the world as a *maydan*, a great battleground, on which the forces of good and evil are locked in mortal combat.<sup>17</sup> True, there is a contest, but it is within the individual, not between ignorant armies—that solution is all too easy.

Recall the statement of Joseph Smith that "every candid man . . . [must] draw a conclusion in his own mind whether this [any political system] is the order of heaven or not."<sup>18</sup> Banners, trumpets, and dungeons were early devised to help men make up their minds. But God does not fight Satan: a word from him and Satan is silenced and banished. There is no contest there; in fact, we are expressly told that all the power which Satan enjoys here on earth is granted him by God. "We will allow Satan, our common enemy, to try man and to tempt him." It is man's strength that is being tested—not God's. Nay, even in putting us to the test, "the devil," to quote Joseph Smith, "has no power over us only as *we* permit him."<sup>19</sup> Since, then, "God *would* not exert any compulsory means, and the devil *could* not,"<sup>20</sup> it is up to us to decide how much power Satan shall have on this earth, but only in respect to ourselves; the fight is all *within us*. That is the whole battle. But how much easier to shift the battle to another arena and externalize the cause of all our misfortune.

It is easy enough to see how a world willingly beguiled by the devil's dialectic is bound to reject God's way and continue with its own. Even the Saints are guilty: "Repent, repent, is the voice of

(First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States). "The laws of men," says Joseph Smith, "may guarantee to a people protection in the honorable pursuits of this life, . . . and when this is said, all is said. . . . The law of heaven is presented to man, and as such guarantees to all who obey it a reward far beyond any earthly consideration. . . . The law of heaven . . . transcends the law of man, as far as eternal life the temporal." Smith, *Teachings*, 50.

15. See Hugh W. Nibley, "The Passing of the Primitive Church: Forty Variations on an Unpopular Theme," in *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, ed. Todd M. Compton and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987), 172 (emphasis in original).

"The Christian masses do not realize what is happening to them; they are 'bewitched' by a thing that comes as softly and insidiously as the slinging of a noose" (p. 172).

16. For a more detailed treatment of this theme, see Hugh W. Nibley,

"The Ancient Law of Liberty," in *The World and the Prophets*, ed.

John W. Welch, Gary P. Gillum, and Don E. Norton (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987), 182–90.

17. See Hugh W. Nibley, "The Hierocentric State," in *The Ancient State*, ed. Donald W. Parry and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 99–147.

18. Smith, *Teachings*, 49.

19. Smith, *Teachings*, 181 (emphasis added).

20. Smith, *Teachings*, 187 (emphasis added).

God to Zion; and strange as it may appear, yet it is true, mankind will persist in *self-justification* until all their iniquity is exposed, and their character past being redeemed.”<sup>21</sup> As in every other dispensation, the world will continue to go its way, which is one of *progressive deterioration*:

The great and wise of ancient days have failed in all their attempts to promote eternal power, peace and happiness. . . . They proclaim as with a voice of thunder . . . that man’s strength is weakness, his wisdom is folly, his glory is his shame.

. . . Nation has succeeded nation. . . . History records their puerile plans, their short-lived glory, their feeble intellect and their ignoble deeds.

Have we increased in knowledge or intelligence? . . . Our nation, which possesses greater resources than any other, is rent, from center to circumference, with party strife, political intrigues, and sectional interest; . . . our tradesmen are disheartened, our mechanics out of employ, our farmers distressed, and our poor crying for bread, our banks are broken, our credit ruined. . . .

What is the matter? Are we alone in this thing? Verily no. With all our evils we are better situated than any other nation. . . . England . . . has her hands reeking with the blood of the innocent abroad. . . . The world itself presents one great theater of misery, woe, and “distress of nations with perplexity.” *All, all, speak with a voice of thunder, that man is not able to govern himself, to legislate for himself, to protect himself, to promote his own good, nor the good of the world.* [After all is said, there is nothing for

it but to accept God’s way—nothing else will work.]

*It has been the design of Jehovah, from the commencement of the world, and is His purpose now, to regulate the affairs of the world in His own time, to stand as a head of the universe, and take the reins of government in His own hand. When that is done . . . “nations will learn war no more.”*<sup>22</sup>

Here the Prophet lays it on the line:

The world has had a fair trial for six thousand years; the Lord will try the seventh thousand Himself. . . . To bring about this state of things, there must of necessity be great confusion among the nations of the earth. . . .

. . . God is coming out of His hiding place . . . to vex the nations of the earth. . . . It is for us to be righteous, that we may be wise and understand; for none of the wicked shall understand. . . .

As a Church and a people it behooves us to be wise, and to seek to know the will of God, and then be willing to do it. . . . *Our only confidence can be in God.* . . .

. . . We have treated lightly His commands, and departed from His ordinances, and the Lord has chastened us sore. . . .

In regard to the building up of Zion, *it has to be done by the counsel of Jehovah, by the revelations of heaven.*<sup>23</sup>

From these sayings of the Prophet, one would hardly expect the world to have improved since his day, and the words of Brigham Young are eloquent in describing the steady deterioration that has continued unabated up to the present

21. Smith, *Teachings*, 18–19 (emphasis added).

22. Smith, *Teachings*, 249–51 (emphasis added).

23. Smith, *Teachings*, 252–54 (emphasis added).

moment. No wonder “thinking men, inquiring minds, ask whether it is really necessary for the Government of God to be on the earth at the present day; I answer, most assuredly; there never was a time when it was more needed than it is now. Why? Because *men do not know how to govern themselves without it.*”<sup>24</sup> “I acknowledged to him [Colonel Thomas Kane] that we have the best system of government in existence, but queried if the people of this nation were righteous enough to *sustain its institutions. I say they are not, but will trample them under their feet.*”<sup>25</sup>

But is not Satan a politician with his love of confusion and controversy? Isn’t the adversary an arch-politician? “There shall be no disputations among you,” said the Lord to the Nephites, “for . . . he that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil, who is the father of contention, and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another” (3 Nephi 11:28–29). Let us make one thing clear: contention is not discussion, but the opposite; contention puts an end to all discussion, as does war. *Cedant leges inter arma*, said the Romans—when war takes over, politics are in abeyance. The most famous dictum of Clausewitz is that war is simply a continuation of the political dialogue in another arena, but—as he points out at great length and with great clarity—it is an arena in which the appeal is all to brute force and in which any talk of laws or rules or principles cannot be anything but a strategic ruse.<sup>26</sup> In reality a declaration of war is an announcement that the discussion is over. War is beyond politics, and God has said: “I . . . will that all men shall know

that the day speedily cometh; the hour is not yet, but is nigh at hand, when peace shall be taken from the earth, and the devil shall have power over his own dominion” (D&C 1:35). That is the end of politics for now.

God discusses things with men “in all humility” for the sake of our enlightenment. Satan too loves to “discuss,” but what a different type of discussion! He is not teaching but laying traps; his whole line is a sales pitch with his own advantage as the end. He is not enlightening but manipulating. He does not reason, but bargains: his proposition as put before Adam, Cain, Abraham, Moses, Enoch, and the Lord himself is the same one he puts to Faust and Jabez Stone: “For if you will worship me I will give you unlimited power and wealth—everything this world has to offer—all you have to do is sign away your rather dubious expectations for the other world.” If his proposition is refused outright, he has no other resort but to have a tantrum, falling down, rending upon the earth, screaming madly, “I am the Son of God! Worship me!” (compare Moses 1:19), for his sole objective from the beginning has been to be Number One.

There are men who . . . wish to destroy every power in Heaven and on earth that they do not hold themselves. *This* is the spirit of Satan that was made so visibly manifest in Heaven and which proved his overthrow, and he *now* afflicts *this people* with it; *he* wants to dictate and rule every principle and power that leads to exaltation and eternal life.<sup>27</sup>

To be Number One is to be beyond politics. It is his command of the ultimate weapon that places Satan—like God—beyond politics.

24. *Journal of Discourses*, 10:320 (emphasis added).

25. *Journal of Discourses*, 12:119 (emphasis added).

26. Karl von Clausewitz, *War, Politics, and Power*, trans. and ed. Edward M. Collins (Chicago: Regnery, 1967), 64–65, 83, 85.

27. *Journal of Discourses*, 10:97 (emphasis added).

A piece appeared in the press noting that businessmen are insisting with increasing zeal on searching the minds and the hearts of their employees by means of polygraph tests. If any arm of government were to go so far, they would be met by horrified protests at this vicious attack on individual freedom, and rightly so. What is it that gives ordinary businessmen a power greater than that of the government? It is the capacity for giving or withholding money—nothing else in the world. This is the weapon that Satan chose from the beginning to place him and his plans beyond politics, and it has worked with deadly effect. There is only one thing in man's world that can offer any check on the unlimited power of money—and that is government. That is why money always accuses government of trying to destroy free agency, when the great enslaver has always been money itself.

We do not have time here to review Satan's brilliant career in business and law: how he taught Cain the "great secret" of how to "murder and get gain" while claiming the noblest motive, "saying: I am free" (Moses 5:31, 33); how he inspired the Jaredites and then the Nephites "to seek for power, and authority, and riches" (3 Nephi 6:15); how he tried to buy off Abraham (in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*) and Moses and Jesus by promising them anything in the world if they would only worship him; how he coached Judas in the art of handling money; how he corrupts the Saints by covetousness and the things of the world; how his disciple, Simon Magus, offered Peter cash on the line for the priesthood. To be beyond politics does not place one, in President John Taylor's words, "above the [rule] of Mammon."<sup>28</sup> Only a celestial order can do that.

28. John Taylor, *Mediation and Atonement* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1882), 70, quoting a hymn of the early Church, "Adam-ondi-Ahman."

Largely because of this dominion, the human dialogue has a tendency, as many ancient writers observed, to deteriorate unless there is divine intervention;<sup>29</sup> and since men normally insist on rejecting such intervention, the end result is periodic catastrophe. This is the standard message found in the apocalyptic literature. "Every system of civil polity invented by men, like their religious creeds, has been *proved by experiment wholly inadequate to check the downward tendency of the human race.*"<sup>30</sup>

When this downward tendency passes the *point of no return*, the process accelerates beyond control, ending in general catastrophe, to be followed by God's intervention and a new dispensation. "Wherefore, I the Lord, *knowing the calamity* which should come upon the inhabitants of the earth, called upon my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., and spake unto him from heaven, and gave him commandments" (D&C 1:17). Joseph Smith intended to follow those commandments: "The object with me is to obey and teach others to obey God in *just what He* tells us to do."<sup>31</sup> "One truth revealed from heaven is worth all the sectarian notions in existence."<sup>32</sup> "A man is his own tormenter and his own condemner. . . . All will suffer until they obey Christ himself."<sup>33</sup> "The sinner will slay the sinner, the wicked will fall upon the wicked, until there is an utter overthrow and consumption upon the face of the whole earth, until God reigns, whose right it is."<sup>34</sup>

The Church has been put to great trouble and expense through the years by its insistence on

29. Compare, for example, Hesiod's law of decay. This is, incidentally, the basic principle of apocalyptic literature.

30. *Millennial Star* 17 (27 October 1855): 675 (emphasis added).

31. Smith, *Teachings*, 332 (emphasis added).

32. Smith, *Teachings*, 338.

33. Smith, *Teachings*, 357.

34. *Journal of Discourses*, 2:190.



sticking to its long and awkward title: plainly the second part of the name is very important—the Church of the *latter days*. These are the *last days*—the last days of what? Neither we nor the outside world have ever bothered to explore or argue definitions about that—because the answer is obvious: it is the perennial message of the apocalyptic teaching, which is now recognized as the very foundation of the Old and the New Testaments. The last days are the last days of everything as we know it. “The Lord declared to His servants, some eighteen months since [1833], that He was then withdrawing His Spirit from the earth; . . . the governments of the earth are thrown into confusion and division; and *Destruction*, to the eye of the spiritual beholder, seems to be written by the finger of an invisible hand, in large capitals, upon almost every thing we behold.”<sup>35</sup> “God hath set His hand and seal to change the times and seasons, and to blind their minds, that they may not understand His marvelous workings.”<sup>36</sup> “While upon one hand I behold *the manifest withdrawal of God’s Holy Spirit*, and the *veil of stupidity* which seems to be drawn over the hearts of the people; upon the other hand, I behold the judgments of God . . . sweeping hundreds and thousands of our race, and I fear unprepared, down to the shades of death.”<sup>37</sup>

At the present time the political dialogue throughout the world has deteriorated catastrophically. In most countries it has degenerated into such mechanical and stereotyped forms that it is no longer profitable or meaningful—it is no longer a dialogue at all. If you are a private citizen, you just do not “discuss” things with colonels, commissars, or corporations—you do what

they tell you to do or at best manipulate you into doing. Has it ever been different? Not much, but on 17 October 1973, the junta in Chile officially put an end to *all* political activity of any kind or by any party. This is something unique, a final step by rulers who do not even make a *pretense* of consulting the ruled. Where do we go from here? We are beyond politics indeed. Another and even more fateful development has recently come to the fore in our midst, indicating beyond question that we have at last reached that point of no return<sup>38</sup> which heralds the last of the last days.

God has never given us a time schedule for the developments of the last days. There are a number of reasons for this; for example, if we knew the time and the hour, we would gauge our behavior accordingly and conveniently postpone repentance—whereas God wants us to live *as if* we were expecting his coming at any moment. He comes as a thief in the night: “Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour” (Matthew 24:42). But though he does not give us dates and figures, he does give us unmistakable signs of the times and urges us to pay the closest possible attention to them. Simply by looking at a fig tree, for example, one can estimate quite closely about how far away the harvest is. The word *historia* was borrowed by Hecateus from the medical profession, the *historia* being progressive symptoms of a disease or illness; just as there are signs by which the doctor can tell how far along the patient is and how long he has to go, so there are such signs in the body politic of any society.

Specifically, if we want to know the sure sign of the end, we are instructed to look for *ripeness* or *fullness*. The end comes when, and *only* when, “the time is *ripe*,” when “the harvest is *ripe*,” when the people are “ripe in iniquity.” Or, to use the

35. Smith, *Teachings*, 16 (emphasis in original).

36. Smith, *Teachings*, 135.

37. Smith, *Teachings*, 13–14 (emphasis added).

38. The point of no return marks the stroke of doom in classical tragedy.

other figure, when “the cup of His wrath is *full*,” which will be when “the cup of *their* iniquity is *full*.” Or, to combine both terms, when the world is *fully ripe* in iniquity. Fruit is fully ripe at that moment when further ripening would not mean improvement but only deterioration. (“And so, from hour to hour, we ripe and ripe, and then, from hour to hour, we rot and rot.”)<sup>39</sup> And a vessel is *full* when nothing more can be added to it, when its contents can no longer be improved or damaged by adding any more ingredients. When the fruit is ripe, there is no point in letting it remain longer on the tree. And when the cup is full, nothing further remains to be done about its contents. Ripeness and fullness are that state of things, in short, when nothing further remains to be done in the direction of filling or ripening, and the process has reached the end.

