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Review of Books on the Book of Mormon

Volume 7, Number 2  
1995

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Editor's Introduction

Daniel C. Peterson

A recent issue of a Protestant magazine that I rather admire (even though I frequently disagree with it) contains the following editorial:

One of our pet peeves concerns has to do with how judgmental readers always sometimes conclude that we at Credenda are arrogant simply because we seek to write, teach, and publish with confidence. Well, all we have to say to them is... This concerns us. As brothers in Christ we should always assume the best about others even if they are being meatheads.

We can't remember all the times Sometimes readers have popped off expressed their conviction that it seems like we “always think we're right.” And we suppose they suggested this to us because they thought they were wrong, hey? But of course, we would like to suggest, everyone is in this position. We are created in such a way that no one says things because they believe them to be false. At least not anyone we know.

We are really being humble, and we wish everybody would just lay off, see? We really appreciate your insights and comments except for the really dumb ones. We invite readers to differ, and we expect them to express their differences with confidence. They're just wrong, that's all.¹

Obviously, the authors of the editorial are poking fun at themselves. No reflective person can fail, at least from time to time, to be acutely and even painfully aware of his or her fallibility. Although we make every effort to do the best work we

can do, this is certainly true of those of us associated with the *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* and with its sponsor, the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies.

Picasso was once accosted on a train by a stranger who recognized him. The stranger complained: Why couldn’t he draw pictures of people the way they actually were? Why did he have to distort the way people looked? Picasso then asked the man to show him pictures of his family. After gazing at the snapshot, Picasso replied, “Oh, is your wife really that small and flat?” To Picasso, any picture, no matter how “realistic,” depended on the perspective of the observer.2

Books and reviews, too, are products of individual human beings, with all the limitations of perspective and knowledge and experience and insight implied in that fact. We are not yet granted access to that “great Urim and Thummim” and the “white stone” by which all things will be made known (D&C 130:8–10). In this world, we continue to “see through a glass, darkly” (1 Corinthians 13:12). That is why finding the truth here is often a matter of sifting, evaluating, comparing, contrasting, and a matter in which multiple opinions and perspectives can be of immense help.

 Appropriately, the *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* is very much a collaborative effort. I am, as always, grateful to those who have assisted in the production of this issue of the *Review*. Dr. Shirley S. Ricks prepared the volume for publication. Prof. Davis Bitton, Dr. M. Gerald Bradford, Alison Coutts, and Dr. Melvin J. Thorne each read and commented upon one or more reviews and offered valuable suggestions (although they are not responsible for my final editorial decisions). Alison Coutts, Robert Durocher, and Matthew Roper helped me to track down important sources. Brent Hall offered useful suggestions. Professors W. Cole Durham and John W. Welch responded kindly to last-minute questions. My

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research assistant, Amy Livingstone, was consistently helpful. Most of all, of course, I thank the reviewers, whose efforts make the whole thing possible.

Once again, as I did in the previous number of the Review, I append here a brief list of the items that we can recommend from this issue. Such a list is necessarily a blunt instrument, but I hope that it will prove helpful to those who want a quick overview.

Editor's Picks

**** Outstanding, a seminal work of the kind that appears only rarely.

*** Enthusiastically recommended.

** Warmly recommended.

* Recommended.

*Overview of the Book of Mormon.* Independence, MO: Zarahemla Research Foundation, 1991. This brief pictorial overview would be useful to new students of the Book of Mormon. **

*First Nephi: Study Book of Mormon.* Independence, MO: Zarahemla Research Foundation, 1988. This has the complete text of the first book of the Book of Mormon (in RLDS versification) with accompanying commentary, notes, appendices, and study aids. *


LDS Collectors Edition CD-ROM (Mac version). Provo, UT: Infobases, 1994. The Macintosh version was less well developed than the PC version at the time this review was written. **

Postscript

At the very moment of finishing this "Introduction," on the evening of 14 August 1995, I happened (as I occasionally do) to tune in to a portion of the Christian Research Institute's "Bible Answer Man" radio broadcast—just in time to hear a former missionary to Brazil named "Nick" tell of his resignation from the Church during the previous week. What writings did "Nick," calling from California, mention as having influenced him? Those of Dick Baer (a former accomplice of Ed Decker), and Decker's Complete Handbook on Mormonism, which I review in this issue. ("Praise the Lord!" responded the show's host, Hank Hanegraaff.)

Stories like this are not only sad and painful, but intensely frustrating. One ardently wishes that one could locate "Nick" and discuss with him the works of Ed Decker. When certain people ask why some of us at FARMS spend so much time and effort responding to books of little or no merit (like Decker's), I can only respond that we are thinking of people like "Nick." While we try to have a little fun with what we are doing, we know that, deep down, the issues are very serious. And they have profound consequences.

Reviewed by Larry K. Smith

The Zarahemla Research Foundation (ZRF), based in Independence, Missouri, has published an overview of impressive quality and content. The overview is an attractive sixteen-page, full-color booklet with ample illustrations.

In the opening section about what the Book of Mormon is, three groups of people are mentioned, two which kept records (the Jaredites and the Nephites) and one which did not (the Mulekites). Another page is devoted to the purposes of the Book of Mormon (as outlined on its title page) and explanations of how we got the Book of Mormon and why we should read it (e.g., “it contains firsthand accounts of the ministry of the resurrected Jesus and gives additional insights into the principles of the gospel” [p. 4]).

In a section entitled “The Importance of Covenants in the Restoration of the House of Israel,” we are informed that the authors of the Book of Mormon were Hebrews who used reformed Egyptian characters in their writing, but that “most, if not all, of their Hebrew thought patterns, idioms, sentence structure, cultural content and poetry were preserved in our literal English translation” (p. 5). The concept of covenants is a central one in this overview. “It is very significant that the Book of Mormon begins and ends with the concept of the covenant. . . . Today we associate the name Mormon . . . with the restoring of covenants. . . . Therefore, the name, the Book of Mormon, symbolically means the Book of the Restoration of the Covenants” (p. 5). This section concludes with, “The Lord has prepared a great endowment of spiritual power to be poured out in the near future. Those who understand and keep their covenant with the Lord . . . will be ready to receive this spiritual power to accomplish the perfect will of God” (p. 5).

A book-by-book summary in outline form of the Book of Mormon takes six of the sixteen pages. It lists the author(s) of
each book and indicates the approximate dates corresponding to each book along with the major events and doctrinal points. The summary helps clear up some easily misunderstood chronology by detailing which sections of Mosiah are flashbacks and where different sections take place.

Although consensus is growing among Latter-day Saint scholars that the geographic location for the events of the Book of Mormon was Mesoamerica, the proposition is not undisputed nor is it official doctrine. However, the ZRF overview asserts without reservation that “the Book of Mormon took place in the area known as Mesoamerica” (p. 9). A map of the physical features of Mesoamerica is overlaid with labels for the lands of Desolation, Bountiful, Zarahemla, and Nephi as well as the West Sea (North), the West Sea (South), and the East Sea. A time line shows the duration of various civilizations and depicts the records they kept. The authors of the overview apparently feel the evidence for a Mesoamerican setting for the Book of Mormon is strong enough to preclude the need for lengthy debate on the issue.

Another page summarizes the different sections of the Book of Mormon records. Included are the portion of the large plates of Nephi that were translated (the 116 pages which were lost), the unabridged small plates of Nephi, the Words of Mormon, the abridgment of the large plates of Nephi, the abridgment of the gold plates kept by the Jaredites, the book of Moroni, the sealed portion, and the brass plates Lehi brought from Jerusalem. For each section, the authors, dates, names of the corresponding books in the Book of Mormon, and major doctrinal points are listed.

A passage from Nephi’s vision (1 Nephi 3:185–88, ZRF Study Book of Mormon; 1 Nephi 13:35–37, LDS edition) is quoted (without attribution) on the back cover to impress on the reader the important destiny of the Book of Mormon record (to be hid up and then come forth unto the Gentiles).

Although the illustrations are large, colorful, and uncluttered, the overview is aimed at adults rather than children. On the whole, it is quite well organized and informative and would be very helpful to a person new to the Book of Mormon.

Reviewed by Larry K. Smith

The Study Book of Mormon is published by the Zarahemla Research Foundation. I examined the only volume currently available—First Nephi. It has the complete text of the first book of the Book of Mormon with accompanying commentary, notes, appendices, and study aids.

The introduction discusses the authorship, the contents, the political background, and the date 1 Nephi takes place. It also gives an outline of 1 Nephi; the outline is then also embedded in the text portion as section headings.

The chapters are divided as they were in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon (a total of seven chapters in 1 Nephi) with verse numbers added later. To illustrate, the Study Book of Mormon has 264 verses in the fifth chapter of 1 Nephi; the corresponding segment of the LDS Book of Mormon is 1 Nephi 16:1—1 Nephi 19:21.

The text itself is printed in a poetry-like style. This should facilitate reading and comprehension, and allow easier identification of various forms of Hebrew poetry. For example, the note for 1 Nephi 1:1–2 (1 Nephi 1:1–3, LDS edition) points out a little chiasm:

```
a  knowledge
b  record
  c  language
 d  learning of the Jews
  c' language
b' record
a' knowledge
```

and explains that the central part of a chiasm is the most important point. The learning of the Jews, therefore, "is one of the keys to understanding the Book of Mormon" (p. 3).
One of the most interesting features of the Study Book of Mormon is the Textual Comparison Chart found in the first appendix. It notes every change in 1 Nephi in the various editions of the Book of Mormon through 1840 and subsequent RLDS editions and gives the variants found in each. It entails much the same work that would go into producing a critical text of the Book of Mormon, and the Zarahemla Research Foundation plans to produce a complete comparison for the whole Book of Mormon, including Latter-day Saint editions. The notation scheme indicates when each change occurred: O∞ indicates a change or correction made to the original manuscript, possibly at the time of preparing the printer’s manuscript, P30 indicates a change marked on the printer’s manuscript before the 1830 edition was printed, P37 indicates a change marked on the printer’s manuscript after the 1830 edition was printed but before the 1837 edition was printed, and so forth.

The second appendix is a concordance-like Topical Index that looks much like the LDS Topical Guide except that only Book of Mormon references are given. Each reference is also marked in the text.

The word fullness in 1 Nephi 3:165 (1 Nephi 13:24, LDS edition) has a superscript T (meaning there is a heading for “fullness” in the Topical Index) and the commentary at the bottom of the page says, “‘Fullness’ has been restored [from the original manuscript] to be consistent with the seven other occurrences of this phrase in the Book of Mormon. The miscopied phrase, ‘plainness of the gospel,’ does not occur anywhere in the Book of Mormon.” Checking the same verse in the Textual Comparison Chart reveals that, indeed, “fullness” was used in the original manuscript while “plainness” appeared in every succeeding RLDS edition, including the printer’s manuscript. The text, the footnotes and commentary, and the appendices amplify each other to give the reader greater insight.

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1 From a phone conversation with Ray Treat, a representative of the Zarahemla Research Foundation, on Saturday, 1 July 1995. The complete comparison will be called the Textual Comparison Chart, which will serve as a basis for the Restored Covenant Edition (a forthcoming new edition of the Book of Mormon).
On seeing this volume, one would logically assume that corresponding volumes exist for the other books in the Book of Mormon, forming a complete set, but such is not yet the case. The Zarahemla Research Foundation plans to return to the Study Book of Mormon and finish the project after first publishing the complete comparison of manuscripts and editions of the Book of Mormon mentioned earlier.2

The Study Book of Mormon is a serious attempt to help people become better scholars of the Book of Mormon. I believe it succeeds in presenting useful tools for such scholarship. Even though only 1 Nephi is available in this format, many insights can be gained and it can open one’s eyes to new ways to study the Book of Mormon. The Study Book of Mormon will be of interest to LDS readers who can comfortably deal with chapter and verse divisions other than the ones they are used to. Readers familiar with the chapter and verse divisions in the Study Book of Mormon should unhesitatingly use it as an aid to their personal Book of Mormon study.

2 Ibid.

Reviewed by Martin S. Tanner

Book of Mormon Christology is not a new subject, but it is an important one. Melodie Moench Charles begins her essay on the topic with a personal anecdote. She relates how when teaching an adult Sunday School class (presumably Gospel Doctrine) she discussed Mosiah 15:1-4, which she quotes as follows:

God himself shall come down among the children of men . . . being the Father and the Son—The Father, because he was conceived by the power of God; and the Son, because of the flesh; thus becoming the Father and the Son—And they are one God, yea, the very Eternal Father of heaven and of earth. (p. 81)

Charles told her class she “saw no good way to reconcile Abinadi’s [sic] words with the current Mormon belief that God and his son Jesus Christ are separate and distinct beings” (p. 81). According to Charles, because of her remarks, she was accused of “crossing the line of propriety and wisdom” by suggesting that “a prophet could teach incorrect doctrines about God” (p. 81). Charles goes on to say that for pointing out what to her is an “obvious difference” between Abinadi’s statement and “current church doctrine” she was “demoted to teaching nursery” (p. 81).

At this point, the reader is left asking: (1) Why does Charles not see a way to reconcile Abinadi’s statement with current Mormon beliefs? (2) What is this “obvious difference” Charles sees between Abinadi’s and the Latter-day Saint Church’s doctrine of God? and (3) Why does Charles consider a calling to teach nursery a demotion? Although Charles leaves no clue to her thoughts on the last question, she does take a stab at answering the
first two. The cause of the difference between Abinadi’s and the Latter-day Saint Church’s doctrine of God, Charles tells us, is that our idea of a restored gospel leads us to believe “Abinadi’s religious knowledge must match our own regardless of what his words say” (p. 82) while the idea of “modern revelation” or “precept upon precept” has caused current Latter-day Saint Christology to differ from Book of Mormon Christology (p. 82). To me this sounds more like an unsubstantiated conclusion than an explanation of what the difference is and how it purportedly occurred. Apparently, Charles believes the Latter-day Saint Church has adopted two incompatible positions. First, Elder Bruce R. McConkie has described the Church as one of restored truths:

“[O]ur concern is to be guided by the Spirit and to interpret the ancient word in harmony with latter day revelation.” “As it happens—it could not be otherwise with an unchangeable God—what we have conforms to what the ancient saints had. . . . The everlasting gospel; the eternal priesthood; the identical ordinances of salvation and exaltation; the never-varying doctrines of salvation; the same Church and kingdom; the keys of the kingdom, which alone can seal men up unto eternal life—all these have always been the same in all ages; and it shall be so everlastingly on this earth.” (p. 82)¹

Second, the Church believes that with continuing revelation God will reveal “more knowledge . . . ‘line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little’ ” (p. 82, quoting Isaiah 28:9–13; D&C 98:12; 128:21). Charles somehow believes this new knowledge requires us to reject some of Brigham Young’s teachings as false, to discard prior teachings of Church leaders—like black males not being allowed to hold the priesthood—and to reject some biblical teachings as baby stories that have been outgrown (p. 82). The idea that new revelation may expand and actually be compatible with old revelation, rather than be contradictory to it, seems to escape Charles entirely.

Again, begging the question of what the difference actually is between Abinadi’s Christology and current Latter-day Saint Christology, Charles asserts:

When we explore what the Book of Mormon says, its christology or doctrines concerning Christ differ from the christology of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints since at least the 1840s. To give the Book of Mormon’s ideas a context, this essay will show some of what the Book of Mormon says about Jesus Christ and will compare that with what Jews at the time of Jesus’ birth were expecting the Messiah to be, with what Christians after his death believed he was, and with current Mormon beliefs. (pp. 82–83, emphasis added)

At this point, pulling your hair out, you want to call directory assistance, get Charles’s phone number and ask her what the words difference and differ mean to her here. If they mean “contradictory” and Charles can show that current and past Latter-day Saint Christology, Book of Mormon Christology, and first-century C.E. Jewish messianism are contradictory, then she may have something. But if her idea of “different” means not identical but still compatible, then Charles’s basic thesis is flawed. After all, giving Charles the benefit of the doubt that somehow Abinadi’s Christology is different from current Latter-day Saint Christology, still no problem exists if the ideas are compatible.

Charles seems to believe that Abinadi’s Christology is incompatible with current Latter-day Saint Christology and that the differences she sees are contradictory, because she begins her essay with the thought, “I saw no good way to reconcile Abindadi’s [sic] words with the current Mormon belief that God and his son Jesus Christ are separate and distinct beings” (p. 81, emphasis added).

Charles may not have carefully thought through the issues. The trap she has fallen into is that she equates Christological “differences” with Christological “contradictions.” She seems to believe that if ideas of Christology are different, they must be mutually exclusive. This is flawed logic. After all, would it not be astounding, and probably a bit suspect, if current and past Latter-day Saint Christology, Book of Mormon Christology, and first
century C.E. Jewish messianism were identical in every way? For years, scholars have discussed the “difference” in the Christology of each of the Gospel accounts and, indeed, in the other books in the New Testament canon.2 But most have not come to the conclusion that the Christologies in the various New Testament books are incompatible.3 At the end of Charles’s introduction, the reader is left wondering exactly what differences she perceives in the Christologies of Abinadi and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Charles’s essay contains other flaws as well. She sometimes claims Book of Mormon Christology is too much like the Bible’s. At other times, she claims it is too different from the Bible’s. Her criteria for deciding which portions are too alike and which too different are never explained.

**Krister Stendahl’s Analysis of Third Nephi**

Before proceeding with her four-part comparison of Book of Mormon Christology, Jewish messianism at the time of Christ, Christian Christology, and current Latter-day Saint Christology, Charles takes a diversion into the ideas expressed by the then dean of the Harvard Theological Seminary, Krister Stendahl.4 Charles has bought into Stendahl’s idea that 3 Nephi 12–14 was “Joseph Smith’s attempt to improve the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew” (p. 83, emphasis added) by magnifying the Christ found in Matthew into something more. For example, according to Stendahl and Charles, the mortal Jesus in Matthew became supramortal in 3 Nephi; doubting Thomas in Matthew touching Jesus’ wounds becomes in 3 Nephi a multitude doing the same; in Matthew Jesus heals afflicted people he encounters, but in 3 Nephi he heals everyone who is afflicted in any manner; and in Matthew he multiplies existing loaves and fishes, but in

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3 Nephi he creates food *ex nihilo* rather than by multiplying existing food (p. 83). The flaw in Stendahl’s (and hence Charles’s) analysis is that they analyze 3 Nephi 12–14 as if it were simply another version of the actual events portrayed in Matthew, when it is not. With the exception of the doubting Thomas episode, the book of Matthew examples cited by Stendahl all describe Jesus during his mortal ministry. In contrast, the entire episode in 3 Nephi took place after the resurrection. Would we expect a resurrected Jesus to act “supramortal”? Of course. In the New Testament Jesus’ actions appear more miraculous after his resurrection as well. He appeared in closed rooms when all the doors were shut (John 20:19, 26); appeared in the midst of the disciples without being recognized (Luke 24:30–32); influenced the same apostles who were bewildered, afraid, and ran away when he was arrested (Matthew 26:56) in such a way that they were made ready (Luke 24:32; Acts 1:3) to go out and preach the gospel to the entire world (Acts 1:8); and departed into heaven while his disciples watched in awe (Luke 24:51; Acts 1:9–11). The dichotomy is not between Matthew and 3 Nephi, but rather between the mortal and resurrected Jesus. This is to be expected and is perfectly compatible with New Testament descriptions.

Charles ends her Stendahl analysis with the baffling statement, “Unlike Jesus’ New Testament disciples, good people in the Book of Mormon never had misconceptions about Christ’s identity or his roles because they had almost no ambiguous information to mislead them.” How does Charles come to this conclusion? In what way were New Testament disciples misled? What makes Charles believe good people in the Book of Mormon never had misconceptions about Christ’s identity or his roles? Charles never lets us know how she came to this conclusion. Is she unaware that, according to the Book of Mormon, King Limhi’s subjects, King Lamoni, and many other people prior to the birth of Christ, and

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5 King Limhi’s subjects have such a misconception about Jesus that they killed “a prophet of the Lord, . . . a chosen man of God, who . . . prophesied of . . . Christ” (Mosiah 7:26). The prophet was killed specifically “because he said this [about Christ]” (Mosiah 7:28).

6 King Lamoni believed that Ammon was “the Great Spirit” (Alma 18:2).

7 The Book of Mormon contains several accounts of people who were misled into believing that Christ was just a foolish tradition of their fathers and
others after his coming— all “good people” in the Book of Mormon— had a few misconceptions or at the very least some lack of knowledge about Jesus and his gospel message? The Nephite legacy in the Book of Mormon is one of “good people” who misunderstood Jesus and his message—they failed so completely to live his gospel that they were ultimately destroyed. They were like the Matthean Jews who rejected Jesus’ message and were wiped out in 68 A.D. as Christ had prophesied.

This ends Charles’s introductory comments. Next, she (1) examines what Book of Mormon people believed about Christ derived from their own experiences and from revelations foretelling his coming, (2) compares these beliefs to Near Eastern people’s expectations about their Messiah, whose coming was foretold in Old Testament prophecies, (3) describes Book of Mormon

would not really come. See, e.g., Alma 21:7-11: Aaron asks certain Amalekites whether they believe “the Son of God shall come to redeem mankind from their sins?” He is answered “We do not believe in these foolish traditions.” In 2 Nephi 32:7 we read that Nephi was constrained by the Spirit to stop telling certain people more about the gospel because they would not “understand great knowledge, when it is given unto them in plainness, even as plain as word can be.” In Jacob 7:10-11 the Nephites were chastened because they did not “understand” the scriptures, which “truly testify of Christ.” In Alma 33:16 we read that the people would “not understand” the mercies “bestowed upon them because of thy Son.”

8 When Christ first appeared to the Nephites he said “ye are weak, that ye cannot understand all my words which I am commanded of the Father to speak unto you at this time” (3 Nephi 17:2). In Mormon 9:7 we read of Nephites who “deny the revelations of God, and say that they are done away, that there are no revelations, nor prophecies, nor gifts, nor healing, nor speaking with tongues, and the interpretation of tongues.” In the next verse the criticism continues, making it clear that these individuals misunderstand Christ’s message: “He that denieth these things knoweth not the gospel of Christ; yea, he has not read the scriptures; if so, he does not understand them” (Mormon 9:8). Toward the end of the Book of Mormon, Mormon himself laments, “O ye fair ones, how could ye have rejected that Jesus, who stood with open arms to receive you!” (Mormon 6:17).

9 Mormon mourns after the final battle in which the Nephites are slaughtered because they rejected Christ’s message, “Behold, if ye had not done this, ye would not have fallen” (Mormon 6:18).

10 In Matthew 24:2 Jesus tells his disciples that the temple would be destroyed; this occurred when the Romans sacked Jerusalem in about 70 A.D. Jesus further warned those listening that when the temple was defiled, it was time to immediately “flee into the mountains” (Matthew 24:16).
Christology, focusing on Christ as the Father, comparing this theology to other Christian theology, and (4) examines the current Mormon belief that Jesus is Jehovah, the God of the Old Testament (pp. 83–84).

I. Book of Mormon Christology

Charles begins her discussion of Book of Mormon Christology by summarizing several Book of Mormon scriptures. She begins the third paragraph in this section by saying, “People in the Book of Mormon taught that during his earthly mission in Palestine Jesus would have a mortal body subject to temptation, pain, hunger, thirst, fatigue, sorrow, grief, suffering, and death” (p. 84). So far, so good. Charles then makes the odd comment, “However, Book of Mormon people did not necessarily believe that this meant he actually was mortal during his ministry on earth” (p. 84). In an attempt to bolster this insupportable position that Book of Mormon people did not believe Jesus was mortal, Charles goes on to cite Book of Mormon scriptures about Christ’s earthly ministry wherein he is described as “the Lord Omnipotent” who would “come down from heaven among the children of men” with “power,” that he would perform miracles and suffer “even more than man can suffer,” that he would be called “the Son of God, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning,” and that his own people, the Jews, would misunderstand and “consider him a man” (p. 84, citing Mosiah 3:5–9, 17). Charles then goes on to quote Book of Mormon scriptures that indicate Jesus was a God during his earthly ministry (p. 85). Charles sees as contradictory, or incompatible, the concept which runs through Latter-day Saint thought as well as through mainstream Christianity that Jesus was both deity and mortal, at the same time, while on the earth.11 This idea

11 See, e.g., William Barclay, professor of Divinity and Biblical Criticism at Glasgow University, Scotland, in his highly regarded work Jesus as They Saw Him: New Testament Interpretations of Jesus (1962; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), who devotes an entire chapter to Jesus as “man” and another entire chapter to Jesus as “God.” Barclay states:

It may come as something of a surprise to us to find that in the New Testament Jesus is on more than one occasion plainly, bluntly and unequivocally called a man. In Greek there are two words for man. There
is *anthrōpos*, which is the word for man as a human being. It is the
generic word for man as a representative and specimen of humanity.
There is the word *anēr*, which describes a man rather as a husband and a
father, as an individual person, as a male member of the human species.
In the New Testament Jesus is called by both of these words. (Barclay,
*Jesus as They Saw Him*, 14)

Christian devotion has never hesitated to call Jesus God. . . . Ignatius
of Antioch could speak about the “blood of God” [citation omitted].
“There is one Physician,” he says, “who is . . . God in man.” He urges
his people to act in such a way that Jesus may be “our God in us.” He
speaks of Jesus as the God who has given you wisdom.” Charles
Wesley in his great hymn sings his love and praise to Jesus: “Amazing
love! how can it be That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?” Isaac
Watts writes: “Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast, Save in the death of
Christ, my God.” (Barclay, *Jesus as They Saw Him*, 20)

Similarly, the *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, to which over 100 Prot­
estant and Catholic scholars contributed and which is recommended by the North
American Patristic Society, under the entry entitled “Christ, Christology,”
declares: “Christology concerns questions about the nature of Christ’s *divinity*,
and the nature of his *humanity*, and the oneness or wholeness of his person. . . .
[1]If both *divinity and humanity* are necessary [to explain Christ] for reasons of
salvation, then some explanation of his wholeness and oneness as a person is
required.” Ferguson, ed., *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, 198, emphasis
added.

The creeds of the early church also underscore the fact that Christians have
always viewed Jesus as both God and man. Regarding Jesus, the Nicene Creed
affirms:

> We believe in . . . one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only-
> begotten of his Father, of the substance of the Father, *God of God*,
> *Light of Light*, *very God of very God*. . . . Who for us men and for our
> salvation came down [from heaven] and was incarnate and was *made*
> man.

“The Nicene Creed,” in *The Seven Ecumenical Councils of the Undivided Church*,
series (1886–1890; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 14:3, emphasis
added.

The Book of Mormon acknowledges Jesus’ mortality in many places: “he
was lifted up upon the cross and slain for the sins of the world” (1 Nephi 11:33);
“the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, should manifest himself unto them in the
flesh; and after he should manifest himself they should scourge him and crucify
him” (2 Nephi 6:9); “and they shall crucify him” (2 Nephi 10:3); “Behold, they
will crucify him” (2 Nephi 25:13).

The current Latter-day Saint perspective is no different. In Bruce R.
McConkie’s *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft: 1977), 30, 127–30,
did not spring out of nowhere—significant scriptural basis for it exists. 12 Certainly, 1 Timothy 2:5 and Romans 5:15 refer to Jesus Christ as a "man."

Next, Charles mentions that Book of Mormon people living long before Jesus was born knew many specific details about him—that he would be born six hundred years after Lehi and his family left Jerusalem, his mother would be a beautiful virgin named Mary, a new star would appear at his birth, his name would be Jesus; that he would heal the sick, raise the dead, and bear transgressions so much that "blood cometh from every pore"; and that he would be crucified (pp. 85–87). Charles claims that all of these details, except Mary's beauty, are found in the New Testament Gospels (p. 86). Actually, the idea that blood came from every pore is not biblical either (see Mosiah 3:7 and D&C 19:18). Charles sees the Book of Mormon account of Jesus as containing an "abundance of nonessential details . . . [which] have nothing to do with the redemption of humankind. Why should Book of Mormon people know the town John the Baptist would baptize in or where Jesus’ dead body would lie and how long it would lie there?" (p. 89). How or why Charles thinks these details are "nonessential" we are not told. The writers of the New Testament and today's readers seem to think these details are essential enough to be included in scriptural writings. If they were essential enough for early Christian writers of the Old World and for current readers, why not for early Christians in the New World?

Charles also claims that "The Book of Mormon's extensive, specific detailing of events hundreds of years in the future is without parallel in verifiable, before-the-fact prophecies [sic]" (p. 90). Again, Charles is wrong. Well before Jesus' birth Old Testament

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12 "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). This has always been understood by Christians to mean that Jesus, as the Word of God, was himself deity. Romans 9:5 has been interpreted by many Christians to refer to Christ as "God." Encyclopedia of Early Christianity, 199. John 8:58 is generally thought to be a reference to Jesus referring to himself as "I AM," the God of the Old Testament. Early and current Christians have thought of Isaiah 9:6 as referring to Christ: "The mighty God. The everlasting Father. The Prince of Peace."
writers proclaimed: “Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14). “Bethlehem . . . out of thee shall he come forth” (Micah 5:2). “There shall come . . . a rod out of the stem of Jesse” (Isaiah 11:1). “To open the blind eyes” (Isaiah 42:7). “He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows” (Isaiah 53:4). “Behold, thy King cometh unto thee . . . riding upon an ass, and upon a colt” (Zechariah 9:9). “He was wounded for our transgressions” (Isaiah 53:5). “I gave my back to the smiters” (Isaiah 50:5). “I was prised at . . . thirty pieces of silver” (Zechariah 11:13). “They pierced my hands and feet” (Psalm 22:16). “I will fasten him as a nail in a sure place” (Isaiah 22:23). “He keepeth all his bones: not one of them is broken” (Psalm 34:20). “In my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink” (Psalm 69:21). “They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture” (Psalm 22:18). “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Psalm 22:1). If Charles is not convinced by biblical references, perhaps she would consider Dead Sea Scroll references, first discovered in 1947, which scholars agree were written before the time of Christ and which, with precise detail, describe the coming Messiah:

[The Hea]vens and the earth will obey His [God’s] Messiah. . . . [T]he Faithful will He restore by His power. . . . He shall . . . make the blind see, raise up the do[wntrodden.] . . . He will heal the sick, resurrect the dead, and to the Meek announce glad tidings. . . . He will lead the [Ho]ly Ones; He will shepherd [th]em.

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14 Translation of 4Q521 in Robert Eisenman and Michael Wise, The Dead Sea Scrolls Uncovered (Rockport, MA: Element, 1992), 23, emphasis added. Eisenman is professor of Middle East Religions and chair of the Religious Studies Department, California State University, Long Beach. Wise is assistant professor of Aramaic, Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, University of Chicago. Both have published several books and articles on the Dead Sea Scrolls.
Another Dead Sea Scrolls text, first released in November 1991,\textsuperscript{15} now often described as the “Pierced Messiah” Text, written before Jesus was born, reports in prophetic detail:

A staff shall rise from the root of Jesse, [and a Planting from his roots will bear fruit.] . . . the Branch of David. They will enter into Judgement . . . and . . . will put to death the Leader of the Community, the Bran[ch of David], . . . with woundings [piercings].\textsuperscript{16}

Specific, detailed, before-the-fact prophecies of Christ therefore can be said to exist.

Charles next makes the bizarre claim that, “For Book of Mormon people so far removed from Jesus’ life on earth, many of these details would be only trivia” (p. 90). But Christians today, by almost any standard, are further removed from Jesus’ life on earth than were Book of Mormon people, yet few other than Charles would claim that the precious details we have about Jesus’ life are “only trivia.” Most wish we could find other new sources with new details about Jesus’ life.

II. Near Eastern Messianic Expectations

Charles begins the second section of her article by claiming that “the Israelites in the Near East from the time of Lehi to Jesus’ birth had almost none of this same information about the messiah to come” (p. 90). But as we have already seen to the contrary, they had significant details available.

Next, Charles correctly claims that Israelites at the time of Jesus expected a Messiah who was in some ways different from Jesus (p. 90). The major difference was that the Israelites expected, in part, a political or military Messiah who would overthrow Roman rule by force.\textsuperscript{17} Jesus did not do this. However, Charles seems to believe that Jesus did not meet Israeliite expectation of a Messiah “descended from King David” (p. 90). In this

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 24-27.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 29.
she is, of course, mistaken (Matthew 1:1–17; Luke 1:23–38; Acts 13:23; and Romans 1:3). Charles’s mystifying claim that “Even those who were closest to him [Jesus] did not understand his identity or role before his death” (pp. 90–91) is belied by his many followers who described him with titles rendered by scholars in English as “Christ” (Matthew 1:16; 16:16), “Savior” (Luke 2:11; cf. Matthew 1:21), “Redeemer” (Luke 1:68), and “Messiah” (John 1:41; 4:25–26). Charles is correct that Jesus called himself the “Son of Man”; however, highly respected scholars disagree with the assessment of Morna D. Hooker, one of Charles’s cited sources, that “equation of the Son of Man and Messiah makes nonsense of the evidence of the gospels” (p. 91 n. 17). William Barclay, for example, states in no uncertain terms:

It has been suggested that, when Jesus used the title Son of Man, he was deliberately contrasting himself with, and deliberately disowning, the visions of a Messiah who was a supernatural figure of might and power and an apocalyptic wonder-worker, and that he was speaking of himself as humble, human and simple, as unlike as possible to the divine warrior figure for whom so many were waiting. The one fact which makes that suggestion impossible is that it appears that in fact Son of Man was a Messianic title, and a title involved in one of the most superhuman pictures of the Messiah in all Jewish thought.\(^\text{18}\)

James H. Charlesworth says “Son of Man” and “Messiah” clearly are terms for the same individual.\(^\text{19}\) Robert M. Grant says that Jesus’ followers “called him ‘Son of Man’ or ‘Messiah.’”\(^\text{20}\) Scripture backs up their position. In 2 Esdras, God the Father says, “My son the Messiah shall be revealed.”\(^\text{21}\) In the book of Enoch, which emerged between the Old and New Testaments, the title \textit{Son of Man} is always a divine preexistent messianic

\textsuperscript{18} Barclay, \textit{Jesus as They Saw Him}, 71.
\textsuperscript{21} 2 (4) Esdras 7:28–29.
figure waiting to be unleashed upon the world. In the New Testament, the Son of Man is raised from the dead (Matthew 17:9; Mark 9:9), and will sit on his throne of glory and judge the twelve tribes (Matthew 19:28), appear before all inhabitants (tribes) of the earth (Matthew 24:30; Mark 13:26), come again as lightening (Matthew 24:27; Luke 17:24), with his angels, (Matthew 16:27), then reward every man according to his works and establish his kingdom (Matthew 16:27–28). These were all events, beyond human capacity, which could only be accomplished by the Messiah. Hence, contrary to the assertion of Hooker and Charles, it is nonsense to claim Son of Man and Messiah cannot be equated.

Charles claims that during Jesus’ lifetime, “his followers knew of no god other than the God of Israel” (p. 91). Some of today’s most highly regarded Jewish scholars disagree with Charles. They say:

The Bible is full of references to the belief in and the worship of many gods (polytheism); to the belief in and worship of the God of Israel together with a belief in the gods of the Canaanites (syncretism); and to the belief in a separate god for every people and country (monolatry).23

The Jewish scriptures available during Jesus’ lifetime, in several places, describe or acknowledge the existence of more than one god.24 Paul acknowledged a belief in “gods many, and lords many” (1 Corinthians 8:5). Origen, while head of the Christian Church in Alexandria, Egypt, wrote a commentary on the Gospel of John in which he says:

There are some gods of whom God is god, as we hear in the prophecy, “Thank ye the God of gods,” and “The God of gods hath spoken, and called the earth.”

22 Barclay, Jesus as They Saw Him, 78–79.
24 Ibid.
Now God, according to the Gospel, "is not the God of the dead but of the living." Those gods, then, are living of whom God is god. The Apostle, too, writing to the Corinthians, says: "As there are gods many and lords many," and so we have spoken of these gods as really existing. Now there are, besides the gods of whom God is god, certain others.25

Other early Christian leaders had similar ideas.26 Thus, the idea of the existence of more than one god is traceable from Old Testament times, through the time of Jesus, and beyond.

In her blanket claim that the "New Testament has no record of Jesus describing himself as the Israelites' god," Charles overlooks several passages which indicate the contrary. For example, the Jews at one point wanted to stone Jesus for that claim. "The Jews answered him, saying, For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God" (John 10:33). In John’s Gospel Jesus is quoted as claiming, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad. Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham? Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am [YHWH]. Then took they up stones to cast at him" (John 8:56–59). Also, as we

26 For example, Clement of Alexandria, in the second century, reported:

Those who have been perfected are given their reward and their honors. They have done with their purification, they have done with the rest of their service, though it be a holy service, with the holy; now they become pure in heart, and because of their close intimacy with the Lord there awaits them a restoration to eternal contemplation; and they have received the title of "gods" since they are destined to be enthroned with the other "gods" who are ranked next below the savior.


have seen, during his lifetime Jesus was equated by Jews with the Messiah (John 1:41; 4:25–29). By them, he would have been likened to the famous Isaiah passage that describes the Messiah as "The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6). Further, prominent New Testament scholars have concluded that Jesus identified himself, indeed proclaimed himself, as the God of Israel.27

Again, Charles is wrong in claiming that "Paul said that there was no other god but one (1 Cor. 8:4) and this god was the Father (Philip. 1:2; Philem. 3 . . . )" (p. 91). The Apostle Paul indicated that although there are gods many and lords many, to Christians there is but one god (cf. 1 Corinthians 8:5–6). This appears to be a proclamation of monolatry rather than monotheism.

Failing to recognize pre-Christian writings which indicate that the coming Messiah would be killed,28 as well as specific statements to that effect in the New Testament (John 12:32–33; Matthew 26:2, 32), Charles claims that "It was a surprise to those who accepted Jesus as the Messiah that he died on a cross and did not radically improve the world they lived in" (p. 92). This is quite a contradiction to Charles's statement one page earlier that "Even those who were closest to him did not understand his identity or role before his death, for he did not explain them clearly" (pp. 90–91). Apparently Charles, within the time it took her to write these pages, changed her mind from believing that even those closest to Jesus did not understand he was the Messiah or what the messianic role was, to claiming that Jesus had followers who accepted him as the Messiah who would radically improve the world, but would not die on a cross.

Charles believes that "Rather than being a feature of his mission, his [Jesus'] dying seemed to have cut his mission short" (p. 92). According to Charles, Jesus' death perplexed his follow-

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27 Barclay, Jesus as they Saw Him, 20–37; Margaret Barker, The Great Angel: A Study of Israel's Second God (Louisville: Westminster, 1992), 227–28. According to Matthew 1:23, Jesus was "Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us." Jesus identified himself as the great "I Am" (John 8:55, 59). In John 4:25–26, we read of Jesus proclaiming himself to be Messiah, saying, "I that speak unto thee am he."

28 Eisenman and Wise, The Dead Sea Scrolls Uncovered, 29, in which it is claimed he will be put to death with woundings or piercings.
ers. They had to figure out how this could be. As a result, she claims, early Christians scoured Old Testament scriptures “with a specific agenda,” which was “to match details in the life [and death] of Jesus” with scripture (p. 92). After all, Charles claims, “Almost all Old Testament scriptures that seemed to match details in the life of Jesus were discovered by believers after the fact; they were not part of anyone’s prior expectation” (p. 92, emphasis added). Such distorted thinking reveals Charles’s own agenda, as well as lack of logic. How in the world would anyone be able before the fact to compare an event in Jesus’ life with Old Testament scripture? It was precisely because Jesus’ actions, after the fact, were seen to be those of the expected Messiah, that people converted to Christianity.29 Charles, apparently blind to this, sees Paul’s statement that Christ died for our sins “according to the scriptures” and rose again the third day “according to the scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3–4) as Paul’s attempt to tie Jesus’ actions to scripture without having any specific scripture that he could cite (p. 92). Paul could very well have had in mind Isaiah’s statements, “the Lord [YHWH] hath laid on him [the Messiah] the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:6) or “in his love and in his pity he redeemed them” (Isaiah 63:9). Paul’s statement about Jesus’ resurrection could have been referring to Isaiah’s statement that “he [the Messiah] will swallow up death in victory” (Isaiah 25:8) or Hosea’s statement that the Messiah would “redeem them from death” (Hosea 13:14). Indeed, contrary to Charles’s assertion

29 Before Jesus’ birth, according to the Dead Sea Scrolls, the coming Messiah was expected to “make the blind see, raise up the downtrodden,” “heal the sick,” and “resurrect the dead.” Eisenman and Wise, The Dead Sea Scrolls Uncovered, 23. These, in addition to many similar Old Testament scriptures, were thought, before Jesus was born, to be prophetic statements about the coming Messiah. “They pierced my hands and feet” (Psalm 22:16); “a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son . . . Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14); “I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King” (Jeremiah 23:5); “Bethlehem, . . . out of thee shall he come forth” (Micah 5:2); “thy King cometh unto thee . . . riding upon an ass” (Zechariah 9:9); “I was wounded in the house of my friends” (Zechariah 13:6–7). During Jesus’ lifetime, his actions were interpreted as corresponding to messianic prophecy. See, e.g., John 1:41: “We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ.”
(p. 92), it is apparent that the prophets did testify of a coming Messiah.  

Next, without citing examples, Charles says, "The Book of Mormon explained why its people's knowledge was so different from the knowledge of the people in Israel as recorded in the Bible as we have it today" (p. 92, emphasis added). But wait. Earlier in her article, Charles claimed, "The only details about Jesus' earthly life the Book of Mormon includes are those also contained in the New Testament" (p. 89, emphasis added). Charles first told us the Book of Mormon is problematic because it is too much like the Bible; now she tells us it has problems because it is too different from the Bible. In neither case does she give us a rationale for these contradictory positions. We are left to wonder what yardstick Charles believes is appropriate to decide when the Book of Mormon is too similar or too different from the Bible to be genuine scripture.

Charles tells us that "committed RLDS and LDS Mormons, and scholars without a bias for or against Mormonism—have suggested . . . that the Book of Mormon . . . was authored by Joseph Smith . . . For these people, explicitly detailed Christian prophecies and concepts are anachronisms that mar the book's credibility as an ancient document" (p. 94). Does Charles believe these scholars are unbiased because they reached these conclusions or for some other reason? We are never told. As evidence for the idea that the Book of Mormon was authored by Joseph Smith rather than translated with divine aid, Charles recites several examples. First Charles claims that the idea of "infinite sins being remitted only through the atonement of an infinite being in Alma 34 had its origin with Anselm of Canterbury in the twelfth century C.E." (p. 94).  

Unfortunately for Charles's point here, neither in Alma 34 nor elsewhere does the Book of Mormon speak of "infinite" sins. The only scripture with the concept of infinite sins is in the Bible. However, the idea that atonement for the sins of the world must be provided by an infinite (or nonfinite) being,

30 See note 29 above.
32 "Is not thy wickedness great? and thine iniquities infinite?" (Job 22:5).
that a human sacrifice would not suffice, is present in the Book of Mormon\(^{33}\) as well as the Bible.\(^{34}\) If an anachronistic idea is here, it would be that of “infinite sins,” which notion belongs to Anselm of Canterbury alone. And yet, the idea underlying the teachings of the Bible, Book of Mormon, and Anselm is that there has been an atonement wrought by a savior or Messiah sufficient to overcome the sins of the world.

Second, Charles claims\(^{35}\) that where “Nephite preachers spoke matter-of-factly about original sin and human depravity” (p. 95) in the Book of Mormon, we have another anachronism indicating that Joseph Smith himself is the author. Perhaps Charles does not cite a specific Book of Mormon passage to demonstrate her point because nowhere does the Book of Mormon contain either the phrase “original sin” or “human depravity.” As evidence for her position, Charles borrows from Blake Ostler the claim that “As portrayed in the Bible, Israelites before Jesus’ time had no notion of being in a fallen state from which they needed saving” (p. 95). This is a curious position. It would seem that any Jew who read the Genesis account and figured out they were not still living in the Garden of Eden and would die some day must have had some notion they were in a fallen state because of Adam and Eve. Further, the Old Testament is replete with the idea that people in general, and Israel in particular, needed saving.\(^{36}\) Charles unwittingly disproves her own point when she cites just such a scripture earlier in her article, “Behold, the days come,

\(^{33}\) “For it is expedient that there should be a great and last sacrifice; yea, not a sacrifice of man, neither of beast, neither of any manner of fowl; for it shall not be a human sacrifice; but it must be an infinite and eternal sacrifice” (Alma 34:10).

\(^{34}\) See, e.g., “The God of my rock; in him will I trust: he is my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my high tower, and my refuge, my savior” (2 Samuel 22:3); “Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite” (Psalm 147:5); “I, even I, am the Lord and beside me there is no saviour” (Isaiah 43:11); “A just God and a Saviour; there is none beside me” (Isaiah 45:21); “There is no saviour beside me” (Hosea 13:4); “So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation” (Hebrews 9:28).


\(^{36}\) See note 34 above.
saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved” (Jeremiah 23:5–6, cited on p. 90, emphasis added). Charles quotes the scripture in the context of her discussion of messianic expectations that already existed at the time of Jesus. Charles claims, “What those Israelites expected was quite different from what Jesus was” (p. 90, emphasis added).

Third, Charles claims that Joseph Smith deceived us and misrepresented the Book of Mormon as ancient scripture. “For Joseph Smith to utilize the English language with which he was familiar in recording the translation is one thing,” Charles says, but “to create the theology . . . is quite another” (p. 95). But Joseph Smith had to use nineteenth-century English in his translation of the Book of Mormon. After all, what other language and phraseology did he know? What other language would nineteenth-century Book of Mormon readers understand? This Charles apparently acknowledges. However, she provides no evidence for the idea that Joseph Smith created theology in the Book of Mormon that could not have existed at the times asserted in the Book of Mormon. The only examples Charles provides are the ideas of an infinite being and original sin, both of which are found in the Old Testament and are therefore not anachronistic as Charles claims.37 Charles again seems to be saying the Book of Mormon is too different from the Bible to be believed, after earlier saying it is too much like the Bible to be believed.

III. Book of Mormon Christology Compared to Early and Current Christian Christology

The premise of Charles’s third section is that, “According to the Bible, Judaism at the time of Jesus’ birth was monotheistic. Jews believed in only one God” (p. 96). Here Charles’s idea needs refining. It would be more accurate to say that Jews at the time of Jesus were not monotheists, that is, only believed in the existence of one god, but were instead involved in monolatry, that is, the worship of one god. The distinction is important. In many
places, the Bible tacitly acknowledges the existence of more than one deity, but does not sanction the worship of more than one god.38

Next Charles claims, “The Book of Mormon people never were monotheists in an Old Testament sense, so the dilemma of Near Eastern Jewish Christians was never theirs” (p. 96). Charles supports this assertion with Book of Mormon passages in which Nephi, Amulek, and Mormon refer to “the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, which is one God (2 Ne. 31:21; Alma 11:44; and Morm. 7:7, 39 emphasis added)” (p. 96). Rather than demonstrating that the Book of Mormon varies from monotheism, however, these passages seem to emphasize its monotheism. Charles claims, “This is a common trinitarian formula” (p. 97). Charles’s analysis here is simply wrong. The trinitarian concept of God hinges on the idea, which Charles correctly acknowledges, of “three distinct persons of one undivided substance” (p. 97). The idea of a single essence in three persons first became official doctrine at the formation of the Nicene Creed in June 325 A.D.40 The concept of a single essence was at that time acknowledged to be unscriptural,41 but the Emperor Constantine forced its adoption as a compromise to avoid fragmentation of the early Christian church.42 The trinitarian concept is not found in the Bible, as notable Protestant and Catholic scholars have readily acknowledged.43 Contrary to Charles’s claim, neither the Book of Mormon passages nor the other sources cited by her contain the

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38 The Old Testament is not speaking of idols when it says, “Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods?” (Exodus 15:11) and “God standeth in the congregation of the mighty; he judgeth among the gods” (Psalm 82:1). This idea carries through into New Testament times—Paul says, “For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,) But to us there is but one God, the Father . . . and one Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 8:5–6).

39 Mormon 7:7 says “which are one God.”


42 Ibid.

concept that God, Jesus, and the Holy Ghost comprise one undivided essence. Charles is just wrong; the trinitarian concept simply cannot be found in the Book of Mormon or the Bible.

But do not fear. Quickly, Charles abandons her claim that this Book of Mormon phraseology “is a common trinitarian formula” (p. 97) for the contradictory position that these passages “in context ... resemble ... the heresy of modalism (also known as Sabellianism)” (p. 98). Again, Charles reads into the Book of Mormon passages something that is not there. One page earlier in her article Charles claims to see in the same Book of Mormon passages the trinitarian concept of three separate persons with one undivided essence. Now, instead, she sees the modalistic concept of God, Jesus, and the Holy Ghost comprising only one personality (p. 98). The truth is that just as the Book of Mormon is void of the trinitarian concept it is also void of Sabellianism. Nowhere does the Book of Mormon state that God, Jesus, and the Holy Ghost comprise just one personality.

But again, not to fear. One page later Charles changes her mind again and professes that modalism and Book of Mormon Christology are incompatible: “On one point, the Book of Mormon’s Christology differs from what early Christian modalists believed” (p. 99).

Again, Charles reads more into the Book of Mormon than the words say. Ironically, she asserts, “To say that ‘oneness’ in these passages refers only to oneness of will, purpose, power, and glory but not oneness of personality, person, essence, or number is imposing an interpretation on the text rather than letting the text speak” (p. 100). This is despite the fact that the text in question never speaks of oneness of personality, person, essence, or number. It would seem that Charles herself is imposing an interpretation rather than letting the text speak for itself. Would Charles assume that the word one in the following passage refers to oneness of personality, person, essence, or number? “There were no robbers, nor murderers, neither were there Lamanites, nor any manner of -ites; but they were in one, the children of Christ, and heirs to the kingdom of God” (4 Nephi 1:17). The “one” here, from the context, appears to be of will and purpose. Similarly, in the Bible, Jesus prays to the Father for his disciples to become one
with him in the same way that he is one with his father. Jesus is certainly not praying that he and all his disciples consolidate into one personality, person, essence, or number.

Charles asserts that "in the New Testament Jesus never claims to be the Father as he does in the Book of Mormon" (p. 100). If Charles is trying to imply that this is an anomaly in the Book of Mormon, she fails—in the Old Testament and other writings considered authoritative by early Christians, as well as in the writings of contemporary Christian scholars, Jesus is considered "the Father." For example, in Isaiah we find a statement, traditionally interpreted by Christians to refer to Jesus, which says, "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6, emphasis added). Another Old Testament verse held by Christians to be a description of Jesus as "father" is, "And I will clothe him with thy robe, and strengthen him with thy girdle, and I will commit thy government into his hand: and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah" (Isaiah 22:21, emphasis added). Christians considered Jesus to be the "Father" in a certain sense. The early Christian Church leader Tertullian wrote that some Christians taught that "the Father forsooth was born, and the Father suffered,—God Himself, the Lord Almighty, whom in their preaching they declare to be Jesus Christ." Professor James E. Smith, regarding the child Jesus, says, "This Child is a Son; he is also the Eternal Father. Later the One spoken of in this prophecy would say, 'I and my Father are one.'" Professor Richard A. Norris, Jr., observes that some early Christians "maintained that 'Son' refers to the humanity of Jesus, his flesh, while 'Father' refers to

\[\text{Source:} \text{Schaff and Wace, eds., The Ante-Nicene Fathers, 3:598.}
\]

\[\text{Source:} \text{James E. Smith, What the Bible Teaches about the Promised Messiah (Nashville: Nelson, 1993), 265.}\]
his deity." Between A.D. 202 and 231, Origen implicitly described Jesus as "the Father" by acknowledging that Isaiah 9:6 refers to Jesus. Yet none of these contexts requires a modalistic or monarchianistic interpretation.

Although the Book of Mormon describes Jesus as "the Father" in a few places, it is important to remember that many Book of Mormon passages also distinguish between Jesus and his Father. For example, the Father distinguishes himself from Jesus by introducing him to the Nephites, "Behold my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, in whom I have glorified my name—hear ye him" (3 Nephi 11:7). Jesus separates himself from his Father in saying, "I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me, and have glorified the Father in taking upon me the sins of the world, in the which I have suffered the will of the Father" (3 Nephi 11:11). Jesus distinguishes his physical location from that of the Father by saying, "Behold, ye have heard the things which I taught before I ascended to my Father" (3 Nephi 15:1). Jesus and his Father are also distinguished in the Book of Mormon because Jesus is commanded by his Father to go teach a group of people: "But I have received a commandment of the Father that I shall go unto them" (3 Nephi 16:3). Since the term father is a title or description, not a name, it can apply to more than one being at the same time, just like the terms mother, son, and daughter. The terms father and son can of course describe the same person at the same time. Therefore, contrary to Charles's assertions, modalism is not implied by Book of Mormon statements such as, "Behold, I am Jesus Christ. I am the Father and the Son" (Ether 3:14).

Charles apparently believes that the Book of Mormon Jesus is described in another way that she thinks is an anomaly. "The New Testament never says that Jesus was the god the Israelites in the Old Testament were worshipping" (p. 100). To the contrary, at one point Jesus was nearly stoned for making that claim for himself. His persecutors said, "For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God" (John 10:33). In another New Testament verse Jesus says:

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Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad.

Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?
Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am [YHWH].
Then took they up stones to cast at him. (John 8:56-59)

Also, referring to Deuteronomy 32:3–4, Paul seems to identify Jesus as Jehovah at 1 Corinthians 10:4. New Testament scholars conclude that Jesus identified himself as the God of Israel.49 This idea persisted for some time. Origen, in the third century, reported, “And he said, I am the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob. . . . The Savior, then, is the first and the last.”50

Charles believes that “Any assessment of Book of Mormon passages showing separate gods functioning simultaneously must also account for Christ’s claims in the Book of Mormon that he was the Father and was the Israelites’ God” (p. 100). How about this: Jesus, who is Jehovah, or YHWH, is the son of El or Elohim, the presiding deity in the divine, heavenly council. YHWH is specifically designated the God of Israel, but Israel knows of other gods, including El. YHWH as Israel’s God is properly addressed or designated as “Father” by the Israelites. However, YHWH’s father, El, is also properly designated “Father” because he is, after all, the father of YHWH. This accounts for the Book of Mormon writers designating Jesus as “the Father,” but still allows for Jesus to have a separate father. The Old Testament backs up this assessment. As one Old Testament scholar describes:

There were many in first-century Palestine who still retained a world-view derived from the more ancient religion of Israel in which there was a High God and several Sons of God, one of whom was Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel. Yahweh, the Lord, could be manifested on earth in human form, as an angel or in the Davidic king. It was as a manifestation of Yahweh, the

49 See note 27 above and accompanying text.
Son of God, that Jesus was acknowledged as Son of 
God, Messiah and Lord.  

This scholar goes on to clarify the reasons for this conclusion:

All the texts in the Hebrew Bible distinguish clearly 
between the divine sons of Elohim/Elyon [one of which 
is Yahweh] and those human beings who are called 
sons of Yahweh. This must be significant. It must mean 
that the terms originated at a time when Yahweh was 
distinguished from . . . El/Elohim/Elyon. A large num-
ber of texts continue to distinguish between El Elyon 
and Yahweh, Father and Son. . . . By tracing these pat-
terns through a great variety of material and over sev-
eral centuries, Israel’s second God can be recovered.

A cross-check that substantiates this conclusion is that the phrase 
Son of God in scripture has two basic roots: (1) sons of El, Elyon, 
or Elohim (Genesis 6:2, 4; Job 1:6–12, 2:1–6, 38:7; and Daniel 
3:25); and (2) sons of Yahweh (Exodus 4:22; Jeremiah 31:9; 
Hosea 11:1; 2 Samuel 7:14; Psalms 2:7, 89:26). Jesus is always 
referred to as a son of the former, that is, “son of the Highest” or 
“Son of the most high God” (Luke 1:32; Mark 5:7). Jesus is 
ever called the son of the latter. He is never called a son of Yah-
weh or a son of the Lord. Jesus is therefore equated with Yahweh, 
Lord, a son of El.

We also know that whoever wrote the New Testa-
ment translated the name Yahweh by Kyrios, Lord. 
(See, for example, the quotation from Deuteronomy 
6:5: “You shall love Yahweh your God . . .” which is 
rendered in Luke 10:27 “You shall love the Lord 
[Kyrios] your God.”) This suggests that the Gospel 
writers, in using the terms “Lord” and “Son of God 
Most High,” saw Jesus as a [divine being different 
from Elyon, the Most High God] and gave him their 
version of the sacred name Yahweh.

51 Barker, The Great Angel, 3, emphasis in original. 
52 Ibid., 10. 
53 Ibid., 5.
We thus have evidence, outside the Book of Mormon, that Jesus was considered the Israelites' God, contrary to Charles's assertion. Charles criticizes the Book of Mormon further, claiming it is consistent with modalism because it "show[s] only his [Jesus'] involvement in creation. As 'Father,' Christ is the author or source of creation, not merely the agent or instrument who carries out someone else's will" (p. 101). Charles is wrong again. In Jacob, a text which Charles apparently overlooks, we read:

For behold, by the power of his word man came upon the face of the earth, which earth was created by the power of his word. Wherefore, if God being able to speak and the world was, and to speak and man was created, O then, why not able to command the earth, or the workmanship of his hands upon the face of it, according to his will and pleasure? . . .

Wherefore, beloved brethren, be reconciled unto him through the atonement of Christ, his Only Begotten Son, and ye may obtain a resurrection, according to the power of the resurrection which is in Christ, and be presented as the first-fruits of Christ unto God. (Jacob 4:9, 11)

Here is a creation scripture in the Book of Mormon, which references both Christ and his Father and differentiates between them.

In the next few pages of her article, Charles repeats several Book of Mormon passages in which Jesus and God are described as one God in order to support her proposition that it goes "beyond trinitarianism in advocating the union of Christ and God and in rejecting any notion that Christ might be less than divine or subordinate to God the Father" (p. 103). This is a bewildering statement. Earlier, Charles argues that certain Book of Mormon verses amount to "a common trinitarian formula" (p. 97). In addition, it is inescapable that Jesus is physically separate from and subordinate to his Father in the Book of Mormon, when we read:

He [Jesus] shall be called the Son of God, . . . having subjected the flesh to the will of the Father. . . .
... He shall be led, crucified, and slain, the flesh becoming subject even unto death, the will of the Son being swallowed up in the will of the Father. (Mosiah 15:2, 7)

What will ye [Nephites] that I [Jesus] should do unto you, when I am gone unto the Father? ... [Y]e [Nephites] shall live to behold all the doings of the Father unto the children of men, even until all things shall be fulfilled according to the will of the Father, when I shall come in my glory with the powers of heaven. (3 Nephi 28:4, 7)

When Charles interprets the Book of Mormon as “advocating a union of Christ and God” she is correct if she is talking about a “union” of purpose rather than of persons. After all, the verses Charles quotes indicate a plurality. Her example reads, “And they are one God” (Mosiah 15:4), in which the words they and are are both plurals, numerically more than one. Yet surprisingly, Charles sees this verse as saying that, “there is only one being who is both the mortal/divine Jesus and the divine Father” (p. 102). Abinadi’s words just do not say what Charles wants to read into them.

Charles is wrong again when she claims that Joseph Smith’s 1838 account of his first vision contains a “new element,” which is Joseph’s seeing “two heavenly beings: God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ.” Of the ten known accounts of the First Vision recorded firsthand from Joseph Smith, all but one mention that two heavenly beings, the Father and the Son, appeared to him.54 The earliest of these, the so-called “Matthias” account, was recorded in 1835 by Warren Cowdery, several years before the 1838 account.55

Charles is right when she says, “Most modern Mormons would resist the idea that Book of Mormon writers envisioned God as one person who assumed three different roles” (p. 103). This is because the Book of Mormon never makes that claim. We never

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54 Each of these accounts is recorded verbatim in Milton V. Backman, Jr., Joseph Smith’s First Vision: Confirming Evidences and Contemporary Accounts, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980), 155–81.
55 Ibid., 158–59.
find in the Book of Mormon a phrase such as, “God is only one person who manifests himself in three different modes” or any other wording with that meaning.

Charles misses the mark when she next claims that the Book of Mormon portrays “Jesus Christ as the Supreme God” (p. 104). The Book of Mormon does not contain the phrase Supreme God.56

Charles criticizes the Church’s 1916 official statement, “The Father and the Son: A Doctrinal Exposition by the First Presidency and the Twelve,” by claiming, “The document failed to explain how the term “Father” in this verse [Ether 3:14] applies to Jesus or how Jesus is a literal parent of anyone” (p. 105). Yet Charles acknowledges in her very next paragraph that the First Presidency’s 1916 doctrinal exposition explains that when Jesus is called “Father” it is often in the sense that he is creator (p. 105). It is true that the First Presidency’s exposition does not explain how Jesus is a literal parent. But many Christians, both within and without the Latter-day Saint Church, believe Isaiah prophesied that Jesus would have children:

Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.
(Isaiah 53:10, emphasis added)

Charles describes changes in four Book of Mormon verses in which the word Son was allowed to be inserted by Joseph Smith in the 1837 edition of the Book of Mormon to clarify which member of the Godhead is being discussed (p. 107). None of these changes alters the meaning or intent of the verses in question. In each case the word Son is inserted to clarify a potential ambiguity.

Charles concludes the third section of her article by speculating that:

It is possible that Smith intended to revise the whole Book of Mormon to reflect tritheism but only barely

56 The word supreme appears three times in the Book of Mormon—Alma 11:22, 12:32, and 30:44. In none of these instances does the phrase refer to Jesus as “Supreme God.”
began the project. He may have given up, realizing that revising the Book of Mormon’s theology would often require major rewriting rather than simple insertions or word replacement. (p. 108)

In a manner only previously attempted by Fawn Brodie, Charles describes a project she believes Joseph Smith contemplated but never actually undertook, even giving us Joseph’s unspoken rationale for giving up the project. Does Charles really expect us to believe she can somehow understand Joseph Smith’s unrecorded thoughts of 150 years ago?

IV. The Latter-day Saint Concept That Jesus Is Jehovah

Charles’s final segment deals with the Latter-day Saint concept that Jesus is Jehovah, the God of the Old Testament. Charles, following Boyd Kirkland’s lead, takes the untenable position that “the earliest serious exponents of this view were apostles George Q. Cannon and Franklin D. Richards in the 1870s through 1890s” (p. 108). This overlooks Book of Mormon language itself, which Joseph Smith and most other members of the Church certainly understood from the time the Book of Mormon was first published in 1830. When the resurrected Jesus descends from heaven to visit the Nephites, we read that he said:

> Arise and come forth unto me, that ye may thrust your hands into my side, and also that ye may feel the prints of the nails in my hands and in my feet, that ye may know that I am the God of Israel, and the God of the whole earth. (3 Nephi 11:14)

In 1836, Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery both claimed to have had “Jehovah” appear to them in the Kirtland Temple and say, “I am the first and the last; I am he who liveth, I am he who was slain; I am your advocate with the Father” (D&C 110:3–4). The idea that Jesus is Jehovah therefore originated far earlier than Charles claims.
In an apparent attempt to show that the Latter-day Saint idea of Jesus as Jehovah is inconsistent with the Old and New Testaments, Charles claims:

There is no evidence in the Old or New Testament that this doctrine was taught anciently. The use of the divine names Jehovah and Elohim in the Old Testament never supports the twentieth-century Mormon doctrine that Elohim is the father of Jehovah, that Jehovah, not Elohim, is the God of the Old Testament, or that Jehovah is Jesus Christ. . . . [T]he divine names Elohim and Jehovah are both used unambiguously to refer to the same divine being, the one god of the Old Testament. (p. 109)

Where does Charles come up with this? Recognized experts on the Old Testament take a contrary position. For example, Professor Mark Smith of Yale University states, “The original god of Israel was El. . . . El was the original chief god of the group named Israel. . . . Similarly, Deuteronomy 32:8–9 casts Yahweh in the role of one of the sons of El.”57 Margaret Barker, of Oakbrook School in England, and member of the Society for Old Testament Study, explains:

Yahweh was one of the Sons of El Elyon, God Most High. In other words, he [Jesus] was described as a heavenly being. Thus the annunciation narrative has the term “Son of the Most High” (Luke 1:32) and the demoniac recognized his exorcist as “Son of the Most High God” (Mark 5:7). Jesus is not called son of Yahweh nor the son of the Lord, but he is called Lord. We also know that whoever wrote the New Testament translated the name Yahweh by Kyrios, Lord. (See, for example, the quotation from Deuteronomy 6:5: “You shall love Yahweh your God . . . .” which is rendered in Luke 10:27 “You shall love the Lord [Kyrios] your God.”) This suggests that the Gospel writers, in using the terms “Lord” and “Son of God Most High,” saw

Jesus as [divine] and gave him their version of the sacred name Yahweh.58

Barker goes on to say that the identification of Jesus as Yahweh happened “in the very earliest period; it was in fact, what the Christians were proclaiming when they said that Jesus was Lord. Jesus was Yahweh, the second God . . . . [T]he first Christians recognized that Jesus was Yahweh, not that he was in some way equivalent but not identical.”59

V. Flaws in Charles’s Methodology

Several flaws exist in Charles’s methodology. One is that she takes contradictory positions—first claiming that Book of Mormon Christology is trinitarian, then modalistic, then trinitarian, and finally unitarian. Another serious flaw in Charles’s work is that she does not have a consistent, well-thought-out way to judge whether the Book of Mormon is believable. Charles seems to think that differences in doctrine or descriptions over time amount to a flawed theology (pp. 81–82). This position fails to apprehend the concept of modern revelation, so crucial to Mormonism, which leads to progress in understanding: “For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little” (Isaiah 28:10). Regarding the “differences” which she perceives, Charles fails to realize that differences alone do not amount to flawed theology. Flaws are not implied by differences, but by incompatible differences or inconsistencies. Charles wrongly criticizes differences that are not inconsistent.

Another major blemish in her methodology is that Charles sometimes sees the Book of Mormon as flawed because it is too much like the Bible (see, for example, pp. 86–87, 89) while at other times she claims it is too different from the Bible (see, for example, pp. 90, 93, 95). Charles uses no consistent standard to judge the Book of Mormon. These methodological problems make it difficult to take Charles’s conclusions seriously.

58 Barker, The Great Angel, 4–5.
59 Ibid., 221, emphasis in original.
VI. Conclusion

For all its problems, though, Charles has written a thought-provoking article. Some Latter-day Saints need to take time to learn and better understand the Mormon doctrine of deity. A better understanding of the nature of deity would help us all feel better about the passage: “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3).

Reviewed by Daniel C. Peterson

**P. T. Barnum Redivivus**

I predict that it will be the definitive work on Mormonism for the next generation.¹

Ed Decker

This is not, as one would have expected, an indescribably horrid book. It is merely a very, very bad one, and the credit for its improvement must surely belong to the editorial staff at Harvest House.² The dedicated anti-Mormons Jerald and Sandra Tanner have noted “Ed Decker’s ability to make up stories,” “his ability to fabricate evidence to support his own opinions,” and his choice of “the path of sensationalism in his work on Mormonism.”³ They are not alone. Decker’s activities as a professional opponent of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have been

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² Perhaps Decker’s admirer Hank Hanegraaff, of the Christian Research Institute, deserves some of the credit as well. His brand of anti-Mormonism is usually more mainstream than that fostered by Decker. Hanegraaff was the author of the foreword for Decker’s *Handbook*.
DECKER, DECKER'S HANDBOOK ON MORMONISM (PETERSON) 39

highly visible (and audible) for years, and he has bestowed upon
the world such signal contributions as “Ex-Mormons for Jesus”
and the movie The God Makers. Thus experienced students of his
astounding career will easily recognize Decker’s hoofprints
throughout this volume. But his usual mendacity is relatively sub-
dued.⁴

In his Complete Handbook on Mormonism, Decker appears to
demeanorize some of the fantastic allegations that, over two de­
cades, have earned him both notoriety and a reputedly comfortable
living. Although, for instance, he has claimed that the spires of
Latter-day Saint churches and temples are satanic nails designed
either to pierce God in heaven or to crucify Christ at the second
coming, his Handbook is silent on the subject.⁵ He says nothing,
in this volume, about his repeated accusations that agents of the
Church have attempted to assassinate him.⁶ His Handbook, oddly,
lacks any entry on “Reactivators,” officials in local Mormon
congregations whose mission is either to bring back wavering
members of the Church or to murder them.⁷ He fails to cite the
prophecy he repeated throughout 1986 and into 1987 that “the

⁴ His speculations at page 30, for instance, are a pale echo of his earlier
claims on the subject, for which he was deservedly roasted even by his fellow
anti-Mormons (e.g., by Jerald and Sandra Tanner in their The Lucifer-God Doc­
trine: A Critical Look at Some Recent Charges Relating to the Worship of Luci­
fer in the Mormon Temple [Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, n.d.,]
21–23), and in their The Lucifer-God Doctrine: A Critical Look at Charges of
Luciferian Worship in the Mormon Temple, with a Response to the Decker-
Schneebelen Rebukal, enl. and rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse
Ministry, 1988), 11–15. (Hereafter, the two editions of this work will be re­
ferred to as, respectively, The Lucifer-God Doctrine [A] and The Lucifer-God Doc­
trine [B].) Here, as elsewhere (including his wholly implausible equation of “Ammon”
and the supposedly evil “Ammon” at pages 33–34), Decker’s amateurish
attempts to impute guilt by philological association are wholly without linguis­
tic merit.

⁵ See the account given by Tanner and Tanner, Serious Charges against
the Tanners, 7, 28–29; Tanner and Tanner, The Lucifer-God Doctrine [A], 2;
Tanner and Tanner, The Lucifer-God Doctrine [B], 2–6.

⁶ On Decker’s accusations, see the devastating exposé written by the late
anti-Mormon crusader Wally Tope, “Poisoned” at Pizzaland: The Revealing Case
of Ed Decker’s “Arsenic Poisoning” (La Canada Flintridge, CA: Frontline
Ministries, 1991); also Tanner and Tanner, Serious Charges against the Tanners,
32–47.

God of the Jews and Christians” was at war with “the god of the Mormons,” and that, unless the Latter-day Saints relinquished Brigham Young University’s Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies, the waters of the Great Salt Lake would soon rise to engulf both Salt Lake City and its temple. He has nothing to say of the full-scale replica of the White House Oval Office that has been prepared in the Washington D.C. Temple for the day when, following the Mormon revolution, the president of the Church will issue his theocratic dictates from it to the conquered people of the United States. There is, in the Handbook, little or nothing of the often disgusting personal libel against living Mormon leaders that distinguished his recent film, The God Makers II. And even though one of his trusted associates has claimed to have heard a supposedly explicit admission, by a Latter-day Saint apostle, that Mormons worship Lucifer, not a trace of this important revelation appears in the Handbook. Nor does he mention the rituals described in materials he once distributed, during which Latter-day Saint apostles were said not only to slit their own wrists and to write the satanic number 666 on their foreheads, but to use the blood of “diamond back rattlers” and racks of human skulls stored in the Holy of Holies of the Salt Lake Temple.

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9 Unfortunately, I was unable to locate this priceless allegation in print. However, at least three other dedicated Decker-watchers besides myself remember having seen or heard the claim. And a friend’s July 1995 call to Decker headquarters in Washington State, though it failed to locate a specific written reference, did get a general, implicit repetition of the claim. In a 9 August 1995 telephone call with the same friend, Decker himself denied the notion of a “full-scale replica,” but did confirm that Latter-day Saint leaders will rule the United States from the Washington D.C. Temple.

10 Once again, even the full-time anti-Mormons Jerald and Sandra Tanner could not stomach Decker’s performance. See their Problems in The Godmakers II (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1993).

11 See Tanner and Tanner, Serious Charges against the Tanners, 21; Salt Lake City Messenger 67 (1988): 13–19.

12 See Tanner and Tanner, The Lucifer-God Doctrine [A], 2–3; Tanner and Tanner, The Lucifer-God Doctrine [A], 8–11.
Some things, however, remain constant. As in previous outings, Decker sees “magic” (pp. 99, 387), “sorcery” (p. 17), and the “occult” everywhere in Mormonism. For him, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is a “juggernaut of generational occultism” (p. 311). He depicts Joseph Smith as “a ceremonial magician—a wizard,” “a dedicated and determined student of the black arts, perhaps even a master magician” (p. 382; cf. 413). Indeed, he declares that Mormonism is Satanism, and that its career in the world exemplifies “a dreadful Satanic momentum” (p. 311).

Nor are his readers to take this metaphorically. Decker himself claims to take it very seriously indeed. Thus priesthood blessings “may be demonically empowered” because “evil energy is transmitted from the blesser to the blessee,” so that “the level of spiritual oppression of many Mormons must be truly appalling in scope” (p. 273). (Elsewhere, Decker has depicted such blessings as having coated individual Latter-day Saints with what he calls a “Satanic shellac,” which has to be peeled off by the ministrations of anti-Mormons.) So, too, fathers’ blessings to their children are “frequently...a source of grave spiritual oppression later in life,” when, because of such blessings, “the spirits of priesthood...surround them” (p. 93). And receiving a patriarchal blessing—for most Latter-day Saints a highlight of their spiritual lives—“is like going to a psychic or a channeler” (p. 321). In fact, the typical Latter-day Saint stake patriarch (whom Decker describes on page 320 as “a man, usually older, who is regarded as being very saintly and absolutely

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13 See, too, Hanegraaff, “Foreword,” 5.
16 In this, he goes beyond even Quinn.
17 See also pages 53–54 (where he badly twists his evidence to make his “case”), 193, 197, 203, 274–77, 302, 400.
above reproach”) is really “just like a carnival palm reader. The process he often uses involves a kind of trance communication such as has been used by mediums (channelers) for centuries” (pp. 321–22). “Thus, the poor Mormon [who receives a patriarchal blessing] brings upon himself the curse of God from visiting a false prophet and seeking divination” (p. 322). And the potential consequences are alarming. “For years,” Decker claims,

I have had a terrible vision of hardworking, dedicated temple Mormons walking into the throne room of their god, as he sits amid the flames of a burning hell. They stand there, watching, as the beautiful face of the god they have imagined melts away to reveal the terrible secret: The god of their everlasting burnings is really Lucifer. He is laughing, crying out, “I told you from the beginning who I was. You have no excuse.” (p. 195)

But does he have evidence for any of this? In his attempt to demonstrate that Mormonism is occult, Decker cites several practices that fall under that category. Among them are “astrology: foretelling one’s future or personality composition through the position of the stars at birth,” “clairaudience: hearing things inaudible to normal hearing,” “clairvoyance: seeing things far away or invisible to normal sight,” and “oneiromancy: telling the future or unknown events by dreams” (p. 307). Presumably Latter-day Saints and their leaders are guilty of all of these damnable things, and, so, stand condemned. But wait. Don’t the “wise men”—the “magi” [Greek magoi]—of Matthew 2:1–15 look suspiciously like astrologers? (And isn’t their title uncomfortably reminiscent of “magic”?) And think of Paul’s experience on the road to Damascus, where, according to one account (Acts 22:6–11), he heard the voice of the Lord while those with him heard nothing. Doesn’t that seem a bit like “clairaudience,” as Decker defines it? And didn’t Jesus himself “see things far away or invisible to normal sight”?19 And as for “oneiromancy,” well,

19 At, for instance, John 1:47–49.
the biblical instances are far too many to count. Finally, what are we to make of Joseph’s divining cup, mentioned in Genesis 44:5? And why, incidentally, does Decker’s list of occult “forms of divination” not include “cleromancy,” the casting of lots? Because it would condemn the apostles in Acts 1:26? Is it possible that Decker is judging the Latter-day Saints by a double standard?

Yes, it is highly possible. And not just in relation to “magic.” Of the Kirtland Temple, Decker records that “numerous strange, mystical manifestations took place within its walls, . . . including a supposed hierophany of Jesus and various pseudo-pentecostal manifestations (glossolalia, visions of angels, singing in the spirit, etc.)” (p. 393). Of course, when identical things occur in the Bible (say, for instance, at Pentecost itself), fundamentalists like Decker find them not “strange” or “mystical,” but divine. Similarly, Decker denounces as unbiblical the notion advanced by some Latter-day Saint leaders that Joseph Smith will play a (subordinate) role on the Day of Judgment (pp. 373-74). Is he similarly indignant about Matthew 19:28, Luke 22:29-30, and 1 Corinthians 6:2-3? If so, he shows no sign of it.

No, the point of Decker’s volume is not to give a balanced or fair picture of Mormonism. It is, rather, to frighten, alienate, and disgust his readers. This is hardly a surprise, of course. “Ed has a penchant,” says his former associate and costar in The God Makers, the veteran anti-Mormon Dick Baer, “to sensationalize, embellish on facts and center on bizarre issues to try to shock people.” Decker briefly acknowledges—as he must, given the easily demonstrated appeal of the restored gospel to millions of people—that there are some seemingly good things about The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. “The tragedy of Mormonism is that mixed among the sweets are these little doses of darkness, revealing the true nature of the thing that lies just beneath the surface. Mormonism is like a photo negative of the truth: black where white should be, and difficult to see unless held up to strong light” (p. 195; cf. 358). Ed Decker is the man who will make the world see. “The spiritual havoc that Mormonism

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20 Just for starters, one might take a look at Genesis 37:5-11; 40:5-23; 41:1-36; Daniel 2:1-49; Matthew 2:12-13, 19, 22.
wreaks in its claim to be the pure holder of true Christianity cannot be overestimated,” he reports. “Day after day the ‘one true church’ grinds up countless people in the monstrous gears of its theology—spitting out wretched, frightened human beings who have all but given up on God, any God” (p. 137). And were one to ask for some statistics or other evidence to sustain this accusation? Don’t waste your breath.

“It is obvious,” Decker says, “that the Mormon church does not want to wear the label of a cult, but the very word cult describes a group at stress with the mainstream. Our work has been to turn up that stress volume and break people away and back into mainstream Christianity” (p. 397). In other words, he seeks not to inform, but to inflame. Accordingly, despite its claims, this is not a “Complete Handbook.” The article on Joseph Smith, for instance, contains no biography or chronology, merely assault after assault. People hoping for a complete picture of Mormonism, or seeking to understand its history and doctrine, will have to look elsewhere. Every entry is an attack. The only article on the Doctrine and Covenants is entitled “Doctrine and Covenants, Changes in.” There is an entry entitled “Angel of Light,” designed to prove that Moroni was really just the opposite, but no general entry treating Latter-day Saint doctrine on “Angels.” Decker includes discussions of “Gospel Hobbies,” “Idolatry,” and “Money Digging,” but offers nothing on missionary service, the welfare program, or the sacrament.

Moreover, to accomplish the goal of “turning up the tension,” Decker pulls out all the rhetorical stops. Throughout the book, Mormonism is dismissed as “silly,” “peculiar,” “eccentric,” “weird,” “absurd.”22 It is “pagan”—in Decker’s view, for instance, “eternal marriage is a subtle form of idolatry”—and “accursed.”23 Latter-day Saint beliefs and practices are

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22 See, respectively, pages 29, 364 (also Hanegraaff, “Foreword,” 6); pages 146, 392–93; pages 323, 345; page 90; and page 28. This is typical of his language. Elsewhere, for instance, he has termed Mormon beliefs “blasphemous tripe.” See Saints Alive in Jesus Newsletter (November–December 1994): 4.

23 See, respectively, pages 177–78, 229; page 206; page 330.
“bizarre,” “odd,” “strange,” “alien.” What Mormons hold sacred is merely “nonsense,” “superstitious nonsense,” and “foolishness.” Doctrine and Covenants 93 is a “hodgepodge of insane prattle” (p. 40). The Latter-day Saint view of the plan of salvation is “foolishness” (p. 269), temple worship is “a fool’s errand” (p. 69), and “Mormons are living in a fool’s paradise” (p. 148). Mormons and their leaders are “cultists.” But Mormonism is not only “a non-Christian cult,” not only “pseudo-Christian” (p. 392), but “anti-Christian” (p. 97), and its teachings are “vicious” (p. 292). The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is nothing but “spiritual darkness in action” (p. 358). It is “deceptive,” and the Latter-day Saints “have been deceived and are buried in lies from their leaders.” In fact, it is doubtful that Mormonism should even be granted the status of a religion. For Mormon leaders are “pretenders” (p. 304). Mormonism is “an act—a counterfeit faith” (p. 397; cf. 400) and Latter-day Saint worship, he implies, is mere masquerade: It is only

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25 See, respectively, pages 22, 189; page 387; page 28.
26 See pages 43, 74, 133, 159, 160, 207, 239, 253, 413. Apparently fearing that readers will resist regarding the Latter-day Saints they have known as “cultists,” Decker advises them to “Remember that Mormonism is something of a soft-core cult, with a happy facade” (p. 159). I do not think that his phrasing (reminiscent of “soft-core pornography”) was chosen at random. For an examination of the claim that Mormonism is a “cult,” see Daniel C. Peterson and Stephen D. Ricks, *Offenders for a Word: How Anti-Mormons Play Word Games to Attack the Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Aspen Books, 1992), 193–212.
28 See, respectively, pages 29, 54, 60, 70, 180, 196, 415; page 160 (on which Decker himself immediately proceeds to tell a huge whopper: “They really believe they can be justified through works” [page 160]). Thus Joseph Smith’s introduction of temple ordinances “simply added that new level of deception to an already-towering Babel-like edifice of theological intricacy” (p. 180).
29 Decker often presumes, rather than demonstrates, the hypocrisy of Mormons and their leaders. (See, for example, page 170; page 176, on which the confirming testimony of eyewitnesses is conveniently ignored; and page 199, on which the doctrine of eternal progression is merely “a doctrine of devils ... added by Joseph Smith to feed his own pride.”) Decker knows the real motives for Mormon revelations—and they are always sordid (as at pp. 290–91). They are merely “revelations of convenience” (p. 340).
“‘worship’” (p. 393). Accordingly, Ed Decker generally refuses to capitalize the title of the being whom Latter-day Saints claim to reverence.31 “The LDS god,” he reveals, “is so far down the spiritual food chain from the biblical God that he might as well be a protozoan” (p. 328).

How can so many accept this “nonbiblical fantasy” (p. 420) and “the far-fetched revelations it has foisted on humanity”?32 “How millions can take the Book of Mormon seriously,” says Hank Hanegraaff in his “Foreword” to the Handbook, “is almost beyond comprehension.”33 The answer, of course, is that Mormons are preternaturally stupid.34 For “the entire LDS church falls like a house of cards before the clear light of reason and the Bible” (p. 397). But Latter-day Saints, both leaders and led, are “frightfully ignorant”35 and ordinary Mormons are both

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30 This is evidently becoming a favorite anti-Mormon put-down. See, for instance, Mark J. Cares, Speaking the Truth in Love to Mormons (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing, 1993), 136: “Mormonism, because it is a thoroughly man-centered religion, has no true concept of worship. True worship is foreign to LDS culture.” (It is difficult to imagine a more obvious case of lexical imperialism. If they don’t worship just as we do, say the critics, it isn’t worship.)

31 As at pages 50–51, 53, 64–65, 98, 113, 119, 157, 174, 195, 227, 263–64, 274, 303, 305, 328, 333, 345, 355, 369–70, 372, 388, 417. On page 227, Decker dismisses the Father worshipped by Latter-day Saints as a mere “man/god.” At page 59, Decker reveals that “Mormons don’t worship ‘Almighty God’ at all, but just a mythical, extraterrestrial superhuman being.” Throughout his Handbook, Decker is given to the use of loaded language like this. Thus, for instance, Brigham Young’s tenure as president of the Church is caricatured as his “reign” (p. 172).

32 For the latter phrase, see Hanegraaff, “Foreword,” 6.

33 Ibid. Decker calls the story of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon “a legend of classic proportion” (p. 400).

34 Decker betrays signs of more than merely anti-Mormon bigotry. Note the anti-Arab racism on page 22 and his classic anti-Catholic slur against “the vast wealth of the Vatican and its effete priesthood caste” on page 329. At page 332, Decker compares some elements of Mormonism to Roman Catholicism. The comparison is scarcely intended to flatter either Mormons or Catholics.

35 Decker observes that “Joseph Smith had little or no knowledge of Bible history and tradition” (p. 20). Here is something on which we can agree—though almost certainly not in the sense he intends. Joseph Smith’s achievement is all the greater (and the more miraculous) when one realizes how little earthly knowledge he had.
“spiritually blind” and “slavish.” Indeed, Decker has observed elsewhere, “the Mormons seem to have had their minds zapped by aliens when it comes to logic and Biblical truth.”

How did Mormons get into this frightful state? Through lust and arrogance, evidently. Decker describes the Latter-day Saint conception of the afterlife as one of “endless, Celestial sex” (p. 267) by which, he says, Mormons hope to “spawn new families throughout eternity” (p. 268). This is part of their motivation. But Decker also claims that pious Latter-day Saints who have served in the temples for the redemption of the dead “believe that when they die and go to wherever they go, many people will come up and kiss their feet and thank them” (p. 68). They are prideful and vainglorious. Thus, Decker asserts, when Latter-day Saints point to their lack of a professional clergy, this is simply their characteristic boastful “chest-thumping” (p. 145). And there is virtually no limit to their egocentrism: “As is true of most cults, . . . Mormons remove the focus of attention from Jesus Christ and turn it on themselves” (p. 207).

Obviously, Ed Decker needs some potent justifications for employing this contemptuous and hostile language against the Latter-day Saints. In the pages that follow, we will see how he provides himself with those justifications.

**Decker’s Abuse of Mormons, Past and Present**

In his “Foreword,” Hank Hanegraaff announces that, by the writing of this *Handbook*, Ed Decker “has distinguished himself”

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36 See respectively, pages 55, 153; pages 104–5 (cf. 253); page 312 (cf. 253). On page 365, Decker falsely asserts that LDS leaders “claim to have divine fiat for everything” they say. His statement directly contradicts Joseph Smith’s famous remark that “a prophet was a prophet only when he was acting as such.” See *DHC* 5:265.

37 Hanegraaff, “Foreword,” 7, uses precisely the same phrase, and I have also heard him use it on the radio. It seems to be a favorite in certain anti-Mormon circles. Perhaps they find it titillating.

38 Hanegraaff, “Foreword,” 7, uses precisely the same phrase, and I have also heard him use it on the radio. It seems to be a favorite in certain anti-Mormon circles. Perhaps they find it titillating.

39 Nonetheless, on page 204 Decker flatly contradicts himself by suggesting, ridiculously, that Mormons believe that “the act of procreation is evil to God.”

40 For other allegations of Latter-day Saint arrogance, see pages 199, 270, 276, 302, 366–67, 406, 411.
as a scholar.\textsuperscript{41} One scarcely knows whether to laugh or to cry. On page 281, Decker seems to think that there are still priesthood groups of “Seventy” on the stake and ward level. (Their discontinuation was announced at a general conference of the Church on 4 October 1986.) By page 340, he realizes that they no longer exist. But few of his egregious errors and distortions are so innocent. A few representative examples will suffice:

**Joseph Smith as a “False Prophet”**

- “Deuteronomy 18:20–22 states,” according to Decker, “that one false prophecy disqualifies a ‘prophet’ from consideration forever as a true prophet” (p. 245, emphasis in the original). Of course, that is not precisely what it says. As one prestigious commentary remarks of the passage,

> Prophecy in the names of other gods is easily rejected, but false prophecy in God’s name is a more serious matter. This dilemma requires the application of a pragmatic criterion that, although clearly useless for judgments on individual oracles, is certainly a way to evaluate a prophet’s overall performance.\textsuperscript{42}

Decker’s rule is also much too simple because it fails to notice the fact that God himself can change his mind and abrogate what he had already revealed. I cite, in this connection, the words of the Lord to the prophet Jeremiah:

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\textsuperscript{41} Hanegraaff, “Foreword,” 5. Hanegraaff is prone to exaggerating Decker’s qualifications. “For 20 years,” he claims on the same page of his “Foreword,” “Ed Decker served as a missionary for the Mormon church.” This sounds rather official, and naïve non-Mormons will, no doubt, be impressed. But in an explanatory note (on p. 431), Hanegraaff says that Decker had been “an active participant in the Mormon church’s ‘Every member a missionary’ program.” Informed readers will not be precisely bowled over. (I recall a television program in California from years ago that, in passing, described a certain grizzled old desert rat as devoutly religious, “a priest in the Mormon Church”—which probably left some viewers imagining him as ranking right up there with the Mormon pope.)

\textsuperscript{42} James L. Mays, ed., *Harper’s Bible Commentary* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988), 226. This commentary was a project of the Society of Biblical Literature, the premier group of Bible scholars in North America.
At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it;

If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them.

And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it;

If it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them. (Jeremiah 18:7-10)

Furthermore, readers of the Bible (and not just the Mormons among them) would be wise to allow prophets to err and be human. If they refuse, they may have no prophets left at all—neither latter-day nor biblical. Consider, for instance, the case of Ezekiel: Ezekiel 29 consists of two prophecies that announce Egypt’s destruction at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar (29:1-16 and 17-21). What is most interesting for my present purpose is 29:17-21. Although the prophecy recorded there foretells the fall of Egypt, its greatest revelation has to do with Ezekiel’s earlier predictions, given in chapters 26-28, that Tyre would be destroyed and plundered by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon.

Those predictions simply had not been fulfilled. Nebuchadnezzar had apparently attempted for about thirteen years (ca. 586–573 B.C.) to conquer Tyre, but the results had been less than satisfactory. Tyre was located off the shore of the mainland, and was therefore extraordinarily difficult to conquer by the conventional means that the Babylonians had employed elsewhere. (Typically, they had used siege warfare that involved the massive deployment of land troops and siege machinery.) Apparently, the Babylonian siege ended with some kind of compromise, in a negotiated settlement. Ezekiel 29:18–20 makes it clear that the plunder that Ezekiel’s earlier prophecy had promised to the Babylonians did not, in fact, materialize. Therefore, as compen-
oration for their failure to conquer Tyre, the Lord announced through Ezekiel that he would give Egypt to the Babylonians.\footnote{43}

By Decker's rule, Ezekiel was a false prophet, and the Old Testament is a fraud. But he does not apply his standard to the Bible. Joseph Smith is his quarry, and it is only the Latter-day Saints that he wants in his crosshairs. This, to put it mildly, is unfair. It is another illustration of his double standard.

- To set Joseph Smith up as a false prophet, Decker triumphantly trots out statements that have absolutely no apparent predictive intent, yet treats them as if they were supposed to be prophecies. And, although he has just quoted them himself, so that any careful reader can easily see that his declaration is false, he asserts that Joseph Smith used the formula "thus saith the Lord" in them (see, for example, pp. 170–72; cf. 289–90).

- Decker uses Doctrine and Covenants 84:2–5, 31 to establish that Joseph Smith was a false prophet (pp. 245–46, 370). He fails to mention Doctrine and Covenants 124:49–51, however—presumably because it would weaken his case. (It sounds very like the application of a principle similar to that enunciated at Jeremiah 18:7–10, quoted above.) He also fails to mention Matthew 24:34, Mark 13:30, and Luke 21:32, which bear striking resemblance to the supposedly false prophecy of Doctrine and Covenants 84:2–5, 31.

**Misuse of the Joseph Smith Story**

- In order to portray Joseph Smith as a hypocrite for becoming a Mason after his First Vision, Decker defines Freemasonry as a religion (pp. 371–72). But this is merely his own idiosyncratic view. Advocates and adherents of Freemasonry invariably deny both that it is a religious sect and that it contradicts more specific religious creeds; in addition, it is very common for members and even pastors of various denominations to be Freemasons.\footnote{44}

\footnote{43} I thank my colleague Prof. Kent P. Jackson for bringing this case to my attention some years ago.

• Quoting Joseph Smith, Decker claims that Joseph Smith’s descriptions of Moroni and of Satanic angels are identical (p. 36). But they are not. For instance, Joseph suggests that the color of the angel’s hair is one crucial clue, and, in the specific case of an evil angel to which he refers, the masquerading messenger has “sandy colored hair.” Moroni’s hair is not described as “sandy colored” (see Joseph Smith–History 1:31–32). On the basis of 2 Nephi 9:9, Decker concludes that, since Moroni was an “angel of light,” he must necessarily have been an angel of the devil (pp. 35–37). But, obviously, being an “angel of light” would not automatically make a supernatural messenger demonic; the whole point of Satan’s light-masquerade is to make himself and his emissaries look like true messengers from God. If there were no such authentic divine messengers, dressing up in borrowed light would be completely useless.

• On pages 216, 286, and 372, Decker claims that Joseph Smith was convicted of “glass looking” before Justice Albert Neely on 20 March 1826. Recent scholarship, however, suggests that Joseph was acquitted.46

• Decker describes Joseph Smith as a “teller of tall tales” and refers for support to Lucy Mack Smith’s biography of her son as if it justified his accusation (pp. 372–73)—which it emphatically does not.

• Decker has the gall to assault the testimony of the Witnesses to the Book of Mormon—in effect indulging in historical character assassination—without ever coming to grips with, or even mentioning, the superb scholarship that has been devoted to them (pp. 400–404).47 Two years ago, responding to a similar attack, I wrote that

Dogma of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry (Charleston: Supreme Council of the Southern Jurisdiction, 1906), 219.
45 DH C 4:581.
It is outrageous that . . . purported scholars of Mormonism would pretend, in 1992, to have examined the evidence on the Witnesses sufficiently to reject their testimony, without refuting—nay, without once referring to or citing—the works of Eldin Ricks (1961), Milton Backman (1983), Rhett James (1983), and especially Richard Lloyd Anderson (1981).48 . . . And new evidence supporting the veracity of the Witnesses continues to appear. I cannot see how anyone can possibly read Lyndon Cook’s recently published anthology of David Whitmer Interviews and imagine for a moment that David Whitmer was an “unreliable man” who merely thought he “may have seen” the angel and the plates.49 It is awfully difficult to remain patient with this sort of slipshod pseudoscholarship.50

And it is not getting any easier. Decker’s abuse of the Witnesses in this section of the Handbook is a perfect illustration of what Professor Richard Lloyd Anderson warned against in 1981:

The first anti-Mormon book was written in 1834 . . . and set the precedent, . . . devoting most space to show them to be either superstitious or dishonest. This became a formula: ignore the testimony and attack the.


witness. . . . That method is sure to caricature its victims: lead off with the worst names anyone ever called them, take all charges as presented without investigating, solidify mistakes as lifelong characteristics, and ignore all positive accomplishments or favorable judgments on their lives. Such bad methods will inevitably produce bad men on paper. The only problem with this treatment is that it cheats the consumer—it appears to investigate personality without really doing so.\textsuperscript{51}

- Decker brings up the well-known fact that the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon lists Joseph Smith as "author and proprietor" of the book, rather than, as in modern editions, as "translator" (pp. 109–10). Yet he never says precisely what this is supposed to prove. Is he seriously arguing that, as late as 1830, Joseph Smith was admitting the Book of Mormon to be fiction and himself to be its author? Of course not. Besides, "recent research into early federal copyright laws clearly explains that this terminology is not a problem because it is consistent with early nineteenth-century practice."\textsuperscript{52} The results of this research have been widely available for several years; Ed Decker could easily have known about it.

- On pages 366–67, Decker cites the \textit{Documentary History of the Church} 6:408–9 as evidence that Joseph Smith was an arrogant boaster.\textsuperscript{53} But the \textit{History of the Church} itself describes that passage as resting upon a "synopsis" by Thomas Bullock. Is it, therefore, a primary source? The date of the sermon is 26 May

\textsuperscript{51} Anderson, \textit{Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses}, 166.
\textsuperscript{52} See John W. Welch, ed., \textit{Reexploring the Book of Mormon} (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 154–57. The quotation is from page 154.
\textsuperscript{53} On page 411, Decker—the cover of whose book bears his name not merely once, but twice, and in large letters—calls Joseph Smith "melodramatic" and "egomaniacal." Incidentally, for what it may be worth, the eminent New Testament scholar Krister Stendahl (former dean of Harvard Divinity School and Lutheran Bishop Emeritus of Stockholm) considers the Apostle Paul to have been "a terrible braggart," "egocentric," and "blatantly arrogant." See Krister Stendahl, \textit{Final Account: Paul's Letter to the Romans} (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 3–5, 14. One need not agree with this judgment; I suspect that Decker would reject it on principle, while applying to Joseph Smith a standard that he would never apply to Paul.
1844. A month later, the Prophet was dead. Did he supervise this entry? No. The last years—years!—of his entries in the Documentary History of the Church were actually made by others, after his death, in an attempt, consistent with the historiographical practices of the day, to complete the narrative. They based their work on other eyewitness accounts and contemporary journals of other people, often transforming third-person narratives into the first person. This point is vitally important to keep in mind when trying to assess the character of Joseph Smith, his moral and spiritual quality, through the so-called “Documentary History.”

The impression I myself get of Joseph Smith from reading his authenticated statements is of a humble and sincere man, struggling to do the will of God as he understood it. However, even if a note of proud defiance had crept into Joseph’s tone during a speech in Nauvoo when both city and Church were under pressure from gangs of unprincipled bigots, I for one would not have blamed him.

On the general reliability of the Documentary History of the Church, by the way, I think it worth saying that, in view of the way it was put together, it is not the overall thrust or narrative that is likely to be inaccurate, but the nuances, the tone, the details. This is precisely the opposite problem from that which anti-Mormons would have us see in it: They think the overall story of the History incorrect (e.g., divine intervention, revelation, Joseph Smith’s prophetic calling, etc.), but want us to accept the details of tone and mood—at least when those details seem to put the Prophet in a bad light. (Amusing, isn’t it?, that the very same people who vehemently reject the Documentary History of the Church as an unreliable source when it seems to support the Latter-day Saint


55 Dean C. Jessee’s “Preface” to his collection of The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984), xiii–xix, specifically addresses the issue of the seeming egotism that enters into Joseph’s later statements as edited by well-meaning others, but which is apparently quite foreign to the man himself.
position clutch it to their bosoms as an unparalleled historical
treasure when they think they can use it as a weapon against the
alleged errors of Mormonism.)

- Wisely without citing any source, Decker informs his readers
that “the Mormons thank God for Joseph Smith, who claimed that
he had done more for us than any other man, including Jesus
Christ” (pp. 268–69).56 Where did Joseph Smith make such an
outrageous claim? He didn’t. Nor is it even thinkable that any
Christian would. In fact, the very wording of Decker’s accusation
shows its dependence on Doctrine and Covenants 135:3. But that
verse, written by John Taylor as part of the Church’s formal
announcement of the murder of Joseph Smith by anti-Mormons,
directly contradicts Decker’s claim: “Joseph Smith, the Prophet
and Seer of the Lord, has done more, save Jesus only, for the sal­
vation of men in this world, than any other man that ever lived in
it” (emphasis added).

Mormons as Mind-Numbed Robots

Since “bearing testimony” or “bearing witness” is one of
the chief ways in which Latter-day Saints attempt to share their
faith with others, Decker concentrates his fire upon it. “A
Mormon’s testimony,” he claims, “is usually not extemporaneous.
It is virtually a memorized, rote litany of statements about the
Mormon church. It does not vary much—at least in the begin­
ning” (p. 207, emphasis in the original). But Decker’s version of
Mormon testimonies goes much beyond this:

A typical fast and testimony meeting might have up
to a dozen people getting up and saying, “I bear you
my testimony that . . . ” and, at that point, the eyes
begin to glaze over, even as they begin to brim with
tears. This is especially true because lifelong Mormons
have been encouraged to get up and bear their testi­
mony since they were knee-high to a seagull. They are
also encouraged to bear it in any religious discussion

56 On page 325, Decker self-contradictorily portrays the Latter-day Saints
as subordinating Joseph Smith to Jesus Christ—though not by much. Even this
claim, however, is slanderous and false.
they might be having, especially with an investigator of the church—again with as much weeping and heartfelt emotion as can possibly be generated.

The net result of years of this is a mind-control phenomenon—an autohypnotic trance state which the sincere Mormon generates without even realizing it anytime he starts to bear his testimony. The next time you are with a Mormon and he begins to bear you his testimony, watch his eyes carefully. Often his pupils will begin to dilate, even as he begins to drone, “I want to solemnly bear you my testimony that God lives,” etc. He will frequently drop into a state of clinical autohypnosis. You can almost watch the tape recorder running behind his forehead, playing the message for you. . . . It is often instructive to gently but firmly interrupt when a Mormon is bearing his testimony. . . . Watch the eyes of the Mormon at this point. You can almost see the “Tilt” signs going off. Nothing in his entire life has prepared him for having his testimony derailed in mid-recitation. Some recover quickly, but others actually reel back, their eyes glazed over like marbles, trying to get reoriented. This is because you have prematurely called them out of a hypnotic state. (pp. 208–9)

The obvious intent of this bit of patent Deckerism is to distract the Mormon’s listeners from what he or she is saying, and to focus their attention on his or her face and eyes instead, as well as to portray Latter-day Saints as something alien (rather like the hypnotized communist agents of the classic paranoid thriller The Manchurian Candidate). But it is rather typical of his technique, in the sense that it is manifestly untrue and easily testable. The problem is that most of his audience will never actually test Decker’s claim; a substantial proportion, no doubt, will reason (not knowing him) that he would not dare to say such a thing unless it were true. (On 19 July 1992, when I questioned him during a conversation carried on the radio program Religion on the Line [KTKK, 630 AM, Salt Lake City], Decker affirmed that Latter-day Saints bearing testimony are brainwashed automatons whose eyes dilate and whose words never deviate even slightly
from the predetermined text that has been imposed upon them by their priesthood masters. When I challenged listeners to test his veracity by simply going to a Mormon testimony meeting and listening, Decker too urged them to do so! One can only marvel at so shameless a deployment of what has been termed "the Big Lie technique."

• Decker claims that the Church fears people who think "that you can read and understand the Bible without the help of the brethren" and is terrified that some of its members might "come to [think] that you can get truth from God without the help of the church hierarchy" (p. 90). That is why, I suppose, the Church spends so much time and money and effort on Gospel Doctrine classes, seminaries, institutes of religion, religious instruction in its colleges, and improved editions of its scriptures. And that must also be the reason for the Church’s emphasis on personal revelation and testimony.

Latter-day Saints as Murderous Traitors

Ed Decker uses brazen distortion of the Mormon past to create a threatening portrait of contemporary Mormonism. Consider the following instances:

• "Utah under Brigham Young," claims Decker, had "very little social or religious freedom" (p. 187). Where is his evidence for this? It would be useful, I think, to permit two eminent historians of Mormonism to sketch the reign of religious terror that existed in Brigham Young's Utah:

By the end of the 1860s other denominations were beginning to establish themselves in the territory. The Church made no effort to keep out other faiths and sometimes cooperated by letting them use Mormon chapels until they could build their own meeting places.

Among the first non-Mormons in Utah were Jews, some of whom came as merchants and businessmen as early as 1854. Strong friendships grew between the Jews and the Mormons, and more than once Brigham Young made Mormon church buildings available for Jewish religious services.
Roman Catholics came to Utah in 1862 as members of the California Volunteers. In 1866 when the Reverend Edward Kelly was looking for a place to celebrate mass, he was allowed to use the old tabernacle, and Brigham Young helped him obtain a clear title to land for a cathedral. Though the Catholics and the Latter-day Saints had little in common religiously, they maintained generally good will. The Reverend Lawrence Scanlan arrived in Utah in 1873 . . . and on one occasion in 1873 was invited by Mormon leaders in St. George to use their tabernacle for worship. Fearful that some of the service would have to be omitted because it called for a choir singing in Latin, he learned to his surprise that the leader of the St. George Tabernacle choir had asked for the appropriate music, and in two weeks the choir would sing it in Latin. On May 18 a Catholic high mass was sung by a Mormon choir in the St. George Tabernacle, symbolizing the good will that existed between Father Scanlan and the Saints.57

- Decker makes wild accusations of murder against early Latter-day Saints, with no more evidence to support his slanders than a throw-away line from Mark Twain (p. 99): “Though today LDS leaders will deny it,” he says, “there were marauding bands of theocratic vigilantes known as ‘Danites’ or ‘Avenging Angels’—almost a Mormon Ku Klux Klan—who would often [often!] exact fearsome retribution upon any who were seen to be out of order with the rulers of the church” (p. 119; cf. 132, 166–67). Of course, modern Latter-day Saints do deny such tales, for the simple reason that they are not true.58

- But even if untrue, for Ed Decker the mythical Mormon past is merely prologue to the sordid Mormon present. “Deep in Mormon country (Utah, Idaho, etc.),” he alleges, “wives who are perceived as not submitting properly to their husbands are sometimes treated to church-directed correction”—by which he means


58 On this subject, see David J. Whittaker, “Danites,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1:356–57. Dr. Whittaker is the leading authority on the subject.
violent "correction" or "chastisement" (p. 132; cf. 306). This is a very, very serious charge. Where is his evidence? How often is "sometimes"? Can he name a single case? The charge doesn't even make much sense. Why would such horrors take place only "deep in Mormon country"? Does Latter-day Saint theology in California and Tahiti and Sweden differ on this point?

• Decker points to the patriarchal character of Mormonism and declares that women in the Church are frequently virtual slaves to their husbands, who "stand in the place of God" to them (p. 306). Yet this is an extraordinary criticism for a fundamentalist Protestant to make, committed as he is to the inspired, inerrant character of scriptural passages like Ephesians 5:22–24. Characteristically, too, he has offered no proof whatever for his charge against the Latter-day Saints. Surely, if the situation is as bad as he paints it, there should be plenty of evidence for the bondage of Mormon women to oppressive little would-be deities. Unconcerned with evidence, however, and undeterred by his own inconsistency, Decker denounces Mormonism as "a combination of legalism and sexual oppression" (p. 307). In fact, Mormon teaching expressly condemns the kind of thing that Decker says is central to it. Consider, for example, the words of Elder James E. Faust, who currently serves in the First Presidency of the Church: "Holding the priesthood does not mean that a man is a power-broker, or that he sits on a throne, dictating in macho terms, or that he is superior in any way... Nowhere does the doctrine of this Church declare that men are superior to women." 59

• Decker devotes two paragraphs to the utterly false notion that Latter-day Saint women will be dependent upon their husbands for their resurrection. "No wonder LDS women feel so spiritually oppressed!" (pp. 298–99). But where is the evidence

59 At the time of writing, Decker continues to circulate outlandish stories about domestic life among the Latter-day Saints. (See, for example, the March–May 1995 issue of his Saints Alive in Jesus Newsletter, 2, where he cites an anonymous "letter" that, to anybody who knows how the Church really works, rings false at virtually every turn.)

that they do? He provides none. (It's rather like the old question about whether so-and-so has stopped beating his wife.) Is there any reason to believe that they suffer from depression more than do their neighbors from fundamentalist Protestant backgrounds?

• Yet Decker’s lurid, fictional Latter-day Saint present pales in comparison to the sinister plots that his imaginary Latter-day Saints are hatching for the future. Mormons, he says, are disloyal (pp. 303-4), and they are planning to set up “a political kingdom, not a spiritual one” (p. 149, emphasis in the original). In fact, their schemes are already well underway. Decker claims, without mentioning any evidence, that Latter-day Saints in the FBI routinely feed presumably classified information to leaders of the Church. “There have been rumors [rumors!] of ‘special assignments’ being handled for the LDS leaders by faithful FBI agents. These agents can be rewarded upon retirement from the agency with well-paying jobs in the church’s ‘private army,’ the LDS Church Security” (p. 149). (Note the vagueness, the presumed code-phrases suggestively placed within quotation marks. What are these dark-sounding “special assignments”? Assassinations? Inventing AIDS?)

