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The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon in the Twentieth Century

Noel B. Reynolds¹

August 3, 1998

And your minds in times past have been darkened because of unbelief, and because you have treated lightly the things you have received—which vanity and unbelief have brought the whole church under condemnation. And this condemnation resteth upon the children of Zion, even all. And they shall remain under this condemnation until they repent and remember the new covenant, even the Book of Mormon and the former commandments which I have given them, not only to say, but to do according to that which I have written—that they may bring forth fruit meet for their Father’s kingdom; otherwise there remaineth a scourge and judgment to be poured out upon the children of Zion. (D & C 84:54–58)

As the twentieth century draws to a close, the Book of Mormon clearly holds center stage in Latter-day Saint scriptural study and appreciation. Large numbers of LDS families read it

together and as individuals on a daily basis. It provides a major share of the source material for talks given in Church meetings. It is a featured resource in missionary lessons. And it is regularly and systematically featured in the correlated curriculum and in the rotation of seminary, institute, and Church college religious instruction. It is the required first year course for BYU and Ricks College students. And large numbers of scholarly projects on the Book of Mormon are filling the pages of the FARMS catalog and LDS bookstore shelves at an ever-increasing rate.

But this has not always been the case. Early converts to the restored gospel were lovers and students of the Bible. And they had no scholarly or devotional traditions that included the Book of Mormon to enable them to incorporate the teachings of this new scripture into their religious understanding. Latter-day Saints have always valued the Book of Mormon as evidence of the Restoration, but the text itself was not generally studied as carefully as the Bible. As recently as the mid-1930s BYU and the LDS Institutes of Religion only occasionally featured the Book of Mormon in their curricula. The high rate of publication on Book of Mormon topics that we now take for granted is a phenomenon of the last twenty five years .

From the beginning, the Saints have regarded the Book of Mormon as the centerpiece of the latter-day restoration of the gospel. It was given by miraculous means to Joseph Smith that the fulness of the gospel might again go forth in the earth (See *D&C* 275, 10:45–46, 20:8–9, 42:12). It was understood to be more correct than the Bible, and to contain many precious truths that had been lost from the Biblical texts. It was the most common primary evidence cited for the truthfulness of the prophetic claims that established Joseph Smith as the founding prophet of the last dispensation in preparation for the second coming of Jesus Christ to the earth. And yet, it was a long time before the book and its contents became the objects of widespread, serious study

by Latter-day Saints. In a recent high-profile treatment of Mormon history, Harold Bloom observed that focus on the Book of Mormon was already much reduced by the early Nauvoo period.²

Most Latter-day Saints would point to the April 1986 general conference of the Church when President Ezra Taft Benson was sustained as a major turning point in the treatment of the Book of Mormon. Indeed, it was a landmark event. President Benson reiterated his long-standing belief that the Church was under condemnation for taking the Book of Mormon too lightly, citing D&C 84:54-57. He reminded the Church how the Lord had inspired Lorenzo Snow to emphasize tithing in his day and announced that “now, in our day, the Lord has revealed the need to reemphasize the Book of Mormon.” He went on to bless the membership “with increased understanding of the Book of Mormon.”³ The enormous and enthusiastic reaction to the new president’s challenge still stands out in the LDS memory. Sales of the English Book of Mormon jumped 700,000 over the previous year. Group Book of Mormon reading programs broke out everywhere.⁴

However, there have been some instructive precursors to President Benson’s teaching on this point. In 1881 John Nicholson, recently returned from his second British mission, asked a general conference audience: “Why, my brethren and sisters, are we not more familiar with the contents of this book?” He went on to assert that “no Latter-day Saint can intelligently comprehend the signs of the times unless he is informed in regard to the teachings of this record.” He then referred indirectly to Section 84:

In the early rise of this church the Lord manifested his displeasure with the Saints because they did not pay sufficient attention to the revelations contained in the Book of Mormon,

and that book itself promises, and the revelations through the Prophet Joseph promise, that in the due time of the Lord, when the people are sufficiently advanced to receive them, other records of momentous importance shall be brought forth for the consideration of the saints; but I do not think we will receive anything additional to what we have already obtained in this form until we have manifested a suitable appreciation of that which has already been given to us.⁵

Elder German E. Ellsworth came independently to a similar conviction about the Book of Mormon during his long service as president in the Northern States Mission.

Shortly after going to the Northern States Mission I received an impression of the Lord concerning the Book of Mormon.... It came to me as strong as if someone...had told it to me, that the Book of Mormon had been given of the Lord as a witness to this generation and that if we would remember it, that we would come out from under the condemnation that, as we are told, rested upon Zion; and then I recalled reading in the Doctrine and Covenants in the 84th section, beginning with the 54th verse, wherein the Church and some of the early readers of the Church, because of their unbelief in the Book of Mormon, I take it, were under condemnation and would needs remain so until they repented and remembered the new covenant, even the Book of Mormon.⁶

President Ellsworth reported that later while standing on the Hill Cumorah, he heard these words: “Push the distribution of the record that was taken from this hill, for it will help bring the world to Christ.” He immediately sent picture postcards of the Hill Cumorah to all his missionaries to share that message with them. During his 18 years in that mission, he reported that 130,000 copies of the Book of Mormon were distributed in the Northern States Mission, “90,000 of which

have been sold.”⁷

While John Nicholson invoked D&C 84:54–58 indirectly in his 1881 address, the first direct use in this context that I have discovered is in a 1908 April Conference talk by German E. Ellsworth.⁸ The same point has been restated occasionally since then, but the Church as a whole never responded in the dramatic way it did after President Benson’s 1986 address. Marion G. Romney resurrected the Ellsworth interpretation in 1949 to encourage daily Book of Mormon reading, and in 1960 and 1980 to show how the evils of the world can be overcome through study of the Book of Mormon.⁹ Elder Benson began using the scripture in 1975, and used it a dozen times between 1984 and 1988.¹⁰

While Elder Benson and other Church leaders had been preaching this message for decades, it was clear that, as President of the Church, he was turning up the volume and increasing the frequency. In a 1989 BYU Education Week lecture, Elder James A. Paramore gave some personal insights to these developments: “I’ll never forget his first remarks to the General Authorities after he was called as prophet. He said to us: ‘Brethren, I’ve read many of your talks again, and they are wonderful, but you don’t use the Book of Mormon enough. May I ask you to know it and use it more, to testify of it to the world, and to have it go into every corner of the world.’”¹¹ During this same period, President Benson’s own use of the Book of Mormon in conference addresses doubled.¹² Three years later when Elder Dallin H. Oaks spoke at BYU about the Book of Mormon, he also reviewed President Benson’s stress on the Book of Mormon and stated that his own present treatment of the book was “the most important [message] he had ever given at BYU.”¹³

In his first general conference address as an apostle, Elder Richard G. Scott reported a

life-reorienting experience he had shared with President Benson during the dedication of the Mexico City Temple.

“During the dedication of the Mexico City Temple, I had one of those singular experiences that readjusts the course of a life. It occurred during the eighth dedicatory session where many of the men and women leaders of Mexico and Central America were present. When unexpectedly asked to speak, I attempted to convey the strong impressions that poured into my heart. I spoke of those beyond the veil who, in fulfillment of prophecy, had served, suffered, and given greatly to form the foundation which permitted the opening of a new era of the work. I expressed a feeling to plead in behalf of former prophets who had prepared and protected the sacred records of the Book of Mormon. I sensed that they were saddened as they see us walk from place to place with an unopened Book of Mormon under our arm or see it kept in homes where it gathers dust and is not read, pondered, nor its contents applied. The Book of Mormon was prepared by divine assignment for the blessing and enlightenment of all those who receive it. As I spoke, I realized in my heart that all the efforts that I had expended for six years in trying to help those beloved leaders overcome the effects of false traditions and learn to apply the teachings of the Lord would have been better directed had I strongly encouraged them to ponder and apply the teachings of the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon contains messages that were divinely placed there to show how to correct the influence of false tradition and how to receive a fulness of life. It teaches how to resolve the problems and challenges that we face today that were foreseen by the Lord. In that book he has provided the way to correct the serious errors of life, but this guidance is of

no value if it remains locked in a closed book. I witnessed that it is not sufficient that we should treasure the Book of Mormon, nor that we testify that it is of God. We must know its truths, incorporate them into our lives, and share them with others. I felt an overwhelming love for the people and an urgent desire that all would comprehend the value of the Book of Mormon.¹⁴

Clearly in recent decades members of the church at all levels have been receiving the message to engage the Book of Mormon in a more earnest and committed way. As David H. Yarn, Jr., former Dean of Religious Education at BYU, has observed, “the Church has become spiritually interested and oriented towards the Book of Mormon.”¹⁵ My own interest in these developments led me in early 1996 to begin investigating the history of LDS interest in the Book of Mormon and to attempt to document significant developments in that interest. This paper is the result of that inquiry. While it only scratches the surface of the total information that might be discoverable, the facts seem fairly plain and consistent with each other at the level reported here. More developed skills of historical inquiry than I possess would be necessary to take this further. I hope this study, however preliminary it might appear, will provide a sound first step toward developing our self-understanding as Latter-day Saints of the history of Book of Mormon use in the twentieth century and the phenomenal increase in understanding, appreciation, and study that has taken place over the last three to four decades. This study may also offer one useful perspective for the gradually emerging history of cultural Mormonism¹⁶ and its antipathy to the Book of Mormon.

This study is grounded in the analysis of a number of possible indicators of intensity of interest in the Book of Mormon and in a dozen interviews with people who were directly

involved in some of the more significant developments of the last half century. In the absence of any readily available scale that directly measures the phenomenon I wish to illuminate, I have collected a number of measures which would intuitively seem to be directly linked to it. These include statistical summaries of Book of Mormon references or citations in LDS literature and general conference addresses, as well as counts of publications related to the Book of Mormon. Almost no comparative statistical analyses have been attempted because of the incommensurability of the various indicators.

Early LDS Literature.

My first indicator is borrowed from Grant Underwood's analysis of early Book of Mormon usage.¹⁷ While his primary focus was on the content of references to the Book of Mormon, he did note that early LDS literature cited the Book of Mormon only infrequently in comparison with Bible references.

FIGURE 1

**BIBLE AND BOOK OF MORMON CITATIONS
COMPARED IN EARLY LDS PUBLICATIONS**

		Number of Bible Citations*	Book of Mormon Citations	Bible to Book of Mormon Ratio
Evening and Morning Star 1	(1832–33)	294	45	7:1
Evening and Morning Star 2	(1833–34)	246	6	41:1
Messenger and Advocate 1	(1834–35)	357	11	32:1
Messenger and Advocate 2	(1835–36)	142	7	20:1
Messenger and Advocate 3	(1836–37)	193	0	—
Elders Journal	(1837–38)	79	2	40:1
Pratt (Voice of Warning)	(1837)	178	6	30:1
=====				
TOTALS		1489	77	19:1

Underwood explained this by pointing to the fact that early Mormon converts were well steeped in the study of the Bible, but that there was “no opportunity for formal instruction or catechization in the Book of Mormon.”¹⁸ He found that when the Book of Mormon was used by the early Saints, it was predominantly invoked to elaborate the Biblical understanding of prophecies relating to the last days. This eschatological focus is confirmed in W. W. Phelps’s linking of the early “neglect” of the Book of Mormon to LDS interest in hunting mysteries in the prophecies.¹⁹

Early LDS Speeches and Writings

A second indicator, although even weaker for my purposes, can be drawn from a 1940 study by Alton D. Merrill, comparing the content of speeches and writings on the Book of Mormon from the earliest (1830–1855) and latest (1915–1940) 25-year periods of the Church’s history.²⁰

While the statistical approach used by Merrill would seem quite primitive to a modern audience, it did reach conclusions that roughly corroborate those of Underwood’s more recent study. A very low percentage of references cited by Merrill were intended to encourage the study or distribution of the book. Like Underwood, Merrill detected an early interest in prophecy. He also found that the early interest in archaeological and stylistic issues related to the Book of Mormon continued, but was less prominent in the 1915-1940 period. While there is no established ground for comparisons of raw numbers of references, it does seem that the early period produced remarkably few references to the Book of Mormon.

Sunday School Manuals

Sunday School manuals since 1889 also help to give us some insight into the extent of the attention given to the Book of Mormon throughout this century in formalized instruction. We have produced a thematic outline of these manuals for all age groups. While we have surveyed all manuals in the Church Archives and the Harold B. Lee Library, these holdings are not complete for all years. This report, consequently only includes the materials that have survived in those repositories.²¹ This review indicates that there is a fair amount of continuity in approach throughout the century, with historical and doctrinal elements receiving regular attention.

The Book of Mormon has always played some role in Sunday School instruction. But it was never a dominant element. Of the 31 leaflets provided for adults studying the life of Christ in 1889–90, one was from the Book of Mormon. These same leaflets were listed again in 1896 along with 25 others, 5 of which featured the Book of Mormon. And by 1898 the leaflet offering had grown to 136, including an additional ten on the Book of Mormon.

Through the first third of the century--and presumably earlier--the 1820s history of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon was the most common context for discussing the book. There was also an evident willingness, especially in the manuals directed to the younger children, to use favorite Book of Mormon stories or heroes, particularly in combination with stories from the Bible or from the early history of the Restoration. Another definite, though less frequent theme, is that of evidences for the Book of Mormon--reflecting the interests of such individuals as B. H. Roberts, John A. Widtsoe, and others.

Comprehensive Book of Mormon approaches show up less frequently. For instance, in 1903 the pre-teens were getting one year of Book of Mormon biographical stories, and the mid-teenagers were taking a two-year course on the Book of Mormon. In 1924 and 1928 the Book of

Mormon still shows up as a full-year topic for the mid-teens. From 1928–1932 a highly developed pattern of rotation through the scriptures developed, with three mid-teen years being focused on the Book of Mormon featuring gospel teachings, history, and evidences for its divinity respectively. And in 1934 there was a Book of Mormon course dealing with the history and teachings of the book chronologically followed in 1935 with a year devoted to “treasure hunting” in the Book of Mormon for teachings to prove its divinity. The Book of Mormon shows up much less frequently in the adult curriculum. B. H. Roberts’s *New Witness for God* provided the advanced (age 18–20) manual for 1919. Finally in 1938 and 1939 we see the Gospel Doctrine course focusing on the Book of Mormon—and for two years. But then the Book of Mormon drops out of the curriculum again until 1948. During this period (20's through 40's), the Doctrine and Covenants and New Testament were more popular courses of study for the adults, along with the topics that were commonly associated with them—Church history and doctrine, and ethical and social teachings respectively. Appendix 1 lists Gospel Doctrine topics by year (1889–1996).