A society has reached such a point when it can no longer go in the direction it has been taking, when the only hope of motion lies in a change or a direct reversal of direction, and repentance is that change of direction. It is when men reach the point of refusing to *repent* that they have reached the point of fullness: “And it shall come to pass, because of the wickedness of the world, that I will take vengeance upon the wicked, for they will not repent; for the cup of mine indignation is full” (D&C 29:17). The moment Adam found himself going in the wrong direction because of the Fall, he was to repent and call upon God forevermore—that is, to reverse his course; and ever since then “the days of the children of men were prolonged, according to the will of God, that they might repent while in the flesh; wherefore, their state became a state of probation, and their time was lengthened. . . . For he gave commandment

that all men must repent” (2 Nephi 2:21). The reason that our lives are extended as they are beyond the age of reproduction is to allow us the fullest possible opportunity to repent. Therefore, when men have lost the capacity to repent, they forfeit any right to sojourn further upon the earth; the very purpose of this extended span of life being to practice repentance; when men announce that they have no intention of repenting, there is no reason why God should let them stay around longer to corrupt the rising generation. “And now cometh the day of their calamity, . . . and their sorrow shall be great unless they speedily repent, yea, very speedily” (D&C 136:35).

There is a time limit, then, and I believe that the time limit has now been reached—the cup is full. For we have in our time the terrifying phenomenon of men who refuse to repent. Why should they repent? Because God commands it. “Behold, I command all men everywhere to repent” (D&C 18:9). “And surely every man must repent or suffer, for I, God, am endless” (D&C 19:4). “Therefore, I command you to repent—repent, lest I smite you by the rod of my mouth. . . . For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent” (D&C 19:15–16). “Wherefore, I command you again to repent, lest I humble you with my almighty power. . . . And I command you that you preach naught but repentance” (D&C 19:20–21). “Wherefore, I will that all men shall repent, for all are under sin, except those which I have reserved unto myself, holy men that ye know not of” (D&C 49:8). “Hearken and hear, O ye inhabitants of the earth. Listen, ye elders of my church together, and hear the voice of the Lord; for he calleth upon all men, and he commandeth all men everywhere to repent” (D&C 133:16).

39. William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, act 2, scene 7, lines 26–27.

[Nibley used the phrase *day to day* instead of *hour to hour*. —Eds.]

Yet throughout the world today, few, it would seem, have any intention anymore of repenting. That is the ominous note! Mormon describes this condition as marking the last stand of the Nephites:

And now behold, my son, I fear lest the Lamanites shall destroy this people; for they do not repent. . . . When I speak the word of God with sharpness they tremble and anger against *me*; and when I use no sharpness they harden their hearts against it; wherefore, I fear lest the Spirit of the Lord hath ceased striving with them. . . . I cannot any longer enforce my commands. And they have become strong in their perversion, . . . without principle, and past feeling. . . . I pray unto God . . . to witness the return [repentance] of his people unto him, or their utter destruction. (Moroni 9:3-4, 18-20, 22)

They sorrowed at the loss of their wealth, “but behold this . . . was vain,” Mormon continues, “for their sorrowing was not unto repentance . . . but . . . because the Lord would not always suffer them to take happiness in sin” (Mormon 2:13). “And I saw that the day of grace was passed with them, both temporally and spiritually” (Mormon 2:15). When the day of repentance is past, so is the day of grace. They had reached the *point of no return*. This is what the Greeks called *atē*, and it is the telling moment of tragedy.

Take that greatest of tragedies, *Oedipus Rex*. Oedipus had in his youth committed a terrible compound crime; but he had done it unknowingly and was therefore given every opportunity, not only to repent and be forgiven, but also to achieve higher glory than ever. The question was not whether or not he was guilty, but whether or not, being guilty, he would repent. At the

beginning of the play, he drops hints that betray a subconscious awareness of his guilt; he, as the king, insists on a thorough investigation. Then, as more and more evidence accumulates against him, he insists even more loudly that he has done no wrong; he looks for one party and then another to fix the blame on, but each time it becomes clear that it could not have been that person. In the end even his wife cannot deny his guilt any longer and pleads with him to drop the case; his reply is to blame her for everything in a fantastically forced and vicious argument. When finally he is forced to recognize that he and he alone is the enemy he seeks, the results are terrible. His whole trouble is that he will not repent: after his meteoric career, his matchless fame, his unfailing cleverness, and strong character had held the reins of power for twenty years, he was in no mood to repent of everything. The last words spoken to him in the play are significant when his uncle (brother-in-law) Creon says to him: “Don’t think you can be *number one* all the time.”<sup>40</sup> This is also the tragedy of Lear, that most tragic of tragedies, of Richard II, and of King Laertes in *The Winter’s Tale*: each king, because he *is* the king, cannot tolerate the idea of repenting—that would be a fatal confession of weakness—and so each one digs himself deeper and deeper into a devastating situation from which he cannot escape: because the only escape hatch is repentance. In each case the trouble is the insistence on being Number One—and this takes us back to the primal tragedy and the character of Lucifer, whose example all our tragic figures are following. “Now, in this world,” said Joseph Smith, “mankind are naturally selfish, ambitious and striving to excel. . . . Some seek to excel. And this was the

40. Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*, line 1522.

case with Lucifer when he fell”<sup>41</sup>—he had to be Number One. Since all have sinned, there is no question of whether one has done wrong or not, but only of whether one will repent. But what is now the approved school solution? Since all have sinned, why should anybody be the goat? Why should anybody repent?

When President Harold B. Lee said that the Saints are above politics, he was referring to the brand of politics that prevails in the world today. “The government of heaven, if wickedly administered, would become one of the worst governments upon the face of the earth. No matter how good a government is, unless it is administered by righteous men, an evil government will be made of it.”<sup>42</sup> Men caught red-handed, charged, tried, confessed, and convicted now come forth to plead innocent: they were merely carrying out orders, they were doing what everyone does, they have done no wrong. The winningest of slogans when the national conscience became burdened with the guilt of relentless shedding of innocent blood day after day, month after month, and year after year could only be the slogan *We have done no wrong!* Any politician foolish enough to so much as hint at a need for repentance certainly was asking for the drubbing he would get. King Claudius and Macbeth were bloody villains, and they knew it, and even in their darkest hours speculated with a wild surmise on the possibility, however remote, of repentance and forgiveness. The fatal symptom of our day is not that men do wrong—they always have—and commit crimes, and even recognize their wrongdoing as foolish and unfortunate, but that they have *no intention of repenting*, while God has told us that the first rule

that he has given the human race is that all men everywhere must repent.

Joseph Smith tells us that there are crimes and sins which are wrong no matter who does them or under what condition: they are wrong in and of themselves, at all times and at all places. You cannot deceive one party to be loyal to another. “Any man who will betray the Catholics will betray you; and if he will betray me, he will betray you.”<sup>43</sup> Compare this with Mr. Stone’s declaration that he found nothing shocking in public officials’ lying under oath, since they were trained to do that very thing. “All [men] are subjected to vanity,” according to Joseph Smith, “while they travel through the crooked paths and difficulties which surround them. Where is the man that is free from vanity?”<sup>44</sup> Granted that, it is still true that “all men have power to resist the devil,”<sup>45</sup> which leaves them without excuse.

The dialogue between men has always been remarkably superficial, devoid of any substance and depth, since men must always be on the go and only make brief contact, like jet planes passing in the night as each goes about his business, looking out first of all for his own interests, with little time left over for the common interest. Busy modern men and women feel they are too busy for the rigors of serious discussion necessary for genuine politics. Senator Proxmire deplored the fact, as all public-spirited people always have, that very few people take a real and active part in the political process. How could it be otherwise? Politics by its very nature is superficial: the practitioner can never go into depth because too many things have to be considered. If in physics the problem of three bodies has been solved

41. Smith, *Teachings*, 297.

42. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 10:177.

43. Smith, *Teachings*, 375.

44. Smith, *Teachings*, 187.

45. Smith, *Teachings*, 189.

only by approximation, how can we expect to cope wisely and fully with the infinite complexity of human affairs? Politics, in the proper Greek sense, was a full-time job for the citizen, who spent his day in the Agora and his nights in long discussions and debates, while servants and slaves took care of petty and menial matters.<sup>46</sup> Even that, however, was an ideal which neither the Greeks nor anyone else could live up to. After all, the first interest of every citizen is to make money: “*O cives, cives, quaerenda pecunia primum est; virtus post nummos!*”<sup>47</sup> And so politics degenerated quickly into subservience to private interests—it yields subservience to wealth. If Greece produced the most enlightened politicians, it also, as Thucydides informs us, produced the most sordid. Politics is often a forlorn and hopeless affair, because it is not really a dialogue unless it is strictly honest, and the ulterior motives of power and gain always vitiate it in the end. It is then the tricky lawyer who takes over. Eventually someone seeks a stronger tool than mere talk—we start talking and end up condemning and smiting. “Man shall not smite, neither

shall he judge” (Mormon 8:20) is the final wisdom of the Book of Mormon. “Man should not counsel his fellow man, neither trust in the arm of flesh” (D&C 1:19) is the initial wisdom of the Doctrine and Covenants. What was to be a meeting of the minds often degenerates into a trial of arms. Politics gravitates in the direction of an ever-stronger clout, inevitably leading to the trial of arms. Someone seeks a stronger tool than mere talk. Consider again Clausewitz’s famous dictum that war is the natural end of politics—and also that war lies beyond politics. It is the arena that smells of death—and we are trapped in the arena.

The wide difference, amounting to complete antithesis, between men’s ways and God’s ways should always be kept in mind. If we would remember that fact, it would save us from a pitfall that constantly lies before us—especially here at Brigham Young University. Nothing is easier than to identify one’s own favorite political, economic, historical, and moral convictions with the gospel. That gives one a neat, convenient, but altogether too-easy advantage over one’s fellows. If my ideas are the true ones—and I certainly will not entertain them if I suspect for a moment that they are false!—then, all truth being one, they are also the gospel, and to oppose them is to play the role of Satan. This is simply insisting that our way is God’s way, and therefore the only way. It is the height of impertinence. “There have been frauds and secret abominations and evil works of darkness going on [in the Church], . . . all the time palming it off upon the Presidency, . . . practicing in the Church in their name.”<sup>48</sup> Do you think these people were not sincere? Yes, to the point of fanaticism—they wholly identified their crackpot schemes with the Church and with the gospel. Some of the most learned theologians,

46. This was their genius and the secret of their success. Whether the Greek pursued philosophy, art, religion, pleasure, science, or money, he was willing to give the search everything he had—sacrificing every convenience and amenity: the ideal of the Greeks was the *sophos*—completely selfless, oblivious to his own comfort, health, appearance, and appetites as his mind came to grips with the problem of achieving one particular objective. That is why the Greeks were anciently way out in front of others in almost every field of human endeavor—and still remain unsurpassed and even unequalled in many of them. The Greek citizen not only spent the day in the Agora, but in the evenings at home he carried on the dialogue in discussion and study groups, for the Greek citizen knew that the only work worthy of the name, a work a hundred times harder than the repetitious routines and seemingly virtuous bootlicking that we call work, was the terribly demanding and exhausting task of cutting new grooves and channels with the sharp edge of the mind. He felt that if politics was all that important, it was worth our best hours.

47. Horace, *Epistles* 1.1:53–54.

48. Smith, *Teachings*, 127–28.



such as Bossuet, have shown from every page of the scripture that God is an absolute monarchist, while others, equally learned and dedicated, have formed religious communities dedicated to the equally obvious scriptural proposition that the Saints are Communists. You can search through the scriptures and find support for any theory you want, and it is your privilege to attempt to convince yourself of any position you choose to take—but not to impose that opinion on others as the gospel. God certainly does not subscribe to our political creeds. The first issue of the *Times and Seasons* contained a lead editorial to the elders: “Be careful that you teach not for the word of God, the commandments of men, nor the doctrines of men nor the ordinances of men; . . . study the word of God and preach it, and *not your opinions*, for no man’s opinion is worth a straw.”<sup>49</sup>

We may seem to be speaking out of order because we insist on bringing into the discussion of political science certain theological propositions which are simply not acceptable to those outside of our Church. But I am speaking for myself. There is the basic proposition: “The Spirit of God will . . . dwell with His people, and be withdrawn from the rest of the nations.” Accordingly, among the Saints, “party feelings, separate interests, exclusive designs should be lost sight of in the one common cause, in the interest of the whole.”<sup>50</sup> If the world cannot accept such a proposition, we are still committed to it—wholly and irrevocably—whether we like it or not. “The government of the Almighty has always been very dissimilar to the governments of men. . . . [It] has always tended to promote peace, unity, harmony, strength, and happiness,” while on the other hand “the greatest acts of the

mighty men have been to depopulate nations and to overthrow kingdoms. . . . Before them the earth was a paradise, and behind them a desolate wilderness. . . . The designs of God, on the other hand, [are that] . . . ‘the earth shall yield its increase, resume its paradisaean glory, and become as the garden of the Lord.’”<sup>51</sup>

How you play the game of politics is important, but the game you are playing is also important. It is important to work, but what you work for is all-important. The Nephites, “by their industry” (Alma 4:6), obtained riches—which then destroyed them; “[for] the laborer in Zion shall labor for Zion; for if they labor for *money* they shall perish” (2 Nephi 26:31). Work does not satisfy wealth, as we try to make ourselves believe. The zeal and intelligence that our political commitments demand—to what should they be directed? At present we have a positive obsession with the *economy*—the economy is all. But the Lord told Samuel the Lamanite that when a people “have set their hearts upon riches, . . . cursed be they and also their treasures” (Helaman 13:20).

While listening to Senator Proxmire’s address, I was impressed by the clear-headed intelligence and zeal he brought to his task: it made one almost think that the show was going on—that there still is a genuine politics after all. What then of the prophecies? Both in manner and appearance the senator recalled to mind certain dashing, wonderful men who, during World War II, used to brief the various units of the 101st Airborne Division which they were leading into battle. (The classic Leader’s Oration before the Battle enjoyed a revival in airborne operations where the army, a short hour before the battle, could sit quietly on the grass one hundred miles from the enemy and listen to speeches.) It was

49. *Times and Seasons* 1/1 (1839): 13 (emphasis added).

50. Smith, *Teachings*, 231.

51. Smith, *Teachings*, 248–49.



the high point of their careers, the thing they had been working and hoping and looking forward to all their lives—to lead a crack regiment or division into battle, and they made the most of it. The feeling of euphoria was almost overpowering—they were smart, sharp, vigorous, compelling, eager, tense, exuding optimism and even humor, but above all excitement. Invariably General Maxwell Taylor would end his oration with: “Good hunting!” It was wonderful, thrilling; you were ready to follow that man anywhere. *But* before the operation was a day old, every man in the division was heartily wishing that he was anywhere else, doing anything else but that; everyone knew in his mind and heart that he was not sent to earth to engage in this nasty and immoral business. The heroism and sacrifice were real—the situation was utterly satanic and shameful; the POWs we rounded up to interrogate were men just as good as we were, the victims of a terrible circumstance that the devil’s game of power and gain had woven around them.