Professional ethical codes or even national laws can be set aside by doctors, lawyers, or psychiatrists who are asked to do “a little something” to further the cause of the kingdom of God. Because there is no effort to distinguish between the LDS church’s private goals and agenda and the kingdom of God, this can mean that any Mormon who was in the right place could be asked at a time of crisis to do just about anything to anyone in the name of the church and be bound to it by their vow to obey the Law of Consecration. . . . This is why Mormons in high positions of government and the military can be worrisome. This oath they have taken in

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61 Dedicated students of the Decker phenomenon will remember the implicit portrayal of ordinary Latter-day Saints as dangerous armed revolutionaries in his film Temples of the God Makers. There is, of course, just the slightest grain of truth in Decker’s accusation: Mormons believe and take seriously such prophetic passages as Daniel 2:44; 7:18, 22, 27; 1 Corinthians 6:2; Revelation 22:15.
their minds supersedes the oath they took to protect and defend the Constitution. Such people bear careful watching. (pp. 149–50)

They believe it is their destiny to seize the reins of power in America and turn it into a theocracy, a religious dictatorship, led by a prophet-king who would be the supreme earthly head of the Melchizedek priesthood... Should the Mormons ever succeed in creating their church-state, it would be a country very much like Utah under Brigham Young. That is to say, it will have very little social or religious freedom. Mormons might criminalize abortion, pornography, and homosexuality, but they might also criminalize soul-winning efforts by Bible-believing Christians (p. 187).62

This is hardly a new theme for Decker. In the book version of The God Makers, published in 1984 and still widely available in mainstream secular bookstores as well as “Christian” outlets, he and his coauthor described The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as a “dictatorship” and compared it to “secret revolutionary groups,” predicting “an attempted takeover by force or subterfuge through political means.” They declared that, among Latter-day Saints, “the obsessive ambition of world domination is openly denied today but secretly plotted... [T]he Mormon hierarchy, beginning with Joseph Smith himself, has always had worldwide and absolute political power as its goal.”63 They even outlined a possible scenario, beginning with the ascension to

62 Compare Peterson and Ricks, Offenders for a Word, 178–83. Decker has an idiosyncratic understanding of such matters. He seems to believe that the fact that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints sends out missionaries contradicts the declaration of its eleventh Article of Faith that it believes in religious freedom (p. 59). Of course, his apparent error may be related to his eccentric explanation of the purpose of Latter-day Saint proselyting: “That goal of establishing a theocratic rule over the United States and planet Earth is still an integral part of the Mormon faith and the underlying motivation factor in their desire to convert the world.” See Ed Decker and Dave Hunt, The God Makers (Eugene: Harvest House, 1984), 10.

power (perhaps via the assassination of his predecessor) of a Latter-day Saint president of the United States:

The new President would immediately begin to gather around him increasing numbers of zealous Temple Mormons in strategic places at the highest levels of government. A crisis similar to the one which Mormon prophecies "foretold" occurs, in which millions of Mormons with their year's supply of food, guns, and ammunition play a key role. . . . Under cover of the national and international crisis, the Mormon President of the United States acts boldly and decisively to assume dictatorial powers. With the help of The Brethren and Mormons everywhere, he appears to save America and becomes a national hero. At this time he is made Prophet and President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day [sic] Saints and the Mormon Kingdom of God, while still President of the United States. There is no provision in the Constitution to prevent this. With the government largely in the hands of increasing numbers of Mormon appointees at all levels throughout the United States, the Constitutional prohibition against the establishment of a state church would no longer be enforceable.64

If the Mormon Church should ever succeed in taking over the world, Mormonism in its most fanatical and bizarre practices will become the rule enforced unblinkingly upon everyone.65

One scarcely knows how to respond to this sort of thing, other than to say, firmly, that Decker's slanders are baseless and contemptible. 66 Latter-day Saints have always believed what the

64 Ibid., 241-42.
65 Ibid., 234.
66 One of Decker's particularly fascinating fellow-travellers, bearing the improbable name of Lofles Tryk, likewise contends that Latter-day Saints are plotting to overthrow the government of the United States and points, as irrefutable evidence, to the enthusiastic Mormon sponsorship of the infamous paramilitary organization called the Boy Scouts of America. (I am not making
Prophet Joseph Smith wrote many years ago in what has come to be called their eleventh Article of Faith, and have tried to live accordingly: “We claim the privilege of worshiping Almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience, and allow all men the same privilege, let them worship how, where, or what they may.” We do not seek to compel our members, much less others, to comply with the gospel. (In Germany, for instance, where the Church is officially recognized as a Körperschaft des öffentlichen Rechts and where the government would, therefore, willingly extract money for it from its members as part of the “church tax” or Kirchensteuer, it has declined to avail itself even of this tiny bit of perfectly legal compulsion.) Accordingly, it is difficult not to be reminded of what Jerald and Sandra Tanner, themselves dedicated anti-Mormons, said about Ed Decker and some of his sidekicks a few years ago:

While we are sorry to have to say this, it seems there are some who will accept any wild story or theory if it puts the Mormons in a bad light. They reason that since they already know that Mormonism is false, it is all right to use anything that has an adverse effect on the system. The question of whether an accusation is true or false appears to be only a secondary consideration. 67

It is, in fact, Ed Decker himself and his associates whose commitment to religious liberty is questionable. Decker went to Israel in a vain attempt to block the construction there of Brigham
Young University's Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies; he showed his inflammatory film *The God Makers* to a subcommittee of the Israeli parliament, the Knesset, in an abortive bid to enlist the Israeli government in his campaign against the Latter-day Saints. In the West African nation of Ghana, he helped to persuade the dictatorial government of Jerry Rawlins to suspend the activities of the Church in June 1989; one week before the official edict was issued, *The God Makers* was shown on Ghanaian national television. “That, I’m sure, cemented some attitudes,” he remarked. As a consequence, all foreign missionaries of the Church were given one week to leave the country, Latter-day Saint buildings were locked up, and Latter-day Saint meetings were banned for nearly eighteen months. At the same time, Decker announced that a major effort was underway to accomplish the same results in other third-world countries, and he specifically mentioned nearby Nigeria.

Consider, too, a contemporary newspaper report from the 29 May 1983 “Capstone Conference” convened by leading anti-Mormons at Alta, Utah, where the late “Dr.” Walter Martin (the founder of Hank Hanegraaff’s Christian Research Institute and a prominent Decker supporter), gloated that “he had recently returned from Kenya, Africa, where he had . . . influenced the country’s government to deny the application filed by the Mormon Church with the Registrar of Societies. This action has closed the country to organized missionary activity for some time, Martin said.” At the same conference, Decker himself boasted

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that by claiming the theology of Mormonism is not "true Christianity," he convinced government authorities in Chile that Mormonism is unconstitutional.

Decker said because the country is a dictatorship and not a democracy, it has the power to implement this policy.

Decker met with government officials while visiting his son, who is presently serving a mission for the LDS Church in Chile. Decker said that, as a result of his meeting, the government will soon restrict the number of LDS missionaries from 1000 to 100.\footnote{Barlow, "Anti-Mormons Organize at Alta," 13. Note the touching evidence of Decker’s fatherly concern in the story.}

That Decker’s prediction about missionary numbers proved false does not alter the fact that it is he, not the Mormons, who has sought to "criminalize soul-winning efforts." It is he, not the Latter-day Saints, who has resorted to the coercive power of dictatorial regimes in an endeavor to suppress people whose theology differs from his. And he would apparently like to do the same thing even in America. The conclusion of his notorious pseudodocumentary film The God Makers intimates that Mormonism would be legally punishable in a properly constituted state.\footnote{Donald Alvin Eagle, an ordained Disciples of Christ minister and Arizona regional director of the National Conference of Christians and Jews, related his experience: "Since the issuance of our rather cautious, unemotional statement about The Godmakers, my office has received many communications. A typical letter from a ‘missionary to the Mormons’ states: ‘I happen to care about the Mormons too much to allow them to go on in their deception. They need to be saved!’ emphasis added. The language suggests religious paternalism at the least or spiritual dictatorship at the worst." See Donald Alvin Eagle, “One Community’s Reaction to The Godmakers,” Dialogue 18/2 (Summer 1985): 38.}

Obviously, this is not merely a theoretical issue of the relationship between “church” and “state.” But the implications of Decker’s actions may go considerably beyond state oppression of Latter-day Saints. “The bombings of Mormon churches in Chile began in July of 1984,” according to Dean Helland, an anti-Mormon evangelist with extensive experience there. “By 1990,
over 200 Mormon chapels had been damaged by bombs."73 Intriguingly, Reverend Helland, who hosted Ed Decker on his visit to Chile, believes that the terrorist bombing campaign against Chilean Latter-day Saints "could have been sparked at least in part by some of the things which were exposed in Decker's teachings." Helland does not, of course, acknowledge that "Decker's teachings" about Mormonism were grotesquely inaccurate, that what was supposedly "exposed" may in fact have been substantially invented, but he admits that Decker's rhetoric against the Church may have been excessive, "emphasizing its more bizarre aspects." Among other things, Decker evidently galvanized his audiences with incendiary allegations about the putatively conspiratorial character of the Church, "its involvement in the FBI, the CIA and international politics. This approach naturally enraged the Chilean citizens."74

- In order to further its purported conspiracy, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints hides its real intentions behind a carefully polished image of traditional values. Thus, for instance, "Its missionaries have simply exchanged their old 'sheep's clothing' for a newer style. They are still wolves" (p. 137). And, "The same tabernacle which echoed a hundred years ago to Brigham Young's cries of 'Kill the apostates!' is now filled with cozy bromides about families and Jesus" (p. 136).

Innocent readers of Decker's book will, of course, assume that the cry of "Kill the apostates!" was common in President Young's sermons. But a computer search of thousands of pages of nineteenth-century Mormon speeches and other writings failed to find a single occurrence of the phrase "Kill the apostates!" In fact, when inquiry was made for the words "kill" and "apostates" in proximity to one another, what showed up over and over again was embittered apostates attempting to kill the Saints and

74 Dean Maurice Helland, "Meeting the Book of Mormon Challenge in Chile" (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1990), 2; cf. 3, 63. Reverend Helland's work, reviewed by Louis Midgley in Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 5 (1993): 116–71, was written as a doctoral dissertation in the School of Theology and Missions at Oral Roberts University.
their leaders. (And, given indisputable historical facts such as the anti-Mormons’ notorious Missouri “extermination order,” the massacre of Latter-day Saints at Haun’s Mill, the murder of Joseph and Hyrum Smith, and the enforced flight of the Church from Illinois to the Great Basin, it would appear that Decker’s claim is, to put it mildly, untrue.)

Mormons as Bogus Ecumenists

“Mormons,” says Ed Decker, “are . . . eager these days to become part of the ecumenical body of Christianity” (p. 134; cf. 231, 331, 341). Accordingly, Mormonism is in a “race to look more like general Christianity” (p. 135). “This work,” Decker says of his Handbook, “is to help prevent that from happening” (p. 341).

As part of the Latter-day Saints’ alleged effort to disguise the horrible realities of their faith, Decker reveals to his audience, “even the celebrated statue of the ‘Restoration of the Aaronic Priesthood’ has been moved to an out-of-the-way corner” of Temple Square (p. 135). But Decker’s allegation is highly misleading. The statue in question has, it is true, been moved. It is now located near the busy new east entrance to Temple Square, through which thousands of people pass each week on their way to or from the theater in the Joseph Smith Memorial Building where the popular film Legacy is shown. This is hardly “an out-of-the-way corner.”

Miscellaneous Misrepresentations

- On page 170, Decker confuses Joseph F. Smith with his son, who is invariably known as Joseph Fielding Smith. On page 291, he makes Joseph Fielding Smith president of the Church earlier than he really was, evidently in order to give official status to one

75 Decker’s comments on the Prophet’s assassination are intriguing. On page 367, he notes that “Joseph Smith was murdered by a mob in Carthage jail.” On page 406, he declares that it was “the Lord” who “struck down Smith” (see John 16:2). On page 382, Decker implicitly laments that Joseph was not murdered earlier.
of Elder Smith’s speculations and thus make it more useful for beating up on the Mormons.

- Decker points out that, at the time of the 1978 revelation on priesthood, the Church warned of the risks of interracial and intercultural marriage. He alludes specifically to an article that quotes several earlier comments from Spencer W. Kimball, who was president of the Church at the time of the revelation. In one comment, originally made to Indian students at Brigham Young University on 5 January 1965, Elder Kimball had said,

  Now, the brethren feel that it is not the wisest thing to cross racial lines in dating and marrying. There is no condemnation. We have had some of our fine young people who have crossed the lines. We hope they will be very happy, but experience of the brethren through a hundred years has proved to us that marriage is a very difficult thing under any circumstances and the difficulty increases in interrace marriages.76

  In another statement, given to a University devotional assembly on 7 September 1976, President Kimball “recommend[ed]” that people marry spouses “of the same racial background generally, and of somewhat the same economic and social and educational background.”77 These remarks neither called mixed marriages a sin nor threatened them with punishment. (“There is,” said President Kimball, “no condemnation.”) Clearly, these comments were of an advisory character; they were prudential rather than theological, doctrinal, or disciplinary. Nevertheless, Decker notes (as if it were relevant) that the New Testament never denounces mixed marriages as a sin nor threatens them with punishment, and then he announces that the “contrast” [!!!] proves Mormonism unbiblical (pp. 291–93). (It seems, incidentally, that Decker has never read Ezra 9:2; 10:10, and Nehemiah 10:30; 13:25, which do condemn interracial marriage on religious grounds.)

- Hugh Nibley’s *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment*, claims Decker, “does such a poor job in

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77 Ibid.
trying to defend Joseph Smith’s ‘translation’ that the church has been unwilling to endorse it” (p. 103). Decker does not inform his readers that the Church seldom if ever endorses books other than the scriptures themselves. Thus he leads them to the false assumption that Prof. Nibley’s book (because of its supposedly low quality) has missed out on something that most Mormon books habitually receive. He attempts, thereby, to deliver himself from the obligation of dealing with Dr. Nibley’s arguments.

- “Even devout Mormons tend to be obsessed with fringe occult practices such as astrology, New Age medicine and healing practices, and even sorcery” (p. 310), if you believe Decker. But does he have any evidence for this rather serious charge? If so, why didn’t he offer it?

- Latter-day Saints, says Decker, “have a hard time accepting John’s testimony” of Jesus in John 1:14–18 (pp. 252–53). However, he cites no evidence for this claim, and I have never (in years of Church experience at various levels on four continents) heard of any such difficulty.

- Decker claims that Mormons seek to escape “from any serious discussions with well-informed Christians” (p. 152). Where is his evidence for this charge? (Does he know any “well-informed Christians”?)

- “A fairly successful witnessing tool in speaking to a Mormon who has brought up the abominable creeds story is to read one of the standards, such as the Nicene or Apostles’ Creed, and ask them to identify those portions that are filthy in the eyes of God. Even the boldest of LDS apologists will walk carefully around that one” (p. 153). Well, well. I don’t know about any others, but Ed Decker can reach me through FARMS, at the address given on the back cover of the present Review. I would be happy to identify for him the influence of pagan Greek philosophy on the classical creeds.

- On page 351, Decker quotes a pamphlet published by the Church, “What the Mormons Think of Christ,” as remarking that “Christians speak often of the blood of Christ and its cleansing power.” “Note here,” Decker comments, “how the LDS church tacitly admits that Christians are something other than Mormons.” But this is misreading of the worst sort. If I say that “people often make mistakes,” am I “tacitly admitting” that I am not one of
them? If I say that "humans have two legs," am I "tacitly admitting" that I am actually a horse?

**Falsifications of Mormon Theology**

In his "Foreword" to *Decker's Complete Handbook on Mormonism*, Hank Hanegraaff offers trusting readers a list of "major Mormon theological travesties," including alleged Latter-day Saint denial of Christ's deity.\(^78\) Hanegraaff's accusation is, of course, completely specious. Nonetheless, Ed Decker approaches Mormonism in the same inaccurate way. And he has demonstrably done so since first he took up his career as an anti-Mormon agitator. Consider, for example, the 1983 evaluation of Decker's film *The God Makers* given by Rev. Dr. Roger R. Keller, who served at the time as pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Mesa, Arizona:

> I know of no other way to state my feelings about the film than to say that it was religious pornography—utterly without redeeming social value. As one associated for many years with the LDS church and as one who has read widely both in the basic documents and theologies of the church, I can assure any who care to hear, that any resemblance between *The God Makers* and Mormonism was purely accidental. The movie was a compilation of half-truths, innuendo and falsehoods, coupled with an incredible lack of appreciation for anything Mormon. It reeked of anger, hatred, and, at best—misunderstanding.\(^79\)

Decker's own doctrinal views are extraordinarily provincial, if not solipsistic. They also suffer from grotesquely exaggerated self-confidence. Thus, at page 263, he effectively decrees that disagreement with his view of God is, *ipso facto*, disagreement with the Bible. But when he quotes Proverbs 14:12 as warning that "there is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end

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\(^78\) Hanegraaff, "Foreword," 6.

\(^79\) Roger R. Keller, letter to the editor, *Mesa Tribune*, 13 March 1983. Incidentally, Dr. Keller has since joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
thereof are the ways of death" (p. 120), one yearns to know how he can be so certain (short of postbiblical revelation, which he denies) that this is a warning to the Latter-day Saints. It could just as plausibly be aimed at him.

Decker quotes Paul, writing in 1 Corinthians 15:3–4, who describes the Christian gospel as the good news “that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures” (pp. 222–23). Decker says that this is “a simple gospel—but certainly not the gospel as presented by the prophet Joseph Smith, his successors, nor [sic] his church” (p. 223, emphasis in the original). He is wrong. In fact, Joseph Smith described the restored gospel in terms obviously dependent on, precisely, 1 Corinthians 15:3–4: “The fundamental principles of our religion,” said the Prophet, “are the testimony of the Apostles and Prophets, concerning Jesus Christ, that He died, was buried, and rose again the third day, and ascended into heaven; and all other things which pertain to our religion are only appendages to it.”80 “A simple gospel,” one might conclude, “but not the post-Nicene Aristotelianized Neoplatonic gospel of Ed Decker and his associates, with its metaphysical Trinity, its Manichean doctrine of original sin, and its insistence that God will never again be allowed to communicate his will to prophets.”81 Thus, Decker is constrained to caricature and distort Latter-day Saint beliefs in order to appall his readers, and to misrepresent the Bible and historical Christian theology in order to make them feel superior to the benighted Mormons. I offer a few examples of his technique:

Decker and “the Mormon Jesus”

“The Jesus of biblical Christianity and the Jesus of Mormonism are,” declares Decker, “quite obviously very different per-

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80 DHC 3:30.

81 Decker speaks of “the simplicity of the true gospel” (p. 420), but his own religious beliefs are the end product of a tortured theological evolution that has been anything but simple. For an eye-opening recent description of this process written by a mainstream Christian scholar and published by a conservative Christian press, see Stuart G. Hall, Doctrine and Practice in the Early Church (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991). (Can anyone label the doctrine of the Trinity “simple” and keep a straight face?)
sons” (p. 248). (In some instances, as on p. 333, he even speaks of “the ‘Jesus’ of Mormonism.”) Certainly his most outrageous and misleading claim is that, in Mormonism, “there is no qualitative difference” (p. 56), “no essential difference between Jesus and Lucifer” (p. 274). How does he endeavor to establish his charge?

- Recent printings of the Book of Mormon have carried on their covers the explanatory subtitle “Another Testament of Jesus Christ.” Ed Decker claims to think that, in this, he has finally caught the fiendishly clever Mormons with their masks off. “The word another on the Book of Mormon cover implies an additional testament,” he says. “The dictionary defines another as ‘different’ or ‘changed’” (p. 248). Well, yes, it does. But is that the word’s only meaning? If I finish one glass of water and ask for another, am I really asking for something “different” or something “changed”? For root beer, perhaps, or for motor oil? Clearly not. The first entry under “another” in my Oxford American Dictionary is simply “additional, one more.” Decker wants readers to swallow his allegations that the Book of Mormon is foreign to the Bible, and that the Jesus of the Nephites is alien to the Jesus of Palestine, but he clearly cannot rely on ordinary English usage to make his case.

- Part of Decker’s argument for the proposition that the Jesus of Mormonism is distinct from the Jesus of the Bible is that, in the Book of Mormon (3 Nephi 8-9), the Savior’s postresurrection appearance is accompanied by considerable death and destruction among the Nephites (see pp. 248-51). “This is some way for the Book of Mormon Jesus to celebrate the first Easter—by wiping out a couple of million people and then smothering the survivors in impossible darkness!” (p. 251). But this is a rather remark-

82 Decker’s phrase “impossible darkness” refers to the “vapor of darkness” described in the Book of Mormon account which, as Decker himself accurately summarizes, “seemed to be a tangible thing which allowed no light at all” (p. 251). Decker finds this “mysterious”—and implies that it is, therefore, unbelievable. What is truly mysterious and unbelievable, however, is that he would presume to write on the subject without having done his homework. Hugh Nibley, Since Cumorah, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 231-38, shows that the account of the great destruction given in 3 Nephi—specifically including the “vapor of darkness”—is remarkably plausible, and must have been written by an eyewitness. This discussion was first pub-
able argument, coming, as it does, from someone who believes that
the Protestant trinitarian Jesus is the same God who ordered the
Flood and the obliteration of the Canaanites, who believes that
Jesus will destroy most of the earth’s population in connection
with his Second Coming, and that, though omnipotent and thus
quite able to do otherwise, he will deliver the vast majority of all
those who have ever lived upon the earth (including most if not all
Latter-day Saints) over to eternal torture in the flames of hell. Is it
possible that we see here, yet again, a self-serving double stan-
dard?

• Mormons, declares Decker, “do not consider Jesus to be the
third Person of the Trinity” (p. 252). And he is quite right.
Mormons consider Jesus to be the second person of the Godhead,
which is composed of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

• According to Decker, “the Jesus of Mormonism” is “less
than God come in the flesh” (p. 253). His false accusation
directly contradicts Mormon scriptures such as Book of Mormon
Title Page; 1 Nephi 19:7–10; Mosiah 7:27; 13:28, 34; 15:1–3;
17:8; Alma 42:15; Ether 3:6, 8–9; Doctrine and Covenants 20:26;
93:4, 11; Moses 7:47, 54.

• In one of the most astonishing sections of the book, the
entry entitled “Jesus: The Hollywood Version,” Decker
announces that the portrayal of Jesus in the controversial Universal
Pictures film The Last Temptation of Christ “exactly matched
the description of the Mormon Jesus” (p. 256).83 This is, to put it
mildly, a glaring untruth, and I cannot imagine that Decker
doesn’t know it. In 1988, when The Last Temptation of Christ
appeared, Richard P. Lindsay, who was then serving as director of
the Public Communications Department of the Church, issued a
statement concerning it. As this statement not only refutes
Decker’s specific slander in this matter but casts doubt generally

lished in 1967. See also Russell Ball, “An Hypothesis concerning the Three
Days of Darkness among the Nephites,” Journal of Book of Mormon Studies 2/1

83 Decker has the sheer brazen chutzpah to steal the phrase “religious
pornography” to describe the film. That phrase had originally been applied
to his own anti-Mormon pseudodocumentary The God Makers by Rev. Roger
Keller, in the 13 March 1983 letter to the editor of the Mesa Tribune, partially
quoted above. Not surprisingly, Decker fails to mention that interesting fact and
gives no credit to Dr. Keller for the phrase.
upon Decker’s accusations about Latter-day Saint views of Christ, I think it worth quoting the statement in its totality:

The film, “The Last Temptation of Christ,” is not the story of Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, who in Gethsemane and on Calvary took upon Himself the sins of the world, and rose from death with the promise of redemption for all.

In our view this film trivializes the message and mission of Jesus Christ. We abhor the unconscionable portrayal of Jesus Christ in intimate sexual scenes and as a voyeur. Men and women are left poorer by exposure to the stereotypes the movie portrays.

As our name implies, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints revere Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the Savior of the world. Having experienced the uplifting power of His spirit, we encourage all people to truly seek the Savior and the eternal truths He taught, and to shun those things that detract from the dignity and spirit of His divine mission.84

On pages 257–59, Decker tries to show that Latter-day Saints believe that the mortal Christ, like the Jesus of the movie, was an imperfect sinner. But even his own carefully chosen prooftexts fail to support him. Nonetheless, Decker tells his readers that the Mormon view of Jesus is “blasphemous,” and that “the vilest portrayal of Jesus that Hollywood can create is in basic agreement with LDS theology” (p. 260).

“The God Makers,” Yet Again

The Latter-day Saint doctrine of eternal progression, Decker announces, is “blasphemy” (p. 302), “the lie from the very pit of hell” (p. 40; cf. 196, 302); it is “arrogantly stated” and “self-serving” (p. 270; cf. 302).

Decker seems unaware that doctrines of human deification or divinization, known in Greek as theosis and theopoiesis, have been

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widespread within Christianity from earliest times. Even today, the language of human deification is characteristic of, among others, the large and ancient churches of Eastern Orthodoxy. Consider, for example, some of the comments on the subject (chosen from very, very many more) of the Archimandrite Christoforos Stavropoulos:

We live on earth in order to live in heaven, in order to be “divinized,” in order to become one with God. This is the end and the fulfilment [sic] of our earthly destiny. . . . It is a topic that is deep and full of profound meaning. It has, in fact, been studied by the great Fathers of the Eastern Orthodox Church and their God-enlightened writings are full of the holy idea of the divinization or “Theosis” of human beings. . . . As human beings we each have this one, unique calling, to achieve Theosis. In other words, we are each destined to become a god; to be like God Himself, to be united with Him . . . to become just like God, a true god.

Clearly, Decker expects Latter-day Saint talk about “becoming gods” to be offensive to his overwhelmingly Protestant audience. He counts on it. And he is probably right. But it should be recalled that fundamentalism is only a quite small and comparatively recent faction of Protestantism, which is itself merely a sixteenth-century schismatic form of Christianity that originated in the northwestern portion of a peninsula called Europe. It is sheer self-assertion, and only self-assertion, for people like Decker to claim that they alone are Christians, or that the vast variety of other doctrines held by the majority of the world’s Christians are, in fact, not Christian, merely because those doctrines do not conform with sufficient exactitude to the views of late-twentieth-century Western Protestant fundamentalists.

85 See the discussion, and especially the many further references, provided by Peterson and Ricks, Offenders for a Word, 75–92. Stendahl, Final Account, 30, points out that “the idea of deification or divinization” occurs in the epistle of Paul to the Romans.

Decker and “Works-Righteousness”

“The Bible,” Decker accurately observes, “is clear that Jesus did not just die for Adam’s sin but for the individual sins of individual people” (p. 350). In contrast, according to Decker, Mormons deny that Jesus died for our sins (p. 56). In Mormonism, Jesus is “no more than a pointer, an example” (p. 253), and “without redemptive powers” (p. 255). “This ‘Jesus’ did not die on the cross for our sins, but only for Adam’s transgression. Thus, he cannot really save any of us from our sins” (p. 349).87 “In Mormonism,” Decker has written elsewhere, “the blood of Christ atones for Adam’s sin only, which brings resurrection to all... Christ’s blood doesn’t atone for a single individual sin.”88 Every Mormon is, thus, necessarily committed to “the task of earning personal salvation, outside the gift of Christ’s shed blood at Calvary” (p. 253; cf. 160, 316, 346). Consequently, Decker contends, Mormonism is “a legalistic system worse than that of the Pharisees” (p. 306; cf. 360).89

“The real tragedy,” he insists, “is that the shed blood of Jesus has been removed as a covering from the Mormon people, replaced by their own works and purity as the reason and hope of

87 On the other hand, Decker falsely alleges that “the Mormons claim that [Joseph Smith] died as a martyr, shed his blood for us, so that we, too, may become Gods” (p. 269).


89 Yet Decker portrays Latter-day Saints as unexpectedly relaxed about all this, since, he contends, they don’t really take sin very seriously and would not be particularly upset if they reach only the terrestrial kingdom instead of the celestial (p. 399). This is not true, and I am quite confident that Decker knows it. His fellow anti-Mormon, Rev. Mark Cares, who unlike Decker has never been a Latter-day Saint, knows that it is false. See his Speaking the Truth in Love to Mormons (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing, 1993). 56.
their resurrection and salvation” (p. 130; cf. 180, 199). Decker laments the supposed “tragedy” that “Mormons must stand before God’s throne . . . and lift up their own frail works as their only offering of righteousness before a holy God” (p. 131).

- But is any of this true? No. “When Mormons claim to be saved,” asserts Decker, “it only means that they have gained . . . general resurrection. Beyond this, everything in the LDS ‘plan of salvation’ is by works.” In support of this false claim on page 348, Decker refers his readers to *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* 3:1257—which says nothing of the kind. Indeed, quite to the contrary, Alma P. Burton’s article on “Salvation” describes it as “the greatest gift of God (cf. D&C 6:13)” and defines it as “redemption from the bondage of sin and death, through the atonement of Jesus Christ.” In fact, even the quotation from Bruce McConkie’s *Mormon Doctrine* supplied by Decker (also on p. 348) contradicts him, when it depicts “conditional or individual salvation” as “that which comes by grace coupled with gospel obedience.”

The article in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* on the “Atonement of Jesus Christ,” written by Jeffrey R. Holland (now a member of the Council of the Twelve), makes the Latter-day Saint position on this subject so clear that even Ed Decker, were he an honest and serious man, would have to acknowledge it. Consider simply the first paragraph of the article:

> The atonement of Jesus Christ is the foreordained but voluntary act of the Only Begotten Son of God. He

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90 Please note that, in this passage, Decker alleges that Latter-day Saints think even their resurrection to be earned by their good works; elsewhere (as at p. 348) he declares that, in Mormon belief, resurrection and only resurrection comes to us by the grace of Christ.

91 It would appear that, on this matter, Hank Hanegraaff has been a faithful student of Decker’s distortions. In an undated “CRI Perspective,” entitled “Mormonism and Salvation” and distributed by his Christian Research Institute, Hanegraaff falsely alleges that “When Mormons talk about salvation by grace, they’re referring to what they themselves call ‘general salvation.’” By this, Mormons mean that everybody is going to be resurrected, after which they will be judged according to their works. In other words, everybody gets an entrance pass to God’s courtroom, but once inside, they’re on their own! This, of course, adds up to nothing more than salvation by works.”

offered his life, including his innocent body, blood, and spiritual anguish as a redeeming ransom (1) for the effect of the fall of Adam upon all mankind and (2) for the personal sins of all who repent, from Adam to the end of the world. Latter-day Saints believe this is the central fact, the crucial foundation, the chief doctrine, and the greatest expression of divine love in the plan of salvation. The Prophet Joseph Smith declared that all "things which pertain to our religion are only appendages" to the atonement of Christ (TPJS, p. 121).93

I can easily imagine Decker replying that this is merely a recent attempt by Mormons to pose as "real Christians." But such a rejoinder fails. From the beginning, and in all of their scriptures, Latter-day Saints have consistently taught the same doctrine. "Therefore," says Jesus Christ in Doctrine and Covenants 19:15–16,

I command you to repent—repent, lest I smite you by the rod of my mouth, and by my wrath, and by my anger, and your sufferings be sore—how sore you know not, how exquisite you know not, yea, how hard to bear you know not. For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent; but if they would not repent they must suffer even as I.94

The fact that Jesus died for our sins (in the plural), and not merely for Adam’s singular sin, is amply attested in Latter-day Saint scripture.95 At Mosiah 14:5, for instance, the Nephite prophet Abinadi cites Isaiah’s description of the Messiah as

94 “It is obvious,” Decker asserts, “that the biblical penalty for sin has been removed from Mormon theology” (p. 163). Obvious to whom?
95 See, besides those cited here, such passages as 1 Nephi 11:33; Mosiah 3:11–12; Alma 24:13; 34:8; 3 Nephi 11:14; Doctrine and Covenants 29:1. There is no point in multiplying references on this issue; similar declarations from Latter-day Saint prophets and apostles must surely number in the thousands. Ed Decker has no excuse for his false statements on this matter.
“wounded for our transgressions” and “bruised for our iniquities,” as well as that ancient prophet’s declaration that “with his stripes we are healed.” “And since man had fallen,” says the Nephite teacher Aaron, “he could not merit anything of himself; but the sufferings and death of Christ atone for their sins, through faith and repentance” (Alma 22:14).

- “Mormons,” Decker pretends, “deny the Bible’s teaching that ‘the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin’ (1 John 1:7)” (p. 351; cf. 388). “Mormons are not Christians,” he declares, “and spurn—even mock—the cleansing power of the blood of Jesus Christ” (p. 311).

Wisely, though, he neglects to supply any examples of such supposed mockery. But there are plenty of counterexamples, of which a few should suffice. As the prophet Helaman said to his sons Nephi and Lehi, “O remember, remember, my sons... that there is no other way nor means whereby man can be saved, only through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ” (Helaman 5:9).96 “O then ye unbelieving,” cried the prophet Moroni, “turn ye unto the Lord; cry mightily unto the Father in the name of Jesus, that perhaps ye may be found spotless, pure, fair, and white, having been cleansed by the blood of the Lamb, at that great and last day” (Mormon 9:6). And the second-to-last verse of the Book of Mormon promises the readers of that volume that, “if ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and deny not his power, then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot” (Moroni 10:33).

- “Mormons believe eternal life must be earned,” Decker asserts, “and thus they can never be assured of its possession” (p. 348). Accordingly, he implies, their position contrasts sharply with that of true, biblical Christianity.

Decker’s assertion falls into two parts, both highly misleading. With regard to the first, that “Mormons believe eternal life must be earned,” a statement made at a general conference of the Church by Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve

96 Compare Doctrine and Covenants 38:4; 45:3–5; 76:69.
Apostles and published in the official monthly magazine of the Church, seems relevant:

Man unquestionably has impressive powers and can bring to pass great things by tireless efforts and indomitable will. But after all our obedience and good works, we cannot be saved from the effect of our sins without the grace extended by the atonement of Jesus Christ. . . .

. . . Man cannot earn his own salvation.97

Is that clear enough? And, once again, there can be no question of this being simply a new doctrinal pose, designed to make Latter-day Saints look more like Protestants. Consider what Orson Pratt, one of the original members of the Quorum of the Twelve, had to say back in 1848:

Man, having once become guilty, could not atone for his own sins, and escape the punishment of the law, though he should ever afterwards strictly keep the law; for, “By the works of the law,” or, by obedience to the law, “NO FLESH CAN BE JUSTIFIED.” If a sinner, after having once transgressed the law, could purchase forgiveness by ever afterwards keeping the law, then there would have been no need of the atonement made by Christ. If the demands of justice could have been satisfied, and pardon granted, through repentance and good works, then the sufferings and death of Christ would have been entirely unnecessary. But if Christ had not suffered on our behalf, our faith, repentance, baptisms, and every other work, would have been utterly useless and in vain. Works, independently of Christ, would not atone even for the least sin.98

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98 Orson Pratt, The Kingdom of God, Part II (Liverpool: James, 1848), 3–4, italics and capitalization in the original.
In the second part of Decker’s statement, he alleges that Latter-day Saints are out of harmony with Christianity because they can supposedly never, in this life, have perfect assurance of their salvation. Much could be said in reply to this claim, but I shall allow a spokesman for the world’s roughly 150 million Eastern Orthodox Christians to respond. First, he quotes a typical fundamentalist Protestant assertion:

“I thank God for the blessed doctrine of assurance. I know that I am saved and am going to heaven.”

You may thank God for such a doctrine, but the fact remains that it is absolutely unscriptural. Scripture clearly teaches that it is possible for a believer to fall away through sin or unbelief and forfeit his salvation. St. Paul warns: “Let him who thinks he stands take care lest he fall” (I Cor. 10:12). He uses the example of the Israelites who passed through the Red Sea with Moses, and yet later fell away and were punished, as a warning to Christians. The Book of Hebrews uses the same example and warns, “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any one of you an evil heart of unbelief, departing from the living God” (Heb. 3:12). Our eternal salvation depends on our perseverance in Christ: “For we are made partakers in Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end” (Heb. 3:14).

St. Paul did not consider himself to have attained “eternal security” but considered it necessary to keep pressing for the goal of the resurrection (cf. Phil. 3:9–14). He disciplined his body so that after preaching to others, he might not be cast away himself (cf. I Cor. 9:27). Christian salvation does not depend on just one instance of faith; it demands a daily walk of repentance and continuing trust in Christ. Otherwise it will be for us as it was for those whom Peter addressed: “For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have
known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them” (II Pet. 2:20–1). Clearly, then, it is possible to know Christ and then fall away. If this is so, how can we know “I am saved”? It is possible that any one of us might fall away. The only insurance against it is continual, daily trust in Christ and struggle against sin. Let us remember the words of Jesus: “Not everyone who says to me Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he that does the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 7:21). We must, as Peter says, “strive to make our calling and election sure” (II Pet. 1:10).

Decker’s Demonization of the Temple

On 5 October 1884, George Q. Cannon, counselor to President John Taylor, explained to his conference audience that

Every temple that we build excites additional hatred, increases the volume of opposition, the volume of hostility and the threatenings of the wicked. Every temple that we have thus far completed—and every temple of which we lay the foundation—has been another testimony in favor of God and has brought strength to the people of God in enlisting the hosts in the eternal world upon our side; but at the same time there has been stirred up, from the very depths of hell, all the damned.

Satan and his legions unite with their agents upon the earth in an endeavor to destroy this work and to do everything in their power to obliterate it from the face of the earth; hell is enaged at the work we are doing; hell is stirred up at that which we are accomplishing. Satan sees that which he dreads, . . . and seeing this he is determined to exert every power, every influence that

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he can muster for the purpose of preventing the spread and growth of this work.100

President Brigham Young agreed. Encouraging his listeners to continue in their efforts to build the Salt Lake Temple, he noted that "Some say, 'I do not like to do it, for we never began to build a Temple without the bells of hell beginning to ring.' " Well, he replied, "I want to hear them ring again."101

It is, therefore, hardly surprising that Ed Decker and his collaborators have been highly visible distractions at virtually every temple open house and dedication in recent memory.102 Nor is it surprising that Decker’s Complete Handbook devotes many of its pages to assaulting Latter-day Saint temple worship.103 Decker has even created a new and exotic breed of religionist, the “temple Mormon.”104 Many people will no doubt be surprised to learn that they belong to “a secret circle of Mormon elite called ‘Temple Mormons.’”105 In my Church experience on four continents, I have never heard that phrase used by Latter-day Saints. But I suppose it serves his intent to create distance, to foster alienation, and to label Mormons as “the other.”106 Let’s look briefly at some of the other gambits he uses to achieve his end:

• “The pagan, fertility connotations of the LDS temple rites are,” allows Decker, “well-concealed” (p. 177). No kidding! (They are nonexistent.)

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100 JD 25:326.
101 JD 8:355.
102 His fellow anti-Mormons Jerald and Sandra Tanner sharply criticize a few of Decker’s more extreme assaults on the temple in their books The Lucifer-God Doctrine [A] and The Lucifer-God Doctrine [B].
103 I will not take Decker’s bait and join him in public discussion of temple ceremonies that I hold sacred. However, I can categorically state that at least two of his disclosures about contemporary Latter-day Saint temple worship are simply, factually, untrue. He should, perhaps, be wary of depending for his information upon people who admittedly violate their own solemn promises.
105 Hunt and Decker, Unmasking Mormonism, 31.
106 As does Hank Hanegraaff’s cryptic and somewhat frightening remark, in his “Foreword,” that Latter-day Saint temple rituals are “shrouded” in “ferocious secrecy” (p. 7).
Decker cites as a strong parallel to pagan rites the fact that, in Latter-day Saint temples, worshipers remove "profane (worldly) clothing" and receive a "ceremonial washing and anointing" (p. 178). It is true that Latter-day Saint worshipers do just this, and their actions find remarkable parallel not only among ancient pagans but in ancient Christian practice. Why does Decker's brand of Christianity not do the same?

"Mormon people continue to trust more in their temple than they do in the true and living God, Jesus Christ" (p. 185). But this is nonsense. It is rather like saying that someone trusts more in the scriptures than in God.

Decker represents Mormons as believing, because of their work for the dead in the temples, that everybody gets a second chance after death (p. 215). But this is, of course, contrary to the teaching of both the Bible and the Book of Mormon (e.g., Alma 34:33–35). The trouble is that it is likewise contrary to the authentic teachings of the Latter-day Saints. In Mormon theology, everybody gets a fair chance to hear the gospel, and to accept it or reject it. Those who do not get this opportunity while in mortal life will receive it in the life to come. There is no "second chance." (In fundamentalist Protestantism, by contrast, as I have often heard and seen it explained, people who fail to accept Jesus as their savior simply go to Hell and fry there for eternity. This includes those, like medieval Chinese peasants and ancient Babylonians and many modern tribesmen, who never accepted the gospel for the simple reason that they never once heard it mentioned.)

"It is . . . important to note," says Decker, "that no Christian temples are ever mentioned in the New Testament (i.e., temples built especially by Christians for rituals as part of the worship of God)" (p. 394). But, of course, it is also important to note (in order to understand how properly to evaluate Decker's argument) that there is extraordinarily little evidence for Christian buildings

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of any kind until after the time of Constantine in the fourth century A.D. 108

**Decker’s Luciferian Obsession**

- “Many Mormons do not know precisely what to make of Lucifer” (p. 276), says Decker, attempting to impose on them a perplexity that, I am quite confident, even he does not feel. He rightly points out that Doctrine and Covenants 93 speaks about Jesus. But then, noting that 93:25 is actually talking about Satan, he preposterously claims that Mormons confuse the Savior with Lucifer (pp. 39-40; cf. 36). It is just as if someone were to observe that Matthew 4 is about Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness and then, noting that Satan is also mentioned several times in the chapter, were to contend that early Christians confused Jesus with the devil. Is this serious writing?

- Hank Hanegraaff sounds a popular contemporary anti-Mormon theme when he asserts in his “Foreword” to the *Handbook* that “Christ, according to Mormon theology, has the dubious distinction of being Lucifer’s spirit-brother.” 109 But, as any serious student of Latter-day Saint doctrine would have known, this is no distinction at all. Mormons believe that all of the spirits born to the Father are brothers and sisters, including every human being who has ever lived and every angel, whether good or bad.

Decker naturally professes to be highly indignant at this: “To say that Lucifer was a son of God in the same manner as is Jesus is once more only the prattling of arrogant liars who instruct their followers in their own ignorance of Scripture” (p. 276). Of course, Mormons do not say that Jesus is the Son of God in exactly and only the sense in which Lucifer is. Mormon scripture is replete with descriptions of Jesus as the “Only Begotten Son of God in the flesh.” But one has only to glance over such passages as Job 1:6 and 2:1, where Satan is numbered among the “sons of

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God," to realize that he can very easily be reckoned, biblically, to be, in some sense at least, the brother of Jesus.

To charge Mormons accusingly with the belief that "Christ is the spirit brother of Lucifer," is an attempt to shock Evangelicals who don’t know what the Bible actually teaches. It is a verbal form of "yellow journalism," where a truth is intentionally and repeatedly phrased so that recipients will automatically reject it rather than investigate and accept it. By intent Evangelicals who use this phrase do not explain the Latter-day Saint teaching on the subject, nor examine its scriptural basis—they only assert that Mormons believe in a "different Jesus" because the Mormon Jesus is the "spirit brother of Lucifer."\(^{110}\)

### Miscellaneous Theological Mistakes

- Ed Decker is a master of the art of war against straw men. For example, based upon his own misreading of the text, Decker mocks Ether 9:28–34 as "the Ballad of the Cowboy Serpents" (pp. 363–64). He loves to draw highly questionable implications from Latter-day Saint beliefs and then to attribute his own inferences to the Mormons. He sets the limits of what can be changed in Mormonism and what cannot. He forces his own narrow fundamentalism on Mormons and then condemns them when they do not behave the way he demands that they should (as at pp. 340, 389, 396).\(^{111}\) On page 374, he finds "much confusion" in Mormon thinking about basic issues—but the "confusion" seems, rather, to be his. Decker is fond of placing in Mormon mouths doctrines that they would never accept, and routinely takes past speculation as official doctrine in order to do so (as at p. 290). For example, he announces to his readers that, "By LDS

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\(^{111}\) On page 396, he invites his readers to "imagine the intense shock" felt by devout Latter-day Saints when confronted with supposedly disturbing changes in their supposedly immutable doctrine and practices. He offers no evidence whatever that any informed Mormon ever reacted in such a way.
Decker, *Decker's Handbook on Mormonism* (Peterson) 87

standards, [the Holy Ghost] really can’t be any kind of god since he doesn’t have a physical body, but is only a spirit. This Holy Ghost cannot really regenerate or sanctify us, neither is he omniscient or omnipresent” (p. 56). Why does he fail to quote any Latter-day Saints saying these things? Wouldn’t his case be stronger if he did? But, of course, he can’t, since Latter-day Saints don’t believe any such thing.

- “Mormons . . . believe,” alleges Decker, in an evident attempt to make them look like sorcerers, “that they can command angels to come and minister unto them. They believe this is not only their privilege (through the power of the priesthood), but it is even a litmus test for the truth of the LDS gospel.” He then proceeds to cite, as his sole support for this accusation, a statement from Bruce R. McConkie that says nothing of the kind (p. 284).

- Decker tells his readers that “the LDS god” resides upon a planet near a sun or star named “Kolob” (p. 263; cf. 274). But Latter-day Saint scripture seems to know nothing about any such planet. Indeed, Decker himself forgets it on page 268 when, while demeaning Latter-day Saint beliefs by the use of science fiction language, he represents “the LDS god” as journeying to earth “from the star base Kolob” itself. 112 And how, unless he himself is in orbit out there to watch, can Decker possibly know that “the LDS god rarely leaves his planet” (p. 263)?

- On page 327, Decker announces that the Latter-day Saint notion of self-existent matter is philosophically incoherent. He would be wise, though, to avoid philosophy, since he manifestly knows little about it. 113 The eminent Nobel laureate British philosopher and logician Bertrand Russell certainly would not have agreed with Decker:

> If everything must have a cause, then God must have a cause. If there can be anything without a cause, it may just as well be the world as God, so that there cannot be any validity in that argument. It is exactly of the same

112 On page 414, one Mormon teaching is described as “almost-science-fiction.” On page 299, he shifts literary genres and says that certain Mormon practices are “worthy of a Tom Clancy novel.”

113 On pages 364–65. Decker unwittingly reveals that he has no very secure idea what a syllogism is.
nature as the Hindu’s view, that the world rested upon an elephant and the elephant rested upon a tortoise; and when they said, “How about the tortoise?” the Indian said, “Suppose we change the subject.” The argument is really no better than that. There is no reason why the world could not have come into being without a cause; nor, on the other hand, is there any reason why it should not have always existed. There is no reason to suppose that the world had a beginning at all. The idea that things must have a beginning is really due to the poverty of our imagination.\footnote{Bertrand Russell, Why I Am Not a Christian, and Other Essays on Religion and Related Subjects, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957), 6–7. One need not agree with Lord Russell on this or other points. (I rarely agree with him.) I cite him to show that Decker’s confident philosophical judgment is not at all beyond dispute.}

- “Mormons will,” says Decker, “cite 1 Corinthians 15:29 as their sole scriptural warrant for all their effort [in performing baptisms for the dead]” (p. 68). Not so. The Latter-day Saint practice of performing vicarious baptisms rests on modern revelation from God. Paul’s reference to baptism for the dead is merely a useful bit of evidence that Joseph Smith has restored something once known to ancient Christians but forgotten by most of their theological heirs. Unlike fundamentalist Protestants, we do not utterly depend on ancient documents from dead prophets for our faith.

- Mormons are “polytheists” (p. 236), according to Decker. But Decker’s own explanation of the Trinity (pp. 405–10) would abundantly justify the suspicion held, for example, by many Muslims that mainstream Christianity itself is polytheistic (not to mention logically incoherent).

- Decker takes a certain perverse satisfaction—or professes to, anyway—in the thought that some Latter-day Saints may regard him as a “son of perdition” (pp. 51, 379). He furthermore claims that Latter-day Saints believe that all who were once “devout temple Mormons” and then, having lost their testimonies for one reason or another, have become fundamentalist Protestants, are “sons of perdition” (pp. 232, 412). But he is wrong. He himself quotes
Bruce R. McConkie as defining "sons of perdition" as "those in this life who gain a perfect knowledge of the divinity of the gospel cause, a knowledge that comes only by revelation from the Holy Ghost" (p. 378). "To commit this unpardonable crime," says Elder McConkie in another passage quoted by Decker: "a man must receive the gospel, [and] gain from the Holy Ghost by revelation the absolute knowledge of the divinity of Christ" (p. 411, emphasis in the original). Probably very few apostate Mormons qualify under this standard. Ed Decker almost certainly does not. His Handbook is incontestable evidence that he knows and understands very little about the restored gospel.

Indeed, in reading Decker's pretensions to the "elite" status of "son of perdition," I am reminded of an old poem:

Once in a saintly passion
I cried with desperate grief,
"O Lord, my heart is black with guile,
Of sinners I am chief."
Then stooped my guardian angel
And whispered from behind,
"Vanity, my little man,
You're nothing of the kind."\(^\text{115}\)

In order to widen the supposed chasm between Christianity and the beliefs of the Latter-day Saints, Decker alleges that, in Mormonism, the "unpardonable sin" is to accept Jesus and be born again (p. 412). This is flatly not true. Decker himself quotes Bruce R. McConkie (on p. 411) as saying that someone who commits the "unpardonable sin" effectively "commit[s] murder by assenting unto the Lord's death, that is, having a perfect knowledge of the truth he comes out in open rebellion and places himself in a position wherein he would have crucified Christ knowing perfectly the while that he was the Son of God. Christ is thus crucified afresh and put to open shame." And, on page 412, he quotes Joseph Smith, who says that, in order to commit the

\(^\text{115}\) James Thomson, "Once in a Saintly Passion" (1883). The poem is available (no doubt among many other places) in John Wilson Bowyer and John Lee Brooks, eds., *The Victorian Age: Prose, Poetry, and Drama*, 2nd ed. (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1954), 613. I am grateful to my colleague Prof. Richard H. Cracroft for locating this half-remembered item from my youth.
“unpardonable sin,” a man “has got to say that the sun does not shine while he sees it; he has got to deny Jesus Christ when the heavens have been opened unto him.” Does any of this sound like a description of accepting Jesus and being born again?

**Mischaracterizations of Mormon Scripture**

Ed Decker lacks a deep or extensive knowledge of Latter-day Saint scripture. Consider this instance: “There is an old Mormon adage which I remember from my years in the church that goes something like this: ‘Adam fell that men might be, and men are that they might have joy’ ” (p. 31). Does he really not know that this is not merely a venerable proverb, an old “adage,” but a direct quotation of 2 Nephi 2:25, one of the most famous and beloved verses in the entire Mormon canon?

But, once again, one can only wish that Decker’s errors were generally so harmless. His abuse of Latter-day Saint canonical texts betrays itself at every point. I offer only a few examples.

**Changes in Mormon Scripture**

- Seeking to portray the Church as constantly in flux and unstable, Decker tells his readers that, though the so-called “Lectures on Faith” have long since been removed from the Doctrine and Covenants, they once “were canonized as scripture” (pp. 168–69). But, as an introductory statement in the 1921 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants correctly pointed out, “they were never presented to nor accepted by the Church as being otherwise than theological lectures or lessons.”116

- On page 109, Decker points to the changes that have been made in the Book of Mormon text since its first edition, and finds them fatal to “the contention by Joseph Smith himself . . . that the golden plates were supposedly translated letter-by-letter ‘by the power of God’ ” (emphasis in the original).117 He cites as his source for this claim *Documentary History of the Church* 1:54–55,

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117 The changes in the text of the Book of Mormon also irritate Hank Hanegraaff; see his “Foreword,” 6.
which does, in fact, contain the phrase “by the power of God” but makes absolutely no mention of any supposedly mechanical “letter-by-letter” translation process. Decker has apparently invented *that* as a weapon against Mormon claims.118

- The changes in the Book of Mormon text that Decker cites—and he has apparently selected his very best—are a remarkably poor lot. Obvious typographical errors like the omission of a “not” in the 1830 version of 2 Nephi 12:9 (p. 110), and manifest dictation mistakes like “wrecked” for “racked” (pp. 111–12) and “arrest” for “wrest” (p. 112), hardly make the case he claims. And there is scarcely a Latter-day Saint scholar anywhere who would deny that Joseph Smith was a poorly educated boy of the early nineteenth century. So what is the point of bringing up the 1830 edition’s use of “arriven” for “arrived” (p. 112)?

- Decker correctly notes the fact that Alma 32:30 is much longer in modern editions of the Book of Mormon than it was in the original 1830 edition (p. 111). But he is irresponsible when he encourages his readers to conclude that the change is evidence of fraud. It is obvious, rather, that the history of the verse is a clear case of the common scribal error known as *homeoteleuton* (or, alternatively, *homeoarcton*), long familiar to students of the New Testament. What happens is simply that the scribe’s eye skips from one word or phrase (in this instance, “beginneth to grow”) to another, identical one occurring further along, and the scribe thereupon inadvertently omits the intervening material.119

- On pages 112–13, Decker mocks Alma 46:19, which, in modern editions, describes captain Moroni as having gone forth “among the people, waving the rent part of his garment in the air.” Correctly, Decker points out that the 1830 edition had him merely “waving the rent of his garment,” which is certainly

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118 Decker also alludes to the changes made in the text of the Doctrine and Covenants (p. 167). “How,” demands Decker on page 176, “can you edit or add to a revelation supposedly from the Lord?” Well, if you have the Lord’s authority to do so, there seems to be no problem at all. Decker simply asserts that the Prophet had no such authority. However, nobody is obliged to accept his assertion.

strange English.\textsuperscript{120} (Incomprehensibly, though, Decker claims that it “reflects an error in logic.”) But Decker seems not to realize that the verse as rendered in the 1830 edition represents perfectly acceptable Hebrew usage—which, since the Book of Mormon claims to have been written originally by ancient Hebrews, is very interesting indeed. “Thus, the ‘error’ that [Decker sees] as evidence of fraud [is] really a Hebraism that [is] evidence for the Book of Mormon.”\textsuperscript{121} This information has been available for several years.