From the late twenties to the sixties the youth and adult Sunday School manuals tended to reflect and respond to earlier developments in the larger culture of American Christianity associated with the advent of modernism and the social gospel. One of the most significant curricular developments appeared in 1933 with the new “Gospel Messages” course that was focused on more philosophical issues, dealing with topics of concern in Church history and in science and religion. In subsequent years “Gospel Messages” dealt with modern problems and social issues, the application of religion to life, theology, comparative religion, problems youth face applying the philosophy of Mormonism, and other issues in philosophy, theology, and

ethics. The New Testament came to play an increasingly significant role as ethical and social gospel approaches used almost exclusively that book of scripture. For example, the youth New Testament course in 1936 focused on the ethical teachings of Jesus. The earlier pattern of rotation through the standard works for the mid-teens was condensed in the late 1930s to provide room for these advanced senior courses focusing on social, religious, and theological problems from the Mormon point of view. These scriptural courses were replaced by “gospel principles” courses in the 1940s with the same ethical orientation. Finally in 1947 the advanced seniors returned to Leland H. Monson’s chronological treatment of the Book of Mormon in his *Life in Ancient America*. The following year (1948) the gospel doctrine course featured Sidney Sperry’s *Book of Mormon Studies*, which provided an unanalyzed running narrative based on the text. Three years later (1951), the Book of Mormon was again the focus of the gospel doctrine class with William E. Berrett’s *Teachings of the Book of Mormon*, which was organized topically according to doctrinal teachings.

The interest in gospel applications and problems did not evaporate, but shifted to gospel doctrine classes in the 1950s and 1960s, and even tended to characterize other manuals on scriptural subjects. As noted above, the New Testament provided a particularly attractive base for new approaches based on ethics. This trend can be traced, as illustrated in the late 1940s New Testament manuals authored by Russel Swensen that began to incorporate ethical approaches along with historical, literary, and doctrinal ones. Classic examples initially aimed at older youth include New Testament manuals such as O. C. Tanner’s frequently recycled *Christ’s Ideals for Living*, first used in 1955, and *The Message of the Master* by Marion G. Merkle (1958), who authored other manuals for all age groups.

The most important development in the twentieth century Sunday School curriculum was the Correlation program and the 1972 shift to an eight-year cycle through the Standard Works as basic texts for the gospel doctrine classes. In 1982 this was condensed to a four-year cycle. Truman Madsen believes that this acceleration was implemented “because of the great number of new converts, the urgent need for scripturally informed leaders, and the high mobility of Church membership.”²² In Richard Cowan’s memory, “the leaders didn’t want the saints to go [six] years between the time they studied the Book of Mormon; . . .it was specifically concern about the Book of Mormon that dictated that change.”²³

At the same time, the priesthood authorities took control of what may have been a semi-autonomous Sunday School program, replacing the largely self-perpetuating board of the old Deseret Sunday School Union with a new Sunday School presidency composed of general authorities and a board that functioned under Church Correlation. The support for the ethical and social gospel approaches was thereby removed and replaced by a clear directive to use the scriptures themselves as the texts. The current Gospel Doctrine manual contains the First Presidency’s directive to this effect as a caution to every Sunday School teacher: “Use the scriptures. The scriptures are the text for Gospel Doctrine classes. Teach directly from the scriptures and the words of the living prophets. Make sure that all discussions center on the scriptures.”²⁴ It would be hard to miss the point.

INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE

With the advent of the correlated curriculum, social gospel approaches were abandoned, and all the standard works received regular and equal emphasis. Rather than relying on manuals, the scriptures themselves were designated as the texts. Teachers’ feelings of inadequacy have led

the Church to provide a standard manual for all of these. These manuals tend to emphasize applications and only rarely develop text-based insights. But they cannot be characterized as a retreat to the social gospel approaches of earlier years, which stressed the social and ethical implications of the Christian life over doctrine and scripture. Responding to the felt inadequacies of teachers, Correlation manuals were soon expanded to provide extensive supplementary materials and lesson structure. That initial trend is now reversed, as there has been a steady tendency over the last twenty years for these materials to be reduced and simplified, leaving more to the teachers, and reducing the competition between the manuals and the scriptural texts for limited lesson and reading time. By 1989 the Gospel Doctrine manuals were squeezed down to one page per lesson and have remained at that level to the present.

In spite of an evident desire on the part of Church leaders to push the scriptures directly in the curriculum, an irresistible educationists' impulse keeps finding alternate venues for the old gospel principles approach, where the gospel is mediated by manual writers' analyses and understandings. Practical applications and "behavioral objectives" are worked into teachers' manuals, and often tend to dominate classroom discussion. Ironically, the shift to direct study of the Standard Works at the adult level has been matched by an elimination of the long tradition of focus on these scriptures through the teen course rotation. Rather, the curriculum for these years now focuses on more abstract presentations of doctrines and practices preceded by a general introduction to the scriptures for twelve and thirteen-year olds.

Book of Mormon Courses at BYU.

The internal dynamics of the decision-making processes that produced this particular series of Sunday School manuals is not readily available to us. But a review of the development

of the curriculum in Church Education, which has been more publicly visible and has left more clearly defined tracks, may give us a helpful window on the social, intellectual, and spiritual dynamics that were operating in the Church and shaping these curricula in the twentieth century. Our study of BYU religion courses and the Institutes curriculum shows the same general trend as the Sunday School, though with more pronounced extremes.

Historically Brigham Young University had always been under an obligation to teach the Standard Works, including the Book of Mormon. The 1875 Deed of Trust for Brigham Young Academy stipulates that the scriptures (all listed) “shall be read and their doctrines inculcated in the Academy.” A second Deed of Trust in 1877 reiterated that these Standard Works “shall be the standard text books, and they shall be read and their doctrines inculcated in the Academy.” But as former BYU dean of Religious Education, Robert J. Matthews notes in his discussion of this history, the early Academy fulfilled this obligation with scripture classes for the elementary and secondary students. The college students were offered a variety of philosophical and theological courses.²⁵ Richard Cowan comments on the early 1900s saying, “We started with the non-specialist people teaching general ethics and that kind of thing.” Then, in the 1930s, new faculty with training in Protestant divinity schools began adding “the kinds of courses that they would have taken back there... Only later did the latter-day scriptures come into their own.”²⁶

Our examination of BYU’s religion department curriculum from 1930 to the present illustrates the development of the increasing role and prominence that the Book of Mormon held in spite of strong opposition. Of 28 courses in religion at BYU in 1930-31, only one lower division course dealt with the Book of Mormon--and that was more an appreciation course than a course using the book as a text. Other subjects included Hymnology and Scout leadership.

Numerous courses focused on social and philosophical aspects of Mormonism and religion generally. The first full-blown Book of Mormon class was offered by Amos Merrill in 1937.²⁷ The introduction of this course faced considerable resistance, and it is reported that key faculty wondered what could be taught for a whole quarter.²⁸ It is clear that the mandate to introduce Book of Mormon teaching into the curriculum did not provoke an enthusiastic response from J. Wyley Sessions, the founder of the Institute program beginning at the University of Idaho, and then the director of the BYU Division of Religion in the 1930s.²⁹

As our study of Book of Mormon sections offered shows, the first significant increase occurred in 1948–1949 when Sessions was replaced in that position by Sidney B. Sperry, a strong supporter for Book of Mormon studies and instruction. Courses in Book of Mormon archaeology proliferated in the 1950s with the arrival of Wells Jakeman and Ross Christensen on the faculty. The next big jump in sections offered occurred in 1961 when the Book of Mormon became the required freshman course.³⁰

INSERT FIGURE 3 HERE

In this graph we have divided the number of sections by the total number of students to correct for the growing size of the student body in these years. Under the influence and efforts of Daniel H. Ludlow, the curriculum was streamlined even further with a clearer focus on uniquely LDS scriptures and history. Ludlow developed a television version of the Book of Mormon course to compensate for the lack of faculty. He has “been a real promoter of the Book of Mormon” according to Robert Matthews.³¹

Book of Mormon courses in Church Institutes of Religion and Seminaries.

Our analysis of the Institute curriculum illustrates a similar situation and development to

that of the BYU religion departments. The Church's five institutes and the LDS Business College in 1935–36 all offered courses on the history and literature of the Old and New Testaments, comparative religion and religious history, and something on Mormon history, doctrine, and philosophy. However none had Book of Mormon classes. The 1943 course lists display the beginnings of a core curriculum. Of the 30 courses listed in the 1943 unified Institutes of Religion curriculum, twelve were designated as "basic courses" which were supposed to be offered each semester. Six of these twelve focused on LDS themes; one dealt with the Book of Mormon; and one dealt with the Doctrine and Covenants and Pearl of Great Price combined. Each institute offered its own electives, which often focused more on philosophy, theology, comparative religions, or ethics, as well as more specialized LDS or Biblical topics. By 1957, the twelve basic courses had been restricted to exclusively LDS and Biblical courses including: Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, LDS Doctrine, Old Testament, New Testament, History of Christianity, LDS Church History, Courtship and Marriage, World Religions, Pearl of Great Price, Missionary Training, and Genealogy. The 1957-60 Institute curriculum included a total of 28 officially accepted courses. These were years of rapid expansion in the Church institutes, and the courses proliferated accordingly. Only three years later in 1963 the number of courses had nearly doubled; the 1963 curriculum lists 45 courses, excluding the music curriculum.

1963 was the first year a core curriculum was officially established to increase unity and correlation among the various institutes (and BYU), as well as to define a specific approved curriculum, covering the essentials of the gospel in a balanced approach. No longer were individual institutes permitted to offer specialized courses as they had previously. Approved

courses were completely based upon LDS and Biblical themes. But despite these initial efforts to control and mandate the curriculum, a 1969 survey revealed that over 70 courses were being offered in the Institute system, even though only 53 were officially sanctioned. The survey showed that on average only 56% of the total students were enrolled in the recommended core curriculum classes. Additionally only 34.2% were taking scripture courses, 14.7% in the Book of Mormon, and 19.5% in the other scriptures. This survey led to an administrative reduction of course offerings in order to increase enrollment numbers in the scripture courses, particularly the Book of Mormon. 18 courses were dropped from previous years in the formulation of the 1970-71 curriculum, leaving 31 total course offerings. These courses were correlated with BYU's numbering system, and reflected a greater streamlining of courses focused on the essentials of scripture, and Mormon doctrine, history, and practice. Since that time the Institutes' curriculum has been more centrally controlled and correlated with that of BYU.³²

We will have a more accurate understanding of this curricular history of the institutes of religion when we recognize that in the earliest years there was a concerted effort to qualify the institute courses for college credit at the state colleges and universities. When institutes offered courses without distinctively LDS content, state colleges could rationalize giving credit, and the courses cost them nothing. On the other side, students could take institute courses that would count toward college graduation and not have to feel that the time they spent on institute classes was hindering their academic progress.

This arrangement seemed in the earlier years to satisfy the objectives of state schools and of the Church's educational program. But over time, both sides began to rethink the matter. The Church's revisions of the curriculum over time reflect considerable concern about avoiding

distinctively LDS content in its institute curriculum, and moved LDS scripture courses increasingly to the core of the offering. The colleges, often under pressure from the ACLU and others concerned about the separation of church and state influence in public education, began to back away from the credit previously offered for institute classes. In the mid-1970s, the ACLU had sued the Logan School District in a famous case that established the legitimacy of release time religious education, but abolished public high school credit for all LDS seminary classes. The logical extension of this principle to colleges was not difficult to see, but only led to changes of policy in a piecemeal, college-by-college, decision process. Utah State University discontinued academic credit for institute classes in 1982. Southern Utah University made the same move near the end of the decade. Arizona State University and the University of Utah had given it up much earlier. As of 1997, a few state schools still offer credit to students taking selected institute classes in what they may call religious studies programs. For example, Idaho State College at Pocatello was still fighting ACLU efforts to force it to give up this practice as late as 1997.³³ The larger universities have almost all discontinued this practice. CES officials have made it clear to state academic officials that the Church no longer promotes such arrangements and that the credit issue is completely in their jurisdiction.³⁴

The Seminary curriculum also merits some comment. In the early 1950s, young seminary teacher and administrator, Boyd K. Packer, piloted an early-morning Book of Mormon class for Brigham City seniors who had already graduated from seminary. Thirty attended the first year, almost fifty the second. This positive response helped gain the approval in 1953 of William E. Berrett, administrator of seminaries and institutes, and a full year course on the Book of Mormon was soon incorporated into the standard seminary curriculum.³⁵ A. Theodore Tuttle, a close

associate of Packer's in those years, believed that more students are converted when Book of Mormon is taught as opposed to the Old and New Testaments.³⁶

Citation Analysis of General Conference Addresses (1942-1993).

The increasing focus on the Book of Mormon has not been limited to the classroom, whether in the church building on Sunday, or the BYU or institute building on weekdays, but has permeated all church instruction. In 1996 Richard C. Galbraith of BYU's Family Science Department completed an exhaustive study of references to the various standard works in general conference talks.³⁷ Galbraith has generously shared his unpublished study of conference talks from 1942 to 1993 as another possible indicator that would be useful in this study. I will show a small selection of the results he reports together with some of our own general conference analyses. Prof. Galbraith used a simple count of scriptural references occurring in each talk. While his data can be reported by individuals and by categories, according to their church callings, the line graphs below reflect the totals for all speakers.