So I like Senator Proxmire—like General Taylor, a splendid man. I admire his style and approve his zeal, but wisdom greater than man tells me that we are not playing the right game: “The world lieth in sin at this time and *none* doeth good *no not one*.”<sup>52</sup> The game is not going to last much longer. “They seek not the Lord to establish his righteousness, but every man walketh in his own way, and after the image of his own god, whose image is in the likeness of the world, and whose substance is that of an idol, *which waxeth old* and shall perish in Babylon, even Babylon the great, *which shall fall*” (D&C 1:16; compare 2 Nephi 9:30). According to Joseph Smith,

We . . . [and] our wives and children . . . have been made to bow down under . . . the most damning hand of murder, tyranny, and oppressions, supported and urged on and upheld by . . . that spirit which has so strongly riveted the creeds of the fathers, who have inherited lies, upon the hearts of the children, and filled the world with confusion, and has been growing stronger and stronger, and is now the very main-spring of all corruption, and the whole earth groans under the weight of its iniquity.<sup>53</sup>

This is our heritage.

The news of the world today reminds me of nothing so much as those bulletins which a short while ago were being issued by the doctors attending the late King Gustave of Sweden and by those treating Pablo Casals. The king was in his nineties; Casals, ninety-six; and both were very ill—what really good news could come out of the sickroom? That the patient had rested well? That he had had some lucid moments? That he had taken nourishment? Could any of that be called good news, hopeful news—in view of the inevitable news the world was waiting for? What is your own idea of an encouraging and cheering item in the news today? That the next Middle Eastern war has been postponed? That a new oil field has been discovered? “This physic but prolongs thy sickly days.”<sup>54</sup> We shall achieve lasting peace when we achieve eternal life. Politics has the same goal as the gospel: complete happiness. But to achieve that requires eternal life. The most painful thing in the world, says Joseph Smith, is the thought of annihilation;<sup>55</sup> until that gnawing pain is relieved, all the rest is a forlorn

53. Smith, *Teachings*, 145.

54. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, act 3, scene 3, line 96.

55. Smith, *Teachings*, 296.

52. Joseph Smith, as quoted in Jessee, “Early Accounts,” 280. See note 3 above.

and wistful game of make-believe. The solution of all our problems is the resurrection: only God knows the solution. Why not follow his advice? And only the gospel can remove that pain. The final relief of all our woes lies beyond all worldly politics. So when Joseph Smith says, “My feelings revolt at the idea of having anything to do with politics,” he is not being high and mighty but putting his priorities in order. “I wish to be let alone,” he says, “that I may attend strictly to the spiritual welfare of the church.”<sup>56</sup> Specifically, “The object with me is to obey and teach others to obey God in just what He tells us to do.”<sup>57</sup> “For one truth revealed from heaven is worth all the sectarian notions in existence.”<sup>58</sup> And so he pursues his way: “It matters not to me if all hell boils over; I regard it only as I would the crackling of the thorns under a pot. . . . I intend to lay a foundation that will revolutionize the whole world. . . . It will not be by sword or gun that this kingdom will roll on.”<sup>59</sup>

How should the Saints behave? Brigham Young believed that “the elders cannot be too particular to enjoin on all the saints to yield obedience to the laws, and respect every man in his office, letting politics wholly, entirely and absolutely alone, and preach the principles of the gospel of salvation; for to this end were they ordained and sent forth. We are for peace, we want no contention with any person or government.”<sup>60</sup> “Amid all the revolutions that are taking place among the nations, the elders will ever pursue an undeviating course in being subject to the government wherever they may be, and sustain the same

by all their precepts to the Saints, having *nothing to do with political questions* which engender strife, remembering that the weapons of their warfare are not carnal but spiritual, and that the Gospel which they preach is not of man but from heaven.”<sup>61</sup> “As for politics, we care nothing about them one way or the other, although we are a political people. . . . It is the Kingdom of God or nothing with us.”<sup>62</sup> The kingdom is beyond politics—one way or the other—that is, it is beyond partisan party politics.

On the last night of a play the whole cast and stage crew stay in the theater until the small or not-so-small hours of the morning, striking the old set. If there is to be a new opening soon, as the economy of the theater requires, it is important that the new set should be in place and ready for the opening night; all the while the old set was finishing its usefulness and then being taken down, the new set was rising in splendor to be ready for the drama that would immediately follow. So it is with this world. It is not our business to tear down the old set—the agencies that do that are already hard at work and very efficient; the set is coming down all around us with spectacular effect. Our business is to see to it that the new set is well on the way for what is to come—and that means a different kind of politics, beyond the scope of the tragedy that is now playing its closing night. We are preparing for the establishment of Zion.🔒

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56. Smith, *Teachings*, 275.

57. Smith, *Teachings*, 332.

58. Smith, *Teachings*, 338.

59. Smith, *Teachings*, 339, 366.

60. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1950), 7:407.

61. *Millennial Star* 13 (15 July 1851): 215.

62. *Millennial Star* 31 (4 September 1869): 573.



# *In the Mouths of Two or More Witnesses*

Review of Richard Bauckham. *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006. xiii + 538 pp. \$26.00.

NOEL B. REYNOLDS

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For readers who have found the pervasive skepticism of twentieth-century scholarship on the four Gospels and the life of Jesus Christ tedious and even challenging, Richard Bauckham has produced a late-career tour de force that builds on other attempts to counter the skeptics while advancing a powerful and radically new refutation of that dominant approach. He lines up the skeptics' assumptions and systematically refutes them all, either by invoking and extending the arguments of other scholars or by developing his own arguments and forms of evidence. That alone would be a major achievement to be widely heralded. But Bauckham goes on to give us powerful and largely original arguments to establish credible direct control of the wording of three of the Gospels by recognized eyewitnesses, concluding that

1. Mark contains Peter's account of Christ's ministry as formulated by Peter and memorized by Mark and others who knew Peter;
2. Luke draws on both Mark's presentation of Peter's account and the accounts of other equally knowledgeable eyewitnesses, including especially the women in Jesus's life; and
3. John is in fact authored by John, another eyewitness from the beginning, but not the son of Zebedee.


Bauckham reviews the evidence for different authors and presents a strong argument for his conclusion that John the Elder, as he was known in first-century Christian circles, was the author of the Gospel of John and the three epistles that bear his name. This makes the Gospel of John the only one of the four Gospels to be actually authored by its principal eyewitness.

Although other conservative New Testament scholars have advanced important objections

and modifications to the dominant approach of form criticism, Bauckham aims at a complete refutation of the assumptions of the form critics that he sees dominating scholarly work on the Gospels. He specifically targets the idea that “the traditions about Jesus, his acts and his words, passed through a long process of oral tradition in the early Christian communities and reached the writers of the Gospels only at a late stage of this process” (p. 6). In spite of much evidence against that view, he sees it firmly in place: most scholarly work continues to assume that the eyewitness accounts of Jesus’s ministry suffered “a long process of anonymous transmission in the communities” (p. 6) before their incorporation into the Gospels, which would have been written independently of any direct influence of the eyewitnesses. Against these assumptions, Bauckham presents evidence that the Gospels were written under the direct influence of living eyewitnesses, and he does this without any revision of the standard dating for their composition.

Using the recognized technique of *inclusio*, he argues that “the Gospels themselves indicate their own eyewitness sources” (p. 305). He also presents an elaborate study of memory and transmission evidence to support his conclusion that the eyewitnesses actually controlled a transmission process based on memorization to preclude the normal tendency to modify an account in the retelling. Extending the work of Birger Gerhardsson,<sup>1</sup> Bauckham develops a careful critique of the long-standing practice of form

critics treating oral tradition as folklore. In many ways he demonstrates the careless superficiality of this approach. He stresses the necessary reliance of all good history on eyewitness testimony. Bauckham’s argument builds on the work of Samuel Byrskog<sup>2</sup> to show how classic historians depended on eyewitness reports for both the facts and the interpretation or meaning of those facts. Bauckham sees the marriage of historical reporting and faithful interpretation in the Gospels’ use of testimony as a built-in solution to the long-standing tension between the historical and faithful approaches to New Testament scholarship.

Bauckham’s bold and challenging theories have already provoked both admiring and critical responses from other New Testament scholars.<sup>3</sup> Many of his assumptions and evidentiary claims will be carefully evaluated in a process that may play out over a period of many years. But no one can claim that the issues he addresses are unimportant or that the arguments and evidence he advances are not deserving of the most careful examination. Bauckham has stirred a sensitive pot, and the fallout will inevitably be both interesting and enlightening for serious readers of the Gospels. 

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1. Birger Gerhardsson, *The Reliability of the Gospel Tradition* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001), 40.

2. Samuel Byrskog, *Story as History—History as Story: The Gospel Tradition in the Context of Ancient Oral History* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2000; Leiden: Brill, 2002).

3. For an excellent review of Bauckham’s *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* from the perspective of a Latter-day Saint New Testament scholar, see Thomas A. Wayment in *BYU Studies* 48/2 (2009): 165–68.

# Telling the Larger “Church History” Story

Review of Christopher Catherwood. *Church History: A Crash Course for the Curious*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books [a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers], 2007. 224 pp., with index. \$12.99 (paperback).

LOUIS MIDGLEY

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*To a large degree, history is autobiography—or perhaps one should say that it is the prolegomena to one’s biography. In any case, our view of who we are, both as individuals and as a community of faith, depends in large measure on what we understand our history to be.*

Justo L. González<sup>1</sup>

*One might wish for a neutral account of the [Christian] story, but there really can be no such thing.*

Roger E. Olson<sup>2</sup>

**I**t is likely that when Latter-day Saints encounter the words *church history*, they will immediately

think of the story of Joseph Smith’s initial encounters with divine beings, the recovery of the Book of Mormon, the restoration of priesthood keys, the hounding of the fledgling Church of Christ by Gentiles, the eventual migration of the Saints to a new desert home, and so forth. But such words also have a much broader meaning. This phenomenon can be illustrated by the expression *Latter-day Saints*, which by contrast calls attention to the biblical story of the covenant people of God and their failure to keep the commandments, followed by the incarnation of the Messiah, or Christ, whose deeds set in place a new covenant community of Saints (or “holy ones”). Despite waves of intense persecution, this community spread through missionary endeavors in lands surrounding the Mediterranean Sea, but it soon fell into apostasy. One turning point came when Constantine gained control of the mighty Roman Empire, built a New Rome (Constantinople), and

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1. Justo L. González, preface to the second English edition of his work *A History of Christian Thought: From Augustine to the Eve of the Reformation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1987), 2:6, and found in each of the three volumes.

2. Roger E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999), 279.

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made Christianity the official servant/consort of this subsequent bloody imperial Roman regime.

## “Church”?

The word *church* is ambiguous. It now often identifies a “house” that believers visit to worship God as well as an extended “household,” or assembly, of believers. But this word has several other meanings. For example, one can ask what the Roman Catholic Church officially teaches on some issue. In such instances, the word *church* identifies not an assembly of believers but the governing officials of an institution such as a denomination or movement. Understood as both an institution and a community of believers, the Christian church has a history of its own particular faith community. There is simply no generic Christianity, but only “Christianities”—each faction having a story. These stories are primarily accounts of internecine squabbles both within a larger movement or denomination and with powerful, meddling government officials. There is a sense in which such partisan factions also share a much larger “church history,”<sup>3</sup> which is unavoidably also the story of contention over the grounds and content of Christian faith. Each story has a place in a still larger story. Historians often focus attention on disputes over forms of church government, salvation, worship styles, the end times, authority, gifts of the Spirit, rituals, divine attributes, and so forth. In this sense, church history is a tale of competing opinions about virtually every topic even peripherally connected to the faith among those who choose to self-identify as Christians.

3. This is Catherwood’s term, subsequent instances of which will not appear within quotation marks in this essay despite the term’s ambiguity.

## “History”?

The word *history* is also ambiguous. Some have conjectured that the word *historia* was borrowed from the Greek medical vocabulary, where it identified the symptoms and suffering (*pathos*) of a disease and then applied to the sickness and decline of the body politic. Be that as it may, the word has come to refer to what actually happened in the past, and also, by extension, to the texts<sup>4</sup> that happened to have been recorded and then somehow preserved. These writings were interpretations of what was believed to have happened (or what their authors wished others to believe had happened). The writers were selective in what they recorded and often highly partisan. More often, however, when we use the word *history*, what we have in mind are not the textual sources themselves but the stories told later by historians about some portion of the past. These add interpretations to interpretations. The narrator/storyteller provides the emplotment<sup>5</sup> for the tale being told by selecting, in addition to the textual sources, the explanations or interpretations of the textual sources. The historian likewise chooses what to omit or lightly pass over, further shading the tale being told.

The questions I wish to address in this essay include whether a neutral story of Christian faith has been or even can be fashioned—one that somehow rises above, transcends, and encompasses all actual or possible factional disputations that constitute the vast, spoiled, complicated, and now mostly lost history of Christianity. Or are we

4. Or text analogues such as burials and buildings and their accompanying symbolic and artistic furnishings and other embellishments.

5. I borrow the term *emplotment* from Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973). The term refers to a historian’s assemblage of historical events into a narrative with a plot.

faced, short of God providing his full version of the story, with competing and even incommensurate church histories, each essentially autobiographical (that is, rooted in experiences and events that constitute what González describes as our own history, which is a kind of “prolegomena to one’s own biography”)? And what can we Latter-day Saints learn from the efforts of other Christians to tell their particular stories?

### Catherwood’s Calvinist “Crash Course” . . .

I have chosen to address these and related questions by examining a book entitled *Church History: A Crash Course for the Curious*,<sup>6</sup> which is a highly autobiographical tale of competing and quarreling communities of Christian faith told by Christopher Catherwood (b. 1955),<sup>7</sup> an English historian who “has written or edited more than twenty-five books” (back cover). Several of his books are either collections of sermons or reflections on the theology of his Calvinist/Anglican maternal grandfather, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899–1981). Many of Catherwood’s other publications focus on the interplay of politics and religion—that is, both between and within Christian and Muslim communities—in the Balkans and the Middle East.<sup>8</sup> His venture into what

he calls “church history” is a brief sketch, from a Reformed (that is, strictly Calvinist) perspective, of the variety and complexity of Christian faith. He is not shy about revealing his Calvinist confessional biases and how these provide the plot for the story he tells.

### . . . Based on Secondary Sources

In 1998 Catherwood confessed that *Crash Course* is “not a book for academic specialists” since it is “based on what historians call *secondary* sources.” He seems to think that this poses no problem since his intended audience is the “ordinary, intelligent, non-specialist reader who wants a general overview of what has happened in Church History.”<sup>9</sup> His version of “church history” is thus a popularized account that does not seek to advance the scholarship on the history of Christianity. In telling an abbreviated social/political story of Christian faith, he avoids probing the more difficult, recondite story of Christian theological speculation and providing a detailed intellectual history of Christianity. If one wants a simple, straightforward account from one whose confessional biases are clearly set out, then the book achieves its stated objective.

### The Plot behind the Story

Catherwood did not fashion the emplotment he employs. In a simple, naive way he proclaims a traditional, creedal, Augustinian, Protestant, and strictly Reformed history of Christian faith. There is nothing subtle or complex about the story he tells. This is, from my perspective, actually a virtue. Since no one can command even a very tiny portion of the primary textual materials

6. See Catherwood, *Church History: A Crash Course for the Curious*, 18. This is a major revision of his *Crash Course on Church History* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1998), which will be cited and footnoted as *Crash Course*, while its 2007 revision will always be cited parenthetically in the text by page number alone.