Ironically, Decker’s Complete Handbook itself suffers from a distressing number of typographical errors and other infelicities. We read, for instance, of the Christian apologist “Aristedes” (p. 45, for “Aristides”) and of the ancient philosopher “Celsus the Epicurian” (p. 46, meaning “Epicurean”), and learn that, “for a Mormon, to be labeled an apostate is perhaps the worse [sic] curse that could be put upon a living person” (p. 50). And “Davis Bitton” I know, but who is the Latter-day Saint scholar “David Britton,” mentioned on page 372? Furthermore, Decker’s impressive Greek phrase \textit{tou nomon} (supposedly cited from Matthew 5:18 at pp. 75, 77–78) is grammatically impossible (and does not actually occur in Matthew 5:18, or anywhere else in the New Testament).\textsuperscript{122} Most intriguingly, when he quotes Doctrine

\textsuperscript{120} Some adjectives in English, though, are commonly used as if they were themselves nouns or substantives, or are commonly taken to imply nouns. We routinely speak, for example, of “the poor,” “the wealthy,” and “the wounded,” referring to poor, wealthy, and wounded people.


\textsuperscript{122} I don’t know if others will be as bothered as I was by the fact that Decker almost always refers to Bruce R. McConkie’s \textit{Mormon Doctrine} as, merely, “\textit{Doctrine}” (see, for instance, p. 19). And when, referring to Moses 6:53–57, Decker denounces it as “a tortured use of the English language to say that ‘conceived in sin’ means that ‘sin conceiveth in their hearts’ ” (p. 146), he is right. But since it is Decker himself who makes that equation, and not the book of Moses, there is little doubt who is doing the torturing.
and Covenants 128:20 on page 35, in place of the original’s “the wilderness of Fayette, Seneca county” Decker’s version reads “the wilderness of Faith, Seance county.” Is this pure chance?123 And, instead of the early New York town of “Colesville,” Decker’s purported quotation gives us the sinister but mythical town of “Collusive.” I am unable to suggest an innocent explanation for such “typos.”

Purposed Errors in Mormon Scripture

- Decker repeats the venerable anti-Mormon claim that the Book of Mormon contradicts Latter-day Saint beliefs (pp. 356–58), but excuses himself on grounds of lack of time from presenting any real evidence or analysis to support his assertion.

- Decker ridicules the account given in 3 Nephi 11:14–15 of the people, at Christ’s invitation, coming forward to touch the wounds in his hands and feet. In a clear effort to make the story implausible, he informs his readers that “most LDS experts” estimate that “about a half-million people” participated in this experience (p. 252).124 He cites no source for this claim, and gives no evidence of having polled the “experts,” so one is at a loss to know how he came up with the figure—especially in view of the fact that the Book of Mormon itself numbers “the multitude” at “about two thousand and five hundred souls” (3 Nephi 17:25).

- Decker implies that the Book of Mormon contradicts the Bible because people are invited to touch the Savior in 3 Nephi 11:14–15, whereas in John 20:17 “Jesus discouraged Mary Magdalene from touching Him at all” (p. 252). But there is no contradiction whatever. Jesus “discouraged” Mary Magdalene because, as Decker puts it, he had “not yet ascended to [his]

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123 Or is it the very kind of attempted subliminal message of which Decker’s associate Loftes Tryk accuses the Mormons? See my review of Tryk’s The Best Kept Secrets in the Book of Mormon in Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 3 (1991): 231–60.

124 Even were this true, his mathematics would be hugely inaccurate. He says that, if each of the purported 500,000 people had taken thirty seconds to touch Jesus’ wounds, “it would have taken almost three days” (p. 252, emphasis in original). No, it would have required nearly 174 days. But one should be cautious of overliteralism in any event.
Father.” Evidently, though, Jesus made an initial ascension to the Father—not yet “the Ascension”—immediately after his conversation with Mary. In any event, later in the day there clearly remained no prohibition against “touching” him. For, that very evening, Jesus appeared in the midst of the disciples who were gathered in the upper room, and said, “Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have. And when he had thus spoken, he shewed them his hands and his feet” (Luke 24:39-40). Surely Decker knows this passage; it is a favorite Latter-day Saint missionary scripture. Moreover, only a few verses after the text Decker uses for his attack on the Book of Mormon, Jesus is depicted as having invited the apostle Thomas, about a week after the resurrection, to do precisely what the Nephites in the New World also did (John 20:26-29).

- Incidentally, although the King James Version of John 20:17 has Jesus command Mary Magdalene “Touch me not,” the meaning of the Greek μη μου ἄπνω is actually “Stop clinging to me.” Most modern translations of the Bible now reflect this. The New American Standard Bible, for instance, renders it in exactly those words. The New American Bible translates the phrase as “Stop holding on to me,” while the Revised English Bible, the Amplified Bible, and the New Jerusalem Bible offer “Do not cling to me.” Both the New International Version (beloved among conservative Protestants) and the New Revised Standard Version render John 20:17 as “Do not hold on to me.” Each of these renderings conveys well the implication of the original Greek present middle imperative, namely that Mary Magdalene was already “touching” or, better, “clinging” to the Savior and that he was simply asking her to let him go. There is not even the slightest hint, contrary to Decker, of some mysterious

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prohibition against merely “touching” the body of the resurrected Lord. What is more, these contemporary translations and the modern scholarship that supports them agree with Joseph Smith’s reading of John 20:17, provided more than 150 years ago: The Joseph Smith Translation corrected the King James Version’s “Touch me not” to “Hold me not.” It is precisely, astonishingly, right. How do Decker and his associates explain this?

- Writing of Ether 15:29–31, Decker informs his readers that Shiz’s struggle for breath after his beheading at the hands of Coriantumr “violates several biological realities” (p. 114). Unfortunately, though, Ed Decker’s grasp of “biological realities” is inadequate for the evaluation of the story. Dr. Gary Hadfield, professor of neuropathology at the Medical College of Virginia, Virginia Commonwealth University, whose knowledge of biology is adequate, has recently shown that the account of Shiz’s demise given in the Book of Mormon is entirely plausible.

- Decker asserts without real argument that the Gadianton robbers in the Book of Mormon were modeled on contemporary Masonry (pp. 210–11, 280). He fails to refute or even notice my extended argument against that claim, published and easily available since 1990.

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127 This argument, such as it is, has become rather popular recently. Hanegraaff, “Foreword,” 6, says the story is “silly.” John R. Farkas and David A. Reed also ridicule it as an “absurdity” in their disappointing *Mormonism: Changes, Contradictions, and Errors* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 152.


129 Like others who have advanced this antique claim, he recognizes the contradiction in claiming that Joseph Smith hated Freemasonry so much that he implicitly condemned it in his Book of Mormon, but loved it so much that he based his temple rituals on it (p. 211; cf. 280). Having noted the problem, he passes on unfazed.

• "What," demands Decker with reference to the word *adieu* in Jacob 7:27, "is a French word doing in a document supposedly written by a Hebrew in America around 421 B.C.? This is almost a millennium before French existed as a language!" (p. 113). How long must we put up with such nonsense? This absurd criticism has been blown away so many times, and has staggered to its feet again so often, that one begins to wonder if one has wandered, by mistake, into a Grade B zombie movie.131 The Book of Mormon claims to be a translation, folks; the word *adieu* was not on the Nephite plates, any more than the words *in the beginning* were in the original Hebrew of Genesis 1:1.

• Decker claims that Latter-day Saints continue to accept the book of Abraham despite "clear, unbiased scholarly tests that prove the Book of Abraham to be a complete fraud" (p. 103; cf. 104), but he neither describes these supposed tests nor troubles himself either to explain just how they have proven the book to be "a complete fraud" or what, precisely, that would entail.

• Decker ridicules the Prophet for having supposedly derived seventy-six words in the book of Abraham from a single Egyptian character (p. 104)—though he never bothers to provide any evidence that the manuscript to which he refers was actually the source of the book of Abraham.

**Decker’s Abuse of the Bible and Ancient History**

Decker is given to offering up sometimes lengthy lists of irrelevant scriptures (as at pp. 75–76), which, in ways that are entirely opaque to me, are supposed to disprove Latter-day Saint claims.132 Presumably he interprets them differently than we do,

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131 I have already addressed this truly phony issue in Peterson, “Chattanooga Cheapshot,” 58–60.

132 Compare page 81, where the relevance of 2 Samuel 22:31 to the proposition that "the Bible ... claims that it cannot be permanently altered" is not at all evident. And Matthew 5:18, cited on page 82 to show that the text of the Hebrew Bible has been perfectly preserved, seems in context to be talking about something else altogether. Besides, do even fundamentalist Protestant scholars really believe that the textual history of the Bible is completely without problems? On the same page, in an astonishing case of misapplied metaphor, Decker takes the declaration of Hebrews 4:12 that "the word of God is quick" to mean that the Bible is actually, in some sense, alive. Thus, if anybody had actually
and imagines that this not-very-interesting autobiographical fact shows us to be wrong. He also fundamentally misunderstands the ancient world out of which the Bible and Christianity emerged. Herewith a few examples, chosen from many that could have been furnished:

**Bibliolatry**

- In connection with his assault on Joseph Smith, Decker announces, correctly, that “Christianity stands or falls on the character of Jesus—not on the strengths or flaws of Calvin or Luther” (p. 366). But he has chosen the wrong people for comparison. Isn’t it obvious that the foundations of Christianity would be weakened if we could demonstrate that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were dishonest? Early Christianity, like Mormonism, was composed of human beings. Its leaders were human. Human beings wrote its scriptures, recorded its miracles, made its decisions. Because the primitive church exists only in the far distant past, there is a tendency among many to idealize it, to treat it as if it were some Platonic archetype untouched by human hands.

- “The Mormon church,” Decker complains, “has taken the very document of God by which they must be judged and have instead become its judge” (p. 75). But he misunderstands the early history of the scriptural canon. The Christian church existed before there was a New Testament or a Christian Bible, and, thus, was the “judge” of scripture from the very first. This is how a spokesman for Eastern Orthodox Christianity puts the matter:

  The Bible never has been and never can be “alone.” It was the Orthodox Catholic Church that finally decided what books belonged in the Bible and what did not. In the era following the death of the Apostles, there were many books that claimed to be Apostolic Scripture. The Church decided what books were authentic and what were not, based on whether or
not those books conformed to the oral tradition she had received from the Apostles. Without the Church there would be no Bible.\textsuperscript{133}

- Decker assures his audience that “No tampering has been successful in permanently altering the biblical text” (p. 79). But how would he, could he, possibly know? Presumably, if the text had been “permanently” altered, any evidence of such alteration would have disappeared.

**Mingled with Scripture**

- “Mormons deny the historic Christian doctrine of original sin” (p. 145), says Decker, and he places this concept “at the very core of Christian theology” (p. 315). But he is wrong to do so, for it developed quite late in Christian thought, and is not biblical.\textsuperscript{134}

- According to Decker, “the biblical God . . . made the entire universe from nothing” (p. 369).\textsuperscript{135} This is, however, not true. It is not until the second half of the second century after Christ that a belief in creation from nothing begins to emerge within Christianity. Mainstream modern scholarship cannot locate the notion in the Bible.\textsuperscript{136}

- Decker tells his readers that “The biblical God is by definition (both scriptural and philosophical)” the “unmoved Mover” (p. 328). If Ed Decker can locate any passage in the Bible where God is “defined” as the “unmoved Mover,” I will write a personal check for a thousand dollars to Ex-Mormons for

\textsuperscript{133} O’Callaghan, *An Eastern Orthodox Response to Evangelical Claims*, 12. For comparable Roman Catholic statements, see Peterson and Ricks, *Offenders for a Word*, 122–23.

\textsuperscript{134} See the discussion and further references supplied by Peterson and Ricks, *Offenders for a Word*, 133–37. Stendahl, *Final Account*, 10, observes that St. Augustine, in some ways the inventor of the doctrine of original sin, was able to find it in Romans 5 only because he based his thinking on a mistranslation of the relevant passage.

\textsuperscript{135} He cites Genesis 1:1–2 and Hebrews 11:3 in support of his pronouncement, but neither passage is relevant.

\textsuperscript{136} See the discussion and references given by Peterson and Ricks, *Offenders for a Word*, 95–96; add to these references B. R. Tilghman, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 44 n. 10.
Jesus. Since I am serenely confident that he will never be able to do it, I am pleased that he provides so unmistakable a demonstration that his view of God rests on the philosophies of men, rather than scripture.

**An Apostate Denies the Apostasy**

- Decker maintains, on page 343, that “the Mormon doctrine of a great apostasy contradicts the Bible where Jesus said that He would be ‘with you alway, even unto the end of the world’ (Matthew 28:20) and that ‘upon this rock will I build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it’ (Matthew 16:18).”

I’ll take the two cited scriptures in order. Matthew 28:20 features the Savior promising his disciples that he would be with them “unto the end of the αἰών.” The King James Version of the Bible renders αἰών as “world,” but this is not necessarily correct. Our word “eon” or “aeon” comes from αἰών, and it is not surprising, therefore, that the word’s meanings include “lifetime,” “age,” “generation,” “era,” “epoch,” and “period.” Thus a Latter-day Saint could easily interpret Jesus’s promise as extending “to the end of the age” (as many if not most contemporary translations do) or, even, “to the end of the dispensation.” Matthew 28:20 definitely does not rule out the possibility of a “great apostasy.” In fact, if this verse is problematic for anybody, it would seem to be problematic for those who, like Decker, want to use it to rule out the possibility of a massive apostasy of the early church.

Those who want to use Matthew 16:18 as a prooftext against the Latter-day Saint teaching of a universal apostasy like to take the word “Hell” in the King James phrase “the gates of Hell” in

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138 See, for instance, the New American Standard Bible, the New International Version, the Amplified Bible, the New American Bible, and the New Revised Standard Version.

139 I might parenthetically add that the fact of the apostasy seems to me, as a historian, utterly obvious, and one of the strongest evidences for the calling of the Prophet Joseph Smith.
a typically fundamentalist Protestant sense, decked out with all the conventional paraphernalia of diabolical torture. But there is no justification in the text for doing so. The Greek word underlying “Hell” is “Hades.” Now, anyone who knows anything about ancient Greek concepts surely knows that Hades is not Hell, but simply the general destination of (all) the dead. It is precisely equivalent to the Hebrew “Sheol,” and means something like “the spirit world.” It is not evil, nor is it, as a whole, under the control of evil. So the promise is not that the powers of evil will not overcome the Church, since the spirit world is all-inclusive and, thus, morally neutral, but that the powers of death will not overcome the Church. And this promise is wholly appropriate to the context of Matthew 16:18, which prominently features the granting of priesthood sealing keys to Peter. Thus, far from being an argument against Mormon belief in the Great Apostasy, Matthew 16 is a charter for the great work of redeeming the dead.

“History Is Bunk!”

- Decker asserts without evidence that Latter-day Saints hold the Bible to be “finally only a human book, not a divine book,” “merely a fallible, human book” (p. 80, emphasis in the original). It would have been helpful if he had supplied some evidence for this false claim. In any event, his stark opposition of “human” to “divine” grossly mischaracterizes the Bible, which is, precisely, a record of interactions between the “human” and the “divine.”

- Decker mocks the Latter-day Saint belief that truth may be had through prayer. He prefers the “objective truth” to be found in the Bible (p. 368). But how does he know that the Bible is true? Because it says it is? Then how is he to prefer it to the Qur’ān, which makes similar claims, or to the principal Upanishads? As any competent student of geometry knows, every system of belief ultimately rests upon axioms or propositions that cannot be justified from within the system.

- Decker claims that Mormons have a false notion of God. In the Hebrew Bible, he observes, the names Yahweh and Elohim refer to the same personage, and not, as Mormons would tend to think, to two different persons (pp. 247–48). However, recent bib-
lical scholarship strongly suggests that Yahweh and El or Elohim were originally separate beings, who were collapsed into one only relatively late.\textsuperscript{140} Thus, it would seem, the revelations given to Joseph Smith miraculously restored to the world an authentically ancient Israelite understanding of the Father and the Son.

- Contrary to Decker, Ashtoreth was \textit{not} the consort of Baal in Canaanite mythology, and “Asherah” (the name of Baal’s consort) is not the plural of “Ashtoreth.” Furthermore, “Baal” does not mean “Sun” (for these assertions, see pp. 63–64).

- Decker claims that the fact that, in Latter-day Saint conception, God is corporeal and anthropomorphic “makes the LDS deity much more akin to the many pagan idols from all over the world than it does to the God of Christianity” (p. 244). But it is ridiculous for Decker to attempt to equate “the Mormon god” with the false deity Baal merely because some Canaanites may have thought of Baal anthropomorphically (see pp. 64–65). The difference between Baal and Jehovah certainly did not center in the details of their anatomy. There is an abundance of biblical and extrabiblical evidence to indicate that early Jews and Christians of the biblical period and beyond commonly believed God to be corporeal. I shall mention here only a very recently available text from the Dead Sea Scrolls: \textit{Sapiential Work A} (4Q416 frg. 1, line 17) seems to describe God as “a creature of flesh.”\textsuperscript{141}

- Decker mocks Latter-day Saints for pointing to the lost book of Jasher mentioned in Joshua 10:13, and then failing to include in their canon the \textit{Book of Jasher} that is sold in many Mormon bookstores (p. 83). He does not explain why we are

\textsuperscript{140} For two quite accessible examples of this recent scholarship, see Margaret Barker, \textit{The Great Angel: A Study of Israel’s Second God} (Louisville: Knox, 1992); Mark S. Smith, \textit{The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel} (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1990). Larry Hurtado’s \textit{One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism} (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), is perhaps also relevant in this context.

\textsuperscript{141} I am using the translation of Professor Torleif Elgvin, of the Norwegian Lutheran School of Theology, as given in his yet-to-be-published paper, “Early Essene Eschatology: Judgment and Salvation according to Sapiential Work A.” (I thank Dr. Alan C. Ashton for first bringing this passage to my attention.) For a sampling of other references, see Peterson and Ricks, \textit{Offenders for a Word}, 74–75.
obliged to canonize a medieval forgery simply because it borrows the name of a lost ancient book of scripture.

- Decker cites the reference, in 2 Chronicles 9:29, to the lost "book of Nathan the prophet," and "the prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite," and the record of "the visions of Iddo the seer." "Nowhere," he asserts, "are these books called inspired writing or God's Word" (p. 84). Well. If they are cited with implicit approval by the author of a biblical book, and are described using such terms as "prophet," "prophecy," and "visions," just what is it that Decker wants in order to certify them as "inspired"?

- Decker sets out the rule that all revelations must agree with what is already written in the Bible (p. 121). "Since God cannot change (Malachi 3:6), His Word cannot contradict itself. The Old Testament must judge the New, and the entire Bible must judge any subsequent revelation" (p. 342; cf. 343). Really? Is there anything, honestly, in the Old Testament that would suggest that we should believe in a metaphysical Trinity, "neither confusing the Persons nor dividing the Substance" thereof? Isn't that doctrine a clear and unmistakable innovation? (Ask a devout and knowledgeable Jew.) Are Christians, or even Christian Jews, obliged to keep the Passover? Yet the narratives of the institution of the Passover clearly say that it should be kept "for ever."¹⁴² Do fundamentalist Protestants strictly observe the Sabbath? No, they do not. Do they think that Jewish converts to Christianity must keep the Sabbath or fall under divine condemnation? No, they cannot, for salvation is by grace alone, and not by works. Yet Exodus 31:16–17 indisputably says that the Sabbath is "a perpetual covenant" and "a sign between [the Lord] and the children of Israel for ever." And is there anything in the Old Testament¹⁴³ that would even suggest to an unbiased reader that "circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing" (1 Corinthians 7:19)? Or that "in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision" (Galatians 5:6)? As is well known, the apostle Paul argued against the need for circumcision. Yet in Genesis 17:13, God calls circumcision "an everlasting covenant." Finally, doesn't the important revelation given to Peter in Acts 10:9–18, in

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¹⁴² At, among other passages, Exodus 12:14, 17, 24.
which he is divinely commanded to eat “unclean” things (and, therefore, by extension, to take the gospel to the previously “unclean” Gentiles) directly and dramatically contradict the prohibitions of Leviticus 11:2–47? (Certainly Peter thought so. That is the underlying assumption of the whole episode.) It would seem, therefore, that Decker’s rule that all revelations must agree with what is already written was unknown to the early Christians.

- Decker contrasts the Latter-day Saint belief in the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost with the story in Acts 2 of the Holy Ghost falling upon the apostles and others “without anyone touching them” (pp. 272–73). Yet surely even he knows, from his two decades as a “temple Mormon,” that Latter-day Saints routinely distinguish between “the gift of the Holy Ghost,” the right to the Holy Ghost’s constant companionship which is conferred by the laying on of hands, and particular instances of the Holy Ghost falling upon people (whether members or non-members of the Church). Thus, the contradiction that he claims to find does not exist in Latter-day Saint thinking.

- With regard to I Corinthians 15:29, Decker claims that “there is ample evidence that there was a pagan cult in the city of Corinth familiar to the readers of Paul’s epistle. This cult did baptize for the dead” (p. 69). It would have been really nice to have seen at least one tiny little bit of this “ample evidence,” since nobody else seems to have heard of it. The prominent Lutheran scholar Krister Stendahl summarizes the actual situation quite well: “The text seems to speak plainly enough about a practice within the Church of vicarious baptism for the dead. This is the view of most contemporary critical exegeses.”

- Commenting on the interest in ancient Gnosticism among some Latter-day Saint scholars, Decker exclaims that “the Nag Hammadi community was far from Christianity. They were Gnostics!” (p. 217). But modern scholars routinely refer to the ancient Gnostics as Christians. (Decker has some sort of standard for determining who is Christian and who is not [see p. 417]. He

144 On page 218, Decker claims that it was Gnostics who were practicing baptism for the dead.
146 See Peterson and Ricks, Offenders for a Word, 52–53.
never makes it explicit, for examination, nor does he ever explain where he received his authority to pronounce unilateral judgment on the matter.)

- Decker dismisses the Latter-day Saint teaching that “men must experience evil in order to prize the good” as a “peculiar, Gnostic doctrine” (p. 146). However, this teaching is neither peculiarly, nor uniquely, nor even particularly, Gnostic.

**Fantastic Fictory**

Decker claims that “hundreds of thousands” of Latter-day Saints have left Mormonism for his fundamentalist Protestant form of Christianity (p. 90). As usual, he cites no evidence for this. In fact, despite Ed Decker’s many years of campaigning against it, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints continues to grow at an astonishing rate. (Or, as he himself puts it, “Mormonism is still ravaging souls and sending people to hell by the millions” [p. 137].) Church membership has roughly doubled since Decker’s 1976 apostasy.

This has to be disconcerting to him. At least, it should be... if Decker’s true aim is to combat Mormonism. But his astonishing career in what can only be called professional religious bigotry shows him to be nothing if not resilient. No matter how many times he has been caught telling transparent lies, no matter how badly he fails in his proclaimed mission, he continues to flourish.

I have been told of an occasion, some years ago, when Ed Decker went out to a restaurant with several Latter-day Saints. One of the Mormons, a fairly well-known defender of the Church, sat uncharacteristically silent throughout the lunch, listening. At the end, when they were all getting up from the table and putting on

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147 In the past, Decker has boasted of preventing literally millions of people from joining the Church in the first place. See Saints Alive in Jesus Newsletter (January 1990): 2. He repeated his boast during the 15 May 1990 broadcast of the Christian Research Institute’s program The Bible Answer Man (as I heard it on KANN, 1120 AM, Ogden), but withering criticisms obliged him to retract it as an innocent “error” in Saints Alive in Jesus Newsletter (July 1990): 2. Tanner and Tanner, Serious Charges against the Tanners, 29–33, offer a fascinating account of the incident, concluding that “the facts speak for themselves; a fabricated story has been created by Mr. Decker and it has been widely circulated throughout the land.”
their coats, he suddenly remarked, "Ed, you strike me as somebody who stays up at night wondering, not 'Is this right?', but 'Can I get away with this?'" Unfortunately, Decker's Complete Handbook bears out that unflattering assessment.

An acquaintance once warned the American circus impresario P. T. Barnum that the trickery in his "museum" was so obvious to everyone who entered that they would never come back. Of course they will, he famously replied. "There's a sucker born every minute." I find it very hard to quarrel with Mr. Barnum: A glossy half-page magazine advertisement for the Handbook praises its author as "one of today's most respected authorities on Mormonism."148 "What a great response we have had to this book!" reports a recent issue of Ed Decker's newsletter. "We can barely keep it in stock."149 Recently, though, I ran across a cartoon in which, standing next to a massive mainframe computer and in front of a blackboard covered with scribbled equations, a bearded scientist is shown talking to his secretary. "We'd better alert the press, Miss Marple," he says. "As it turns out, there's a sucker born every 0.6 minute." If the scientist's equations are correct, it is sadly conceivable that, in some circles, Decker's Complete Handbook on Mormonism will be a triumphant success.

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Reviewed by Frank F. Judd, Jr., and Terrence L. Szink

The Restoration of Israel in the Book of Mormon

Interaction of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints with the Jewish people in general, and with the state of Israel in particular, has been in the news for the past decade. With the construction of the BYU Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies, the Church signed an agreement with the state of Israel that students participating in the study abroad program would not proselyte in Israel. More recently, there has been concern over performing vicarious temple ordinances for victims of the Holocaust, which has led the Church to agree to cease such ordinances unless they are requested by direct relatives of the Holocaust victims. Therefore, the topic of *Mormons and Jews* is both important and timely.

*Mormons and Jews* attempts to illustrate the doctrines of the Book of Mormon and the attitudes and beliefs of early Latter-day Saints regarding the destiny of the house of Israel and the Jewish people. *Mormons and Jews* also contrasts the teachings of Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, Orson Hyde, and the Book of Mormon with other key Latter-day Saint leaders, and with the prevailing "triumphalism" and "anti-Judaic theology" (p. 33) of mainstream early nineteenth-century Christianity. However, in our opinion, the methodology employed in *Mormons and Jews* is not

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carried out in a way that lends confidence to the conclusions that Prof. Epperson reaches. In this review we will for the most part limit ourselves to the book’s treatment of Book of Mormon theology contained in chapter 2. Portions of Mormons and Jews which deal with the early history of the Church have been examined elsewhere.2

Presuppositions

Mormons and Jews asserts from the outset of chapter 2 that regardless of what “a reader believes about the origin of the Book of Mormon, the text itself can be considered as a self-contained literary unit, as a world in its own right” (p. 22). Without such an approach, it asserts, the critical reader “obscures attention to what one scholar [Lawrence Foster] has called ‘the fascinating question of the content and meaning’ ” (p. 22).3 Given this presupposition, Mormons and Jews rightly observes that “fidelity to context in interpretation means considering the Book of Mormon’s consistent focus on Jesus Christ” (p. 23). In spite of this observation, however, the explanations given by Mormons and Jews for this christological focus are not themselves contained in the Book of Mormon.

Mormons and Jews contends that “as editor of the book, Mormon has abundantly marbled into the text, both in its ante- and post-Christian chapters, veins of his own post-resurrection belief” (p. 23). It further says that “The unwary reader may be jarred by resulting anachronisms, including placing explicitly christological details and formulations in pre-Christian settings” (p. 23). The Book of Mormon, however, does not support this claim that Mormon contaminated his pre-Christian source material with his own Christian beliefs. Mormons and Jews attempts to support this idea not by citing the words of the prophet Mormon, nor any other person in the Book of Mormon, but by quoting Dr. James H. Charlesworth, a prestigious non-Latter-day Saint scholar.

in Bible, Pseudepigrapha, and Dead Sea Scrolls studies. Mormons and Jews says,

Like the pseudepigraphical writings with which it shares certain similarities, the Book of Mormon contains, according to one scholar [Charlesworth], "lengthy sections that look very Jewish and others that look peculiarly Christian. The Pseudepigrapha and the Book of Mormon preserve some passages that prophecy [sic] the future coming of an ambiguously described messiah, and others that describe his advent in a singularly descriptive and particularistic way." Mormon is untroubled by anachronism and never disguises his literary and theological purposes. Narratives are arranged and earlier texts emended according to his doctrinal aim. (p. 23)

It is disappointing that Mormons and Jews relies upon Charlesworth's assertions rather than evidence from the Book of Mormon text. Charlesworth's own conclusions on this particular topic are bound by predetermined assumptions. According to Charlesworth, "Much more frequent in the Book of Mormon are the sections in which it seems evident that we have later Christian influence because the precise description of the Messiah's life and activity is distinguishable from the reserved generic nature of what is usually recognized as pre-Christian prophecy." Thus, according to Charlesworth, pre-Christian passages in the Book of Mormon that contain detailed information about Jesus must be later post-Christian interpolations, because, as Charlesworth says, "the description is so precise that it is evident it was added after the event." As Mormons and Jews subscribes to these presuppositions, it is putting words into Mormon's mouth, which is exactly what it suggests Mormon does with pre-Christian Book of Mormon prophets who testify in detail concerning Jesus Christ.

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5 Ibid.
6 Ibid., 125.
Mormons and Jews never explicitly addresses the issue of specific source material used by Mormon. Mormon definitely claims to have abridged the large plates of Nephi along with other records in his possession. But what about the small plates of Nephi? Does the author of Mormons and Jews think that Mormon’s interpolating hand stretched to the small plates as well? If we rely on what the text of the Book of Mormon says, there is no evidence for this, for Mormon says that he simply “put” the small plates with his “abridgment” of the large plates (Words of Mormon 1:3–7). And if Mormon is so “untroubled by anachronism and never disguises his literary and theological purposes” (p. 23), as Mormons and Jews claims, why does Mormon state very plainly that the reason he “put” the small plates with his “abridgment” of the large plates is because “the things which are upon these plates pleas[e] me, because of the prophecies of the coming of Christ,” which are already contained in them (Words of Mormon 1:4)? Why does Mormons and Jews assert that interpolation is Mormon’s methodology, when Mormon never says anything to support such an idea?

Next, following in the steps of the above claim that the Book of Mormon and the Pseudepigrapha have similar anachronistic tendencies, Mormons and Jews also tells us that the Book of Mormon shares these same tendencies with apocryphal accounts of Jesus’ forty-day ministry because of “the Christian commitments” of the abridger Mormon. Mormons and Jews alleges that

The explicit messianism of the text, the stated time frame of its production, and its intended, distant audience are obviously crucial elements of the Book of Mormon. Jesus’ post-resurrectional activity is portrayed similarly to apocryphal renditions of the “Evangelium Quadraginta Dierum” (the forty-day period of the resurrected Christ’s ministry to his disciples in Palestine [cf. Acts 1:3]). Sorting out the world

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of the text thus requires first considering the stories of earlier generations included in the Book of Mormon and then considering the explicitly Christian commitments of the books’ editors which frame them. (p. 24)

Is Hugh Nibley’s “Evangelium Quadraginta Dierum” being cited as support for the assertion or just as a reference to information on the forty-day ministry? If the author of Mormons and Jews is using Nibley in support of his argument he is mistaken, because Nibley never even mentions the Book of Mormon in that article. If he is not using Nibley as support, from where does he derive support for his assertion that Jesus’ visit to the Nephites is an anachronistic apocryphal account derived from “the explicitly Christian commitments of the books’ editors which frame them” (p. 24)? Is there any basis for the claim of Mormons and Jews that,

According to the records received and edited by Mormon and Moroni, Christ confirmed the covenantal faith and aspirations of the early writers when he visited the Americas. Thus the final editors reaffirmed this inherited messianic tradition and devotion to covenant and wed it textually to the words and deeds of the exalted Lord. They record that their Holy One promises an end to Israel’s exile and bondage. (pp. 31–32)

The issue here is not what the resurrected Jesus said, but who put the words into his mouth. Mormons and Jews claims that Mormon and Moroni took these ideas and “wed [them] textually to the words and deeds of the exalted Lord.” If there is any support for Mormon’s and Moroni’s tampering with and tainting the actual words of Jesus or the earlier prophets, it certainly does not come from the text of the Book of Mormon. Mormon himself says,

And now there cannot be written in this book even a hundredth part of the things which Jesus did truly teach unto the people;

But behold the [large] plates of Nephi do contain the more part of the things which he taught the people.
And these things have I written, which are a lesser part of the things which he taught the people; and I have written them to the intent that they may be brought again unto this people, from the Gentiles, according to the words which Jesus hath spoken. (3 Nephi 26:6–8)

To suggest that Jesus’ words did not originate with Jesus, but with later editors, is similar to that which the “Jesus Seminar” has done with the majority of the sayings of Jesus in the canonical Gospels. And it raises the question, If Jesus’ words originated with Mormon and Moroni, where did they get them? As the above discussion demonstrates, these types of methodological presuppositions lead Mormons and Jews to conclusions which are both careless scholarship and dangerous Latter-day Saint theology.

What about those who do not accept the methodology used in Mormons and Jews? Most Latter-day Saints would tend to accept the evidence which is actually given in the text of the Book of Mormon. The prophet Jacob (c. 544 B.C.) gave the following clear and simple explanation for including pre-Christian passages about the coming of Jesus Christ:

We labor diligently to engraven these words upon plates, hoping that our beloved brethren and our children will receive them with thankful hearts, and look upon them that they may learn with joy and not with sorrow, neither with contempt, concerning their first parents.

For, for this intent have we written these things, that they may know that we knew of Christ, and we had a hope of his glory many hundred years before his coming; and not only we ourselves had a hope of his glory, but also all the holy prophets which were before us.

Behold, they believed in Christ and worshipped the Father in his name, and also we worship the Father in his name. (Jacob 4:3–5)

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8 See Michael J. Wilkins and J. P. Moreland, eds., Jesus under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents the Historical Jesus (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995).
Why the Law of Moses?

*Mormons and Jews* says that "the status of the law of Moses is similarly affected by the messianism of the Nephites" (p. 27). The Nephite knowledge of the coming Messiah certainly affects their outlook on the law of Moses. However, while outlining the Nephites' positive view of keeping the law of Moses, *Mormons and Jews* states:

The leaders and prophets of the Nephite people acknowledge its [the brass plates'] essential role in preserving their language, institutions, religious belief, and practice (Om. 1:17; Mos. 12:25–29). Its [the law of Moses'] "performances and ordinances . . . keep them in remembrance of God and their duty towards him" (Mos. 13:30). As they affirm: "salvation did come by the law of Moses" (Mos. 12:31–33). (p. 27)

But in context, the above affirmation of salvation by the law of Moses is from the wicked priests of king Noah, not from "the leaders and prophets of the Nephite people"! In stark contrast, the prophet Abinadi explicitly states that those priests of Noah were wrong in asserting that salvation came by the law of Moses alone:

And now ye have said that salvation cometh by the law of Moses. I say unto you that it is expedient that ye should keep the law of Moses as yet; but I say unto you, that the time shall come when it shall no more be expedient to keep the law of Moses.

And moreover, I say unto you, that *salvation doth not come by the law alone; and were it not for the atonement, which God himself shall make for the sins and iniquities of his people, that they must unavoidably perish, notwithstanding the law of Moses* . . .

But behold, I say unto you, that all these things were types of things to come.

And now, did they [the children of Israel] understand the law? I say unto you, Nay, they did not all understand the law; and this because of the hardness of their hearts; for they understood not that *there could*
not any man be saved except it be through the redemption of God. (Mosiah 13:27–28, 31–32)

Israel’s Complete Restoration

One reviewer of Mormons and Jews has noticed the following concerning its use of terms for the Abrahamic covenant’s relationship to literal descendants of Israel.

The underlying understanding of the Abrahamic covenant in this book, though never clearly detailed, appears to be that it was unilateral and unconditional. God initiated the covenant, and despite a history of Israelite infidelities, he never disowned it.9

However, the Book of Mormon does not define the covenant in this way. The Book of Mormon states that the actual seed of Jacob may be excluded from being the covenant people for rejecting Jesus Christ, the great Jehovah who gave the Abrahamic covenant (3 Nephi 15:5).

For behold, I say unto you that as many of the Gentiles as will repent are the covenant people of the Lord; and as many of the Jews as will not repent shall be cast off; for the Lord covenanteth with none save it be with them that repent and believe in his Son, who is the Holy One of Israel. (2 Nephi 30:2)10

Salvation does not come because of one’s bloodline, but because of one’s devotion to the covenant of the Savior.11 But Mormons and Jews asserts the following, which it claims is supported by the Book of Mormon text:

In the penultimate days leading to the messianic kingdom, two great gatherings of scattered Israel were

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10 See also 1 Nephi 14:1–2; 3 Nephi 16:13, 21:6, and 30:2.
to occur. First, the "remnants" or "seed" of the families of the Nephites would gather to Zion, the "New Jerusalem," to be reared in the Americas. Then Judah along with those of Israel long since scattered in the "north countries" (Eth. 13:11) would again be established and restored in Israel with Jerusalem as their capital. The Book of Mormon repeatedly asserts that Israel's restoration depends on realizing the territorial terms of the covenant not in its conversion to, or identity with, the church. (p. 30, emphasis in original)

The use of Ether 13:11 by the author of Mormons and Jews to assert that the restoration of Israel does not include conversion to the true Church of Jesus Christ is problematic. The full passage, of which Mormons and Jews only quotes two words, reads as follows:

And then also cometh the Jerusalem of old; and the inhabitants thereof, blessed are they, for they have been washed in the blood of the Lamb; and they are they who were scattered and gathered in from the four quarters of the earth, and from the north countries, and are partakers of the fulfilling of the covenant which God made with their father, Abraham. (Ether 13:11)

Neither does the rest of the text of the Book of Mormon confirm that which Mormons and Jews claims. Just a quick glance through the passages which deal with this issue reveals that, according to the Book of Mormon, the complete restoration of the house of Israel in the latter days does indeed include recognition of Jesus Christ as the true Messiah and conversion to both the gospel and the Church of Jesus Christ. In response to the previous claims of Mormons and Jews, the reader must consider the following pre-Christian Book of Mormon passages:

Nevertheless, when that day cometh, saith the prophet, that they no more turn aside their hearts against the Holy One of Israel, then will he remember the covenants which he made to their fathers.
Yea, then will he remember the isles of the sea; yea, and all the people who are of the house of Israel, will I gather in, saith the Lord. (1 Nephi 19:15–16)\textsuperscript{12}

They at Jerusalem . . .

. . . shall be scattered among all nations.

But behold, thus saith the Lord God: When the day cometh that they shall believe in me, that I am Christ, then have I covenanted with their fathers that they shall be restored in the flesh, upon the earth, unto the lands of their inheritance. (2 Nephi 10:5–7)

And it shall come to pass that the Jews which are scattered also shall begin to believe in Christ; and they shall begin to gather in upon the face of the land; and as many as shall believe in Christ shall also become a delightful people.

And it shall come to pass that the Lord God shall commence his work among all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, to bring about the restoration of his people upon the earth. (2 Nephi 30:7–8)

And as he [the Lord] hath covenanted with all the house of Jacob, even so shall the covenant wherewith he hath covenanted with the house of Jacob be fulfilled in his own due time, unto the restoring all the house of Jacob unto the knowledge of the covenant that he hath covenanted with them.

And then shall they know their Redeemer who is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. (3 Nephi 5:25–26)\textsuperscript{13}

The resurrected Jesus himself stated the following to the Nephites concerning the restoration of Israel:

And I command you that ye shall write these sayings after I am gone, that if it so be that my people at Jerusalem . . . do not ask the Father in my name, that they may receive a knowledge of you by the Holy

\textsuperscript{12} The Book of Mormon repeatedly says that Jesus Christ is the Holy One of Israel; see 2 Nephi 25:29; 30:2; and Omni 1:27.

\textsuperscript{13} See also 1 Nephi 10:14; and 2 Nephi 6:11, 14.
Ghost, ... that through the fulness of the Gentiles, the remnant of their seed, who shall be scattered forth upon the face of the earth because of their unbelief, may be brought in, or may be brought to a knowledge of me, their Redeemer.

And then will I gather them in from the four quarters of the earth; and then will I fulfill the covenant which the Father hath made unto all the people of the house of Israel. (3 Nephi 16:4–5)

Then is the fulfilling of the covenant which the Father hath made unto his people, O house of Israel.

And then shall the remnant, which shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the earth, be gathered in from the east and from the west, and from the south and from the north; and they shall be brought to the knowledge of the Lord their God, who hath redeemed them. (3 Nephi 20:12–13)

And Mormon echoed the statements of the resurrected Jesus toward the end of the Book of Mormon:

And behold, they [the Gentiles] shall go unto the unbelieving of the Jews; and for this intent shall they go—that they may be persuaded that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God; that the Father may bring about, through his most Beloved, his great and eternal purpose, in restoring the Jews, or all the house of Israel, to the land of their inheritance, which the Lord God hath given them, unto the fulfilling of his covenant. (Mormon 5:14)

Simply believing in Jesus Christ, the Messiah and Redeemer, however, is not the only requirement for the complete restoration of Israel in the latter-days. According to the Book of Mormon, this conversion is explicitly associated with acceptance of the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ, his doctrine, his atonement, the New Testament (the book of the Lamb of God and of the twelve apostles of the Lamb), and latter-day scripture.

14 See also 3 Nephi 28:24–29.
And it came to pass that I beheld the remnant of the seed of my brethren, and also the book of the Lamb of God, which had proceeded forth from the mouth of the Jew, that it came forth from the Gentiles unto the remnant of the seed of my brethren.

And after it had come forth unto them I beheld other books, which came forth by the power of the Lamb, from the Gentiles unto them, unto the convincing of the Gentiles and the remnant of the seed of my brethren, and also the Jews who were scattered upon all the face of the earth, that the records of the prophets and of the twelve apostles of the Lamb are true.

... and that all men must come unto him, or they cannot be saved.

And they must come according to the words which shall be established by the mouth of the Lamb; ...

... and after he has manifested himself unto the Jews and also unto the Gentiles, then he shall manifest himself unto the Gentiles and also unto the Jews, and the last shall be first, and the first shall be last. (1 Nephi 13:38-42)

And now, the thing which our father meaneth concerning the grafting in of the natural branches through the fulness of the Gentiles, is, that in the latter days, when our seed shall have dwindled in unbelief, ... then shall the fulness of the gospel of the Messiah come unto the Gentiles, and from the Gentiles unto the remnant of our seed—

And at that day shall the remnant of our seed know that they are of the house of Israel, and that they are the covenant people of the Lord; and then shall they know and come to the knowledge of their forefathers, and also to the knowledge of the gospel of their Redeemer, which was ministered unto their fathers by him; wherefore, they shall come to the knowledge of their Redeemer and the very points of his doctrine, that they may know how to come unto him and be saved.
Wherefore, our father hath not spoken of our seed alone, but also of all the house of Israel, pointing to the covenant which should be fulfilled in the latter days; which covenant the Lord made to our father Abraham, saying: In thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. (1 Nephi 15:13–14, 18)

Wherefore, the Lord God will proceed to make bare his arm in the eyes of all the nations, in bringing about his covenants and his gospel unto those who are of the house of Israel.

Wherefore, he will bring them out of captivity, and they shall be gathered together to the lands of their inheritance; and they shall be brought out of obscurity and out of darkness; and they shall know that the Lord is their Savior and their Redeemer, the Mighty One of Israel. (1 Nephi 22:11–12)

Wherefore, the Jews shall be scattered by other nations.

And after they have been scattered, and the Lord God hath scourged them by other nations for the space of many generations, yea, even down from generation to generation until they shall be persuaded to believe in Christ, the Son of God, and the atonement, which is infinite for all mankind—and when that day shall come that they shall believe in Christ, and worship the Father in his name, with pure hearts and clean hands, and look not forward any more for another Messiah, then, at that time, the day will come that it must needs be expedient that they should believe these things [the Book of Mormon]. (2 Nephi 25:15–16)15

Once again, Jesus, following his resurrection, declared to the Nephites in plain terminology:

And I will remember the covenant which I have made with my people; and I have covenanted with them that I would gather them together in mine own due time, that I would give unto them again the land of

15 See also 2 Nephi 25:17–19; and Ether 13:11.
their fathers for their inheritance, which is the land of Jerusalem, which is the promised land unto them forever, saith the Father.

And it shall come to pass that the time cometh, when the fulness of my gospel shall be preached unto them;

And they shall believe in me, that I am Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and shall pray unto the Father in my name. (3 Nephi 20:29–31)

Mormons and Jews contends that “The conversion of the Jewish people to the church is never mentioned nor advocated in the Book of Mormon. . . . [N]owhere is this hope [of Israel’s salvation] then linked to conversion to the gentile church” (p. 36). But such a claim must be rejected in light of the above Book of Mormon passages. With unmistakable language the prophet Jacob tells us that the complete restoration of the house of Israel includes not only gathering to the lands of promise, but also conversion to the true church of their Redeemer, who is Jesus Christ.

And now, my beloved brethren, I have read these things that ye might know concerning the covenants of the Lord that he has covenanted with all the house of Israel—

That he has spoken unto the Jews, by the mouth of his holy prophets, even from the beginning down, from generation to generation, until the time comes that they shall be restored to the true church and fold of God; when they shall be gathered home to the lands of their inheritance, and shall be established in all their lands of promise. (2 Nephi 9:1–2)

Obviously, something is wrong with the way the author of Mormons and Jews interprets the Book of Mormon. Indeed, contrary to what Mormons and Jews implies, the Book of Mormon repeatedly teaches that salvation comes through Jesus Christ and in no other way. There are not two legitimate roads to salvation—only one.

O remember, remember, my sons, the words which king Benjamin spake unto his people; yea, remember
that there is no other way nor means whereby man can be saved, only through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ, who shall come; yea, remember that he cometh to redeem the world. (Helaman 5:9)\textsuperscript{16}

In summary, President Spencer W. Kimball has clearly echoed the above teachings of the Book of Mormon concerning the law of the gathering of Israel in the latter days.

Now, the gathering of Israel consists of joining the true church and their coming to a knowledge of the true God. Any person, therefore, who has accepted the restored gospel, and who now seeks to worship the Lord in his own tongue and with the Saints in the nations where he lives, has complied with the law of the gathering of Israel and is heir to all of the blessings promised the saints in these last days.\textsuperscript{17}

\textbf{Some Final Observations}

A danger in the methodological errors outlined above is that they misrepresent to non-Latter-day Saints what the Book of Mormon and early Latter-day Saint authorities taught about the Jews. For example, in a previous review of this book, the highly regarded Jewish scholar Jacob Neusner praises \textit{Mormons and Jews} which, in his view, “uncovers Joseph Smith’s, Orson Hyde’s and Brigham Young’s hitherto unappreciated, affirmative conception of the enduring validity of Israel’s vocation.”\textsuperscript{18} From \textit{Mormons and Jews}, Neusner has gotten the idea that early LDS Church authorities like Joseph Smith taught that Judaism is a “valid road to God” in and of itself, without the need to be “superceded by Christianity.”\textsuperscript{19} Neusner restates a Brigham Young quotation cited in \textit{Mormons and Jews}: “Brigham Young took a position that

\textsuperscript{16} See also 2 Nephi 9:41, 25:20, 31:20–21; Mosiah 3:17, 4:8, 5:8; and Alma 38:9.
\textsuperscript{17} Spencer W. Kimball, \textit{The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball}, ed. Edward L. Kimball (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982), 439.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 71.
Christianity in general would attain only in the aftermath of the Holocaust: ‘Jews and gentiles will not be obliged to belong to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.’”

Had the author of *Mormons and Jews* expanded the quotation from Brigham Young a scant two lines earlier, Neusner might not have decided to use it. The expanded quotation reads as follows: “When the kingdom of God triumphs, every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is the Christ, to the glory of the Father. *Even the Jews will do it then,* but will the Jews and Gentiles be obliged to belong to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints? No; not by any means.” In this discourse, Brigham Young was first speaking of the conditions which will prevail at the beginning of the millennium, not to any final condition of mankind.

Later in the discourse, President Young does refer to the final condition of man and uses the phrase from John 14:2, “In my Father’s house are many mansions.” Neusner, noting the quotation of Brigham Young, states that *Mormons and Jews* “describes Young’s construction of human, religion [sic], and cosmic orders as ‘eternally pluralistic.’” But in fact, Brigham Young speaks of “many mansions” to explain the Latter-day Saint doctrine of differing kingdoms of glory, not of any idea that a multitude of different religious denominations would dwell together in heaven without receiving the saving ordinances of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is understandable that Neusner would misunderstand this point, since he is not a Latter-day Saint. Most likely, Neusner simply trusted the interpretation of Latter-day Saint doctrine given in *Mormons and Jews* and its use of the sources. Unfortunately, Neusner’s trust was misplaced.

Either the author of *Mormons and Jews*—who has a Ph.D. from Temple University, is a current BYU History Department faculty member, and is also a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—is guilty of careless scholarship stemming from a limited understanding of the Book of Mormon, or he is guilty of dishonest scholarship. We sincerely hope it is the former.

20 Ibid., 72 quoting Epperson, 200.
21 *JD* 11:275, emphasis added.
A comment on the back cover of Mormons and Jews may allude to a third possibility. Paul M. van Buren suggests that *Mormons and Jews* "raises the question whether Latter-day Saints might not have something to share with [the] ecumenical movement." Increased ecumenical dialogue among all religions is certainly a noble desire, if this is indeed the objective of *Mormons and Jews*. However, is there not a better way to arrive at an ecumenical dialogue with other religions, especially the majority of the Jewish people with whom the Latter-day Saints already have a wonderful relationship, than to misrepresent the teachings of the Book of Mormon? Does the end justify the means?

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Reviewed by Larry C. Porter

**Reinventing Mormonism: To Remake or Redo**

When two individuals eat, sleep, and drink a specific subject for thirty years, and further concentrate their area of study by pinpointing the most critical issues within that delimitation, they can often ferret out the minutia and present a most convincing case for their particular point of view. Whether their case holds water in the final analysis depends on if the facts support the conclusion. Sometimes we make decisions based on what we suppose the situation to have been as determined from a single set of facts; however, these may or may not reflect the actual condition. At times, what appear to be provable facts are impaired because only partial evidence remains. In too many instances the primary documentation no longer exists and the principal parties who could have enlightened us are dead—the bane of historians.

The authors have amassed a sizable amount of documentation to support their particular thesis. As readers examine their material they will be impressed with the exacting care that has been taken to establish even minuscule points. They have developed an interesting array of subjects, logically spelled out and bolstered with references. It is understandable that some will be awed by particular evidence which may at times seem irrefutable.

As one who has had a long-time interest in the documents relating to the origins of the restored Church, I have had a personal acquaintance with both H. Michael Marquardt and Wesley P. Walters for more than thirty years. I have known them as men who have literally spent their lifetime pursuing every avenue that might
bring the Prophet Joseph Smith and the Church under close scrutiny. They differ from many "armchair researchers" of the past and present who seek to examine the claims of Mormonism by working largely through the mails. Instead, Marquardt and Walters have taken to the field in an attempt to tramp out every inch of Mormonism geographically on the ground and in the public and private repositories where any vestige of related documents might be found. I have encountered them in person or their imprints in library after library and courthouse after courthouse over a multiyear period.

Individually these men have been both affable and friendly; however, their motives are patently clear. With the death of Wesley P. Walters in 1990, Michael has unhesitatingly picked up the old gauntlet and the traditional line of march. *Inventing Mormonism* was and is a continuation of a former thrust. It is for the most part exceptionally well documented and meticulously programmed as an exposé of Joseph Smith and certain cardinal claims of the Restoration—a new face on an old set of biases. Each of us certainly has his or her individual biases; I am merely pointing out that the authors have not changed their spots—only particular aspects of their approach. It is difficult to believe that their sole interest is to "understand, not to debunk," as announced (p. 197). The very title *Inventing Mormonism* by definition impinges on the veracity of the Prophet and his associates by its up-front presupposition of a planned or calculated deception. Visions, seer stones, magical incantations, money digging, legal entanglements, and intemperance are all introduced in such a manner as to debase the character of Joseph Smith and his contemporary supporters.

As the reader will understand, numerous informational voids are to be found in the early history of the Latter-day Saint Church. For instance, only a few day-month-and-year dates are provided during the entire New England, New York, and Pennsylvania periods in Joseph Smith’s "Manuscript History of the Church." Very often the words "in the spring of," "in the month of," or "in the year of," are used because in the earliest

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period of the Restoration complete dates and events were not always recorded at the time and only meager source documents survived. This obviously leaves some marvelous gaps for those who would step into the vacuum and supply their own chronology. It allows them the opportunity to do some "Reinventing of Mormonism," or to "Remake" or "Redo" selected sequences.

If the long-established Latter-day Saint chronology of events can be thrown out of whack, then doubt can be cast on the integrity of the whole continuity of occurrences recounted by the Prophet and the brethren in the written history of the Church. This statement is by no means intended to suggest that when valid dates and events are discovered they should not readily be added to the early chronology of Mormonism. In an otherwise limited field of data all such information is gratefully received. Certainly missing links have and will continue to surface to help complete the scope. To their credit, Marquardt and Walters have made a definite contribution in a number of areas by supplying valuable documents and information on certain key events and personalities. Such is the case with their tracing of the "articling" process experienced by the Smiths during their attempt to gain title to the Farmington/Manchester farm. This is a nice piece of historical detective work. In other instances, however, their additions have not been as well directed.

At the beginning of the volume, Marquardt and Walters have placed a chronology of events as they suppose them to have transpired in the earliest years of the Restoration (pp. xxvi–xxxvi). This chronology has eighty-eight entries. Of that number I believe Latter-day Saints would generally agree with seventy-three directly out-of-hand, a decided majority. Ten of the remaining entries would probably fall into the category of dispute because of what may be simple historical errors or entries that in combina-

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2 Simple questions of accuracy in the chronology might be asked: (1) "22 September 1827, Joseph Jr. . . . also finds with the plates a sword, breastplate, and a pair of spectacles (also called Urim and Thummmim)" (p. xxx). Joseph Smith didn't specify a "sword" as part of the contents of the stone box at Cumorah. However, the sword was later displayed by Moroni at the Whitmer farm when the Prophet and the Three Witnesses viewed the ancient artifacts. Initially, at the Hill Cumorah, Joseph merely reported, "I looked in and there indeed did I behold the plates, the Urim and Thummi[m] and the Breastplate as stated by the messenger" (Jessee, The Papers of Joseph Smith, 1:281). (2) 16 January, "An
tion represent an inordinate preoccupation with repeated implications against the character of Joseph Smith because of his treasure seeking. Joseph Smith did indeed at one time engage in digging for treasure, but it is the redundant comments on the subject that are objectionable. The remaining five entries are disputable because they represent major chronological discrepancies with the Latter-day Saint time line. These five items are listed herein followed by a brief discussion:

1. “1820-21, Joseph Smith, Jr., later reports he has a personal forgiveness of sins; he is an exhorter for the Methodist class in Palmyra and attends a local debating club” (p. xxvi).