INSERT FIGURE 4 HERE

Figure 4 shows how Book of Mormon citations hovered closely around twelve percent until President Benson's 1986 challenge to the Church. Subsequently, Book of Mormon citations jumped to forty percent over the next year, before leveling off above the 25 per cent mark almost twice the earlier rate. Figure 5 shows this same Book of Mormon citation rate against the background of citation rates for the other scriptures. The twentieth-century emphasis on the New Testament in the Sunday School curriculum seems to be reflected in a mid-century citation rate that held close to fifty percent over three decades. The Doctrine and Covenants was the other large source of conference talk citations, and may have once held the dominant position

assumed by the New Testament in the early 1940s. Because Galbraith's study begins with 1942, we can only speculate about the crossing lines in the mid-1940s. While the citation rates for New Testament and Doctrine and Covenants were converging in the late 1970s, both dropped off when the Book of Mormon rate rose, with the New Testament rate showing the sharpest decline. It would appear that conference speakers were finding Book of Mormon texts to support teachings that they had traditionally supported with New Testament or Doctrine and Covenants references. Small declines in Pearl of Great Price and Old Testament citations were quickly erased as the rates returned to pre-1986 levels.

INSERT FIGURE 5 HERE

While Galbraith's data would allow detailed graphing of citation rates by individual conference speakers, or by groups of speakers according to their church calling at the time of each conference talk, it is not clear what these kinds of comparisons would mean, if anything. For my purposes, what seems to be most helpful is the gross comparisons of rates of citations for the different Standard Works for all speakers combined. Galbraith's data show that the Book of Mormon was definitely used less than the Bible up until President Benson's call to the Church in 1986, after which Book of Mormon references in conference almost tripled relative to the other scriptures. While the initial jump has leveled off, there remains a significant, and apparently lasting doubling of the citation rate.

Content Analysis of General Conference Addresses (1950–1994)

Our own study of general conference talks classifies references to the Book of Mormon according to the significance or intensity of the reference.³⁸ Four levels of intensity were measured as follows: (1) a brief reference (mention); (2) a brief discussion—one to two

paragraphs (minimal); (3) one of several major components of talk (secondary); (4) the Book of Mormon is discussed throughout the talk (primary).

INSERT FIGURE 6 HERE

Some of these results suggest that minimal references have been consistently higher and have increased far more than substantial ones. However, substantial references to the Book of Mormon (primary and secondary levels of intensity) increased and reached their peak during 1985-89, most likely influenced by President Benson's pronounced emphasis and concern placed upon reading and using the Book of Mormon.

INSERT FIGURE 7 HERE

Individual data also show that some of the individuals who have made the most substantial statements on the Book of Mormon are not necessarily the same ones that make the most references to Book of Mormon passages. This points out how cautiously this kind of data should be used. It doesn't prove anything for individual speakers, and may not prove much for the group as a whole. For example, the following are Church leaders who have made important contributions to our understanding and appreciation of the Book of Mormon, who also have very low citation rates in the Galbraith index: Gordon B. Hinckley (.11), LeGrand Richards (.1), Spencer W. Kimball (.16), Bruce R. McConkie (.15), Joseph Fielding Smith (.14), and Levi Edgar Young (.05). Some of the most vocal Book of Mormon promoters tended to cite other scriptures at higher rates. Milton R. Hunter had rates of .29 for the Doctrine and Covenants, .26 for the New Testament, and .22 for the Book of Mormon. Marion G. Romney had rates of .4 for the Doctrine and Covenants and .22 each for the New Testament and the Book of Mormon. John A. Widtsoe wrote an important book on Book of Mormon evidences,³⁹ and yet never cited the

Book of Mormon in conference talks after 1942.

The next graph divides conference speakers into percentage groups according to their Book of Mormon citation rates, based on the Galbraith citation index. The largest group consists of those who cite the Book of Mormon in 10–19 per cent of all their scriptural references. The next largest group of speakers have the lowest Book of Mormon citation rate. Third largest is the group with the highest citation rate (.3–.39), and the smallest group cites the Book of Mormon about one fourth of the time—what might be considered the normal expected rate (.2–.29).

INSERT FIGURE 8 HERE

Missionary Teaching Plans and the Book of Mormon.

Taking the gospel to the world has been a primary mission of the Church since its organization in 1830. Missionary instructional materials offer a unique view of the Church's perception and presentation of itself to those outside the faith. The varying degrees of emphasis placed on the Book of Mormon throughout the twentieth century provides insight into its perceived centrality to the faith. In 1953 the first Church-wide missionary lesson plan was introduced, but even this *Systematic Program for Teaching the Gospel* was widely supplemented by mission-specific approaches. The variety of mission plans that prevailed before this time tended to take one of two general approaches. The first is represented by Ben E. Rich, president of the Southern and Eastern States Missions, and author of the popular pamphlet, *A Friendly Discussion*. In this approach the LDS slant on a large number of standard religious questions is promoted, using the Bible as the primary resource, against standard Protestant views. The Book of Mormon is briefly mentioned as evidence for the Restoration. The second approach was taken by German E. Ellsworth, President of the North Central States Mission through much of the early

1900s. As already reported, Ellsworth was a great Book of Mormon advocate, and used it endlessly as a primary tool in missionary work. To satisfy the need for large numbers of books, Ellsworth enlisted other sympathetic mission presidents and founded Zion's Press in Independence, Missouri, to print the Book of Mormon and missionary tracts in large quantities. Ellsworth's influence remained strong in the Northern States mission under President John Taylor. One missionary from 1927-29 notes that her mission leaders instructed missionaries "to tell the news of the Restoration of the Gospel and place Books of Mormon in homes." Accordingly she "gave or sold hundreds of Books of Mormon."⁴⁰ However, this emphasis may have been mission specific. The decades of the twenties and thirties show little evidence of church-wide emphasis on the Book of Mormon in missionary work. Missionary plans and tracts authored by B. H. Roberts, John A. Widtsoe, and LeGrand Richards as presidents of major missions always included discussion of the Book of Mormon, but did not feature it. Elder Widtsoe encouraged placement of the Book of Mormon in tracting in the European Mission. But the official Church handbook for missionaries used from 1937–1946 did little to promote the Book of Mormon.

The 1940s saw a renewed emphasis on the use of the Book of Mormon in proselyting in some missions.⁴¹ The experiences of missionaries Glenn Pearson and Reid Bankhead later inspired Richard L. Anderson, who authored a "Plan for Effective Missionary work," which was first published by the Northwestern States Mission in 1949. Pearson and Bankhead had served together in the North Central States Mission in the early 40's and developed new approaches to using the Book of Mormon in missionary work.⁴² Bankhead passed many of these ideas on to Anderson while the two were serving in the military in the mid-40's.⁴³ The Anderson Plan

focused primarily on the Book of Mormon as a starting point, rather than the apostasy as was typical of other plans. Anderson accounts for the initial widespread use (approximately 60% of the missions of the church) of his plan after World War II because of the “vacuum of missionary experience” caused by the withdrawal of all European missionaries during the war.⁴⁴ Other missions began creating their own plans that were to some degree modeled after Anderson’s, but with varying approaches towards the Book of Mormon.⁴⁵ Truman Madsen reports that during this same period his mission president, S. Dilworth Young, introduced “push the Book of Mormon” as the New England Mission motto. The more common experience is probably well captured in Robert Matthews’ observation that the Book of Mormon was not widely used in the mission field: “it wasn’t so much a matter of opposition as it was just neglect... We didn’t know we were neglecting it.... We were trying to impress the world. We’d go to them with the Bible.... We thought that’s how it had to be.”⁴⁶ The 1953 church-wide *Systematic Program for Teaching the Gospel*, created partially in response to the wide-spread de-centralization of missionary materials, reduced the number of themes or discussions to 7, compared with 12 in the Anderson plan and even more in previous plans.⁴⁷ The new plan utilized some elements of the Anderson plan, but generally followed another plan from the Great Lakes Mission, introducing the Book of Mormon only after lessons on the Godhead, the apostasy, and the Restoration, resulting in less emphasis on it⁴⁸. However, individual missions continued to supplement the church-wide plan, and some, such as the British and New England missions, introduced the Book of Mormon earlier and used it more centrally.⁴⁹ The major revision of the standardized lesson plan issued in 1961 moved the Book of Mormon up to the second lesson. Meanwhile, as mission president in the Cumorah Mission, Reid Bankhead was authorized to develop his own plan

centered completely on the Book of Mormon⁵⁰ with phenomenal success.⁵¹ Truman Madsen reports being counseled by Elder Hinckley, then of the missionary committee, to read the Book of Mormon when he was called as a mission president in the mid-60s.⁵² Hugh Nibley describes a profound experience when he was present with the presiding brethren in the Salt Lake Temple in the late 60's, the upshot of which was the discovery by revelation during prayer that the Book of Mormon had not been emphasized adequately as a missionary tool.⁵³ In the 1973 revision of the standard plan, the Book of Mormon was moved into a first lesson on the Restoration. The 1986 revision retains the Book of Mormon presentation in the first lesson, and the Book of Mormon is commonly used in door approaches.⁵⁴ Due primarily to curricular emphasis on the Book of Mormon, more missionaries are going into the field with a solid understanding and testimony of it, which only leads to greater incorporation of this book of scripture into every facet of the missionary's work.⁵⁵

Book of Mormon Translations

The mission of the Church to preach the restored gospel to all nations has made necessary the translation of the Book of Mormon into other languages. Depending on needs and resources, these translations may provide either selections or the entire Book of Mormon text. Figure 16 identifies four major periods of significant translation effort—the decades of the 1850s, the 1900s, the 1930s, and the period from 1960 onward. Within this last period an even sharper increase in translation activity is evident in the 1970s. The 1850s translations included major European languages—French, Italian, German, and Welsh—in support of major missionary efforts. The turn-of-the-century translations reflect missionary expansion in the South Seas, the Middle East, and the Far East—Samoan, Tahitian, Turkish, and Japanese. The translations

completed in the 1930s included Czech, Armenian, Braille, and Portuguese. The sharp rise in translations from the 1970s onward was facilitated by resorting to Book of Mormon selections, rather than translations of the complete text for many languages. Complete translations have increased much more slowly.⁵⁶ The recent emphasis on translation of Book of Mormon selections has enabled the Church to provide some support to missionaries working with a large number of less common languages, signaling the Church's view of the centrality of the Book of Mormon in missionary work.

INSERT FIGURE 9 HERE

Family to Family Distribution of the Book of Mormon.

The increasing focus on the Book of Mormon set the stage for an unprecedented phenomenon in Book of Mormon publication at the end of the 1980s. What began as a project of Temple Square volunteers William Bradshaw and Eugene England, Sr., spread first to a primary class, some families, and became a grass roots movement in direct collaboration with a few interested missions. Individuals or families would paste their own photograph and personal testimony of the Book of Mormon inside the cover of quantities of the Book of Mormon they had purchased, and then send the books to a receptive mission for free distribution by missionaries. After catching the approving eye of Church leaders, it was implemented Church-wide in 1975 when Spencer W. Kimball became President of the Church. It received another significant boost when President Ezra Taft Benson encouraged the Church to flood the earth with the Book of Mormon (October, 1988).⁵⁷ Distribution numbers peaked in 1990 at 6,558,383 copies—many times the 974,439 distributed in 1983. In 1991 the flood receded to 4,701,080, but remained at that high level thereafter.⁵⁸ Meanwhile, for reasons it was thought best not to explain publicly,

the Church abandoned the family-to-family program in the early 1990s. It may be that the enthusiasm of the members was creating awkward problems for the missionary effort. The extraordinary success and popularity of the program, while it lasted, provide clear evidence of a solid and enthusiastic base of support for the Book of Mormon among Latter-day Saints in recent decades. It is hard to imagine something like this having succeeded in the 1930s or 1940s.

Brigham Young University Library Holdings.

Another strong indicator of shifting levels of interest in the Book of Mormon might be the rate of publication related to it. We have analyzed this first by looking at a year-by-year summary of holdings in the BYU library. This library's budgetary guidelines specify purchase of all books dealing with Mormonism, making the library's catalog a plausible index of serious book publication on Book of Mormon topics. It would appear from Figure 9 that there was a detectable increase in such publications in the late thirties. But any trend this might have portended was interrupted by the Second World War. This explanation seems possible as the rising trend continues after the war and reaches a new plateau in the late 1960s. The largest rate acceleration occurs in the decade between 1975 and 1985. The rate of publication of books on the Book of Mormon rose fifty percent in the late 1970s and then another 230 percent in the early 1980s. The rate of increase slowed to about 30 percent in the next decade, still a significant number. On any interpretation, the increases of the last two decades can only be taken as clear indication of a major expansion in the market for new titles on this topic.

INSERT FIGURE 10 HERE

Comprehensive FARMS Book of Mormon Bibliography.

We have looked at this differently through the comprehensive annotated bibliography of

the Book of Mormon released by FARMS in 1996.⁵⁹ (For this study we rearranged the electronic version of the *Bibliography* chronologically to give year-by-year summaries. Allison Clark made the judgments that sorted each item into the various categories that will be mentioned in the following pages.) The *Bibliography* gives us a comprehensive look at over 6000 publications related to the Book of Mormon. All entries were sorted first as to whether their approach was general, religious, polemical, or creative writing. The first three categories were further analyzed as to whether the approach of each listing was scholarly. The polemical materials were also sorted according to which side of the argument they took.

The most obvious revelation of these graphs is the rapid rise in publications, especially since 1970. This market growth is beyond dispute and may constitute our strongest indicator of a significant increase in serious interest in the Book of Mormon. The dramatic increases after 1970 should not obscure the fact that significant increases were already occurring after 1940. It will be noticed that the increases in publications shown here are much greater even than those measured in the Harold B. Lee Library catalog. This difference likely reflects the fact that the FARMS bibliography includes separate listings for all articles, pamphlets, and separately authored chapters in books, while the library catalog only lists book-length publications.

INSERT FIGURE 11 HERE

The next graph divides these same publications into four categories—general, religious, fiction, and polemics—without regard to writing level. Rather than a uniform increase across categories, we found that most of the total increase is explained by increases in the general and religious publications. The only notable increases in fiction occurred in the 1950s and have remained relatively constant since then. There has been some increase in polemical writings, but

nothing to match the other two categories. It would appear that the dramatic rise in publication rates reflects more of an interest in the Book of Mormon itself than in the strategic issues that lead to polemical exchange.

INSERT FIGURE 12 HERE

The total market share of publications with a polemical purpose has been in steady decline, relative to all publications on the Book of Mormon. It is also interesting to note that the number of apologetic publications, that defend the Book of Mormon, is usually at least two to three times as high as the critical publications.

