Errata

The following is a correction of a typographical error on page 190 in the second line of the last paragraph:

“ejkhvrxen” should read “ἐκήρυξε.”
TO OUR READERS:

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Editor's Introduction:  
Fictionary  

Daniel C. Peterson

I have been much occupied, over the past few years, with the contemplation of what I have called "lexical polemics" or "lexical imperialism" — the attempted use of verbal legerdemain, in the obvious absence of rigorous analysis and substantial evidence, to win an argument. Indeed, the book Offenders for a Word: How Anti-Mormons Play Word Games to Attack the Latter-day Saints takes the evaluation of such maneuvers as its central theme.¹ The basic tool of "lexical imperialism" is the redefinition of a term in order to defeat one's chosen enemy by excluding him or her from a desirable group or category by sheer verbal fiat.

In 1996, a particularly egregious example of such terminological trickiness appeared in a very unexpected place, the distinguished journal Religious Studies, published by Cambridge University Press. In an article entitled "Are Mormons Theists?" A. A. Howsepiian, someone linked with the department of psychiatry at a veterans hospital in Fresno, California, argued that, since the God worshiped by the Latter-day Saints is not identical with the God-concept associated with St. Anselm of Canterbury (d. 1109 A.D.), he is not really divine at all and "in spite of initial appearances Mormons are, in fact, atheists."² It is a breathtakingly audacious claim.

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¹ 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). Offenders for a Word has recently been reissued by FARMS.

St. Anselm is most famous for what has been known, since the days of Immanuel Kant (who rejected it), as the “ontological argument” for the existence of God, which appears in the second part of his Proslogion, or “Discourse.” It is an argument based entirely upon the word *God* or, perhaps more precisely, upon the concept behind the word. It is wholly uninterested in examining evidence from what most people would recognize as “the real world.” (For all its venerability and undeniable philosophical interest, therefore, one can certainly see how the ontological argument might appeal to someone prone to terminological games.) St. Anselm defined God as “something than which nothing greater can be conceived” (*aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari potest*). Then he argued that, since a thing that exists in reality is greater than a thing that exists only in the mind, God must exist in reality. For if God existed only in the mind, he would not be “something than which nothing greater can be conceived” and we would be able to imagine something greater—namely a God having all the characteristics of the imagined one but with the considerable further advantage of actual existence.

It is clearly this Anselmian definition of God that Howsepiian had in mind. Since Latter-day Saints believe in a God who is bounded within a physical body, who may well be a father’s son, who functions within a universe of co-eternal intelligences and co-existent matter and apparently works within natural laws as well as the rules of logic, it takes little effort to show that he is, at the most, not wholly Anselmian. But that, for Howsepiian, demonstrates that he is not divine at all. Within about a year of the appearance of Howsepiian’s article, the Latter-day Saint attorney and philosopher Blake Ostler published a quite creditable critique of it in the same journal, and I commend that critique to those who might be interested in pursuing the subject further.3 I would nevertheless like to offer a few comments on the article myself. And, as the editor of the present Review, *aliquid quo* (in this realm, and at least in my own mind) *nihil maius cogitari potest*, who can stop me?

I will admit that my first reaction to Howsepiian’s article was a somewhat angry one. The piece is clever, but fundamentally and, I

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think, obviously wrong-headed. Indeed, maliciously wrong-headed. Not only do I find it sophistic—*sophomoric* struck me initially as the more appropriate, and etymologically more precise, term—but I think its anti-Mormon motivation, though evidently sufficiently well hidden to get past the (perhaps naïve) editors of *Religious Studies*, manifests itself in unmistakable ways.

For example, Howsepijan’s comments on the Virgin Birth of Christ and his complacent certainty that Latter-day Saint teaching on the subject contradicts the Bible (p. 359, note 6) come right out of standard evangelical Protestant criticism of the church. One can scarcely be surprised at this, though, since (on p. 357, note 2) he has already cited the late anti-Mormon impresario “Dr.” Walter R. Martin as one of his scholarly sources. And there are the catty little comments that show up at various places. Consider, for instance, Howsepijan’s definition of “the ideal marriage” in Mormonism as “the marriage of one man to at least two women for time and eternity” (p. 370; emphasis deleted). Or his explanation (also on p. 370; emphasis deleted) that “Mormons are taught that they ought to marry for eternity but that they ought not remain worshipfully faithful to the Godhead for eternity.” This latter item picks up the charge, not uncommon in more sophisticated anti-Mormon circles, that, while Latter-day Saints deify the family, they humanize and thus devalue the deity. But can anybody recall any leader in the church ever teaching, explicitly or by implication, that we “ought not remain worshipfully faithful to the Godhead for eternity”?

And when (on p. 361) Howsepijan wants to account for the alleged discrepancy between the appearance the Mormons give of worshiping deities and the supposed fact that they do not, he offers as a first explanation that “Mormons have been intentionally deceptive about what their actual theological beliefs are.” This is, of course, a staple accusation of anti-Mormon agitators. Careful readers of his essay will note that Howsepijan does not rule out the possibility of systematic, deliberate Mormon deception; he simply lets the implication of bad faith linger in the minds of his readers.

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4 On “Dr.” Martin’s astonishing career as a (still influential!) religious mountebank and entrepreneur, see Robert L. Brown and Rosemary Brown, *They Lie in Wait to Deceive*, vol. 3 (Mesa, Ariz.: Bronsworoth, 1986).
"I shall," he chastely writes, "say nothing more about the first of these alternatives."

Most troubling of all, I think, is Howsepián's repeated use of the words *atheism* and *atheist(s)*—terminology, of course, that is at the very heart of his argument. (See, for example, pp. 357, 361, 365, 367.) His hostile attitude toward the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its teachings is more than implicit. I cannot imagine that such terms, and the charge itself—much like the accusation that Latter-day Saints are non-Christian cults—were not chosen for their explosive, damning, and maximally damaging character. Indeed (on pp. 364-65, having laid the groundwork on pp. 360-61), Howsepián stresses his accusation that Latter-day Saints do not merely fail to believe in his One Authorized View of God, but consciously reject it. But readers must guard against such sleight of hand. It is Howsepián, and Howsepián alone, who has conjured up what he calls (on p. 368) "the problem of Mormon atheism."\(^5\)

The crux of Howsepián's argument, and the point to which my response will be primarily directed, is clearly his restrictive definition of the term *God*. He says that "no entity countenanced as being a God by the LDS Church, given any plausible characterization of the concept of deity, qualifies as being a genuine God" (on p. 361, emphasis altered). It turns out, though, that the only "plausible characterization of the concept of deity" that Howsepián allows is an Anselmian one. This, in my opinion, is unashamed lexicographical imperialism.

Howsepián continually tries to hold Latter-day Saints to Anselmian theories or even to mainstream understandings of certain theological concepts—understandings that they would not accept—the better to beat them with. For instance, having cited

\(^5\) There are other things, simple errors, that do not really affect Howsepián's argument one way or the other. One example is his explanation that, for Latter-day Saints, "God the Father was once an unexalted man named Elohim" (p. 359). His identification of the late Elder Bruce R. McConkie as a member of the (long defunct) First Council of the Seventy may say something about his level of current knowledge of Mormonism and/or his direct familiarity with primary sources. (I strongly suspect that Walter Martin is his source for the materials he quotes from not only Elder McConkie but Brigham Young, Wilford Woodruff, and the like.) And his notion that Elder McConkie was speaking, or could speak, "for the whole LDS Church" (p. 361) is certainly questionable.
Brigham Young about eternal progression (on p. 361), he remarks that, “of course, on any standard understanding of finitude of being this is metaphysically impossible.” But Brigham Young almost certainly did not have in mind any such thing as a “standard understanding of finitude of being.” (More precisely, I suspect, he was using a nonstandard understanding of the word infinite—one that perhaps would not even pass philosophical muster as genuinely “infinite,” but that does nonetheless convey certain important religious ideas.) Howseepian declares that

there is, in theological contexts, good reason to identify an infinite being with an Anselmian perfect being, i.e. with a being than which no greater is possible. The principal intuition at work here is that an infinite personal being can have no (non-logical) limitations of any sort; such a being is maximally or unsurpassably great; or, in other words, the greatest possible being” (p. 362; emphasis in the original).

Since, however, Howseepian has failed to demonstrate that either Brigham Young in particular or the Latter-day Saints in general care about such a God, or aspire to believe in one, his personal Anselmian musings about God have no apparent relevance to Mormonism. He seems, in fact, as he proceeds, to be committing something like the classic fallacy of equivocation, where the success of an argument depends upon a surreptitious or unconscious shift in a word’s meaning between its occurrence in the premises and its occurrence in the conclusion.

Besides, Howseepian’s attempted ideological landgrab would wreak havoc with ordinary and scholarly understandings of both history and world religions. On the definition that he permits for the term God, the Romans, the Greeks, the Norse and the Germanic tribes, the Maya, the Aztecs, the Babylonians, the Canaanites, and the ancient Egyptians were all atheists. All or most Hindus and Buddhists would have to be considered atheists, as well. This finding would, to put it mildly, force us to rewrite virtually every book ever written on ancient history, comparative religions, and the like. Process theology, too, would arbitrarily be redefined as atheistic.
The ironies involved in Howsepians lexical transmogrification are remarkable: For example, in antiquity, Socrates, the Jews, and the early Christians were accused of atheism, largely because they did not believe in the usual gods of Greece and Rome. The well-known University of Toronto Egyptologist Donald Redford says that “the Egyptians, when eventually confronted by the faceless, unidentifiable, vindictive Judeo-Christian God, rejected him and declared the religiosity—or irreligiosity—of his fanatical followers atheism.” However, if one accepts the position of A. A. Howsepians, Socrates and the Jews and the early Christians would have been atheists if they had accepted the gods of their pagan neighbors! Such is the fruit of mutual insult, substituted for solid argument and analysis.

The simple fact is that precious few of the conceptions of God or the gods entertained by human beings across time and cultures have been constructed with the help of St. Anselms Proslogion. And the very terms that Howsepians uses to press his case against the Latter-day Saints—terms such as God (related to Old High German got and Old Norse goth or guth) and theism and atheism (from ancient Greek theos)—referred in their original settings to beings such as Odin and Thor and Freya and Zeus and Apollo and Athena, who, by Howsepians rule, would not qualify as

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8 As will be demonstrated by a glance at such standard works as Geo Widengren, Religionsphänomenologie (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1969), 46–149; G. van der Leeuw, Phänomenologie der Religion, 4th ed. (Tübingen: Mohr, 1977), 3–207; and Walter Burkert, Greek Religion, trans. John Raffan (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985). Indeed, any collection of Greek, Roman, or Norse myths would serve the purpose.
"gods" or theoi at all. It is, for that matter, difficult to think of any term for deity to which Howsepiam could resort that does not have its roots deep in polytheism and, thus, as he would apparently see it, in atheism. Take deity itself, for instance: It derives from Latin deus ("god"), and originally denoted such beings as Mars, Vulcan, Minerva, and Jupiter; related terms include divine and divinity. Howsepiam could avail himself of the biblical term El or Elohim, but the first is also the name of the Canaanite father-god, while the second, a masculine plural, is used even in the scriptures themselves for false gods as well as for the biblical God. As a last refuge, of course, he might flee to Jehovah or Yahweh. But that name, too, was venerated among ancient pagan polytheists, in the Syria of the first and second millennia before Christ.9

In fact, although Howsepiam devotes considerable energy to demonstrating (as he sees it) that Latter-day Saints, contrary to another strain of anti-Mormon propaganda, are not polytheists because they were never theists in the first place, it scarcely seems to have been necessary for him to go to all the trouble: I find it difficult if not impossible to see how any polytheism that has ever actually existed in the real human world could conceivably, given his odd urge to deicide, ever count with Howsepiam as anything other than a more or less "sophisticated form of atheism."10

More important, though, especially in view of recent works of

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9 See Cyrus H. Gordon and Gary A. Rendsburg, The Bible and the Ancient Near East, 4th ed. (New York: Norton, 1997), 38 n. 11, 113, 250–51. One is reminded, in this context, of such anti-Mormon polemicists as Robert Morey and John Ankerberg and John Weldon, who, in the process elsewhere of attacking the faith of Islam—what an interesting career choice!—point to the pre-Islamic pagan associations of the title Allāh as evidence that the God Muslims worship is evil and demonic. See Robert Morey, The Islamic Invasion: Confronting the World's Fastest Growing Religion (Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House, 1992), 57–65; and John Ankerberg and John Weldon, The Facts on Islam (Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House, 1991), 9–12, 14, 18, 24, 33, 40n, 42–43, 44. They evidently do not care that the word Allāh is closely related to the Hebrew word Elohim, that it is simply the Arabic equivalent of the English God—and is so used throughout the Arabic Bible—and that, in thus denouncing the Muslims as heathenish devil-worshipers, they also blithely condemn millions of their Arabic Christian brothers and sisters. More to the point here, they overlook the heathen origins of their own terms for God.

10 As, on p. 361 of his essay, he describes the faith of the Latter-day Saints.
biblical scholarship such as Mark Smith’s *The Early History of God* and Margaret Barker’s *The Great Angel*, but not limited to them, is the fact that the God described by the Bible writers themselves can be linked at best only very dubiously with the God of St. Anselm’s definition.\(^\text{11}\)

Of course, it is possible that Howseopian simply does not realize how provincial is his view of the acceptable limits of the doctrine of God. As the evangelical scholar John Sanders points out,

> The view of God worked out in the early [post-apostolic] church, the “biblical-classical synthesis,” has become so commonplace that even today most conservative [Protestant and Catholic] theologians simply assume that it is the correct scriptural concept of God and thus that any other alleged biblical understanding of God . . . must be rejected. The classical view is so taken for granted that it functions as a preunderstanding that rules out certain interpretations of Scripture that do not “fit” with the conception of what is “appropriate” for God to be like, as derived from Greek metaphysics.\(^\text{12}\)

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\(^{12}\) John Sanders, in Clark Pinnock, Richard Rice, John Sanders, William Hasker, and David Basinger, *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 60. This important book is, in its entirety, a repudiation, from an evangelical Protestant point of view, of essential portions of the concept of deity held by such thinkers as St. Anselm and dogmatically insisted upon by A. A. Howseopian. Recent Latter-day Saint criticisms of the traditional notion of God include Richard R. Hopkins, *How Greek Philosophy Corrupted the Christian Concept of God* (Bountiful, Utah: Horizon, 1998) and David L. Paulsen, “The
One of the attributes central to ancient conceptions of God or the gods is that of deathlessness (although there are numerous cases where gods have died, one thinks of the Norse deity Balder, for example, or the Greek Pan, Mesopotamian Tammuz, or ancient Egyptian Osiris). Indeed, amusingly, when Latter-day Saint writers have attempted to defend our doctrine of eternal progression or human deification (known in Greek as theosis or theopoiesis), evangelical critics have frequently responded that the term theos—which shows up in the context of such a belief throughout the early church fathers—really connotes only immortality, not the entirety of the qualities associated with true divinity. But now, when the question at issue is whether or not the God(s) of the Latter-day Saints can be said to be truly divine, we find that “theism” requires acceptance of Anselmian ontology, and that nothing else will do.

But why—especially in view of the violence it does to our understanding of religious beliefs around the world and throughout history—should we accept Howsebian’s definition? William James was surely correct—certainly he was true to the historical and comparative data—when he pointed out, near the conclusion of his classic The Varieties of Religious Experience, that normal human religious needs and the felt impressions of ordinary religious life do not by any means require God or the gods to be all-powerful or even unique.13

Once we toss out Howsebian’s idiosyncratically restrictive definition of God, his arguments become to a large degree irrelevant. When he declares (on p. 363) that, “within the bounds of traditional Mormon metaphysics, neither the Heavenly Father, nor the Heavenly Mother, nor Jesus the Son, nor the Holy Ghost are (individually) ‘greatest possible beings,’” the informed response should be a shrug and a “So what?” When (on p. 364) he asks

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the question, “Is there anything at all in traditional Mormon ontology that qualifies for the office of Godhood?” and implicitly answers his own query by pointing out that “None is now, or ever can be, a greatest possible or infinite being,” he has answered the question for Anselmians, but not for non-Anselmians—though he claims, quite falsely, to be doing something universally compelling. His move here is not legitimate. It is rather like arguing that there can never be real points in a baseball game, because there is no way in baseball to score a touchdown.

Howsepians devote considerable space (on pp. 363 and 366) to arguing—irrelevantly, I would contend—that Elohim cannot be a true Anselmian God because there must, in Mormon belief, be a God greater or more perfect than he. This is hardly earthshaking, of course, since Howsepians offer no evidence that any Latter-day Saint has ever argued that Elohim is the God of St. Anselm. Moreover, although it is obvious that, from a Latter-day Saint perspective, one God might be greater than another (e.g., having greater dominion, or, as John 14:28 seems to say of the Father in relation to the Son, being located higher on the patriarchal ladder), it is not at all obvious that one God can be more perfect than another.

Late in his article, Howsepians appear to realize that he has come thus far only on the basis of certain appalling leaps of logic and assumption. “One might justifiably charge,” he writes, “that I have, up to this point, been moving much too quickly. Why after all, is it not possible both to be a genuinely worship-worthy deity and, contra Anselmians, to lack certain omniproperties?” (p. 365; emphasis in the original). Why indeed? Most humans throughout the world and throughout history have certainly thought it possible. But, despite his tantalizing us with the prospect of his confronting a non-Anselmian alternative, Howsepians falls right back on Anselmian assumptions. He starts off promisingly enough, quoting Brian Leftow, who has argued that, as Howsepians summarizes his position (on p. 365), “x is divine if and only if x is worthy of worship. Furthermore, he avers, some sub-maximally powerful (or benevolent or knowledgeable) beings are, by Western theistic standards, worship-worthy and, therefore are, by these standards, divine.” With some modifications, I would accept Leftow’s principle here.
But suddenly we are back to Anselmianism—for Brian Leftow, too, we discover, is an Anselmian. It turns out that even Leftow's limited God has to be the greatest thing or personage that its worshipers can conceive. But, says Howsepiam, "Mormons can (and do) conceive of beings greater than Elohim" (p. 366; emphasis in the original). So, yet again, the God of Mormonism, because he is not the God defined by St. Anselm, is proclaimed by A. A. Howsepiam to be no God at all. "Perhaps," Howsepiam writes, in what is either a remarkable display of disingenuousness or a sad confession of incompetence, "there is some manner of adequately construing deity which has escaped us and which can comfortably accommodate the so-called Gods of traditional Mormonism. But, frankly, I see no alternate way in which this would be possible" (p. 367).