2. “September 1824 to Spring 1825. Revival of religion commences with the Methodists, followed by the Baptists and Presbyterians, in the Palmyra vicinity. Joseph Jr. hears discourses by Reverend Lane of the Methodist church and attends meetings” (p. xxviii).


4. “Manchester, New York, 6 April 1830. The Church of Christ is organized; six revelations are received (BC 17-22; LDS D&C 21, 23; RLDS D&C 19, 21). Cowdery is ordained an elder. Joseph Jr. is ordained an elder, also prophet and seer by Cowdery. Joseph Sr., Lucy, Harris, and Sarah Rockwell are baptized in Crooked Brook” (p. xxxiv).

agreement between Joseph Sr. and Martin Harris on selling the Book of Mormon is witnessed by Oliver Cowdery” (p. xxxiv). In examining this document, Scott H. Faulring has come to the conclusion that we have been misreading it all these years. Rather than an agreement between Joseph, Sr., and Martin Harris, Scott believes that the signature is really the signature of Joseph Smith, Jr. However, he also believes that the supposed “Sr.” is neither an “S” nor a “J,” but rather an almost unconscious, uncorrected flourish of the pen by the Prophet. The signature is unmistakably identified as the Prophet’s when compared with his other period signatures. An agreement between Joseph, Jr., and Martin would certainly make more sense (interview between Scott Faulring and Larry C. Porter, 18 July 1995). (3) “September 1830, Joseph Jr. travels from Harmony to Fayette” (p. xxxv). Rather than arriving in September, however, Joseph stated that “We arrived at Fayette, during the last week of August, amidst the congratulations of our brethren and friends” (Jessee, *The Papers of Joseph Smith*, 322).
5. “Fayette, New York, 11 April 1830. A Fayette, New York, branch of the church is established. A revelation is received regarding individuals who have been baptized in other Christian churches (BC 23; LDS D&C 22; RLDS D&C 20). Cowdery delivers the first public discourse of the church and performs baptisms” (p. xxxiv).

For purposes of discussion, the first three items should be grouped together because of their implications for revivalism, the First Vision, and the conversion of some Smith family members to Presbyterianism.

The Latter-day Saint disagreement with item 1 is not so much in what is said, but rather in what is not said. Joseph did report “a personal forgiveness of sins,” as indicated by Marquardt and Walters. The Prophet recorded, “I saw the Lord and he spake unto me saying Joseph my son thy sins are forgiven thee,” as part of his First Vision experience in the spring of 1820.3 However, the writers don’t recognize that the First Vision even occurred and so chose to identify it only as a “reported” event by Joseph—thus the disagreement.

Marquardt and Walters prefer to think that the only time element which fits the descriptions of the Prophet regarding religious revivalism is the revival of 1824–25. However, Milton V. Backman believes that Joseph had a broader spectrum in mind:

Although Joseph Smith noted that the religious excitement was occurring in the area where he lived during his fifteenth year and that his vision took place in the spring of 1820, he did not necessarily state that the revival which he described was limited to a few months or to a particular year. In his 1832 autobiography, the Prophet declared that for three years, from the ages of twelve through fifteen, he was involved in serious religious reflections and from about 1818 to 1820 he was searching for religious truth and the right church. Based on this long quest, the 1838 history may imply a longer time span for the revival he referred to

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3 These words were spoken to Joseph by the Lord, according to the Prophet’s 1832 recitation of events associated with his First Vision experience; see Jessee, The Papers of Joseph Smith, 1:6.
than is generally assumed, and possibly Joseph Smith did not "intend to portray all revival events as happening just before his vision." Although Joseph Smith stated that "an unusual excitement" was in evidence in the second year after this removal to Manchester, the results of this religious quickening might well have extended beyond Joseph Smith's sacred experience in the grove, thus expanding the possible time period for the revival which initiated such great events in his young life.4

The latter portion of Marquardt and Walters's chronology as outlined in item 1 above is valid. It is true that Joseph was an exhorter for the Methodist class, although he did not join that denomination. It is likewise true that young Joseph participated in a debate club, first in the village of Palmyra and later in the red schoolhouse on "Durfee Street" (North Creek Road), just northeast of the village proper.5

Latter-day Saint chronology places the events detailed by Marquardt and Walters in item 2 in the general context of the spring of 1820 rather than in this 1824-25 sequence. While it is certainly true that Rev. George Lane was the presiding elder of the Ontario District from 1824-25, it is also true that Lane associated with that area for an extended period of time. In July 1819, Rev. Lane was just fifteen miles away from the Smith home for a period of eight days attending the annual Genesee Conference at old Vienna (later Phelps, New York). Elsewhere in their text (pp. 28-29), Marquardt and Walters mention the Vienna conference and speak of Lane's presence in these terms:

Lane was at Vienna in July 1819 attending the annual meeting of the Methodist Genesee Conference, at which he was appointed to serve in Pennsylvania. There is no record that he preached or that a camp meeting was held in connection with this conference. In 1826, when a camp meeting was actually held, the con-


ference minutes contain reference to the ministers who were put in charge of the arrangements for the meeting. No indication of any such arrangements appears in the 1819 minutes. (pp. 29, emphasis added)

Marquardt and Walters have missed an important point. Apologists have placed Rev. Lane at the gathering of numerous Methodists for a period of enlightenment. This gathering took place in Joseph Smith’s vicinity, and as Rev. Lane had the prospect of preaching a sermon, the Prophet might have heard such a sermon as early as 1819.6 Do the relevant factors exist to support such an encounter? Lane was in attendance at the annual Genesee Conference held at Vienna (now Phelps), New York, from 1 July to 8 July 1819, where he was named presiding elder of the Susquehanna District.7 He was there along with one hundred and ten Methodist ministers, their leader Bishop Robert R. Roberts, and a host of adherents to the faith. While it is true that the “Journal of the Genesee Conference” does not record Rev. George Lane as having preached during the conference, neither does it list the name of any other minister addressing the conference. The content of the minutes in the conference journal is concerned with only the temporalities or business aspects of the various sessions. For instance, Rev. Lane was among those “again received into the traveling connexion.”8 No one is listed by name as having delivered any of the conference sermons, and yet we know that many such preachments were given. The ministers not only concerned themselves with conducting business, but likewise took opportunity to preach to the congregation assembled for this auspicious occasion. This was an ideal time for the Prophet to have come under Lane’s instruction, particularly with Joseph’s professed interest in Methodism. Aside from whether or not a designated “camp meeting” was held in conjunction with the gathering, the very nature of the conference provided many opportunities for a

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7 Minutes Taken at the Several Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church . . . for the Year 1819 (New York: Totten, 1819), 51.
number of ministers to preach to the laity, who always came in
droves to hear their exhortations, and were enlivened by them.
Such conferences were not just dry-bones business but were high-
lighted with a goodly share of stirring sermons. Abel Stevens has
given us the general pattern followed at these gatherings:

These annual assemblies became imposing occa-
sions. A bishop presided; the preachers from many
miles around, usually including several states, were pre-
sent; hosts of laymen were spectators. There was
preaching in the early morning, in the afternoon, and
at night. The daily proceedings were introduced with
religious services, and were characterized by an
impressive religious spirit. They continued usually a
week, and it was a festal season, gathering the war-worn
heroes of many distant and hard-fought fields, renew-
ing the intimacies of preachers and people, and
crowned alike by social hospitalities and joyous devo-
tions.9

Again, none of the names of the many preachers who taught
mornings, afternoons, and nights for a week in 1819 are listed. In
the “Journal of the Genesee Conference” only business items
appear. Lane was present and the opportunity to speak was there
for a seasoned veteran who had been on the circuit since 1804.
Likewise, Rev. Lane again traveled through the Manchester area in
the summer of 1820 on his way to the annual conference in
Lundy’s Lane, Niagara, Upper Canada; and also in July of 1822,
when he was again at the Genesee Conference held at Vienna, New
York. Joseph’s opportunities to meet or hear Rev. Lane need not
be sandwiched into just the period of Lane’s assignment to the
Ontario District, July 1824 to July 1825.10 More than one window
of opportunity was present.

Joseph Smith conveyed to Oliver Cowdery his earliest expe-
riences in regard to this period for publication in the Messenger
and Advocate in what is the first printed history of Mormonism

9 Abel Stevens, The Centenary of American Methodism (New York:
Carlton and Porter, 1865), 112, emphasis added.
from within the Church. As preface to that series, Oliver Cowdery said, “That our narrative may be correct, and particularly the introduction, it is proper to inform our patrons, that our brother J. Smith jr. has offered to assist us. Indeed, there are many items connected with the fore part of this subject that render his labor indispensable.”11 As the series unfolded, Joseph relayed to Oliver that in the proximity of his fifteenth year [aged fourteen and going on fifteen, 1819–20], “One Mr. Lane, a presiding Elder of the Methodist church, visited Palmyra and vicinity,” and that, “in common with others, our brother’s mind became awakened.”12 There is an obvious discrepancy between Joseph’s identification of the 1820 time frame and Marquardt and Walters’s “September 1824 to Spring 1825” placement of the Prophet’s coming under the tutelage of Rev. Lane. I think that Joseph recognized the difference.

Again Marquardt and Walters do not mention the First Vision in this context because they don’t acknowledge its factuality. However, the ramifications for believing Mormons are immediately apparent. Under the Marquardt and Walters time line the First Vision has not yet taken place by 1825, since Joseph is still in the process of investigating Methodism in that year (items 2 and 3).

Marquardt and Walters’s item 3 is similarly objectionable since they have substituted the climate of the 1824–25 revival for the 1820 conversion of Lucy Smith and other family members to Presbyterianism and the setting for the First Vision. A dearth of documents plagues our search of Smith family membership in the Western Presbyterian Church of Palmyra. If the first session book of that denomination had survived, it might have supplied us with some early mention of the Smiths’ affiliation. Regrettably, the first book had disappeared by at least 1932 and is unavailable. The second session book, which fortunately is still extant, identifies the Smiths as being under investigation for “Neglect of public worship,” and reports their excommunication on 10 March 1830 and 29 March 1830.13 However, the records which have sur-

12 *Messenger and Advocate* 1 (December 1834): 42.
13 “Records of the Session of the Presbyterian Church in Palmyra,” 2:11–13, microfilm copy in the Herald B. Lee Library, BYU.
vived do not specify when the Smiths joined the Western Presbyterian Church of Palmyra. At the time certain family members joined the Presbyterians, Joseph said, "I was at this time in my fifteenth year [1819–1820]. My Fathers family were proselyted to the Presbyterian faith, and four of them joined that Church, Namely, My Mother Lucy; My Brothers Hyrum, Samuel Harrison, and my Sister Soph[r]onia." The Prophet is again adamant in placing the conversion of these family members in the proximity of 1820 rather than the 1824–25 period as outlined by Marquardt and Walters.

In addition to the First Vision, which is closely allied with the conversions of some of the Smith family to Presbyterianism, another subtle casualty in the Latter-day Saint time line is quietly being bumped, unheralded by Marquardt and Walters. Understandably missing from their chronology during the entire period is any mention of the visits of the Angel Moroni, who of course would be for them a fictional personage. If the "September 1824 to Spring of 1825" revival sequence is confirmed for the authors, then the successive appearances of Moroni to Joseph Smith take a header, or are certainly curtailed timewise. But in Joseph's 1838 account the First Vision occurred in the early spring of 1820. This was followed by three and one-half years of preparation and finally the appearance of Moroni on 21–22 September 1823. Moroni then participated in four successive annual visits at the Hill Cumorah, concluding on 22 September 1827, at which time the plates were delivered into the Prophet's hands for translation. Obviously the 1824–27 time frame does not allow for the requisite four visits if the First Vision isn't a possibility until 1825 under the Marquardt and Walters chronology. Marquardt and Walters maintain that, "A revival in the spring of 1825 would place the first visit to the hill Cumorah in September 1825 and allow only one visit (September 1826) before Smith finally received the plates in 1827" (pp. 32–33).

However, another witness may unexpectedly substantiate Moroni's visits. One of the dates that both sides of the issue agree on is the death of Alvin Smith on 19 November 1823

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14 Jesse, The Papers of Joseph Smith, 1:270.
Valuable testimonies both from Smith family members and close associates record that Alvin knew of Moroni and was closely leagued with his brother Joseph regarding the first appearance of the angel in September 1823. If substantiated, this means that the requisite period for Moroni’s succession of visits with Joseph from 1824 to 1827 remains intact. Lucy Mack Smith, William Smith, and Joseph Knight, Sr., all declare that Alvin was acquainted with facets of the Moroni experience before his death in November 1823.

Lucy Mack Smith affirmed:

The 3[rd] harvest time [1821, 1822, 1823] had now arrived since we opened our new farm [in the summer of 1820]. . . . After we [the Smith family] ceased conversation he [Joseph] went to bed. . . . He had not laid there long till a bright light entered the room where he lay he looked up and saw an angel of the Lord standing by him. . . . The next day he and his father and Alvin were reaping in the field together suddenly Joseph stopped and seemed to be in a deep study for sometime Alvin hurried him saying Joseph we must keep to work or we shall not get our task done. . . . His father saw that he was very pale and urged him to go to the house and tell his mother he was sick. . . . [Joseph went a short distance when] the personage whom he saw the night before came to him again and said why did you not tell your father what I told you. . . . [Joseph told his father, then went to the hill Cumorah as directed.] When Joseph came in the evening he told the whole family all that he had made known to his father in the field we sat up very late and listened attentively to all that he had to say.16

During the last days of Alvin’s life, 15–19 November 1823, he said to young Joseph, “I want you to be a good boy & do

everything that lays in your power to obtain the records be faithful in receiving instruction and keeping every commandment that is given you.”17 As Marquardt and Walters indicate, the farm had been “articled” for during the summer of 1820 (p. xxvii). Lucy dated the first visit to Joseph by the angel at the time of the third harvest, September 1823. This was followed by the devastating loss of Alvin in November of that same year. With his appearance in September 1823, Moroni is no longer crowded by Marquardt and Walters’s 1825 agenda, which allows for only one scheduled visit in 1826 before the Prophet received the plates in 1827. Moroni and Joseph are free to have their four annual visits, 1824–27.

William Smith places the conversion of members of his family to Presbyterianism prior to the visit of Moroni. He also identifies Joseph’s First Vision in advance of Moroni’s visit. William mentions Alvin’s participation in a family discussion following Moroni’s first appearances. He remarked, “The next day I was at work in the field to gether [sic] with Joseph and my oldest brother Alvin.” William then said that Joseph left the field at the behest of Alvin because he saw that he was not well. Joseph was sitting by the fence “when the angel again appeared to him, and told him to call his father’s house together and communicate to them the visions he had received.”18

Joseph Knight, Sr., was present at the Smith home on the evening of 21 September 1823. The following day, when Joseph recounted his conversation with the angel at the Hill Cumorah, Knight said that the Prophet exclaimed:

“why Cant I stur this Book?” And he was answerd, “you have not Done rite; you should have took the Book and gone right away. You cant have it now.” Joseph says, “when can I have it?” The answer was the 22nt Day of September next [1824] if you Bring the right person with you. Joseph says, “who is the right Person?” The answer was “your oldest Brother.”

17 Ibid., 51–52.
But before September Came his oldest Brother Died [19 November 1823].

Lucy Smith, William Smith, and Joseph Knight, Sr., are all admittedly adherents to the faith, but they are also primary witnesses who placed these events before Marquardt and Walters’s 1824–25 calendar, and before Alvin’s death in November of 1823.

In items 4 and 5 of the Marquardt and Walters chronology, the authors are in effect declaring that not only is the Latter-day Saint calendar of years irregular, but also that events within specified years are not sequentially correct. It is their contention that the Church was organized at Manchester, New York, on 6 April 1830 rather than at the Peter Whitmer, Sr., farm in Fayette, New York (item 4). They also claim that events at the Whitmer home did not occur until 11 April 1830 when the Fayette Branch was first organized (item 5). The Latter-day Saint point of view would assert that the Church was organized at the Peter Whitmer, Sr., farm on 6 April 1830, and that the 11 April 1830 meeting at the Whitmers’ home was merely the first public meeting following the previous week’s organization.

Ideally, historians should have been able to resolve this and other questions by going to the county clerk in three different New York counties and researching their particular “Incorporation of Religious Societies” book. Accordingly, within those volumes should appear a listing of the desired religious society along with persons appointed as moderators and trustees, together with the date on which they were formed as a society in that particular county. Thus the Fayette, Manchester, and Colesville branches of the Church should have all registered according to New York law. I, along with many others, have beaten that trail to no avail, even throwing in the counties of Wayne and Chenango for good measure. A check of documents at the state archives in Albany has been no more fruitful. No evidence of any of these branches having registered during their nine-month stay in New York has

yet been found—though all the requisite conditions were certainly met and recorded for the organizational meeting at Fayette.20

Failure to find the desired evidence at one level moves us to another. Marquardt and Walters stress that some early Church publications identify Manchester as the site of organization on 6 April 1830, as opposed to the Whitmer residence at Fayette (pp. 153–72). Without a doubt Manchester played a key role in the period. Revelations were received there, and baptisms occurred in Crooked Brook. At the same time, revelations were also recorded at the Peter Whitmer, Sr., farm, and numerous baptisms were performed in Seneca Lake, Cayuga Lake, the Seneca River, Thomas, Kendig, and Silver creeks in Seneca County.21 A good deal of activity, proselyting and baptizing, went on in both Ontario County and Seneca County before, during, and after the organization of the Church. Although certain early Mormon publications designate Manchester as the organizational site, there were likewise later corrections and emendations, by the same leadership, identifying Fayette as the place of the formal organization on 6 April 1830. In the May 1834 issue of the Evening and Morning Star, the “Minutes of a Conference of the Elders of the Church of Christ, which church was organized in the township of Fayette, Seneca county, New-York, on the 6th of April, A.D. 1830,” are recorded for that conference as it assembled at Kirtland, Ohio, 3 May 1834. Joseph Smith is named as “Moderator” and Oliver Cowdery as a “Clerk”—repeating the pattern of original organization at Fayette on that same date four years earlier, a fact of which they were cognizant.22

Just two days later, 5 May 1834, the Prophet again solidified his acceptance of that same date and place when he conducted a land transaction with John and Elsey Johnson. The indenture

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identifies him as "Joseph Smith Junior President of the church of
christ organized on the 6th of April, in the year of our Lord one
thousand eight hundred and thirty, in the Township of Fayette,
Seneca County and State of New York."23

David Whitmer, one of the six organizers, affirmed, "The first
organization was in Seneca county, New York, under the name of
'The church of Christ.' " He then declared, "On the 6th of April,
1830, the church was called together and the elders acknowledged
according to the laws of New York."24 In 1887, David was again
very positive in his assertion, "We met at my father's house in
Fayette, N.Y., on April 6, 1830, to attend to this matter of organi­
zing according to the Laws of the land."25

The content of the Marquardt and Walters lead chronology
and the supporting text that follows deserves careful evaluation
because they have opened some fascinating avenues of pursuit
which, when explored, may heighten our historical understanding
of the period. Where such a profusion of documents has been cast
into the arena, it would be ideal if the reader had the opportunity
to examine each of the items separately. Such is obviously not
practical nor are all the materials readily available. The majority
of the documents check out as to content and reference. The
interpretation of what is meant by the source is of necessity an
individual matter. Occasionally a small glitch slips into the works.
Marquardt and Walters refer to Samuel Jennings, a Palmyra mer­
chant with whom the Smith family had dealings. They point out
that at the death of Jennings on 1 September 1821, Joseph Smith,
Sr., owed Jennings debts of $11.50 and $1 respectively, and cite
his estate papers for "5 Jan. 1822, 8, line 23, and 10, line 10"
(p. 11 n. 9) However, the correct reading should be, 5 June 1822,
10, line 23, and 12, line 10, for anyone searching for the source.
Inasmuch as the writers have carefully singled out a variety of
debts owed by various members of the Smith family to a variety
of persons over an extended period, it might be well to point out
that Joseph Smith, Sr., was not alone in this instance of indebted­
ness. Nineteen pages listed other residents who understandably

23 Geauga County, Ohio Deed Records Book 18, 478–79.
25 David Whitmer, An Address to All Believers in Christ (Richmond, MO: David Whitmer. 1887), 33.
owed monies to the deceased merchant at the time his business affairs were closed out.26

In part, Marquardt and Walters justify their detailed and painstaking investigation of Mormon claims and sources by asking:

Why should we be concerned about accuracy in these details? LDS church educator T. Edgar Lyon once remarked, "[W]hy should Latter-day Saints concern themselves with authentic history? What difference does it make to the tourist if he is told fact or fiction? Personally, I do not appreciate being victimized by someone who, while posing as an authority, disseminates error, however trivial it may seem." (p. 165)

This is certainly a less-than-subtle allusion to the historical narrative of the Prophet and others who assisted him in the preservation of that early history. By association these brethren are guilty of somehow “victimizing” individuals by the wilful dissemination of error. Marquardt and Walters go on to say in conclusion, “When Smith told his life’s history, his understanding at that later time shaped the story of his extraordinary visions. Magical incantations, guardian spirits, treasures in hills, use of a special stone for secular and religious purposes—these were all deemphasized while the story became conflated and simplified. Supernatural encounters were amplified and polished to accommodate more orthodox views. To us, the original accounts ring more authentic” (p. 198).

Marquardt and Walters express a desire for accuracy in detail, “however trivial it may seem.” But surely this ought to apply to them as well as to early Mormons. The second part of the “Bibliographical Essay” in Inventing Mormonism is entitled, “2. The 1826 Examination” (pp. 222–30). In one section (pp. 222–23), they examine “Itemized Bills by Justice Albert Neely and Constable Philip De Zeng,” making mention of the respective bills being bound in bundles in 1826 and placed in

26 Samuel Jennings Estate Papers, 5 June 1822, p. 10, line 23; and p. 12, line 10, Ontario County Estate Records, Film #1991.272.5, Ontario County Historical Society Archives, Canandaigua, New York.
storage. Then their text shifts from a nineteenth-century scene to a twentieth-century event and the declaration: “These and other bills relating to Joseph Smith’s Bainbridge court hearings were removed by [Wesley P.] Walters and [Fred] Poffarl\textsuperscript{27} from the water-soaked box in which they were found and hand-carried to Yale University’s Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. They were received back by Chenango County in October 1971. Photographs are on file at the library of Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia” (p. 223).

On the surface this description seems innocuous enough—two men removing documents from a water-soaked box and taking them to a manuscript library for examination and perhaps treatment, and then returning them to the county of origin. These appear to be the thoughtful acts of preservationists at work—seemingly with approval of the county, implied though not actually recorded. Now let’s take a second look for the sake of “accuracy,” and discuss some of the attendant circumstances. I had been microfilming materials related to Mormonism in the Guernsey Memorial Library and at the same time researching documents in the adjacent Chenango County Office Building in Norwich, New York. The county clerk, John P. McGuire, had allowed me access to the vault. I was looking for the very type of documents later found by Wesley P. Walters and Fred Poffarl, but I had no success. After I carefully checked the records in the vault, Mr. McGuire directed me to the cache of court records which had been placed in storage in the downstairs portion of the jailhouse. These documents had been placed under the immediate supervision of the sheriff, who had given the undersheriff the task of looking after them. Walters and Poffarl were not exaggerating; the documents themselves were water-logged and in water-soaked boxes. After two days of searching hundreds of documents, unfortunately at the wrong end of the room, I had to leave to keep some prior appointments. Shortly after I left, Walters and Poffarl called on Mr. McGuire and were granted the same privilege as I had been in examining the content of the vault. As they finished that project, a clerk in the county office building mentioned to

\textsuperscript{27} Fred Poffarl was an associate of Rev. Wesley P. Walters from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
them that Mr. Porter had been working under the jailhouse. On 28 July 1971 they investigated and were successful in locating the elusive bills and some other related records. Taking them from their packets, the men went to the Guernsey Memorial Library. One of the librarians, Charlotte Spicer, told me that they used the photocopy machine, but that it was of poor quality and they didn’t like the results. Mrs. Spicer related to me that they then determined to take the court documents elsewhere. Seeing the nature of the papers she advised them to return the documents immediately. She said that “Mr. Walters responded by saying, ‘that if they were returned the Mormons would dispose of them.’ ” They then left, removing them from the community and the custody of the county clerk. Fred Poffarl carried them east to Yale. Walters later claimed that they removed the documents without permission because the sheriff and the county historian “were both unavailable at the time.”

At the instigation of Walters, some of the documents with accompanying commentary were published in August 1971 by Jerald and Sandra Tanner in The Salt Lake City Messenger under the title, “New Find Undermines Mormonism,” as an ongoing exposé of Joseph Smith.

I was at that time doing continued research in the East. Richard L. Anderson alerted me to the Tanner treatise on Walters’s find. Eager to see the records, I proceeded to Norwich to verify their content. There I met Mae L. Smith, Chenango County Historian, but she was unable to show me the original court documents. She had only photocopies in her possession since the actual bills had been taken away. Mae further informed me that Wesley P. Walters had photocopied the original documents in his possession, and then sent these copies to the editor of the Chenango Union in Norwich as verification of an accompanying article on Mormonism which he asked the newspaper to print. The editor had suspected something was awry and called the attention


of Mae Smith to the photocopies. She recognized that court
documents had been taken without authorization and, working
with the county clerk, contacted Mr. Edwin M. Crumb, Clerk of
the Chenango County Board of Supervisors. Mr. James H.
Haynes, Jr., Chenango County Attorney, was next directed to write
Wesley P. Walters. Mr. Haynes responded on 16 September 1971:

Dear Reverend Walters:

Our County Historian, Mrs. Mae Smith, has asked me to write you concerning certain papers that were taken by you from County records stored in the cellar of our local sheriff's office. I have letters about these records which you wrote Mrs. Smith dated August 21, 1971.

According to Mrs. Smith, these records were taken by you without her permission and she has written you requesting they be returned immediately.

Will you please contact Yale University immediately and ask that these papers be returned to Mrs. Smith, our County Historian, without any delay whatsoever.30

The documents were subsequently returned under duress. Obviously the records in that basement room were uncataloged, so there was no way of determining just how many documents had walked out the door. The observer can appreciate the justifiable dilemma of those who had the documents in their charge.

Someone might say, "Well, they did preserve them by their action—what other option did they have?" Well, let me suggest some alternatives. The county clerk, Mr. John P. McGuire, was a very responsible man, besides being the lawful caretaker of the records. I had worked with him over an extended period of time in targeting certain items of historical value for microfilming by the Latter-day Saint Church genealogical microfilmer. If he had been alerted to the historical value of these documents I haven't the least doubt that he would have taken steps to see that they were removed from the basement and preserved in a safe place for

further disposition. Other items of a historical value to the community were already in the vault. Too, Mae Smith, the Chenango County Historian, could have guaranteed their safety and made requisition to obtain possession of them, which was what ultimately happened.\textsuperscript{31} By taking them away, Walters and Poffarl committed the cardinal sin of possibly compromising their validity. Some felt they had tampered with the evidence during their disappearance. I personally believe that those documents that were returned are valid and intact. But, of course—and this is the problem—that cannot be proven.

Walters did give an extended explanation of the actions of himself and his friend in 1974, some time after the fact. He reported that he was in immediate contact with Mae Smith and others (a little over three weeks afterwards). His description would lead the reader to believe that everything was amicably smoothed over.\textsuperscript{32} However, I only know that I saw a bristling Mae Smith when I arrived in Norwich soon after the published report by Walters. She was not at all pleased with the methods of these two men in extracting official documents, a situation that had not changed a year later when I called at the Chenango County Historical Museum to see the elusive documents, which had since been returned. In the press to the fore historians cannot override their local counterparts. Something more was lost in that exchange than the momentary disappearance of records. That nonprofessional act created an air of suspicion in Chenango County officialdom where so much trust had been extended to generations of researchers before this mishap. In retrospect I can still hear the simple request of the county clerk, Mr. McGuire, to all comers, “When you take them out, just put them back where you found them.” A few details for the sake of accuracy can provide a wider

\textsuperscript{31} In 1974, Walters reflected on his action and did concede that, “In the light of subsequent developments perhaps it would have been wiser simply to have obtained from the county certified copies of all the bills and allowed them to be returned to the damp basement to disintegrate”; “Joseph Smith’s Bainbridge, N.Y., Court Trials,” 53. Partially repentant, but not quite. He still would not allow the Chenango County historian and others credit for knowing when items of historical value need to be removed from the dampness when their condition was discovered. Mae Smith has placed them in the security of a high and dry vault.

\textsuperscript{32} Walters, “Joseph Smith’s Bainbridge, N.Y., Court Trials,” 153–55.
spectrum of understanding when limited information may have given us a somewhat slanted view of the actual incident.

The writers have compiled what appear to be "plausible" answers to some long-time trouble spots. This will have an appeal to those anxious for a resolution of certain difficult questions. Marquardt and Walters have crafted their attack on the early historical institution of Mormonism with exceeding care and have written in a convincing style. Their approach will be disarming to readers who may not be able to discern the dividing line between fact and fiction.

The questions which they have raised have implications for readers that will demand the very best verifiable responses available. As their sources are further digested and critiqued the "winnowing" process will be more complete. Perhaps then the delineation of what is actual versus what might be classified as the "Reinvention of Mormonism" can be further affixed.

Reviewed by Kevin Christensen

**Paradigms Crossed**

In the sciences the [paradigm] testing situation never consists, as puzzle-solving does, simply in the comparison of a single paradigm with nature. Instead, testing occurs as part of the competition between two rival paradigms for the allegiance of the scientific community.\(^1\)

This hefty volume of essays attacks the historicity of the Book of Mormon. To justify their claims, the authors cite apparent anachronisms and historical implausibilities and criticize historicist Latter-day Saint writers.\(^2\) Whereas the usual clergy-backed anti-Mormon volume depends on shallow reading and recycled arguments, this book attempts close readings and new arguments provided by cultural insiders. Some of these authors reserve grounds for belief in the spiritual value of Mormonism, but most of the book reads like a post mortem on an anonymous cadaver—we get lots of grisly details, but no life, no light, and no hope. However, in contrast to the dismal view of the Book of Mormon offered in

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2. To be fair, Melodie Moench Charles and Deanne Matheny avoid direct comment on the historicity of the Book of Mormon in their contributions, and at times they give notice to alternate theories. (Other authors in the volume refer to Matheny’s critique of John Sorenson as though she had disproved the Book of Mormon; see, for example, Hutchinson [p. 11].) Mark Thomas tries to conclude his essay in an open-ended manner.
New Approaches, other perspectives continue to affirm that the subject not only lives, but provides essential light and hope.

To shift to the metaphor used in Alma 32, most of the New Approaches authors blame the poor harvest on the seed (that is, the Book of Mormon). I propose to look at the nature of the soil in which these authors plant the seed, the care taken for the seed’s nourishment, the patience and desires evidenced by the particular approaches taken, and comparisons with other approaches that report a more impressive harvest.

I intend to show that the conclusions of these authors depend on highly selective methods, narrow perspectives, and brittle background expectations. We shall also observe that the rivalry between prophets and skeptics, as developed in New Approaches, has a long history. That is, while the packaging and specific applications are relatively new, the approach is ancient.

I should briefly summarize New Approaches. It consists of ten essays which, according to the editor’s preface, attempt “to expand appreciation3 of Mormon scripture through critical analysis” (p. x). The first essay in New Approaches, “The Word of God Is Enough,” by Anthony Hutchinson, begins by saying that “Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints should confess in faith that the Book of Mormon is the word of God but also abandon claims that it is a historical record of the ancient peoples of the Americas” (p. 1). In “Book of Mormon Christology,” Melodie Moench Charles argues that modern Mormonism does not follow the Book of Mormon’s concept of God. Mark Thomas’s essay, “A Rhetorical Approach to the Book of Mormon,” compares Nephite sacramental prayers with nineteenth-century controversies and concludes that “the eucharistic prayers themselves are in the form of a post-Reformation epiclesis containing a covenant” (p. 77).

Two essays devote themselves to criticizing the work of believing scholars. Deanne G. Matheny’s “Does the Shoe Fit? A

3 Compare the definition of “appreciation” from the World Book Dictionary (Chicago: Doubleday and Company, 1981), 101, with the contents of New Approaches for some insight into the editor’s intent: “Appreciate: 1. the quality or condition of being thankful for; gratefulness; approval. 2. the fact of valuing highly; sympathetic understanding. 3. an estimate of the value or quality of something. 4. favorable criticism. 5. a rise in value.”
Critique of the Limited Tehuantepec Geography” argues against the plausibility of Mesoamerican correlations proposed by F. Richard Hauck and John L. Sorenson. Edward H. Ashment’s “‘A Record in the Language of My Father’: Evidence of Ancient Egyptian and Hebrew in the Book of Mormon” criticizes the work of several Latter-day Saint apologists, and claims that there is “no direct evidence to support the historical claims of the Book of Mormon” (p. 374).

The rest of the essays expressly depict the Book of Mormon as nineteenth-century fiction. The essay “Anti-Universalist Rhetoric in the Book of Mormon,” by Dan Vogel, argues that the application of rhetorical criticism, while it did not have “the primary goal” (p. 47) of investigating the historicity of the Book of Mormon, nevertheless raises questions about it. Stan Larson’s essay, “The Historicity of the Matthean Sermon on the Mount in 3 Nephi,” concludes that “there is no evidence to substantiate the view that the Book of Mormon records a real visit by the resurrected Jesus to the place called Bountiful in the Book of Mormon” (p. 133). David P. Wright’s essay, “‘In Plain Terms That We May Understand’: Joseph Smith’s Transformation of Hebrews in Alma 12–13,” claims that Joseph Smith borrowed themes from Hebrews to create the Melchizedek material in Alma 13, and suggests that to understand the scriptures, we should adopt the critical method, which generates critical conclusions (p. 213). John Kunich’s “Multiply Exceedingly: Book of Mormon Population Sizes” argues against the historicity of the Book of Mormon based on his reading of the population demographics. Finally, the editor caps the book with his own contribution, “The Priority of Mosiah: A Prelude to Book of Mormon Exegesis,” which depicts “Smith as the narrative’s chief designer” (p. 433).

At times the New Approaches authors’ observations may be interesting and provocative, and some of their criticisms merit response and consideration. FARMS has already provided formidable replies to each of these essays, in the form of a 566-page Review.4 At times, my essay supplements the previous FARMS

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response, and occasionally draws upon it for illustrations. But even while addressing specific issues, I am most interested in illuminating the general structure of the ongoing debate about the Book of Mormon. And because this debate structure is illuminated by the Book of Mormon, particularly by Alma 32, I hope to make a real contribution to our appreciation of Latter-day Saint scripture.

My comments are structured not to provide a systematic response to each author, but rather to illustrate a pattern by which believing Mormons (particularly non-specialists) can deal constructively with this kind of book. I argue that the paradigm of the Book of Mormon as a nineteenth-century fiction does not provide a better alternative for Mormons.

My response involves three themes:

1. The nature of paradigms and paradigm debate.5
2. How limits on human perspective—such as temporality, selectivity, subjectivity, and context—function to exaggerate the weight of the arguments in these essays.
3. Concluding thoughts on the enterprise.


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5 My discussion follows Thomas Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* and Ian Barbour’s *Myths, Models, and Paradigms* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), which examines the discussion generated by Kuhn’s book and applies Kuhn’s observations to religious experience. Elsewhere I have observed that Alma 32 expresses an epistemology identical to Kuhn’s (Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 2 [1990]: 215–19). This essay treats the subject in greater detail.
Section 1

Paradigms and Paradigm Debate

Paradigms differ in more than substance, for they are directed not only to nature but also back upon the science that produced them. They are the source of the methods, problem-field, and standards of solution accepted by any mature scientific community at any given time.6

Opponents in the debates about Mormon history and scripture typically criticize each other for having preconceptions and methods that influence their approach to the evidence.7 But merely to point out an opponent’s assumptions, though it raises issues, neither disproves the opposition’s case, nor settles the case for the defense. The current debate needs discussion of the means by which we decide why one set of assumptions and methods should be preferred over another. The assumptions and methods of each group of scholars derive from their respective paradigms. Thomas Kuhn’s work describes not only the nature of paradigms, but the means by which one scientific paradigm supplants another.

For Kuhn, scientific paradigms are defined by “standard examples of scientific work that embody a set of conceptual, methodological and metaphysical assumptions.”8 In the sciences, according to Kuhn, such works as Aristotle’s *Physica*, Newton’s *Principia* and *Opticks*, and Franklin’s *Electricity* define “the legitimate problems and methods of a research field.”9 They rep-

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6 Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 103.
7 For example, compare Gary Novak’s essay “Naturalistic Assumptions and the Book of Mormon,” *BYU Studies* 30/3 (Summer 1990): 23–40, with Anthony Hutchinson, “The Word of God Is Enough: The Book of Mormon as Nineteenth Century Scripture,” 10, and Edward Ashment, “ ‘A Record in the Language of My Father’: Evidence of Ancient Egyptian and Hebrew in the Book of Mormon,” 374. Or consider the essays in George D. Smith’s *Faithful History: Essays on Writing Mormon History* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), or the letters columns in *Dialogue* and *Sunstone* from issue to issue, and various reviews in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon*.
resent unprecedented achievements that attract researchers away from competing theoretical frameworks.

1. Paradigms *unify* a scientific community around "a group-licensed way of seeing,"10 a shared set of standards and rules for scientific practice.11

2. Additionally, these paradigms are *extensible*, mapping the known in satisfying detail, but "sufficiently open-ended to leave all sorts of problems for the redefined group of practitioners to resolve."12

3. Finally, paradigms provide the *background* of expectation against which anomaly appears.13

Kuhn notes that the "more precise and far-reaching a paradigm is, the more sensitive an indicator it provides of anomaly and hence an occasion for paradigm change."14 Thus we need to pay close attention to background expectations, especially those background expectations held or attacked as if they were creeds.

For example, consider David Whitmer's background expectations as he objects to the changes in the Book of Commandments: "As if God had changed his mind after giving his word. No, brethren! God does not change and work in any such manner as this."15

Whitmer clearly outlines the premise that underlies his distress over the changes, a premise that is precise and far reaching and therefore highly sensitive to anomaly. But at this point, we need to invoke what I call the "Mote-Eye" rule (from Matthew 7), and ask whether Whitmer is, in this instance, seeing clearly. How would Whitmer's premise explain the story of Abraham's arrested sacrifice of Isaac? Also, notice the variant wording of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 compared to the wording in Deuteronomy 5. Then compare these differences in what Whitmer would

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10 Ibid., 189.
11 Kuhn notes that scientific communities without shared paradigms tend to display chronic debate over fundamentals, ibid., 48.
12 Ibid., 10.
13 Ibid., 65.
14 Ibid.
regard as “written in stone” with the changes in the Doctrine and Covenants.16

Also, contrast Whitmer’s premise with the formula, “Ye have heard that it hath been said, . . . but I say unto you,” used by Jesus several times in Matthew 5:19–48, and Joseph Smith’s remark: “a man would command his son to dig potatoes and saddle his horse, but before he had done either he would tell him to do something else. This is all considered right; but as soon as the Lord gives a commandment and revokes that decree and commands something else, then the Prophet is considered fallen.”17

Clearly, Whitmer’s rigid premise cannot account for these conspicuous examples of divine and prophetic behavior. If Whitmer had accepted these particular examples as paradigmatic, and built his premises from these observations, he could have arrived at a more tolerant and robust set of background expectations. The Mote-Eye rule shows that on this point, however attractive the premise, however sincere his belief, and however logical his argument from that belief, Whitmer was not seeing clearly.

Joseph Smith’s visions and the Book of Mormon performed a paradigm-defining function as “standard examples” and “unprecedented achievements” that attracted a community of believers to Mormonism. And in Book of Mormon studies, Hugh Nibley’s efforts for the Near Eastern side and John Sorenson’s efforts for the Mesoamerican side have defined paradigms for the most significant groups of believing researchers today.

Metcalf, by concentrating these efforts in a single volume and by including attacks on historicist scholars (such as Nibley, Sorenson, Welch, Tvedtnes, and others), obviously intends that New Approaches should provide this kind of paradigm-defining example for modern students of the Book of Mormon. Hence, one goal of the project is to attract scholars away from the kind of

16 Discussed in Robert J. Woodford, “How the Revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants Were Received and Compiled,” Ensign 15 (January 1985): 26–33, and Melvin J. Peterson, “Preparing Early Revelations for Publication,” Ensign 15 (February 1985): 14–21; also compare Jeremiah 36:28, 32, wherein after the king burns a written revelation, the prophet writes “all the former words” and “added besides unto them, many like words.”

work that FARMS produces and towards a secular approach to scripture.

The Limits of Verification and Falsification

The proponents of competing paradigms are always at least slightly at cross purposes. Neither side will grant all the non-empirical assumptions that the other needs in order to make its case. . . The competition between paradigms is not the sort of battle that can be resolved by proofs.18

Much paper is wasted over the issue of whether this or that point has or has not been proven. Any academic claim that conclusions derive from direct observation of facts (or the lack thereof) should be tempered by the recognition that “all data are theory-laden.”19 As Nibley observes, “Things that appear unlikely, impossible, or paradoxical from one point of view often make perfectly good sense from another.”20 The notion of proof only makes sense within a given paradigm. In comparing paradigms, we confront the limits of verification and falsification.

Issues for Paradigm Verification

Paradigms cannot be verified for two reasons:

1. Future discoveries may conflict with present theory. For example, in her essay in New Approaches, Melodie Moench Charles comments that “the Qumran documents . . . show no evidence of detailed prophesies [sic] mentioning Jesus or matching his life or mission” (p. 93 n. 22). I suspect that Ms. Charles com-

18 Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, 148; see Daniel C. Peterson, “Text and Context,” Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 6/1 (1994): 525: “It seems to me that the dispute between defenders of the Book of Mormon and the traditional truth claims of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, on the one hand, and those who would revise or redefine those truth claims, on the other, is as much a clash of opposing world views as a quibble over this or that piece of evidence.”

19 N. R. Hansen quoted in Barbour, Myths, Models, and Paradigms, 95.

compiled her essay before the release of the latest Qumran fragments that John Tvedtnes refers to as “recently released fragments of the Dead Sea Scrolls” that “support the view of the Book of Mormon that a knowledge of a savior-messiah was had in ancient Israel.”

This example supports some specific claims of the Book of Mormon, but we should acknowledge that sometimes the turn of circumstance has obliged defenders of the faith to change their arguments. Even so, such examples as the Aston’s *In the Footsteps of Lehi* and John Sorenson’s work on the Mesoamerican setting of the Book of Mormon provide examples to show that such updating can be enlightening rather than disillusioning.

2. Another theory may explain present evidence equally well. Consider the implications of the famous drawing of the Old/Young woman in figure 1. Because the artist creates unresolvable ambiguities, we can interpret the drawing in two very different ways. The drawing compels us to awaken to the possibility that anything that we observe can be understood in a different way. My choice of title for this essay provides another example; in this case, two words, *Paradigms Crossed*, suggest multiple meanings that complement, rather than contradict, one another. That is not to say that any interpretation is equally valid, either for the picture or for my title—each consists of specific evidence that must be explained. But more than one interpretation may account for the same evidence. In the case of the picture, an observer who sees only one possibility demonstrates either perceptual or imaginative blindness. Some critics may denigrate the more attractive possibility, perhaps because they have been disappointed in the past, or perhaps because lasting beauty is too much to hope for. But by doing so, they demonstrate ideology rather than perception.

In *New Approaches*, Mark Thomas, less dogmatic than most in *New Approaches*, kindly acknowledges three possible ways to account for his findings (p. 77). Melodie Moench Charles also makes a notable effort to highlight alternate understandings of


some issues (pp. 94–95). On the other hand, Edward Ashment knows that certain biblical paraphrases recur in clusters in the Book of Mormon text because Joseph Smith repeated those phrases while they were “fresh in his mind” (pp. 368–69). Of course, the clustered phrases could just as easily recur for a Nephi or a Mosiah while fresh on their minds. Ashment’s choice of words clearly demonstrates how data become “theory-laden.”

**Issues for Paradigm Falsification**

If paradigms cannot be verified, can they be *falsified*?

In practice, as Ian Barbour observes, paradigms resist falsification because “a network of theories and observations is always
tested together. Any particular hypothesis can be maintained by rejecting or adjusting other auxiliary hypotheses.”23 Some adjustments to such auxiliary hypotheses strengthen the overall paradigm. For example, Kepler adjusted the assumptions of the Copernican theory of planetary motion by arguing for elliptical orbits rather than circular orbits. The rival Ptolemaic theory explained otherwise anomalous planetary motions by surmising epicycles. While the assumption of epicycles preserved the usefulness of the Ptolemaic theory for several generations, comparison with Kepler’s assumptions makes it plain that not all adjustments are created equal. Whereas Kepler’s adjustments led to his generally applicable laws of motion, the ad hoc notion of epicycles applied only to particular problems and had little justification other than necessity. The course of the Copernican Revolution shows that the “accumulation of anomalies” or of “ad hoc modifications having no independent theoretical basis cannot be tolerated indefinitely. An accepted theory is overthrown not primarily by discordant data but by an alternative theory.”24

The antihistoricists tend to resist any adjustments in target hypotheses concerning Book of Mormon historicity,25 the priority of “traditional” views of geography and cultures,26 and potential language translation and text transmission factors.27 This

24 Ibid., 114.
25 For example, according to Hutchinson, the Book of Mormon’s authority “evaporates as soon as the book’s absolute ancientness is compromised in the least degree” (p. 12).
26 Note how John Kunich attempts to fend off Sorenson and Nibley by appealing to B. H. Roberts (pp. 260–61). Kunich dismisses John Sorenson’s “When Lehi’s Party Arrived in the Land, Did They Find Others There?” Journal of Book of Mormon Studies 1 (Fall 1992): 1–34, as “imaginative musings.” Also, note how Deanne G. Matheny cites Dan Vogel’s irrelevant observation that “it is absolutely clear that Joseph Smith and the early Mormons associated the Book of Mormon with the Moundbuilder myth” (p. 271). My review of Dan Vogel’s Indian Origins and the Book of Mormon in Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 2 (1990): 214–57, argues that the Mound Builder myth contributed to the misreading of the Book of Mormon by the early Saints, but that the Book of Mormon diverges from the Mound Builder myth in profound ways.
27 For example, Stan Larson (p. 132) insists that “The Book of Mormon cannot be exempted from such textual criticism by emphasizing that translation inevitably introduces elements from the translator’s environment.”
resistance to adjustments in auxiliary assumptions about the Book of Mormon makes for an easier, stationary target and artificially adds weight to the criticisms these authors make.

This is why Joseph Smith opposed creeds, not because they are false teachings, but because "creeds set up stakes, and say, 'Hitherto thou shalt come, and no further'; which I cannot subscribe to." The message of the First Vision is not that a true creed had come to replace the false ones, but that the heavens had opened. You don't need to worship at a cistern when you've got a fountain (see Jeremiah 2:13). Creeds tend to create rigid background expectations which become "abominable" by promoting static authoritarianism that resists further light and knowledge. This is not to say that we should bow without resistance to every wind of doctrine that happens to blow by (Ephesians 4:11–16), but that resistance to new ideas should be just as carefully considered as acceptance of such (Acts 10:9–28). Too often, creeds buy present conformity (as when the Inquisitors came to chat with Galileo about astronomy, torture, and correct thinking) with the coin of future faith (such as those for whom the Galileo incident becomes the defining myth of the relationship between science and religion). Creeds make for spiritual vulnerability in

29 TPJS, 327.
30 See Jeremiah 17:5–13; also Luke 5:37–39; John 7:38; 2 Nephi 28:29–30; D&C 1:24–28. When creeds are intact in any community, whether scientific, political, or religious, the question of questions becomes "Do you preach the orthodoxy religion?"
31 Kuhn points out that the history of science includes many instances of intolerance and resistance to new theories among scientists. The point with regard to the Galileo incident is that it dramatizes tensions in a paradigm debate, not necessarily an essential relation between science and religion. Notice that the religious figures in the trial of Galileo and in the Scopes Trial do not truly represent Mantic thinking; that is, the issue was not between Sophic science and Mantic revelation, but between Sophic science and traditional authority and interpretation; see Hugh W. Nibley, "Three Shrines: Mantic, Sophic, and Sophistic:" and "Paths That Stray: Some Notes on the Sophic and Mantic," in The Ancient State: The Rulers and the Ruled (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 311–478.
those whose cisterns are too brittle to change shape and too fragile to take shocks.\textsuperscript{32}

In \textit{New Approaches}, for example, while replacing sound methodology with rhetorical judo, Stan Larson makes a creed of the pure falsification hypothesis by quoting Hugh Nibley as saying the following:

We can never prove absolutely that the Book of Mormon is what is claims to be; but any serious proven fault in the work would at once condemn it. If I assume the Book of Mormon to be fraudulent, then whatever is correct in it is merely a lucky coincidence, devoid of any real significance. But if I assume that it is true, then any suspicious passage is highly significant and casts suspicion on the whole thing, no matter how much of it is right. (p. 133)\textsuperscript{33}

Immediately after this quotation, Larson narrows this claim of pure falsification to the historical claims for 3 Nephi 12–14 (p. 133). He then turns his argument against the reality of the visit of the resurrected Jesus to Bountiful on grounds of there being no verification (ibid.), having just disqualified 3 Nephi as evidence by claiming that “Smith copied the KJV blindly, not showing awareness of translation problems and errors in the KJV” (p. 132).

Consider the care with which Larson makes his case up to that point, and which he subsequently continues in his appendix, and notice the crucial lapse here, where any decisive significance for his observations must rest. In 1953, Nibley’s argument illustrated the notion of falsification as practiced in textual criticism. At the time, Nibley compared falsification to the problem of identifying a counterfeit bill, wherein the nature of an authentic bill is well defined. But at this point the methodological parallel to testing the Book of Mormon breaks down. For falsification to work perfectly in the case of a counterfeit bill, the qualities of an authentic bill must be fully known. But the qualities of an authentically historic


Book of Mormon, translated by inspiration, are nowhere near as well defined as those of an authentic bill.

This limit in the logic of falsification, especially in the case of general theories—that the requisite knowledge of authenticity is always incomplete—underlies the editorial change that Larson alludes to when he says that “all but the first clause has been deleted” (p. 133) in The Prophetic Book of Mormon.34

Looking to the 1989 version, we find the following adjustment to Nibley’s argument, highlighting the differences from the 1953 original as quoted by Larson:

*Thus, while* we can never prove absolutely that the Book of Mormon is what it claims to be, *we are justified in the outset in assuming that it is what it claims to be. If one assumes that it is true, its features at least become testable.*35

The change is strictly in line with the practical limits of falsification, as noted by Kuhn and Barbour, as well as in keeping with Nibley’s more representative argument that “It is not enough to show . . . that there are mistakes in the Book of Mormon, for all humans make mistakes; what they must explain is how the ‘author’ of the book happened to get so many things right.”36

If we drop Larson’s weak notion of falsification and start asking the sorts of questions that should be asked during a paradigm debate, the significance of his evidence dwindles abruptly. For example, are the problems that Larson describes as the domain of textual criticism, those nuances regarding “the same distinctive addition, peculiar error, or the same alternate reading” (p. 129), really the most significant problems to have solved? Can such questions even be addressed without sure knowledge of the parameters of an “inspired” translation?

As is typical for New Approaches, Larson ignores significant matters in which the Book of Mormon gets it right. His theory of “blindness” and “plagiarism” accomplishes nothing to explain

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35 Ibid.
the insights of the 3 Nephi text that John Welch, Hugh Nibley, Richard L. Anderson, and others discuss.  

As should be obvious in reading his eight examples, most of the differences have little or no significance for meaning (pp. 121–27). Larson’s case depends on the questionable claim that the Book of Mormon, purportedly an “inspired” (not an academic) English translation of an ancient New World text, should take us back to the best available Greek text of an Aramaic original: “Where the Book of Mormon could offer a fresh translation directly from the valuable fourth-century inscription of a first-century document, one finds a reaction to the late and corrupted text of the KJV” (p. 132).

However, the academic definition of translation current in Joseph’s day in the 1798 Encyclopedia Britannica gave the three “fundamental rules for translations” as: “1. That the translation should give a complete transcript of the ideas of the original. 2. That the style and manner of the original should be preserved in the translation. 3. That the translation should have all the ease of the original composition.” Joseph Smith is on record as describing an admittedly imperfect translation as “sufficiently


38 Compare the reviews by John Tvedtnes and John W. Welch in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994): 8–50, 145–86. See Welch for a discussion of the one change that makes a significant difference, the *without a cause* present in the King James Version of Matthew 5:22 and absent in the Book of Mormon 3 Nephi 12:22.

plain to suit my purpose as it stands’’ (D&C 128:18). According to the definition of translation active in the nineteenth century, the “blindness” to Old World manuscript nuance that Larson belabor does not matter.

In effect, Larson rests his case on differences which do not apply to translation by nineteenth-century standards, appealing instead to expectations that he imposes based on his twentieth-century training. He makes a creed of his academic training and refuses to make adjustments in his expectations for the Book of Mormon.

**Confronting Self-Reference in Paradigm Debate**

To the extent . . . that two scientific schools disagree about what is a problem and what is a solution, they will inevitably talk through each other when debating the relative merits of their respective paradigms. In the partially circular arguments that regularly result, each paradigm will be shown to satisfy more or less the criteria that it dictates for itself and to fall short of a few of those dictated by its opponent.\(^{40}\)

Critics and defenders of the Book of Mormon often appeal to facts. But as we have seen, during paradigm testing it pays to be skeptical of appeals to the “plain facts,” because theory influences observation with the result that all data are to some degree theory-laden. Ian Barbour insists on three points that must be accepted by all concerned (if opposing sides expect to communicate at all).