INSERT FIGURE 13 HERE

We have also categorized the materials in the FARMS bibliography according to their scholarly character. Figure 13 shows that scholarly publications have increased at the same rate as the non-scholarly publications. The interests of scholars and the interests of the general public seem to be linked to the same motivations, and fluctuate in tandem. There is some evidence that the new scholarly publications inspire non-scholarly take-offs dealing with the same topics and materials.

INSERT FIGURE 14 HERE

We were also interested to look at the polemical publications that were of a scholarly character to assess the balance of critical publications against those that were apologetic, that is, written in defense of the orthodox LDS understanding of the Book of Mormon and its origins. Figure 14 shows that while the most dramatic and voluminous increase occurred with the scholarly apologetic writings beginning in the very early 1970s, the critics reacted at the end of the decade with a similarly sharp increase in publications. Critical writings before this point in

time made little effort to meet even minimal scholarly standards of evidence and logic, but were more likely to be unthinking and inflammatory in character, relying principally on the Spalding theory or other long disproven arguments against the Book of Mormon. The 1980s-surge in scholarly critical materials is due largely to Signature Press and other publishers which have launched a concerted challenge to the authorship and historicity claims of the Book of Mormon, using both Mormon and non-Mormon writers. During the 1980s the rate of increase in publications appears to be higher for scholarly apologetic writings than for almost any other category that has been examined.

INSERT FIGURE 15 HERE

In Figure 15 above it is evident that the scholarly apologetics line has several temporary increases. These can be easily identified with single scholars or groups of scholars and their apologetic writings. The surge around the turn of the century is due to numerous articles and books published by George Reynolds and B. H. Roberts. The bump in the 1930s is mostly explained by Sidney Sperry's publications. And the much larger peak in the early 1950s reflects the parallel, but independent writings of Hugh Nibley, Francis W. Kirkham, and a group of anthropologists and archaeologists at BYU, including John Sorenson, Wells Jakeman, and Ross Christensen, among others.

One final question that we have addressed to the FARMS bibliography asks what share of the publications which assume the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon have a principally faith-promoting and apologetic purpose. Figure 16 shows us that apologetics were the dominant focus of faithful publications for most of the nineteenth century. But since the early 1890s the general and religious categories of publication have steadily gained ground. The downward trend in

apologetic writing dropped below ten percent in the mid-1970s and has stayed in that range for twenty years. The range of faithful approaches to the Book of Mormon appears to be increasing steadily.

INSERT FIGURE 16 HERE

The Book of Mormon in Mormon Arts and Literature.

The FARMS bibliography shows that creative writing, including fictional writing based on the Book of Mormon is an early genre in Mormon arts, but that the publication rate has not increased over time in the way other categories have increased. My research in this area is only cursory. It should be noted, however, that Mormon writers as a group in the first half of this century have been described as a “lost generation” who were often ambivalent toward the religious tradition which seemed to them to have failed. Edward A. Geary has pointed out further how their discouragement with the economic conditions in Utah often included a sense of decline in the Church itself.⁶⁰ Pending more detailed study, it would seem that though the rate of publication for creative works inspired by the Book of Mormon has only increased modestly, the stance of more recent work is more often clearly supportive of the Church as a divine institution and the Book of Mormon as a record of an ancient people.

The visual arts have also featured the Book of Mormon, but not in a disproportionate way. Minerva Teichert (1888–1976) is still the undisputed queen of Book of Mormon painting, having dedicated most of her life to this work and having produced over 40 Book of Mormon subjects, which were later donated to Brigham Young University.⁶¹ Arnold Friberg (1913–) accepted the invitation from General Primary President Adele Cannon Howells to paint twelve dramatic Book of Mormon scenes to be serialized in the *Children’s Friend*, which were only

finished after a significant interruption while Friberg worked on costuming for Cecil B. Demille's *Ten Commandments*. Friberg explained his approach: "I try to bring into reality the stories so often taught in Sunday school. These stories are not mere allegory; they happened to real people who had names, jobs, and grandchildren....Through my paintings I bear witness to the truth as I understand it."⁶² James C. Christensen has produced some well known paintings on Book of Mormon themes, and J. Leo Fairbanks has had a number of his paintings published in Church magazines. The Church's Second International Arts Competition had a scriptural theme and inspired a number of Book of Mormon entries during the period in which President Benson was speaking with that emphasis.

I have made no systematic effort to count creative works in the visual arts or in music. But these kinds of efforts might offer another useful measure of LDS interest in the Book of Mormon. Pageants celebrating the Book of Mormon should also be mentioned. The Hill Cumorah Pageant now claims attendance of well over 100,000 during its seven-night run. *The Book of Mormon's Standing in the larger Mormon community.*

The quantitative evidence is clear: the Book of Mormon's role in LDS study and instruction has grown dramatically since the early decades of this century. In order to understand the reasons behind this tremendous increase, it might be helpful to gain some insight into the perceptions of the Book of Mormon on the eve of this transformation, and how these perceptions have played themselves out in the larger Mormon community. A student in the 1940s, David H. Yarn, Jr., reports that "it may be an exaggeration, but I would think not much of an exaggeration that probably in a lot of wards it was hardly realized that we had a Book of Mormon. . . I think the general membership was woefully ignorant on the Book of Mormon. They were much more

skilled in the Bible. Even in missionary work it was generally the Bible that was used.”⁶³ Reinforcing this evaluation, Hugh Nibley observed, “Not long ago you would find stake presidents who had never read the Book of Mormon.”⁶⁴ Ellis Rasmussen comments more generally, “I lived in a generation that just about dwindled away. Was it Tolstoy that said, ‘Well Mormonism is a great new thing, but in the third and fourth generation it will blend out into the other cultures as most new movements have done?’⁶⁵ And it was rapidly happening in the 30’s. Not many of us went on missions. I can remember our sacrament meetings. There were thirty to forty people in a little town of 500. Ninety-nine percent of them were members of the Church, but not very active.”⁶⁶ Ignorance and neglect of the Book of Mormon was not an anomaly. There was little serious writing on the Book of Mormon beyond George Reynolds, B. H. Roberts, John A. Widtsoe, Sperry, and Francis W. Kirkham for faculty to draw from. And their academic preparation does not appear to have inclined them to look in those directions for help.

Although Reynolds, Roberts, Widtsoe, Sperry, and Kirkham were all highly educated, their approaches were considered too literal and faithful to be compatible with those of a liberal academic orientation. However, important work in Book of Mormon studies had been done by these scholars. George Reynolds was perhaps the first to do serious and thorough analytic work focused on the text of the book of Mormon. He produced both a concordance and a dictionary and numerous substantive analyses of the book and its contents during the last quarter of the nineteenth century.⁶⁷ Despite recent efforts to suggest that Roberts had serious doubts about the historicity of the Book of Mormon,⁶⁸ persuasive arguments by Truman Madsen and John Welch argue that Roberts remained faithful to his testimony of it. While taking seriously the fashionable arguments of higher criticism, Roberts believed that their conclusions were faulty.

Roberts stressed that the scriptural texts must stand pre-eminent, and that their claims should be accepted by faith.⁶⁹ Roberts's writings on the Book of Mormon in the first third of the twentieth century were both extensive and widely circulated. Widtsoe, like Roberts, was concerned with the potential threats posed by modern scholarship to faith and belief. Widtsoe wrote serialized publications in Church magazines that addressed the reconciliation of faith with scientific and other modern questions. These were later collected into three volumes with the subtitle *Aids to Faith in a Modern Day*.⁷⁰ Widtsoe also joint-authored a defense of the historical claims of the Book of Mormon in *Seven Claims of the Book of Mormon: A Collection of Evidences*.⁷¹ Francis Kirkham was similarly concerned with evidences for the Book of Mormon. In 1937 he published *Source Material Concerning the Origin of the Book of Mormon*, that was later expanded into his two-volume work *A New Witness for Christ in America: The Book of Mormon*. Widtsoe acknowledged Kirkham as being the foremost scholar in this field "due to his vast research and reading on the Book of Mormon and its coming forth."⁷² Kirkham, in an oral history interview, reveals this fundamental distinction as he critiques the choice of words used by a Mormon historian, "the story of the first vision": "Now to me, I couldn't any more use that word than fly. I always use these words, the event of the first vision."⁷³

Works by these scholars represented the best of the studies on the Book of Mormon fueled by evidential concerns. Attempts to prove the historicity of the Book of Mormon until recent decades often rested on arguments about its coming forth and its ancient American context rather than internal or textual evidences. Nibley characterizes the more common general approach espoused by the general membership of the Church as "totally uncritical, naive." Truman Madsen comments on his own transformation of interest in the Book of Mormon: "In

younger days I was concerned with the question: what is the evidence for the Book of Mormon? Now I am preoccupied with what is the Book of Mormon evidence for? To me it is a window to Christ. I am less interested in studying the frame, or the composition of the glass, or the spots on the pane than I am in looking through.”⁷⁴

Cultural Mormonism and the Book of Mormon

Hugh W. Nibley’s candor lifts the veil on an even more ominous or insidious dimension of the widespread lack of support for Book of Mormon instruction before 1960. When Nibley first arrived at BYU, he maintained an active connection with the so-called “swearing Mormons,” a circle of LDS liberal academics who regularly met from 1949 to 1950 to discuss intellectual issues relating to Mormonism in an open environment in which they could speak freely about their views. Many of the “swearing Elders” questioned fundamental beliefs of the LDS faith and some flatly rejected the Book of Mormon as a divine work. Nibley tells of being invited to Salt Lake City to talk with them about the Book of Mormon: “And they’d say, ‘You’re among friends now, you can say what you really feel about the Book of Mormon and about anything else.’ Well, then I bore my testimony, and oh, were they mad. They were just boiling. I never saw such anger. They just ripped me. And then going back...O. C. Tanner laid it out about the Book of Mormon, ‘We have to get rid of it. It’s driving the best minds out of the church! You can’t see it, but with my training, I know it.’ He’d say to me, ‘Now Joseph Smith was a deceiver, but he was a sly deceiver. The Book of Mormon is not true.’...They had a real active hatred of the Book of Mormon up there, even though they were members of the Church.”⁷⁵

The O. C. Tanner case is particularly interesting because Tanner may have eventually modified his antagonism toward the Book of Mormon. In the 1954 seminar for CES teachers,

Elder Harold B. Lee shared a story with the group that Glenn L. Pearson later pursued in private conversation with Elder Lee. Apparently Llewelyn McKay, President McKay's son, was able to persuade his father to authorize an invitation from the Sunday School to Tanner to write a Gospel Doctrine manual, in spite of Tanner's fairly well known scepticism regarding many fundamental claims of the Church. Pearson remembers this as a common occurrence: "The General Boards would pass out the assignments to various individuals, and half the time they weren't even believers." Because the particular manual (*Christ's Ideals for Living*) required a treatment of Third Nephi, Tanner decided he would have to read the Book of Mormon, and in the process concluded that the Book of Mormon was true after all. "He hadn't believed it for years and years."⁷⁶ Elder Lee's point in sharing the story with the CES personnel was to show how someone with Tanner's views could gain a testimony, and should not be written off as a hopeless enemy. O. C. Tanner's recent autobiography confirms his life-long doubts in these matters, but gives no hint of this late illumination.⁷⁷ It may be that Elder Lee interpreted Tanner's report of increased appreciation for the Book of Mormon and its message as increased belief in its historicity.

Robert J. Matthews reports another revealing experience in a very different context: "I remember when I came home from my mission, that would have been in 1948...talking to an LDS audience in my hometown [Evanston, Wyoming], just a small group. And I said to them, 'The Book of Mormon is the most important book in the whole world.' I remember some of them saying, 'More important than the Bible?' And they struggled with the concept that the Book of Mormon should be that important."⁷⁸

A major scenario in which perceptions of the Book of Mormon have played themselves

out at length is in the writing of Mormon history. It is clear that secular historians do not accept the veracity of LDS claims about the founding events, including the First Vision, the restoration of the priesthood, and the divinely-aided translation of the Book of Mormon. But how have LDS historians dealt with these founding events in their professional writing? The most helpful survey on this issue is the annotated bibliography of historians' writings on these subjects prepared by Louis C. Midgley, recently retired professor of political science at BYU.⁷⁹ In his generous annotations, Midgley keeps track of this particular question. He has also published a number of essays documenting how the naturalistic stance of some LDS scholars creates large or small tensions with orthodox faith.⁸⁰

“A distinguished historian” who “didn’t want to be mentioned by name” was interviewed almost a decade ago by English journalist and religious skeptic, Malise Ruthven.⁸¹ In the published interview Ruthven pointed to recent attacks on Joseph Smith by some historians and asked if these studies were “not making it more and more difficult to sustain the official version, that there was a 1500-year gap between the Book’s original composition and its ‘discovery’ by Joseph Smith?”⁸² In reply the historian explained,

What the Church tells us is sacred history, and somehow it doesn’t bother me that what I’m doing down here—the study of people, and places and events—appears different. I don’t expect them to merge together. When I was a student I read George Santayana’s *Reason and Religion* in which he discusses the difference between myth or sacred history and actual history. He presents the idea that there is a sacred epic for Christians, Muslims and practically every other people. . . . So at an early stage I came to accept the idea that there is a truth which does not rest upon historical narrative, but comes under the heading

of faith, belief or religion. Nothing that has come up, in the form of new historical data, has ever bothered me. The story, the way that it's told, is something that's in your heart. When you hear songs sung, or poems read, or see pictures that show these things, whether it's Christian history, or Mormon history, or whatever, it stirs you inside. But it does not affect what you're writing professionally. Protestant, Catholic, Jewish and Muslim historians have found ways of pursuing their work and displaying their integrity while maintaining their faith. Why shouldn't Mormons do the same?⁸³

This separation of historical and religious truth has been put forward repeatedly by a few LDS historians who love and support the Church, but who do not want to be pushed into defending the historicity of the founding revelations.