"So," says Howsepiam,

it seems that by the lights of both traditional and contemporary (monotheistic) Anselmianism, as well as by the lights of Leftow's (polytheistic) Anselmianism, nothing countenanced by Mormon metaphysicians could possibly count as God. But then it appears that Mormons are not really theists after all. And if not theists and, in virtue of their total rejection of alternative theistic systems of religion, not mere non-theists, then it appears that Mormons are atheists (p. 367).

But this is silly. All Howsepiam has really established is that Latter-day Saints neither believe in nor worship the kind of God defined in Anselm's Proslogion. He has not come near to establishing—and I believe he can never hope to establish—that the Anselmian definition of God exhausts the possibilities. However, I sadly conclude, Howsepiam uses the explosive charge of atheism against the Mormons because it is more conducive to his real aims than would be the much less eye-catching (but clearly more accurate) claim that Mormons are non-Anselmian theists. That he managed to publish such anti-Mormon propaganda in a journal as illustrious as Religious Studies is a matter for sorrowful reflection.

Howsepiam discusses one other issue that has the potential both to offend Latter-day Saints and to give a delicious shock to their ever-eager critics. "It appears impossible," he announces,
that there be faithful Mormons, for one would assume
that faithful Mormons (like other persons of faith who
consider themselves to be theists) are such that they
would faithfully worship the Godhead; yet, even if one
were to recognize the Gods of the Mormon Godhead as
being genuine deities, it appears impossible for Mor-
mons faithfully to worship their Godhead; therefore it
appears that there can be no faithful Mormons. (p.
368; emphasis in the original)

Most Latter-day Saints encountering such a claim will, I am
sure, find it preposterous on its face (as I do). Still, despite appear-
ances, Howsebian is, here as elsewhere, making neither a moral
judgment nor an empirical claim. His argument is entirely differ-
ent. He mentions first in this connection (at p. 369 and note 33)
the view that the God of the Latter-day Saints is not "worship-
worthy" because, according to Mormon doctrine, the cosmos is
not utterly and absolutely dependent upon that God in a meta-
physical sense. The God of Mormonism is neither an emanating
Neoplatonic deity, nor did he create the universe ex nihilo. Still, as
with the issue of Mormon deception and duplicity, Howsebian
leaves this claim hanging in the air. That is a dangerous place for
him to leave it, though, since it is quite easy to shoot down. Neo-
platonism, of course, is generally reckoned to have begun in the
third century A.D. with Plotinus, or, perhaps, with his teacher
Ammonius Saccas, who left no written record of his teaching
behind. And according to the best scholarly authorities, the
doctrine of ex nihilo creation too arose only in the second or third
century after Christ.14 Thus, since both creation by emanation
and creation out of nothing (ex nihilo) appear to be postbiblical
theories, Howsebian’s claim that only a deity upon whom the
existence of the entire cosmos metaphysically depends is
"worship-worthy" would deny that the God of the Bible himself
is worthy of worship. This is, of course, simply another instance of

14 See Gerhard May, Schöpfung aus dem Nichts: Die Entstehung der Lehre
von der Creatio Ex Nihilo (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1978); Jonathan A. Goldstein,
the fact that acceptance of Howsepien’s position would do grave damage to normal ways of viewing religion and religious history. It is very much like the collateral damage done, usually unwittingly, when people accept definitions of the terms Christian and cult that have been designed ad hoc by anti-Mormons to exclude the Latter-day Saints from their clubhouse. Other groups like the Catholics and the Orthodox end up being excluded as well—which, for most people (though, sadly, not for all), is a profoundly weird result.15

What Howsepien more fundamentally argues (on pp. 369–70) is that mortal Latter-day Saints are not exalted or deified now because they are—as sinful human beings—not perfectly faithful to their God. This, of course, is incontestable. But he goes on to maintain that, should they ever attain perfect faithfulness and the deifying exaltation that is consequent upon it, they will thereupon, as being themselves Gods, be released from their obligation to worship the personage they had previously acknowledged as their God, “since it is clearly a necessary truth that there can be no being B such that B is a proper object of worship for God. . . . And if this is the case, then the relationship between Mormons and the Mormon Godhead is, in the ideal case scenario, a relationship that is essentially marred by infidelity” (p. 369; emphasis in the original).16

There are at least two fundamental problems with Howsepien’s argument on this issue, one philosophical and one factual. The philosophical problem relates to his claim that “It is not possible for there to exist an x such that God properly worships x” (p. 370). This does not seem at all obvious to me, unless—as Howsepien always and everywhere does—one has in mind only an Anselmian God, “than which no greater is possible.”17 It is “clearly a necessary truth” on Anselmian grounds, but not on

15 On this fascinating phenomenon, see Peterson and Ricks, 
16 Note, again, the presentation of a Mormon “ideal” that no Mormon would recognize or embrace. 
17 By using the singular and capitalized term God here, Howsepien may, in fact, be smuggling Anselmian assumptions into his argument, not by demonstrative reasoning, by evidence and analysis, but by an implicit rhetorical appeal to the prejudices of his largely non-Mormon (and perhaps, indeed, classical theist) audience.
Mormon ones. Howsepiian appears to have committed here the error of "begging the question," of sneaking into his premisses the very conclusion that he seeks to establish. I have no difficulty conceiving of one exalted being "worshiping" another of higher rank, in the sense of the verb to worship that is given in the Oxford English Dictionary. There, the meanings include such perfectly appropriate notions as "honour or revere as a supernatural being or power, or as a holy thing; regard or approach with veneration," "regard with extreme respect or devotion; 'adore'," "honour; regard or treat with honour or respect," and so on. None of these actions or attitudes would be out of place in a celestial society of exalted beings.

The second problem with Howsepiian's claim about necessary infidelity in Mormon worship is the factual one. "Mormons," he informs his readers, "are taught that . . . they ought not remain worshipfully faithful to the Godhead for eternity. . . . Mormonism teaches that what were once proper objects of worship for S may, at some later time, no longer be." (p. 370). I know of no such statement from any Mormon scripture or Mormon leader. On the contrary, there are numerous statements of church leaders affirming that we will continue to be subject to God, our Father, in the same patriarchal order that makes us subservient to him now. And, in that case, worship would, as I have indicated, not be at all out of place even in the eternities.

The one truly interesting question raised by Howsepiian's paper concerns how Latter-day Saints would define or identify God among the many other beings in the universe. "There is," asserts Howsepiian,

. . . an ineliminable arbitrariness to what counts as something's being considered to be a God within a Mormon ontological framework. In Anselmian monotheism, there is no such arbitrariness involved in virtue of the fact that the Anselmian God is both sui generis and unsurpassably great. But in Mormonism, each member of a class of beings is considered to be divine none of which is either sui generis or unsurpassably great. The question then arises: What reason is there to think that only beings in that class are genuine deities
which deserve our worship? None that I can see. (p. 368; emphasis in the original)

This is a legitimate point of inquiry, although it is not, I am confident, one for which no cogent answer can be found. Howsepiian himself, in an effort at *reductio ad absurdum*, proposes the rebellious followers of Lucifer and the elementary particles of physics as candidates for Mormon Godhood, on the basis of their necessary existence (on p. 367). But, of course, their necessary existence is not unique—all humans share it, for example (as Howsepiian himself recognizes, on p. 367)—and no Latter-day Saint has ever proposed necessary existence as a sufficient criterion for Godhood. More seriously, Howsepiian suggests (on p. 368) that a necessary criterion for Mormon Godhood might reside, for Latter-day Saints, in the genealogical relationship between exalted beings and mortal humans. This approach seems to me to have some promise. My own tentative answer to Howsepiian’s question on this issue would probably involve something of genealogy, but would certainly go back to some of the points raised by his quotation from Brian Leftow (on p. 366) and in the brief discussion leading up to it.

Leftow offers a hypothetical account of a “minor deity” called Nod and his worshipers, the Passians:

Now perfect moral goodness is one attribute Western theists insist to be a member of $S$ [the set of attributes that make something divine]. Nod is at least of an awe-inspiring power and knowledge, and awe is one key response involved in worship. Only Nod’s unending anguish, freely undertaken, spares the human race all manner of awfulness. Thus Passians are certainly rational in thinking themselves to owe Nod great thanks and praise. It is not clear on what basis one could deny these thanks and praise the title “worship”, particularly if the main attribute involved in their paeans is perfect goodness, and the rest of Nod’s relevant attributes are (as we have said) awe-inspiringly greater than any human can conceive, and Nod is thanked for salvific actions. The thanks and praise Passians address to Nod,
after all, are very much like those which Christians address to God.18

It would seem to me that moral perfection, coupled with awe-inspiring power and knowledge, would have to be components of what it means, in Mormonism, to be a God. And, it should be noted, such considerations put Latter-day Saints well above the cut-off line or minimum standard for the gods that humans have historically worshiped; many of them have lacked any pretense of moral perfection or even moral goodness. In this sense, my quasi-definition accords much better with the actual historical and cross-cultural data than does Howsepi'an's.

In closing, I might add that I have always found Anselm's proof too clever by half, and not at all convincing. I am, personally, much more interested in the greatest being that exists than in the greatest one of which I can conceive. It might be the case that a God who can make a four-cornered triangle could be considered greater than one who cannot, or that a God who can make \( 2 + 2 \) yield five is greater than one limited by the rules of logic and mathematics. But no such being seems to exist. It might be that a deity who created the universe out of nothing could be reckoned greater than a divinity who did not. But neither the Bible nor the Qur'ān nor modern scripture seems to know anything of such a being. Some (certainly including the ancient Greek philosopher Plato) might well consider a God who is completely intangible higher than an anthropomorphic divinity, but prophets ancient and modern report seeing the latter, not the former.

The irony here might be that, in conceiving a deity who is very great but who does not exist, as in attempting rhetorical deicide against the God proclaimed by prophets ancient and modern, it is A. A. Howsepi'an who, from a Latter-day Saint perspective, could be called an atheist. But it is impolite to point.

In this Review, we favor evidence and analysis over lexical games and mesmerism, and I think the present issue carries on the tradition. Kevin and Shauna Christensen offer interesting readings of the Book of Mormon, two reviews (by Richard Lloyd Anderson

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and Scott Faulring, and by Danel Bachman) carefully evaluate Todd Compton's controversial recent volume on the plural wives of Joseph Smith. S. Kent Brown examines that *rara avis*, a sober Latter-day Saint book about the Dead Sea Scrolls. John Tvedtines and Bruce Chadwick briefly notice a pair of recent books in which major non-Mormon scholars, writing respectively on ancient seafaring and the spread of early Christianity, find it worthwhile to pay attention to the Latter-day Saints. John Gee and John Tvedtines respond to two relatively sophisticated recent attempts to undermine the claims of the gospel. I am grateful to these and the other reviewers for their efforts, for the interesting fare they offer to the readers of the *Review*.

My thanks go as well to those who have labored on this issue of the *Review*, including Melvin J. Thorne, Sandra A. Thorne, Mary Mahan, Wendy C. Thompson, Becky Isom, Robyn Patterson, and Maria Ilieva. Shirley S. Ricks did remarkably well, via the wonders of modern communications technology, preparing the various files from her temporary residence in London. Meanwhile, and on top of her own considerable responsibilities, Alison V. P. Coutts—ironically, a displaced British subject working here in the colonies—took over the process of preparing the *Review* for press in Utah and managed it with her characteristic competence. As always, I am delighted to take credit for the work they do.

**Editor's Picks**

Concluding in traditional fashion, I now list certain texts or items treated in the present issue of the *Review* and offer my own (necessarily subjective) ratings. My opinions come, in some cases, from personal and direct acquaintance with the materials in question. In all cases, I have determined the rankings after reading the reviews featured in this issue and after further conversations either with the relevant reviewers or with those who assist in the editing of the *Review*. The final judgments, however, and the final blame for making them, are mine. This is how the rating system works:

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

Here, then, are my ratings—at least, as of today; they could change tomorrow—for the items that we feel we can recommend from the present issue of the FARMS Review of Books:

* Lauramaery Gold, Mormons on the Internet
** Jeffrey R. Holland, Christ and the New Covenant: The Messianic Message of the Book of Mormon
** Donald W. Parry and Dana M. Pike, eds., LDS Perspectives on the Dead Sea Scrolls
** Raphael Patai, The Children of Noah: Jewish Seafaring in Ancient Times
** John W. Welch and Doris R. Dant, The Book of Mormon Paintings of Minerva Teichert
*** Rodney Stark, The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History


Reviewed by Melvin J. Thorne

**The Role of Amateurs in Book of Mormon Studies**

These two slim paperback books embody many of the strengths and weaknesses of books written about the scriptures by amateurs. The strengths are primarily the enthusiasm, personal insights, and personal witnesses of the authors, which make both books worthwhile reading for certain audiences. The weaknesses, however, limit the usefulness of the books for most readers, as will be discussed below.

But first, a summary of these books. *Book of Mormon Insights* provides a page or two of William N. Partridge's ideas about each chapter of the Book of Mormon. Partridge explains in his preface that this book stems from his attempt to follow President Benson's encouragement to make the study of the Book of Mormon a lifetime pursuit and his desire to share with others the insights he has gained over the last few years of this study, in the hopes that his insights will stimulate readers to find their own. He wants to help readers understand that there are many lessons in each chapter of the Book of Mormon that can benefit our lives.

Partridge usually begins his discussion of the individual chapters in the Book of Mormon by summarizing what he sees as the most important events in that chapter. He then typically comments on the significance of these events and concludes by trying to help readers apply the insights to their own lives. For example, for Alma 14 (discussed on page 124) Partridge mentions the
pleadings of Zeezrom on behalf of Alma and Amulek and summarizes the ordeal of Alma and Amulek as they watched their converts burned. After quoting Alma’s statement that the Lord suffers such actions so that his judgments on the wicked will be just, Partridge urges his readers to “try to consider what type of judgment a wrathful God will impose upon such sinners.”

Partridge then points out that while Amulek worried that he and Alma might also be burned, Alma knew they would be protected, from which he concludes that Alma was spiritually more mature than Amulek, who “was still growing in spirit.” Partridge then ends this discussion of Alma 14 by trying to get the reader to envision what this experience must have been like; he asks readers to try to put themselves in Alma’s position by imagining themselves in similar circumstances, and he asks the readers questions such as “How would you feel to observe wicked men round up your converts who had been baptized and burn them?” If you have never tried to read the scriptures in this way—if you have never paused to wonder why the individuals in the scriptures do the things they do or to consider how you might act or react in similar situations—you may find Partridge’s insights both instructive and inspirational.

_The Bible and the Book of Mormon_, by John E. Enslen, is intended to help readers see connecting links between the Bible and the Book of Mormon, as the subtitle indicates. It seems to have been written primarily for a non-LDS audience and perhaps for members of the LDS Church who are troubled by anti-Mormon attacks on the Book of Mormon (in contrast to _Book of Mormon Insights_, which seems primarily aimed at members of the LDS Church). The first two-thirds of the book reprints twenty-six newspaper articles written by Enslen, originally published in the _Wetumpka Herald_ (in Wetumpka, Alabama); nine of those twenty-six articles deal with chapter 29 from Isaiah and its connections with the Book of Mormon. The last third of the book consists mostly of Enslen’s responses to letters to the editor that were written about Enslen’s articles.

Enslen’s ultimate purpose appears to be to persuade readers that the Book of Mormon is worth reading, so that they will not dismiss the book without a fair hearing. He wants to show that the Bible supports some of what the Book of Mormon says and to
create an interest in reading the Book of Mormon. If you are looking for an enthusiastic personal testimony of the authenticity of the Book of Mormon, backed by some fairly simple evidences of its antiquity and its connections to the Bible, you may find Enslen’s book useful.

Unfortunately, both books are much less valuable than they could have been. They are weakened by characteristics that seem to be common in works by amateurs. For one thing, both books are written as if in an intellectual vacuum—a vacuum of knowledge about what has been written by others. Both books could have been much stronger if their authors had drawn on the large body of research that has been published on the topics they address. Furthermore, neither book is well balanced in its treatment of evidence; very speculative ideas are given the same weight as concepts that have been quite well documented by other people, as if both kinds of “evidence” (and many levels in between) were equally valuable and persuasive.

What is the place of amateurs in the field of Book of Mormon studies? While this subject deserves more systematic treatment than can be given in a review like this, may I conclude with a few suggestions based on my experience as an editor in this field, in the hopes that they may stimulate a more complete consideration of this topic by others in a more appropriate venue.

The case of one very sincere student of the scriptures seems particularly instructive. He is a medical professional. He has devoted considerable time and energy to a study of a certain aspect of Book of Mormon studies and has published books on the subject. He and I have had several discussions about his books. When the FARMS Review of Books published a review criticizing one of his books for the same kind of weaknesses I have pointed out in this review, he came to me to discuss the criticisms made by the reviewer. We talked about the need to understand the body of knowledge in the area of his interest and how it applies to his ideas, to evaluate arguments and evidence (his own and those of others), to make his own assumptions clear, to reason logically, and so on. He asked how he could obtain the knowledge and tools that the reviewer criticized him for not using. When I suggested that he take a portion of the large amounts of time and energy he was currently spending on his studies and invest them in pursuing
a good graduate degree from a reputable university, he didn’t see the point.