1. Although proponents of rival theories inevitably talk through each other to a degree, adherents “of rival theories can seek a common core of overlap . . . to which both can retreat.”\(^{41}\)

Notice, however, that this “retreat” to a common core of overlap is done as an aid to communication, not as a prerequisite for seeing truth. Joseph Smith talked about how even God adapts himself to our capacity to understand.\(^{42}\) That does not mean that

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\(^{42}\) *TPJS*, 162.
knowledge of truth is circumscribed by our ability to find common ground and consensus. It simply means that when addressing a particular audience, if you expect to communicate, you might have to retreat from certain preferred, even useful and possibly true, assumptions. On the other hand, apart from the problem of communicating our beliefs, our ability to find further truths depends on our willingness to risk certain assumptions and explore their possibilities (for example, John 7:16–17; 8:31–32; Alma 32). We do not need to retreat from our preferred assumptions when doing our research, or living our lives, or in communicating with audiences that share those assumptions.

2. Comprehensive theories are highly resistant to falsification, but observation exerts some control over theories.43

3. There are no rules for choice between paradigms but there are criteria of assessment independent of particular paradigms.44

In comparing general theories (such as Newton’s and Einstein’s physics, or different Book of Mormon geographies), neither of which is proven or provable because neither “solves all the problems it defines,”45 scientists can only ask which of the two theories better describes nature,46 and which problems are more significant to have solved.47

In making a paradigm choice in religious matters (such as between Mormonism and atheism, or historical and environmental views of the Book of Mormon), Barbour argues that the decision is more subjective than in the hard sciences, but this difference involves the degree, not the kind, of subjective valuations. Regarding faith decisions, Barbour remarks that “There are no proofs, but there are good reasons for judgments which are not simply matters of personal taste or individual preference.”48

43 Barbour, Myths, Models, and Paradigms, 113.
44 Ibid.
45 Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, 110.
46 Ibid., 147; cf. Alma 32:34–35.
48 Barbour, Myths, Models, and Paradigms, 146.
Values Applied in Evaluating Paradigms

The resort to shared values rather than to shared rules governing individual choice may be the community’s way of distributing risk and assuring the long-term success of its enterprise.49

Kuhn demonstrates that choice between paradigms depends largely on the application of values, rather than the application of rules.50 Whereas rules would determine the choice, values can only constrain it. As Kuhn emphasizes, these values can be applied differently by people who agree on them. The most important values that Kuhn and Barbour identify include the following:

- Accuracy of Key Predictions
- Comprehensiveness and Coherence
- Fruitfulness
- Simplicity and Aesthetics
- Future Promise

Observe that Alma asks for those who will experiment, even with “no more than desire to believe,” to apply these same values until they can “give place to a portion of my words” (Alma 32:27).

Other values influence theory choice, such as a teacher’s nationality, or prior reputation, and various social and biographical experiences.51 Even though these sorts of things have less to do with what is real, they do function as randomizing or constraining factors for individuals within a group. My discussion concentrates on the more significant values described by Kuhn and Alma.

Accuracy of Key Predictions (cf. Alma 32:26–27, 35)

Probably the single most prevalent claim advanced by proponents of a new paradigm is that they can solve the problems that have led the old one to a crisis. . . . Claims of this sort . . . succeed if the new paradigm

49 Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, 186.
50 Ibid., 153–59, 185.
51 Ibid., 153.
displays a quantitative precision strikingly better than its older competitor.52

Kuhn suggests that the accuracy of key predictions is not a static objective measure but:

1. comparative between competing paradigms and nature,
2. relative to the importance the community assigns to the problems that each paradigm solves or fails to solve, and
3. weighted by the degree of precision attained by each theory.

Each of the New Approaches writers attempts to elevate his or her pet concern to this “key” problem status. For Metcalfe, the key problem involves nuances of the Book of Mormon text as considered in light of the “Mosiah first” theory of translation. For Wright, the problem is the apparent anachronistic relation between Alma 13 and Hebrews. For Kunich, the problem is Book of Mormon population statistics. For Vogel, the problem involves parallels between nineteenth-century debates about universal salvation and Alma’s discourse to Corianton about restoration. But we do not need to accept their conclusions regarding such problems at face value. We should instead ask: What makes an anomaly “that normal science [or faith] sees as a puzzle” into what “can be seen from another viewpoint as a counterinstance and thus as a source of crisis?”53 There is no comprehensive answer. (Part of what makes any issue “key” involves the door that you intend to open.) But Kuhn does highlight three issues:

1. Issues for Fundamental Generalizations

Sometimes an anomaly will clearly call into question explicit and fundamental generalizations of the paradigm.54

52 Ibid., 153-54. Alma encourages an “experiment” regarding key issues for his audience (where to worship, and how to know whether to believe him; Alma 32:5, 26), predicts the results of an experiment in spirituality (Alma 32:27), leads them through that experiment, and remarks, “Is this not real? . . . It is discernible” (Alma 32:35).
53 Kuhn, Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, 79.
54 Ibid., 79.
Think about how the “problem of evil” poses such an obstacle for theologies which presume an absolute omnipotent, omniscient, and benevolent God. According to Antony Flew, the problem of evil is “perhaps the most powerful of all skeptical arguments,” one that appeals to “the clearest and most direct minds, striking straight and decisively to the heart of the matter.” McClosky adds, “We must conclude from the existence of evil that there cannot be an omnipotent, benevolent God.”

For Mormons, this “most powerful of skeptical arguments” has no power. Why? Because we perceive of Deity as being surrounded by intelligences, elements, and conditions which he did not create from nothing (D&C 93:29; Abraham 3:15–28). Non-Mormon theologians such as Alfred North Whitehead and William James have advocated similar ideas under the headings of Process Theology and Finitism. Discussing Whitehead’s process model, Barbour writes:

If the classical ideas of omnipotence and predestination are given up, God is exonerated of responsibility for natural evil. . . . Suffering is inevitable in a world of beings with conflicting goals. Pain is part of the price of consciousness and intensity of feeling. In an evolutionary world, struggle is integral to the realization of greater value.

Finitism, whether expressed as Mormonism or as Process Theology, resolves a host of troubling paradoxes. Those who resist

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56 McClosky, in ibid., 223.
57 Sterling McMurrin, *The Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah, 1965), 105–6, discusses the different approaches taken to arrive at the model—that is, philosophical analysis versus Joseph’s unargued, commonsense pronouncements.
the implications of Finitism do so on the skeptical side, because they want to preserve the power of the "best" skeptical argument, and on the believing side because they refuse to sacrifice a belief in omnipotence in spite of the theological quandaries that it drags along.

Similar issues regarding an author's controlling premises and resistance to potential solutions abound in New Approaches. For example, John Kunich frets at length about Book of Mormon population issues and assumes that Lehi's and Mulek's peoples must supply all North and South American populations. It says something for Kunich's infatuation with the population problem that he goes on for twenty-nine pages before even attempting to validate his starting assumptions, and even then, he ignores several contrary arguments. Ironically, he concludes: "Our study must be honest, open, . . . and not limited by preconceived conclusions" (p. 265).

What Kunich sees as a roadblock to plausibility, Sorenson sees as a doorway to a new understanding.\textsuperscript{60} Rather than stepping through the doorway, Kunich labors to save the problem from the solution. Kunich's defense amounts to appealing to the authority of B. H. Roberts (p. 261), without considering the basis for the opinions Roberts expressed,\textsuperscript{61} providing some weak readings of a few scriptures (pp. 261-64), and concocting some unfulfilled conditions for plausibility (pp. 262-64).

Sorenson's reading of the prophecies regarding "other nations" is far superior to Kunich's (p. 261).\textsuperscript{62} In support of his belief that the Book of Mormon cannot account for non-Lehite/
Mulekite populations in the Americas, Kunich quotes 2 Nephi 1:8–9, “It is wisdom that this land should be kept as yet from the knowledge of other nations; for behold, many nations would overrun the land.”

What is the extent of Lehi’s reference to the land in this passage? John Tvedtnes says that “In the Bible, the word land most often refers to the land occupied by the Israelites.”63 A recent article by Russell Ball shows that the Book of Mormon usage of the terms the land, and even the whole earth, is often very localized.64

Who and where are the other nations? In An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon, Sorenson wrote that “Most Latter-day Saint readers have supposed that the ‘other nations’ were the European ‘Gentiles’ (1 Nephi 13:1–3) who overran the land after Columbus’s discovery, but does it make sense that the fate prophesied by Lehi would be delayed until 1,100 years after Cumorah?”65

Lehi’s promise that his children would possess the land unmolested was conditional on their keeping the commandments (2 Nephi 1:9). The next verses say that “when ... they shall dwindle in unbelief” (not “long afterwards,” but “when”), the Lord “will bring other nations ... and he will take away from them the lands of their possessions, and he will cause them to be scattered and smitten. Yea, as one generation passeth to another, there shall be bloodshed” (2 Nephi 1:10–12).

Second Nephi 5:2–5 reports that soon after the death of Lehi—the passing of a generation—Nephi’s brothers plotted against his own life. Nephi and those he called “his people” fled the land. Despite the report that those who initially left “were those who believed” in God (2 Nephi 5:6), such passages as 2 Nephi 32:7 and 2 Nephi 33:1–3 suggest strongly that Nephi’s people had problems of their own. For example, Jacob reports on

63 See Tvedtnes’s review in Review of Books on the Book of Mormon, 28.
the necessity for "diligent" labor among them on the part of the prophets (Jacob 1:7) even before Jacob 2:15 describes the beginning of extreme tendencies. Prior to the departure of Nephi's people, the Lamanites had already acted in a role as "a scourge to [Nephi's people], to stir them up in remembrance of me" (2 Nephi 5:25). Although neither Nephi nor Jacob provides details, Jacob 1:10 describes Nephi as having "wielded the sword of Laban" in defense of his people. Thus we have no record of the conditions for blessing being fully kept, and significant information suggesting that the covenant curse was in effect almost from the time of the death of Lehi. That is, immediately after the death of Lehi (the passing of that generation), we see the loss of lands and scattering (2 Nephi 5:5), and smiting and bloodsheds (2 Nephi 5:25, 34, Jacob 1:10). What about the "other nations"? alerted by the work of Sorenson and others, we have only to look with eyes that see.

Other than to assert that the Jaredites became extinct (pp. 261, 264), Kunich has never dealt with Nibley's arguments in favor of Jaredite survivors.66

What does the Book of Mormon mean by "destroyed"? The word is to be taken, as are so many other key words in the book, in its primary and original sense: "To unbuild; to separate violently into its constituent parts; to break up the structure." To destroy is to wreck the structure, not to annihilate the parts.67

Consider Kunich's requirement that the Lehilites win "total domination over a host of people" (p. 262). Actually, all that plausibility requires is a population influx over time sufficient to contribute to population growth.

Kunich calls for a detailed account of the "discovery and absorption of the natives" (p. 262). A key example of Kunich's limited imagination and careless reading comes in the phrase "If the Nephite encounter [actually, it was a Mulekite encounter, see Omni 1:21] with a single Jaredite survivor, Coriantumr, was suffi-

66 See Nibley, Lehi in the Desert, 237–63. Also see Mosiah 8:12, in which Ammon seeks "knowledge of a remnant of the people who have been destroyed."
67 Ibid., 239.
ciently important to warrant inclusion in the sacred record..." (p. 264, emphasis added). Perhaps the Nephite record keepers found Coriantumr sufficiently important both because he was royalty and because he was mentioned on an engraved stone that they obtained from Zarahemla’s people (Omni 1:21), and on the twenty-four plates (Ether 12–15). The Nephite record keepers found Zarahemla sufficiently important because he was descended from Zedeckiah, another royal line mentioned in relation to prophecy on their own sacred records (Omni 1:14). Sorenson’s article gathers considerable evidence that others were around, not all of them royalty and connected with individuals named in the scriptures, and therefore not “sufficiently important” for detailed discussion with respect to genre and narrator priorities (1 Nephi 19:6).

Add to Sorenson’s recent work the following observations:

Yea, the Lord hath covenanted this land unto me
[Lehi], and to my children forever, and also all those
who should be led out of other countries. (2 Nephi 1:5)

Notice that from the start, possession of the promised land is not just conditional, as we have seen, but also nonexclusive. Note also that there is no requirement that the “other countries” be located in the Old World.

Before explaining about the covenant for the land, Lehi reminds his children that, besides themselves, the land contains “all those who should be led out of other countries by the hand of the Lord” (2 Nephi 1:5). This remark comes before any reported contact with the Mulekites or the several indications of Jaredite remnants. Why does Lehi make this point about others being led to the land? He very likely knew about them. Nephi’s vision of the promised land, granted before the ocean voyage, may refer to these others:

And it came to pass that the angel said unto me:
Look, and behold thy seed, and also the seed of thy brethren. And I looked and beheld the land of promise; and I beheld multitudes of people, even as it were in number as many as the sands of the sea. (1 Nephi 12:1)
Reading this passage as describing non-Lehite multitudes existing in the New World before the voyage makes Lehi’s remarks about “other nations” (2 Nephi 1:8, 11) in relation to the covenant curse more meaningful. Lehi taught that a law cannot function without an attached punishment (2 Nephi 2:13), and if the “other nations” referred to in the promised land covenant would not arrive until Columbus’s voyage, how would the covenant curse have any immediate significance? It makes sense to suppose that from the beginning Lehi knows that his people are not alone, and he wants his sons to be sobered by the fact. An immediate expectation of other nations on the part of Nephi and Lehi, possibly even interaction with small groups of natives early on (who could signify other nations without representing such), makes the whole story more consistent and meaningful.

I, Nephi, did take my family, and also Zoram and his family, and Sam, mine elder brother and his family, and Jacob and Joseph, my younger brethren, and also my sisters, and all those who would go with me. (2 Nephi 5:6; cf. 5:14)

Again, the passage can easily be understood to include native populations, friendly to the new arrivals. Because the focus of the record is deliberately exclusionary, we need to avoid setting unreasonable conditions when we confront the ambiguity inherent in references to “others” at the start of the Lehite experience in the New World.

And all those who were with me did take upon them to call themselves the people of Nephi. . . .
And if my people desire to know the more particular part of the history of my people, they must search mine other plates. (2 Nephi 5:9, 33)

I see plausible indications for mixing populations from the very beginning of the Lehite migration. Kunich’s insistence on a Robinson Crusoe level of detail belongs to another genre of writing. This next passage makes more sense if we assume native populations with different cultural backgrounds.
Many of my people . . . know not concerning the manner of prophesying among the Jews.

For I, Nephi have not taught them many things concerning the manner of the Jews. (2 Nephi 25:1–2)

Sam, Zoram, Jacob, Joseph, their families, and several of the women mentioned in 2 Nephi 5:6 certainly had a predominance of experience in Jewish culture, as well as belief in and personal experience with the revelations given by Lehi and Nephi, which came in the Jewish modes. Nephi says that he has “not taught [his] children after the manner of the Jews” (verse 6), but that exclusion to his children does not restrict the implications in verse 1, which clearly refers to cultural ignorance among “many” of his people. Notice that Nephi emphasizes that he has “made mention to my children [not necessarily all his people] concerning the judgments of God . . . according to all which Isaiah hath spoken.” We may have different levels of instruction. The preexistence of native populations with alternative cultural backgrounds seems to be a reasonable way to account for an ignorance of the manner of Jewish prophecy, other Jewish manners, skepticism about the gospel, and a reluctance to fully embrace Nephi’s teachings. Hutchinson protests Sorenson’s “adoptionist” theology (p. 11), which is necessary to reconcile some traditional understandings of the extent of promised blessings among indigenous New World peoples, but such a notion is scriptural.

As many of the Gentiles as will repent are the covenant people of the Lord. (2 Nephi 30:2)

Kunich protests that if these others were around that “Certainly . . . their religious conversion . . . [and] the religion centered nature of Nephite society” (p. 263) requires that the Book of Mormon provide an account of a mass conversion. But “Nephite” society often is only a simplified term for dealing with a complex social group, not just one extended family of palefaces that attend the same church. And far from securing a “mass conversion,” Nephi very early refers to his “people” as being “stiffnecked” (2 Nephi 25:28), and mourns the “unbelief, and

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the wickedness, and the ignorance, and the stiffneckedness of men” (2 Nephi 32:7). Such a complaint makes more sense if the people involved included locals who resisted the kind of mass conversion that Kunich views as an implausible necessity.

2. Anomaly Related to Specific Practical Applications

An anomaly without apparent fundamental import may evoke crisis if the applications that it inhibits have a particular practical importance.69

Stan Larson describes the “again” at the end of 3 Nephi 14:2 as being unsupported by ancient Old World manuscripts of Matthew 7:2. He says that “Welch downplays the difference among the variants at Matthew 7:2 by saying that the difference is ‘negligible,’ but it is often such fine distinctions that are clues in textual criticism” (p. 123).

That is, it is Larson’s training in textual criticism that determines the significance of the “again” cited here and the other variants he cites as examples. For any specialist, however, the danger exists of the loss of perspective, the temptation to treat the world like a nail because your tool is a hammer. The applicability of the tool depends not on its availability, but on the situation at hand. If Joseph’s “inspired” translation does not suit the tool, or if the tool itself has design problems,70 the best contribution Larson could make is to show us what not to expect from an inspired translation. Other tools and studies tell us things about 3 Nephi that contradict Larson’s “blindness”-and-“plagiarism” hypothesis (p. 132).

Other frustrated “practical applications” that have been pressed into service as tests of Joseph Smith’s prophetic call involve such things as frustrated business dealings, like the failure of the Kirtland Bank during the Panic of 1837 that led many to

69 Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 82.
70 See Royal Skousen, “Critical Methodology and the Text of the Book of Mormon,” *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994): 125: “The hollowness of New Testament textual criticism becomes fully apparent when we realize that virtually all the specific readings in the reconstructed New Testament text are nonfalsifiable and based upon assumptions that are contradicted by established examples of manuscript copying.”
reject him, or the sort of collapsed pyramid scheme that occasionally captures headlines in the Utah newspapers. They can involve personal conflicts with individuals, such as that between Abner Cole and Joseph Smith when Cole attempted to publish the Book of Mormon in his newspaper. They can involve conflicts growing out of complex social issues, such as church and state conflicts in Utah over prayer in schools or seminary released time, or various feminist and academic issues. They can grow from struggles with personal sexuality, or from the pain of victimization in such matters. The danger in all of these situations comes from attempts to base ultimate truth and commitment decisions on such peripheral issues. None of it has anything to do with the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon. While complex social issues should not be oversimplified and feelings in such matters should not be trivialized (hearts can die, pierced with deep wounds), it is still essential to think through which issues are fundamental for the faith, and which are peripheral.

3. Research Puzzles That Currently Resist Solution

The development of normal science may transform an anomaly that had previously only been a vexation into a source of crisis.72

B. H. Roberts’s Studies of the Book of Mormon73 presents a number of research problems that puzzled Elder Roberts in his reading of the text in comparison to scientific opinion in the 1920s. With the passage of time, most of these puzzles have found solutions.74 John Kunich’s essay quotes Roberts in New Approaches (p. 261), but ignores Welch’s paper, which dealt with all the points that Kunich tries to establish by using Roberts.

Deanne Matheny’s essay in New Approaches critiques John Sorenson’s and F. Richard Hauck’s work on Book of Mormon

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72 Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, 82.
74 See John W. Welch, “Finding Answers to B. H. Roberts’s Questions and ‘An Unparallel.’”
geography with respect to puzzles about “metallurgy, tents, plants, animals, and sites” (p. 320) that she does not regard as solved. For example, she claims that those in favor of Sorenson’s model must “argue that the directionality system is not what the plain meaning of the terms would suggest because otherwise the model will not work” (p. 279). Sorenson responds that “She has failed to grasp the significance of my extensive data showing that Mesoamerican and all other ancient directional systems were constructed on different cultural principles than ours or that Nephite direction usage can be reasonably interpreted in light of what we know from antiquity.”

Solving puzzles is the business of normal science. But on this point, Matheny and Sorenson do not operate in the same paradigm. Their understandings of what constitutes a problem and what constitutes a solution are different. Some of the disagreement has to do with different bodies of knowledge with which they work (such as Sorenson’s evidence for tents, which Matheny overlooked); some with different basic assumptions, notably Matheny’s idea that there is such a thing as “the plain meaning of the words” (p. 321); and some with their different evaluations of the Book of Mormon’s “fit” (Matheny discusses only problems, no solutions); Sorenson sees a considerable fit despite open issues—he questions her “dominant concern with ‘problems’ ” and her neglect of “the sizable body of cultural information in the Book of Mormon which patently agrees with Mesoamerican culture.”

When confronted by different conclusions about such research puzzles during the ongoing paradigm debate, the best way to get perspective is to start asking all the questions that apply to a paradigm debate. Rather than focusing on a single problem, or the opinion of a particular authority figure, ask, Which paradigm is better? Which problems are more significant to have solved?

The Book of Mormon itself claims that the key problem to have solved is testimony (Moroni 10:3–5), but even with that settled, your knowledge is “not perfect” (Alma 32:36). Similarly,

76 Ibid., 318.
Kuhn states that a new paradigm "has seldom solved more than a few of the problems that confront it, and most of these solutions are still far from perfect." Kuhn refers to the existence of unsolved problems in any research paradigm as providing the "essential tension" that surrounds all inquiry. Scientists must be able to "tolerate crisis" in order to work on unsolved problems. "If a paradigm is ever to triumph it must gain some first supporters, men [and women] who will develop it to the point where hardheaded arguments can be produced and multiplied." Likewise, Alma determines that you must "nourish the word . . . by your faith with great diligence, and with patience, looking forward to the fruit thereof" (Alma 32:41).

**Comprehensiveness and Coherence (Alma 32:34)**

The new paradigm must promise to preserve a relatively large part of the concrete problem-solving ability that has accrued to science through its predecessors.

The scientist aims at the comprehensive unification of separate laws, the systematic interrelation of theories, the portrayal of underlying similarities in apparently diverse phenomena.

One of the most persuasive aspects of Einstein's theory was that it seemed to contain Newton's theory as a special case. That is, it not only explained anomalies in Newton's physics, but it also explained why the old paradigm had been as successful as it was.

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77 Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 156.
78 Ibid., 79.
79 Ibid.
80 Ibid., 158.
81 Ibid., 169.
82 Barbour, *Myths, Models, and Paradigms*, 92. Notice that Alma starts with a recognition of his audience's current beliefs, and addresses key concerns (Alma 32:5, 9), adds to their understanding, following implications and making connections, and then says that through the word "your understanding doth begin to be enlightened, and your mind doth begin to expand" (Alma 32:34).
Here, the authors in the Metcalfe volume fall short. By and large, they do not explain the successes of the historicist paradigm.83

Metcalfe’s own essay provides a good example of this. He writes about King Benjamin’s oration as though it were a nineteenth-century revival, claiming that “the apex of the narrative . . . depends . . . fundamentally on a nonbiblical pattern contemporary with Smith” (p. 421 n. 31). He sees the four-step pattern as “(1) Revival Gathering (Mosiah 2); (2) Guilt-Ridden Falling Exercise (4:1–2a); (3) Petition for Spiritual Emancipation (v. 2b); and (4) Christological Absolution and Emotional Ecstasy (v. 3)” (ibid.).

Metcalfe then remarks that “some have attempted to assert comparisons between Lehite religious awakenings and ancient Hebrew rituals” (p. 421 n. 31), referring to, but neglecting the strengths of, valuable studies by Welch, Nibley, Ostler, Ricks, and Tvedtines,84 and ignoring other studies such as those by Welch on the farewell address form85 and on the complex interwoven chias-

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83 The closest that the New Approaches essays come to admitting that anything exists to support the Book of Mormon are David Wright’s acknowledgment that the Book of Mormon contains “notable matters of style” and unidentified “striking parallels” to antiquity, and Ed Ashment’s claim that the lack of “direct evidence” has compelled Mormon apologists to argue from “parallels” (p. 374). While they do not constitute proof, don’t the elaborate parallels deserve an explanation? On the other hand, if the question is, “How well do the apologists explain the successes of New Approaches?” the answer can be found by listening in on the ongoing discussion.


tic structures, and Thomasson on kingship. He defends the priority of his reading by asserting that nineteenth-century camp meetings were modeled after the Israelite Feast of Tabernacles. He also leaves us to wonder why the ancient studies provide a far more comprehensive set of parallels to the ancient convocations than does comparison with the nineteenth-century sources. Nibley's chapter alone, "Old World Ritual in the New World" in An Approach to the Book of Mormon, includes a thirty-six-step pattern, versus a four-step pattern in Metcalfe.

Reluctant to confront directly the undeniably more comprehensive account by "traditionalists," Metcalfe shifts his ground and anchors his account to a "key" anomaly, claiming that traditionalists need to show "neophytes of any culture B.C.E." experiencing a "'revival' conversion." This begs the question of


88 Welch, "King Benjamin's Speech," 25 n. 42, summarizes Nibley's points as:

the proclamation, transfer of kingship, assembly around the temple, taking a census, bringing firstlings and offerings, giving thanks for deliverance, dwelling in tents around the temple, the king speaking from a tower, the call or silentium and teaching of the mysteries, hailing the king, homage by the people to the king (which Benjamin rejects), cleansing from sin, acclimating the king, recounting the story of creation, the king's ritual farewell and descent into the underworld (which Benjamin refers to as a literal event soon to occur), choirs, ensuring succession to the throne, promises of peace and prosperity, the preservation of records, God preserving his people, promises of never-ending happiness, divination of the future, a day of judgment, falling to the ground before the king, seeing all men as equals, the closing acclamation, making of a covenant, receipt of a new name, begetting of the human race, concern about standing in the proper place, having a seal, recording names in a register, appointing priests to remind people of their covenant, and dismissal.

whether "revival" conversion" is an appropriate description of the Mosiah account, sidesteps serious consideration of the more comprehensive studies assembled by FARMS, and ignores the potential effect of translation factors on the language used.90

Fruitfulness (Alma 32:36–41)

Particularly persuasive arguments can be developed if the new paradigm permits the prediction of phenomena that had been entirely unsuspected while the old one prevailed.91

Despite Hutchinson’s attempt to discredit Sorenson for assuming historicity (p. 10),92 there are sound methodological reasons for making historicist assumptions. The most obvious reason is, if you do not risk the assumption, you don’t do the work. If you don’t do the work, you don’t see the fruit. A survey of the classic examples of “fruitfulness” in Book of Mormon study should include, among other things, John Welch’s discovery of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon and Allen Christenson’s subsequent discovery of the form in Mayan texts.93 Neither discovery, of course, proves historicity, but nevertheless both discoveries represent phenomena consistent with historicity which any successful theory must eventually account for. Both discoveries represent phenomena that no one but a believer would ever look for. Regardless of the assumptions that provoked the work, such discoveries should be considered with due respect by any accounting of the Book of Mormon.

In New Approaches, the findings offered by Metcalfe on nuances of a Mosiah-first translation, Dan Vogel on anti-Universalist rhetoric, and Mark Thomas on the forms of the sacramental covenant purport to be consistent with a nineteenth-century

90 Even Melodie Moench Charles refers to Nibley’s and Ostler’s discussions of possible translation factors (94–95).
91 Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, 154.
92 Ashment makes the same argument (p. 374).
origin. This represents the skeptic’s side of the “fruitfulness” process.

With rival schools of thought offering the fruits of their labors, we are faced with contradictory findings. As individuals, we have to weigh the significance according to the various values under consideration in this article. Only David Wright among the contributors to New Approaches ever alludes to the need to weigh contrary findings. (In a footnote he refers to “some striking coincidences between elements of the ancient world and some notable matters of . . . style” [p. 165 n. 2], but he regards them as less “key” than his anachronisms. I would prefer that he identified what even he concedes is so striking and notable so that I could get a better idea of how he operates the balance scale.)

However, in my view, theories which assume historicity have the advantage when I must weigh contrary findings. As a modern translation of an ancient prophetic document, the Book of Mormon can easily accommodate various translation and transmission factors. The ancient world contains more unknowns than the nineteenth century, and therefore, conclusions regarding what existed in the distant past must be more tentative. We need only consider the revolution in biblical studies subsequent to the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the more recent revolutions in Mesoamerican studies pertaining to the decipherment of the Maya glyphs, and the recognition of the prevalence of war in Mayan culture. Such revolutionary events in scholarship leave us room to expect further enlightening discoveries. The view of the Book of Mormon as a nineteenth-century document has much more to explain in order to accommodate the presence of ancient-seeming aspects. Given the unusual circumstances of its origins, why should there be something, and not nothing?

Simplicity and Aesthetics (Alma 32:28, 42)

Simplicity is sought both as a practical advantage and as an intellectual ideal. This includes not only simplicity of mathematical form, conceptual simplicity, and a
minimum of independent assumptions, but also an aesthetic element. 94

Consider two simple descriptions of how the Book of Mormon came to be. Joseph Smith provided one:

Moroni, who deposited the plates in a hill in Manchester, Ontario County, New York, being dead and raised again therefrom, appeared unto me, and told me where they were, and gave me directions how to obtain them. I obtained them, and the Urim and Thummim with them, by the means of which I translated the plates; and thus came the Book of Mormon. 95

In New Approaches, Larson offers "plagiarism" (p. 132) as a simple explanation of the similarity between the King James Version and 3 Nephi 12–14. Unfortunately for Larson, this initial simplicity begins to grow extra heads as soon as we consider the kind of subtle nuances in 3 Nephi 12–14 that John Welch discusses in his chapter on "The Differences between the Sermons" in The Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount.

Although, to the casual observer, most of them seem insignificant or meddlesome, a closer examination shows that most are quite meaningful and subtle. The differences are consistent with the introduction of the Sermon into Nephite culture, with its covenant-making context, and with dating the text to a time before when the suspected factional alterations or additions were made to the Sermon on the Mount. 96

And as soon as we move to the surrounding context of the sermon in 3 Nephi, we get extra arms and legs that "plagiarism" does nothing to explain. If Joseph worked blindly, why the complex parallels to ancient year-rites, the accurate details of catastrophic earthquakes and volcanoes, the inclusion of the Hebrew pesher teaching, and the themes of the early Christian forty-day and descensus literatures? If Joseph plagiarized, where did he get

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94 Barbour, Myths, Models, and Paradigms, 92. Alma talks about the word being good, delicious, precious, sweet, and pure.
95 TPJS, 119.
96 Welch, The Sermon at the Temple, 112.
the stuff? Even apart from the weakness of its explanation, the moral implications of Larson’s use of the word “plagiarism” deserve reconsideration in light of the lack of nineteenth-century standards of citation, as well as the lack of a citation standard within the scriptures. Does it bother Larson that none of the New Testament citations of Old Testament prophets specifically mentions the Septuagint translators, whose effort the authors obviously quoted?

For aesthetics and the Book of Mormon, recall that Alexander Campbell, on February 7, 1831, claimed that “It has not one good sentence in it, save the profanation [sic] of those sentences quoted from the oracles of the living God.” If that were so, we should not encounter Donald Parry’s *The Book of Mormon Text Reformatted According to Parallelistic Patterns*, or other literary studies of the Book of Mormon by Eugene England, John Welch, Angela Crowell, Donald Parry, Alan Goff, Bruce Jorgenson, and Richard Rust, all of which highlight the aesthetic sophistication and beauty of the Book of Mormon. The recent volume on *The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob* adds more weight for the naysayers to carry.

In *New Approaches*, Anthony Hutchinson attempts to argue against the notion of historicity on aesthetic grounds. That is, he paints an ugly picture of what a historic Book of Mormon does, and implies that a nineteenth-century Book of Mormon is somehow more attractive. Hutchinson relates the historicity of the Book of Mormon to “authoritarian approaches to church governance” (p. 17). The frontispiece of the book makes an appeal to aes-

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97 See Dean Jessee, “Has Mormon History Been Deliberately Falsified?” Mormon Miscellaneous pamphlet No. 2.
99 *The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob 5*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch (Salt Lake: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1994).
100 Doctrine and Covenants Section 20 sets out the rules for Church governance and the standards for Church membership. As an explanation of authoritarian personality types, which are neither exclusive to nor excluded from the Latter-day Saint Church, I would suggest the wonderfully enlightening books on the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI™), such as Otto Kroeger and Janet Thuesen, *Type Talk* (New York: Delta Books, 1988); David Keirsey and Marilyn
theories by claiming that the message of the Book of Mormon can “sometimes be obscured by polemical use of the book as a proof text for elitist and institutional agendas over personal religious experience.”

Hutchinson prefers that we no longer use the Book of Mormon “as an apologetic argument or sign of the uniqueness of Mormonism and warrant of its authority and truthfulness” (p. 1). He claims that “maintaining Book of Mormon antiquity” supports such un-Christian-like behaviors as “absolute religious certainty” (p. 14; cf. Alma 32:35-36) and such fundamentalist ideas as “inerrancy” (cf. Title Page, 1 Nephi 19:6, and so forth), “literalism” (cf. 2 Nephi 11:2-4; Moses 6:63), support of “authoritarianism” (cf. Alma 30:7, 11; D&C 121:41, 43), and “false certitude, self satisfaction in one’s own sectarian advantage” (p. 15; cf. Alma 31:12-30).

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Bates, Please Understand Me (Del Mar, CA: Prometheus, 1984); Sandra Hirsh and Jean Kummerow, Life Types (New York: Warner, 1989); and Isabel B. Myers, Gifts Differing (Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologist’s Press, 1980). MBTI measures preferences (akin to handedness) for Extraversion or Introversion, for gathering information through Sensing or Intuition, for deciding based on Thinking or Feeling, for living with Judgment or Perception. Pay special attention to the contrast in values between the ESTJ (13% of the population, and a large majority of the managers) and INTJ and INTP types (about 1% each, but highly concentrated in academia). Indeed, to me it seems that the tensions between institutional leaders and academics often involve type preference issues, and that a common recognition of this notion could do much to improve communication strategies in both directions, reduce tensions, and increase appreciation of the “gifts differing” (cf. Romans 12:4-8).

New Approaches itself is a polemical proof text for the elitist agendas of the authors and publishers. Were I to simply bear my testimony in response, that is, to pit my personal religious experience over their footnotes and degrees, would that deter Mr. Metcalfe and company from their intent?

Hutchinson’s charge of “inerrancy” makes no sense in terms of Mormon scripture and tradition. In New Approaches, Hutchinson (an allusion, p. 11), Kunich (citing Roberts, p. 261), and Matheny (p. 270) at various times appeal to tradition or authorities to stabilize the target and thereby defend their arguments. In a recent article, “The Continuing Journey,” in Sunstone 16/5 (July 1993): 13, David Wright complains that “Sorenson and his readers need not put much stock in Joseph’s views about geography: a prophet’s words that tradition values are set aside with relative ease.” This complaint is ironic because Wright is arguing that we make a far more profound adjustment. Why retain some of Joseph’s speculative views about geography while rejecting the historicity of the Book of Mormon?
You can find such attitudes among the Mormons, and become obsessed with them if you like, but as the references I've added show, Hutchinson commits a lamentable misdiagnosis in perceiving the Book of Mormon as causing what it plainly attempts to cure. He would do well to read Eric Hoffer's classic *The True Believer*, which describes eruptions of rigid and dogmatic individuals among various secular and religious groups all through history.\(^{103}\) For the negative results of their attitudes we cannot scapegoat the Book of Mormon, but must look to other causes. In the end, Hutchinson's attempt to paint belief in historicity as aesthetically unpleasant fails for me because his painting is inaccurate.

**Future Promise (Alma 32:41)**

The issue is which paradigm should in the future guide research on problems many of which neither competitor can yet claim to resolve completely. A decision between alternate ways of practicing science is called for, and in the circumstances that decision must be based less on past achievement than on future promise. ... A decision of that kind can only be made on faith.\(^{104}\)

The disagreements about the Book of Mormon represented by *New Approaches* and the FARMS response is not just between rival groups of scholars, but between competing world views. The issues are: Which community, if any, has authority? Should prophets take their license for seeing from the community of secular scholars? Must we have secular academia's permission to

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\(^{103}\) Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer* (New York: Harper and Row, 1951). The strength of the "True Believer" mode is the zeal such persons possess, with an accompanying willingness to sacrifice all things, if necessary, for the cause. Hoffer claims that no mass movement ever succeeded without such people. The weaknesses of the mode derive from its rigidity, the tendency to polarized thinking, and brittle background expectations. True believers can demonstrate what Joseph Smith referred to as a zeal that is not according to knowledge. A number of the most vocal critics of the Church are former true believers, who, when their too-brittle faith shatters, become true antibelievers.

\(^{104}\) Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 157–58.
believe? Is personal spiritual experience valid? Can we ignore scholarly and scientific opinion and survive as a faith? Can a believer apply the tools of scholarship in the service of faith? What kind of faith should we have? Should we take seriously the Book of Mormon as a testament of Christ? Where do we go to exercise our faith in Christ most appropriately? What, if anything, in this life deserves our commitment? Where is the greatest future promise?

From the beginnings of Mormonism, the Book of Mormon has always been the defining phenomenon that both sets us apart and holds us together. So it comes as a surprise that Hutchinson denounces the notion of the Book of Mormon as “a sign of the uniqueness of Mormonism and warrant of its authority and truthfulness” (p. 1). Hutchinson seems troubled by the notion of “prophets who know not only God’s will but also know the past, [and] the future” (p. 14). Never mind that Book of Mormon prophets, especially Alma, take care to remind the reader that they do not know everything that God does, and that they are often left to their own reasoning and opinions (for example, Alma 7:8). Hutchinson complains that a historic Book of Mormon “supports the authority of” prophets in the believing community (and I agree), that such authority is necessarily authoritarian (but I disagree), and that those who support those authorities relieve themselves of “responsibility for decisions and for heeding the voice of Jesus” (p. 15, and here I disagree completely). The best quotes on the topic of individual responsibility and Church authority come from Joseph Smith and Brigham Young.

We deem it a just principle . . . that all men are created equal, that all have the privilege of thinking for themselves upon all matters relative to conscience. Consequently, then, we are not disposed, had we the power, to deprive any one of exercising that free independence of mind which heaven has so graciously bestowed upon the human family as one of its choicest gifts.105

I do not wish any Latter-day Saint in this world, nor in heaven, to be satisfied with anything I do, unless the

105 TPJS, 49.
Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ, the spirit of revelation, makes them satisfied.\(^{106}\)

How often has it been taught that if you depend entirely upon the voice, judgment and sagacity of those appointed to lead you, and neglect to enjoy the Spirit for yourselves, how easily you may be led into error, and finally be cast off to the left hand?\(^{107}\)

Hutchinson depicts Mormonism as something that is closed, rigid, and unpromising if it retains belief in the Book of Mormon. I see Mormonism as open-ended, flexible (if frustrating at times), and promising because of the Book of Mormon. He could cite anecdotes to support his view, as I can to support mine. But which of our examples should be paradigmatic? It is rather like asking which story about King David most clearly illustrates the principles of faith and righteousness—that with Goliath, or that with Bathsheba? If you really know what the gospel is, both stories have their time and place.

The rivalry between prophets and skeptics as developed in *New Approaches* has a long history. The Book of Mormon gives us in Alma 30 the enlightening debate with Korihor. In *The Ancient State*, Nibley’s essays on the Sophic and Mantic provide an expansive perspective, especially with his discussion of *Oedipus Rex* and the trial of Socrates, and the lengthy notes comparing modern and ancient arguments, showing the timelessness of certain issues.\(^{108}\) In *The World and the Prophets*, Nibley showed the transition from Mantic revelation to Sophic scholasticism in early Christianity.\(^{109}\) Daniel Peterson calls our attention to similar

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\(^{106}\) *JD* 3:45.

\(^{107}\) *JD* 8:59; for contrast in leadership styles, see an article by Carl Sagan in *Parade Magazine* (7 February 1988): 6, in which he quotes Rudolf Hess from 30 June 1934: “One man remains beyond all criticism, and that is the Führer. This is because everyone senses and knows: He is always right, and he will always be right. The National Socialism of us all is anchored in uncritical loyalty, in a surrender to the Führer.”


rivalry and transition in Islam. Contemporary with Joseph Smith, Ralph Waldo Emerson in his surrender to academia falls into the same pattern—literalism sundered by contemporary scholarship, and then the unhappy seeker turning to mysticism and philosophy in order to salvage some meaning in life. In England, just before Joseph Smith’s time, the visionary English poet William Blake (who had occasion to consider the worth of his personal religious experiences as set against the arguments of such Enlightenment figures as Thomas Paine and the Godwins) provided his view of the same rivalry:

Obey thou the Words of the Inspired Man! . . .
The Negation is the Spectre, the Reasoning Power in Man . . .
To cast off the idiot Questioner who is always questioning.
But never capable of answering; who sits with a sly grin
Silently plotting when to question, like a thief in a cave;
Who publishes doubt & calls it knowledge; whose Science is Despair,
Whose pretense to knowledge is Envy: whose whole Science is
To Destroy the wisdom of ages to gratify ravenous Envy.114

Given such historical precedents, I don’t see much future promise in siding with the Sophic skeptics. But then, what does the

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112 Ibid., 11.
113 Note the about-face in “Threnody,” ibid., especially 661–63. I should say that I regard Emerson as an inspired teacher. Indeed, comparing Joseph Smith and Emerson is extremely rewarding. I denote such seeking by Emerson, or anyone else, as a “salvage operation” to recognize the sense of loss and disillusion that precedes his effort and periodically haunts him; I do not demean what he found in his searching. But, despite the light you can get from Emerson and his valid inspirations, you don’t get Doctrine and Covenants 1.
study of Book of Mormon historicity provide that is more promising than study of the Book of Mormon as fraud or inspired fiction? For me, light and urgency.

First consider the issue of light. Hutchinson calls for us to “stop talking about the Book of Mormon’s antiquity and begin reading its stories, considering how early Mormons would have understood them and relating their context to our own” (p. 17). I agree that study of how the early Mormons understood the text is important, and I do agree with Ms. Charles that they often understood the text differently than we do. That said, in my experience, current study of the Book of Mormon’s antiquity has often revealed how early Mormons misunderstood the stories; while we need to respect their understandings, we should not feel bound to them.

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\text{Inasmuch as they erred it might be made known; And inasmuch as they sought wisdom they might be instructed. . . . And inasmuch as they were humble they might be made strong, and blessed from on high, and receive knowledge from time to time. (D&C 1:25–28)}
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Talk about antiquity provides a far greater sense of immediacy and urgency when it comes time to liken the stories to ourselves. For example, it is one thing to consider the notion of your own death in the abstract, as an inspired fiction. But when death confronts you personally in history and becomes a literal presence in your life, when the thief places a gun against your head and for the third time asks for something you cannot give, or when your doctor says, “We need to cut,” or when your car begins to slide, or a solemn voice on the telephone makes the announcement that a loved one has seen his or her last mortal moment, death takes on an entirely different face—immediate, urgent, and demanding a response. One’s value system undergoes a sudden shock. In my experience, in those moments when the Book of Mormon gains in historic plausibility, it conveys this kind of immediacy and urgency (as Alma says, “Is this not real?”), demanding a personal response.

Potentially, of course, someone who sees the Book of Mormon as inspired fiction, even as a myth (in the sense of a myth as a transcendent story—not as a falsehood), should be able to provide
an illuminating reading by focusing on teachings, the vivid relevance of the stories, or the sublime literary aspects. The truth of the parables of Jesus does not depend on their historicity, but on their resonance in the life of the listener. While it has nothing to do with history, Shakespeare's *King Lear* hits me with such a profound urgency that I must consider it an inspired work.\(^\text{115}\) In some questions of biblical historicity, as with the Jonah story, to fret about the dimensions of the whale’s throat is to miss the point entirely and bury the immediate relevance of the story in trivia.\(^\text{116}\) And consider the mileage Joseph Campbell gets by likening various myths to crucial issues that arise in the course of our lives. But when a Joseph Campbell or Shakespeare or Jesus has the skill and insight to inject a myth, a scriptural story, a play, or a parable into your personal history, the stories cease to be pure fiction because they literalize around your experience. Symbols cease to be mere abstractions when they connect to your own history.\(^\text{117}\) In such cases, the stories provide both light and urgency.

But, as it happens, only Dan Vogel in the Metcalfe volume actually looks at a story “considering how the early Mormons would have understood” it. However, his intent is not to bring any sense of immediacy and relevance, but to make the text seem remote and abstract, to show the Book of Mormon as merely a reflection of obscure theological debates about dead issues, hold-

\(^{115}\) See Eugene England’s marvelous “Shakespeare and the At Onement of Jesus Christ,” in *Why the Church Is as True as the Gospel* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987), 31–51. Although England argues that “the scene at the end of act 4, where Lear and Cordelia reach full at onement . . . is the play’s true climax, a spiritual fulfillment and redemption that transcends the agonizing losses of the final act” (ibid., 42–43). Professor Birenbaum at San Jose State University taught me to see Lear’s transformed character shining through the losses of the final act as the heart of a daring theodicy. If indeed, “Ripeness is all,” then when Lear has lost everything earthly, we should be forced by the tragic outcome to consider whether what has become of Lear matters nearly as much as what he has become. He lost the world, but what has he gained? In a subsequent essay, England offers insights on the profound significance of Lear’s final words. See Eugene England, *The Quality of Mercy* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1992), 10.


\(^{117}\) Even Nephi recommends that his readers “liken” the scriptures to themselves. See 2 Nephi 11:2.
ing no more interest today than does the ancient debate about the number of angels that could dance on the head of a pin. If I accepted Vogel’s conclusions at face value, I’d find the Book of Mormon less relevant, less meaningful, less urgent. New Approaches offers less, not more. The urgency, the light, the life, and the attendant future promise are lacking.

The fruit that Hutchinson offers is the chance to see scripture as “stopgap medicines that help us endure a sometimes painful condition, . . . raise our sensitivity and desire to serve, help us to find moral courage within ourselves, and make some sense, however fleeting, of our lives.” I find such patently entropic fruit unappetizing and unpromising.

In contrast to Hutchinson’s “stop-gap medicine,” Alma offers up a fruit that swells the soul, enlightens the understanding, expands the mind, and is therefore real and discernible, precious and sweet above all that is sweet, and ultimately able to fill us so that we neither hunger nor thirst (Alma 32:34–42).

Section 2
Limits to Perspective

Reason, or the ratio of all we have already known, is not the same that it shall be when we know more.

We have discussed the “criteria of assessment” for paradigms, and noted that they do not provide rules for choice, but function as values. As values, such criteria can be applied differently by people who agree on them. The difference in application comes from four specific limits on human perspective. I’ll discuss these limits and provide examples of how they function for several of the authors in New Approaches. Although I introduce each issue under a separate heading, all four limits interact with each other and function simultaneously.

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I cannot disprove every claim that these authors make, but I can show that their conclusions, like everyone else’s, always involve issues of temporality, selectivity, subjectivity, and context. This is important because the key illusion that Sophic minds want to sell is that they have reached their conclusions with complete objectivity, that they have faced things as they really are, and that we would all be better off if we deferred to them in all things. The Sophic illusion is designed to shame those who would otherwise hold to their iron rods and liahonas. It supposes that paradigms drive only an opponent’s science, scholarship, values, or beliefs; that one’s own view is pristine, unfiltered, objective, and certain. The secular version of this illusion is heady and intoxicating, but it is only the pride of the world and is therefore without foundation. The same illusion has its counterpart in religious life, and the Book of Mormon relates the story of the Rameumptom (Alma 31) as a cautionary tale for the Saints. With the passing of time, such pride must always fall.

**Temporality**

All is as one day with God, and time only is measured unto men. (Alma 40:8)

And I was led by the Spirit, not knowing beforehand the things which I should do. (1 Nephi 4:6)

I perceive that ye are weak, that ye cannot understand all my words. . . . Therefore, go ye . . . and ponder upon the things which I have said . . . and prepare your minds for the morrow. (3 Nephi 17:2–3)

We are time bound. The historical context in which we live makes a difference in the availability of information and the conceptual frameworks upon which we must base our judgments. Remember that in one of the first attacks on the Book of Mormon, Alexander Campbell protested the account of the Nephites building a temple away from Jerusalem. Nibley’s “Howlers in the Book of Mormon” gives several examples of how this and other similar problems have been rendered obsolete by subsequent dis-
More recently, the discovery of the name of Abraham in Egyptian texts contemporary with the Joseph Smith papyri has thrown open doors that critics had thought fully barred for over a hundred years. But temporality limits our perspective in ways other than the mere availability of information. We require time to discover, absorb, and evaluate knowledge and experience. In a very literal sense the knowledge we gain over time changes what we see.

Looking at a contour map, the student sees lines on a paper, the cartographer a picture of a terrain. Looking at a bubble-chamber photograph, the student sees confused and broken lines, the physicist a record of familiar subnuclear events. Only after a number of such transformations does the student become an inhabitant of the scientist’s world, seeing what the scientist sees and responding as the scientist does.

I am delighted with the way Nibley began his talk, “The Book of Mormon: Forty Years After,” reminding us that even after decades of close study, more preparation and another reading can provide “a new book.” It is important to remember (as Melodie Moench Charles notes) that the early Saints often read the Book of Mormon differently than we do, just so long as we remember that different is not necessarily better. Sorensen’s work on internal geography provides a solid example of this point. For all the old opinions about Book of Mormon geography that have

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120 Nibley, The Prophetic Book of Mormon, 243–58.
122 Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, 111; cf. also James Burke, The Day the Universe Changed (London: British Broadcasting, 1985), 309, which includes several provocative examples. It is also worth contemplating the fascinating 3D illusions in the Magic Eyes books from N. E. Thing Enterprises.
123 Nibley, The Prophetic Book of Mormon, 533.
been quoted to counter Sorenson, no one has resurrected any rigorous Book of Mormon research that upholds those opinions. The evidence suggests that they supposed they understood and did not ask.

Until John Welch’s work, no one saw the temple in the Book of Mormon,125 and many scholars considered the lack to be prime evidence for a lack of continuity in Mormon teachings between the early Saints and the Nauvoo era. Welch’s observations, in this case, utterly reverse the significance of the former arguments, making the Nauvoo era a culmination of the original promise of the Book of Mormon, rather than a break from its teachings.

Led by a new paradigm, scientists adopt new instruments and look in new places. Even more important, during revolutions scientists see new and different things when looking with familiar instruments in places they have looked before.126

Kuhn’s chapter on “The Invisibility of Revolutions” would have provided a better context for understanding the issue that Charles calls “presentism” in the Church, a tendency to project current beliefs into older times. In her New Approaches essay, Ms. Charles reminds us that not only did the earlier Saints sometimes read the scriptures differently than we do, but that our texts often do not account for such shifts in historical perspective. However, Kuhn shows that each paradigm shift, whether in science, or religion, brings to the rewriting of history an insistent conceptual reframing and associated pedagogical imperatives.127 So, when considering the notion that Mormon understandings change, we should do so in light of the way all histories adjust to accommodate a new understanding. This process has been recognized so recently that exploration of how to write histories that account for such “reframing” has just begun. And each history that is written may in turn be subject to a subsequent reframing. For example, how will the New Mormon history accommodate John Welch’s

125 Cf. Welch, The Sermon at the Temple.
126 Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, 111.
127 Ibid., 136–43.
work on the significance and centrality of the temple in the Book of Mormon when it discusses the development of the temple in Latter-day Saint history?

Where Ms. Charles describes the common notion among Mormons that “God would not permit righteous people who desire to know the truth to seriously misunderstand” (p. 103), we ought to realize that such reasoning, however compelling, has no empirical support. After all, Jeremiah, certainly a righteous person and earnest seeker, could ask the Lord, “wilt thou be altogether unto me as a liar, and as waters that fail?” (Jeremiah 15:18). The book of Job raises the issue of a righteous man misunderstanding God, as does the Gethsemane story in the New Testament, speaking of Peter. In the Book of Mormon, 3 Nephi 15:18–24 describes the issue of the “other sheep” and says that the Old World disciples misunderstood. Doctrine and Covenants 1:24–28 describes the prophets as involved in an open-ended process of learning, going from “their weakness, after the manner of their language,” and suggests that “inasmuch as they erred, it might be made known; and inasmuch as they sought wisdom, they might be instructed.” The Book of Mormon prophets insist that the scriptures include both the inspiration of God and human weakness. Our ability to obtain light from the scriptures (as from the Church) is related to our capacity to accept the divine inspiration without condemning the human weakness, trusting the Lord to make weak things strong (Ether 12:27) in his own due time.

Furthermore, when Ms. Charles discusses the biblical beliefs at the time of Christ and before, she should consider the possibility that the same “presentism” that she sees in Latter-day Saint accounts could have also been operating in the same invisible way in the composition of the Bible as we have it, just as “presentism” must operate in the current scholastic interpretation of the Bible. Eugene Seach’s monograph *Ancient Texts and Mormonism*128

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explores evidence for the notion that the Bible texts periodically underwent this same kind of conceptual overhaul, a Mosaic Reform and a Deuteronomic Reform, which involved deliberate harmonizing of texts to accord with changing doctrinal understandings. A biblical text that has changed over time, and that is understood differently at different times, does not provide a completely objective standard for comparison.

Regarding how each individual deals with the ways that temporality affects our approach to crisis issues, whether this or that aspect of the scriptures, or this or that issue in Latter-day Saint society, looks implausible or undesirable, the scriptures provide a comforting promise with regard to the resolution of the crisis.

And if men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them. (Ether 12:27; cf. Isaiah 54:14–17)

If anyone finds the current case against the Book of Mormon to be personally troubling, he or she should try to gain a little perspective by considering how poorly prior attacks have fared with the passage of time.129 While you wait for resolution on one issue, you can always occupy yourself with another that seems more immediately promising.

Selectivity

"[One] of the most self-evident characteristics of the conscious mind [is that] the mind attends to one thing at a time." . . . Why the mind chooses to focus on one object to the seclusion of all others remains a mystery. But one thing is clear: the blocked-out signals are the

unwanted ones, and the ones we favor are our "deliberate choices." ¹³⁰

The very writing of a paper is a matter of selection and emphasis. Some of the arguments in New Approaches, such as Ashment's discussion of translation issues, I do not select for emphasis because I don't know anything about languages. Some issues I pass over for a lack of interest, time, or resources; some because I don’t have a good answer yet, and some because better qualified people have already responded.¹³¹ Even though everyone’s picture of the Book of Mormon depends on a considerable selectivity, any believer can compare what he or she finds to be of greatest value in the Book of Mormon and in supportive scholarship with what the New Approaches authors select for emphasis. In comparing such different selections, we can make inferences about why we see what we see.