But not all LDS historians have been satisfied with this kind of middle-of-the-road position. Almost without exception, Mormon historians who teach in the BYU Department of Church History and Doctrine openly defend the literal historical reality of the founding events and the Book of Mormon. The wide range of scholars that publish with FARMS take the same stance. Because they understand Moroni's visit and the account of the gold plates as historical events, empirical evidence for or against those events does have relevance for faith, and appeals to Santayana's distinction look like admissions that the claimed founding events did not really occur. Though their approach is often less direct, a large share of the other LDS historians who write on these matters are guided by personal belief and testimony compatible with basic LDS orthodoxy. But, as documented at length by Midgley, the kinds of skepticism that prevailed among LDS intellectuals in the early twentieth century are still vigorously held in some quarters today.

Wisely, the fraternity of professional historians has avoided allowing this difference to become a focus of public battle. But their studied silence on these matters has also made it difficult for their lay readers to understand fully the issues that sometimes underlie historians' writings. As the twentieth-century history of cultural Mormonism comes to be more openly studied and discussed by historians themselves, the LDS community may find itself more easily and less tendentiously discussing these issues and their implications for the faith and for the self-understanding of the community. While few Latter-day Saints today would agree with the view that one's beliefs about actual history and religious truth should be radically insulated from one another, it may also be the case that such thinking is less a threat to the Church now than in times past. While isolated anecdotal evidence suggests that some private agendas were aggressively hostile to the Church's commitment to the historicity of the original account of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon (see *e.g.*, Nibley's interview comments on Tanner cited above), the publicly verifiable evidence is that most of these skeptics have been genuinely gentle in their positions and have not campaigned in any concerted way to impose their naturalistic views on the larger community. Their recurring success in gaining the support and even protection of President David O. McKay and other general authorities provides further evidence of their loyalty to the Church in some significant sense. As these issues gradually become less contentious in the community, there may emerge a fuller divulgence of the private conversations of the past, and a consequent fuller understanding of this dynamic in mid-twentieth century cultural Mormonism. The posthumously-published biographical writings of McMurrin and Tanner certainly move us in that direction.

Part of the problem historians, and especially non-LDS historians have with the Book of

Mormon is that it seems so obvious to them that the book had to have been written by Joseph Smith and his associates in the 1820s that they cannot believe it is worth their time to analyze the book itself carefully or to pay any attention to the growing literature based on these kinds of analyses. The growing list of scholarly treatments of Mormonism published by academic presses simply go on making this assumption. To experiment with the foundations of this assumption, I organized a small, private conference of mostly non-LDS scholars to include both historians of American religious history and other text-oriented disciplines, with the Book of Mormon itself as the text for discussion and certain questions of political theory as the subject. Following the September 1997 meeting, one of the historians wrote the following letter to the Indianapolis-based sponsoring foundation.⁸⁴ Professor Howe's observations are fully consistent with the verbal comments of the other participants and seem to indicate that historians can learn a great deal from intensive textual analysis of the Book of Mormon and that there might be reason to hope their treatments of Mormon history in the future will pay more attention to the book's unique and complex content.

Dr. G. M. Curtis, III

Liberty Fund, Inc....

Dear Dr. Curtis:

Thank you so much for including me in the Liberty Fund conference on "Personal and Political Liberty in the *Book of Mormon*." The Liberty Fund is to be congratulated for having the imagination and courage to sponsor a conference on this subject, which was fully vindicated by the outcome.

Having taught the history of religion in the United States for some time (nineteen years at

UCLA and six so far at Oxford) I was of course familiar with the *Book of Mormon* to some extent, and had read a good deal of it. However, I confess that it had not occurred to me that the text would bear the kind of close analysis to which our group of philosophers, political scientists, literary and historical specialists subjected it. My teaching and writing in the future will benefit from the enriched appreciation the seminar gave me for this complex and inspiring work.....

Signed

Daniel W. Howe

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Given the overwhelmingly supportive attitude that Book of Mormon instruction enjoys at BYU today, both in Religious Education and among the faculty generally, it may be hard to understand or appreciate the intellectual milieu of cultural Mormonism that prevailed during the first half of this century. Our interviews with people who were students and/or faculty members during those years reveal a depth of skepticism and antipathy toward the Book of Mormon, even among the very individuals responsible for teaching it, that one rarely encounters among Latter-day Saints in the 1990s, and which would likely lead to a holder of such views today being characterized as apostate or dissident. Chauncey C. Riddle remembers, “When I was a student [in the 1940s], the Book of Mormon was scoffed at—sneered at—by a great many of my professors on campus.”⁸⁵

In retrospect, it seems truly miraculous that the general intellectual climate of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries did not permanently disorient the LDS community from

the commitment to its origins in the revelations received by Joseph Smith, as it clearly has done for the RLDS community and most Protestant denominations in their understandings of the scriptures and the divine. How is it that the philosophy of positivism which had such tremendous impact on so many academic disciplines has had so little lasting effect on the LDS community? The positivist determinism to deny real existence to beings or forces not detectable by scientific means produced at least two generations of spiritual cripples in almost every religious tradition that claimed origins in revelation and direct relationships with God. Intellectuals trained in philosophy, the humanities, history, and the social sciences were most vulnerable as most graduate schools offered little alternative to these atheistic assumptions as beginning points for all respectable intellectual endeavor. Bright LDS graduate students were not prepared in their Utah schools to understand the limitations of the seemingly monolithic forces of religious skepticism, and were frequently robbed of whatever spiritual testimony they had, or reinforced permanently in their own budding doubts. Not until Chaucey Riddle obtained his Ph.D. in philosophy at Columbia University in the 1950s and joined forces with fellow Columbia graduate student David Yarn and later Harvard graduate Truman Madsen, did the Church have highly competent intellectuals who understood fully the philosophical options and could fortify future graduate students in their own faith. When one reads the biographies of leading cultural Mormons such as Sterling McMurrin or O. C. Tanner, one is struck by their lack of contact in their formative years with highly educated Latter-day Saints who were thoroughly grounded in the restored gospel. Cultural Mormons generally seemed to buy into the positivist assumption that if they were to take modern science and philosophy seriously, they had to abandon the faith of their fathers, at least as their fathers understood and experienced that faith. No one was

showing them the limits and nature of science and philosophy and how those limits pointed to the need for a gospel of revelation.

Dialogue recently published the personal reflections on this topic of Brigham D. Madsen, a well-published cultural Mormon and historian. Madsen has become quite annoyed in recent years with “LDS leaders in Salt Lake City” who “continue their aggressive preaching of the Book of Mormon, despite the overwhelming scientific proofs of its fictional character.” He notes wistfully how late seventeenth century New England Puritans devised a “Half-Way Covenant” to keep the families of those who did not accept the full Puritan teaching on the rolls of the churches and laments that the Mormon church will lose needed intellectual stimulation and support as those members who cannot believe in the Book of Mormon as history drift away.⁸⁶ He also recommends for LDS consideration the “wise practice” of the RLDS leaders who, after public and private discussions of these issues as raised by some of their intellectuals in the 1960s, chose to soft-pedal “the Book of Mormon in church curricula and publications.”⁸⁷

The fate of belief in the Book of Mormon in the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints is both instructive and relevant, because it shows where the Latter-day Saints might have wound up if the attitudes prevailing earlier in the century had won out. Reports of a 1980s interview with Paul Edwards, considered the leading RLDS intellectual and principal of the Temple School, which trains their professional clergy, might help contemporary Latter-day Saints understand better the mentality of someone who considers himself a faithful member of the Church while disbelieving the fundamental revelations of the Restoration.⁸⁸

Ruthven next asked Edwards about the “part the Book of Mormon played in the teachings of the Reorganized Church.”⁸⁹ Edwards said that his “guess would be that it

constitutes less than ten percent of our scriptural readings. We don't teach it much in our schools. Our people believe *in* it, but they don't believe it. It's important as a symbol."⁹⁰

For Edwards, the Book of Mormon is something the RLDS have to live with: "It's a story, a myth, who knows what? For most people I know it's got nothing to do with anything. It's the way we explain ourselves. But whenever possible, I avoid bringing it up. If somebody else brings it up I squirm. If somebody wants to know what I think I usually lie."⁹¹

Ruthven wanted to know why Edwards, given his view of the foundations of the faith, remains RLDS. "The Church," Edwards said, "has some social and I think, in a very small sense, some religious meaning, and I don't want to see it destroyed. I'm a member of the Church despite the Book of Mormon, not because of it. I don't think that's an unusual position for people in the RLDS, but it's totally unacceptable to announce it."⁹² Ruthven asked whether Wallace Smith, the current RLDS president, had announced publicly that he does not believe the Book of Mormon, but Edwards brushed that question aside. About Latter-day Saint evangelism, Edwards maintained that it "is much more committed to the Book of Mormon."⁹³

While it is true that the RLDS hierarchy has moved away from a commitment to the Book of Mormon, many of their members maintain strong testimonies of its truthfulness. Ironically, the committee on archaeology established over 100 years ago severed its official connection to the Church in 1992 to become a non-sectarian organization promoting the Book of Mormon (the Foundation for Research on Ancient America), allying itself more openly with Utah Mormons who do believe and who are publishing new and faithful studies of the Book of Mormon.

It would be interesting to know for sure what Brigham Madsen had in mind when he referred to “overwhelming scientific proofs of the fictional character” of the Book of Mormon. His essay does not give much evidence of personal erudition in these matters. He does cite the conclusions of several essays in Brent Metcalfe’s *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon* approvingly, without appearing to be aware of the thorough and devastating criticisms of those efforts to disprove the Book of Mormon that were published in *The Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* in its first 1994 issue.⁹⁴ Perhaps a more fair-minded and well-informed judgment comes from another surprising quarter. In 1996 two young evangelical scholars undertook to assess the state of the debate between faithful Latter-day Saint scholars and anti-Mormons regarding the Book of Mormon and related matters. They concluded the critics have grossly underestimated the quality of the apologetic literature in support of the Book of Mormon, and that they will have to rise to new levels of scholarly competence before they will be able to deal effectively with the current generation of LDS scholars and the large body of credible scientific work now supporting the plausibility of the Book of Mormon as history.⁹⁵ Madsen might also be interested to know that the Smithsonian Institution has recently decided to stop circulating an old statement which flatly denied the possibility of the Book of Mormon being consistent with the findings of Mesoamerican archaeology.

Cultural Mormonism at BYU and in the Church Educational System

Institutional histories of BYU, the Church Education System, or the Church in general, do not make any effort to account for, or explain, the expanding role that the Book of Mormon occupies in their various curricula. However there are elements of their history which seem to be quite relevant and provide another lens through which to view the changing perceptions of the

Book of Mormon.

If we take BYU as the best documented case study, we find that the role of the Book of Mormon in the curriculum has repeatedly surfaced as a major political issue. In the period centering on 1910 two sets of brothers, Ralph and William Chamberlin and Henry and Joseph Peterson, were major intellectual powerhouses in Provo and invested great personal energy inside and outside the institution to promote their “enlightened” views which discounted the historical reality of any scripture and its contents and found the strength of Mormonism in its social and theological teachings.⁹⁶ They further invoked a broadly gauged account of biological and cultural evolution to explain the world and the rise of man and religion in that world and argued that these kinds of scientific and philosophical perspectives were optimal for intelligent Mormons. Contrary to other more orthodox LDS scientists, they promoted the humanistic thesis that a scientific mind could not accept the scriptures (Bible or Book of Mormon) as literally true. They appealed to standard Protestant rationalizations for giving up on the miraculous and shifting religious focus to ethics and social concerns. Writing in the student newspaper, Ralph Chamberlin stated, “For assuredly, it is only when we perceive the constant growth, the constant evolution, in the Bible and recognize in it the progressive unfolding of the Divine Will in the Hebrew race that it has its highest meaning for and can teach and stimulate us.” In another article entitled “Early Hebrew Legends,” Chamberlin observed, “Only the childish and immature mind can lose by learning that much in the Old Testament is poetical and that some of the stories are not true historically. Poetry is a superior medium for religious truth...”⁹⁷ All of this was held by Chamberlin and other cultural Mormons to be a reasonable interpretation of the Mormon tradition. The question-begging depreciation of “childish and immature” minds was effective on

an audience that had intellectual ambitions or pretensions, but insufficient education to judge these matters confidently for themselves.

But BYU didn't operate any more in a vacuum then than now. The more popular these enlightened views became, the more complaints came in from concerned parents and townspeople. Horace H. Cummings, superintendent of Church education reacted vigorously, visited the campus for nine days at the end of 1910, and submitted his report to the General Church Board of Education January 21, 1911.⁹⁸ Cummings reported that in the two years or so since these teachings had been introduced at the Provo campus, most of the students and much of the traditional faculty had been won over, students were zealous in defending these new views. Their inspiration came directly from the higher criticism as articulated in the writings of Lyman Abbot. Inevitably, the Bible was regarded as "a collection of myths, folk-lore," etc. Christ's temptation was regarded as allegory; John the Revelator was not believed to have been translated. The application of the theory of evolution as demonstrated law to gospel truths required new characterizations of the fall and Christ's atonement, and was most "damaging to the faith of the students." Sin is redefined as ignorance. All truth changes. Visions and revelations are mentally induced; the literal reality of Joseph Smith's visions is questioned. Proponents of these views claimed that rather than downgrading the scriptures this enlightened understanding made the "Scriptures and the gospel...more dear and more beautiful to them on that account, being broader in their applications." Cummings further reported that since his December visit to Provo,

as many as three Stake Presidents in one week have called upon me expressing alarm at the teachings that emanate from the B.Y. University. One of them said that when he

expostulated with the Principal of their Stake Academy for teaching false doctrine, his defense was that the B.Y. University taught the same. Another President told me he did not want their present principal another year, as he is an apostate in his teachings and belief. The third said he would not allow one of his children to be under certain of the B. Y. University professors for anything. Many parents of students there have also visited me and expressed great fear for the faith of their children.