7. Catherwood holds an MA in modern history from Balliol College, Oxford; an MLitt in modern history from Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge; and a PhD in Middle Eastern history from East Anglia.

8. Catherwood has been a tutor at Cambridge University’s Institute of Continuing Education, operated at Madingley Hall, which is a conference center near Cambridge where he has taught a course for adults based on *Church History*. He has also been an instructor at the University of Richmond’s School of Continuing Education, and he sometimes lectures on politics in the Middle East at the Cambridge-based INSTEP program (p. 11). This is not, however, a part of Cam-

bridge University, but an independent program catering to American Semester Abroad students with lectures on politics and economics.

9. Catherwood, *Crash Course*, unpaginated preface.

that just happen to have been preserved, his reliance on (perhaps both dated and inferior) secondary sources is not, in and of itself, a fatal flaw.

As a staunch “Bible Calvinist,” Catherwood finds at the heart of the Reformation “the key Protestant distinctive, *sola scriptura*, or ‘Scripture alone’” (p. 19). No attempt is made to hide what is entailed in slogans like *sola scriptura*. He shows how this notion tends to order the way he pictures the events constituting the gradual apostasy from the presumed original *regula fidei* of Christian faith. This eventually leads to the efforts of the magisterial Protestant reformers to set things right again. He does not avoid mentioning the contests, competition, and quarrels that constitute the story of Protestant faith communities. The root cause of the contention and controversy that constitute the core of much Christian church history is explained in his emplotment as a failure to draw only on the Bible, and hence a willingness to rely on various sorts of merely human traditions. His Protestant ideology also explains why “church history,” as he understands that label, began only “after the unique revelation of Scripture came to an end” (p. 18).

“Scripture alone” (pp. 19, 33)<sup>10</sup> is the controlling rule because it alone provides access to “core doctrines” (p. 31) of “genuine Christians” (p. 18).<sup>11</sup> He thus refers to “the core doctrines of Christian faith upon which all God’s redeemed children inevitably agree with one another” (p. 31). “There *are*,” he also maintains, “key things upon which all Bible-

believing Christians do and have always agreed and united” (p. 19, emphasis in original). These “key things” that “genuine Christians” necessarily hold in common include “a belief in absolute truth” (p. 21), “final truth” (p. 22), or, following Francis Schaeffer’s tautology, “true truth” (p. 20).<sup>12</sup>

There are, however, different and competing Christian faith traditions, each of which claims in different ways to be grounded on truths, to possess “true truth,” or to embody in some sense an “absolute truth.” Those within Orthodoxy<sup>13</sup> and the Roman Catholic Church, in addition to the different brands of Protestantism, can claim to “believe” in truth. Each of these competing versions of Christian faith holds that the truth is to be found in large measure in their own faith tradition. In addition, believing that there must be truth is not the same as possessing such a thing, especially given the fact that both the grounds and content of Christian faith are profoundly historical and hence open to the vicissitudes of history. Even or especially the dogma that only the Bible contains the final, sufficient, infallible, divine, special revelation, which Catherwood claims is the “key” Protestant distinctive, is not itself self-evident. It has, instead, a complex, jaded, contested, problematic history. Which, if any, faith tradition embodies or possesses a “final truth”?

## Spectacles and the Reformed Lens

What exactly are the “core beliefs” set out in the Bible? Whatever their content, they must be clearly identified, especially if Catherwood’s

10. *Sola scriptura* is one of the five *solas* that over time came to identify Protestant distinctives. The other four catchwords include *sola gratia* (grace alone), *sola fide* (faith alone), *solus Christus* (in Christ alone), and *solus Deo gloria* (glory to God alone).

11. In *Crash Course*, Catherwood refers to “core doctrines or beliefs” (p. 3), “core belief” (p. 11), “core beliefs” (pp. 28, 30, 31), “core Christian belief” (p. 17), “core doctrines” (p. 31), and “the core scriptural teaching” (p. 38).

12. Francis Schaeffer (1919–1984) appears to have had a profound influence on Catherwood. Schaeffer’s influence on conservative Protestantism was primarily through L’Abri, a Calvinist study center in Switzerland. He is cited or quoted in *Church History* seventeen times; only Calvin and Luther receive more attention.

13. I capitalize the term *Orthodoxy* to refer to the Eastern Orthodox religious tradition, not to theological correctness in general.

schema is to be coherent. According to Catherwood, “throughout [church] history there have been *brave Christians* who have attempted to *work out the core doctrines, or beliefs*, that all Christians can and should hold.”<sup>14</sup> Apparently those core doctrines are not set forth emphatically in the canon of scripture, perhaps because the Bible is mostly stories. Instead the core beliefs must be “worked out” subsequently by quarreling theologians and powerful churchmen struggling to fashion creeds or dogmatic or systematic theology. One of these “brave Christians” was St. Augustine of Hippo (354–430), who “was regarded in the Middle Ages as the greatest of all the Fathers of the Church, and because of the way in which Calvin rediscovered so much of his thought—on predestination, for instance—[Augustine] is given due reverence among Protestants today as well, especially those of Reformed persuasion” (p. 51, compare pp. 115, 134). In Catherwood’s Calvinist scenario, the magisterial Protestant Reformers—especially John Calvin (1509–1564) but also Huldreich Zwingli (1484–1531) and Martin Luther (1483–1546)—with the help, of course, of many other “brave Christians,” somehow managed to rediscover what Augustine had previously worked out before the church underwent a dismal decline into serious apostasy. Eventually, when elements of Augustine’s theology were rediscovered, the church was reformed—that is, the Protestant Reformation took place.

Readers of *Church History* are told that “honest historian Catherwood informs us straightaway that he views the Christian story through the lenses of Protestant, Reformed, evangelical, baptistic, free-church spectacles. His telling of the tale, *journalistic in style* while scholarly in substance, then proves the point” (back cover,

emphasis added). This endorsement for *Church History* was provided by J. I. Packer, a prominent Calvinist theologian.<sup>15</sup> Packer is quoted or mentioned five times in *Church History* (see pp. 113, 163, 167, 197, 213). Another Reformed endorsee, the Reverend John MacArthur, who is fulsome in his praise for *Church History*, is quoted or mentioned six times by Catherwood (see pp. 18, 115, 142, 145, 184, 187).

These endorsements indicate that Catherwood has not obscured the Reformed emplotment of the tale he tells. This may, of course, have helped to yield ebullient blurbs from his conservative Calvinist colleagues. I do not, however, object to the mutual admiration seemingly behind these endorsements, especially because it is all transparent and aboveboard. Neither Catherwood nor those who endorse his work are trying to hide their confessional commitments. What is significant is that the somewhat symbiotic relationship between the author of *Church History* and prominent Reformed theologians demonstrates that Catherwood’s opinions fit snugly within an essentially contemporary Calvinist story of the Christian past. Rarely does he even hint that there are alternative ways of telling the story of Christian faith.<sup>16</sup> Precisely because *Church History* is a “crash course” (and hence not grounded in original sources), as well as “journalistic in style,” from my perspective the tale that is told—and the way that it is told—is interesting and instructive.

15. J. I. Packer (b. 1926), who taught theology at Regents College in Vancouver, British Columbia, is a controversial Calvinist theologian and author of numerous books.

16. For example, he mentions that Catholics would disagree with some opinions he has set out (see p. 55). But their voices are essentially mute since he does not indicate why they would disagree, how these disagreements would affect the tale he tells, or how he would respond to their disagreement.

14. Catherwood, *Crash Course*, 3, emphasis added.

In his endeavor to tell the story of Christian church history, Catherwood also shows the way in which confessional commitments, formal and informal background assumptions, and presuppositions play a crucial and even controlling role in the way a contested story is told. Since the author provides the plot, his endeavor illuminates what is entailed in a Reformed understanding of the Christian past. Without, of course, wishing to do so, Catherwood has fashioned a history of the Christian past that reveals why there are competing and contrasting ways in which the story is told. Thus it is also possible to identify the assumptions underlying alternative accounts of the Christian past.

It is fruitful to consider alternative understandings of what Catherwood calls “church history.” That the author must tell these competing stories from either inside or outside a particular circle of faith, or from some form of unfaith, accounts for the numerous incommensurable alternative understandings of the Christian past that have been and can be written, each based on the same events and same sources. Merely complaining, as he often does, about what he calls “a postmodern world, in which the whole concept of truth is denied, with all the repercussions that so negative a worldview has for us” (p. 206), does not address the crucial issue of which, if any, of the radically different versions of the same story is true.

### Being “Scrupulously Fair”?

Regarding Catherwood’s insistence on core beliefs grounded in the Bible alone, there is an important corollary that should be of special interest to Latter-day Saints: “I trust,” he opines, “that we would agree, as evangelicals, whatever our denomination, that *God does not reveal to us*

*new things not contained in the Bible*” (p. 18, emphasis added). Put another way, the heavens were permanently closed with the death of the original apostles since only the Bible contains divine special revelation. If Catherwood is correct about the Reformed stance on this matter, and I believe he is, then Protestant/evangelical accounts of the history of Christianity will also have a different emplotment of the story being told than would either a Roman Catholic or a Latter-day Saint account.<sup>17</sup>

It is presumably from the Bible alone that Catherwood attempts to sort and assess all the subsequent quarrels, contests, differences, and disagreements that turn up in the jaded history of Christianity, including especially those within and between the various faith communities or religious movements spawned by the Protestant Reformation. It is also from his Calvinist perspective that he identifies what he considers the flaws in Roman Catholicism and Orthodoxy. He is aware of and a bit annoyed by the existence of those who reject or resist a strictly Calvinist way of understanding Christian faith. He is especially annoyed by the variety of Christian faiths found in the United States, as well as the partisan political orientation of American evangelicals. He holds that “our political prejudices are man-made, however strongly we believe in them, and I am always careful,” he claims, “to try to weed out such opinions from my analysis of the past” (p. 22). This is rubbish; his version of church history is larded with observations about partisan politics. For example, he complains about “crass

17. Roman Catholics restrict divine special revelation, or what they designate “public revelation,” strictly to the Bible. What is called “private revelation” is, however, possible only for the encouragement of individuals. Thus God does not reveal new things not contained in the Bible or already present in tradition as fleshed out from time to time by the magisterium.

American right-wing cultural imperialism,”<sup>18</sup> and he does not disguise his loathing of the “conservative” political ideology common among American evangelicals.<sup>19</sup>

### Protestant Ecclesiastical Anarchy and the Balkanization of Communities of Faith

When faced with the ecclesiastical anarchy that has characterized Protestantism from the beginning, Catherwood grants that genuine Bible-believing Christians have disagreed on many matters, “including issues such as baptism, church government, the continuation of the gift of tongues, or whatever other issues divide us. But as Christocentric Bible believers there are,” he insists, “certain *core truths*, such as the atonement, resurrection, and evangelism, upon which all of us *as evangelicals* do believe exactly the same thing” (pp. 19–20, emphasis added). He thus employs the usual Protestant ploy of distinguishing “indifferent matters” (p. 111), or “inessential matters” (p. 121) and “secondary issues” (p. 112),<sup>20</sup> from essential “core beliefs.” Protestants disagree on such matters as worship styles,<sup>21</sup> the place and type of music in devotions,<sup>22</sup> the mode or meaning of baptism,<sup>23</sup> the continuance or cessation of so-called sign gifts such as speaking in tongues as an indication of the presence of the Holy Spirit,<sup>24</sup> whether there will be an actual second coming or whether this is merely a sort of

symbolic talk,<sup>25</sup> the details of creation and hence also especially the controversy over Darwin (pp. 187–89), whether there should be an established (or state authorized and financed) denomination or “church” (pp. 42–44), what constitutes the “church” and how it is to be governed (pp. 43, 149), and so forth.

Other than the elusive “core truths,” Catherwood allows a very wide variety of contending opinions within what he considers the authentic Christian church. A host of differences and disagreements can be found at the very beginning of its history, and “even in Paul’s lifetime there were genuine differences among believing Christians” (p. 31). “Even at the very dawn of the church itself, Christians were disagreeing with one another, and we have been doing so vigorously ever since” (p. 30). Christians “have disagreed among themselves even in Bible times—we are no different from the first disciples of Jesus.”<sup>26</sup>

How are such “secondary issues” that generated differences of opinion even in the apostolic age and much contention since that time distinguished from essential “core beliefs” that presumably have never been in dispute? Catherwood does not turn directly to the Bible for an answer to this question. Instead, he indicates that “throughout history there have been brave Christians who have attempted to work out the core doctrines or beliefs that all Christians can and should hold.”<sup>27</sup> The Bible is seen as the sole source from which churchmen and theologians must “work out” the essential elements of Christian faith. And yet he also insists that there are “things that all Christians agreed upon—whatever

18. Catherwood, *Crash Course*, 186.

19. For some striking examples of Catherwood’s strong distaste for Evangelicals’ “conservative” political proclivities, see my review of his book *The Evangelicals: What They Believe, Where They Are, and Their Politics* in *FARMS Review* 22/2 (2010): 232.

20. Catherwood, *Crash Course*, 11.

21. Catherwood, *Evangelicals*, 69.

22. Catherwood, *Evangelicals*, 55, 57, 153.

23. Catherwood, *Evangelicals*, 54, 149.

24. Catherwood, *Crash Course*, 19; and Catherwood, *Evangelicals*, 21, 54, 153–54.

25. Catherwood, *Evangelicals*, 111–12.

26. Catherwood, *Crash Course*, 3.

27. Catherwood, *Crash Course*, 3.



differences they had on other issues,”<sup>28</sup> though “Christians today diverge enormously on these issues.”<sup>29</sup> All of this is self-serving, circular, and vague. In addition, if there had not been profound differences over core beliefs, why would a Reformation have taken place?

In his effort to identify the crucial core beliefs,<sup>30</sup> Catherwood tends to read back into the earliest segment of Christian history his own Calvinist version of Protestant ideology. For example, in striving to locate a core belief, he claims that, “until AD 312, the Church consists of those individual Christian believers who have faith in Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour and Lord.”<sup>31</sup> Elsewhere he objects to “reading back” current notions into the past (p. 71), though he also grants that he cannot avoid making this mistake: “One of the major problems we have unearthed regularly in this book is *anachronism*, reading the present back into the past. The other is to reinterpret the past according to our own views.” Catherwood warns the readers of *Crash Course*, “You must always bear in mind that I too can be guilty of just that myself—and so can you, the reader.”<sup>32</sup>

According to Catherwood, Protestant Christianity has always been fractured into competing factions. The story he tells is necessarily one of sects, factions, or movements even within denominations that, when they are not in open warfare, manifest a thinly veiled rivalry, especially between contending theologians and/or competing churchmen. Often in the past these struggles also heavily involved princes and other worldly powers. A Protestant account of Chris-

tian church history must also address the host of internecine conflicts generated by the Protestant Reformation and its aftermath. Much of Catherwood’s church history is thus an effort to sort out some of these conflicts and differences based on his understanding of what the Bible alone seems to say about core doctrines and secondary issues. In addition, from outside of strictly conservative Protestant circles, there are, of course, radically different versions of Christian faith and its richly checkered history, each vying for hegemony.