For example, when Hutchinson sets out to discredit Nibley, he selects for consideration four pages of Nibley's work on names from Since Cumorah, and of that four pages, he tries to emphasize as representative something Nibley threw in "just for fun" (p. 9). Hutchinson paints a picture of "Nibleyesque labor" with "dictionaries, concordances, and lexica," and "taking any language in any dialect in any time" in order to make parallels. The picture is not meant to inspire confidence, of course. But how accurate is the picture? Nibley reports that his labor included consultation with William Albright, the great biblical scholar and archaeologist, and Klaus Baer, Nibley's instructor in Chicago.¹³² That doesn't make him right on every occasion, but it suggests to me that Nibley acts more responsibly than Hutchinson would have us imagine.

Ashment is more ambitious than Hutchinson, targeting Nibley’s best work on names, and also going after various authors who have written on Hebraisms. Regarding Ashment’s critique of

these authors, I do not see the issue as crucially decisive. As a non-specialist, my best response is to give things time, to watch the course of the ongoing discussion, and not to lose sight of the big picture.  

However, right away, even a non-specialist can notice some telling things about Ashment’s selectivity. He does not choose to confront Book of Mormon evidence of Hebrew poetic forms, prophetic forms, ritual practices, law, and imagery, all of which are more interesting and meaningful than the nuances of grammar and less subjective than philology. When confronting the word-print studies, he first goes after Larson, Rencher, and Layton, spending two pages attacking their assumptions, and then moves to dispose of John Hilton’s work, almost as an afterthought, by claiming that Hilton has made the same assumptions (pp. 372–74). Hilton’s work had superseded the efforts of the Rencher group, and involved significant effort to deal with most of the assumptions that Ashment criticizes. With regards to Hilton, Ashment’s selectivity, insinuation, and silence are examples of rhetorical sleight of hand. When Ashment says “No documents of known attribution exist outside of the text of the Book of Mormon for any of the disputed authors” (p. 372), he fails to acknowledge that according to the Spalding Theory, the Rigdon theory, or the Cowdery theory, Joseph Smith himself is one of the disputed authors.

In dealing with stylistic features of the text, Ashment frequently cites biblical precedents for Book of Mormon phrases, but he never raises the issue of the degree to which the biblical phrases are formulaic, sometimes dependent on nonbiblical sources or conceptual precedents. In criticizing John Welch’s suggestion that the phrase cluster “Lord God Omnipotent” was distinctive to King Benjamin’s speech, Ashment explains it all by pointing out that the phrase first occurs in the Bible in Revelation 19:6, and says “the distribution of the phrase suggests that Smith used the

134 It has many conceptual precedents elsewhere. For example, under “God,” the Cambridge Bible Dictionary in my Latter-day Saint edition of the scriptures says that very early on, a common title for deity is “El Shaddai” which is translated as “God Almighty.”
idiom frequently while it was fresh in his mind” (p. 368). Ashment cites a “potpourri” chapter in Welch’s *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, neglecting Welch’s much more challenging and comprehensive treatment of ritual and literary issues regarding the distribution of the same phrase in the 1985 FARMS paper, “King Benjamin’s Speech in the Context of Ancient Israelite Festivals.” In light of the context provided in the 1985 paper, Ashment’s glib “fresh in his mind” assertion explains little or nothing about the composition of Mosiah. He strains at a gnatsized phrase while swallowing the camel-sized complexities of the context.

Hugh Nibley’s response to Ashment’s effort in *Sunstone* still strikes me as appropriate with respect to the issue of selectivity in his own or anyone’s work. Nibley said, “There are lots of things that Brother Ashment pointed out that I should have noticed; but I notice I could point out lots of things that he has not noticed.” The recognition of our inevitable selectivity should lead to a degree of tentativeness and tolerance in the community and greater awareness of the question, “Which problems are more significant to have solved?”

**Subjectivity**

For the things which some men esteem to be of great worth, both to the body and soul, others set at naught and trample under their feet. (1 Nephi 19:7)

Our perception of proportion and significance is subjective, relative to emotion and preconception, desire and fear. I find it striking that all the arguments given by scriptural people who rejected the prophets reflect measures taken against either fear (that is, submission to preconceptions—something “perfect” not to be challenged) or desire (emotional ideals, and not to be threat-

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Betty Edwards points out that the effects of fear and desire are built into our perceptions.

Most of us tend to see parts of a form hierarchically. The parts that are *important* (that is, provide a lot of information), or the parts that we *decide* are larger, or the parts we think *should be* larger, we *see* as larger than they actually are. Conversely, parts that are *unimportant*, or that we *decide* are smaller, or that we think *should be* smaller, we *see* as being smaller than they actually are.

Which current problems or solutions demonstrate the course to take in the future? The questions you ask shape your answers. If you say of Joseph Smith, “Is his inspiration perfect?” and, therefore, promising in light of your present capacity to judge that inspiration, you have also arranged to make the appearance of imperfection decisive. If you say, “Is his inspiration ideal?” and, therefore, promising in light of your current desires, you have also arranged to make your wants decisive. But if you say, “Is his inspiration real?” you begin to participate in the way Alma recommends. You can start with a single seed, and the first sign of growth and life is enough to show the future promise, in spite of any imperfections you see or frustrations you may have.

While those who accepted the biblical prophets often experienced the same conflicting fears and desires as those who rejected the prophets (for example, see John 6 and 9), the difference in perception comes in a willingness to challenge what one fears by both experiment and faith (Alma 32, Matthew 7, and John 9) and a willingness to risk one’s desire by saying “thy will be done” even while honestly expressing one’s urgent protests. Some discoveries, like new wine, must be placed in new bottles to preserve them. Those who refuse the new wine, who refuse the test and

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138 In other words, resistance to truth always reduces to, “It’s not what I think” or “It’s not what I want”; see also Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth* (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 140. Fear and Desire are the two guardians of the Buddhist temple; the Buddha has to move through them to achieve enlightenment.

insist the old is better, forego any chance of escaping the bounds of their traditions. Those who fear to test their traditions may never come to comprehend their true value.

The New Approaches authors take care to inflate the significance of their studies, and to play down the studies by historicists, just as their opponents take care to do the opposite. I've already described how Larson's perspective falls from his training, and how Kunich labors to inflate his problem. David Wright remarks that the best rational historicist response to the apparent anachronistic relation between Alma 13 and Hebrews 7 involves a hypothetical common source. He then argues against such a common source based on a list of improbabilities for such a text (pp. 204–7). My initial response, which served until John Welch and John Tvedtnes got around to providing a broader range of comparisons involving other Melchizedek sources, is that the Book of Mormon itself is remarkably improbable, much more improbable as it stands, than the requisite common text.

Arguing against the historicity of the text, Wright says, "Logical—even theological—consistency indicates that it is unlikely that these chapters [Alma 13] would be [Joseph Smith's] composition while others would be ancient" (p. 207). As it happens, the same logic functions in the other direction in challenges such as Nibley's: "It would have been quite as impossible for the most learned man alive in 1830 to have written the book as it was for Joseph Smith. And whoever would account for the Book of Mormon by any theory suggested so far—save one—must completely rule out the first forty pages." And so we cannot avoid the larger picture that we summon when we ask the paradigm question, "Which problems are more significant to have solved?"

In spite of the various problems that the New Approaches authors seize upon to celebrate, none have provided a comprehensive and coherent explanation of the Book of Mormon as a strictly contemporary text. No such explanation exists. Compared to the problems that a historic Book of Mormon solves, are the unsolved problems that important? Believers can assume that any

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140 See essays by Welch and Tvedtnes, in Review of Books on the Book of Mormon, 145–86, 8–50.
141 Nibley, Lehi in the Desert, 123.
current puzzles can be solved eventually, that all truth will fit into one great whole.

**Context**

There is none other people that understand the things which were spoken unto the Jews like unto them, save it be that they are taught after the manner of the things of the Jews. (2 Nephi 25:5)

Whatever we observe takes meaning from the *context* in which it appears. A single word may be understood differently depending on its placement in a sentence, on the culture in which it is written, and the intellectual and spiritual background the reader brings. Yet *New Approaches* contains recurring assertions about the "plain meaning of the text" (pp. 10, 264, 279, 321, with only Thomas offering a serious caution about misinterpretation, p. 55). This should set off alarm bells in the reader's mind because there is no such thing as the plain meaning of the text. As S. I. Hayakawa puts it, "To a mouse, cheese is cheese. That is why mousetraps work." Context can transform meaning enough to make the difference between life and death.

I have experienced many transformations in "plain meaning" through an enhanced context. The transformation of "plain meaning" in Doctrine and Covenants 19 should be a classic example for Mormons:

Nevertheless, it is not written that there shall be no end to this torment, but it is written *endless torment,* ... ... for Endless is my name. Wherefore—...

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142 A recurring theme in S. I. Hayakawa, *Language in Thought and Action*, 4th ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978); contrast Hutchinson (p. 10). "The question arises, when is a cow not a cow, when is north not north?" What we see here is a mousetrap at work.

143 "Derrida gives as an example of undecidability Plato's frequent presentation of writing as a drug, *pharmakon*. The Greek word can mean either 'poison' or 'cure' and, as with a drug, which way is taken (translated) makes a lot of difference." Madran Sarup, *An Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism*, 2nd ed. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993). 52.
Endless punishment is God's punishment. (D&C 19:6, 10, 12)

Matthew 13:13–18 illuminates the discussion of context, both for the form and the content. Just as the usual prose format hides a distinct poetic form, the theme suggests that familiar stories and everyday content can conceal hidden meanings.

Therefore speak I to them in parables:

Because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand.

And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith,

By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive:

For this people's heart is waxed gross,

And their ears are dull of hearing,

And their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes,

And hear with their ears,

And should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears, for they hear...

Many prophets and righteous men

Have desired to see those things which ye see; and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear and have not heard them.

Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower.

Notice the urgent recommendation to the disciples to truly hear the parable of the sower. Regarding this key parable, Jesus remarked, “Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables?” (Mark 4:13). The most obvious message of the parable of the sower is that the same seeds (words) can produce vastly different yields depending on the soil in which they are planted.

Isaiah’s formulaic warning about having “eyes, but not seeing,” should temper any reliance on one final “plain meaning of the text.” But Isaiah’s oft-quoted warning becomes more mean-
ingful only as you pass through the experience of repeatedly having a familiar text transformed\(^ {144}\) and sometimes retransformed by various contexts. In another essay, I illustrated this experience of transformation of meaning by comparing a documentary reading of the Noah story\(^ {145}\) with the amazing unitary reading in Isaac M. Kikawada and Arthur Quinn’s *Before Abraham Was*.\(^ {146}\) In this paper I’ve cited the transformation wrought by John W. Welch’s temple reading of 3 Nephi. And there have been many others making striking contributions.\(^ {147}\)

Those who have experienced such transformations can better appreciate Ian Barbour’s observation that a paradigm “makes a difference not only in one’s attitudes and behavior but in the way one sees the world. One may notice and value features of individual and corporate life which one otherwise might have overlooked.”\(^ {148}\) Theory influences both the selection and the significance of the data—anomaly appears, with resistance, against a background of expectation.\(^ {149}\)

Returning to the Book of Mormon, consider the implications of the Egyptian context that Nibley provides regarding the phrase “white and delightsome” and the contrary “dark and loath-
In *New Approaches*, John Kunich claims that “since the Nephites are consistently described as ‘white,’ there could have been little intermarriage between Nephites and the darker skinned inhabitants” (p. 263). The Egyptian context transforms the “plain” meaning of the text, removing racial implications and substituting cultural and moral implications. This cultural context is completely absent, not just in Kunich’s paper, but also in Rodney Turner’s attempt at a definitive essay, “The Lamanite Mark.”

Hutchinson warns against the danger in “ridding the text of its plain meaning” (p. 10). When I consider the profound implications that a context like Nibley’s has for context-free efforts by believers, such as Turner’s essay, and then consider that Hutchinson wants us to “stop talking about the Book of Mormon’s antiquity” (p. 17), I conclude that opponents of historicity may be robbing us of the plain meaning of the text by denying us access to the most illuminating contexts.

For example, consider Dan Vogel’s effort to treat the Book of Mormon in light of “Anti-Universalist Rhetoric” (pp. 21–52). Of all the things Dan Vogel could have selected to mention about my response to a previous book, he selects only one point of mine to criticize (this time, at least)—a point I confess I made rather weakly, regarding his identification of Corianton as a Universalist. At the time I had made no background reading in Universalism, but was skeptical of Vogel’s certitude and grounds for such an identification as a comprehensive explanation. Vogel builds his entire article for *New Approaches* on an identity between contemporary debates about Universalism and the Book of Mormon. Having recently done some reading about Universalism, I now

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152 Compare Sorenson’s remarks in *An Ancient American Setting*, 355. As a believer, he seeks not proof, but greater understanding.
better understand the grounds for his identification, but remain skeptical with respect to the comprehensive explanation.

In my previous review, I noted that Vogel is highly selective, partial to closed-system comparisons, and that he tends to resolve textual and historical ambiguity towards whatever appears to discredit the Book of Mormon.\textsuperscript{153} Dan Peterson\textsuperscript{154} and Grant Underwood\textsuperscript{155} have observed the same tendencies in their responses to his other works.

It seems a good strategy to deal with Vogel by moving to open up the historical comparisons (in this case to biblical precedents) and to note certain oddities in the Book of Mormon text that other research has brought to light and that present problems for his argument.

The key points in Vogel’s comparison of anti-Universalist rhetoric with the Book of Mormon involve the contemporary parallels to various of Alma’s teachings to Corianton, and parallels to the stories about Nehor and his followers. Indeed, nearly contemporary with the translation of the Book of Mormon, the big buzz within Universalist circles came to be called “The Restorationist Controversy.” Consider the following points in judging the significance of Vogel’s parallels.

Universalism was not a phenomenon confined to Joseph Smith’s time. Vogel does notify the reader that the notion of universal salvation has had a long history, and that some of the key figures in the modern movement based their teachings in part on writings they found in Origen and 1 Clement (both of whom spent a lot of their days in the library).\textsuperscript{156} The Universalists and their

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critics were biblically oriented people who debated Bible issues in a vernacular heavily influenced by Bible language. Bible language is, in turn, heavily formulaic, with authors widely separated in time freely quoting and paraphrasing each other. The Bible is, among other things, a history of people saying the kinds of things people say, and doing the kinds of things people do. Because of this, even after thousands of years, even across many cultural gaps, we find many of the stories comprehensible and relevant.

For example, in introducing the reader to rhetorical criticism, Vogel quotes Leland Griffen on the “crystallization of fundamental issues ... [and] a time, very likely, when invention runs dry, when both aggressor and defendant rhetoricians tend to repeat their stock of argument and appeal” (pp. 22–23). Nibley’s essays on the Sophic and Mantic should serve as powerful notice of just how far back certain stock arguments can go and how constant they can remain.

Vogel cites “Nephi’s characterization of a latter-day group with the motto, ‘eat, drink, and be merry’ (p. 29) as typical anti-Universalist rhetoric,” and in this case Vogel includes references to 1 Kings 4:20; Ecclesiastes 8:15; Isaiah 22:13; Luke 12:19; and 1 Corinthians 15:32. The attitude is an ancient one (I believe it appears in Gilgamesh), but Vogel nevertheless wants us to see it as a distinctive feature of Universalists as perceived by their opponents during Joseph Smith’s time.

Vogel reminds us that even the earliest Latter-day Saint commentaries on the Book of Mormon called Nehor a Universalist, “likening” what they saw to themselves. Yet nothing that Nehor does in the Book of Mormon would seem unusual to Isaiah, Jeremiah, or Ezekiel, all of whom vent considerable anger against rival teachers, particularly those who preached for profit.

I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem an horrible thing: they commit adultery, and walk in lies:

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158 In the Assyrian version, Siduri says: “O Gilgamesh, fill your belly, make merry day and night, make each day a festival of joy. Dance and play day and night” in *Semitic Mythology: The Mythology of All Races*, vol. 5 (Boston: Jones, 1994), 234–69.
they strengthen also the hands of the evil-doers that none doth return from his wickedness. . . .

They say still unto them that despise me, The Lord hath said, Ye shall have peace; and they say unto every one that walketh after the imagination of his own heart, No evil shall come upon you. (Jeremiah 23:14, 17; cf. Isaiah 1; Jeremiah 7:8–9; 11:8; 18:8–12, 20; 21:8, 14; Ezekiel 7:3; 11:21; 13:22; 18:21–32).

Likewise, little or nothing in Corianton’s arguments and behavior seems out of place in his immediate Hebrew heritage. The story of Eli’s sons reported in 1 Samuel 2:22–25 provides a good example.

Vogel cites the Jezebel in Revelation 2:20–30 in comparison to Corianton’s Isabel (p. 37 n. 14). This is because Dan Peterson, in his “Notes on Gadianton Masonry,” had speculated on connections between the name Isabel and the Jezebel in 1 Kings.159 The urge to compare Alma’s Isabel to the Jezebel in Revelation, rather than the one in 1 Kings, does show Vogel’s preference for even the appearance of an anachronistic borrowing, even when a viable alternative exists. Notice that Vogel bypasses comment on my citation of Nibley’s observation that “Isabel was the name of the Patroness of Harlots in the religion of the Phoenicians.”160 Nibley’s suggestion has implications for the issue of whether “Universalist” provides a comprehensive and coherent label for Corianton, or whether he fits an ancient context better. Corianton’s public apostasy and his participation in the sexual rites of a pagan cult would involve a system of beliefs and practices that diverges dramatically from Universalism. Also recall Sorenson’s observation that Mesoamerica “contained a religious system comparable in important ways to that of the Canaanites. The religious ideals and behavior transmitted by the continuing Mesoamerican population would resonate with the naturalistic,

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159 Peterson, “Notes on Gadianton Masonry,” 215–16 n. 22. Peterson’s article skewers another of Vogel’s attempts at an environmental account—in that case, an argument that the term “secret combinations” referred exclusively to Masons.

160 Nibley, The Prophetic Book of Mormon, 542; also Nibley, Teachings of the Book of Mormon: Semester 2, 468.
Baalist elements in the minds and lives of the less faithful in Lehi’s and Mulek’s groups.”  

In denouncing Corianton’s involvement, Alma uses the term “abominable” in a manner entirely consistent with Jeremiah 2:7–8, 4:1, 8:12, and Ezekiel 16, where the Old World prophets fought against the Baalist practices.

Vogel says that the Book of Mormon argument (2 Nephi 2) that “fear of punishment is a motive for obedience to both civil and divine law . . . makes the same point that one Methodist made in 1820” (p. 33). This point, of course, is also very ancient and very biblical. Deuteronomy says, “Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; A blessing if you obey the commandments . . . and a curse if ye will not obey” (Deuteronomy 11:26–28). Vogel’s point about whether the Lord would save people in their sins or from their sins (pp. 34–35) likewise involves prevalent biblical themes (Jeremiah 7:5–15, 21:14; Ezekiel 18, 33).

In response to my doubt that Universalism was behind Corianton’s concern about foreknowledge of Christ’s coming and his worry about the resurrection, Vogel remarks ambiguously that “Universalists were heterodox in their theology” and “Many Universalists in Joseph Smith’s day were also Unitarians” (p. 37 n. 15). Actually, Cassera’s _Universalism in America_ quotes Abner Kneeland in 1833 as saying that “Universalists believe in the resurrection of the dead.”

Vogel’s most imposing parallels involve the nineteenth-century arguments about restoration, given that Alma lectures Corianton at length on the same topic. Nevertheless, Alma’s teachings about “restoration” recall biblical themes and fit comfortably with the Old World background (Exodus 21:23–24; Deuteronomy 11:26–28; Jeremiah 2:19; 17:10; Ezekiel 18:21–30). Vogel’s Universalists focused on a restitution passage in

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161 Sorenson, _An Ancient American Setting_, 218.
162 Note that Isaiah spends much effort trying to convince Israel about God’s foreknowledge (Isaiah 41:22; 46:10; 48:3–6), which suggests that some people doubted God’s foreknowledge.
163 Cassera, _Universalism in America_, 166.
164 Note that Alma expresses himself in poetic forms common to ancient Israel, but unusual among the modes of discourse in Joseph Smith’s day; Parry, _The Book of Mormon Text Reformatted_.

Acts 3:21 (p. 40), but the Acts passage parallels Isaiah 1:26, which does use the word “restore.”

Alma’s emphasis on restoration is not only biblical, but also consistent with the reports of the Life Review (or Encounter with Deeds) reported in near-death experiences throughout history.\(^{165}\) One of the early Universalist teachers in England (Dr. George de Benneville 1703–1793, born to French Huguenot parents) based some of his ideas on what a modern researcher would immediately call a near-death account.\(^{166}\) However, neither the Universalists nor their critics (other than Mormons) cared to resolve the issues by referring to a contemporary revelation (as Alma does). Impressed and challenged by the Deist thinkers, the dominant Universalist teachers based their arguments on Reason.\(^{167}\)

Vogel’s main argument requires that we see Alma as using anti-Universalist rhetoric against Corianton in relation to the main anti-Universalist issue regarding the endless duration of future punishment for mortal sin. Yet, Alma’s own teachings plainly affirm the notion of temporally limited punishment. Alma’s own “eternal torment” (Mosiah 27:29) in an “everlasting burning” (Mosiah 27:28), when encircled about by the “everlasting chains of death,” lasted for three days (Alma 36:16, 18).\(^{168}\) Likewise, Zeezrom experiences “the pains of hell” (Alma 14:6) for a limited time.

Vogel claims that the Book of Mormon argues for a doctrine of endless duration since punishment is “as eternal as the life of the soul” (Alma 42:16; p. 44). Yet this passage can be understood as referring to the existence of just punishment and blessing through eternity, rather than the infinite and endless application of such.

Vogel cites Book of Mormon references (pp. 36, 45) that indicate the wicked “shall go away into everlasting fire . . . and their torment is as a lake of fire and brimstone, whose flame ascendeth up forever and ever and has no end” (2 Nephi

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\(^{165}\) See Christensen, “Nigh unto Death,” 14–17.

\(^{166}\) Cassera, *Universalism in America*, 7, 53–54.

\(^{167}\) Ibid., 6, 8.

\(^{168}\) Christensen, “Nigh unto Death,” 6–7; also consider Doctrine and Covenants 19.
Vogel quotes Hosea Ballou’s Universalist argument against traditional interpretations to the effect that “the never ending fire was ‘a state of great trouble of mind, in consequence of conscientious guilt’” (p. 45). Vogel fails to observe that Alma agrees and makes it very clear that the imagery symbolizes the torment that comes from a personal sense of guilt (Alma 12:14–15; 36:17; also Jacob 6:9; Mosiah 3:25).

Ironically, Vogel pits Alma against Elhanan Winchester (1751–1797), the leader of the “Restorationist” faction of Universalism, who opposed Murray’s radical Universalism (p. 42). But rather than being anti-Universalist, Alma’s teachings seem more consistent with Winchester’s restorationist position. Some parallels should be natural because both Alma and Winchester draw on biblical precedents. Additionally, Winchester had been influenced by Benneville’s near-death vision, which again would tend to supply certain parallels to Alma.

The lens provided by Vogel’s anti-Universalist context creates the misreadings here. At the beginning of his essay, Vogel had claimed that he would “discuss the Book of Mormon in its nineteenth century context without necessarily making conclusions about its historicity” (p. 21). Further, he reasoned that the “question of the Book of Mormon’s historicity becomes secondary when the rhetorical critic seeks to understand the book’s message to its first readers” (ibid.). However, by neglecting the ancient context and the biblical backgrounds, Vogel draws unjustified conclusions about the historicity of the Book of Mormon. Because he has not examined the ancient context, he has no grounds for demonstrating that his data are significant, and he can provide no comparison to show that his paradigm is better. By forcing the text into the context of the nineteenth-century anti-

Universalist debate, he frequently misreads the message, and undercuts the significance of the text for modern readers.

**Perspectives in Summary**

Postmodern criticism has been fond of pointing out that, due to the uncertain relationship between the symbols of language and the things signified, the dependence of logical arguments on paradigmatic metaphors, and the existence of "opposition in all things," any reading of any text can be deconstructed, and the deconstruction can be deconstructed *ad infinitum*. Nevertheless, despite some extreme post-Modern assertions, some readings are obviously better than others. The existence of better readings—indeed, I suspect, the existence of communication—ultimately falls not to any *determining* factors in language, but to the operation of the same basic *constraints* on meaning that Kuhn identifies as operating in the sciences, and that Alma depicts as supporting faith. And if you take such ideals as "accuracy of key predictions," "comprehensiveness and coherence," "simplicity and aesthetics," and "fruitfulness" and use them to guide your selectivity, subjectivity, and temporality, what you obtain should be a progressively better context, and a better reading, although never a final or exhaustive meaning. That is why Alma takes pains to remark that even when you have a testimony, your knowledge is not perfect, and you must continue nourishing the seed (Alma 32:29, 38).

**Section 3**

**Concluding Thoughts on the Enterprise**

To be accepted as a paradigm, a theory must seem better than its competitors, but it need not, and in fact, it never does, explain all the facts with which it may be confronted.

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If any and every failure to fit were ground for theory rejection, all theories ought to be rejected at all times.172

Several years ago, as we discussed our very different reactions to our explorations in Latter-day Saint controversies, a friend of mine of shattered faith asked, “How can you know what you know, and believe what you believe?”

Several of the New Approaches authors describe the problems they confront in terms of an array of facts that somehow speak for themselves. For example, Hutchinson talks about an “evidence-despising stubborn support of Book of Mormon antiquity” (p. 15). My argument is that, contrary to what Hutchinson imagines, at issue are not self-evident facts, but paradigms. John Welch illustrates this as part of his response to David Wright’s essay in New Approaches:

My article, entitled the “Melchizedek Material in Alma 13:13–19,” covers much of the same ground, works with virtually the same texts, cites and analyzes almost the same scholarly literature pertaining to Melchizedek, but reaches a much different conclusion.173

Alma would say, at issue are not the words, but the soil in which you plant the seed. Alma makes an important comparison between people who want proof so that they will simply and finally “know,” and those who are content to work with “cause to believe” (see Alma 32:18–21). Ashment claims that, in the absence of “direct evidence,” apologists argue from parallels (p. 374). Ashment is correct in observing that parallels do not constitute proof, and most believing scholars agree. But we are justified in seeing the parallels, such as the Hebrew festival patterns in Mosiah, as “cause to believe.”

For someone content to find “cause to believe” from a variety of criteria, and across a range of experience, the process can be open-ended and self-correcting. After all, once the seed begins to grow, it never retains its initial form. The important things are the light that provides vital life energy, a rich soil in which to

172 Ibid., 146.
173 Welch, Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 6/1, 169.
grow, protection from predation, resistance to choking weeds, sufficient water to quench thirst, and patience to endure through the seasons and attain the future promise.

For those who demand to simply and finally "know" a thing with respect to a static set of assumptions, the situation is different. Alma illustrates the two great dangers by preceding his discourse on faith with the stories of Korihor (Alma 30), the skeptic who requires proof on his own terms, and the Zoramites (Alma 31), the worldly true believers for whom all things have been decided beforehand in terms of group membership and election.

How do we choose a paradigm? What is the process of conversion? The questions are the same, and Alma 32 conveys the same essential answer for spiritual life that Kuhn does for the growth of science, with the recognition that religious life calls for a higher degree of personal involvement than does science. We perform a successful experiment regarding key concerns, and further investigation enlightens and expands our minds. We make connections between fragmented experiences and knowledge, and move toward unity and order in our lives. We step inside a belief system, nourish it with great care, with diligence and with patience, and in doing so, we see things that we never would have seen otherwise. We pronounce the experience delicious and beautiful. We admit to imperfect knowledge, and yet, on the basis of what we have experienced thus far, find cause to believe the future promise that the system holds out for us.

What can go wrong? Why might an investigator reject a true and living faith? Alma 32 again describes the situation.

But if ye neglect the tree, and take no thought for its nourishment, behold it will not get any root; and when the heat of the sun cometh and scorched it, because it hath no root it withers away, and ye pluck it up and cast it out.

Now, this is not because the seed was not good, neither is it because the fruit thereof would not be desirable; but it is because your ground is barren, and ye will not nourish the tree, therefore ye cannot have the fruit thereof. (Alma 32:38–39)

The heat of the sun, in Book of Mormon study, would be frustrated expectations and desires. The barren ground would correspond to invalid assumptions, faulty methods, inadequate knowledge. Because our knowledge is not yet perfect, we should expect some frustration from time to time. We can always try another approach on a more promising plot of soil, adding needed nourishment through personal repentance, including deeper study, or wait for the rain of further discovery.

Does New Approaches offer alternative paradigms of faith within Mormonism that could serve as a viable “distribution of risks” for some Saints, or as a means of communicating the worth of the scripture to outsiders? I have a few friends in the Church who have been impressed by the sorts of arguments presented in New Approaches but who remain committed to the faith. The message of the Book of Mormon is sufficiently relevant to contemporary life that it should be possible for someone to read it for the purpose of “likening it to ourselves” without being concerned about historicity. Lessons regarding wealth and charity, peace and war, crime and government, faith and doubt can be profitably likened to contemporary life without reference to the ancient context. The text of the Book of Mormon is sufficiently rich that it offers all sorts of poetic forms to explore, archetypal imagery to investigate, stories to analyze, and complex themes to unravel. For instance, the truth value of the epistemology in Alma 32 is independent of historicity. Such matters could be profitably studied by people who do not believe Book of Mormon historicity, but who do have a desire to appreciate our scripture. There is much to appreciate, and I would have been gratified to encounter such appreciation from whatever source. But of such matters, offered up so we could learn to be more wise than the Book of Mormon peoples, New Approaches provides little. Taken as a whole, New Approaches does not come as an alternative view that distributes risk within the faith. With all due respect to those contributors who do keep the faith, the book overall has been designed to provide an escape from that faith.

Kuhn says that the choice “between competing paradigms proves to be a choice between incompatible modes of community
life."175 This choice between different modes of community life is exactly what Hutchinson and Wright suggest for the Mormons. We are to go from being a community defined by belief in the Book of Mormon to one defined by adherence to "the critical method." Rather than accept Joseph Smith as a "standard example" whose life embodies a paradigmatic set of methods and assumptions, we are to examine the work and personal example of certain critical scholars whose paradigms they find compelling (Wright, p. 212). If a paradigm is a "group-licensed way of seeing," they want us to apply for a license administered by another group.

John Gee made some important remarks on the process of "conversion" to the critical paradigm: "This conversion marked by the acceptance of the historical critical method" is expected by professors at many graduate schools, who believe "that after only two weeks in the program, all our doctoral students would assent" to its assumptions and methods."176 Gee remarks that "Not all Mormon graduate students in the Near East Studies Program [in Berkeley] have 'converted': while Wright and Firmage may have 'converted'; Stephen Ricks and I have not."177

Again, what makes the difference? This cannot be simply a matter of facing facts. Conversion in either direction always involves the issues we’ve been discussing in this essay, that is, which examples do you accept as paradigmatic, and why?

I do not think that you have to believe in the historicity of the Book of Mormon to find it valuable and inspired, nor do I think that you must believe in the historicity in the Book of Mormon to be a Mormon, nor that belief alone suffices to make you a good person, nor that disbelief makes you a bad person. It should be possible to critique a particular reading or approach to the Book of Mormon without necessarily depreciating the Book of Mormon as scripture. But while a range of factors in our spiritual lives can

175 Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, 94.
177 John Gee, "La Trahison des Clercs," 49 n. 23.
serve to sustain individual commitment to a community, we must recognize that it is the Book of Mormon that defines this community.

Every community celebrates and re-enacts particular historical events which are crucial to its corporate identity and its vision of reality.178

“What distinguished Mormonism,” writes Richard Bushman, “was not so much the Gospel Mormons taught, which in many respects resembled other Christians’ teachings, but what they believed had happened—to Joseph Smith, to Book of Mormon characters, and to Moses and Enoch [and later to the pioneers, during their archetypal exodus to the west]. . . . The core of Mormon belief was a conviction about actual events. . . . Mormonism was history, not philosophy.”179

The historicity of the Book of Mormon is just one aspect of our religious experience, but as the keystone of the faith, it takes the predominant role in defining the community. Questions regarding the historicity of the Book of Mormon deal with how much the Mormon community possesses that is above and beyond that which is available elsewhere. This is how Doctrine and Covenants 1:30 expresses it, defining the Latter-day Saint charter not in terms of exclusive truth and virtue, but in terms of key distinctions (D&C 1:22–23, 29–30), whose validity is signified by the Book of Mormon.

Questions regarding the historicity of the Book of Mormon, then, involve the key issue in paradigm debate: that is, whether our community provides better descriptions of the divine nature, better access to the divine, and whether the religious problems that Mormonism solves, or promises to solve eventually,180 are the

178 Barbour, Myths, Models, and Paradigms, 55.
180 Doctrine and Covenants 1:25–28 emphasizes that Mormonism is incomplete, socially imperfect, and nonexclusive with respect to truth and virtue. Jerald and Sandra Tanner have made a career of neglecting these points and using background expectations for perfection, completeness, and exclusivity as a license to scorn, to “watch for iniquity,” and “to make a man an offender for a word . . . and turn aside the just for a thing of nought” (Isaiah 29:20–21).
most important ones to have solved. The questions raised in *New Approaches* usually have to do with the historicity of the Book of Mormon, and thereby relate most directly not to issues of faith, but to community. As Hutchinson puts it:

To the degree we disparage the holiness and value of the Book of Mormon, we alienate ourselves from the LDS tradition and define ourselves as outside of that tradition. (p. 4)

I regard investigation of the historicity of the Book of Mormon as essential toward developing contexts that unveil the messages in the text. But notice that Alma, far from offering an "all or nothing" gospel, invites his listeners to begin with "no more than [a] desire to believe," and to apply that desire to even "a portion of my words" (Alma 32:27). Alma even leaves it to his listeners to decide on that plantable portion for themselves, and of the whole of his words he freely acknowledges, "You cannot know of their surety at first." The important thing is that they plant something that can grow in their hearts. As long as that portion can take root and grow, we can hope for everything else over time.

I do not mind the diversity of thought in Mormonism. I approve of a distribution of risks. If someone prefers to invest his or her faith in the community, or in some personal experience, or in the strengths of "eternalism," that is fine with me. Chances are that someone who anchors his or her faith in community, or the philosophical strengths of Mormonism, or New Testament study, or whatever, will develop expertise that I do not have, and will offer gifts to the community that I cannot.

Likewise, Alma, whose discourse on faith is remarkably consistent with Kuhn’s findings, champions freedom of belief and makes a contrast between those who simply and finally "know," whose beliefs are determined and closed, and those who have "cause to believe," whose beliefs are constrained by experience, but open-ended. Again, Joseph Smith opposed creeds, not because they are false teachings,181 but because "creeds set up stakes, and

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181 "It dont [sic] prove that a man is not a good man, because he err in doctrine"; see Ehat and Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith*, 183–84. Compare
say, ‘Hitherto thou shalt come, and no further’; which I cannot subscribe to.”

The most prominent difference in sentiment between the Latter-day Saints and sectarians was, that the latter were all circumscribed by some particular creed, which deprived its members [of] the privilege of believing anything not contained therein, whereas the Latter-day Saints have no creed, but are ready to believe all true principles that exist, as they are made manifest from time to time.\(^{182}\)

The issue is a question of orientation—of the wine or the wine-bottle, which has priority? You need both to enjoy either. But should theory, paradigm, or creed determine experience, or should experience constrain and determine theory? In Alma’s terms, do you filter experience through what you simply and finally “know,” or do you accept theories tentatively, and only to the extent that your ongoing experience gives “cause to believe?” Do you settle for the current academic or religious orthodoxy, or do you seek for ever greater light and knowledge? Creeds make for rigid background expectations which impede the growth of knowledge. In New Approaches, various authors set up stakes on particular readings with:

- Appeals to the “plain meaning of the text.”
- Appeals to authority figures with regard to paradigms of translation, geography, and Book of Mormon cultures without regard for their grounds for belief in those paradigms.
- Appeals to the authority of preferred methods.
- Appeals to a current lack of verification on this or that issue, without considering the importance of other issues which currently have substantial support.

also how such passages as Doctrine and Covenants 88:41 and Mosiah 3:27 sound like what some Mormons might like to think of as creeds. The words don’t make the creed: the setting up of stakes and bounds does. In effect, creeds place you beyond the reach of further light and knowledge—that is, beyond repentance. What could be more abominable? However, the absence of creeds does not imply the absence of constraints—that is, of important considerations.

\(^{182}\) DHC 5:215.
All too often, the message is "Hitherto thou shalt come, and no further." But as the parable of the wine bottles shows, the growth in light and knowledge often calls for a new container for the wine. Hence, when reading important studies by Nibley, or Rockwood, or England, or Welch, or Bush, or anyone who takes me to greater understanding, my paradigm sometimes shifts, and I feel as though scales have fallen from my eyes. But I experience such changes as expansion, as enlightenment, not as shattering and destructive.

Does a belief in "historicity" involve a creed, a setting up of stakes? A stake is a piece of dead wood that marks out a position. For me, a belief in historicity has been enlightening, mind expanding, soul enlarging, and fruitful. Such experience signifies not a fruitless piece of dead wood, but the flowering of a tree of life. I refuse to say "Hitherto thou shalt come, and no further," but I want to share what I’ve found because it tastes good and has great promise.

Hutchinson claims that "we should stop talking about the Book of Mormon’s antiquity and begin reading its stories, considering how the early Mormons would have understood them and relating their context to our own" (pp. 16–17). If the editor really accepts Hutchinson’s argument, then one might expect some articles that breathe life and relevance into the Book of Mormon narratives. Unfortunately, they provide nothing that gives joy, nothing that expands the mind, nothing that enlarges the soul.

How much attention should we give unsolved problems? In what forum? The social dynamic of Mormonism handles that issue by itself. Those inclined to make inquiries do so, and those not so inclined encourage us to keep to ourselves until we’ve got something to contribute. The scriptures do recognize four valid motives for managing access to information: (1) pedagogy—when the information cannot be understood without significant preparation or experience (3 Nephi 17:2–3; Hebrews 5:11–14), (2) confidentiality on personal matters (D&C 42:88, 92), (3) sacredness (3 Nephi 17:17; D&C 63:64), and (4) social danger—this restriction never applies to ideas, but only to spelling out methods.

183 For example, the Gadianton oaths are suppressed, but not their existence, function, or goals. See Helaman 6:25–26 and the discussion of Mesoamerican secret societies in Sorenson, An Ancient American Setting, 300–
Information management in these cases derives from genuine love on the part of the teacher and free consent on the part of the student. Full knowledge remains available to those who seek it.

Our scriptures caution all of us against limiting knowledge in order to cover sins, gratify pride and vain ambition, or to exercise control, dominion, or compulsion over people in any degree of unrighteousness (cf. D&C 121:37). Pure knowledge, we are told, greatly enlarges the soul, without hypocrisy and without guile (D&C 121:42). That is, if the knowledge is pure, we can expect to see an increase of love and empathy, as when Enos first prays for himself, then for his family, and then for his enemies. It follows then, that impure knowledge leads to hypocrisy, impatience, and intolerance, all of which signify a contracting of the soul (D&C 121:39). This does not mean, however, that pure knowledge, sharp criticism, and love are always strangers to each other.

Take note that those who send out the young unprepared, or who create faulty background expectations for them, have just as much to answer for as those who stand in the great and spacious building, zealously or morbidly pointing out problems. Whether they intend to or not, both camps can lead innocent individuals to feel shame at clinging to the iron rod, and to lose their way, and wander lost in the broad roads. The disillusioned got their illusions somewhere.184

In the lead-off article in New Approaches, Anthony Hutchinson claims that "ultimately whether the Book of Mormon is ancient really does not matter" (p. 16). He is quite wrong here. It matters for the definition of the community, and it matters for what we see when we read the Book of Mormon. Whether a person chooses to adopt a religious or an irreligious view or a historicist or environmentalist view of the Book of Mormon "makes a difference not only in one's attitudes and behavior but in the way

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184 See the lovely story told about the Prince Buddha and the consequences of his having an overprotective father; Campbell, The Power of Myth, 159–60. The Prince finds his first glimpses of age, sickness, and death to be utterly shattering precisely because he had been so protected from them.
one sees the world. One may notice and value features of individual and corporate life that otherwise might be overlooked.”

Back to my friend’s question: How can we know what we know, and believe what we believe? If we really comprehend the function of paradigms, and recognize their perpetual inability to provide perfect certainty and an exact fit to reality, and likewise the uncertain and imperfect relationship between the signs and symbols of language and the realities that we must use them to signify, we must admit the imperfection of our knowledge. Where does this inescapable uncertainty leave us when it comes time to make decisions about our life commitments? Exactly where Mormonism began, and with the example that ensures that Mormonism continues.

At length I came to the conclusion that I must either remain in darkness and confusion, or else I must do as James directs, that is, ask of God. (Joseph Smith-History 1:13)

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185 Barbour, Myths, Model, and Paradigms, 56.

Reviewed by Louis Midgley

The Shipps Odyssey in Retrospect

Where, then, do we draw the line between explaining and “explaining away”? . . . It is either a fact, or legend, or lie. You must take it or leave it.

C. S. Lewis, “‘Horrid Red Things’”¹

Some, impressed by the sheer mass and charge of the Book of Mormon, are now asking why it can’t be seriously and respectfully treated as a myth. Lots of myths are today coming in for the most reverential treatment. But the book disdains such subterfuge, and never tires of reminding us that it is not myth but history and must stand or fall as such. . . . To call this record a myth is to condemn it as effectively as by calling it a fraud.

Hugh Nibley²

By happenstance, Jan Shipps’s *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* was published a few years before the *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* was begun. The assessment of the Book of Mormon contained in this book, if it were published now, would warrant comment. The celebratory treat-

ment this book has already received, and the lofty reputation of its author—the premier non-Mormon expert on Mormon things—justifies retrospective attention to Jan Shipps's book. It therefore seems appropriate, at the tenth anniversary of the publication of *Mormonism*, to examine its author's voyage of discovery as she has striven to fashion a satisfactory explanation of the Book of Mormon and its place in the history, as well as the faith and memory of Latter-day Saints.

I will not examine her crowning achievement—the notion that the Church is not a cult, at least as that term is now used by Evangelical Protestant critics, nor a sect nor a denomination, and that it is neither Catholic nor Protestant, but "a new religious tradition." This is an adaptation of the opinion first broached in 1945 by Fawn M. Brodie, who claimed that Mormonism "was a

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4 Shipps recognizes that explanations of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon cannot be made independent of each other.

5 Shipps's speculation does not apply to the RLDS, who have had considerable Protestant leanings from their beginning in 1860 and who are now moving toward Protestant liberalism.
real religious creation, one intended to be to Christianity as Christianity was to Judaism: that is, a reform and a consummation,” though Shipps insists that “her sustained argument does not follow the lines of Fawn M. Brodie’s work.”

**Introducing Shipps**

Shipps has been an influential figure among Mormon historians since 1973. She describes herself as an “inside-outsider” to the Latter-day Saint community. She is perhaps the only non-Mormon scholar who has fashioned an entire career out of Mormon studies. In addition, she was both the first woman and the first non-Mormon—with the exception of RLDS luminary Paul M. Edwards—to serve as president of the Mormon History Association.

The first contact Shipps had with Latter-day Saints and the Mormon past came in 1960 when her husband—a librarian—took a position at Utah State University. Earlier she had studied music at two small Southern women’s colleges. In Logan she switched from music to history, while working on a teaching certificate. At that time, according to Shipps, history at Utah State was Mormon and Utah history. Within a year she had her degree and moved with her husband to Colorado. With her interest in Mormon things aroused, at age 36 she earned a doctoral degree in history at the University of Colorado. The novel explanation of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon contained in the initial chapter of her dissertation, later modified and refined, got the attention of RLDS and Latter-day Saint historians. She eventually parlayed

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8 She served in that role in 1979–80.
her degree into a position teaching religious studies and history at Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis. She is currently the key gentile “expert” on Mormon issues for the media.

Recognizing the Crucial Truth Claims

Shipps stresses the crucial role of the Book of Mormon in constituting the faith of the fledgling Church of Christ. The publication of the Book of Mormon set in place “Mormonism’s foundational claims” (p. xii), which are linked to “the claims made in the book” (p. xiii; cf. p. 174 n. 5). Joseph Smith claimed “that the plates were actually a book whose text contained the fulness of the gospel that would lead to salvation” (p. 13). Thus, “non-Mormons become Mormons when they respond to Mormonism’s fundamental truth claims by taking the Book of Mormon at face value.” But these truth claims are also potentially divisive, and “the truth claims at the very heart of the Book of Mormon guaranteed,” according to Shipps,

that this potential would be realized as soon as this “very strange book,” as Parley P. Pratt called it, thrust itself into culture. Humanity ever since has been divided, so to speak, into opposing camps, one peopled by individuals who treat the book as just a book and nothing more. Set over against this population is a camp in which the network of truth claims in the work is treated as a valid description of what once was and what will be. (p. 27)

Shipps thus seems to agree that on one side of what Dale L. Morgan called the Great Divide are unbelievers who approach the Book of Mormon with naturalistic explanations, and on the other side are those willing to entertain the possibility that angels may bring books. Thus, from Morgan’s perspective, “Joseph either was all he said he was, a prophet of the living God translat-

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ing from plates of gold, or a conscious fraud and imposter.” He and others are clearly on the other side of this Great Divide. Accounts of both Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon differ decisively depending on where they stand on what Shipps describes as the “truth claims at the very heart of the Book of Mormon” (p. 27; cf. p. 35).

When confronted by the Book of Mormon, the critical issue about which readers of the book have to make up their minds is that of authenticity. But Shipps steadfastly insists that, as both Methodist and historian, she has never been tempted to accept the book’s truth claims. Instead, she strives to understand the impact of the Book of Mormon on the faithful.

Without accepting the work at face value, it is nevertheless possible to regard the Book of Mormon as the product of an extraordinary and profound act of religious imagination. It lent legitimacy to Joseph Smith’s career and, by tying America to Israel, gave credence to the claim that in these latter days America is the Promised Land and the Mormons are the Chosen People.

But the question still remains: Is it possible or even desirable for an historian dealing with the Book of Mormon to avoid addressing its truth claims? Is it possible to avoid having a latent opinion manifest itself at crucial points in an account? Put another way, are the accounts of the Book of Mormon provided by Shipps really as neutral as she thinks they are?

**A Novel Naturalistic Account?**

Shipps has striven to fashion a more sympathetic account of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon than previous gentile authors. If we give the label “naturalistic”—the standard description—to explanations that rest on assumptions that deny the pos-

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13 Ibid., 96.
sibility that Joseph Smith was “a prophet of the living God,” to use Morgan’s language, and “nonnaturalistic” to those explanations that picture Joseph Smith as a genuine prophet, on which side of the Great Divide does her explanation fall? In 1974 and in 1992, Shipps set out what she calls a “naturalistic explanation” of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. It is instructive to examine the details of Shipps’s mature explanation of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon.

In 1945, as is well-known, Fawn M. Brodie pictured Joseph Smith as a charlatan deeply into “magic” and other fraudulent activities as he began to produce the Book of Mormon—which she brushed aside as frontier fiction. According to her theory, Joseph only later introduced into his narrative religious trappings borrowed from Ethan Smith, other elements of his sectarian environment, and so forth.

Shipps began her own “naturalistic explanation” by distancing her views from those of Brodie. “It is . . . evident that beneath its crude exterior,” according to Shipps, “the Book of Mormon reflects knowledge of the Bible, familiarity with theological currents, perceptions of the problems posed by Protestant denominationalism, and experience with extra-rational religious phenomena that simply are not consistent with the theory that its religious framework was an afterthought,” as Brodie claimed. Shipps responds to details in Brodie’s “naturalistic explanation,” which she claims “required a greater leap of faith” than accepting the “naturalistic explanation” she wished to set in place.

The essential details of Shipps’s explanation are as follows:

1. that Joseph grew up in a family fascinated with religion;
2. that . . . he thoroughly searched the scriptures;
3. that . . . he probably did have a vision or go through some other non-rational experience;
4. that in the throes of revivalistic excitement he . . . inquired about the matter a second time, thereby stimulating a second vision around 1824;
5. that . . .

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17 Ibid., 10, for Shipps’s account of Brodie’s stance.
18 Ibid., 11.
19 Ibid.
in connection with his money-digging activities, he actually found some Indian artifacts, or hoped so much to do so, that . . . inspired the writing of the Book of Mormon. Which, leaving aside the question of whether the book has captured eternal truths, plainly reflects the religious experiences and concerns that had been an important part of [Joseph Smith's] life until that time.\textsuperscript{20}

This explanation, whatever else one might say about it, is clearly naturalistic—and Shipps labels it as such.

Morgan was confident that some naturalistic account of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon would eventually turn out to be wholly satisfactory, that is, “unless, of course, after we are dead and buried,” as he mused in a letter written to Bernard DeVoto on January 2, 1946, “it turns out that Joseph was, after all, a prophet of the living God who established the consummating dispensation and was thus the most important thing to happen since Christ.”\textsuperscript{21} Though Shipps has also toyed with naturalistic accounts of the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith’s prophetic charisms, she is not confident that any such account can settle the crucial issues. She holds that “whether Joseph Smith was prophet or fraud has been debated ever since news of his ‘gold bible’ spread across the New York countryside in the late 1820s” (p. 38). Shipps realizes that her interpretation “of the nature of the creative process that brought Mormonism into being will not ultimately—or even intermediately—settle that disputed issue” (p. 38).

It appears that if one begins with naturalistic assumptions, then one might come to believe that a satisfactory negative explanation will eventually be forthcoming. Naturalistic accounts of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon rule out the possibility that the book is simply true. However, those who do not share secular assumptions will remain skeptical of such explanations. And the believer or potential believer will be skeptical of assumptions that do not at least allow for the possibility of a nonnaturalistic account of the Book of Mormon.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{21} Dale Morgan on Early Mormonism, 111.
Moving Beyond Truth Claims

Despite having advanced a "naturalistic explanation" of the Book of Mormon that rules out its truth claims, Shipps also claims that her efforts are not intended to confront that issue—they presumably "leave aside" or "bracket out" such questions.

I have, of course, no objection to historians limiting their inquiries to whatever interests them, or to whatever issues they feel competent to address. They may choose to table certain difficult and even crucial questions. And clearly most of the time most historians writing about the Mormon past do not address (directly or in detail) the generative or founding events, including the Book of Mormon, and hence they do not have to argue directly whether Joseph Smith was or was not a genuine prophet. For those whose disposition and training does not equip them to deal with such issues, it might be considered a sign of humility for them to avoid opining about the truth of the Book of Mormon. Furthermore, it may be wise for historians, for political reasons and in an effort to observe the informal norms of comity that govern professional life, to forgo directly expressing their opinions on such issues. We must ask whether this is what Shipps has been doing.

For various reasons some historians may feel impelled to explain how they feel about the truth of the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith's prophetic truth claims, even though these issues are not the direct focus of their inquiries. They may wish to signal to their more perceptive and curious readers where they personally stand on the crucial questions. This is often done in personal or bibliographical essays, introductions, or notes. Jan Shipps, it turns out, is clearly one of these.22

Lawrence Foster, perhaps the second ranking gentile expert on Mormon things, provides another example. In his study of marriage among the Latter-day Saints, he describes his controlling assumptions, offering an outline of his own "comprehensive naturalistic explanation of the Book of Mormon—an explanation that could," he claims, "go beyond the conventional Mormon view that it is a literal history translated by Joseph Smith or the conven-

22 See, for example, Shipps, "An Inside-Outsider in Zion," 143, where she indicates that she has never been tempted to take the Book of Mormon at face value.
tional anti-Mormon view that it is a conscious fraud.” What Foster proposes is that the Book of Mormon can “probably best be understood, at least in part, as a trance-related production,” whatever that might be. Be that as it may, the Book of Mormon is not, he opines, “history in any sense.” Instead, it is “an unusually sophisticated product of unconscious and little-known mental processes.” To see the book as a “trance-related production” would, according to Foster, allow historians to shift from the unrewarding and ultimately irrelevant question of whether any golden plates with inscriptions ever existed or whether the Book of Mormon was a literal history to the far more important and fascinating question of the content and meaning of this most extraordinary religious document.

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23. Lawrence Foster, Religion and Sexuality: The Shakers, the Mormons, and the Oneida Community (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 294 n. 15.
24. Ibid., 296.
25. Ibid., 297.
26. Ibid. Though Foster once rejected “psychological reductionist approaches” to Joseph Smith (ibid., 292 n. 7), he recently provided just such an explanation of Ann Lee, John Humphrey Noyes, Martin Luther, George Fox, Sabbatai Sevi, Emmanuel Swedenborg, Joseph Smith, and Jesus of Nazareth. They all presumably suffered from manic depression—they were bipolar, and that somehow explains their “genius.” See Foster, “The Psychology of Religious Genius: Joseph Smith and the Origins of Religious Movements,” Dialogue 26/4 (Winter 1993): 1–22. Foster borrows his explanation from R. Jess Groesbeck, a Jungian psychotherapist, who has offered a number of bizarre explanations of Joseph Smith grounded in the categories of abnormal psychology. Ibid., 9. For Foster’s remarkable diagnosis of Jesus, see ibid., 20. Foster is also back explaining the Book of Mormon as the product of trances. He also lines up behind Anthony A. Hutchinson’s stance in New Approaches to the Book of Mormon, ed. Brent Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993), 1–19. Foster believes that for Latter-day Saints to cease taking the Book of Mormon at face value and start reading it as Joseph’s frontier fiction, provides a middle ground somewhere between anti-Mormon critics who see it as fraud and the credulity of those who accept it at face value. But it does not make organizational sense to move in that direction. Earlier he insisted that believers must reach an accommodation with revisionist historians who have been willing to “reach out and meet them halfway.” Foster, “A Radical Misstatement,” Dialogue 22/2 (Summer 1989): 5–6.
There is, of course, a justification for such signaling of where an author stands on the crucial issues. Thoughtful readers, whether Latter-day Saint or otherwise, will want to know the controlling biases that guide and tend to color or control an author’s work. And it is now widely recognized that there is simply no such thing as detachment, neutrality, or objectivity in the writing of history. Those who write about the past are never somehow above the storms that swirl around them. Such writing is always an effort to challenge or defend some view of the world and in that sense all history is both apologetic and political.