He seemed to want to acquire, quickly and easily, the knowledge and skills that others have invested years in obtaining and maintaining. He wanted the fruits of that training, but he didn’t want to sacrifice for it. Yet as a medical professional he certainly would not expect others to succeed in his profession without the proper training. The same is true in many fields of human endeavor; we don’t expect people to succeed (and in some cases we don’t even let them try) unless they are qualified by training and experience. So why should anyone expect things to be entirely different in the field of scripture scholarship?

Perhaps the answer lies in the fact that the most important and most valuable type of scripture study—obtaining a personal witness of the truthfulness of the scriptures and an understanding of how to live one’s life in accordance with the teachings of the scriptures—requires no scholarly training. Perhaps because no training is needed for that type of scripture study, some assume none is needed for any type of scripture study.

But scripture scholarship is another matter. While the most important questions about the scriptures—are they true and what do they mean to me?—can be answered without any special training, there are some questions that can best or only be answered by applying the knowledge and skills developed by academic training: such as questions about context, both cultural and physical; or questions about forms, whether literary or social, political or legal; and questions about what things like context and forms may tell us about meaning. It is questions like these that are the focus of what I mean by scripture scholarship.

Amateurs who try to address these kinds of questions (like Enslen and Partridge) without obtaining and employing the knowledge and skills of scholarship are at a distinct disadvantage. They publish books (frequently self-published, like both Enslen’s and Partridge’s books) and expect them to receive the same serious attention as books published by scholars who have prepared themselves to address such questions effectively. While formal academic training is not the only way to acquire the knowledge and skills of scholarship, it is the best way I know, and I know of few
people who have acquired them in any other way to the level of doing effective scholarship on these kinds of questions.

Some people whose scholarship I admire remind us that professional scholars cannot be relied upon without question and that inspired amateurs have made indispensable contributions to scholarship. Hugh W. Nibley has been particularly tough on professionals who hide behind their credentials, although he has no reservations about those who truly deserve their credentials.\(^1\) Much more recently, John W. Welch has offered excellent guidelines to individuals who wish to become more serious about their studies of the scriptures.\(^2\) He is more optimistic than I that an amateur (\textit{novice} is the term he uses) can “move toward becoming a gospel-scholar” without formal training, although he too warns against thinking that such a goal can be obtained easily: “If anyone is looking for a quick fix in becoming a gospel-scholar, think again. How does one become a great musician? How does one become a scratch golfer? Doing anything well in life requires lots of love, work, dedication, and consistent attention to the task.”\(^3\) Are there great musicians and scratch golfers who have not benefited from training from those already accomplished in the field? There are clearly many well-trained but mediocre musicians and golfers, but very few who are really accomplished in those fields who have not taken great pains to learn from masters, mentors, and even peers. I think that the analogy holds for accomplished scripture scholars; it certainly does for these two very productive scholars who inspire amateurs to stretch themselves toward becoming scholars—they themselves took advantage of the


\(^2\) See John W. Welch, “Toward Becoming a Gospel-Scholar,” \textit{This People} 19/3 (1998): 42–56. Although Welch discusses becoming a gospel-scholar, I don’t think he is talking about the same level of scholarship that I am addressing here. He does, however, offer very helpful ideas to those he describes as novice gospel-scholars, and he includes a discussion of the spiritual dimension that I have not addressed, since the books I am reviewing (and other books like them) are not lacking in spiritual understanding but in the scholarly component that I believe must accompany the spiritual for the pursuit of the kinds of questions I have mentioned.

\(^3\) Ibid., 56, 44.
opportunities presented to them to receive formal academic training and devoted great effort to making the most of that training, and they have used it to great effect in combination with their spiritual understanding.

Sometimes lucky or persistent amateurs make significant contributions to scripture scholarship. Sometimes they have unique access to important materials or places; occasionally they achieve new insights because they are free of the received opinions that at times blind even well-trained scholars to new ways of looking at things. But even these contributions usually need the careful scrutiny and comparative analysis of scholars before their value can be relied upon or developed further.

A good case in point is the work that Warren Aston has done in the Arabian Peninsula in search of Nephi’s Bountiful. His career in the travel and airline industries in Australia has facilitated his travel to Arabia and has given him contacts that have helped him gain entry to Yemen and especially Oman at times when such entry was difficult. His persistence in examining likely candidate areas has been matched by his care to learn what others have done on the subject (for example, he contacted FARMS to learn what had been published on the subject before beginning any personal explorations and he has kept FARMS apprised of his progress so that others who might be interested in doing research on the subject could learn what he had so far discovered). And when he thought that he had identified the best candidate, he asked FARMS to help him enlist professional scholars who could verify and extend his work.

Such amateur successes are rare in scriptural scholarship. Scripture scholarship is less important than personal study of the scriptures, but if it is going to be done, it should be done right. And so far, experience shows that it is done best by individuals who have acquired scholarly tools and knowledge through professional training and experience.

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5 See Aston’s article and another article by a group of scholars who have recently returned from Oman, in the next issue of the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*.

Reviewed by John Gee

**A Book of Mormon Christology at Last**

The appearance of this book should cause rejoicing, for this is a commentary on the Book of Mormon that merits reading. The author has important and insightful things to say. The writing is clear and accessible. The typeface is pleasant and readable. And at long last Deseret Book has actually produced a well-bound volume.

It should not surprise anyone that it would take an apostle, a special witness of Jesus Christ, to produce by far the best work to date on the christology of the Book of Mormon. Elder Holland is no stranger to Book of Mormon studies, having produced a master's thesis on the Book of Mormon. In an offhand remark a couple of years ago at a symposium, Elder Holland, commenting on the busy schedule of an apostle, lamented that it is difficult to produce a scholarly work from the reading material available on Delta airlines. He has nevertheless done exceedingly well, for although references to scholarly studies are at a minimum in this work, the focus is, as it should be in a work of this kind, on the Book of Mormon. Even if Elder Holland has not had the time to reference previous purported studies of Book of Mormon christology, he has the distinct advantage of actually having read the Book of Mormon closely, and thus no future scholarly study of

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Book of Mormon christology can afford to neglect Elder Holland’s study.

The plan of this book is very simple. Beginning with the assertion that the Book of Mormon is a new covenant or testament of Jesus Christ and that Christ is the central figure in the book, Elder Holland then goes through the Book of Mormon chronologically, prophet by prophet, and identifies what new understanding each prophet’s revelations added to the knowledge of Christ in that remarkable record. Elder Holland pays careful attention to the teachings in the Book of Mormon about the atonement of Christ and the appearance and teachings of the resurrected Jesus to the Nephites. Finally he concludes with his own apostolic witness of Jesus Christ. At the end, appearing before the notes and indexes, are four appendixes on the titles for Christ, Book of Mormon quotations of Isaiah, the First Presidency’s “Doctrinal Exposition of the Father and the Son,” and comparison of the Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount.

Elder Holland’s many insights into the Book of Mormon (including the chiastic framework of Jesus’ first day among the Nephites) are too numerous even to summarize here. The reader would be better served by reading Elder Holland’s writings rather than this book review. It is, however, worth emphasizing one of Elder Holland’s statements: the devotion of Latter-day Saints to the Book of Mormon and the traditional account of its production have come to be among our most cherished convictions “because the Book of Mormon affirms our yet higher and more sublime belief that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and Savior and Redeemer of the world” (p. 346).

Reviewed by Kevin and Shauna Christensen

**Nephite Feminism Revisited: Thoughts on Carol Lynn Pearson’s View of Women in the Book of Mormon**

And after this manner of language did my father, Lehi, comfort my mother, Sariah. (1 Nephi 5:6)

Periodically, readers of the Book of Mormon have raised the issue of its depiction of women and specific messages that it has for women. Having come to regard Carol Lynn Pearson as a cultural treasure, we looked forward to reading her essay on this topic in the March 1996 *Sunstone*, “Could Feminism Have Saved the Nephites?” The question is certainly interesting, and her asking voice is important and eloquent. While affirming that “The Book of Mormon is indeed a book written for our day, and it contains many powerful lessons that can greatly benefit us” (p. 32), she expresses concerns about what she sees as the “near unrelenting militarism” of the Nephites, “the absence of women in the record and the stunning, negative female imagery” (p. 32). We sympathize with her concerns and can agree with some of her general propositions and observations. Compared to the Bible, particularly the Gospels, the Book of Mormon neglects the female perspective.\(^1\) However, her case turns out to be seriously flawed, and if we

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\(^1\) Another treatment of this topic includes Maureen Ursenbach Beecher and Lavina Fielding Anderson, eds., *Sisters in Spirit: Mormon Women in Historical and Cultural Perspective* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987). One essay from that volume, by Melodie Moench Charles, “Precedents for Mormon Women from the Scriptures,” noted that the attention given to women was not impressive and that Book of Mormon authors apparently saw women as less significant than men; nevertheless, “the most important teachings show that
take her charges at face value, they unjustly diminish our appreciation of the Book of Mormon. In this review, we point out problems in her essay, but do so hoping to address many of the concerns that she voices. We do not intend to diminish her many accomplishments elsewhere.

Our initial focus was on her neglect of important Book of Mormon texts and contexts that contradict or modify specific statements that she makes. Reviewers of drafts of this paper encouraged us to undertake a broader approach to the issue of women in the Book of Mormon, rather than just responding to her paper. Accordingly, we include observations relevant to her questions that go beyond the specific cases she mentions.

We affirm that the message of the Book of the Mormon for women is a positive one, more so than has been recognized by most readers. We shall consider several kinds of evidence that this is so:

- Doctrinal statements and the absence of prescriptive statements
- Type-scenes involving specific women
- Imagery concerning a Divine Mother
- Symbolism in narrative context
- The significance of the narrator perspective (male, Nephite, military)

We shall also discuss the influence of culture and biographical influences on contemporary reader expectations on the text. We must point out that Pearson’s paper seems never to analyze passages in context. Instead, she quotes isolated texts and makes subjective evaluations. This approach generates questions that illuminate contemporary concerns, but such a method cannot provide definitive answers. Even her most passionate assertions—that there is a correlation between an apparent sexism and the seeming militarism of the Nephites—comes with no textual or contextual analysis of the causes of the Book of Mormon conflicts or of the Nephite attitudes and policies regarding war. She observes the

salvation is available equally to all” (ibid., 52). Charles gives the Book of Mormon four pages. Also, Donna Lee Bowen and Camille S. Williams have written an informative essay, “Women in the Book of Mormon,” in Encyclopedia of Mormonism, 4:1577–80.
accounts of violence and reacts with horror, expressing her feeling that such passages "stain the pages of the book" (p. 34). But she never looks at the wars either in the ancient context or in terms of their contemporary relevance, thus neglecting to note that the negative depiction of war is intended to engender feelings of sorrow and repugnance among readers.

We shall also describe the results of a computer-based search and contextual readings that suggest that women have a stronger presence in the text than first appears. Pearson cites a statistical study of ratios of he/his versus she/her pronouns in the Book of Mormon as evidence of Nephite marginalization and neglect of women (p. 35). Here, we shall examine textual and contextual evidence that generalizations about women’s inclusion in the Book of Mormon based on these statistics have been misleading. We shall show that the language is far more gender-inclusive than is commonly recognized.

Overall, we attempt to select more comprehensively, to pay more attention to narrator perspective and cultural context, and to incorporate new discoveries about text and context. We value the text differently and also see a more satisfactory interpretation.

**Doctrinal Statements and the Absence of Proscriptive Statements**

Our women ... were strong, yea, even like unto the men. (1 Nephi 17:2)

Quoting a rare "statement that would appear inviting to women," Pearson cites Alma 32:23: "And now, he imparteth his word by angels unto men, yea, not only unto men, but women also." Then she asks, "Where are the stories to demonstrate this expansive doctrine? ... Was there something going on that did not make its way into the record?" (p. 34).

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3 It may be useful to note that the Book of Mormon was never intended as a woman's history text. Although written in a patriarchal society by men, the lessons are for both sexes.
Before we look closer at the stories that do appear in the record, let's recall some of the expansive doctrines that expressly refer to women.

And he cometh into the world that he may save all men if they will hearken unto his voice; for behold, he suffereth the pains of all men, yea, the pains of every living creature, both men, women, and children, who belong to the family of Adam. (2 Nephi 9:21)

Behold, my sons, and my daughters, who are the sons and the daughters of my first-born, I would that ye should give ear unto my words.

For the Lord God hath said that: Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land; and inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments ye shall be cut off from my presence. (2 Nephi 4:3-4)

For . . . he inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile. (2 Nephi 26:33)

And now, because of the covenant which ye have made ye shall be called the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters; for behold, this day he hath spiritually begotten you; for ye say that your hearts are changed through faith on his name; therefore, ye are born of him and have become his sons and his daughters. (Mosiah 5:7)

And the Lord said unto me: Marvel not that all mankind, yea, men and women, all nations, kindreds, tongues and people, must be born again; yea, born of God, changed from their carnal and fallen state, to a state of righteousness, being redeemed of God, becoming his sons and daughters. (Mosiah 27:25)
Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee. (Mosiah 13:20)

The spirit and the body shall be reunited again in its perfect form; both limb and joint shall be restored to its proper frame, even as we now are at this time; and we shall be brought to stand before God, knowing even as we know now, and have a bright recollection of all our guilt.

Now, this restoration shall come to all, both old and young, both bond and free, both male and female, both the wicked and the righteous. (Alma 11:43–44)

From these statements, and many others which use inclusive language, we see that the promises and obligations of the gospel are the same for both men and women. Pearson gives a nod to some of these positive statements, but misses the point that, unlike the Bible, the Book of Mormon never makes prescriptive statements with respect to women’s roles. In the course of delivering his message, Mormon describes his culture, but never circumscribes ours.

**When Women Move to the Foreground**

Given that the Book of Mormon doesn’t often mention individual women, what can we learn from those instances when it does? In researching this essay, we have realized that when women move from the background to the foreground in the Book of Mormon they typically do so for three reasons:

- to highlight profoundly archetypal situations
- to show the mutual dependence and independent agency of men and women
- to emphasize that the promises and obligations of the gospel apply equally to men and women

There is a consistency and deliberation in this on the part of the authors that suggests a positive intent and attitude. Pearson contrasts the Book of Mormon with the Bible, observing that the
Bible far more frequently describes strong female role models. Nevertheless, the stories we do have in the Book of Mormon have more significance that she realizes.

Abish and the Lamanite Queen

I say unto thee, woman, there has not been such great faith among all the people of the Nephites. (Alma 19:10)

Alma 18–19 contains the single most detailed account of individual female actions and words in the entire Book of Mormon. This is the story of Ammon’s preaching to the Lamanite king, the king’s conversion and lapse into apparent death, the testing and conversion of the queen, her fall into a deathlike state, the appearance of Abish, and her role in the resolution of the crisis. Given that the editor, Mormon, so often neglects the female perspective, why does he give space to Alma’s detailed story of these women’s actions and words unless he sees them as particularly significant? If Mormon has anything specific to say about women, he must be saying it here.

So the story of Abish and Lamoni’s queen in Alma 19 is potentially crucial. But, according to Pearson, the queen “is another spiritually dependent woman: she does not receive from God but from her husband’s servants the knowledge that Ammon is a prophet” (p. 35). In Pearson’s report, the queen exists only to teach us that, to a wife, “the husband must never stink.” She derives this lesson, not from her own close reading of the text, but from an anonymous teacher, a reading she holds up for deserved ridicule. Other passages in the Book of Mormon don’t hesitate to criticize errant husbands and fathers. For example, Jacob not only chastises Nephite husbands for infidelity (see Jacob 2:31–35), but explains that he has come to deliver his prophetic message because the Lord has heard the prayers of those Nephite women.

4 In passing, we must observe that Pearson’s contrast of the Bible and Book of Mormon overlooks many examples of “negative imagery” in the Bible (Delilah, Jezebel, Salome, etc.) and several striking instances of “positive imagery” in the Book of Mormon.
For behold, I, the Lord, have seen the sorrow, and heard the mourning of the daughters of my people in the land of Jerusalem, yea, and in all the lands of my people, because of the wickedness and abominations of their husbands. (Jacob 2:31)

In Mosiah 25:12, the children of Noah’s runaway priests refuse to be associated with their fathers, taking upon themselves the name of Nephi. Obviously then, Book of Mormon writers do not place husbands on an unassailable pedestal. We should not assume blind approval even in the case of the stolen Lamanite daughters who at one point pled for the lives of their husbands (see the discussion on pages 37–39 of this review). Here we hope to provide a more enlightening reading of the text.

In Alma 18:23–24, the king, having believed Ammon’s preaching, falls to earth as if dead. He is mourned by his family and, after two days and nights, they are about to bury the king.

Now the queen having heard of the fame of Ammon, therefore she sent and desired that he should come in unto her. And it came to pass that Ammon did as he was commanded, and went in unto the queen, and desired to know what she would that he should do. And she said unto him: The servants of my husband have made it known unto me that thou art a prophet of a holy God, and that thou hast power to do many mighty works in his name. (Alma 19:2–4)

In Alma 19, the words that the queen heard came to her as a witness from the servants and a testimony from Ammon. The capacity to believe Ammon’s testimony as she did came from God. Ammon says of her, “Blessed art thou because of thy exceeding faith; I say unto thee, woman, there has not been such great faith among all the people of the Nephites” (Alma 19:10). This signals us to pay attention.