### The Principal Contenders for Hegemony

The idea that the message articulated by evangelicals is identical to what is found in the Bible “is of course a Protestant point of view. Catholics reading this,” Catherwood admits, “will not agree, since they see a direct continuity from the early church right through to the present day fulfilled only in the doctrines and practices of the Roman Catholic Church.”<sup>33</sup> This is an important insight into the competing accounts of the Christian past. In his book *The Story of Christian Theology*, Roger Olson asks, “How did the Great Church in the West become the Roman Catholic Church?”<sup>34</sup> Olson, who writes from a Protestant but not Calvinist perspective, is aware that there are alternative ways of telling the story of Christian faith. At least from one crucial perspective, asking when the Roman Catholic Church emerged “is an improper question.” Why?

According to the Roman Catholic account of the history of Christian theology, the Great Church catholic and orthodox lived on from the apostles to today in the West and all bishops that remained in fellowship with the bishop of Rome have con-

28. Catherwood, *Crash Course*, 30.

29. Catherwood, *Crash Course*, 32.

30. Catherwood, *Crash Course*, 3; see also pp. 17, 28, 30, 31, 38.

31. Catherwood, *Crash Course*, 37.

32. Catherwood, *Crash Course*, 86.

33. Catherwood, *The Evangelicals*, 93.

34. Olson, *Story of Christian Theology*, 278.

stituted its hierarchy. There was no break, as it were, of the Roman Catholic Church from something else. In this way of seeing and telling the story, the Eastern bishops broke away from the Great Church gradually throughout the centuries after Augustine and officially in 1054. Similarly, in this view all Protestant denominations are not true churches of Jesus Christ at all but religious sects that need to return to the mother church of Rome.<sup>35</sup>

From an Orthodox perspective, those who follow the bishop of Rome should repent and be reunited with the original apostolic faith from which they have strayed. Put another way, it was the Roman Catholic Church that drifted away from the original Orthodox universal church. And from an Orthodox and also Roman Catholic perspective, Protestantism is a rather new deficient religious movement. From a Protestant perspective, however, the Reformation is understood as a return to the essentials of the original apostolic faith. With these basic alternatives in mind, we can begin to identify a Latter-day Saint perspective, and we can also see exactly why this faith is cast in a negative light even by those observers who are noted for their civility and gentility.

In the chapter entitled “The Western Church Becomes Roman Catholic,” which is not the first but the eighteenth of thirty-five chapters of Olson’s fine book, he points out that

Protestants generally interpret the story of Christian theology as a gradual demise of true, apostolic Christianity during the time of Cyprian and then Constantine and afterward. This decline was continuous with the

rise of the penitential system, the authority of the great Christian patriarchs of the Roman Empire, and the loss of the gospel of free grace by faith alone and the priesthood of all believers. Only from a Protestant perspective, in other words, does the story of theology include an episode of “the rise of Roman Catholicism.”<sup>36</sup>

### From a Protestant Perspective: Sign Gifts and Cessationist Ideology

The so-called sign gifts have become a very divisive issue among conservative Protestants. This has made “writing on this issue . . . a theological minefield.” Why? “Few things still divide evangelicals more.” The most “miraculous sign gifts of the early church” included especially “speaking in tongues or using special heaven-sent language” (p. 199). The first Protestant revival of these “gifts” in America was on Azusa Street in Los Angeles, California, in 1906, though something like it was known, according to Catherwood, in some sectarian circles in Britain for centuries. The Azusa Street event started what is commonly called the Pentecostal movement or family of “churches,” the best known being the Assemblies of God (pp. 199–200). “Today, in the twenty-first century,” according to Catherwood, “an enormous percentage of evangelicals would also call themselves Pentecostal or if they are in ordinary denominations, charismatics” (p. 199).<sup>37</sup>

“What makes Pentecostalism controversial is its theology that speaking in miraculous languages is a sign from God that a *baptism of*

36. Olson, *Story of Christian Theology*, 278–79.

37. Estimates place the number of Pentecostals worldwide at more than 500 million. See David B. Barrett, George T. Kurian, and Todd M. Johnson, eds., *World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Survey of Churches and Religions in the Modern World*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

35. Olson, *Story of Christian Theology*, 278.

the Holy Spirit, a special anointing from God subsequent to conversion, has taken place” (p. 200, emphasis in original). Why is this an issue for Catherwood? The reason seems to be that his hero, John Calvin, was “firmly cessationist” (p. 200)—that is, Calvin insisted that all the spiritual gifts mentioned in the New Testament were intended solely for the primitive church and ceased with the passing of the apostles. But the charismatic movement has infiltrated the Southern Baptist Convention and other denominations now also very much attracted to Reformed theology (see pp. 200–201). Can this controversy be resolved by relegating questions concerning the gifts of the Holy Spirit to the category of secondary issues, about which it is presumably proper to disagree, sometimes in florid language and even with strange circular arguments? (see pp. 124–25 for an amusing description of such quarrels). A modest willingness to tolerate sign gifts does not seem to qualify or compromise Catherwood’s dictum that genuine evangelicals all agree that “God does not reveal to us new things not contained in the Bible” (p. 18).<sup>38</sup>

### Partisan Polemics and “Objectivity”

In 1998 Catherwood assured his readers that he was “certainly keen to be as objective as possible” (p. 19). What might compromise his objectivity? His five-point Calvinism (aka TULIP)<sup>39</sup>

provides the interpretive dogmatic backbone for his “church history.” Could this commitment compromise his objectivity? “It is hard,” he admits, “for someone of Reformed belief to write objectively about John Calvin, for to many of us he is the towering genius of the Reformation” (p. 113). But there are additional qualifications to his neutrality.

In 2007 he confessed that “in the original [1998] version of this book it was necessary, being produced by a secular publisher [Hodder & Stoughton], to be more *neutral* than I am in this new edition” (p. 202, emphasis added). With Crossway (a.k.a. Good News Publishers), which makes available a wide selection of primarily Reformed literature, appearing “neutral” would have been a mistake. But in 1998 it was useful for Catherwood to blur his largely Calvinist biases. It appears that “objectivity” and “neutrality,” however these concepts are understood, can be bent to fit circumstances. In 1998 he included in *Crash Course* somewhat favorable remarks about individuals and events that he deplores. The justification he provides is that both his intended audience and publisher required the appearance of neutrality. But in 2007, with a publisher fond of five-point Calvinism, he removed from the revised edition of his book, for example, praise for Mother Teresa (1910–1997) and also some faintly favorable remarks about Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–45), a Lutheran pastor whose opposition to Adolf Hitler made him a martyr (see p. 202).<sup>40</sup> One reason he gave for dropping favorable comments about Bonhoeffer is that “before the war . . . he had already become well established as a liberal theologian.”<sup>41</sup> If there were cultural Protestants (or

38. Roman Catholics seem to agree since what they call “private revelation” does not add to the canon of scripture. Instead, modification and expansion of official dogma take place through an elaboration of “tradition” by the teaching authority (magisterium).

39. TULIP is the acronym used to identify five-point Calvinism. Thus T = total depravity, which presumably flows from the original sin of Adam; U = unconditional election (or predestination); L = limited atonement (or divine mercy only for those predestined for salvation by God); I = irresistible grace (the saving gift is available only to those predestined for salvation); and P = perseverance of the elect (or eternal security, which is available only for the predestined elect).

40. These remarks should be compared with Catherwood, *Crash Course*, 161 (for Bonhoeffer) and 180–81 (for Mother Teresa).

41. Catherwood, *Crash Course*, 161.

“liberals”) among the Lutheran clergy in Germany during the Hitler regime, they tended somewhat to associate with the so-called German-Christian movement that saw National Socialism as providential. But Bonhoeffer was anything but German-Christian.<sup>42</sup>

Catherwood is also annoyed by Bonhoeffer’s complaint about the “cheap grace” then being offered by Lutheran pastors, a concept he set out in a book entitled *The Cost of Discipleship* in 1937,<sup>43</sup> and by his later enigmatic appeal for a “religionless Christianity.”<sup>44</sup> In both instances, Bonhoeffer was calling for genuine faithfulness—that is, a faith no longer cloaked in the trappings and traditions of addled, rancid religiosity. In addition, one must keep in mind that until the end of World War II, in the German language “religion” was often contrasted with either faith (*Glaube*) or revelation (*Offenbarung*), and hence was seen by one not at all pious, Karl Marx (1818–1883), and later by an entirely pious one, Karl Barth (1886–1968), as at least a skillfully administered narcotic.

Though he boasts of desiring to be as objective as possible, Catherwood doubts that “a present-day scholar can ever be truly ‘scientific’ or ‘objective.’” The reason he offers is that “an author’s preconceived ideas make an enormous impact on how he sees things, even if he tries to deceive himself that he is being completely unbiased and open-minded.”<sup>45</sup> While rightly skeptical of a thick version of the myth of detached, disinterested, balanced, neutral, objective historians and their scientific history, he retains a thin version

of this myth. This is typical of those in thrall to the myth of objective history or objective historians. Hence he grants that what he calls “complete objectivity of interpretation is, as many historians and others are coming to realise, rather difficult to achieve.”<sup>46</sup> In addition, and for reasons he does not specify, he also claims that “in our own time objectivity is all the more difficult, if not to say impossible, to achieve.”<sup>47</sup> The problem is not, however, merely the difficulty of achieving “complete objectivity,” but the very idea of objective history (and objective historians).<sup>48</sup> It is not that objectivity is a worthy ideal that is difficult to achieve; it is an essentially flawed, incoherent notion, though it serves as a powerful polemical weapon against presumed adversaries and for one’s own ideological preferences.

### “By Biblical Standards”

In 1998 in the first edition of *Crash Course*, Catherwood claimed, “I am writing this book as objectively as possible, attempting to be scrupulously fair to everyone in the process, whether or not I agree with them privately.”<sup>49</sup> In 1998 Catherwood did not mention the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and hence there was no commentary on Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. But in his 2007 book he informs his readers that “Joseph Smith was the founder of Mormonism, the first of the unusual religious views to be invented in North America” (p. 165). He then adds

42. For a solid summary of Bonhoeffer’s deeds and thoughts, see Peter McEnhill and George Newlands, *Fifty Key Christian Thinkers* (London: Routledge, 2004), 70–80.

43. See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan, 1959), 38.

44. Catherwood, *Crash Course*, 161.

45. Catherwood, *Crash Course*, 24.

46. Catherwood, *Crash Course*, 4.

47. Catherwood, *Crash Course*, 158–59.

48. For a detailed setting out of the incoherence of most ideological appeals by historians to objectivity, and its surrogates such as neutrality, detachment, balance, and so forth, see Peter Novick’s remarkable *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988). For additional commentary on Novick’s position, see Louis Midgley, “Knowing Brother Joseph Again,” *FARMS Review* 18/1 (2006): xlv–lx.

49. Catherwood, *Crash Course*, 4.

that “strictly speaking the movement is called the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints [*sic*], though since it invented nonexistent golden tablets purportedly from God, the actual resemblance to genuine Christianity is fairly nonexistent” (p. 165). The reason Catherwood gives for this opinion is, “as Lawrence Foster has put it, the Book of Mormon, the basis of the religion, ‘is a highly complex work of the religious imagination’” (p. 165).<sup>50</sup> He adds that

Smith himself was murdered, and after various wanderings the Mormons ended up in Utah, especially Salt Lake City, which they dominate to this day. While Mormons tend to be moral and clean-cut, their theology, including their notorious acceptance of polygamy (technically abandoned in 1890 but still practiced by some), shows clearly that they are a false religion *by biblical standards*. By now they have moved well beyond their Utah base, with at least five million adherents worldwide. (p. 165, emphasis added)

The faith of the Saints, according to Catherwood, is “by biblical standards” a “false religion.” He unfortunately neglects to set out these standards. Instead, he argues by bald assertion. This is typical of virtually every claim made in *Church History*. In addition, the heavy lifting in his church history is done by the adjective *biblical* in one of its various polemical iterations. He claims that only the Bible is the “final revelation” and hence the ultimate authority on divine things. It fol-

lows that he is confident that his fellow evangelicals agree with him that there can be no divine special revelations outside the Bible. Protestants who complain about the Roman Catholic veneration of Mary, and hence also about what appears to be a steady increase in what amounts to “Mariolatry,” some of which is officially approved or encouraged, might take a closer look at their own underlying “bibliolatry.” Signs of this can perhaps be seen in Catherwood’s appeal to “biblical standards” (p. 165) to dismiss Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon.

But Catherwood also makes reference to “the biblical view” (p. 49), “biblical theology” (pp. 53, 210), “a biblical theology” (p. 54),<sup>51</sup> a “realistic biblical view of humanity” (p. 193), “biblical doctrine” (pp. 88, 96, 143), “biblical doctrines” (p. 216), a “biblical option” (p. 196), “biblical standards” (p. 165), a “biblical answer” (p. 145), “the biblical mandate” (p. 197), “biblical Christianity” (pp. 140, 197), a “biblical concept” (p. 97), “biblical form” (p. 97), “biblical freedom” (p. 120), “biblical grounds” (p. 122), “biblical stress” (p. 134), “a biblical balance” (p. 147), “biblical tradition” (p. 153), a “biblical basis” (p. 163), a “biblical lifestyle” (p. 209), “biblical truth” (p. 105), “the biblical truth” (p. 125), and “biblical truths” (p. 163), with the need for theologians to “systematize biblical truth” (p. 114). His readers are also introduced to “Bible-based evangelicals” (p. 202) and to, of course, “an evangelical, biblical, theological, and spiritually accurate standpoint” (p. 64). There is also “bible-based Christianity” (p. 202) and those who follow “the correct biblical pattern” (p. 151). One can also find

50. This remark appeared in an essay by Lawrence Foster in an anthology entitled *Eerdman’s Handbook of Christianity in America*, ed. Mark Noll et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 200. Catherwood, however, does not cite a source for the language he quotes. Neither edition of his sketches of church history has citations or a bibliography.

51. This label was applied by Catherwood to the post-World War II European theological movement called “Neo-Orthodoxy.” But evangelicals have mixed opinions about whether, for example, Karl Barth was in any sense evangelical. See Gregory G. Bolich, *Karl Barth & Evangelicalism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1980), especially pp. 57–99.

references to “Bible-based Christians” (p. 36) or “Bible Christians” (p. 79), who are sharply contrasted with whatever is deemed “unbiblical” (p. 181). If expressions like “biblically speaking” (pp. 80, 142) are included, it turns out that argument by adjective can be found in at least fifty places in *Church History*. In virtually no instance is there a hint of even a proof-text or an allusion to the text of the Bible. Instead, he insists that access to all but the “core beliefs” that theologians or churchmen—those “brave Christians”—have “worked out” cannot be found by merely consulting the Bible. This can be seen in his waffling over the controversial “sign gifts” that Pentecostals (and charismatics) have made popular despite the cessationist ideology reaching back to near the end of the apostolic age.