Cummings found these views to be vigorously taught by only five faculty members. He reported:

These teachers have been warned by the Presidency of the school and by myself, and even pleaded with, for the sake of the school, not to press their views with so much vigor. Even if they were right, conditions are not suitable, but their zeal overcomes all counsel and they seem even more determined, if not defiant, in pushing their beliefs upon the students. They seem to feel they have a mission to protect the young from the errors of their parents, and one student said to me, "I could make my dear mother weep in a minute by telling her how I have changed my religious views." Yet he had only accepted that which he thought was far ahead of what his mother had taught him. The poor mother did not have the capacity of understanding his new light and rejoicing with him in it, so he would keep it secret from her.⁹⁹

Superintendent Cummings eventually won over reluctant BYU president George H. Brimhall, as evidenced in Brimhall's letter to the Salt Lake authorities:

I have been hoping for a year or two past that harmony could be secured by waiting, but the delays have been [fraught] with increased danger...The school cannot go off and leave

the church in any line of activity without *perishing in the desert*...I recognize now that a more vigorous course of action on my part might have been better, but I was lenient, and patiently hopeful that men would change gradually as they have in other cases, but the storm, instead of dying out, increased in its fury. I feel now that nothing short of a public retraction should be accepted as a guarantee that these men will preserve an attitude of being in harmony with the spirit of the school and the doctrines of the church as preached by the living oracles.”¹⁰⁰

Cummings recorded in his autobiography a dream of Brimhall’s, which was pivotal in gaining Brimhall’s enthusiastic support of church leaders’ desire to focus the university’s academic mission more clearly along the lines of doctrinal orthodoxy. In this dream several BYU professors were casting bait with a rod and reel into the sky where a flock of snow-white birds were flying contentedly above. When a bird went for the bait, it was immediately brought down to earth.

On reaching the ground the bird proved to be a BYU student, clad in an ancient Greek costume, and was directed to join a group of other students who had been brought down in a similar manner. Brother Brimhall walked over to them, and noticing that all of them looked very sad, discouraged and downcast, he asked them: ‘Why, students, what on earth makes you so sad and down-hearted?’ ‘Alas, we can never fly again!’ they replied with a sigh and a sad shake of the head. Their Greek philosophy had tied them down to the earth. They could believe only what they could demonstrate in the laboratory. Their prayers could go no higher than the ceiling. They could see no heaven—no hereafter.¹⁰¹

These avant garde professors enjoyed the clear support of the students and of many LDS

intellectuals, including Milton Bennion, University of Utah professor who later became the Church's commissioner of education.¹⁰² Several leading professors left the university after the Petersons and Ralph Chamberlin were dismissed for refusing to adjust to the directions issued subsequently by the Board of Trustees.¹⁰³ President Brimhall himself was characterized by his granddaughter, Fawn M. Brodie, as "nominally devout." This may not have been a fair inference of Brodie, the open heretic, and her "quiet heretic" mother, who in younger years had seen her father's bringing of prominent secular social scientists and philosophers to the BYU campus as evidence of an openness that somehow qualified his faith.¹⁰⁴ But it does reveal the mentality of those years in which to listen to secular scholars and study their works was taken as some kind of commitment to the secular point of view. The examples of eminent and faithful LDS scholars from the second half of the century have thoroughly undermined that naive kind of expectation.

The second round occurred in the 1930s and 1940s. More widespread acceptance of evolutionary thinking, including within the Church hierarchy, tended to eliminate that as an issue. But the divisions between liberal and conservative approaches to the interpretation of scripture and doctrine and to the religion curriculum provided the ground for another significant battle. BYU President Franklin S. Harris had established the Alpine Summer School at Aspen Grove in 1922, featuring a six-week school for religion teachers in the CES. While in retrospect we might see this as a formula for disaster, especially given the decidedly liberal orientation of much of the personnel involved, it enjoyed the enthusiastic support of the Commissioner, Adam S. Bennion, and even Elder Widtsoe, who taught some of the courses. Joseph Merrill, Bennion's successor, was also very impressed, especially with Sidney Sperry's 1929 course on the Old Testament. Merrill decided to promote the Alpine Summer School and opened up a special relationship with

the University of Chicago Divinity School, where Sperry was completing graduate work, inviting four University of Chicago divinity professors to teach at the summer school in successive years.¹⁰⁵ A number of LDS graduate students were sent off to Chicago, at the invitation of Merrill with the offer of financial assistance by the church and re-employment in the Church Education System, contingent upon their continued faith and loyalty to the church.¹⁰⁶ Merrill's successors, John A. Widtsoe and Franklin West continued this relationship and oversaw a wave of University of Chicago students going and returning to BYU and the CES throughout the 1930s.¹⁰⁷ Nibley explains that the church in these decades was "always very impressed by outsiders" hoping perhaps to change, through interaction with intelligent and liberally educated Mormons, the negative perceptions of Mormonism held by many of these outsiders.¹⁰⁸

Sidney Sperry offers a classic example of how a believer can be fully educated in a secular scholarly tradition, and yet maintain a comfortable faith. David H. Yarn relates how the more skeptical crowd could misread Sperry, the first Latter-day Saint to receive a Ph.D. in Biblical languages and the first academically trained full-time religion teacher at BYU.¹⁰⁹ "I remember being in Dr. Sperry's office when one who was considered a religious skeptic came in to visit with him. Upon learning that Dr. Sperry was writing about the Book of Mormon, the visitor said cynically, 'Oh, Sid, you don't believe that stuff about the Book of Mormon, do you?' Dr. Sperry, in a courteous and respectful manner, but in firm and unmistakable terms, bore a resolute testimony concerning the Book of Mormon."¹¹⁰ Sperry clearly inspired a number of students in Book of Mormon studies and used his influence to bring to BYU several religion professors who were thoroughly committed to the Book of Mormon.¹¹¹

The Chicago connection fell apart as Merrill and Widtsoe were removed from the scene

by mission calls and possibly changing views on the value of the experiment. Widtsoe later cited this experiment as his basis for opposing a Ph.D. program in religion at BYU.¹¹² A strong reaction was developing against the perspective of the Chicago brigades, which culminated spectacularly in the 1938 statement of J. Reuben Clark from the First Presidency to the religion teachers at the CES summer school. President Clark made clear to all concerned that the Church was committed to its historical origins in revelations, visions, and the inspired translation of the literally true Book of Mormon.

The Book of Mormon is just what it professes to be....These facts...must stand unchanged, unmodified, without dilution, excuse, apology, or avoidance; they may not be explained away.... Any individual who does not accept the fulness of these doctrines...is not a Latter-day Saint.... Our Church schools cannot be staffed by unconverted, untestimonied teachers.¹¹³

Such statements explain clearly why students and teachers might have thought that “President Clark and Elder Widtsoe were foremost in recognizing the problem and doing something about it,”¹¹⁴ and why unbelieving CES personnel like Sterling McMurrin saw Clark’s statement as the watershed event when the Church “placed severe limitations on academic freedom in matters relating to religion and morals throughout the Church Educational System.”¹¹⁵

There were several other First Presidency mandates in 1940 and 1942. J. Reuben Clark sent a letter in 1940 to Frank West saying that false doctrines were continuing to be taught in CES and at BYU. This letter directs that religion teachers must teach only from the Standard Works, which

are the ultimate authority on all matters of doctrine.... Teachers will do well to give up

indoctrinating themselves in the sectarianism of the modern ‘Divinity School theology.’ If they do not, they will probably bring themselves to a frame of mind where they will be no longer useful in our system.... Teachers will not teach ethics or philosophy, ancient or modern, pagan or so-called Christian. They will as already stated teach the Gospel and that only, and the Gospel as revealed in these last days.... The *Gospel* should be spoken of as *The Gospel*, God’s revealed truth; it is not and must never be spoken of or treated as a “history and evolution of *human* ideas”.... Cumulative evidence coming to us leaves us with no alternative but to believe that some teachers (too many of them) are doubt sowers.¹¹⁶

A 1942 statement, “Principles Controlling Church-Paid Service,” reiterated these same guidelines.¹¹⁷

At BYU many faculty left or went underground with their no-longer appreciated views. One of the better known Chicago graduates, Russell Swensen, once explained how he and other like-minded BYU faculty managed the changing atmosphere without leaving the University: “Clark’s method...caused a lot of bitter reaction...When I taught in the school I found that I [had to be] discreet. Something that I thought might be a problem to people who didn’t have the background, I discreetly omitted. I think many [adopted] that—a voluntary censorship.”¹¹⁸ Some CES personnel chose to leave the system rather than fight over these clarified guidelines. Sterling M. McMurrin was one of the more visible of these, though he was one of the less emotional and combative of the group. He simply found that CES was no longer the comfortable and nurturing environment he had once valued. He had never believed in the Book of Mormon—or even in God, for that matter—and would not agree to teach it, even if required to

do so.¹¹⁹ As he told one group at BYU, he had never even read the Book of Mormon.¹²⁰ This admission may seem surprising for a learned man who rejects the authenticity of the Book of Mormon on the grounds that he knows “of no real evidence for its support,” and that “there is a great deal of evidence against it.”¹²¹ But like other leading spokesmen for this widespread perspective among cultural Mormons, McMurrin, relying on the fashionable positivist assumptions of the times, had decided early on that because such a book couldn’t be true, it really wasn’t worth reading. In the same interview, McMurrin explained: “I came to the conclusion at a very early age, earlier than I can remember, that you don’t get books from angels and translate them by miracles; it is just that simple...all the hassling over the authenticity of the Book of Mormon is just a waste of time.”¹²²

There was never a straightforward house-cleaning and change of direction in CES or BYU as a result of these events. But control was shifted increasingly to administrators who were orthodox in their beliefs and suspicious of liberalized approaches. Again, in the early 1950s, Church leaders became concerned about a drift in the attitudes of some CES teachers who were more interested in liberating their students from traditional LDS teaching, than in instilling faith in the established fundamentals of the Church. Young CES administrators A. Theodore Tuttle and Boyd K. Packer were given a special assignment to seminaries and institutes “for some reinforcement, some shaping up.”¹²³ They frequently found themselves “challenged by a spirit of intellectualism that had spread under former administrators who had promoted men of such leanings over more orthodox religion teachers.”¹²⁴ Their mentor during these years was Harold B. Lee, with whom they shared significant spiritual experiences that shaped their later careers as general authorities.¹²⁵ A 1954 five-week summer seminar for all seminary and institute personnel

organized by Elder Packer featured daily instruction by Elder Harold B. Lee, with supporting appearances from President J. Reuben Clark, Jr., President Joseph Fielding Smith, and half the members of the Quorum of the Twelve.¹²⁶

The Book of Mormon in the BYU Curriculum.

The culminating development in the BYU Religion curriculum arose out of a prolonged debate in the Division of Religion. Eldin Ricks, Reid Bankhead, and Glenn Pearson led agitation for changing the required freshman religion course from a general LDS theology course to the Book of Mormon. Of the many arguments advanced in support of that position, the one that stands out and makes most sense focused on the value of immersing students directly in the text of the Book of Mormon. It was generally assumed that the selection of a first year course was critical because of the high drop out rates after the first year.¹ Many of those that left for marriage or missions did not return to BYU. The argument Pearson emphasized was that the Book of Mormon text provided a built-in control on teachers that might have liberal theological inclinations.¹²⁷ The debate raged back and forth in the religion faculty, and the University finally agreed to pass the unresolved question along to the Board of Trustees.

David H. Yarn, at that time dean of the Division of Religion and a supporter of the required freshman theology course, continued to pray regularly for guidance in this issue which had proved so divisive for his faculty. He reports that being so engaged one Sunday, he was answered by an audible voice contradicting his own position and telling him that the Book of

¹ The data summarized in Figure 3 may call this assumption into question. The number of Book of Mormon sections *per BYU student* after Book of Mormon was required for freshmen soon leveled off where it had been back in the 1950s. What we have not been able to determine is the extent to which average section size increased, which could make a big difference.

Mormon should be the required first-year course at BYU. At the end of the week, President Ernest L. Wilkinson called to inform him that the Board of Trustees had finally decided the issue and had determined that the Book of Mormon should replace theology as the required course. Brother Yarn tells this story to explain his gratitude to the Lord for allowing him to know in advance and to know it was the will of the Lord, especially in view of the extraordinary rancor and back-door politicking that occurred during the extended decision-making process.¹²⁸

Book of Mormon Archaeology and Geography Studies.

Among believers in the Book of Mormon, attempts to improve understanding of the text itself have increased significantly. One such manifestation is in archaeological and geographical studies. Interest in the Book of Mormon has at various times been fueled by efforts to determine the geographical location of the events it records and to document archaeological artifacts from the ancient American civilizations that might possibly derive from the Nephites or Lamanites. George Q. Cannon reported in the *Juvenile Instructor* in 1890 that “there is a tendency, strongly manifested at the present time among some of the brethren, to study the geography of the Book of Mormon. We have heard of numerous lectures, illustrated by suggestive maps, being delivered on this subject during the present winter, generally under the auspices of the Improvement Societies and Sunday Schools.” While the speculations themselves did not bother the Brethren, there was some evident concern for the confusion and disunity such debates could create.¹²⁹ Brigham Young Academy president, Benjamin Cluff, headed up an unfortunate expedition to find “Book of Mormon lands” in Central America in 1900.¹³⁰ A Book of Mormon convention was held in Provo in 1903. 1904 brought a report on Book of Mormon geography by the new Society of American Archaeology. The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter

Day Saints was caught up in the same fever and established its own official Committee on Archaeology in 1894.¹³¹ B. H. Roberts took up some issues in his books and particularly warned against rash and hasty interpretations.¹³² The First Presidency continually re-affirmed that there had been no revelation on the issue.¹³³ In 1928 the Church purchased the New York Hill Cumorah, which was believed by B. H. Roberts and Anthony W. Ivins to be the site of the final Nephite battle.¹³⁴ After Joseph Fielding Smith's 1938 rebuke of those who argued for a more limited geography, open discussion became more difficult,¹³⁵ and the efforts of Jakeman, Ferguson, and Franklin S. Harris, Jr. to open the Cumorah question were greeted with suspicion and hostility. Various organizational efforts among the serious students of these questions led eventually to the establishment of the New World Archaeological Foundation (NWAf) and the Society for Early Historical Archaeology (SEHA). These sometimes competing groups pushed the discussion forward with their research, conferences, and publications, though the Church maintained a virtual ban against inclusion of their theories or findings in its manuals or magazines.¹³⁶ The landmark event that re-opened discussion in 1984 was the serialized and abbreviated *Ensign* publication of John L. Sorenson's *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*,¹³⁷ which was published in full the next year by FARMS and the Church-owned Deseret Book Company.¹³⁸ To the present day the Church maintains a hands-off policy on these unofficial studies and publications. While Sorenson's limited geography has attracted broad support among students of these questions, including many general authorities, the earlier feeling that one's particular views about geography constitute a test of faithfulness is largely forgotten. The questions are pursued by most in a spirit of simply seeking for a better understanding of the book itself—with a broadly shared assumption of faithful inquiry.