When the king rises from his near-death state, he reaches out to her and declares that “I have seen my Redeemer; and he shall come forth, and be born of a woman, and he shall redeem all mankind who shall believe on his name” (Alma 19:13). At this, the king and the queen are both overpowered by the Spirit. This
leads into the story of Abish, which Pearson alludes to without analysis except to say that “Abish, who performs one of the few strong deeds by a woman in the book,5 had converted to the Lord because of a remarkable vision her father had had years before, not a vision of her own” (p. 35). Before we look at the “strong deed” that Abish performs, compare the language of the Book of Mormon with Pearson’s version:

[Abish] having been converted unto the Lord for many years, on account of a remarkable vision of her father. (Alma 19:16)

Note that the text does not specify a vision “that her father had” or a “vision of her father’s.” It says “a vision of her father.” It seems a better reading to credit Abish with having a vision of her father,6 which led to her conversion. This is one of those instances in which the reader’s paradigm colors the interpretation of the text. It is understandable that Pearson overlooked this possibility, since many of us have come to a similar conclusion. But yet, once someone (in this case, John Hansen) provides a better reading,7 the possibility seems quite obvious. Clearly, we all need to read more carefully.

Now look closely at the “strong deed” in Alma 19:29–30:

And it came to pass that she [Abish] went and took the queen by the hand, that perhaps she might raise her from the ground; and as soon as she touched her hand she [the queen] arose and stood upon her feet, and cried with a loud voice, saying: O blessed Jesus, who has saved me from an awful hell! O blessed God, have mercy on this people!

And when she had said this, she clasped her hands, being filled with joy, speaking many words which were

5 While not often named, the women in the Book of Mormon participate in intensely dramatic situations from start to finish. Strength was obviously required for endurance and for survival. See, for example, 1 Nephi 5:1–8; 7:19; 17:1–2; 18:19; 2 Nephi 5:6–7; 2 Nephi 17:14; Mosiah 5:7; Mosiah 25:12; and so forth.

6 Which father? Earthly or heavenly? Either is plausible in light of current near-death literature.

7 Post to a Listserv on Thursday, 12 September 1996.
not understood; and when she had done this, she took
the king, Lamoni, by the hand, and behold he arose
and stood upon his feet.

Here we have women involved in prophecy, healing, speaking
in tongues, and visions. Pearson had asked, “Where are the stories
to demonstrate [God’s imparting his word to women also]?”
Certainly, here is one. At this point in the story, the queen, like
Abish, has had her own witness directly from the Lord, and she
can in nowise be considered “spiritually dependent” on her hus-
band with respect to her knowledge. In describing the queen this
way, Pearson overlooks entirely the queen’s subsequent vision.

Most of us at some point in our lives have to decide to place a
particle of belief in someone else’s words and testimony (see
Alma 32 on faith). This is a common human experience, a by-
product of infancy, childhood, and naïveté on any subject outside
of our personal experience. If a wife were to receive a profound
spiritual epiphany alone atop a plateau in Mesa Verde and her
husband were to believe her, would Pearson then be justified in
describing him as a spiritually dependent male? Or, on the other
hand, if a husband dismissed his wife’s report and testimony,
merely on the grounds that, as a male, he should possess an inde-
dependent mind and spirit, would Pearson judge him favorably? If
we are to be on equal grounds, in partnership, as Pearson adva-
cates, we should act and judge according to equal standards. De-
spite Pearson’s reservations about the story of Abish and the
queen, it is here that we can begin to address her concerns for
finding Book of Mormon exemplars for women.

Significantly, the story of Abish and the Lamanite queen
qualifies as a “type-scene,” a prophetic prefiguring not only of
the resurrection of Christ, but also of the role of women in that
event. As Robert Alter remarks, “The type-scene is not merely a
way of formally recognizing a particular kind of narrative mo-
ment; it is also a means of attaching that moment to a larger

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8 For details and sources on the importance of archetypes in the Book of
Mormon, see Alan Goff, “Boats, Beginnings, and Repetitions,” Journal of Book
of Mormon Studies 1/1 (1992): 67–84. For an introduction to the notion of
type-scenes, see Goff, “Uncritical Theory and Thin Description: The Resistance
pattern of historical and theological meaning." Compare the general features of this account in Alma with a conspicuous pattern in ancient Near Eastern religion:

One of the most striking features of the ancient Sacred Marriage cult was that the goddess had an important part to play in the resurrection of her husband. . . . We will recall how Anath made possible Baal-Hadad’s resurrection by attacking and destroying his enemy, Mot, the god of death. In Mesopotamian myth it was Inanna-Ishtar who descended into the realm of death to destroy Erishkigal’s power so that dead Dumuzi-Tammuz could be restored to life. Aristide’s Apology describes how Aphrodite descended into Hades in order to ransom Adonis from Persephone. Cybele likewise made possible the resurrection of Attis on the third day, while in Egypt it was Isis who made possible the restoration of her husband, Osiris. . . . But no matter what the details of these ubiquitous Near Eastern death-and-resurrection legends, the underlying theme is the same: the god is helpless without the ministrations of his consort. . . . The reunion of Jesus and Mary Magdalene at the tomb on Resurrection Morning therefore clearly fits within this well-known tradition.10

The same motif also appears in the Mesoamerican Popol Vuh in the story of One Hunahpu’s death and the maiden daughter of the underworld lords, through whose courageous actions life was renewed.11

The stories of Abish and the Lamanite kings and queens also resonate with these traditions. Given the growing recognition that Book of Mormon authors consciously selected stories that present archetypical patterns, it is likely that these stories attracted the atten-

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10 Eugene Seaich, "A Great Mystery: The Sacred Marriage and Bridal Chamber in Early Christianity and Judaism" (Salt Lake City, unpublished MS, 1979), 198–99.
tion of Mormon as significant type-scenes, and as such, they receive due attention and prominence in the text. That the queen’s spiritual experience duplicates that of her husband surely demonstrates the equality and partnership that Pearson longs for. The events in the story demonstrate both independent actions of the women involved and the mutual dependence of male and female.

Had Pearson given the story of Abish and the queen a close and understanding reading, some of the strongest criticisms in her essay would require modification, a toning down of the hyperbole that often appears in her rhetoric. She asks, “Was there something going on that did not make it into the record?” Our answer, with respect to the Book of Mormon and to Pearson’s essay, is “Yes.”

Other Type-Scenes in the Book of Mormon

The discovery that the story of Abish is typologically significant led in turn to the examination of other relatively detailed accounts of women in the Book of Mormon to ascertain whether type-scene or ritual issues play a role in their inclusion and formulation in the text. Speaking of type-scenes, Robert Alter writes:

Since biblical narrative characteristically catches its protagonists only at the critical and revealing points in their lives, the biblical type-scene occurs not in the rituals of daily existence but at the crucial junctures in the lives of the heroes. . . . Some of the most commonly repeated biblical type-scenes I have been able to identify are the following: the annunciation . . . of the birth of the hero to his barren mother; the encounter with the future betrothed at a well; the epiphany in the field; the initiatory trial; danger in the desert and the discovery of a well or other source of sustenance; the testament of the dying hero.12

In comparing this passage to the Book of Mormon, we think of Nephi’s vision of the virgin; Nephi’s journey to find Ishmael, whose daughters marry Lehi’s sons, thereby fulfilling a commandment from God (see 1 Nephi 7:1; 16:7–8); Nephi’s vision;

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Nephi's initiatory adventures in securing the plates of Laban; much danger in the desert; the discovery of the Liahona; Lehi's blessings to his sons; and other closing testimonies by his successors. Clearly, the selectivity of the Book of Mormon narrative has a cultural background and a literary context. With an eye alert to the notion of type-scenes, when we look back at the other fairly detailed accounts of specific women (or groups of women) in the Book of Mormon, we notice that many have significant archetypal or ritual backgrounds. Pearson discusses none of these stories in any detail. These include the story of Sariah's complaint and testimony, the vision associating the tree of life with the virgin in Nazareth in 1 Nephi 11:13–23, the story of Adam and Eve in 2 Nephi 2:18–27, the story of the kidnapping of the twenty-four daughters of the Lamanites (which Alan Goff has examined as a type-scene13), the story involving Isabel in Alma 39, and finally, the archetypal "Salome" story of the daughter of Jared in Ether 8 and 9.

The prominence of these and other type-scenes in the overall narrative suggests that we might gain insights into what was included in the Book of Mormon and the significance of those selections by reading them against larger contexts.

Alter also suggests that variations in type-scenes are significant. That is, if a similar story is included, we should pay close attention to differences. The most conspicuous difference between the stories of Lamoni and his queen and the subsequent narrative of the father of Lamoni in Alma 22 is that the second queen acts out of fear and anger rather than faith. That is, the first queen inquires before she takes action. The second queen acts with determination and initiative, but without making inquiries of the prophet. The narrator shows sympathy for her concerns. But even though the second queen's actions and commands trigger Aaron's successful response in raising Lamoni's father, she does not obtain the same kind of direct witness as did the first queen.

Sariah’s Complaint and Testimony

Actually, the female presence in the Book of Mormon begins with the first line: “I, Nephi, having been born of goodly parents.” Sariah figures as an active participant in the journey across the desert, appears in Lehi’s vision as one partaking of the fruit of the tree of life, and participates in the journey to the New World. The story of Sariah’s complaint and testimony deserves a closer reading than it has received thus far:

And it came to pass that after we had come down into the wilderness unto our father, behold, he was filled with joy, and also my mother, Sariah, was exceedingly glad, for she truly had mourned because of us. For she had supposed that we had perished in the wilderness; and she also had complained against my father, telling him that he was a visionary man; saying: Behold thou hast led us forth from the land of our inheritance, and my sons are no more, and we perish in the wilderness. And after this manner of language had my mother complained against my father. (1 Nephi 5:1–3)

At first glance, we might want to dismiss this part of the story as a negative image, since it depicts Sariah as “complaining.” But in structuring the account, Nephi starts with the end, highlighting her gladness and joy in contrast to her mourning over her sons and sacrifices. This shows that his focus is not on the fact that she complained, but on the outcome of the experience. Nephi recognizes the validity of both her fears and her joy. Of all the stories he could tell about his mother, why does he give the most space to this one? Sensitized by readings on allusion and type-scenes by Alan Goff and Robert Alter, we should hear an echo of the account of the widow of Zarephath and Elijah in 1 Kings 17:9–24. Like Sariah, the widow had been asked by a servant of God to sacrifice all her material goods and subsequently seems to have lost her son. She too complains and the prophet recognizes the validity of her concerns. He offers no rebuke; instead, Elijah prays to the Lord on her behalf. Lehi’s response to Sariah is just as exemplary:
And it had come to pass that my father spake unto her, saying: I know that I am a visionary man; ... I know that the Lord will deliver my sons out of the hands of Laban, and bring them down again unto us in the wilderness. And after this manner of language did my father, Lehi, comfort my mother, Sariah, concerning us, while we journeyed in the wilderness up to the land of Jerusalem, to obtain the record of the Jews. (1 Nephi 5:4–6)

In this passage Lehi *comforts* Sariah; he does not rebuke her or belittle or dismiss her concerns. The story continues in a way that strengthens the association between Sariah and the widow, and, by extension, between Lehi and Elijah as servants of God:

And when we had returned to the tent of my father, behold their joy was full, and my mother was comforted. And she spake, saying: Now I know of a surety that the Lord hath commanded my husband to flee into the wilderness; yea, and I also know of a surety that the Lord hath protected my sons, and delivered them out of the hands of Laban, and given them power whereby they could accomplish the thing which the Lord hath commanded them. And after this manner of language did she speak. (1 Nephi 5:7–8)

The allusion, the “likening,” in the narrative is confirmed on comparing Sariah’s response to the delivery of her sons to the restoration of the widow’s son. The widow says, “Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth” (1 Kings 17:24). The comparison makes Lehi an Elijah in the same way that biblical stories of Elisha parallel Elijah’s acts and demonstrate that Elisha was Elijah’s successor. So, of all the stories Nephi could choose to tell about his mother, he chooses one that “likens” her to an exemplary woman in the scriptures. It is of comfort that Sariah is “flawed” and yet righteous, as was Peter in the Bible.

Finally, the “complaint” story concludes with another significant passage:
And it came to pass that they [Lehi and Sariah] did rejoice exceedingly, and did offer sacrifice and burnt offerings unto the Lord; and they gave thanks unto the God of Israel. (1 Nephi 5:9)

The man and the woman pass through an ordeal and worship together afterwards. Recall that Pearson uses the Bible only to make negative comparisons with the Book of Mormon. We are suggesting that she read more carefully. Many of the negative images that she complains of in the Book of Mormon also appear in the Bible. More significantly, a broader reading puts the negatives in context with the corresponding positives.

**Eve and the Experience of Joy**

Pearson remarks that, because of the Book of Mormon’s infrequent explicit addresses to women, there is “room for us to quip: Men are that they might have joy, and women are that they might provide it.” This parodies 2 Nephi 2:25:

Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy.

Feminist criticism of the social impact of the Bible tends to focus on three points: the scapegoating of Eve in the traditional anti-female reading of the garden story, Exodus 22:18 on not suffering a witch to live, which was exploited to justify the medieval witch burnings, and passages such as 1 Timothy 2:11-15 on women keeping silent and submissive, using the garden story as justification. From the outset, Mormonism rejected all these readings.

The Mormon reading of the garden story that first emerges in 2 Nephi 2 makes the fall a blessing, and, consequently, Eve a figure of honor. The Adam and Eve account in 2 Nephi 2:18-27

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14 This would not be relevant to a discussion of the Book of Mormon, except that Pearson remarks that “Probably 85 percent of ‘witches’ burned in the Inquisition were female” (p. 38).

15 That is not to say that one cannot find traces of these notions within Mormonism, but that when one finds them, they are in tension with our sacred texts and have obvious ties to the larger culture.
contains no trace of the usual scapegoating of Eve that is so prevalent elsewhere in the normative Christian tradition.\textsuperscript{16} Joseph Campbell informs us that one of the functions of a mythology is sociological, "supporting and validating a certain social order."\textsuperscript{17} Hence, the New Testament passages that have been cited to justify a particular social order refer back to the pointed interpretations of the Garden story. Generations of post New Testament fathers did so too. If Book of Mormon authors truly marginalized women to the extent that Pearson believes, it is strange that they passed up this key opportunity to justify themselves.

Incidentally, the Joseph Smith Translation of Exodus 22:18 anticipated modern scholarship in correcting that verse as a mistranslation, referring not to witches, but to murderers. And Mormon scripture and tradition contains much that contradicts the questionable opinion of 2 Timothy 2:11 and similar passages, such as the callings given to Emma Smith in Doctrine and Covenants 25. While criticism of Mormon history and culture with respect to feminist issues may be justified on these points and others, credit should be given where it is due, particularly with respect to the depiction of Eve. We celebrate with her when she says, "Were it not for our transgression we never should have had seed, and never should have known good and evil, and the joy of our redemption, and the eternal life which God giveth unto all the obedient" (Moses 5:11).

**Negative Imagery in Narrative Context**

Pearson also makes several strongly worded remarks with respect to "negative female imagery" in the Book of Mormon. Here she uses an approach to the text that is both inappropriate and unfair—inappropriate because she removes the images from

\begin{footnotesize}

\textsuperscript{17} Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth* (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 31. Campbell’s reading of the woman as initiator in the fall is interesting in comparison with 2 Nephi: Moyers: "Why are women the ones held responsible for the downfall? Campbell: They represent life. Man doesn’t enter life except by woman, and so it is woman who brings us into this world of pairs of opposites and suffering." Ibid., 48.
\end{footnotesize}
an apolitical symbolic context in order to politicize them, and unfair because for men to take the same approach to negative male imagery in the scriptures, or even her essay ("testosterone poisoning"), would defeat the purposes of the text. First consider the importance of context. Pearson's citation of some prophetic imagery from Isaiah illustrates the hazards of overly selective, context-free reading.

And my people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O my people, they who lead thee cause thee to err and destroy the way of thy paths. (2 Nephi 13:12)

Far from being a doctrinal pronouncement on the fitness of women to provide leadership, this passage occurs in the middle of a prophetic narrative. The situation begins with crisis in Jerusalem and a breakdown of social obligations:

And the people shall be oppressed, . . . every one by his neighbor; the child shall behave himself proudly against the ancient, and the base against the honorable. When a man shall take hold of his brother . . . and shall say: Thou hast clothing, be thou our ruler, and let not this ruin come under thy hand—In that day shall he swear, saying: I will not be a healer; for in my house there is neither bread nor clothing; make me not a ruler of the people. (2 Nephi 13:5–7)

This denial of familial obligations breaks down the social order, in many cases leaving children without both parents, or parents so involved in economic survival that they do not or cannot provide leadership. But the prophecy does not end with the bleak picture of decadence, defeat, scattering, and servitude, but continues with the gathering of Israel:

They shall return to their lands of promise. And the house of Israel shall possess them, and the land of the Lord shall be for servants and handmaids; and they

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18 We have just seen that the leadership of Abish and the Lamanite queen contributes to significant conversions among the Lamanites.
shall take them captives unto whom they were captives; and they shall rule over their oppressors. (2 Nephi 24:2)

The image that Pearson takes as “uncomplimentary” in an isolated reading is directly paired with a promise that the former handmaids shall rule over their oppressors. So the trajectory of a prophetic narrative is important. Also, the literary form is significant. Regarding other aspects of Isaiah’s negative female imagery, Bowen and Williams’s interpretation is that this imagery shows that: “Decadent Israel is described as devoid of honorable men, in that they valued women as decorative sex objects (2 Ne. 13:16–26; Isa. 3:16–26).”19 The point is that the negative images in this context do not apply to women only, but to decadent Israel, men and women together.

Positive and Negative Imagery

The Book of Mormon makes a striking use of dualistic imagery, pairing opposing symbols to make the maximum contrast:20 a rebellious Laman versus an obedient Nephi, a tree of life versus a great and spacious building, King Noah versus King Benjamin, wicked Nephite husbands versus faithful Lamanite fathers, Alma versus Korihor, and Mormon versus Amalickiah. If there are negative female images, we should also look for the corresponding positives. We should also consider the use to which the negative images are put.