In 2010, while trying to identify and situate contemporary evangelicalism, Catherwood claimed that his Calvinist brand of “evangelical faith goes right back to the beginning of the church itself, a theme” that he has, he points out, “followed elsewhere, in [his] *Church History: A Crash Course for the Curious*. Evangelicalism in this sense is not new at all: it was what the Christians at the time of the Bible thought, what the early church taught, and what the reformers of the sixteenth century also believed.”<sup>52</sup> This simply must be the case since the magisterial Reformers insisted on the “Bible only” as they appropriated much of Augustine’s theology. But this leaves a gaping hole in church history.

Catherwood admits that the Reformation, which he thinks influenced Roman Catholicism favorably, did not sort out all of these matters. The Reformers themselves were necessarily deeply beholden to princes and kings who were eager to use the Reformation to preserve their

own prerogatives and privileges in opposition to the Vatican and remnants of the Holy Roman Empire. Where the Reformation was dominant, it changed some things such as architectural and worship styles. But unfortunately, Protestants joined Roman Catholics in slaughtering Anabaptist peasants, whose undertakings threatened the power of both. Burning heretics was a vice practiced by Catholics and Protestants.<sup>53</sup> Such refinements as the legal preservation of freedom of conscience came only much later, when neither bishops nor kings could hold the reins of churchly or worldly power. The separation of what we call “church” and “state” is thus a new wrinkle in “church history” and not the product of the Protestant Reformation.

How can one account for all the earlier forging of alliances with or subordination to worldly princes, the veneration of relics and also Mary, the Inquisitions, the Crusades, monasticism, pilgrimages, the pomp of the Papacy, and a host of other things that Catherwood seems to abhor? These sorts of things leave the “church,” until the Protestant Reformation, in a kind of vacuum or worldly limbo. He is clearly aware of the problem. He even draws special attention to the fact that, from the perspective of “the part of the Christian Church from which” he comes—that is, “the Protestant wing of Christianity”—some may “dislike” what he has written because Protestants “tend to think that nothing happened” in “church” history “from the fourth to the sixteenth centuries.” Instead, they may conclude that “God was remarkably quiet” for all those years.<sup>54</sup> The “church” was either in deep apostasy or had simply

52. Catherwood, *Evangelicals*, 93.

53. When we remember that the Roman Inquisition burned Giordano Bruno (1548–1600) at the stake as a heretic, we should keep in mind that in Geneva the governing council (with Calvin’s approval) likewise burned Michael Servetus (1511–1553) at the stake for heresy.

54. Catherwood, *Crash Course*, 4.



vanished. “Such views imply, in effect, that God abandoned his people who make up his creation, the Church, for at least twelve hundred years, or for three-fifths of the entire history of Christianity since Jesus came in the first century.”<sup>55</sup> He insists that Protestants must face the question of whether or not “God abandoned the Church from the time of Constantine in the fourth century up until the Reformation . . . , twelve hundred years later.”<sup>56</sup> He seems to believe that God did not entirely abandon the church during those twelve hundred years, despite all those silly relics that still fascinate the superstitious, the terror of the Roman and Spanish Inquisitions, the strange and sometimes brutal maneuvers behind the fashioning of the creeds and confessions, the quirkiness of monasticism, the power and wealth of religious orders, the borrowing of half-understood categories from pagan philosophy in an effort to patch together theological systems, the obsession with pilgrimages to supposed “holy” sites, the cynical brutality of papal power politics, the endless meddling of ecclesiastical authorities in worldly regimes, the kings and princes declaring the faith of their subjects by fiat,<sup>57</sup> and the corruption of ecclesiastical authorities, to say nothing of the strikingly worldly show that leaves especially Europe and Britain littered with magnificent religious art and monumental “church” architecture. I actually agree with Catherwood that God did

not entirely abandon his children even during their most intense spells of apostasy.

## A Personal Witness

These days older Latter-day Saints with disposable incomes sometimes avail themselves of tours, during which they are led around various places in Europe to gaze at its wondrous art and architecture, much of which is in various ways Christian. The venturesome might even visit Rome, and also the New Rome established by Constantine at what is now Istanbul, and even the third Rome in Moscow,<sup>58</sup> as well as various historic centers of protest against these older Christianities. Be that as it may, it is difficult for the Saints to go on holiday in various places in Britain, Europe, or the Near East without encountering a surfeit of antique “church history.” I have a way of seeing all of this, and much more, as part of the story of my own faith, and I believe that our Latter-day Saint scriptures provide a warrant for doing so.

Much of the Old Testament, especially Kings and Chronicles, but elsewhere as well, contains prophetic warnings about the consequences of failing to remember and keep the Lord’s commandments. To do so is to incur the cursing that eventually follows a departure from the terms of the covenant with God. In addition, the Book of Mormon begins with a story of a tiny colony fleeing from the spiritual Babylon then found in Jerusalem. Unfortunately, those people took with them tragic elements that ultimately brought an end to the covenant people of God cached in that far corner of the Lord’s vineyard. Hence I believe that despite the tragic loss of covenants

55. Catherwood, *Crash Course*, 4.

56. Catherwood, *Crash Course*, 19.


57. The corrupting symbiotic relationship between bishop and king or pastor and prince, which has a long and terrible history, became the order of the day following the dreadful sectarian warfare in German-speaking lands. Following the Peace of Augsburg (1555), the subjects of princes or kings were forced to adopt either the Catholic or the Lutheran faith of the ruler (“Whose realm, his religion”—*Cuius regio, eius religio*). See *Crash Course*, 107, for Catherwood’s commentary on this matter.

58. Soon after the fall of Constantinople (now Istanbul) to the Ottoman Empire on 29 May 1453, some Russian Orthodox clerics proclaimed Moscow as the new or third Rome.

and priesthood keys and the later adoption of confusing ecumenical creeds crafted by councils of bishops intimidated by mobs,<sup>59</sup> God was still at work in various, essentially invisible ways. It was the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ that was lost, not God's involvement with and watch-care over his children; nor would faith, hope, and love entirely disappear among those who were somehow genuinely touched by the crucial story of the humble deeds of Jesus of Nazareth on their behalf. The apostasies were often great, but they were not absolute or complete. I am confident that many often-now unknown and unheralded heroic individuals, families, and perhaps even communities managed somehow to keep at least a flicker of the flame alive despite what now seems to have been either puerile or demonic episodes in the larger story of Christianity—which story I believe Latter-day Saints must come to share with others who genuinely self-identify as Christians. Others may not, for various reasons, choose to accept the founding narratives of the LDS faith, but I believe that the Saints must understand the danger signs of apostasy as well as strive to discern what appear to them to be signs of piety and faithfulness wherever they occur. The Saints find nothing problematic about singing hymns written by Martin Luther, Isaac Watts, Stuart K. Hines, Francis of Assisi, and, of course, Charles Wesley.<sup>60</sup>

Latter-day Saint scriptures provide accounts of portentous turning away from the genuine faith. These accounts are for me prophetic warnings. Hence I would like to know more about

my Christian cousins and their stories, which I believe are remote, fateful portions of our own larger story. A holiday in Britain, Europe, or the Near East should begin to make it possible for the Saints to pry open a bit the door to at least a tiny portion of what the Saints can and should see as part of the larger history of their own faith.

I am enthralled by even partisan efforts to tell the story of Christian faith, with all the rich details, including many wonders and unfortunate betrayals. From my perspective, the besotted Calvinist “crash course” of what amounts to a bitter-sweet story of Christianity is part of the larger story of, first, the confounding of genuine faith in Jesus Christ and, second, the urgent desire of those who marked its deficiency and desperately wanted it back again. Much like Catherwood, I am also confident that elements of faithfulness persisted despite all the more conspicuous and terrible faults and frailties that come to light. In this I remain, however, a consumer of the stories told by those whose faith was never stirred or has lapsed, as well as the stories told by devout Protestants, Orthodox, and Roman Catholics. These efforts are worthy of our close, critical attention, if not our entire admiration or credulous acceptance. And this is true despite their being, even at their very best, partial sketches and also, given their different confessional groundings, necessarily incommensurate, clashing stories. Gonzáles is right—the stories we tell are in an important sense autobiographical since they are ultimately our stories and hence bear the marks of our own hopes and yearnings, including especially our faith in God or the absence of such. 

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

60. Some of my own favorite hymns were not composed by Latter-day Saints. One is “Brightly Beams Our Father’s Mercy,” by Philip Paul Bliss, and another is George F. Root’s “Come to the Savior,” which as “Koutou Katoua Ra” is sung by the Maori Saints.



# Book Notes

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**Diarmaid MacCulloch. *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years*. New York: Penguin Books, 2009. 1184 pp., with index and “Further Reading” bibliography. \$45.00 (hardcover), \$25.00 (paperback).**

MacCulloch’s *Christianity*<sup>1</sup> is “emphatically a personal view of the sweep of Christian history” (p. 11). It is also remarkably rich in detail and is polished and urbane. This wonderful book might serve as a kind of handbook for Latter-day Saints interested in the details on Christian peoples and events. There is no pretense of detached neutrality in *Christianity*. Instead, MacCulloch recognizes that a reader “has a right to know” (p. 11) how an author understands his endeavor. In a candid introduction (pp. 1-15), MacCulloch indicates that, coming from a devout Anglican family, he can even now remember “with affec-

tion what it was like to hold a dogmatic position on the statements of Christian belief” (p. 11). He is, however, now puzzled at “how something so apparently crazy [as the Christian faith] can be so captivating to millions” of people (p. 11). He now sees himself merely “as a candid friend of Christianity” (p. 11).

The author does not make direct pronouncements about the truth of Christianity even though he admits that, unlike Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, which might be “true” in some ordinary prosaic sense, “Christianity’s claim to truth is absolutely central to it over much of the past two thousand years, and much of this history is dedicated to tracing the varieties of this claim and the competition between them” (p. 11). He feels that one trained to write history simply cannot address the question of the soundness of the crucial founding truth claims. But even his denial that historians can assess the

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1. A six-part BBC series entitled *A History of Christianity* is based on this book and is narrated by MacCulloch. It aired in 2009 and 2010.

founding truth claims is a subtle way of denying that, for example, the story of the empty tomb in Jerusalem is true, since it and other elements of the founding story are profoundly historical. To claim that the truth of such stories cannot be addressed brushes them aside as something other than genuine history.

MacCulloch thus sees every version of Christian faith as a chimera—a glorious, charming, or hideous delusion with which people have consoled or perhaps tormented both themselves and others. Yet he also insists that some of the stories he tells are really moving (p. 5). This explains why he hints that he is apophatic—that is, that the truth about divine things can only be set out in negations. This is not a fatal flaw. A careful reader can easily sense his position and also enjoy his irenic style. In addition, he has surveyed an enormous mass of secondary literature upon which his account is made to rest. His way of portraying the Christian past can assist those more partisan and hence concerned with defending their version of Christian faith to see how others less certain or even quite uncertain can tell the plethora of often-convoluted and tragic stories.

The book addresses the question of where Christianity really began. Was it in Athens and not Jerusalem? Or was it in Constantinople, or later in Rome? And how and why were the creeds and confessions created? In addition, he provides rather detailed accounts of the often-ignored Christian communities in Africa, India, China, the Americas, and the South Pacific. MacCulloch even begins his narrative by tracing some of the background of Christian faith in Jewish and Greek history and culture (pp. 19-73). (This explains the strange subtitle for his book—“The First Three Thousand Years.”)

MacCulloch sets out what he sees “as the good in the varied forms of Christian faith, while pointing clearly to what . . . is foolish and dangerous in them” (pp. 12-13). To accomplish this task, he draws upon his professional training in an effort to discipline his “strong feelings of both affection and anger towards [his] own [Anglican] inheritance” (p. 12). He admits that “it is always difficult to stand inside a religion and view it objectively; worse still to judge what is ‘true’ about a package of ideas which has shaped one’s own identity. Those who try are liable to be unpopular with their fellow believers and equally open to ridicule from those who have no sympathy with the belief-package and feel that the effort is not worthwhile.” He also insists that “religious belief can be very close to madness. It has brought human beings to acts of criminal folly as well as to the highest achievements of goodness, creativity and generosity” (p. 13). He is, however, far too restricted in his notion of what constitutes “religion.” If we understand that vague label in an expansive way—as the deepest, controlling concerns of individuals and groups, including even or especially those who no longer stand inside some circle of Christian faith—then the National Socialist and Communist regimes, as well as other equally demonic movements (many of which are overtly atheist in ideology), most certainly should be included in his anathema against the madness of religion. This is not, however, to discount the fact that at least from the age of Constantine, Christian faith has been deeply embroiled in execrable acts of “criminal folly,” often involving worldly power politics and ideologies. Be that as it may, the vice of faith, which presumably no longer afflicts him, is, he thinks, having answers to questions (p. 2), or perhaps having what he considers the wrong answer

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to a crucial question. At some point MacCulloch refused Anglican ordination, a stance that seems to be deeply enmeshed in a sophisticated and “faithful” form of unfaith, though he is not the village atheist since he recognizes that, despite his own situation, much good flows from faith in the Christian God. And one of the tasks he sets himself is awarding blue ribbons where he thinks they are merited.

MacCulloch traces the links between ancient Greek philosophy/classical theism and creedal Christianity. There is, of course, a controversy over whether these two sources of “wisdom” are compatible, and if so, on whose terms and to what degree. Jews, who had long faced misfortune, retained faith in a God concerned about their responses to the covenant they made with him. They also believed God to be concerned with all human beings. Greek philosophers, on the other hand, had in mind a quite different God—a supreme being or First Thing whose reality could be discovered by human reason, and hence also a being “immune to change and devoid of the passion which denotes change” (p. 2). Though MacCulloch does not use the label, what he describes is the complicated confrontation of what others have called the wisdom of Jerusalem with the wisdom of Athens. The subsequent quarrels over, for example, the details of the Trinity indicate to MacCulloch that, for the first five centuries, Christianity was “in many respects a dialogue between Judaism and Graeco-Roman philosophy” (p. 8). Hence much of Christianity is not grounded in scripture but was born, instead, of traditions reaching back to pagan sources.

Varieties of Christian faith have been able, it seems, to survive and flourish in part because what was believed was adapted or compromised or somehow just mutated. There is no such

thing as that which has always been believed everywhere by every Christian. MacCulloch stresses the variety of beliefs and practices and also how little any of the competing faith traditions have their roots in the Bible, despite what the Reformers and their various followers claim (pp. 8–9). For example, he calls attention to “one of the most numerically successful movements of modern Christianity, Pentecostalism” (p. 6), and notes that it seems to prosper despite the fact that it embraces “speaking in tongues, which was severely mistrusted by Paul of Tarsus and which (despite the understandable claims of Pentecostals to the contrary) has very little precedent in Christian practice between the first and the nineteenth centuries CE” (p. 6).