Fawn Brodie and Hugh Nibley

As the graphs derived from the FARMS Book of Mormon Bibliography suggest, polemical efforts to refute the historicity of the Book of Mormon have in many cases unwittingly furthered the cause of belief and spurred renewed interest in Book of Mormon studies. This is clearly manifest in the case of Fawn Brodie, niece of Church president David O. McKay, who in the early 1940s began her literary efforts with an attempt to write a short essay on the 19th century sources of the Book of Mormon. This evolved into a biography of Joseph Smith.¹³⁹ She intended to show how Joseph Smith and his religious experiences could be explained without believing his stories about visions, angels, or golden plates. Although a recent survey of the scholarly reviews of her book shows that it was not entirely well-received by historians—though it was praised by literary types¹⁴⁰—there was a widespread perception within the LDS community that the book was solidly endorsed by most knowledgeable scholars. The weakness of Brodie’s approach was later exposed by academic historians after she used the same amateurish psycho-historical techniques to write a similar exposé of Thomas Jefferson.¹⁴¹

Brodie may have been correct in thinking that she was only making explicit what a lot of Mormon intellectuals already believed. But if Brodie’s effort was intended to put an end to the persistent orthodoxy represented in President Clark’s 1938 statement to the CES faculty, it may have had just the opposite effect. She provoked the young Hugh Nibley, recent Ph.D. in ancient history from Berkeley, to carefully examine her sources and logic. Nibley himself had gone through a skeptical phase during his graduate years. But a dramatic series of personal religious experiences had left him without any doubts about the reality of the spiritual world and the truth of the restoration through Joseph Smith. Where she had titled her 1945 revisionist account of the

Mormon founding *No Man Knows My History*,¹⁴² Nibley responded with a series of devastating attacks on the reliability of her work which he labeled collectively *No Ma'am, That's Not History*.¹⁴³

Nibley was not satisfied with an expose' of Brodie's portrayals of early events in the Mormon founding. The important issue for him was Brodie's claim that the *Book of Mormon* was actually written in the 1820s and not, therefore, an ancient book. Bringing to bear his formidable background in ancient languages and history, Nibley undertook what was to become a lifelong inquiry into the ancient origins of the *Book of Mormon*. The flood of parallels he found between the ancient world and the Book of Mormon led him to formulate an oft-repeated "bullseye" argument, which he applied to scores of ancient features he found in the Book of Mormon. The basic argument focuses first on the uneducated state of Joseph Smith and his contemporaries in upstate New York, and the relative ignorance of the whole scholarly world in 1829 on so many of these issues. The large majority of Nibley's parallels were drawn from texts and historical facts that have been uncovered since the Book of Mormon was first published. Nibley asks time after time, how is it that Joseph Smith in 1829 could throw some passing comment or account into the Book of Mormon text, and get things exactly right, according to scholarly knowledge that wouldn't be available for years or even decades? How did he always hit the bulls-eye, issue after issue?

Nibley's studies were frequently serialized in Church magazines and collected in volumes. His *Lehi in the Desert* (1950) and *The World of the Jaredites* (1951)¹⁴⁴ broke new ground for LDS audiences, and "kept the Book of Mormon very visible in front of the church."¹⁴⁵ Combined with the archaeological and geographical work of John Sorenson and others, Nibley's

focus on the Old World helped establish for believing Latter-day Saints a significantly clarified perspective within which the Book of Mormon could be understood as a legitimate ancient text, written by real people who lived in real places and received real visions and revelations. These scholarly efforts were clearly based on a premise that had been discounted in liberal Mormon thought for decades and directly attacked in Brodie's book more recently.

Nibley was next invited to bring his work together in one volume which could serve as a priesthood lesson manual. His *Approach to the Book of Mormon* (1957)¹⁴⁶ provided enormous stimulation and food for thought to Latter-day Saints everywhere and put the case for a literally true Book of Mormon squarely on the table. Nibley even succeeded in converting some skeptical Mormons. Apparently a skeptical BYU faculty member who was teaching out of Nibley's manual commented to him, "I didn't take the Book of Mormon seriously at all, but you've got me wondering."¹⁴⁷ In writing this volume, Nibley found out that it was far from clear that the Church was really ready for this kind of discussions. As Nibley retells the story, the manual-writing committee that oversaw his work turned down every chapter on the grounds people would not be able to understand his arguments or evidence. President David O. McKay overruled the committee on every chapter, saying "Well, if you think it's over their heads, let them reach for it. We have to give them something more than pat answers."¹⁴⁸ While much of Nibley's efforts were directed against long-standing criticisms of the text, he also continued to expand and elaborate his list of "bulls-eye" arguments in lectures, articles, and books.

The Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS).

Though Nibley's efforts did not attract a great deal of support or collaboration from his BYU colleagues, few of whom were motivated or equipped to do this kind of work, he inspired a

generation of students, who eventually started showing up as junior faculty, principally at BYU. By the 1970s the scholarly work of this next generation began to make an appearance. In 1979 John W. Welch organized the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies or FARMS, as it is known acronymically. Welch's vision was to provide a support institution for scholarly research and publication in faithful Book of Mormon studies. The first five years were tenuous, but by the late 1980s increasing numbers of scholars from a variety of disciplines became interested in lending their expertise to some aspect of Book of Mormon studies; and financial support grew as ideas for new scholarly projects matured. By the mid-1990s the sustained and expanding scholarly output of faithful Latter-day Saints had become a force to be reckoned with. The sheer volume of scholarly investigation of the Book of Mormon text that finds the book to be wholly sensible and related to ancient world writings and practice in countless detailed ways was leaving the critics so far behind that, whereas they had once been the agenda setters, they now can no longer keep up. One attempt to recapture the initiative appeared in 1993 as Brent Metcalfe pulled together a group of dissenting voices to produce what was intended to be the final blow to the Book of Mormon and its prospects of ever being taken seriously as a genuinely ancient book. Far from accomplishing this objective, Metcalfe's edited collection demonstrated that the anti-Book of Mormon effort was reaching its end. Few of the contributors were recognized, publishing scholars. A large portion of their arguments were readily refutable with off-the-shelf studies. And they had studiously avoided responding in substantive ways to the growing volumes of competent studies in support of the book's authenticity. All these defects and more were made abundantly evident in the following issues of the FARMS *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon*.¹⁴⁹ Even more telling is the lack of impact in the LDS community. In

Brodie's generation, it seemed that most educated Latter-day Saints knew about Brodie's book and had opinions about it. Interest in Metcalfe's book seems to be quite low inside the LDS community, and non-existent outside it.

From its unlikely beginnings in a car pool of Los Angeles lawyers, FARMS has emerged as a large and steady producer of new scholarly work related to the Book of Mormon. During the same time period, the Religious Studies Center in the college of Religious Education at BYU has significantly increased its output of studies on the Book of Mormon, most of which tend to deal with doctrinal issues. Other important work continues to be done by individuals.

The Correlated Curriculum

Perhaps the most significant development in the Church that has promoted LDS interest in the Book of Mormon has been the development of a correlated curriculum. Richard Cowan recalls that the correlation movement was initiated by President David O. McKay who called Elder Harold B. Lee to the priesthood committee and as operating head of correlation. Professor Cowan attributes this initiative to President McKay's background in education.¹⁵⁰ The dictum of President Lee, "close down the mines and open the refineries,"¹⁵¹ underlines the fundamental mission of correlation, namely to dig deeper into the scriptural texts. In the Church Education System correlated curriculum now means that Church college and institute students take a course of study grounded in direct study of the scriptures. In the case of Church colleges this curriculum since 1961 requires at the beginning a full year of Book of Mormon study. The adult gospel doctrine classes in Sunday School since 1972 have had the four standard works as their curriculum. Instead of studying manuals written about these basic scriptural works, the members study the scriptures themselves.¹⁵² As a member of the Sunday School General Board in the early

1970s, Truman Madsen explains that he and his associates “were determined ...to put the scriptures at the center of the Gospel Doctrine curriculum and to re-write manuals so they enhanced rather than replaced the scriptures.... But we found that when teachers were given a thin manual, they felt insecure, and began scratching for other source materials to pad it out.”¹⁵³

While this study does not measure in any direct way what the impact of this scriptural curriculum might have been, observers believe there has been a significant increase in the ability of Latter-day Saints to discuss the scriptures in informed ways. While the manuals provided to accompany these classes still sometimes impose modern abstractions and preconceptions on the texts, it is nonetheless true that those Latter-day Saints who follow this curriculum and their own family and individual scripture study, as encouraged by Church leaders, are becoming increasingly literate in scriptural things. The availability of computers to assist in complex scriptural searches is also having a notable impact on Church speaking and publications on scriptural topics.¹⁵⁴

New Editions of the Standard Works and Reference Apparatus.

After long and intensive effort, the Church published a completely updated edition of the Bible and Bible Dictionary in 1979, followed two years later by a similarly updated edition of the Triple Combination with index. These new editions featured new chapter headings written by Elder Bruce R. McConkie and an elaborate and fully integrated system of footnotes to cross-references and to the new Topical Guide, which provided integrated access on hundreds of topics to the four Standard Works. New maps and other study aids were also included. The goal of the project was to simplify and make the scriptural texts more accessible.¹⁵⁵ Never before had the LDS scriptures been equipped with such complete and helpful study aids. Members were

encouraged anew to study the scriptures regularly and to carry their scriptures to all meetings so that they could follow along with talks that quoted or analyzed scriptural passages. Ellis T. Rasmussen, one of those responsible for preparing the new Bible edition, looks back on that experience as the greatest calling and challenge of his career.¹⁵⁶ He remembers Elder Boyd K. Packer, who was on the advisory committee from the beginning, as “most eager that everybody should use these scriptures and concerned when he found that not everybody was getting into them as rapidly as they should.”¹⁵⁷ Richard Cowan articulates a perception that was widely shared: many people “in earlier decades read more about the scriptures than they read them [the scriptures] themselves.”¹⁵⁸ While I offer no measure of the contribution of these new editions, most older observers acknowledge a clear increase in personal scripture ownership and use after their release in the early 1980s.

Computerized Access to Scriptural Texts.

In April of 1988 the Church released the scriptures on disk with the powerful WordCruncher software to manage searches. In an *Ensign* interview Elders Packer and Nelson explained the history behind its development. They noted the early efforts of Professor Eldin Ricks of the BYU Ancient Scripture Department who supervised the entering of the scriptures into the campus computers through punch cards, beginning in 1958. In the 1970s this project provided the basis for the comprehensive cross-references and topical guide released with the new scripture editions. In 1983 James Rosenvall and Monte Shelley of BYU’s Instructional Services department began programming WordCruncher as a powerful personal computer software program that could index and display large texts. In 1985 Elders Nelson and Packer began meeting with the BYU programmers and testing their application with the Standard

Works. The release version has enjoyed wide use throughout the Church under the title, *The Computerized Scriptures of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, and is available at low cost from the Church Distribution Center.¹⁵⁹

The release of the scriptures on disk stimulated private forays which produced most notably the *Infobase* CD-ROM version of the LDS Scriptures first released in 1991. Other ventures have produced different kinds of computerized databases to help teachers and students of the scriptures. The effect of these powerful computer aids is evident in a growing number of scriptural research projects and in Church speaking. Elder Nelson in particular seems to have used the computer repeatedly to explore all the aspects of a topic for his public addresses.

Ezra Taft Benson's Speaking Emphasis

President Benson's April 1986 general conference addresses included calls to the Church to emphasize Book of Mormon study. This caught on immediately and stimulated an enthusiastic wave of Book of Mormon study and focus that continues to this day. What is not widely remembered is that Elder Benson had consistently been emphasizing the Book of Mormon. His son Reed describes a missionary experience of President Benson that surely must have left a strong impression on him as to the importance of the Book of Mormon. He and his companion had been invited to speak to a group antagonistic to the Church. While he had "spent considerable time preparing his talk on the apostasy," when he stood up, he spoke only of the Book of Mormon. President Benson remembered this as a great spiritual experience.¹⁶⁰ His April 1975 general conference address was entitled "The Book of Mormon is the Word of God," and was widely reprinted and used, for example, in BYU religion classes. In regional and stake conferences he unapologetically regularly emphasized his testimony of the Book of Mormon as

“a text for our times” and urged the Saints to “make the study of the Book of Mormon a lifetime pursuit.”¹⁶¹ His biographer further reports that he was a constant advocate in the councils of the Church for focusing the missionary effort on the Book of Mormon.

The Book of Mormon, he taught, was compiled by those who foresaw the latter days and who abridged centuries of records, selecting events, stories, and speeches that would be most helpful to Saints of the latter days. It would bring men to Christ; it would expose the enemies of Christ; it would testify that Joseph Smith was a prophet. And in a troubled world filled with uncertainty, it bore another witness of the Savior and his mission.¹⁶²

Of course, Elder Benson was not the only one who was preaching the Book of Mormon, as can be seen in even earlier talks by Gordon B. Hinckley and Marion G. Romney, among others.¹⁶³ But there was constant agitation on his part, and on the part of religion teachers at BYU, some of whom were quite close to him. While it is impossible to know how much difference these efforts made on the Church as a whole, they were certainly harbingers of an emphasis that has pervaded the entire Church that shows every sign of staying around for a long time.

Conclusion.