While Pearson strongly protests the Book of Mormon use of the “great and abominable church, the mother of abominations, . . . the whore of all the earth” (p. 36; see also pp. 39–40), Pearson does not observe that the abominable church consists of “both male and female” (2 Nephi 10:16) who fight against Zion, which, as she herself remarks, is also characterized as feminine. Nor does she observe that the “whore of all the earth” is just as much a biblical image as a Book of Mormon one (see Revelation 17, Proverbs, Hosea, etc.). Given that the scriptures typically por-

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tray Jerusalem and Zion as feminine, even though consisting of male and female, and destined as the intended bride of Christ, we are dismayed at her statement that “there is no mistaking the gender of ultimate good and the gender of ultimate evil” (p. 36). Does the Book of Mormon account as a whole give anyone the impression that males comprise the gender of ultimate good? (Whatever happened to Satan?) Pearson says that “to contrast the Heavenly Father with the mother of abominations is very much a statement on gender” (p. 37). We disagree. Like “Babylon” or the “Great and Spacious Building,” which is its symbolic equivalent, the “mother of abominations” is a symbol of a mixed-gender group. Such a “statement on gender” is easily contradicted by selecting from other Book of Mormon symbols, such as the feminine wisdom, mother earth, the mother of the Son of God, or God’s describing his love for Israel in terms of maternal imagery. Indeed, while the poetic opposition between Father in Heaven and Babylon is appropriate, another set of opposing symbols should be considered in assessing Pearson’s claim: mother earth, wisdom, and the tree of life. We must then understand the narrative symbolic context to which the great whore belongs.

Mother Earth, Wisdom, and the Tree of Life

Despite her well-known interest in the Divine Mother and her mention of the Canaanite goddess and the Popol Vuh of the Maya, which contains references to such a figure, Pearson makes no reference to the three Book of Mormon occurrences of “mother earth” (2 Nephi 9:7; Mosiah 2:26; Mormon 6:15). What is the religious context behind the use of that language in the Book of Mormon? Northop Frye explains:

No principle is without many exceptions in mythology, but one very frequent mythical formulation of this attitude to nature is an earth-mother, from whom everything is born and to whom everything returns at death. Such an earth-mother is the most easily understood image of natura naturans, and she acquires its moral ambivalence. As the womb of all forms of life, she has a cherishing and nourishing aspect; as the tomb of all forms of life, she has a menacing and sinister
aspect; as the manifestation of an unending cycle of life and death, she has an inscrutable and elusive aspect. Hence, she is often a *dive triformis*, a goddess of a threefold form of some kind, usually birth, death, and renewal in time; or heaven, earth, and hell in space.²¹

The references to "mother earth" in the Book of Mormon are subtle but neatly spread across the entire history, arguing for a long-standing tradition. Also, it is clear that these references, in connection with other archetypal feminine imagery, contain the essentials of the mythic formulation. The presence of these essential elements of the picture in the text invites our further exploration of the Old and New World contexts. Some have expressed concern that the three passages cited refer to mother earth in the context of death. While this is strictly correct in the ancient mythological formulation, it might be beneficial to see some of the other manifestations of the image. Accordingly, other passages in the Book of Mormon suggest the life-giving aspects of mother earth:

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O Lord, wilt thou hearken unto me, and cause that it may be done according to my words, and send forth rain upon the face of the earth, that she may bring forth her fruit, and her grain in the season of grain.... And it came to pass that in the seventy and sixth year the Lord did turn away his anger from the people, and caused that rain should fall upon the earth, insomuch that it did bring forth her fruit in the season of her fruit. And it came to pass that it did bring forth her grain in the season of her grain. (Helaman 11:13, 17)
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While Pearson does mention the reference to feminine wisdom—"For they will not seek wisdom, neither do they desire that she should rule over them" (p. 36, quoting Mosiah 8:20)—she does not follow up on the implications of the passage. At a minimum, we should quote from Raphael Patai’s *The Hebrew Goddess*:

In the late Biblical period a theological tendency made its appearance which prepared the ground for the emergence of the Talmudic Shekhina. The trend referred to is that of interposing personified mediating entities between God and man. . . . The most frequently appearing of these intermediaries . . . is . . . Wisdom.22

Patai refers to the discussions of Wisdom as a holy feminine personification in Job 28:12–28 and in Proverbs 3, 8, and 9. Later developments in the Old World are interesting (see Patai), but this much, at least, would have been part of the Nephite tradition. Again, the Book of Mormon reference is strictly correct.

An important article by Daniel Peterson, “Nephi and His Asherah: A Note on 1 Nephi 11:8–23,”23 contains several brilliant insights into the significance of Mary’s presence in the vision of the tree of life, and meaningful parallels between the Book of Mormon and characteristic themes and images of Wisdom literature. Peterson begins by considering the context for this notable recurring image in the Book of Mormon. During his vision of the tree of life, Nephi asks for an “interpretation” of the tree (see 1 Nephi 11:8–11). By way of providing the interpretation, the angel shows Nephi a vision of the Virgin Mary.

And he said unto me: Behold, the virgin whom thou seest is the mother of the Son of God, after the manner of the flesh. And it came to pass that I beheld that she was carried away in the Spirit; and after she had been carried away in the Spirit for the space of a time the angel spake unto me, saying: Look! And I looked and beheld the virgin again, bearing a child in her arms. And the angel said unto me: Behold the Lamb of God, yea, even the Son of the Eternal Father! (1 Nephi 11:18–21)


Peterson explores in fascinating detail the puzzle of why, in the vision, the angel expects Nephi to be able to associate the vision of Mary and the birth of the Son of God with the tree of life. He presents recent discoveries—which may relate to Nephi’s cultural background in Israel—regarding Asherah, a mother goddess venerated in ancient Israel and worshiped as the consort of Jehovah. Peterson demonstrates that Asherah was frequently associated with the tree of life. In the same article, Peterson explores the association of feminine wisdom with the tree of life. For example, in Proverbs 3:18, we are told that “She [Wisdom] is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her.” In Proverbs 1–9 and “elsewhere in ancient Hebrew and Jewish literature, Wisdom appears as the wife of God, which can hardly fail to remind us of ancient Asherah.”

Peterson observes many direct connections between the Book of Mormon and the ancient genre of Wisdom literature, including the nature of the opposition to wisdom:

Thus in Proverbs, readers are told of two contradictory “ways”—that of the foolish and that of obedience to wisdom—and Lady Wisdom is contrasted repeatedly with her antagonist, “the strange woman” or “whorish woman,” who is certainly “forbidden” to the righteous. (Likewise opposed to the truth of God is Nephi’s striking image, given to him in the same vision as the tree of life, of “the mother of abominations,” “the whore of all the earth,” which fights against the saints.) Lady Wisdom and the “whorish woman” are, in fact, competitors.

The context of the reference to feminine wisdom has another clue worth exploring. It occurs as King Limhi learns from Ammon that Mosiah can translate the Jaredite plates: “Doubtless a great mystery is contained within these plates” (Mosiah 8:19). The term mystery should not be understood as something generally unknown, but refers specifically to the temple mysteries. The only other reference to “a great mystery” in all the scriptures comes in Paul’s discussion of the love husbands should have for

24 Ibid., 211.
25 Ibid., 215.
their wives when the two are joined into one flesh (Ephesians 5:28–32). That is, the "great mystery" has to do with marriage. Such a context for the specific notion of "a great mystery" implies a hunger for greater knowledge of the temple ordinances and mysteries, including a greater knowledge of wisdom.

The implication is that the Nephites did know something about the Divine Mother and therefore had some positive notions in this respect. Further speculation on our part would be of no value, but, as Peterson’s article demonstrates, careful reading and background research can be far more enlightening than noncontextual approaches.

## Bridegroom and Bride: Narratives and Symbols

We should also examine both the narrative and the symbolic complex to which the "mother of abominations" symbol belongs. Far from being a statement about gender, it derives from the internal logic of a symbolic narrative. And as we shall see, that symbolic narrative grows out of a specific cultural context.

We have next to set this apocalyptic structure in its context. In the first place, there is the problem that the nations outside Israel—Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, Phoenicia—are as a rule more wealthy, prosperous, and successful than Israel. They possess the power and domination that the Israelites themselves desperately longed to possess, and would certainly have regarded as a signal mark of divine favor if they had possessed it. The only recourse is to show this heathen success in a context of demonic parody, as a short-lived triumph that has all the marks of the real thing except permanence. It follows that there must be two forms of demonic imagery: the parody-demonic, attached to temporarily successful heathen nations; and the manifest, or you-just-wait demonic, the ruins and wasteland haunted by hyenas and screech owls that all this glory will inevitably become.

As an example of this structure, let us look at a group of female figures in the Bible. We may divide them into two groups: the maternal and the marital,
mother figures and bride figures. Apocalyptic mother figures include the Virgin Mary and the mysterious woman crowned with stars who appears at the beginning of Revelation 12, and who is presented also as the mother of the Messiah. Bridal figures include the central female character of the Song of Songs and the symbolic Jerusalem of Revelation 21 who descends to earth prepared “like a bride adorned for her husband” and is finally identified with the Christian Church. . . . Eve in particular is the intermediate female maternal figure, “our general mother,” in Milton’s phrase, going through the cycle of sin and redemption. . . .

The demonic counterpart of the Bride who is Jerusalem and the spouse of Christ is the Great Whore of Revelation 17 who is Babylon and Rome, and is the mistress of Antichrist. . . . But, of course, Israel itself is symbolically the chosen bride of God, and is also frequently unfaithful to him. . . . Thus, the forgiven harlot, who is taken back eventually into favor despite her sins, is an intermediate bridal figure between the demonic Whore and the apocalyptic Bride, and represents the redemption of man from sin.26

Thus the image of the great whore has a specific context as one symbol among many, some positive, some negative, some transitional, in a complex narrative of covenant, fall, forgiveness, judgment, and redemption for Israel collectively. Remember that in this scenario, the female symbols, positive and negative, represent all of us, male and female. Removing that particular image from the scripture would tear across a tightly woven narrative fabric. Several of the biblical images and events that Pearson cites with approval depend on this interwoven set of symbols. For example, the story of the woman caught in adultery in the Gospel of John is a significant occurrence of this theme. If we see the images in the appropriate context, we can remove any unintended mes-

sages. The Book of Mormon itself says that we cannot understand the text without knowing the culture from which it comes (see 2 Nephi 25:5). Are the images sufficiently archaic as to be irrelevant in the modern world? Not at all. Would even Pearson ever attempt to tell the story of Corazon Aquino without making reference to Imelda Marcos? Of the harlot image, Pearson asks whether "we appreciate what this really means" (p. 36), but does so without reference to either the narrative context or the symbolic complex that reveals the meaning.

**Isabel and the Daughter of Jared**

We should mention Hugh Nibley’s suggestion that the Isabel of Alma 39:3–4, rather than being a simple prostitute, was a priestess. Nibley observes that “Isabel [is] the name of the Patroness of Harlots in the religion of the Phoenicians,”27 that she had many followers, and that, to go to her, Corianton had to “forsake the ministry, and . . . go over into the land of Siron among the borders of the Lamanites” (Alma 39:3). Corianton’s participation there is described as “an abomination” (Alma 39:5), precisely the same term that the Old World prophets used to denounce the Canaanite practices, which often included ritual prostitution and human sacrifice. It is reasonable to assume that some forms of goddess worship were being practiced. Daniel Peterson’s suggestion that the name Isabel corresponds to the name of Jezebel in 1 Kings may also be significant here, because of the ties between Jezebel and some of these same practices.28 We have examined some positive suggestions of the goddess in Nephite culture. But for whatever reason, Alma took a dim view of the particular form of expression popular in Siron at the time.

Nibley also pointed out the consciously archetypal behavior of the daughter of Jared in Ether 8:7–17. Nibley has shown that the story begins as a deliberate imitation by the participants of an ancient type-scene.

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There is one tale of intrigue in the book of Ether that presents very ancient and widespread (though but recently discovered) parallels. That is the story of Jared’s daughter, . . . an ambitious girl who had read, or at least asked her father if he had read “in the records which our fathers brought across the great deep,” a very instructive account of those devices by which the men of old got “kingdoms and great glory.”

Hath he not read the record which our fathers brought across the great deep? Behold, is there not an account concerning them of old, that they by their secret plans did obtain kingdoms and great glory?

And now, therefore, let my father send for Akish, the son of Kimnor; and behold, I am fair, and I will dance before him, and I will please him, that he will desire me to wife; wherefore if he shall desire of thee that ye shall give unto him me to wife, then shall ye say: I will give her if ye will bring unto me the head of my father, the king. (Ether 8:9–10)

Historically, the whole point of this story is that it is highly unoriginal. It is supposed to be. The damsel asks her father if he has read “the record” and refers him to a particular account therein describing how “they of old . . . did obtain kingdoms.” In accordance with this she then outlines a course of action which makes it clear just what the “account” was about. It dealt with a pattern of action (for “kingdoms” is plural) in which a princess dances before a romantic stranger, wins his heart, and induces him to behead the ruling king, marry her, and mount the throne. . . .

The thing to note especially is that there actually seems to have been a succession rite of great antiquity that followed this pattern. It is the story behind the rites at Olympia and the Ara Sacra and the wanton and shocking dances of the ritual hierodules throughout the ancient world. . . .
Certainly the book of Ether is on the soundest possible ground in attributing the behavior of the daughter of Jared to the inspiration of ritual texts—secret directories on the art of deposing an aging king.\textsuperscript{29}

The point here is that the negative images, like the positive ones, merit inclusion in the record because they represent archetypes.

A Different Jesus?

Pearson says, "I find it difficult to understand how the same Jesus who gave us these wonderful female images in the New Testament would not speak to women or significantly of women when with the Nephites" (p. 37). Yet women are expressly said to be participants in Jesus’ ministry in 3 Nephi 17:25 and, second, we now possess not even a hundredth part of his teachings to those people (see 3 Nephi 19:32; 26:6–10). The Book of Mormon assumes that we have those biblical stories (see 2 Nephi 29). Of that which we possess in the Book of Mormon, nothing obstructs our view of the women of the Bible, or of Christ’s remarkable gender-inclusive New Testament ministry. There is nothing to suggest that his unrecorded teaching would not carry on that tendency, nothing in the text that prevents us from learning about the significant contributions of women in Mormon history, nothing that hinders us from learning from contemporary female voices, such as Pearson’s own. The Book of Mormon nowhere claims to replace other books. It supplements and complements other sources.

The Lord twice uses maternal imagery in the Book of Mormon to describe his own love for his people. Pearson mentions 3 Nephi 10:4–6 but overlooks 1 Nephi 21:15, a quotation from Isaiah. With reference to the 3 Nephi passage, she claims that "any inclusion of women or positive statements about women end there" (p. 36).\textsuperscript{30} Again, she speaks too quickly: the positive statements do not end there.


\textsuperscript{30} She says: "Only two instances in the entire 522 pages provide evidence that women are being specifically addressed along with men" (p. 34). She cites 2 Nephi 4:3 and Mormon 6:19. In addition, we noticed Mosiah 5:7 and Alma 19:10, as well as a few others. She also claims that Jesus never used
In discussing the Book of Mormon ministry of Jesus, Pearson takes great offense at the passage “Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch not that which is unclean; go ye out from the midst of her” (p. 37, quoting 3 Nephi 20:41). By convention, cities are feminine, whether seen as righteous or wicked. But here, too, she neglects the context, both the general context of the quotation in 3 Nephi and the complex of prophetic symbols used to relate the story. The passage that Pearson takes as a signal that a different Jesus is speaking occurs within the discourse on Isaiah, using what now should be a familiar set of symbols: Christ as the Bridegroom, redeeming Jerusalem as his Bride. Those willing to read the entire discourse can find the directly inviting voice that Pearson longs for and overlooks:

For thy maker, thy husband, the Lord of Hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel—
the God of the whole earth shall he be called. For the Lord hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God. For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer. (3 Nephi 22:5–8, and compare Isaiah 54)

Pearson claims that in 3 Nephi Jesus neither includes nor invites females in his speeches nor does he use positive feminine imagery or honor feminaleness. Here, the entire chapter uses positive female imagery as part of a direct and inclusive invitation.

Did Feminism Save the Lamanites?

This question is worth asking. As striking as the relatively infrequent mention of specific women in Mormon’s accounts is the circumstance that many of the women he does mention are La-

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negative female imagery. Foolish virgins, Lot’s wife—such hyperbolic lapses detract from her valid insights.

31 By convention, all cities are female in the Book of Mormon, as are all ships.
manites. This includes the Lamanite queens, the faithful servant Abish, and the mothers of the stripling warriors. Pearson had contrasted the patriarchal Nephites with the “descendants of the Nephites—and those other people who lived later on the American continent—[who] have in their literature many positive and powerful references to women and the concept of the feminine” (pp. 37-38). It may be that Mormon himself was impressed by the results of this contrast between his own culture and that of the Lamanites.

The cultural contrasts between the Nephites and Lamanites within the text are as arresting as the contrast outside of the text and deserve closer examination.

The Stolen Lamanite Daughters

Mosiah 20:1-7 introduces us to the story of twenty-four Lamanite maidens who are abducted by the runaway priests of King Noah. One thing that the complex and richly allusive narrative omits is how we are to judge the maidens themselves. And what are we to make of the Lamanite king who himself goes to war in a failed attempt to recover the women (see Mosiah 20:15)? Perhaps this is the Lamanite king who some years later captures these same priests, not only spares them, but grants them political power (see Mosiah 23:39), and exploits their learning for economic gain (Mosiah 24:1-7). The text paints a relentlessly dark picture of these priests as corrupt, cowardly, exploitive, coercive, intolerant, and abusive. Not only the priests themselves but, despite their rise in fortune among the Lamanites (see Mosiah 23:31-35, 39; 24:1-8), the descendants of this union eventually come to a bad end (see Alma 25:4-12).