However, I am not arguing that just any account of the past is as good as any other, nor am I saying that there was no past or that we have no texts upon which we must strive to ground the stories we tell and with which we can test our accounts. I am not, as has been alleged, a radical relativist or nihilist. Instead, I have argued that secular categories and naturalistic explanations, whatever else might be said about them, are not somehow privileged merely because they explain away prophetic truth claims, nor do I believe that they necessarily manage to uncover what really happened in the past, while the story told by believers is merely the expression of feelings and in that sense only subjective. In addition, secular, naturalistic explanations of prophetic truth claims, whatever else might be said about them, end up logically foreclosing the possibility that the Book of Mormon is what it claims to be and hence they beg the crucial questions.

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29 The Book of Mormon, of course, cannot be proven or not proven to be an authentic ancient history or the word of God. But it still can be tested by the methods of historians. The results will likely only reach some measure of plausibility. That is not because the Book of Mormon has “religious” content or that an angel is believed to have made it available but because plausibility is about as good as can be expected in nontrivial historical inquiries. And a final proof is not necessary for faith to flourish.
Shipps, it must be granted, has wisely focused most of her attention on the function of the Book of Mormon in the lives of the faithful and not on whether it is what it claims to be. It is here that she makes a contribution. In describing the implications of accepting the Book of Mormon at face value, Shipps is at her best. In a kind of summary of her findings, she claims that “Smith’s story is best understood in the context of his sequential assumption of positions/roles that allowed the Saints to recover a usable past” (p. 38); her speculation seems intended to suggest a way of “shifting the focus,” presumably away from crucial truth claims of the Book of Mormon to other less controversial issues, in which a secular historian might make a contribution without becoming embroiled in controversy with the Saints.

Shipps wisely realizes that the primary fact about Latter-day Saints—what makes them such—is their belief that, among other things, the Book of Mormon is simply true. But instead of asking whether the Book of Mormon is true, Shipps calls attention to the fact that believing that it is true—both an authentic ancient history and the word of God—leads the believer back into the world of the Old and New Testaments, where prophets spoke for God, and forward into the eternities to an ultimate forgiveness of sins for those who have faith and then endure to the end, and also to resurrection and eternal life or the fulness of life in the presence of God. By thus calling attention to the role of the Book of Mormon in the life of the faithful, Shipps may have assisted skeptical Gentiles to better understand Latter-day Saints. For this she is to be congratulated.

Instead of asking if the Book of Mormon could be true, Shipps looks at what she calls the “experiential process [which] legitimated the prophet’s centrality to the enterprise, which means that,” she then claims,

*as far as history is concerned*, the question of whether Smith was prophet or fraud is not particularly important. Of far more significance for the purposes of this study is the fact that when Mormon history is examined within a framework that recognizes a process of replication of the biblical story, it becomes clear that the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith’s prophetic leadership, and the experience of the Saints were all crucial com-
ponents in the creation of Mormonism. (p. 39, emphasis in the original)

But unlike Foster, Shipps correctly senses that the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith’s story work together, by “reopening the canon and bringing God back into the history of the Saints in such a substantial way that within Mormonism, divinity is still as real as all the other realities of everyday existence” (p. 39). Why then sidestep the question of the truth of the Book of Mormon? Is it that one must adopt the stance of secularized historians who insist on explaining away prophetic truth claims? Is it true that “as far as history is concerned” questions other than whether Joseph was or was not a prophet are “of far more significance”? Perhaps other questions are more rewarding or significant for secularized historians for whom all Latter-day Saint talk of the Divine is ultimately considered a mere manifestation of sincere but naive illusion or delusion. Such a one turns out to be like a music critic who cannot distinguish tones, or a painter who is blind to colors.

Enter “Magic” and the “Occult”

Thus, instead of confronting the crucial truth claims of the Book of Mormon, Shipps clearly prefers to speculate about “the state of religion and culture wherein the Book of Mormon had to make its way,” while considering “the various responses that were generated by the claims made in the book,” and so forth. She hopes to demonstrate “that a belief that the book is a true record implied much more than acceptance of the historicity of the document itself” (p. xiii).

As she did in her dissertation, only now in a more polished form, Shipps distinguishes the story told by Latter-day Saints of the Restoration from the stories told by anti-Mormons, which tend to describe Smith’s visions and his explanation of the Book of Mormon’s sources as the products of a diseased imagination, if not the elements of a gigantic

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30 Or, as Shipps constantly has it, whether he was prophet or fraud, which is not the same thing, since he might not have been a prophet and yet not a conscious fraud, but only involved in an illusion or delusion.
fraud. Consequently Mormonism was pictured in such accounts as a mixture of superstition and subterfuge that conceals the light of truth. (p. 3)

Her strategy in *Mormonism* is to link religion in the nineteenth century with necromancy (p. 6) in order to make a case that the Smith family was deeply involved in magic and the occult arts (see pp. 7–8), which presumably in the 1830s would not have been seen as inconsistent with folk religion. In this way Joseph Smith can be made to appear sincere in his illusions. I have already shown that speculating about such matters was an essential element of her earlier naturalistic explanation of Joseph Smith’s prophetic truth claims.

Shipps seems fascinated by the possible early involvement of Joseph Smith in magic and the occult. Her account of what she considers their obvious links with Joseph Smith’s visions and revelations is expressed in her book in statements such as the following: “Yet it stands to reason that Smith, too, might sometimes have wondered about the nature of the connection between magical practice and manifestations of divinity despite his convictions about the reality of his visions and the assurances his father gave him that they were ‘of God’ ” (p. 18).

The fascination with speculation and rumors about the Smith family’s involvement with magic and the occult arts has been a prominent feature of Shipps’s work on Mormon history since her dissertation in 1965. At one point she insisted that the Church would have to recast the story of the Restoration by taking into account the contents of a document that was later shown to be a forgery cooked up by Mark Hofmann. More recently she has promoted an awful book by John L. Brooke published under the title *The Refiner’s Fire: The Making of Mormon Cosmology, 1644–1844*, which forces upon Joseph Smith and the Saints bizarre notions presumably drawn from his environment. As far

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back as 1988, Shipps was actually advertising Brooke’s book under the title *Joseph Smith, Early American Occult Traditions and the Origins of Mormonism*. Perhaps Shipps really does see the origins of Mormonism in magic and occult traditions and hence welcomes anything that can be used to support her “naturalistic explanation” of the Restoration. One thing is for certain: Brooke’s book does not provide, for those at all familiar with Mormon things, anything approaching plausibility. Why was Shipps unable to see its flaws? Shipps has much explaining to do over her involvement with the execrable Brooke book.

**And Yet . . .**

And yet Shipps is good at explaining the links in the minds of the faithful between the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith’s role as God’s prophet. “Persons who accepted the volume’s contents as reliable descriptions of past events also accepted at face value Joseph Smith’s account of how it came into being” (p. 29). “It stands to reason, then,” Shipps opines, “that the Book of Mormon and the subsequent events of Smith’s extraordinary career functioned together to establish the authenticity of the book and to cement the link between a Hebrew-Christian understanding of the story of the world and the personal lives of the prophet and the people who became his followers” (p. 37, emphasis in the original). “Non-Mormons become Mormons when they respond to Mormonism’s fundamental truth claims by taking the Book of Mormon at face value.”

Might we not also conclude that Mormons become non-Mormons when they fail to take the Book of Mormon at face

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value—for example, when they start conjuring alternative explanations of its origin and meaning? Shipps senses that the Saints are “very much aware that if enough of their brethren come to accept as true an alternate version of Mormon history then schism is the consequence.”36 What this opinion suggests is that it is not obnoxious anti-Mormon propaganda that threatens the Saints, but strife and dissent from within, especially over foundational issues.

Shipps is even helpful in identifying from where this kind of thing is likely to come in its more secularized manifestations. “There are,” she claims, without explaining how she came up with the number, “perhaps 25,000 . . . so-called ‘cultural’ Mormons, i.e., individuals who are Latter-day Saints solely from the standpoint of family heritage, not from active membership in any LDS ecclesiastical unit.”37 A few of these cultural Mormons now report a kind of conversion in which an alternative version of the Mormon past and a revisionist understanding of the Book of Mormon is opened up.38

A few of these cultural Mormon dissidents have recently been disciplined by the Church. How would or should Shipps evaluate the actions taken against recent heretics and dissidents? Earlier she sensed that what she labels as “heresy trials” operate among other things “to establish and maintain boundaries of acceptable belief and behavior within religious communities.”39 She is right. And one can sympathize with those disciplined for flagrant heresy or dissident activity, without denying the need and justification for such discipline. Shipps once annoyed one of her audiences, the radical feminist faction, by making just such a point.40

40 Ibid.
Sacred History—“Truer than True”?

Though Shipps grants that the Book of Mormon has the appearance of “historical accounts of past events, a form integral to everyday experience” (p. 28), this is only an appearance, because, unlike accounts of what really happened in the past,

it has never lent itself to the same process of verification that historians use to verify ordinary accounts of what happened in the past. The historicity of the Book of Mormon has been asserted [for example, by Hugh Nibley] through demonstrations that ancient concepts, practices, doctrines, and rituals are present in the work; that the nineteenth century’s overwhelming concern with liberty and the working of the political process is absent from it [by Richard L. Bushman]; that from the standpoint of archaeology, its account of settlement and peoples “makes sense” and could have happened [by John L. Sorenson]; that the pre-Columbian compilers of the various books within the work had distinct literary styles [various word-print studies], and so on.

But such demonstrations point, finally, only to plausibility. Proof is a different matter. (p. 28)

She also distinguishes what she calls “sacred history” from “ordinary history.”41 While I am not opposed in principle to such a distinction, I worry about what she tries to do with it. She insists “that there are two separate and distinct kinds of history of any religious tradition—and that Mormonism is no exception. It has a sacred history and it has an ordinary history, ... and these are very different things.”42 But are they different? She does not argue the issue but merely opines. She states a corollary: “history as a scholarly discipline treats humanity’s perception of divinity’s dealings with it while history as a sacred story treats God’s dealings with mankind more directly.”43 “Sacred history” is seen as taking on “a mythic character which makes it ‘truer than true,’ if

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42 Shipps, “The Mormon Past,” 57, emphasis in the original.
by truth one means that which is established and verified according to the canons of historical scholarship.”44 Here is where she goes wrong. She has driven a wedge between “what really happened”—her “ordinary history”—and the story (myth if you will) forming and grounding the identity of the Saints.

But for the Saints what Shipps calls “sacred history” is ordinary history that has taken on mythic dimensions and thereby constitutes their story, their relationship to God, the explanation of their trials, the ground for their hopes, and so on. For Shipps, “ordinary history” is presumably about “what really happened,” while “Mormonism’s sacred history, like all sacred history, is a part of the mythological dimension of this religion. By its very nature it can only be retold and defended, not reinvestigated; re-searched.”45 On this she is at least partially wrong.

For Shipps, the contents of the Book of Mormon become “sacred,” and thereby “it becomes something other than a book” for those who accept its historicity (p. 29)—it functions in a mythic dimension. Suppose Shipps is right: Can myth—the story—not be real? Why not? Efforts to examine it, she claims, in the case of the Book of Mormon, lead “only to plausibility,” but not to the proof that is what historians seek while doing “ordinary history.” This opinion—so confidently though casually set forth—may best be understood as her own confessional and professional boundary maintenance mechanism. It is certainly not, as I will show, a mature reflection on either the Book of Mormon or on historical methodology.

Though Shipps recognizes that the Book of Mormon appears to be history, her secular orientation—she now identifies it with “religious studies”—demands that she turn it into mere mythology. Hence, when the faithful accept it as history, they are mistaken in assuming that it is about a genuine past. If, as she claims, the Book of Mormon, because it contains sacred things, becomes something more than history, what exactly does it become? Certainly not a bird or a plane—it becomes their canon, a sacred book or scripture, a book containing the word of God, and thus takes on a mythic dimension in the life of the community of

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45 Ibid., emphasis in the original.
believers. Is Shipps arguing, I wonder, that such a book simply cannot be true but only "truer than true," whatever that means, in perhaps the way mythologies that make no claim to being about reality might be thought to be true?

Certainly by containing matters sacred to the faithful, the Book of Mormon does not somehow cease to be a text whose historical claims can be tested in exactly the same way as any other text that appears to be or is thought to be ancient. Shipps grants as much: "nothing distinguishes it from all other books except its claim to be a record of God's dealing with His people in the Western Hemisphere" (p. 29). But she sees in this claim an ingredient that transforms the Book of Mormon into "something more than mere propositions; they become true. But how? In what manner was this book, whose origin was explained in supernatural terms, transmuted into a record of actual events involving real people?" (p. 29, emphasis added). She should be asking in what way a history of real events and peoples takes on a mythic dimension, becomes a founding story, assumes the role of sacred history. The answer: by having the Divine present in the story, and then through faith. That is exactly what transforms ordinary historia into sacred mythos. Of course, not all myths are genuinely historical nor involve real peoples or events. How can we tell? Is the Book of Mormon about reality? Though we will very likely never have anything approaching a final proof, we can and do have what Shipps calls plausibility. And the Saints can have something approaching a prophetic charisma, without which there is only plausibility.

Clearly Shipps confuses how we happen to have gotten the Book of Mormon with the question of whether it is an authentic history. Merely labeling the method by which Joseph Smith claimed to have gotten the record as "supernatural" does not thereby automatically preclude the possibility that it can either be tested or turn out to be true, unless one begins with the dogmatic presupposition that "you don't get books from angels and translate them by miracles."46

For Shipps, those who accept the historicity of the Book of Mormon are described in the past tense. This tactic allows her to explain that in the age in which this book and the story of its coming forth were originally circulated, “the Bible was still culturally defined as an undoubtedly authentic record of actual events involving real people” (p. 29), that is, it had not been entirely reduced to a mere myth without historical reality by skeptical scholars. Hence it was easy for those rustics who were heavily involved in a cultural context in which the Bible and also “magic” and the “occult” worked together to believe the story of the angel and the book. And she also appropriates the notion that one of the purposes of the Book of Mormon was to counter skepticism by bolstering the Bible, since there was then, just as now, much skepticism about divine things in the age in which the Book of Mormon came forth. But the Book of Mormon is as much an object of skepticism as is the Bible.

But people, lots of them it seems, believe that the Book of Mormon is an authentic ancient history and also the word of God. How does Shipps explain this fact? Do they simply make a mistake and confuse myth and legend or frontier fiction with real history? Do they need to be enlightened on such matters by contemporary experts in secular religious studies? Presumably, for reasons she does not explain, those who receive the Book of Mormon turn out to want it to be true, and some of them even work to show that it is an authentic ancient record, but they only come up with plausibility, since they are dealing with “sacred history,” and therefore not with proof, which is presumably what she thinks real historians arrive at in doing ordinary history with the current canons of the history profession. But again, on this issue she is simply wrong.

Plausibility is about as good as it gets for anything other than the most trivial questions that historians take up. From my perspective, Shipps seems innocent or naive about historical method. It seems that she assumes that objectivity is possible, that facts are what historians work with, and that they generate proofs.

Historians in thrall to one or another variety of positivism might talk that way. “Thus, the story of Mormon beginnings,” according to Shipps, “appears to be an exception to the normal modern expectation that natural explanation based on objective
evidence will be more persuasive than supernatural explanation growing from subjective accounts” (pp. 44–45). She concludes:

Like the gospels that include the story of the resurrection of Jesus without supporting it with objective evidence obtained from persons outside the incipient Christian community, the Mormon story includes an account of the translation of the Book of Mormon supported only by the testimony of members of the incipient LDS community. (p. 45)

Presumably, one can describe the evidence for the resurrection as “objective” if and only if the texts reporting eyewitness experience with the resurrected Jesus come from people who did not believe that he was resurrected. Does the mere fact that one believed that Jesus was in fact resurrected somehow preclude one’s report of actually seeing him alive after his crucifixion from being counted as “objective evidence”?

Shipps reports that so-called “supernatural explanations,” that is, what amount to accounts from eyewitnesses of events in which the Divine was manifested in one way or another, have proved persuasive to people who have become Latter-day Saints, “notwithstanding the commonsense arguments that, in an open and public manner, have repeatedly called into question the supernatural explanation that undergirds the Mormon story” (p. 45).

Naturalistic explanations of Mormon beginnings turn out to have no more objectivity than do the arguments presented by the Saints in support of their story. The differences are in the explanation, which in one case includes the Divine, and in the other case excludes the Divine—not in one side offering objective demonstrations and the other side appealing merely to subjective feelings. Is there some reason, other than a predisposition to distrust stories that include encounters with the Divine, to exclude, on principle, the possibility that Joseph Smith was God’s prophet and the Book of Mormon an authentic ancient history? If there is, Shipps has not identified it.

Though Shipps adamantly insists that she is not in the least interested in Book of Mormon truth claims, her very unwillingness to even report on the current state of the debate over its historical
authenticity, and in that sense genuinely leave the issue open, betrays a bias against its truth claims. This is unfortunate, because she has some interesting and perhaps even important things to say about the links between Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon in the faith of Latter-day Saints.

The Odyssey—Getting Launched

In 1965, in the introductory portion of her dissertation, Shipps noted that “Smith said that the Book of Mormon was a translation of records which had been engraved on a set of golden plates given him by an angel in the fall of 1827.”

This and subsequent observations were preceded by an account of Joseph Smith’s initial interviews with heavenly messengers. Having thus rather prosaically introduced the Book of Mormon, she added that

This strange volume claimed to be the history of the Western Hemisphere between 600 B.C. and 400 A.D., but its account of that millennium was interspersed with such an astonishing variety of philosophical notions and theological speculations that it was immediately apparent that here was no ordinary history. The work recounted stories of voyages and battles and tales of intrigue and treason, and yet the most striking passages in the Book of Mormon were those which were essentially explications of what had also been a part of the visions of Joseph Smith’s youth.

And what might these explications be? Shipps claimed that Joseph Smith had placed in the Book of Mormon “allusions to the ideas which, according to Smith’s own account, were conceived in the course of his extraordinary experiences.”

According to Shipps, these allusions

were particularly clear in the second section of the book. This section, the Book of 2 Nephi, included a series of chapters which provided a detailed description

48 Ibid., 20.
49 Ibid.
of the state of society which would exist at the day when the plates of gold would be opened to the man chosen by God. These supposedly prophetic predictions returned again and again to the themes of the visions: that churches already current were corrupt. 50

Shipps described the Book of Mormon as a "fanciful history of the Western Hemisphere," and as such "its initial appeal was not entirely religious." 51 What then might have been its initial appeal? Shipps thought that the Book of Mormon appealed to the faithful because it provided them with a sort of instant heritage, part of which included the notion that the American Indians were remnants of the twelve tribes of Israel, and that Christ had appeared on this continent in 34 A.D. Thus this book provided a connecting link between the history of the United States and the Judao-Christian tradition which by-passed the European culture filter altogether. 52

One must, of course, look behind the rather common and by now worn-out bromide about the Book of Mormon being an effort to link any pre-Columbian peoples with the lost tribes of Israel. If that is done, then one can see the faint outlines of one of the intriguing elements in Shipps's later work. Hence, in a much more polished and elegant form, something like this opinion can be found in her Mormonism, where the Book of Mormon is seen as providing Latter-day Saints with a distinctive past—a story, or mythology, a sacred history—that forms the identity of the Saints by linking them to ancient Israel and the faithful at the time of Jesus of Nazareth. This seems to be the germ that eventually matured into one of her more significant contributions to the understanding of the faith of the Saints.

The initial explanation provided by Shipps for the Book of Mormon was also her explanation for Joseph Smith. "In the eyes of the Latter-day Saints, Joseph Smith's early visions and his later

50 Ibid.
51 Ibid., 21.
52 Ibid.
revelations are both seen as dialogues between man and God." 53 But can such a conversation take place? Not really! Why? She merely provided an alternative account: "Whether it is regarded as a metaphysical event or a psychic phenomenon, a religiously oriented vision is an intensely realistic subjective experience which leaves the individual who has experienced it with a definite sense of having been in direct communion with God." 54 What Shipps seems to be saying is that Joseph Smith really believed the story he told, though she sees it as merely a "subjective experience."

For Shipps, Joseph Smith was a mystic, which presumably explains both his visions and revelations. "Like comparable mystical manifestations—the hearing of transcendental voices, spiritual illumination, infused meditation—visions are spontaneous occurrences apparently independent of the conscious human mind." 55 On the other hand, "revelation ... is a more prosaic, but far more dependable method of communicating with God." 56 It involves, according to Shipps, "asking for divine instructions and receiving an 'impression' of the will of the Lord in return." 57 Shipps thus describes Joseph Smith's visions and revelations as typical instances of merely "subjective religious experience." 58

Shipps grants that "making any objective differentiation in varieties of religious experience is extremely difficult." 59 She notes that "some scholars explain the origins of Mormonism entirely in terms of abnormal psychology and treat the visions and the revelations and the Book of Mormon all as products of Joseph Smith's 'diseased' mind." 60 Or they offer accounts of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon that see both as instances of fraud (citing three examples). Brodie had, according to Shipps, "decided that the Mormon prophet was a likable ne'er-do-well whose Book of Mormon was a gigantic hoax which he, himself, came in time to believe." 61 By recounting various secular expla-

53 Ibid., 24.
54 Ibid., 25.
55 Ibid., 24.
56 Ibid., 25.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid., 26.
59 Ibid., 27.
60 Ibid., 27–28, citing two examples; emphasis in the original.
61 Ibid., 29, emphasis in the original.
nations of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon, she has set the stage for her more charitable account. Her explanation is as follows:

Official church literature proclaims Joseph Smith as translator, prophet, and martyr—and is forced thereupon into endless justification of the many events in his extraordinary life which fail to fit the pattern. Even so, the religious movement which he started is probably more understandable in these terms than it will ever be in terms of unmitigated villainy or mental derangement. For if Joseph Smith were a knave, then those who joined him were dupes; if he were a madman, those who joined him were fools—and in either case, all subsequent Mormon history must be explained in reference to Smith’s personal magnetism.\(^{62}\)

In 1965 Shipps seems to have recognized that there are two general types of explanations of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon, for “Mormonism has had,” according to her, a kind of “historiographical schizophrenia.”\(^{63}\) She then attempts to find a middle ground between the two large, competing alternatives which fall on either side of Morgan’s Great Divide. The answer to the historiographical puzzle is to be found, she claims, in “studies in the nature of religious experience and research in the field of comparative religion during the last three-quarters of a century” which “have made it possible for scholars to provide a more precise and perceptive explanation of the place of faith in history.”\(^{64}\)

These studies, Shipps claims, show clearly that Joseph Smith was what she described as “a kind of native American mystic.”\(^{65}\) Joseph Smith a mystic? In 1954 Hugh Nibley had shown, using one of the two sources cited by Shipps, that Joseph Smith was not a mystic.\(^{66}\) Shipps garners the idea that Joseph Smith was a mystic (and the corollary that the Book of Mormon was a mystical text)

\(^{62}\) Ibid.

\(^{63}\) Ibid., 30.

\(^{64}\) Ibid., 31.

\(^{65}\) Ibid.

from an essay by Ray B. West on Mormonism. She grants that his remark was merely “suggested, without elaboration.”

Shipps claims that “a careful reading of the Book of Mormon and of the prophet’s personal history indicates that the religious experiences described therein are typical of the mystical experience that most students of comparative religion posit at the genesis of all the world’s enduring religious faiths.” She mentions essays by Evelyn Underhill and Rufus Jones, whom she describes as “two outstanding historians of mysticism,” who “have clearly shown . . . that the mystic comprehends an objectively real relationship between himself and the metaphysical world in the course of his interior religious experience.” She then asserts that Joseph Smith’s accounts of his visions “are nearly classic statements of mystical experiences.”

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69 Ibid., emphasis in the original.
72 Ibid., 31–32.
73 Ibid., 32. According to Thomas G. Alexander, “unfortunately, both scholars and Mormon writers have generally failed to consider Mormonism as falling within the tradition of Christian mysticism. The principle exception is Jan Shipps’ perceptive suggestion of a mystical interpretation of Joseph Smith’s thought.” Thomas G. Alexander, “Wilford Woodruff and the Changing Nature of Mormon Religious Experience,” Church History 45/1 (March 1976): 60, citing Shipps, “The Mormons in Politics,” 22–23 (sic, actually 31–33). Four years later, on 11 November 1980, Shipps sent me an eleven-page, single-spaced letter in reply to seven questions I had asked her on 12 August 1980 concerning her views on whether Joseph Smith was a mystic and the Book of Mormon a mystical text. In this letter she explained that when she wrote her dissertation she was not well informed on either mysticism or Mormon origins and she was also unaware of Nibley’s analysis. She also indicated that prior to her essay entitled “The Prophet Puzzle” in 1974 she had undergone a significant shift in orientation and no longer thought, for example, that Joseph Smith should be described as a mystic. But she also staunchly defended Alexander’s 1976 effort to read mysticism into Mormonism, which he rested in large part on an opinion expressed in her dissertation in 1965.
But Nibley, drawing on Rufus Jones and others, has argued that Joseph Smith was not a mystic.

The foremost present-day Protestant student of mysticism writes: "From the nature of the case this experience of ecstasy and absorption is something unutterable and incommunicable. . . . It is not like anything else, consequently there are no terms of description for it." The mystic, having found God, "cannot hint to human ears any descriptive circumstances about the actual character of God."\(^74\)

Nibley then adds the following observation:

As against this, the whole calling of a prophet is to communicate the will of God to men; he is a mouthpiece and a witness, and he tells what he has seen and heard; he is a man with a message. The mystic, on the other hand, has no such message. Mr. Rufus Jones becomes positively indignant at the thought of contaminating mystic purity with anything as crass and tangible as a message. Mystics, he says, "have not had secret messages from sociable angels. They have not been granted special communications as favored ambassadors to the heavenly court. They have been men and women like the rest of us," and their mystical experience is rather an enrichment of the individual mind, an increase of its range and depth, an enlarged outlook on life, a heightening of personality. It is much like what happens with the refinement and culture of artistic taste, or with the appreciation of beauty in any field. In other words, the visions of mystics are not like those of prophets at all. What they convey is not knowledge, says Jones, but rather an "increase of serenity."\(^75\)

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\(^{74}\) Nibley, "Prophets and Mystics," in CWHN 3:102, quoting Rufus Jones, emphasis in the original.

\(^{75}\) Ibid., 102–3.
Joseph Smith, whatever else one might say about him, claimed to have gotten “messages from sociable angels,” to have possessed plates containing a massive history, and so forth. Neither his story nor the Book of Mormon fits the typical description of mystics and mystical theology. Still, perhaps because Shipps had not attributed fraud to Joseph Smith nor signs of abnormal psychology, at least one RLDS and two LDS historians found her views attractive. They seemed to assume that she had found in mysticism a middle ground between prophet and fraud. Joseph Smith pictured as a mystic and the Book of Mormon as a mystical text constitutes a middle ground between genuine prophet and fraud, but certainly not between prophet and not-prophet.76 Marvin S. Hill, without drawing on Shipps, Thomas G. Alexander, or Paul M. Edwards,77 developed his own habit of linking mysticism, superstition, and magic in his explanation of Joseph Smith.78 In his biography of Wilford Woodruff, Alexander has somewhat muted his theory that visions, inspired translations, and revelations are instances of mystical religious experience.79

76 Thomas G. Alexander made the theory advanced by Shipps the grounds for his understanding of divine special revelations. See Alexander’s “Wilford Woodruff and the Changing Nature of Mormon Religious Experience,” 60–61, 69; and his “The Place of Joseph Smith in the Development of American Religion: A Historiographical Inquiry,” Journal of Mormon History 5 (1978): 14–15; and his review of Donna Hill, Joseph Smith: The First Mormon, in American Historical Review 82/2 (April 1978): 517–18. In this review, Alexander praises Donna Hill for her treatment of “various aspects of culture evident not only in the experiences of Joseph Smith but also the expectations of those who followed him. Thus, Joseph Smith could quite easily combine money digging, peep-stones, and mystical experience into a whole which was congruent to him, and to those who shared his world view” (p. 518). But Donna Hill does not mention mysticism—that is part of Marvin S. Hill’s explanation of Joseph Smith.


By 1988 Shipps felt that a fondness for "their folk religion" allowed the Latter-day Saints "to embrace the occult as well" as the Bible, "although neither in a mystical sense nor in a superstitious frame."\(^80\) So mysticism appears to have somewhat receded from her formal arsenal of explanations. At least the word has mostly disappeared,\(^81\) though much of what the word typically identifies in the scholarly literature is retained.\(^82\) Why?

**Avoiding a Logomachy**

Shipps reports discovering very early that "what 'outsiders' write about Mormonism draws special attention to itself, both within and without the LDS community."\(^83\) She admits that she "did not always stop to think through all the implications of everything" that she wrote in her dissertation.\(^84\) She soon began to see a multitude of audiences having "two extremes: active, intense, serious, literal-minded Mormons are located at one end, while active, intense, serious, literal-minded anti-Mormons are located at the other. At both of these extremes, people confuse the study of Mormonism with the investigation of its truth claims."\(^85\)

How has Shipps managed to avoid offending or annoying the various audiences who might encounter her work? For one thing, she insists that she has steadfastly "managed to keep truth questions 'bracketed out' through all [her] years of study. To a significant degree, this has been a conscious scholarly strategy adopted to provide . . . enough distance to be analytical."\(^86\) Her wise strategy is to avoid stating overt opinions on the truth claims of the faith of Latter-day Saints.

How does Shipps deal with those who are believers? She explains her strategy in the following way:

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\(^{81}\) See Shipps, "The Prophet Puzzle," 11 n. 15.

\(^{82}\) See ibid., throughout.

\(^{83}\) Shipps, "An 'Inside- Outsider' in Zion," 140.

\(^{84}\) Ibid.

\(^{85}\) Ibid., 142, emphasis in the original.

\(^{86}\) Ibid., 143.
Because literal acceptance of the Book of Mormon automatically turns people into Latter-day Saints (whether they join the Church or not), my non-Mormon status makes it obvious that I am not to be counted among the millions for whom the Book of Mormon’s content is *prima facie* evidence that the book is precisely what it claims to be.87

She adds, however, that in discussing the Book of Mormon she does

not feel compelled to take a position on the disputed issue of whether Joseph Smith was the author or translator of this extraordinary work. The content of this basic LDS scripture and the connection between its content and its function within Mormonism are the issues about the Book of Mormon which are of the greatest concern for me.88

She sees the issue of the Book of Mormon’s authorship as “a faith question” which she strives “to bracket out of consideration” in her work on Mormon things.89

It appears that once Shipps began to sense that academic success depended on her skill in avoiding giving offense to the various audiences that might be consumers of her essays, her writing would henceforth not be *au naturel*—plain or unaffected; it would be fashioned with different audiences in mind. Her writing, as the current fashions in literary criticism would insist, is thus profoundly and intentionally political; that is, it is intended to hide as much as it reveals.

Referring to what she describes as her “stubborn silence on fundamental LDS faith issues,” she claims that this silence sets her “apart from many . . . ‘Gentile’ compatriots whose work is, at bedrock, dedicated to disproving the ‘Mormonism is true’ proposition.”90 As a Methodist, she see herself “squarely in the mainstream of traditional evangelical Christianity.” Her interest in

87 Ibid.
88 Ibid.
89 Ibid.
90 Ibid.
Mormon things is not "to prove false Mormonism's exclusive claim as the only really legitimate form of Christianity," nor is she interested in trying "to prove the counterclaim that [a] conservative brand of evangelical Protestantism is the only really legitimate form of Christianity." She is an observer, but an outside-insider observer.

Are Theories Really Neutral?

In Mormonism, Shipps makes much of her having appropriated sophisticated theoretical models to assist her in uncovering the secrets of Mormon faith (p. xi).

In everyday life Mormons have no need for theoretical models or sophisticated conceptual frameworks to understand Mormonism. They know that theirs is the Restored Gospel, . . . reestablished on the earth under the leadership of a prophet in these, the latter days, the new "Dispensation of the Fulness of Times." But unless suitable analogues are found to enable non-Mormons to make sense of the Restoration, . . . avoiding misconceptions and misunderstandings is almost impossible.

Why? Because it is impossible for an unbeliever to see a faith ultimately as *sui generis*? That can hardly be the case, for she also insists that her current "perspective . . . regards Mormonism as *sui generis*" (a Latin expression meaning something like unique, of a class by itself, its own kind of thing). Hers is a "history of a *sui generis* set of peculiar people." Shipps seems to be saying that Gentiles need some analogies in order to understand the faith of the Saints. But the Saints understand the Restored Gospel without secular analogies or conceptual frameworks or theoretical models. Are we confident that

91 Ibid.
92 Ibid., 143–44.
93 Ibid., 158.
94 Ibid., 160.
95 Shipps, "Writing about Modern Mormonism," 44.
our audiences will not be led astray, diverted, confused by the use of social science or religious studies jargon?

What Shipp is really talking about is finding an adequate secular theory to account for Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. In introducing her remarks on how best to avoid misconceptions and misunderstandings, she reports a conversation in which Paul M. Edwards (an RLDS luminary and one of her close friends) said to her: “Jan, every time we talk you have a different theory to account for Mormonism.”96 Various theoretical models, conceptual frameworks, or analogies thus provide her with a “theory to account for Mormonism.” Shipp explains that if Paul Edwards’s observation overstated somewhat the rapidity with which I had moved from one theoretical model to the next in my extended search for adequate analogies, it nevertheless captured the essence of my efforts to deal with my ever-expanding amount of information by searching for a conceptual framework to fit my body of Mormon data without leaving any significant part unexplained.97

Shipp is aware of the procession of fashions among historians attempting to explain the past.

Because socio-political and politico-economic explanations were advanced in the early sixties in the field of history to account for just about everything that ever happened in the past, I started out in Mormon history using more or less secular models, picturing Mormonism as a social movement, an economic movement, a political movement.98

How has her analysis avoided becoming just another in the parade of flawed explanations?

Instead of looking for analogues to Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon in the Christian world, she explains, she “came

97 Ibid.
98 Ibid.
to understand that really useful analogues for Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon are simply not found in the history of Christianity. And so I was forced to abandon my idea that Mormonism is only a subdivision of this historic religious tradition."\textsuperscript{99} Americans, she realizes, are rather uninformed on the Mormon past. Professional historians can open up that past to them by providing them with explanations of what presumably "really happened."

The tale of an unsophisticated farm boy who found some engraved metal plates and used "magic spectacles" to translate therefrom a thousand years of pre-Columbian American history appears so incredible to many non-Mormons that they simply dismiss the prophet's visions as hallucinations, regard his "golden bible" as a worthless document, and wonder how any intelligent person could ever accept it as true. Serious critics look at the Book of Mormon more closely. Using as evidence its obvious parallels to other 19th century accounts tying the American Indian to Israel's lost tribes, its descriptions of situations, incidents and characters suspiciously like those within Joseph Smith's ken, its echoes of Masonic lore, its Isaiah passages and its bountiful supply of anachronisms, they conclude that the work is not only worthless but a fraud.\textsuperscript{100}

The problem, for Shipps, with either of these common gentile approaches to the Book of Mormon is that from her perspective they fail to appreciate that, for those who accept the book "at face value," it melds "disparate individuals" into a single people by providing "them a usable past and a common set of expectations."\textsuperscript{101} She is, of course, right about this. And this rather prosaic insight may be her primary contribution. But her point turns out to be merely a way of saying that Latter-day Saints actually accept the Book of Mormon at face value and it constitutes what I like to describe as both the grounds and content of the faith and

\textsuperscript{99} Ibid., 160.
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., 30.
memory of the Saints. What Shipps does not address in a satisfactory manner is the much more difficult question of why the Saints believe that the Book of Mormon is true—why it constitutes a reality that both explains the past, anchors the present—whatever the evils currently being confronted—and addresses the future with a genuine hope.

Why then do the Saints believe that the Book of Mormon is true? The answer provided by Shipps is both circular and superficial: the Saints, she claims, believe that the Book of Mormon is true because it was “defined as truth by the prophet whose rising up was prophesied therein, the book became true for those who believed, in much the same way that the entire body of Christian Scripture has become true for biblical literalists.”¹⁰² Those for whom the Bible is no longer true will quickly grasp the point she is making. Thus her presumably detached, neutral approach to the Book of Mormon is intended to allow her to rise above even the stance taken by those she describes as “serious critics” who see it as “not only worthless but a fraud” because of what she sees as its numerous weaknesses; it is, she insists, nevertheless to be regarded “as the product of an extraordinary and profound act of the religious imagination.”¹⁰³ She is silent on what might constitute such an imagination.

Perhaps it is possible to see what Shipps thinks were the sources for the Book of Mormon—in her language, Joseph Smith’s “religious imagination”—in her public endorsement of the Brooke book. This book is the most recent, ingenious, and inaccurate version of F. M. Brodie’s earlier effort at explaining away what Shipps correctly understands as the very foundation of the faith of the Saints. Brooke’s book, whatever else one might say about it, is clearly not neutral. When confronting prophetic truth claims, the theories employed to explain them are never neutral. The Book of Mormon, in the language already quoted from C. S. Lewis, “is either a fact, or a legend, or a lie.”

¹⁰² Ibid., Shipps has the unfortunate habit of referring to those who accept the Book of Mormon as true in the past tense. Of course, then and there the Saints accepted the book at face value, but here and now they continue to do so, despite what those Shipps calls “serious critics” have had to say about it.
¹⁰³ Ibid.
Shipps has undertaken the difficult task of explaining Mormons to skeptical Gentiles, while not offending the Saints. That she has stumbled occasionally and not satisfied everyone should not overshadow her accomplishments, even though Mormonism is not a book of rigorous scholarship or deep learning, but a sympathetic, cautiously worded, highly generalized work which approaches the explanation of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon rather temperately on a kind of sociological (or what might also be called a popularized religious studies) plane. As I have shown, the portions of the book that might be of interest to readers of this review are really cautious extensions or elaborations of themes, resting on naturalistic assumptions, initially set out much earlier in her career.
Earnestly Seeking

Perhaps the most important impression made by this compilation of articles in the Zarahemla Record—an RLDS publication—is that the authors have a deep respect and love for the Book of Mormon and are earnestly striving for understanding. The problem with their manner of doing this is that all too often understanding is presented as a product of thought and inspiration, and the reader is urged to accept the interpretation as definitive. This would be acceptable if these revelatory statements had some kind of substantiating scholarship; unfortunately, however, the tendency is for the author to expound his or her thoughts and then treat them as the view to be accepted for all further discussion on the subject, leaving little or no room for counterarguments.

The Preface starts the trend of sweeping statements by declaring that “the Book of Mormon was not named after the man Mormon but after the land of Mormon where the covenant was restored through the ministry of Alma” (p. v). David Lamb’s article “The Meaning of the Name ‘Mormon’ ” (p. 44–45) sheds light on this somewhat startling pronouncement, and we see that this is a personal opinion, extrapolated from Mormon’s declaration that he was named after the land of Mormon (Mormon 1:6). Furthermore, the land of Mormon is synonymous with the restoration of the covenant; therefore, the Book of Mormon is really the Book of the Restoration of the Covenant (p. 45).

1 This is an RLDS scripture notation; the LDS Book of Mormon reference is 3 Nephi 5:12.
This cleared up another query arising from the preface which mentions the same alternative appellation and leads to an article by Raymond Treat himself on “Covenants: Key to the Restoration of the House of Israel” (p. 52). By now this scan through the book was turning into something of a treasure hunt, but the nature of the treasure was still somewhat obscure, since notations such as “my mind was quickened” (p. 44) and “the Lord has recently given us a new and powerful insight” (p. 52) lead the reader to feel inadequate if personal spiritual confirmation is not forthcoming.

These two articles share the section “Hebrew Nature” with some observations from firmer ground by Angela Crowell on the “Midrash: Ancient Jewish Interpretation and Commentary” (pp. 27–30). The use of Hebrew poetry is also examined, and of course no discussion of the Hebrew nature of the Book of Mormon would be complete without some examples of chiasm (pp. 40, 56). However, comprehensive references are rare and personal opinion seems to be prevalent.

Royal Skousen’s current work on the Critical Edition of the Book of Mormon is cited in the next section dealing with the differences in the manuscripts of the Book of Mormon, notably the Original and Printer’s editions, and those subsequently printed by the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. This section contains some interesting findings and is well referenced. Obviously a great amount of time and effort went into this research.

Sections on Archaeology and Geography follow, again causing mixed reactions. The articles essentially parallel work done by John Sorenson and others, without referring to that work. Credibility is however lost in an article by Sherrie D. Smith entitled “Jade: Stones of Light” (pp. 125–27). Theories concerning the Jaredite stones are manifold and Smith admits in an Author’s Note that the “ideas . . . presented here are at best my present feeling and knowledge.” However, the article itself contains such

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statements as “Either the brother of Jared melted the jade to free it from the rock . . . or he actually melted one rock and poured the liquid jade into sixteen molds” (p. 126). Again we have the admonition to “prayerful research and study to discover modifications (to those things I’ve presented),” suggesting that an alternative is perhaps not to be sought.

The final sections, Testimony and Insights, are the “Mormon Journal” and “Random Sampler” sections of this book. J. Robert Farley has drawn an overview of the Book of Mormon and the paintings featured are quite striking. He relates his experiences in “Discovering God’s Will in My Life,” (pp. 153–56). The article in the Insight section, “More ‘No Erasers’ in the Book of Mormon” by Dennis Heater (pp. 197–200) deals with the problems of writing (and not being able to erase) on brass plates and is an amusing insight.

These final sections, offering homilies and suggestions for direction of study, confirm the feeling that the writers of this volume are earnest seekers after truth. However, as most of their insights and research cover subjects that have been better and more extensively researched and published by Latter-day Saint scholars in general and FARMS in particular, I do not feel that this publication adds greatly to our present resources.

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4 See the review by Larry K. Smith in this issue of the *Overview of the Book of Mormon*. 

Reviewed by Larry K. Smith

The paperless office, the paperless classroom, and the paperless library are distant dreams (or nightmares). Paper has a long and venerable history, and books on paper will be with us for a very long time. Paper is cheap, portable, and durable. Text written on paper in one century is still legible the next, while computer files recorded only fifteen years ago on punch cards or 8-inch floppies are almost irretrievable. However, electronic textbases can also be very useful, and Infobases International Incorporated invites us to “enter a new era in gospel study” with its LDS Collectors Edition CD-ROM.

Infobases has published electronically, either on disk or on CD-ROM, many volumes of interest to the student of the Book of Mormon and other Latter-day Saint topics. The engine used to browse and search the infobases is the VIEWS software licensed from Folio Corporation.3 The Folio product can be used to search nearly any conceivable textbase,4 from computer documentation to President Clinton’s Health Care plan, but, “currently, Infobases

1 Infobases International Incorporated, 305 North 500 West, Suite C, Provo, UT 84601.
2 On the Macintosh it is called VIP or VIEWS Lite; the Windows version is called Bound VIEWS.
3 Folio Corporation, 2155 North 200 West, Provo, UT 84604.
4 Folio VIEWS is the “delivery mechanism for more than 2,000 electronic titles from over 500 commercial publishers.” From a newspaper article, “Folio ‘Fuses’ Infobase with Lotus Notes,” The Daily Herald, 1 June 1995, B7.
is the number one publisher of consumer titles using the Folio
search engine."

Competition for Infobases is furnished by Portals’s Word-
Cruncher program in the DOS world. Each engine has some
advantages over the other. From WordCruncher advertisements we
are told that the following features present in the WordCruncher
program are absent in the Infobases program: computing an
accurate word count, locating concepts that span multiple verses,
linking texts purchased separately, and having compatibility with
the LDS Computerized Scriptures. Product literature from
Infobases emphasizes the greater number of books available,
multimedia capabilities, the capacity to obtain an exact verse
count, the ability to revise queries, the option of having multiple
windows open, customer support, and availability on platforms
other than DOS. On the Macintosh platform, ICD Corporation
provides competition by selling similar titles with their VersaText
program.

Contents

Infobases, Inc., sells different collections (called infobases) of
computerized LDS books at different price points, but the LDS
Collectors Edition CD-ROM contains them all: LDS Scriptures,
LDS Gospel Writings, LDS Historical Writings, Gospel Study Aids,
and the Encyclopedia of Mormonism, for a total of over 500
volumes in the 1994 edition. The CD-ROM has enough space to
include in addition 280 LDS hymns in MIDI format, some maps
and photos, the CIA World Factbook, a textbase of over 12,000
famous quotations and another textbase on American history. The
new 1995 edition contains 804 LDS works, more than 1,000 LDS
photographs and graphics, over 100 Church history and Bible
maps, and 285 LDS hymns, so Infobases continues to add more to

5 Travis Jacobsen, “Business Has Only Begun with Provo’s Info-
6 ICD Corporation, 750 North Freedom Blvd., Provo, UT 84601.
7 The Macintosh CD-ROM claims a MIDI sequencer is needed to
play the hymns, but they are playable with SimpleText (a free text editor
from Apple Computer, Inc.), among other applications.
the CD-ROM while reducing the price.\(^8\) However, as of this writing, the 1995 edition is only available for the Windows platform.

A list of a few of the included volumes is impressive. In addition to the LDS scriptures themselves, other works such as the Joseph Smith Translation, the Topical Guide, and a Greek and Hebrew Study Bible enhance scripture study. *Discourses of Brigham Young, Discourses of Wilford Woodruff, Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, Teachings of Lorenzo Snow, Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith,* and *Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball* are included. Multivolume works such as the *Journal of Discourses, Collected Discourses, Doctrines of Salvation, Comprehensive History of the Church, Documentary History of the Church, Messages of the First Presidency,* Bruce R. McConkie's *Messiah* series, and the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* appear in their entirety.

**Hypertext, Personalization, and Search Capabilities**

Having so much information in such a small space at such a low cost\(^9\) is only part of the attraction of the infobase concept; what makes it useful are the hypertext and search capabilities of the software.

The idea of hypertext is that one is no longer bound to read text in a linear fashion, but that at any time one can jump to related information (e.g., definitions, commentary, further resources, multimedia), usually with the click of a mouse. Buttons labeled G, H, and E at the beginning of many verses in the standard works correspond to commentaries in the LDS Gospel Writings infobase, the LDS Historical Writings infobase, and the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* infobase, respectively. By clicking on any one of the buttons, one is taken directly to a list of pertinent commentaries on that verse. Double clicking on a word in green text in the Bible takes one to the Hebrew/Greek lexicon. Some

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8 Suggested retail price for the 1994 edition was $299.95 while the 1995 Windows edition is being offered for $149.95 as a special introductory price. The DOS version still sells for $219.95 at the BYU Bookstore. FARMS offers discounts on many of the titles.

9 Dividing the $149.95 introductory price of the 1995 edition by the advertised 804 works gives a per work cost of less than 20¢.
format changes have been made in the Gospels because the Bible is a red-letter edition (to indicate the words of Jesus)—green text normally indicates links to the Hebrew/Greek lexicon; however, since Jesus' words are in red (and therefore cannot also be green), Infobases has chosen to italicize those of Jesus' words that link to the lexicon. Consequently, words that are normally italicized in the printed KJV New Testament are relegated to square brackets in the red-letter sections of the infobase.

An infobase library can also be personalized. Daniel D. Taggart, president of Infobases, said, "This is what we mean by 'Enter a New Era in Gospel Study.' Not only can users have instant access to thousands of pages of information, but they can highlight passages, create bookmarks and add their own commentary, then instantly retrieve any of it. This is something that was never before available in gospel software."10 It is something that still isn't completely available to Macintosh users (see below). When I tried to set a bookmark on my Macintosh edition, the program replied, "Insufficient security to perform operation." But the 1995 Windows edition does have these impressive features. It allows one to attach commentary notes containing personal insights to any word or phrase in the infobase. One can create personal hypertext cross-references, unlimited bookmarks, and color-coded topical marking pens for highlighting important passages. Then one can do searches within the highlighted passages, for example.

The search capabilities of this software package are quite complete. Full Boolean searches are supported, including And, Or, Exclusive Or, and Not operators, as well as phrase searches, ordered proximity searches, unordered proximity searches, and single character and multiple character wildcards. The Folio search engine is known for its speed and the searches are impressively fast for the size of the database, considering that CD-ROM is not an inherently fast medium (drives faster than the old single-speed drive may help). A search can be revised as much as one likes, and then a window comes up with all the records containing "hits" listed. Clicking on the "Hits" button in the (configurable) Toolbelt (also called the Toolbar) puts the selected hit in its con-

10 Jacobsen, "Business Has Only Begun."
textual surroundings. Successive clicks on the “Hits” button toggle between the view of the list of all hits and the selected hit in context. The scope of a query can be limited to a specific collection, volume, book, or part (such as a chapter or verse). For example, if one wants to do research into the internal geography of the Book of Mormon one can enter [Level Collection/the book of mormon:]west* or east* in the query box and find that there are 63 records (verses) that contain words that start with “west” or “east” in the Book of Mormon. Entering [Level Book/mosiah:]govern* finds the record Mosiah 25:20, which contains the word governed.

In the 1995 edition one can search the whole library (CD-ROM) at once, while in the 1994 edition each infobase must be searched separately.

The Book of Mormon

Not only does the CD-ROM contain the full text of the Book of Mormon, but it also includes many commentaries, long and short, about it. These supporting works include the Journal of Book of Mormon Studies (new in the 1995 edition); Lehi in the Desert, The World of the Jaredites, There Were Jaredites; An Approach to the Book of Mormon; A New Witness for Christ in America; The Prophetic Book of Mormon; Review of Books on the Book of Mormon (seven issues); Since Cumorah; and The Story of the Book of Mormon (new in the 1995 edition). Having such a collection of Book of Mormon commentary in one place should greatly facilitate Book of Mormon study. Of course, other comments about the Book of Mormon in books not specifically devoted to it can be found using the search features.

Macintosh Version

While the infobase concept borders on the revolutionary, the current implementation of the 1994 Macintosh version leaves much to be desired. Despite statements in older documentation, the software is virtually unusable on a Macintosh with only 4 MB RAM; the program really needs either more RAM or virtual memory (the newer documentation does recommend 6 MB RAM). The 1994 Macintosh version is clearly a port from the
Windows version which will leave a lot of Macintosh users unsatisfied. An incident from a call to customer support\footnote{Customer support is free except for the long-distance phone call. So far two of my calls to tech support and one to sales have gone unreturned. The new Windows edition manual claims that support is also available by e-mail at techsupp@infobases.com, but my computer can’t find the infobases.com host. However, Infobases’s world-wide web page is working; the URL is http://infobases.wia.net. The infobases can be searched on-line in a similar manner to searching on the CD-ROM. Some basic services are free while a larger library is available to subscribers who pay a monthly fee.} will illustrate the point. When I read

You may wish to change some of the default settings for the Toolbelt, Table of Contents, and Screen Display. To do so you must first change the status of the previews.ini file in your \windows directory to read/write. To change previews.ini to read/write, simply open the Windows file manager, click on the previews.ini file in the /windows directory. Then, pull down the File menu and click on Properties. Click on the box that is marked read only until it is blank. Close File Manager and return to the Gospel Library. You may now change the settings... Click on OK to save your changes to the previews.ini file.

to the technical support person on the phone, he thought I had the wrong manual; then I told him, much to his chagrin, that I was reading from the on-line files on my Macintosh screen, and not from a manual at all!

Many features are missing from the 1994 Macintosh version (the 1995 Macintosh version is promised to be functionally equivalent to the Windows 1995 version). For example, it really made me wonder if the product is ready for market when the help files contain: "Bookmarks are not available in this edition of your MacInfobase, but will be available in a future edition," "None of the items listed under the Customize menu are available in this edition of your MacInfobase, but will be available in a future edition," "Highlighters [sic] are not available in this edition of your MacInfobase, but will be available in a future edition,"
"There are eight pull down menus at the top of the screen: File, Edit, View, Search, Layout, Customize, Window and Help. Some of the commands in these windows are not yet available in this edition of your MacInfobase, but will be in a future edition," "The following personalization and annotation features are not available in this edition of your MacInfobase, but will be available in a future edition," and "Shadow have [sic] not been implemented in this edition of your MacInfobase, but will be in a future edition." Macintosh users can therefore only partially enter the promised new era in gospel study so far.

There are a number of other features that are un-Macintosh-like, but the new version may fix most, if not all, of them. The manual is a sparse, almost insufficient,\textsuperscript{12} sixteen pages long (the manual for the 1995 Windows edition is more substantial), but extensive on-line documentation is available. The "Contents" button on the opening screen of an infobase does not perform as advertised in the manual (but luckily the "Contents" button in the Toolbar does what one would expect). Nor is there a "Topical Guide" button on the opening screen of the Standard Works infobase, as implied by the manual (the Topical Guide is available, however, in the Study Aids infobase on the same CD-ROM).

\textbf{Windows Version}

The 1995 Windows edition contains far more text in the infobase library and has many more features and capabilities than the 1994 Macintosh edition. On-line guided tours come with the new edition, and it has all the personalization features mentioned earlier.

However, a friend with Novell DOS had a few installation problems with the 1995 Windows edition. When he switched to MS-DOS all the installation problems went away, but he still described the search engine as unintuitive and unpredictable, even after it was working properly.

\textsuperscript{12} For example, the manual says nothing about the other infobases (\textit{CIA Factbook}, \textit{Quotations}, etc.) or the LDS hymns that are included on the disc.
Copying and Printing

It is a fairly easy matter to copy portions of text and paste them into a word processor. Selections can also be saved directly as separate text files from within the Infobases program. When printing a scriptural selection directly from the program, one has the choice of showing the complete reference at the beginning of each verse (record) or not at all; the way to give a reference at the beginning only of a multiverse passage is to copy the selection to a word processor and delete the references on all but the first verse by hand.

Conclusion

For years to come, it will still be more comfortable to read a book straight through on paper, but for research and study this new tool is a quantum leap forward. The quantity of text and the hypertext and search capabilities are exciting. If the 1995 Macintosh version gains parity with the Windows version when released in September 1995, then Macintosh owners will want to be LDS Collectors Edition owners also.

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13 Else this publication may have to change its name to *Review of Software on the Book of Mormon.*
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Compiled by Daniel B. McKinlay

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