MacCulloch stresses what he believes are absurdities, crimes, excesses, contradictions, and endless quarrels that tend to constitute the stories of Christian faith. Christianity in all its many forms is thus heavily integrated with politics, cultures, economics, migrations, diseases, and almost everything in addition to some version of the teachings of Jesus. The Crusades and the Roman and Spanish inquisitions were not unique but were major manifestations of a tendency among believers whose passions had run wild. MacCulloch addresses the propensity of peoples through the ages to use the sword to settle even minor issues in Christian theology. An example can be found in his summary of the events that took place with Constantine and what is called “the Imperial Church”:

The emperors were deeply involved not so much because of their own religious convictions . . . , but because so many other people cared so much about the issues. Naturally clergy were passionately involved, and it is difficult to disentangle



their righteous longing to assert the truth from their consciousness that the clerical immunities and privileges granted Christian clergy by Constantine and his successors were only available to those who had succeeded in convincing the emperors that they were the authentic voice of imperial Christianity. The play of forces was in more than one direction: emperors had no choice but to steer the Church to preserve their own rule, while few in the Church seem to have perceived the moral dangers involved when mobs took up theology and armies marched in the name of the Christian God. It may seem baffling now that such apparently rarefied disputes could have aroused the sort of passion now largely confined to the aftermath of a football match. Yet quite apart from the propensity of human beings to become irrationally tribal about the most obscure matters, we need to remember that ordinary Christians experienced their God through the Church's liturgy and in a devotional intensity which seized them in holy places. Once they had experienced the divine in such particular settings, having absorbed one set of explanations about what the divine was, anything from outside which disrupted those explanations threatened their access to divine power. That would provide ample reason for the stirring of rage and fear. (pp. 221-22)


When addressing the "sheer variety" of stories of Christian faith (p. 9), and especially what he calls the expansion of Christian identity, in addition to recent movements like "American conservative Protestant evangelicalism" and Pentecostalism, "its vigorous and unruly cousin,"

MacCulloch notices Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon.

In nineteenth-century America, marginal Christians created a frontier religion with its own new sacred book, the basis of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the Mormons). The astonishing growth of the Mormons is as much part of the modern story of Christianity as that of Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism or Protestantism, however fiercely conventionally conceived Christianity may deny the Mormons the name Christian. (p. 10)

MacCulloch has tried both "to synthesize the current state of historical scholarship across the world" (p. 12) and then to reflect cautiously on what he has fashioned. His is not, however, "a work of primary-source research" (p. 12), for such a thing is simply impossible. *Christianity* is limited by, among other things, its author's choice of secondary sources, which is also, of course, true of all those scholars, whether Latter-day Saint or not, who write about Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. Latter-day Saints will find MacCulloch's treatment of the Church of Jesus Christ, including Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon (pp. 906-8), dependent upon a narrow slice of often-flawed secondary literature. He relies, for example, on Fawn Brodie's biography of Joseph Smith, though he mentions in passing Richard Bushman's *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (p. 1088 nn. 102-8). MacCulloch's selection of secondary literature led to some embarrassing mistakes. For example, Joseph Smith was not, as MacCulloch claims, "the only person definitely to view the plates" (p. 906). This should be a warning to all of us when we yield to the urge to opine about complicated, controversial historical matters, and especially when

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we do so about versions of Christianity not our own. With these cautions, I highly recommend MacCulloch's book to those who want more information on, and understanding of, the vast sweep of Christian history. 

Louis Midgley

**Kenneth J. Stewart. *Ten Myths about Calvinism: Recovering the Breadth of the Reformed Tradition*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic (an imprint of InterVarsity Press), 2011. 301 pp., with name index, scripture index, and appendix ("The Earliest Known Reference to the TULIP Acronym"). \$24.00 (paperback).**

In *Ten Myths about Calvinism*, Professor Stewart seeks to demythologize Calvinism by debunking claims made by recent critics of Calvinism as well as myths held tenaciously by some ardent Calvinists. His primary goal is to rescue Calvinism from extremist ideologues—that is, those who advance what he considers stereotypes, misconceptions, and misrepresentations of sound Calvinism. In so doing he strives to save Calvinism from Calvinists, or to reform Reformed theology, and thereby take some of “the swagger and certainty” out of certain Calvinists (p. 12). He grants that the “Calvinist strain [of Christianity] has a tendency to generate its share of extremists. Call them high-flyers or ultras if you like, but Calvinism has its share” (p. 12). I believe that Latter-day Saints who encounter countercult critics like James White will agree with Stewart’s assessment. And those who encounter other, less belligerent critics of the faith of the Saints, such as Norman Geisler, John MacArthur, or Al Mohler, may appreciate an effort to tone down the harsh, crusading, inquisitorial elements in contemporary Calvinism.

The most important part of Stewart’s book is devoted to urging Calvinists to cease advancing the “Four Myths Calvinists Should Not Be Circulating (But Are)” (pp. 11–120). He clearly seeks to correct some of the confusion he finds in contemporary contentious Calvinists. My own experience is that Calvinists of whatever brand are guilty of more than one of the mistakes Stewart identifies. These four myths include the following:

1. One man (Calvin) and one city (Geneva) are determinative (pp. 21–43).
2. Calvin’s view of predestination must be ours (pp. 45–72).
3. TULIP is the yardstick of the truly reformed (pp. 75–96).
4. Calvinists take a dim view of revival and awakening (pp. 99–120).

Stewart insists that John Calvin did not provide a creed and that, fortunately, there is more to Calvinism than merely Calvin’s teachings. Despite the narrow opinions held by some cranks and crackpots, Calvin’s legacy is somewhat messy, with much mixing and matching with other ideologies and strains of Protestant religiosity. Stewart strives to rescue Calvinism from those he considers extremists. He does this by sacrificing or challenging some of its much-vaunted coherence and consistency. Calvinists are not, he holds, stuck with Calvin’s understanding of predestination since there is a host of different understandings of this key concept among Calvinists. Thus, according to Stewart, “today’s Calvinists ought, at the very least, to have observed that predestination as addressed in the major confessions of the Reformation era is shorn of some excesses attached to Calvin’s own views” (p. 71).

Stewart targets TULIP, the famous five-point Calvinist acronym. He argues that TULIP does not necessarily capture the Calvinist five points as set out in the famous Synod of Dordt (1618-19), when Dutch Calvinists responded to threats posed by Arminianism. He reveals that the now-famous TULIP acronym turned up in print only in an American weekly political newspaper in 1913, and even then not in the exact terms with which it is now commonly associated (p. 79). Stewart identifies an item by William H. Vail entitled “The Five Points of Calvinism Historically Considered”<sup>2</sup> as the first published source for TULIP. Vail was merely reporting that TULIP was mentioned in a lecture by the Reverend Cleland Boyd McAfee before the Presbyterian Union in Newark, New Jersey, in 1905.

Stewart insists that TULIP is not a kind of Calvinist shorthand creed (p. 93). His own dogmatism about what should and should not be understood as core Calvinism is itself a kind of caricature of those who summarize Dordt’s response to the Arminian five points with the TULIP acronym. He is troubled because there are Calvinists who are more concerned about the acronym than about the specific doctrines. There is, however, no standard way of setting out or understanding the Calvinist five points (p. 79). He provides a chart (pp. 93-95) showing which prominent five-point Calvinists use or do not use TULIP as a benchmark for their version of Calvinism. Of the fifteen prominent defenses of five-point Calvinism he examines, nine make use of TULIP in one way or another, and all of these without the realization that the acronym first appeared in print in 1913.

In addition to striving to moderate Calvin’s view on predestination, Stewart is eager to downplay if not flatly reject the idea of limited atonement. In his view, only those who are belligerent, strident, or contentious really stress limited atonement. Stewart’s book is endorsed by folks like Richard Mouw, who in his book *Calvinism in the Las Vegas Airport* explains that because limited atonement for him is incomprehensible, he puts it “on the shelf.” And yet Mouw sees himself as a “card-carrying Calvinist.” Stewart seeks to accommodate those who would like to think that there is potentially hope for everyone and who need a reasonable justification for witnessing to sinners. He seeks an understanding of the atonement that allows for potentially everyone to be saved. Stewart inveighs against those who do not see the “capaciousness,” as he calls it, of an atonement “sufficient for everybody” (p. 89). On this issue he seems to me to advance a kind of mellow semi-Arminian ideology. He also asks whether revival is an event or a process and whether it necessarily “descends from heaven” or can be generated by our own efforts on behalf of lost souls. He answers that it can come from either source, which entails a radical revision of the notion of predestination and extreme understandings of divine sovereignty.

There are, it seems, schools of Calvinism, each of which is at war with the others. The contending views of moderate Calvinist Norman Geisler and five-point Calvinist James White exemplify such rifts. One of these schools holds the TULIP acronym sacrosanct, while at the other end of the Calvinist ideological spectrum are those who, as in the case of Richard Mouw, are painfully aware of problems inherent in the TULIP rubric while remaining chained to it as the supposed authentic expression of biblical Christianity.

2. William H. Vail, “The Five Points of Calvinism Historically Considered,” *The New Outlook* 104 (1913): 394.

Stewart lists but does not situate some of the “new Calvinists” in a fine chapter entitled “Recovering Our Bearings: Calvinism in the Twenty-First Century” (pp. 270–90). His is a kind of reverse history of Calvinism in which he begins with the latest crop of Calvinists, including John Piper, Mark Driscoll, and C. J. Mahaney (pp. 272–74), while mentioning in passing Mark Dever, Al Mohler, and Wayne Grudem (p. 273 nn. 7–8). He works backward uncovering wave after wave of Calvinist “revivals” beginning with Martyn Lloyd-Jones (pp. 274–75, 280, 288), J. I. Packer (p. 276), and Francis Schaeffer (p. 276), and then further back to C. H. Spurgeon (p. 276) as well as other large figures in the Calvinist past. Stewart mentions the formation in 1795 of the London Missionary Society (p. 287), which should be of interest to Latter-day Saints who have encountered the remnants of this endeavor in the South Pacific. This historical account of English-speaking Calvinism is the most interesting and useful part of Stewart’s book.

There are two curiosities in Stewart’s efforts to address the myths raised by critics of Calvinism. One is his effort to rationalize Calvin’s involvement in the 1553 burning of Michael Servetus for heresy (pp. 187–89). Calvin was, we are told, less brutal since he only wanted Servetus’s head removed. Stewart’s way of dealing with this matter is to argue that everyone, both Protestants and Catholics, was doing that sort of thing. But this does not explain away the ideological buttresses for hounding heretics, which fit within Calvin’s overall ideology and even now turn up in the strains of Calvinism that Stewart seeks to exorcize.

The other curiosity involves the alliance of Protestants of various stripes with corrupt and corrupting princes and kings. These compromising bargains were presumably made in desperate

efforts to survive and then prosper. In an effort to challenge the myth that “Calvinism promotes Antinomianism” (pp. 151–70), Stewart tells the story of the capitulation of various large figures in the Protestant Reformation to the demands made by Philip I of Hesse (1504–1567). Also known as Philip the Magnanimous, Landgrave of Hesse, this prince insisted that if he was not allowed to take a second wife, he would withdraw his support from Luther. Philip was not asking the leading ecclesiastical figures merely to wink at his conduct; he needed and demanded and got their public approval for bigamy, or what we would call polygamy (pp. 151–52, 154). This seems to indicate that, in a pinch, moral rules can be brushed aside—or so these early Protestants decided. It is, however, not exactly clear what this has to do with Calvin or Calvinism, since this is a problem for Lutherans faced with serious threats from Catholic princes and hence much in need of princes who would protect them.

*Ten Myths about Calvinism* is a useful Calvinist critique of some versions of Calvinism and should be of interest and use to Latter-day Saints faced with belligerent Calvinists. It also opens a door for those curious about the contentions and foibles of theologians and churchmen.❏

Louis Midgley

**John W. Welch and Donald W. Parry, eds., *The Tree of Life: From Eden to Eternity*. Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, Brigham Young University, 2011. xvi + 280 pp., with selected bibliography, citation index, and subject index. \$23.99 (paperback).**


Lehi’s vision of the tree of life, together with the expanded explanation revealed to Nephi, contains many essential elements of Latter-day Saint theology. But the tree of life as a symbol of

faith is not unique to Mormonism. It is found in many religions and cultures, all celebrating the mystery of life and renewal.

Following a successful symposium held at Brigham Young University, John W. Welch and Donald W. Parry have assembled papers focusing on the tree of life from diverse perspectives. Eleven authors discuss how the tree of life is used symbolically in the Old and New Testaments, the Book of Mormon, and the Qur'an; in ancient Maya and Catholic traditions; in the art, folklore, and traditions of Asia; and finally in Book of Mormon art. Many beautiful illustrations enhance these studies (see the seventy-one figures listed on pp. vii-xi and the sixteen color plates identified on pp. xi-xii and inserted between pages 128 and 129).

It would be hard for a single volume to contain a full survey, but as an introduction to the tree of life as a persistent religious symbol, this book fulfills its purpose. Without going into each of the eleven excellent articles, I will just highlight three that I particularly enjoyed. Daniel C. Peterson ably presents insights into the Islamic tree of life tradition (pp. 193-216). With his brief introduction to the Qur'an as a preface, Peterson opens up this important world to the lay reader. Equally, Andrew C. Skinner leads us into the use of the symbol in the perhaps mystical world of later Jewish thought, as well as the more traditional Hebrew Bible (pp. 25-54). John W. Welch takes us from the world of the New Testament to early Christianity (pp. 81-107).

It would not be fair to dismiss the other studies by Donald W. Parry (pp. 1-24), Margaret Barker (pp. 55-79), C. Wilfred Griggs (pp. 109-27), Charles Swift (pp. 129-49), Allen J. Christenson (pp. 151-70), Jaime Lara (pp. 171-92), John M. Lundquist (pp. 217-40), and Richard Oman (pp. 241-60), as well as Daniel B. McKinlay's useful

selected bibliography of Latter-day Saint sources (pp. 261-64) and non-Latter-day Saint sources (264-68), since time spent with this volume will expand our knowledge and understanding of the tree of life and help us put in context Lehi's vision, both through the written word and visually through artwork from around the world. 

Alison Coutts

**Nicholas Perrin and Richard B. Hays, eds.** *Jesus, Paul and the People of God: A Theological Dialogue with N. T. Wright*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic (an imprint of InterVarsity Press), 2011. 294 pp., with subject index and scripture index. \$24.00 (paperback).

Previously I have called attention to the commotion generated by N. T. (Tom) Wright, prominent contemporary Anglican New Testament scholar and erstwhile churchman, in certain conservative Protestant circles over his rejection of "justification by faith alone." He holds that the Protestant understanding of salvation rests on a grave misreading of Paul.<sup>3</sup> His detractors, who are essentially ideologues from the Reformed camp, are deeply troubled by his understanding of justification. But Wright has also addressed what in England is known as the historical Jesus controversy. This endeavor, which has yielded what he calls the Big Picture of Kingdom, Cross, and Resurrection, has made him popular with evangelicals. His views on these matters have been set out in a massive 2,016-page series entitled *Christian Origins and the Question of God*, which consists of three volumes: *The New Testament and the People of God* (Fortress, 1992), *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Fortress, 1997), and *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Fortress, 2003).

3. See, for example, reviews of Wright's *Paul: In Fresh Perspective* (2005) and *Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision* (2009) in *FARMS Review* 20/1 (2008): 260-63 and 21/1 (2009): 216-20, respectively.

His opinions on these themes should be of interest to Latter-day Saints, and *Jesus, Paul and the People of God* provides an excellent introduction to his perspective on both Jesus and Paul. This fine book also constitutes a kind of *Festschrift* for Wright.