So, why do these Lamanite daughters at one point plea that their “husbands” might be spared? (see Mosiah 24:33). This is not quite the same as the situation in King Noah’s flight from the Lamanites, when those left behind “caused that their fair daughters should stand forth and plead with the Lamanites that they would not slay them” (Mosiah 19:13). Amulon himself pleads and then sends forth the wives (see Mosiah 23:33). We don’t know enough about what real hard choices these women had to face. Had they gone to dance on a ritual occasion specifically to
find husbands? Was escape at any point really an option? After being taking back into Lamanite society, what would have been their economic and social status had they managed to escape or separate themselves from their husbands? Is Amulon the type to leave anything to chance when the Lamanite army finally found him? Where were their children at this moment? Thinking about the type-scene issues for the story and the economic and social possibilities confronting these women can be sobering and enlightening, if not comforting.

Goff analyzes the trio of stories from Judges 19–21, the last one of which resembles in some ways the scene depicted in Mosiah 20; the similarities are "type-scenes" (p. 70). In looking at these common stories from antiquity we find that the stealing of the daughters of the Lamanites fits in with ease, and the behavior of the Lamanite fathers and daughters after the stealing makes good sense in light of the economic value virgin daughters had for their fathers. Having lost their unmarried or virginal status, the daughters lost much of their bargaining value. The only alternative for the daughters was to plead with their Lamanite families for their Nephite husbands (when they were later discovered), even if the priests of Noah were scoundrels.

Goff writes:

When we compare the people as the text invites us to do, we contrast the care the men of Limhi showed for their wives and children with the abandonment by the priests of Noah. All these events define the lack of moral character of the priests. The fact that the Lamanite king was willing to permit the stealing of the

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32 John W. Welch, ed. Reexploring the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 139–41.

Lamanite daughters by welcoming Amulon into his kingdom speaks badly of this king, just as the Israelites’ encouragement of the Benjaminites to kidnap their own daughters speaks badly of all Israel. . . .

The text is clearly unsympathetic to the people of Amulon. The connection between the two stories of abduction is a hint from the author that their actions were reminiscent of a time, reported in Judges, when the Israelites didn’t follow God’s law but did that which was right in their own eyes.34

The narrative shows the patriarchal focus on the actions and accountability of the men involved. But then, as now, to the extent that women have been denied choice and agency, they cannot be judged for the hard choices they make.

“Our Mothers Knew It”

We should also look more closely at one of the most quoted stories in the Book of Mormon, that of the 2,000 stripling warriors.

They had been taught by their mothers, that if they did not doubt, God would deliver them. And they rehearsed unto me the words of their mothers, saying: We do not doubt our mothers knew it. (Alma 56:47-48)

We like this story for its drama, the remarkable deliverance of the young men, and the vision of young men who would obey “every word of command with exactness” (see Alma 57:21). It is, as Pearson says, “the only story about women that most . . . have heard used in a Church talk” (p. 35). However, that is all she says about this story, and all too often that is all any of us say. But how is it that these mothers were able to deliver this promise to their sons? The covenant that the young men make explicitly includes a willingness to die (see Alma 53:17). The story demonstrates the validity of the promise of the mothers, but earthly deliverance is not necessarily inevitable in the Book of Mormon. While the righteous are often delivered, the innocent can suffer, and the

34 Goff “Stealing of the Daughters of the Lamanites,” 73.
price in life is often high. The story of the slaughter of a thousand and five of the Anti-Nephi-Lehis (see Alma 24:19–25), all unarmed to keep a covenant with God and engaged in the act of prayer, is one impressive example. That personal experience seemingly would have taught these same Lamanite mothers that righteous behavior does not guarantee earthly deliverance. Many of them must have been on the field during the slaughter. But the young men did not doubt that their mothers knew what they were promising. So does it not seem evident that these Lamanite mothers had secured a special revelation on behalf of their sons? Pearson supposes that “Not one woman in the Book of Mormon appears to have her own connection to the heavens” (p. 35). Here are a great many who do.

**Power and Powerlessness: Queen and Pawn**

Robert Alter teaches us to read the scriptures with an eye to how different narratives reflect one another. Two of the women in the Book of Mormon reflect on one another in an ironic commentary on power and the powerless. First look at the Lamanite queen in the story of Amalickiah’s rise to power:

And it came to pass on the morrow he [Amalickiah] entered the city Nephi with his armies, and took possession of the city.

And now it came to pass that the queen, when she had heard that the king was slain—for Amalickiah had sent an embassy to the queen [falsely] informing her that the king had been slain by his servants, that he had pursued them with his army, but it was in vain, and they had made their escape—

Therefore, when the queen had received this message she sent unto Amalickiah, desiring him that he would spare the people of the city; and she also desired him that he should come in unto her; and she also desired him that he should bring witnesses with him to testify concerning the death of the king.

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35 Brian Christensen made this suggestion after reading a draft of this review.
And it came to pass that Amalickiah took the same servant that slew the king, and all them who were with him, and went in unto the queen, unto the place where she sat; and they all testified unto her that the king was slain by his own servants; and they said also: They have fled; does not this testify against them? And thus they satisfied the queen concerning the death of the king.

And it came to pass that Amalickiah sought the favor of the queen, and took her unto him to wife; and thus by his fraud, and by the assistance of his cunning servants, he obtained the kingdom. (Alma 47:31–35)

This is a thoroughly disturbing story, the more so because the queen is sympathetically portrayed. She quite clearly feels an obligation to her people and a distrust of Amalickiah. Whether she is taken in completely is not clear. Perhaps she accepts him as a suitor out of respect or fear or because she wants to avoid destructive conflicts. The sadness of the story lies in her powerlessness despite her high office. Despite her concerns on behalf of her people, war comes. Yet, later on in the book of Alma, we read another story that seems directed to those who might appear to be the most powerless. This occurs after a conflict over ownership of land and the subsequent possibility of a dangerous political alliance taking place:

And behold, they would have carried this plan into effect, (which would have been a cause to have been lamented) but behold, Morianton being a man of much passion, therefore he was angry with one of his maid servants, and he fell upon her and beat her much.

And it came to pass that she fled, and came over to the camp of Moroni, and told Moroni all things concerning the matter, and also concerning their intentions to flee into the land northward. (Alma 50:30–31)

Compared to the queen, the servant maid has fewer social obligations binding to her circumstance. The course she takes obvi-

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36 This story also implies that Moroni, a righteous man, was held in high regard by this woman. By extension, can we suggest higher patterns of behavior by righteous men toward women?
ously involves real risk and consequence. Yet she makes the effort and, as a result, not only escapes her oppressor, but also brings about his downfall and secures a benefit for those who helped her.

Women in Book of Mormon Societies

By the sacred support which we owe to our wives and our children. (Alma 44:5)

Pearson claims that women in Nephite culture are marginalized and viewed as property. The longer we have worked on this response, the less inclined we are to accept this charge. Pearson reads a blessing that the peace of God may “rest upon you, and upon your houses and lands, and upon your flocks and herds, and all that you possess, your women and your children” (p. 35, quoting Alma 7:27). The reference to women and children comes after the summary statement “all that you possess,” not before. And even so, there are instances when women speak of “my husband; ... my sons” (1 Nephi 5:8; compare Mosiah 21:9; Alma 19:4–5). It is very clear that marriage in the Book of Mormon is divinely ordained and has implications of mutual obligation. At least Pearson’s reading can be questioned.

Mormon’s frank admission of his own and his people’s imperfections—which Pearson cites—actually invites her criticism of Nephite culture in general or of particular instances of behavior. We should be able to criticize in such a fashion while still appreciating the Book of Mormon, if our reading is careful and sensitive to the full implications of text and context. For example, in discussing the story of the journey through the desert from Jerusalem to Bountiful, Hugh Nibley wrote:

The women particularly had a hard time in the wilderness (1 Nephi 17:20), as they always do, since they do all the work, while the men hunt and talk. “The Arab talks in his tent, cares for the animals, or goes hunting, while the women do all the work.” The women have their own quarters, which no man may invade; and an older woman may talk up boldly to the sheikh when no one else dares to, just as Sariah took Lehi to task when she thought her sons were lost in the
desert (1 Nephi 5:2–3). All that saved Nephi’s life on one occasion was the intervention of “one of the daughters of Ishmael, yea, and also her mother, and one of the sons of Ishmael” (1 Nephi 7:19), for while “the Arab can only be persuaded by his own relations,” he can only yield to the entreaties of women without losing face, and indeed is expected to yield to them, even robbers sparing a victim who appeals to them in the name of his wife, the daughter of his uncle.37

In this example, Nibley heightens our appreciation of the Book of Mormon text without suggesting that every act and attitude expressed in the accounts is exemplary. He matter-of-factly shows us a layer of culture that is very distinct from the gospel doctrine and therefore subject to criticism rather than to emulation. This seems to be a model approach, one that adds perspective and draws us into the text, making it more real and vivid.

Because the Book of Mormon involves several cultures and peoples, long stretches of time, and different narrators, it is important not to overgeneralize particular conditions or perceptions at one period across the whole text. For example, the way Enos describes Lamanite society at an early period from an outsider’s perspective is quite different from the way the sons of Mosiah experience it when they give us our only extended look from the inside. And we should keep in mind the tendency of the writers to show contrasts; for example, the priests of Noah abandoning their families in contrast to Mormon’s covenantal language describing a “sacred support” owed to one’s wife and children, or Jacob’s contrasting Lamanite fidelity with Nephite infidelity. But one striking observation holds true for the whole book:

The behavior and treatment of women were seen as an index of social and spiritual health. Many references to women concern their suffering during war, captivity, and hardship. Nephi and his brothers measure the difficulty of their travels in terms of the

suffering of their wives, though Nephi emphasizes that the women were made strong like the men, while his brothers describe their wives’ sufferings as being worse than death (1 Ne. 17:1, 20). Jacob sharply contrasts male infidelity with the tenderness of the women (Jacob 2–3); immorality is described as precipitating the collapse of both family and society. The inhumanity and depravity of dying civilizations are also described in terms of the suffering of women: Lamanites fed to women and children the flesh of their dead husbands and fathers (Moro. 9:8); Nephite women were sacrificed to idols (Morm. 4:15, 21); Nephites raped captured Lamanite women, tortured them to death, and then ate their flesh as a token of their bravery (Moro. 9:9–10).³⁸

Healthy societies in the Book of Mormon stand in a stark contrast:

And now, because of the steadiness of the church they began to be exceedingly rich, having abundance of all things whatsoever they stood in need—an abundance of flocks and herds, and fatlings of every kind, and also abundance of grain, and of gold, and of silver, and of precious things, and abundance of silk and fine-twined linen, and all manner of good homely cloth.

And thus, in their prosperous circumstances, they did not send away any who were naked, or that were hungry, or that were athirst, or that were sick, or that had not been nourished; and they did not set their hearts upon riches; therefore they were liberal to all, both old and young, both bond and free, both male and female, whether out of the church or in the church, having no respect to persons as to those who stood in need. (Alma 1:29–30)

These insights lend persuasive evidence to the notion that Book of Mormon writers did value women far more than has been

claimed. If they did not measure up to our contemporary standards of historiographical inclusiveness and narrator balance, they were a different people in a different time. If they had legal and cultural restrictions on women, they quite deliberately excluded those restrictions from the record, so as not to bind us to their errors. What these writers do say about women deserves great respect.

Survey Methods and Inclusive Language

We should make a further comment on methods. Pearson says that she “read the [Book of Mormon] specifically to focus on what it says about women” (p. 34). She “circled in red every female reference” (p. 34). Our initial responses to her paper involved our own notes and reading. Later, we used the Infobases™ LDS Collectors Library CD-ROM to locate expressly female references. We performed a search using the following terms: women, woman, mother, mothers, daughter, daughters, sister, sisters, queen, queens, virgin, virgins, maid, maids, maiden, maidens, handmaids, womb, breast, breasts, harlot, harlots, concubine, concubines, wisdom, she, her, hers, Eve, Sariah, Abish, Isabel, Sarah, Mary, wife, wives, whore, prophetess, nurse, nursing, widow, widows, and female.

This produced 312 hits. When these passages were cut out for reference, we had about sixty pages of text to digest. Our computer-assisted search brings out a number of references that elicited no comment in Pearson’s paper. But notice that this still does not produce a complete survey of women’s presence in the Book of Mormon.

We searched again for terms that include females: parent, parents, children, and people. This produced 1,724 hits. Among these hits, the phrases children of men or children of Israel or children of Christ often appear in doctrinal and prophetic passages. Their use emphasizes the inclusiveness of these passages as applying equally to men and women.

The plural pronouns they, them, we, ye, and you often must be understood as inclusive of both genders. Other terms, such as Nephite, Lamanite, Jew, or gentile, are inclusive except in some
military contexts. Terms such as *the wicked* or *the righteous* are expressly gender inclusive.

Furthermore, at various times, masculine nouns such as *men* or *he* should often be understood as inclusive, equivalent to *mankind* or *whoever*. While such use of language runs contrary to current fashions for explicit gender inclusiveness, we should not expect to be able to understand an ancient writer by uncritically imposing contemporary standards of proper usage. For example, 2 Nephi 9:21 expressly explains that *men* is used inclusively:

> And he cometh into the world that he might save all men, . . . both men, women, and children, who belong to the family of Adam.

Also, see the express inclusiveness of *he*:

> Wherefore, he that fighteth against Zion, both Jew and Gentile, both bond and free, both male and female.

(2 Nephi 10:16)

As we have seen, the inclusiveness of language has cases where men are included as part of feminine symbols as well, the most conspicuous example being Babylon, the whore of all the earth, consisting of those who fight against Zion. Pearson herself opens her essay with a definition of *feminism*, a word built on a gender-specific root, but she assures us that the term nevertheless advocates "the equality of women and men." She rarely gives Book of Mormon authors the same latitude in assuming inclusiveness in their use of language.

This expressly inclusive use of language by Book of Mormon authors creates a problem for those studies that try to measure the gender balance and female presence or absence by counting male versus female pronouns. Our contemporary sensitivity to gender-inclusive language should not be applied without equal sensitivity to the cultural, biographical, and genre context of the narrative.

**Mormon’s Role in Shaping the Account**

Pearson observes that the Book of Mormon mentions individual women far less frequently than does the Bible. She correctly credits this phenomenon to Mormon’s Nephite culture and also
likely biographical influences, such as his military career, but she does not pursue these issues in the detail they deserve. She does recognize the importance of asking, "What indeed was Mormon’s role in shaping the account?" Several significant sources of information answer her question: biography, culture, and genre. Unfortunately, while she chooses "to believe that the anti-female bias . . . is not there from malice but from lack of awareness" (p. 32), her approach tends to alienate the reader from Book of Mormon writers. She mentions that Mormon was a general and makes a quip about a hypothetical General Patton editing Scarlett O’Hara from *Gone with the Wind*.

Specifically, the first chapter of Mormon’s account says that at the age of ten he was given charge of the sacred writings, at age eleven he was carried by his father to Zarahemla during a time of great war and wickedness, and by age sixteen he became the general of an army. From this, we infer that, from a very young age, he underwent a very exclusive and specialized training. He probably didn’t have much chance to learn about the feminine sphere. But as we have seen, what he does include about women has an evident deliberation and positive intent.

Of Mormon’s accounts Pearson says that “scenes of bloodshed and almost unbelievable violence stain the pages of the book. . . . The book’s violence is unforgettable” (p. 34). Pearson reports that the Book of Mormon “violates” her spirit, using language loaded with the implication that Mormon is a perpetrator of crimes through his text, rather than a witness of them. We should recognize that neither biblical nor Book of Mormon authors approve of everything they depict. As a corrective to this sense of violation and in the spirit of gaining empathy for Mormon’s motives, we recommend a reading of a 1984 FARMS paper by Lisa Bolin Hawkins and Gordon Thomasson, “I Only Am Escaped Alone to Tell Thee: Survivor Witnesses in the Book of Mormon.” It compares the editors of the Book of Mormon with a profile of those who survived the horrors of the Nazi and Soviet death camps and felt compelled to survive and bear witness. It turns out that Mormon and Moroni fit precisely the profile of a survivor witness. They describe violence because they do not want us to forget. The summary of this paper is worth reading:
• The will to remember and record anchors the survivor in
the moral purpose of bearing witness, thus maintaining his own
integrity in conscious contradiction of the savagery around him
[Mormon 3:11-16; Moroni 9:6-25].

• Witnessing of his experience is viewed as a duty, even a sa-
cred task [Mormon 3:16; 8:14; 9:31].

• It is instinctively felt, an involuntary outburst, born out of
the horror that no one will be left [Mormon 6:17-22; 8:1-3].

• The task is often carried out despite great risks; often in
secret by depositing the record in a secret archive [Mormon 6:6;
8:14].

• Survivors do not witness to inflict guilt or to rationalize
their own survival. Their mission transcends guilt and their ir-
repressible urge to witness arises before any thought of guilt sur-
faces and at their initial stage of adjustment to extremity [Mormon
9:30-31; Moroni 9:3-6].

• They speak simply to tell, to describe, out of a common
care for life and the future, realizing that we all live in a realm of
mutual sacrifice [Mormon 4:17-22; 8:37-40; Moroni 7:45-48].

• Survival in this sense is a collective act; the survivor has
pledged to see that the story is told [Mormon 3:16].

• The survivors speak to the whole world, as a firsthand
eyewitness, one whose words cannot be ignored [Mormon
3:16-22; 9:30].

• They perceive that “out of horror . . . the truth will
emerge and be made secure,” that “good and evil are only clear
in retrospect,” for wisdom only comes at a terrible price. Thus,
their mission is to display the “objective conditions of evil”
[Mormon 5:8-9; 9:31; Moroni 9, 10].