While our data is often indirect and partial, the clear direction of trends as measured in numerous different ways is consistent. We found no anomalies or contradictions. It seems evident that the last few decades have produced a significant revolution in the LDS community in terms of the increased understanding and appreciation for the Book of Mormon as an inspired work of ancient scripture. The Book of Mormon appears much more frequently as the focus of

official and unofficial attention in all kinds of LDS settings. Latter-day Saints as individuals are much more engaged with the text itself, and the curricula of the Church Education System and the Sunday School are much more committed to a study of the text in a way that takes its authenticity for granted. While earlier decades in this century offered a very different picture in all these respects, and center stage was held by an influential minority of CES employees and BYU faculty who saw no need to take seriously Joseph Smith's claims for the book, that liberal view has been gradually pushed to the periphery of LDS intellectual and religious life. Today, few young Latter-day Saints have ever encountered such views, and those who hold them are marginal and uninfluential in Mormondom, however much they may be lionized by the media with its endless appetite for controversy. In place of the old critiques of the Book of Mormon and the teaching emphasis placed on a social gospel, LDS scholars and laymen today are passionately focused on a productive effort to understand the Book of Mormon on its own terms and to benefit from the pristine accounts of Christ's gospel which it contains. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland's *Christ and The New Covenant: The Messianic Message of the Book of Mormon*¹⁶⁴ is an excellent recent example of a new, deeper level of textual analysis among works by general authorities. Even some non-LDS scholars are willing to take a second, more serious, look at the Book of Mormon, in light of LDS scholarship.¹⁶⁵

This trend of increasing commitment to the Book of Mormon and other scriptures among educated Latter-day Saints is consistent with sociological studies that link religiosity and levels of education. The 1982 Princeton Religious Research Center survey data indicate that American religious communities show significant negative correlation between education and religiosity)) as measured by devotion to private prayer, scripture study, financial contributions,

Church attendance, and other forms of religious activity. But for the LDS community, this correlation is exactly reversed. It may be an American anomaly, but it is true of the LDS community that the more educated a person is, the more likely he or she is to be fully observant and faithful.¹⁶⁶

While I have offered accounts of events and developments which seemed to be significant in this revolution, I am confident that none of the key players I have mentioned would want to take any credit. Causal explanations are not ready at hand. But the results are clear and should be most heartening to faithful Latter-day Saints. Perhaps the most important part of this story remains untold except in the lives of those who enjoy the benefits or suffer the consequences.

Endnotes

1. The author is Professor of Political Science at BYU and President of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS). He expresses profound appreciation to Allison D. Clark, who spent the seven months between her Italian mission and the start of her graduate studies at Boston University as the research assistant on this project and to FARMS for funding that research assistance. The author also thanks Ben Ahlstrom for preparing the final versions of the graphs and Theresa Brown for her assistance in all stages of this work.
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5. John Nicholson, “Discourse on the Book of Mormon,” in *Journal of Discourses* (1881): 22:23.
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11. James A. Paramore, “Leadership—Jesus was the Perfect Leader,” in *Devotional and Fireside Speeches* (Provo: University Publications, 1989–90), 7.
12. Richard Galbraith, “Data on General Conference Reports 1942–1995” (Unpublished Data, 1996).
13. Dallin H. Oaks, “Another Testament of Jesus Christ,” in *Brigham Young University 1992–3 Devotional and Fireside Speeches* (Provo: University Publications 1993), 111–112.
14. Richard G. Scott, “True Friends That Lift,” *Ensign* (November 1988): 76.
15. David H. Yarn Jr., interview by Allison Clark, 21 February 1996, 13.
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to be part of the LDS community without embracing orthodox teaching and practices. Cultural Mormons, like liberal Protestants or Jews, tend not to believe in visions or other forms of direct revelation or the scriptures that report them.

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19. *Ibid.*, 59-60.
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22. Truman G. Madsen, interview by Allison Clark, 22 April 1996, 6.
23. Richard Cowan, interview by Allison Clark, 8 April 1996, 4.
24. Gospel Doctrine Sunday School Book of Mormon Manual, 1992, 1996, v.
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26. Cowan, 3.
27. "Brigham Young University General Course Catalogs" (Based on a review of years 1930-1990).
28. Nibley, interview by Clark, 7.
29. Nibley, interview by Clark, 7.
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34. Based on telephone conversations with various CES personnel, 28 July 1997.
35. Lucile Tate, *Boyd K. Packer: A Watchman on the Tower* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1995), 101.
36. Matthews, interview by Clark, 9.
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40. Autobiography of Dessie Verene Worthington, 16, as quoted in letter by John C. Thomas to Noel Reynolds, 16 May 1997.
41. See Allison D. Clark, "FARMS Preliminary Report on Missionary Plans and Materials Used by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: 1900-1995" (FARMS, 1996).
42. Glenn L. Pearson, interview by Allison Clark, 15 April 1996, 1. Reid E. Bankhead, interview with Allison Clark, 18 April 1996, 1-2
43. Richard L. Anderson, interview by Allison Clark, 2 April 1996, 2.
44. Anderson, 2-3.
45. Clark, "Missionary Plans and Materials."
46. Matthews, interview by Clark, 2.
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48. Cowan, 6.
49. Clark, "Missionary Plans and Materials."
50. Reid E. Bankhead and Glenn L. Pearson, *Missionary Work with the Book of Mormon* (Cumorah Mission, 1967). Copy in the LDS Historical Library.
51. Bankhead, interview by Clark, 7.

52. Madsen, interview by Clark, 8.
53. Nibley, interview by Clark, 12.
54. Clark, "FARMS Preliminary Report on Missionary Plans and Materials."
55. Matthews, interview by Clark, 8, 10.
56. *Church News*, 2 January 1988, 2. "Appendix" in *A Comprehensive Annotated Book of Mormon Bibliography*, Parry, et. al., eds.
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59. Donald W. Parry, Jeanette W. Miller, and Sandra A. Thorne, eds., *A Comprehensive Annotated Book of Mormon Bibliography* (Provo, UT: Research Press, 1996).
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62. Richard G. Oman and Robert O. Davis, *Images of Faith: Art of the Latter-day Saints*, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1995), 102.
63. Yarn, interview by Clark, 6.
64. Nibley, interview by Clark, 5.
65. Leland A. Fetzer has persuasively demonstrated that the well known quotation from Tolstoy paraphrased here by Rasmussen should be attributed instead to either Tolstoy's interviewer, or the LDS interviewer of the interviewer, see "Tolstoy and Mormonism," *Dialogue* 6/1 (1971): 13–29. Rasmussen's point remains a valid judgment on his own experience.
66. Ellis Rasmussen, interview by Allison Clark, 27 February 1996, 13.
67. See the summary of George Reynolds's contributions in Bruce A. Van Orden's review of the dictionary in "Every City, Hill, River, Valley, and Person," *FARMS Review of Books*, 8:1 (1996), 51–60.

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69. B. H. Roberts, *The Truth, the Way, the Life: An Elementary Treatise on Theology (1927-28)*, 2nd edition edited with an introduction by John W. Welch, Provo: BYU Studies, 1996. See also *B. H. Roberts Final Decade: Statements about the Book of Mormon (1921-33)*, collected by Truman G. Madsen, Provo: FARMS, Preliminary Report.
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72. Francis W. Kirkham, "Oral History Interview with Dr. Francis W. Kirkham," conducted by Hollis Scott, 4 November 1966, 28.
73. *Ibid.*, 29.
74. Madsen, interview by Clark, 9.
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76. Pearson, interview by Clark, 16.
77. Obert C. Tanner, *One Man's Journey: In Search of Freedom*, Humanities Center at the University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1994.
78. Matthews, interview by Clark, 10.
79. Louis C. Midgley, "Mapping Contemporary Mormon Historiography" (Working paper, 1996).
80. Louis C. Midgley, "The Challenge of Historical Consciousness: Mormon History and the Encounter of Secular Modernity," in *By Study and Also by Faith*, ed. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 2: 502-51.
81. See Louis C. Midgley, review of *The Divine Supermarket: Shopping for God in America*, by Malise Ruthven, *BYU Studies* 32/1 & 2 (1991): 303-313. This interview was originally reported in Ruthven's *The Divine Supermarket*. My excerpts, however, are taken directly from Midgley's

98. Ibid., 13.

99. Ibid., 13.

100. Gary J. Bergera, *Brigham Young University: A House of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Signature, 1985), 142.

101. Wilkinson, Ernest L. *Brigham Young University: The First One Hundred Years* (Provo: BYU Press, 1975-76), 1: 421-22. Quoted from the “Autobiography of Horace H. Cummings” (1917-1936), photocopy of unpublished typescript in BYU archives (MSS 1575). Brimhall left no written record of the dream in his papers. See footnote 47 in Wilkinson, 1:421-22. Also cited in Boyd K. Packer, “The Snow-White Birds,” *Brigham Young Magazine* 49/4 (1995): 48–49.

102. Sherlock, “Campus in Crisis,” 15.

103. Bergera, *Brigham Young University: A House of Faith*, 147–8.

104. “Fawn McKay Brodie: An Oral History Interview,” interviewed by Shirley E. Stephenson, November 30, 1975, *Dialogue* 14/2 (1981): 102.

105. These professors were: Edgar J. Goodspeed, William C. Graham, John T. McNeill, and William C. Bower. Ernest L. Wilkinson, *Brigham Young University: The First One Hundred Years*. (Provo: BYU Press, 1975-76), 2: 103, 219, 287–288. Russell B. Swensen, “Mormons at the University of Chicago Divinity School: A Personal Reminiscence,” *Dialogue* 7/2 (1972): 40.

106. Swensen, 40. Russel Swensen, Daryl Chase, and George S. Tanner were the initial three chosen to attend the University of Chicago Divinity School. O. C. Tanner reports in his autobiography *One Man’s Journey: In Search of Freedom* (Salt Lake City: The Humanities Center at the University of Utah, 1994) that he was also invited by Merrill to attend, but he refused fearing that it would compromise his “intellectual integrity” to do so with Church sponsorship (111).

107. Swensen, 44-45. Other students who were encouraged to attend the UC Divinity School included: T. Edgar Lyon, Carl J. Furr, Heber C. Snell, Vernon Larsen, Wesley P. Lloyd, Therald N. Jensen, and Anthony S. Cannon. The Chicago experience did not have the same liberalizing effect on all these graduate students as was evident in the cases of Sidney Sperry and T. Edgar Lyon, among others.

108. Nibley, interview by Clark, 7.

109. Ellis T. Rasmussen, “Sidney B. Sperry,” *Ensign* (July, 1986), 24 and David H. Yarn Jr., “Sidney B. Sperry: A Reminiscence by David Yarn,” in *They Gladly Taught*, ed. Jean Anne Waterstradt (Provo: Brigham Young University, 1986), 171.

110. Yarn, “Sperry Reminiscence”, 169.

111. Anderson, interview with Clark, 1, 9-10; Bankhead, interview with Clark, 2-3; Matthews, interview with Clark, 6; Pearson, interview with Clark, 2, 5-6; Rasmussen, interview with Clark, 2, 7; Riddle, 1-2; and Yarn, interview with Clark, 1-4.
112. Wilkinson, *BYU: The First One Hundred Years*, 2:450–5.
113. J. Reuben Clark, Jr., “The Charted Course of the Church in Education” (Address given at BYU Alpine Summer School to Church Educators), 1938.
114. Riddle, 3.
115. Blake Ostler, “An Interview with Sterling McMurrin,” *Dialogue* 17/1 (1984): 24.
116. Wilkinson, *History*, 2:381–3.
117. Wilkinson, *History*, 2:285–7.
118. Bergera, *House of Faith*, 61
119. Ostler, 26.
120. Yarn, interview by Clark, 16. These facts have been confirmed on the public record in recently published interviews. See Sterling M. McMurrin, L. Jackson Newell, *Matters of Conscience: Conversations with Sterling M. McMurrin on Philosophy, Education, and Religion* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996), 105-127.
121. Ostler, 25.
122. *Ibid.*, 25.
123. Packer, “Snow White Birds,” 48.
124. Tate, *Watchman*, 117.
125. *Ibid.*, 120.
126. Packer, “Snow White Birds,” 48.
127. A copy of the letter advanced to the Board of Trustees is in my possession, courtesy of Glenn Pearson.
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130. Sorenson, *Geography*, 17 and Bergera, 10–12.
131. Sorenson, *Geography*, 17.
132. *Ibid.*, 18.
133. *Ibid.*, 16–17, 20.
134. *Ibid.*, 22.
135. *Ibid.*, 23.
136. *Ibid.*, 26–29.
137. *Ensign* 14 (September 1984): 26-37; (October 1984): 12-23.
138. *Ibid.*, 29–31.
139. Fawn McKay Brodie, “Fawn McKay Brodie: An Oral History Interview,” conducted by Shirley E. Stephenson, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 14/2 (1981): 104.
140. Louis Midgley, “F. M. Brodie — ‘The Fasting Hermit and Very Saint of Ignorance’: A Biographer and Her Legend,” *FARMS Review of Books* 8/2 (1996): 147-230.
141. Louis C. Midgley, “The Brodie Connection: Thomas Jefferson and Joseph Smith,” *BYU Studies* 20/1 (1979): 59–67.
142. Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1945).
143. Hugh W. Nibley, *No Ma’am, That’s not History: A Brief Review of Mrs. Brodie’s Reluctant Vindication of a Prophet She Seeks to Expose* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1946).
144. Hugh W. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert and the World of the Jaredites, There Were Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and Provo: FARMS, CWHN 1988).
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146. Hugh W. Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and Provo: FARMS, CWHN 6, 1988).
147. Anderson, 8.
148. Nibley, interview by Clark, 4.
149. *FARMS Review of Books* 6/1 (1994); 7/1 (1995): 91-119, 170-207.

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151. Madsen, interview by Clark, 7.
152. Cowan, 7.
153. Madsen, interview by Clark, 6.
154. “Computerized Scriptures Now Available: A Conversation with Elder Boyd K. Packer and Elder Russell M. Nelson about the new Computerized Scriptures,” *Ensign* 18/4 (1988): 74.
155. Rasmussen, interview by Clark, 4.
156. Rasmussen, interview by Clark, 3.
157. Rasmussen, interview by Clark, 5.
158. Cowan, 7.
159. “Computerized Scriptures,” 72–75.
160. Reed Benson, interview by Allison Clark, 4 April 1996, 3.
161. Dew, 492.
162. Ibid.
163. Allison D. Clark, “General Conference Analysis.”
164. Jeffrey R. Holland, *Christ and The New Covenant: The Messianic Message of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1997).
165. Madsen, interview by Clark, 7-8. Matthews, interview by Clark, 9.
166. Stan L. Albrecht and Tim B. Heaton, “Secularization, Higher Education, and Religiosity,” *Review of Religious Research* 26 (Sept. 1984): 43–58.