*Jesus, Paul and the People of God* consists of the papers read at the 2010 Wheaton Theology Conference by Tom Wright's friends who gathered to assess his contributions to the debate over the historical Jesus as well as his views on the apostle Paul. Following a useful introduction by Nicholas Perrin (pp. 7-17), the first part of this anthology consists of papers on the topic "Jesus and the People of God" by Marianne Meyers Thompson, Richard B. Hays, Sylvia C. Keesmaat and Brian J. Walsh, and Nicholas Perrin. Each paper is followed by a brief, highly irenic response by Wright, who in a long essay also reviews and restates his views on the historical Jesus and its meaning for Christian faith (pp. 115-58). The second part, entitled "Paul and the People of God," contains papers by Edith M. Humphrey, Jeremy S. Begbie, Markus Bockmuehl, and Kevin J. Vanhoozer, followed by brief responses by Wright, who then restates his rejection of the Protestant notion of justification by faith alone (pp. 262-81).

Wright's views on the historical Jesus have made him something of a favorite among sophisticated evangelicals. The reason is that he has taken seriously the challenge posed by some posthumously published fragments written by Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694-1768) about an "ugly ditch" that presumably separates historical reality and Christian faith. Eventually made public by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, these so-called fragments generated a *Fragmentenstreit* (quarrel). Much like Albert

Schweitzer, Wright describes Reimarus as "the great iconoclast" who had hoped to "destroy the Christian faith" by removing its crucial historical foundations. Marianne Meyers Thompson puts the matter bluntly: "Reimarus wants the real Jesus of history, the Jesus without dogma, without the church, Jesus *wie er eigentlich gewesen* (as he actually was)" (p. 25). Wright has taken up the challenge by attempting to grasp the intentions and self-understanding of Jesus, as well as his teachings and ministry as he seems to have understood them, and hence also his reasons for moving relentlessly toward a brutal death, followed by his resurrection. All of this should be of special interest to Latter-day Saints.

Wright's somewhat more recent contribution to what is known as the "New Perspective on Paul" (NPP) has deeply troubled some evangelicals. The reason is that he challenges the stance on justification taken by Augustine and then later appropriated by Luther and Calvin. Justification, of course, is the essential core claim upon which, it is often said, the Protestant Reformation either stands or falls. Wright's position on this matter has deeply troubled those who cannot countenance a reformation of the Reformation's primal premise. Wright's primary target is the slogan "by faith alone" and its dogmatic underpinnings. He denies that justification consists of the imputation of an alien righteousness to the totally depraved sinner at a moment of conversion. He argues that there is, instead, the paradox of a possible present temporary justification and also a future, final justification since justification is both already but not yet. Faith must necessarily yield faithfulness and hence deeds and not merely words—that is, the genuine disciple must submit to being sanctified, purged, purified, and cleansed. The disciple must be faithful to a covenant with Christ. The



ultimate justification takes place only when the final judgment of one's deeds (or works) takes place and certainly not merely on a primitive, preliminary confession of faith.

*Jesus, Paul and the People of God* provides a fine introduction to both of the central themes in Wright's writings as well as an opportunity for him to address questions and objections.

In his introduction, Nicholas Perrin claims that, unlike many or most conservative Protestants, Wright is not constrained by theological tradition (p. 9). Wright thus annoys Calvinists by insisting on *sola scriptura*—that is, his own reading of the Bible over against some of the fatuous formulae of the Reformed tradition. So we find Wright asserting that when the faithful die, they do not go to a disembodied heaven. It is a mistake to assume that the Holy One of Israel entered human history so that his disciples could end up in a heaven where they do nothing except praise God for eternity, understood as timelessness where nothing really happens. Instead, this earth is the home of humans, where they await the resurrection to continue turning this place into Zion and a garden park. The resurrection is, for Wright, “life after life after death” (where we then do something). Wright also sees the future glory as set out in 2 Corinthians 2–5 as essentially the idea behind *theosis*. He does not shy away from future deification (see the comments on *theosis* at pp. 169, 178, 182). In his famous prayer for unity (John 17:21), Jesus is actually pleading for his disciples to have Christ in them. This is evidence for a belief in *theosis*. All of this, too, should attract the interest of Latter-day Saints.

In stressing that Jesus was a real historical being, Wright also has much to say against the myth of objective history and historians (pp. 116–17; compare p. 155). He also seems distressed by

what he considers the ahistorical understanding of the fundamental message of Jesus concerning the kingdom of God, which yields, in Perrin's words, a kind of covert docetism. In Wright's view, Jesus was primarily one who announced the kingdom of God (e.g., p. 140). The entire story of his ministry is thus crucial. His death is the climax of his setting up his kingdom. He is the victorious king—the Lord (YHWH) of the Old Testament—who has vindicated a new and properly constituted Israel (p. 149). And the task of kingdom building necessarily involves telling the kingdom story. What we have in the New Testament are stories told about a group of devout Jews with their scriptures in their heads and hearts (p. 151), who are busily building the kingdom of God (p. 152).

We must, according to Wright, shift back to the historical Jesus and not be confused by the picture of Christ found in later confessions. The creeds (and especially the one fashioned by the Council of Chalcedon) are, from his perspective, efforts of later Christians to wash Christian dirty laundry—that is, to clean up and iron out quandaries and quarrels. The New Testament, according to Wright, knows nothing of divinity but much about Jesus vindicating Israel as its king. The later focus on the question of the humanity and divinity of Jesus distorts the content of the Gospels, where Jesus as king clearly announces and vindicates his kingdom. Hence Jesus did not go around thinking of himself as or proclaiming himself the second person in the Trinity or wondering how his divine and human nature work together so harmoniously. Instead, his announcement of the kingdom meant that at last the long-expected return of YHWH to redeem Israel was taking place right then and there (pp. 135, 274, 277; compare the

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commentary by others on this theme at pp. 28-29, 37, 50, 99, 162, 174).

But unfortunately, from Wright's perspective, attention has subsequently been shifted away from the Jesus of history to the Christ of the great ecumenical creeds. Theologians have invented a different Jesus—that is, fashioning an ahistorical idol (p. 157). They have done this by seeing the Gospels as merely the chips and dip before the real meal, which they picture merely as the death of Jesus. But the Christ, when properly understood as king, is resurrected and hence alive and should be in his disciples as they seek now to build Zion before their own death and resurrection.

From my perspective, Tom Wright is right about some crucial matters that tend to separate Latter-day Saints from many contemporary conservative Protestants. I highly recommend *Jesus, Paul and the People of God* as an introduction to Wright's contributions to an understanding of both Paul and Jesus.🔒

Louis Midgley

**N. T. Wright. *The Resurrection of the Son of God. Christian Origins and the Question of God*, vol. 3. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003. xxi + 817 pp., with indexes. \$40.00 (paperback).**

N. T. Wright, noted Anglican biblical scholar, offers a comprehensive and useful study of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Written from an unmistakable position of faith in the literal reality of a bodily resurrection, his book affords not only a comprehensive review of the New Testament accounts and evidences but also a sweeping look at the concept of resurrection as witnessed as an actuality by the early Christians. It places the bold Christian message

in perspective and contrast with other views of the afterlife in the ancient world, in Old Testament and intertestamental times, and in the New Testament setting. Wright's biblical considerations are thoroughgoing, while his research goes well beyond the canonical texts, providing insights from many sources.

Wright stresses the vital importance of the resurrection as a basic Christian claim and belief, developing the idea that only a literal resurrection and unwavering confidence in it can explain the determined actions of the early Christians and the phenomenal growth of the church. Wright engages many of the arguments pro and con that have been made about the resurrection. With rich documentation of sources and references to an extensive literature, this volume provides a very substantial resource for anyone studying the resurrection.

Latter-day Saints should find Wright's study commendable, readable, helpful, and insightful. They will, of course, have some distinct views based on the Book of Mormon and other scriptures that contain much important additional information and understanding about the resurrection. For example, Latter-day Saints tend to take the references to revival of the "dry bones" in Ezekiel 37 as allusions to a literal bodily resurrection, while Wright sees it as "the most obviously allegorical or metaphorical" of passages (p. 119), referring to the restoration of Israel. However, that text could reflect the spiritual aspects of a restored Israel, which can also be viewed as a "resurrected" Israel in both senses, witnessing by a whole people in the very sweep of history the reality of the resurrection of the Son of God and the consequent resurrection of all mankind.🔒

George L. Mitton

**James P. Eckman.** *Exploring Church History: A Guide to History, World Religions, and Ethics.* Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008. 335 pp., with glossary, three bibliographies, no index. \$19.99 (paperback).

*Exploring Church History* consists of three previously published booklets: *Exploring Church History* (pp. 7-108), which appeared in 2002; *The Truth about Worldviews* (pp. 109-237), which was published in 2004; and *Biblical Ethics* (pp. 239-335), also published in 2004. I will focus attention primarily on the first booklet.

Eckman, retiring president of Grace University in Omaha, Nebraska, believes that “most Christians are abysmally ignorant of their Christian heritage” (p. 9). He claims that the study of church history, including the “diversity and the contributions many individuals and groups have made to the church,” actually “produces a tolerance and appreciation of groups with which we may personally disagree” (p. 9). However, as the last five chapters of “Book One: Exploring Church History” (pp. 67-102), as well as all of “Book Two: The Truth about Worldviews” (pp. 113-230), demonstrate, he does not manifest much tolerance towards versions of Christianity that do not fit snugly under his sense of Protestant orthodoxy. For example, he stresses the “church’s struggle with the modern world” (p. 9), which he sees as doing battle with an array of challenges, including the Church of Jesus Christ (see pp. 202-4).

Eckman insists that Paul advanced a “free-grace Gospel,” which is code language for “justification by faith plus nothing” (p. 15). We learn that after the apostles labored to establish the Christian church, their deaths “produced a leadership vacuum in the church” (p. 19). The devotional writing style of the early apostolic fathers (Clement of Rome, Ignatius, and Polycarp), including that

of the *Didache* and the “bizarre work of five visions” by the Shepherd of Hermas, yielded to “a more apologetic style as the [subsequent] leaders combat[ed] theological error creeping into the church” (p. 22). This was necessary because “both inside and outside the church false teaching and error abounded” (p. 23). The church faced Gnosticism, Manichaeism, and Neoplatonism (pp. 23-24), and also heresies such as Marcionism, Ebionitism, and Montanism (pp. 24-25). But help came when Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Origen “began to systematize theological truth. Through their work the church reached consensus” (p. 29).

Eckman goes on to explain that “about the year 300, the winds of theological change were blowing through the church” as theological disputes “caused the church to systematize its beliefs and reach consensus on what the Scriptures taught” (p. 31). Eventually Constantine created the imperial church. And a series of great ecumenical councils followed, beginning at Nicea (AD 325) and ending with Chalcedon (AD 451). Constantine made Christianity part of the administrative apparatus of the Roman Empire, and the church had taken on regal trappings (pp. 32-36).

Eckman’s hero, Augustine (AD 354-430), the great “theologian of grace” (p. 37), “formulated the doctrines of election and predestination that would powerfully influence Luther and Calvin centuries later” (p. 38). Augustine “saw the God of the Bible as an eternal [that is, not contaminated by space and time], transcendent, infinite, and perfect triune God. In defining God as a Trinity in one essence, his work constituted the capstone of centuries of theological thought on the nature of God. There was little debate on the nature of the Trinity after Augustine” (pp. 38-39).

After Augustine and others systematized a Christian theology, unfortunately then came the

medieval church, which “became corrupt and ineffective” (p. 41). Protestants, Eckman claims, tend to date the beginnings of Roman Catholicism to AD 590, when Gregory I was installed as bishop of Rome (p. 41). The papacy brought in the “veneration of Mary, purgatory, an early form of transubstantiation [a.k.a. “Real Presence”], and praying to departed saints” (pp. 41–42). However, theologian giants like Anselm (AD 1033–1109) and Thomas Aquinas (AD 1225–1274) got some things right. For example, Anselm “gave reasonable proofs for God’s existence” (p. 47), and Aquinas defended classical theism, creation *ex nihilo*, and the resurrection. Unfortunately, he also defended the veneration of Mary, purgatory, and the role of human merit in salvation (pp. 46–47).

Then Martin Luther (AD 1483–1546), Philip Melancthon (AD 1497–1560), Ulrich Zwingli (AD 1484–1531), and John Calvin (AD 1509–1564) got the crucial matters sorted properly (pp. 51–55). They revived the traditional theological *consensus* (p. 39, also pp. 29, 31, 37). Calvin, with his stress on predestination and election, led others to systematize a God-centered system of theology that is now “often summarized with the acrostic [*sic*] TULIP”—that is, Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace, and Perseverance of the Saints (p. 55). Unfortunately, Calvin participated in the execution of Michael Servetus, and this “contributed most to the image of Calvin as an extremist” (p. 55).

Both Protestants and Roman Catholics eventually faced the challenge posed by the rise of modern science (pp. 67–70), as well as both skepticism about truth and confidence in human reason (p. 74)—that is, the Enlightenment (pp. 73–76). Protestants were challenged by the rise of a “liberal Protestantism” (pp. 76–78). The first book ends with a very brief account of the rise of the

modern missions movement—that is, the effort to carry out Christ’s great commission to take the gospel to all the world (Matthew 28:19–20), something that the Protestant denominations have “not always taken . . . seriously” (p. 79).

The second book is an effort to describe and respond to challenges to Eckman’s Protestant faith. As such, it covers postmodernism, naturalism (or Secular Humanism), Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Shintoism, Judaism, Islam, the New Age movement, and finally Christian cults, in which category, following Walter Martin and others, Eckman places the Church of Jesus Christ (pp. 113–208). In addition, his own brief account entitled “The History of Christianity: Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and the Origin of Protestantism” (pp. 210–15) is similar to my own summary of his first book. He complains that Roman Catholics and Orthodox differ from Protestants in what they do and believe (pp. 215–19). For example, he is troubled by the Orthodox belief that the ultimate destiny of faithful Christians is deification (*theosis*)—that is, to be united with and hence become like God. Though he cites 2 Peter 1:4 (p. 218) and quotes Orthodox interpretations of this passage, he does not really confront the claim that the gospel offers very “great and precious promises” that eventually make possible our participation in “the divine nature.” Though he is aware of C. S. Lewis, he seems unaware that Lewis stressed deification. This very old, clearly biblical teaching is foreign to his religious world where attention is focused solely on justification understood as an event in which an alien righteousness is imputed to totally depraved humans rather than as a long and difficult process (see p. 216).

Eckman sketches an essentially Protestant understanding of church history. He begins by

bemoaning that Christians are ignorant of the Christian past, and he also complains that “we live in a world where religious cults are threatening orthodox truth at every turn” (p. 37). His account then attempts to illustrate how that is true. Eckman’s reliance on a tiny sampling of the most dreadful countercult literature for his misunderstanding of the faith of the Saints, as well as his mishandling of a tiny sampling of Protestant accounts of the Christian past, is actually useful because it illustrates the way an educated and devout person can stumble when he tries to manage the future by controlling the past. In addition, this book should serve as a dire warning to Latter-day Saints to avoid expressing facile but poorly grounded, oversimplified opinions about the faith of others.🔒

*Louis Midgley*

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