The Hawkins-Thomasson paper teaches us to examine the
motives and humanity behind the accounts of violence in the
Book of Mormon. Just so, few readers of the Book of Mormon
can read the accounts of genocidal conflicts in Bosnia and
Rwanda without recognizing the immediate relevance of the text.
Mormon gives us these stories not because he thought we wanted

39 Lisa Bolin Hawkins and Gordon Thomasson, “I Only Am Escaped
Alone to Tell Thee: Survivor Witnesses in the Book of Mormon” (Provo, Utah:
FARMS, 1984).
them, but because he knew we needed them. Most of the wars since World War II have been tribal and ethnic conflicts exactly like those described in the Book of Mormon.

**War in the Book of Mormon**

Moroni said unto Zerahemnah: . . . we do not desire to be men of blood. (Alma 44:1)

Yea, [Amalickiah] was exceedingly wroth, and he did curse God, and also Moroni, swearing with an oath that he would drink his blood. (Alma 49:27)

Pearson approaches the text based on the theory that patriarchy and militarism go together. She defines patriarchy as the rule of the fathers. Nephite culture was clearly patriarchal but, as we have seen, they did have more understanding of the Divine Feminine than Pearson observed. Pearson never defines militarism. It simply means having to do with military matters. In the context of her interpretive key—that war is a masculine endeavor, a by-product of patriarchy—her use of the term has pejorative overtones that go beyond a strict dictionary definition. Military matters do take up about one third of the book. But this should be expected in a book edited by a military man. What is the Book of Mormon’s attitude toward violence and militarism? Is it a blueprint for the repression of women and an admonition to embark on a policy of political and sexual conquest? Quite the contrary, we think.

She sees “near unrelenting militarism” (p. 32) in the Nephite culture. We think that her characterization of Nephite society as “patriarchal = militaristic” is in its own way as misleading as the common characterization of the Nephites as the good guys and the Lamanites as bad guys. She makes no analysis of any of the Book of Mormon’s explanations for the various conflicts that it describes. Consequently, she does not show how feminism could have changed the outcome in any specific case. Since, as we have seen, the treatment of women is a “barometer” of the health of the varied Book of Mormon societies at different times, such case-specific criticism could be of use. Yet, we should not oversimplify and overgeneralize from one instance across the whole of Nephite
or Lamanite history. The Book of Mormon is morally and culturally complex. The reasons for war vary: tragic misunderstandings, fear, ambitious men, ingrained cultural hatreds, defense of home and family, vengeance, political rivalry, propaganda, personal rivalry, and socioeconomic competition for resources. The motivations of the combatants vary too: the Nephites typically fought defensively. Thus her view overlooks the Book of Mormon’s own explanations of the causes of and cure for conflict.

Righteous responses to war vary:

- Active defense (see Alma 43:45–46)
- Enduring captivity and finding nonviolent resolution (see Mosiah 20:22)
- Migration to avoid conflict (see 2 Nephi 5:2–10; Alma 27:22–26)
- Pacifism to the point of death (see Alma 24:6–30)
- Economic support of combatants (see Alma 27:24)
- Lamanite preaching to and conversion of Gadianton insurgents (see Helaman 6:37)

Throughout the Book of Mormon, peace is secured and preserved only through righteousness and never through military means.

The confrontation of the Anti-Nephi-Lehis with the morality of war (see Alma 24 and Alma 53:10–21) is much more complex, powerful, and realistic than that found in Aristophanes’ Lysistrata, which Pearson cites. Look at this passage, which shows some of the moral complexity of passivism:

But it came to pass that when they saw the danger, and the many afflictions and tribulations which the Nephites bore for them, they were moved with compassion and were desirous to take up arms in the defence of their country. (Alma 53:13)

Compassion moves these pacifists to be willing to take up arms, and Helaman’s compassion and respect for the oath they made compels him to persuade them to keep their oath despite the danger.

In passing, Pearson suggests contemporary parallels to the militarism of Saddam Hussein’s Iraq and Hitler’s “Fatherland.” One character in the Book of Mormon who closely parallels
Hussein and Hitler are Zerahemnah, who is certainly not portrayed as worthy of emulation.

For behold, his [Zerahemnah's] designs were to stir up the Lamanites to anger against the Nephites; this he did that he might usurp great power over them, and also that he might gain power over the Nephites by bringing them into bondage.

And now the design of the Nephites was to support their lands, and their houses, and their wives, and their children, that they might preserve them from the hands of their enemies; and also that they might preserve their rights and their privileges, yea, and also their liberty, that they might worship God according to their desires. (Alma 43:8–9)

If there is to be a better solution to this particular kind of threat, Moroni would like to hear of it.

And thus he was preparing to support their liberty, their lands, their wives, and their children, and their peace, and that they might live unto the Lord their God...

Now, they were sorry to take up arms against the Lamanites, because they did not delight in the shedding of blood; yea, and this was not all—they were sorry to be the means of sending so many of their brethren out of this world into an eternal world, unprepared to meet their God.

Nevertheless, they could not suffer to lay down their lives, that their wives and their children should be massacred by the barbarous cruelty of those who were once their brethren, yea, and had dissented from their church, and had left them and had gone to destroy them by joining the Lamanites. (Alma 48:10, 23–24)

On Being a Reader in a Strange Land: Violation of the Spirit, or Enlarging of the Soul?

Pearson remarks that
The valuable things I have gleaned from the Book of Mormon have been bought at the expense of putting my femaleness aside and ignoring what is said of it. And while I am more than my femaleness, my femaleness is a profound and highly valued part of me, and to have to put it away when I pick up the book violates my spirit. (p. 34)

By now, it should be plain that we believe that Pearson overlooks much that is positive and important and is much too harsh in her judgments. We do grant the general direction of her criticism—the Book of Mormon is not as gender balanced as she and many other women might prefer. But what really happens when she puts her femaleness aside and enters into the text on its own terms?

"Pure knowledge," says Doctrine and Covenants 121:42, "shall greatly enlarge the soul." The story of Enos in the Book of Mormon demonstrates that enlargement of the soul: Enos’s concern and empathy grows to encircle not only his family and kin, but also his adversaries. The best writing enlarges the soul, but only if we let the pure knowledge enter and do its work. If, speaking as middle-class, middle-aged, white American Mormons, we feel violated when we encounter essential differences in our reading or conversation, in a book by a feminist; a poem by a black, Native American, Chinese, or Hispanic writer; a statement of faith by a Catholic or a Jew; a web page in which a Muslim woman explains her views of the veil; a Protestant on the experience of being born again; an agnostic describing a loss of faith; a Hindu explaining his opinions about cross-cultural marriage; or a document of life from a medieval or ancient Hebrew culture, is the fact of difference in the other necessarily to blame? Does not the openness or brittleness of reader ideology in the face of another perspective contribute something to the different reader experience of empathy and enlightenment, an enlarging of the soul, or a contrasting sense of personal violation?

Given that many of us have read the Book of Mormon to see what it says about women, what accounts for the difference in our appreciation? Such appreciation is not just a matter of gender difference. As we compose this response, Shauna often expresses her passion for the Book of Mormon. Where Shauna says, "It’s
beautiful!” Pearson reports that “When I encounter the occasional statement that would appear inviting to women, I stare at it as at an anachronism” (p. 34). This reminds us of Thomas Kuhn’s observation that

In science . . . novelty emerges only with difficulty, manifested by resistance, against a background provided by expectation. . . . Anomaly appears only against the background provided by the paradigm. The more precise and far-reaching that paradigm is, the more sensitive an indicator it provides of anomaly and hence an occasion for paradigm change.40

Reading Pearson’s comment in this light, and comparing our responses to hers, we conclude that she overlooked some of the things we found simply because she did not expect to see them, and, perhaps, something in her resisted finding some of the things we saw. We have to consider the historical exemplars and ideologies that define her background expectations and focus her attention. And some of the things that she finds to be profoundly offensive. Other women accept without reservation as narrator perspective, just as easily as contemporary readers accept Dickens, Twain, or Austin for themselves, expecting to have a richer life because of their readings. To read negatively, Shauna says, emphasizing her active choice, would rob her of a positive experience. An observation by Betty Edwards is apt in this instance:

Most of us tend to see parts of a form hierarchically. The parts that are important (that is, provided a lot of information), or the parts that we decide are larger, or the parts that 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.\textsuperscript{41}

Women’s voices can provide useful and necessary correctives to male perspectives, perceptions, and values. Many of the significant accounts of the roles that women played in Mormon history have been overlooked in the official histories and have been the subject of much interest by Latter-day Saint historians in recent decades. It is entirely good and proper to add to our understanding by broadening our reading and seeking neglected writers and stories. Pearson herself has provided valuable perspectives in her book \textit{Good-bye, I Love You}, and elsewhere in her poems, plays, and essays. The same book reveals much to explain the frustration that emerges in her critique of the Book of Mormon.\textsuperscript{42} We understand that she came by those frustrations honestly and has the right to ask the questions that she has and we hope that she finds our response worthy of those concerns. Pearson calls for more feminine input into social decision-making. Here, we agree. So does President Hinckley—one of the recurrent messages of the last few general conference sessions has been the inclusion of women’s voices in ward councils.

\textbf{Politically Corrected Scriptures, or Contextually Corrected Readings?}

Toward the end of her essay, Pearson suggests “correcting” the scriptures to remove offensive passages (she votes against all references to the whore) and adding more gender-inclusive language (making addresses more inclusive of brothers and sisters).

We have presented evidence that the language in the Book of Mormon is more gender-inclusive than she has observed. She ad-


\textsuperscript{42} In particular, “Where could I go to find healing for the wound to the woman in me? Only to God. But . . . didn’t God prefer men too,” in her memoir, \textit{Good-bye, I Love You} (New York: Random House, 1986), 80. This is her facing a moment such as when “many hearts died, pierced with deep wounds.” Such feelings as expressed here matter a great deal to many people. Pearson is not the only Latter-day Saint woman with such concerns.
mits to arguing with herself about the notion of changing scripture. But, in support of the notion, she cites a few valid examples where the words of hymns have been changed to avoid giving offense. However, her two examples in which the church has changed scriptural texts to avoid giving offense are not only problematic in their description but also instructive in their actual resolution. She remarks that “The great and abominable church used to be characterized as the Catholic Church, but the later editions of McConkie’s Mormon Doctrine show the change from that because we do not want to offend Catholics” (p. 39). Actually, as a superb article by Stephen Robinson shows, the association of the great and abominable church with the Catholic Church goes back to Luther, not to the Book of Mormon. The Catholic Church cannot be the great and abominable church in the Book of Mormon for two reasons. First, it did not exist when the specific actions attributed to the historical model took place. Second, the symbolic great and abominable church is not a specific institution, but is rather all those who fight against Zion (see 1 Nephi 11:36). McConkie’s interpretation was not preapproved by the First Presidency before publication, and was, in fact, criticized by President Marion G. Romney and by Elder Mark E. Peterson upon publication. What needed changing was not the Book of Mormon, but the faulty, culturally conditioned interpretation of the Book of Mormon.

In her second example, Pearson observes that “white and delightful” in the Book of Mormon has been changed to “pure and delightful,” “clearly because we do not want to offend people of color” (p. 39). In Hebrew, however, “white” and “pure” are interchangeable equivalents referring to moral behavior and in context have no connotation of race or skin color. (Compare Daniel 12:10 and Lamentations 4:7–8, where before a moral fall Nazarites can both be “whiter than milk” and “more ruddy in body than rubies” and 2 Nephi 30:6.) Hugh Nibley looks at the similar use of language in various Semitic texts and concludes that, in that cultural context, the formulaic expressions “white and delightful” and the contrary “dark and

loathsome” have nothing to do with race, or skin color, and everything to do with character.44 Again, the change to 2 Nephi 30:6, which was originally made by Joseph Smith, was justified by the original sense of the language and was made to prevent misinterpretation, not to bow to popular taste.

A better example of a changed scripture would have been adding the phrase son of to the passage about the virgin being the mother of God (see 1 Nephi 11:18). Perhaps some of Joseph Smith’s revisions to the Bible could be examined. The difference in these examples involves notions of doctrinal consistency and clarity, rather than a more subjective concern with removing passages deemed offensive.

Even so, by learning to be better readers of the scriptures through understanding their background and cultural context, we can often overcome the kinds of negative experience that Pearson has endured. On the other hand, we agree with Pearson that the current LDS educational materials, including magazines, lesson materials, media, talks, and firesides, can often be criticized, and then revised and improved to our benefit. This would improve the contexts and conceptions that we bring to our reading of the Book of Mormon, the Bible, and our history.

Seeing Each Other Clearly

One thing that we have found particularly enlightening bears on some of Pearson’s comments about the differences between men and women and, further, on the whole tendency to frame certain issues in male versus female terms. She comments on research showing “a particular tendency in either the female brain or female socialization that encourages women and girls rather consistently to choose cooperation over competition. . . . Men seem programmed to be more aggressive than women” (p. 34). However, these same tendencies, and the polar male/female generalizations that come from them, can also be accounted for with Jungian Type Theory.45 Type Theory looks at personality as

45 We would suggest the wonderfully enlightening books on the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI)46, such as Otto Kroeger and Janet Thuesen, Type
based on the interaction of preferences, akin to handedness, in four pairs of complementary processes:

- personal orientation towards Extraversion vs. Introversion
- gathering information via Sensing vs. Intuition
- deciding with Thinking vs. Feeling
- living with Judgment vs. Perceiving

Four sets of preferences combine to form sixteen different types. The only pair that shows a significant gender difference is for deciding based on Thinking or Feeling. Two-thirds of all males prefer to decide with thinking and two-thirds of all females decide with feeling. People with the thinking preference tend to prefer justice: people with the feeling preference tend to prefer mercy. This tendency may underlie why the Book of Mormon applies feminine gender to mercy and male gender to justice.

For behold, justice exerciseth all his demands, and also mercy claimeth all which is her own; and thus, none but the truly penitent are saved. (Alma 42:24)

This use of imagery is fine, deriving from general tendencies in populations. However, when dealing with individuals, the assumption of traits based on male or female gender, rather than on type preference, is wrong a third of the time, more than enough to be tragically misleading. Furthermore, Type Theory opens the question as to whether the “competitiveness” versus “cooperation” issue that Pearson raises should even be addressed as a gender issue. If a third of all men have the feeling preference, and a third of all women have the thinking preference, the ensuing difference in “competitiveness” versus “cooperation” is not really at base a gender issue. It has to do with an inborn preference that for individuals is independent of gender. Therefore, gender-based criticism may not only be reductive and divisive, but misleading. Type Theory not only moves the male/female dialogue from the old grooves, but by providing sixteen types, rather than just two, it

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instantly increases the number and variety of strong role models available to individuals.

**New and Powerful Images of Women and Femaleness**

Pearson calls on us to “create new and powerful images of women and femaleness, . . . new volumes of history and indeed new scripture that will fill our minds and our hearts with positive female pictures, pictures of women serving as full and fully honored partners in our religious life” (p. 40). We have tried to answer this call in our response by reading closely, enlarging contexts, listening to critiques, and reading again. We have learned some things that have transformed familiar stories and have become alert to overlooked feminine presence in the text.

Obviously, much more could be said. Where can Latter-day Saint women look? With respect to the Book of Mormon in particular, the arts can fill in some voids.

The Book of Mormon paintings of Minerva Teichert have lately drawn attention. And one notable aspect of her work is its inclusion of female images. In Orson Scott Card’s five-volume science fiction retelling of the Book of Mormon, his Homcoming series, beginning with *The Memory of Earth*, he has actually done what Pearson has recommended, that is, created new and powerful images by imagining a large cast of female characters in Book of Mormon plots and telling their stories. Like Teichert, he has done so in a way that shows his love for the text, rather than impatience with it. We believe that love will always provide better criticism than anger because love sees with greater insight, empathy, and clarity. What if one does not agree with Card’s artistic vision? Fine, he is just one voice. What if Teichert’s paintings aren’t sufficient? Other voices work with history, scholarship, drama, novels, poetry, songs, personal essays, and art. Other approaches and critical tools are available, not the least of which is inspiration.

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We still have examples of great women from the Bible—Sarah’s taking her turn on the lion couch as an equal to Abraham and Isaac, Deborah and Huldah’s prophesying for Israel, Anna and Mary, and Mary and Martha. We still have our own lively history with Eliza’s lovely hymns, Emma’s sacrifices and conflicts, Lucy Mack Smith’s pride and sorrow, and many others. And we do have a lively present, with many voices active and anxiously engaged.

Mormon women have participated fully in a rich history and participate in a rich present. As for Pearson, her story has become a part of the community story. We should enlarge our appreciation of the richness of our history and our present, inclusive of the unhistoric women and of the women who have found their way into the spotlight of history.

Whether we have a small part of the stories and names of the women in the Book of Mormon, or nothing at all, they did have lives and they do matter to the whole story. We have found in our searches and reading that women are not as absent from the text and that the language is much more inclusive than Pearson and other readers claim. True, the women’s perspective is offered infrequently, but, as we shall see, given the cultures, genres, and specific narrators involved, this should be neither surprising nor disturbing. Despite the patriarchal perspective of the narrators, the presence of women begins with the first line—being born of goodly parents—and continues to Moroni’s sad reflections on the unimaginable suffering he witnesses. Women figure significantly in most of the major narratives of the book, in the journeys and adventures in Jerusalem; the desert and ocean crossings; the divisions in the colonies; Benjamin’s coronation ritual; the migrations, conflicts, and escapes that fill the book of Mosiah; the conversions, apostasies, and wars in Alma; the visitation of Christ; the Jaredite tragedy; and the final destructive wars. In our reading, even the many roles suggested by the explicit feminine terms cannot fully encompass the range of female experiences described in the text. We see women acting in a range of roles that is far broader than can be expressed through the expressly female nouns in the

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text, for example: *advocate, pioneer, worshiper, convert, combatant, conspirator, ruler, servant, witness, victim, laborer, martyr, prophetess, planter, dancer, colonizer, explorer, priestess (Isabel), ruler (Lamanite queens), artists and artisans, clothiers, prisoner, mourner, spy, fashion designers and consumers for both good and ill (neat and comely versus costly and gaudy), crafts-person, teacher, exemplar, and fugitive.*

All of this goes to suggest that women play a broader role in the Book of Mormon narratives than appears to the casual reader. More importantly, few readers have noticed the typological significance of the occasions when individual women figure prominently in the text.

Pearson complains that the majority of women in the Book of Mormon are the "nameless" and "faceless" (p. 35). That is just as true of the men in history, as in life. Most are simply husbands, fathers, and sons. Does that mean they don't matter? The description of Dorothea near the end of George Eliot's *Middlemarch* makes an important point.

Dorothea herself had no dreams of being praised above other women, feeling that there was always something better which she might have done, if she had only been better and known better. ... Her full nature ... spent itself in channels which had no great name on the earth. But the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive: for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and ... [all those Dorotheas] who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs.49

Implicit in George Eliot's observation that the growing good of the world depends partially on unhistoric acts is the fact that we do need public role models to help us grow and develop. The growing good of Mormonism depends on both the historic and unrecognized acts. We have the faithful, hidden lives, but we also have worthy historic acts, many of which deserve to be better known and appreciated. As we tell our stories and live our lives, we

trust that our vision may be clear and that our actions and the consequences of those actions may truly contribute to the growing good.

Reviewed by Edgar C. Snow Jr.

“Minerva Mania” has struck Mormonism, and not a minute too soon. In the last ten years, and especially in the last twelve months, we have richly sampled the life and work of Mormon artist Minerva Teichert from exhibitions at the Museum of Church History and the BYU Museum of Art, a BYU video, a one-woman theatrical performance, a biography, a collection of her letters, and *The Book of Mormon Paintings of Minerva Teichert*, the subject of this book review.

It is fitting that I should write this review since a couple of months ago I wondered on AML-List (a Listserv) why someone had not already published a version of the Book of Mormon illustrated by Teichert’s paintings. On hearing from Marny Parkin on AML-List that the print had yet to dry on a forthcoming BYU Studies/Bookcraft volume reproducing those paintings, I suggested it was not possible that the volume could do her paintings justice. I must now correct myself and say that a standard-sized Book of Mormon illustrated by Teichert’s works would not do the mural-sized paintings justice, and the BYU Studies/Bookcraft volume superbly demonstrates that her paintings, unlike Arnold Friberg’s, rise above the level of illustration and are enduring works of art, deserving not only the virtually unanimous critical and popular acclaim she has recently received, but also this luscious volume from BYU Studies and Bookcraft.

By now I suspect nearly everyone knows the story of Teichert’s Book of Mormon paintings, how she studied art in Chicago and New York under noted masters, how during the 1940s and 1950s she pursued her dream to tell the Book of Mormon...
story in over forty murals painted on canvas tacked to the wall of her small living room. She even had to use inverted binoculars to view the murals from a distance for a proper perspective. She pursued this dream without being commissioned, unlike murals she rendered on other themes. The only client she served was the Spirit, unless you count her arrangement with Brigham Young University to pay for tuition for her children and other students with these paintings. As a result, BYU now owns most of these works, a few others being held by the church and in private collections.

A couple of years ago, Carol Lynn Pearson asked “Could Feminism Have Saved the Nephites?” After having read The Book of Mormon Paintings of Minerva Teichert, I would now respond to Pearson’s question, “I don’t know, but I think Minerva Teichert could have.” Teichert’s visual midrash on the Book of Mormon transforms a text often preoccupied with armed conflict into the kinder, gentler story found between the lines of the Book of Mormon, and this from a woman’s point of view in peaceful, yet vibrant colors, as if Edgar Degas had painted a ballet based on the Book of Mormon story.

Of course, Friberg’s depictions of Book of Mormon events, which have appeared in the Book of Mormon for a couple of generations, will inevitably be compared to Teichert’s work. After closely examining The Book of Mormon Paintings of Minerva Teichert and reading the graceful commentary by Welch and Dant (and an essay by Marian Eastwood Wardle, one of Teichert’s granddaughters), I suggest that Teichert and Friberg created different versions of Book of Mormon gospels: Friberg, as if Matthew or Mark, focused on the mighty acts and miracles of the heroic Nephites. Whereas Teichert, as if Luke or John, focused on women, children, and themes of the heart. Few would doubt that we have been influenced in our reading of the Book of Mormon text in the last thirty years by the sheer ubiquity of the Friberg illustrations. If the only available Book of Mormon text for the next thirty years featured Teichert illustrations (in an over-sized, coffee-table edition, of course), or if Minerva Mania continued

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unabated, wouldn’t her paintings change the way we view the Book of Mormon text as well? Wouldn’t we be drawn toward the subtleties of the text, perhaps to its literary beauty, the stories of its handful of women and children, rather than to the familiar war stories, Captain Moroni, the two thousand stripling warriors, or a “soloflexed” Neph? Since this is supposed to be a review of the book, allow me to focus on a few examples of Teichert’s different vision of the world of the Nephites and Lamanites.

“Love Story” (pp. 62–63) is a wonderful transformation of the terse account of the marriage of Ishmael’s daughters to Lehi’s sons into a boisterous dance number right out of an ancient Near Eastern West Side Story, replete with tambourines and cymbals, billowing costumes, and flirtatious smiles. As in many of Teichert’s other paintings, the women steal the scene.

“Defense of a Nephite City” (pp. 122–23) displays the Nephite repulsion of a Lamanite attempt to take a city. Teichert’s combat murals obscure the brutality of, say, Friberg’s painting of the last Nephite battle with corpses strewn all around Moroni. In this painting Teichert, a rancher familiar with horses, creates sympathy not for the fallen Nephites or Lamanites who are nearly invisible, but for the Lamanite horses injured in the confrontation, the horses being the emphasized casualties of the campaign.

“The City of Gid” (pp. 132–33) demonstrates that, notwithstanding Fawn Brodie’s cool assessment,2 the Book of Mormon contains potential untapped humor. The story of Laman’s teasing the Lamanites with some strong wine until they were feeling no pain (Alma 55:1–16) qualifies as comic relief in an otherwise no-nonsense account of warfare (unless one also counts Alma 55:30–32 as additional humor).3 Teichert’s interpretation of this story shows some suspicious but thirsty Lamanites awaiting an earnest Laman and his chuckling cohorts, accompanied by the least earnest of all beasts of burden—donkeys—bearing jars of wine, one of the donkeys flicking its ear.

“Gadianon’s Band” (pp. 136–37), a story about murder and plunder, becomes an exotic and colorful carousel of horses, rid-

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den by Gadianton and his men, ascending a mountain. The shadow work seems to suggest poles on which the horses glide up and down around the mountain. Again, the horses are the focal point of the picture.

“Look to Your Children” (pp. 146–47) is the apex of the volume (as well as the Book of Mormon), depicting angelic ministrations to children during the Savior’s visit at the temple. Teichert chose red, her favorite color and one she associated with heaven, as the predominant color for this mural (p. 16). While contemporary readers likely interpret 3 Nephi’s discussion of angelic ministration with priesthood blessings (at least I always have), Teichert transforms this scene into a literal feast, with angels serving children the way Welch and Dant suggest Teichert performed her own “grandmotherly acts” (p. 146) of serving food and caring for grandchildren. The eye is drawn to the central angelic figure who ministers to a young girl by washing her face.

It should be noted that, notwithstanding Teichert’s study of biblical and Mesoamerican cultures, her paintings might appear less than historically accurate, based on the extensive and influential research and proposed models of Nephite culture promulgated in the last fifteen years by John Sorenson (among other things, he discounts the use of horses by Lamanites and Nephites for transportation)⁴ and other FARMS researchers (who discount the style of armor and weaponry painted by Teichert in favor of more exotic Mesoamerican weaponry and armor).⁵ However, these perceived minor flaws in her work should not detract from appreciation of her paintings, since the murals are more important for the way they convey the emotional and communal aspects of the Nephite story.

Welch and Dant have done an excellent job of complementing Teichert’s work with a balanced text containing an introduction to Teichert, her artistic themes, influences on her work, and essential statements from Teichert’s own pen regarding her work and testimony. A running commentary on her paintings, with insightful interpretations that feel natural, not strained, only rarely distracts

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from the beauty of Teichert's paintings. In a couple of places, Welch apparently could not resist what must have been a constant temptation to add interesting Book of Mormon commentary. In discussing "Love Story," for instance, the text abruptly says, "The ram's horn on the right of the mural may indicate this is also a religiously significant occasion." And in the discussion of "Death of Amalikiah" (pp. 126-27), the text says, "Interestingly, Amalikiah was killed on the eve of the first day of the year, when symbolic reenthronements in some cultures take place." I do not disagree with these statements; I would just prefer to read them in a FARMS publication rather than be sidetracked by them in a commentary on Teichert's art.

I now conclude my review with the following directives: Buy the book; the royalties go toward the Minerva Teichert Scholarship Fund at Brigham Young University. Buy one for your ward library. Give them as gifts. Convince BYU Studies and Bookcraft to sell framed posters of the paintings. Use Teichert's pictures in Primary, Sunday School, priesthood, Relief Society, seminary, and family home evenings. Encourage others to use the paintings as book covers (this is already happening). Learn how to paint like Teichert, establish a Mormon art movement based on the renewal of her artistic vision, and continue her work.

May Teichert save us from our nearsighted visualization of the story of the Nephites.

Reviewed by Richard Lloyd Anderson
and Scott H. Faulring

**The Prophet Joseph Smith and His Plural Wives**

This is a landmark recent publication, an ambitious first book by Todd M. Compton.¹ This informative work of over eight hundred pages compiles individual biographies of the polygamous wives of Joseph Smith, the founding prophet of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. For the first time, readers intrigued with the personalities involved in this unique socioreligious practice have an in-depth examination of the women who were sealed to the Prophet, many of whom were the first Latter-day Saint plural wives. The sensitive issue of the introduction of plural marriage by Joseph Smith is best addressed by honest inquiry, as far as we have data. Gathering reliable material is actually fifty percent of the problem, since everyone who writes must remark on how little is known behind the scenes. In most cases, the Prophet’s marriage sealing dates are known; in many instances the comments of Joseph Smith’s wives describe how they accepted this marriage system and what their feelings were at that time and later.

¹ Todd Compton earned a bachelor’s degree from Brigham Young University and a Ph.D. in classics from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). Along with Stephen D. Ricks, he coedited the fourth volume in the Collected Works of Hugh Nibley series, entitled *Mormonism and Early Christianity* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987). Compton has also published several informative articles in ancient studies, and in the present study applies his training to earliest Mormonism.
Compton received a research fellowship in 1992 from the prestigious Henry E. Huntington Library in San Marino, California (see p. ix), which gave him the opportunity to study the library’s collection of the personal writings of Eliza Roxcy Snow, Joseph Smith’s best known plural wife. This research stimulated his interest in the Prophet’s other plural wives. Because of a lack of accessible information, Compton expanded his research over the next four and a half years, with a goal of compiling detailed biographies on thirty-three women who he believes married Joseph.

The introduction of polygamy in Ohio and Illinois has been controversial and little understood, both in the Prophet’s generation and the current one, even among many of the Mormon faith. A few select Latter-day Saints participated in plural marriage prior to the 1846 exodus from Nauvoo, Illinois, out of religious devotion and open-minded obedience. Compton recognizes that deep spiritual conviction was at the base of reestablishing the marriage system of the ancient patriarchs: “Accepting polygamy was a matter of integrity for both Latter-day Saint men and women, given the restorationist underpinnings of their faith and their acceptance of Smith as a direct conduit of revelation” (p. 312).

As Compton discovered while researching for his book, serious study of Mormon plural marriage has special challenges in the period before its 1852 public announcement. The introduction of latter-day polygamy is obscured by the confidentiality first stressed by the Prophet in teaching polygamy to his most devoted followers. Defensive public statements, in which participants honestly denied that the church believed or practiced an immoral system of spiritual wifery, were made in a serious attempt to avert hostilities generated by misunderstandings fed by apostates and anti-Mormons. Certain Mormon dissidents turned into wolves. They attracted others through local and national newspapers and speeches, which distorted the private teachings of the Prophet as being carnal and unrestrained. Political and religious enemies stalked Joseph Smith—the shepherd—and his dedicated flock living in Nauvoo and the surrounding area. Violence in Missouri and the constant threat of its return largely explain the caution with which the Prophet first introduced the principle to those he
trusted. Moreover, the Prophet was legally at risk, since Illinois statutes made bigamy a crime.

**General Observations about the Book**

Overall, *In Sacred Loneliness* is extremely informative. The book features a high level of research, generally good judgment in the use of source materials, and a fairly comprehensive collection of known data pertaining to the wives of Joseph Smith. No biographer in Mormon history has ever been ambitious enough to write a group biography as extensive as this. Because of the complexity of the subject and an obvious lack of detailed primary sources, the job of compiling full-chapter biographies of Joseph Smith’s plural wives could be insurmountable. *In Sacred Loneliness* was recently honored with the annual best book award from the Mormon History Association. This recognition is deserved because it is the most detailed study of the lifetime experiences of the women sealed to Joseph Smith.

There are, of course, limitations in such a massive collection. Compton has done everything possible to reconstruct lives, but even then the narrative mainly reports outward events, with regular observations that little is known of private lives and inner feelings. The typical biography in this collection moves through a family conversion to Mormonism, gathering to Nauvoo, gaining a personal witness of plural marriage, the sacrifices of the exodus, and then pioneer life in Utah. The author stresses deprivation and sorrow, but the factual reality is the remarkable power of faith most of the wives displayed. He tells the stories of a group of impressive women who gave their all to establish a latter-day gospel dispensation and expand family kingdoms of the hereafter.

*In Sacred Loneliness* synthesizes hundreds, possibly thousands, of primary and secondary pieces of an enormously complex historical reconstruction. Unfortunately, many of these documentary pieces do not fit together well. Some are gross contradictions while others were purposely misrepresented by their creators. Compton’s biggest challenge, from which arose one of the book’s greatest weaknesses, was evaluating and selecting the most reliable pieces of biographical evidence to use in portraying these women accurately. The book employs a confusing,
nontraditional method of citing supporting information. The main text of the book is devoid of conventional endnote numbers. Instead, In Sacred Loneliness furnishes explanatory notes at the back of the book. These references are introduced by a short contextual phrase identifying the issue. In reading this important work, we were often frustrated by the inordinate time it took to find a source—and were on occasion unsuccessful. The contextual phrases in the reference section take up far more space than consecutive numerals. In our opinion, the traditional numbering system would have been more efficient, pinpointing the references immediately. In content, the notes maintain good scholarly standards, avoiding long irrelevancies and generally meeting the author’s stated goal of giving readers the texts of main sources, many of which are in manuscript form and would be time-consuming to locate.

It is important to know the viewpoint of anyone who interprets the teachings and activities of the Prophet Joseph Smith, especially when addressing a challenging subject like plural marriage. Compton is forthright about his position: “I am a practicing Mormon who considers himself believing but who rejects absolutist elements of the fundamentalist world view, e.g., the view of Joseph Smith as omniscient or morally perfect or receiving revelation unmixed with human and cultural limitations. However, I do accept non-absolutist incursion of the supernatural into human experience” (p. 629).

This position is applied in a consistent campaign against plural marriage, with repeated editorializing on the subject. For example, after acknowledging the religious integrity of men and women in polygamy, the introduction adds: “Nevertheless, my central thesis is that Mormon polygamy was characterized by a tragic ambiguity. . . . It was the new and everlasting covenant, having eternal significance. . . . On the other hand . . . it was a social system that simply did not work in nineteenth-century America” (p. xiii). The preface argues this point with a few non-Joseph Smith examples. Is Compton claiming that his book proves the failure of polygamy—or that he wrote the book because he holds this premise? The author seems to wear twin hats of historian and social theorist. For instance, Agnes Coolbrith Smith became the widow of Don Carlos Smith in 1841 and was afterward sealed to
him for eternity and married for time, first to her brother-in-law Joseph Smith and later to his cousin George Albert Smith. However, pressures of the exodus blocked this last relationship, and Agnes married William Pickett and moved to California. Later Pickett deserted her. *In Sacred Loneliness* opines it was illogical to return to Utah because “polygamy was almost an institutionalized form of marital neglect” (p. 170). In another case, the author says that Orson Whitney followed his grandfather and father “in accepting the onerous burden of polygamy” (p. 531). Actually, Orson married his second wife with the consent of the first and lived in the normative dual-wife pattern in Utah. In fact, Compton describes how well this two-household system worked through the fairness of Horace Whitney, Orson’s father, and the considerate sisterhood of his wives (see p. 513).

The author explains and reexplains his title: “Often plural wives who experienced loneliness also reported feelings of depression, despair, anxiety, helplessness, abandonment, anger, psychosomatic symptoms, and low self-esteem” (p. xiv–xv). If plurality was sacred, “its practical result, for the woman, was solitude” (p. xv). The narrative sustains this dramatic, tragic mood. Compton paints his subjects with an assortment of brushes. At times he uses the brightest colors and lineaments of faith in interpreting these women, while in other instances he employs mostly muted hues and shadows to achieve a dark and foreboding biographical landscape. The attempt at psychohistory too often fails for lack of materials, as the author regularly admits. Obviously, taking more wives meant spending less time with any one of them. On the other hand, the above complex of “desertion reactions” is not an inevitable result of the system. Joseph Smith’s situation is atypical, with complicating tensions of a new teaching and the necessity for secrecy, not to speak of his murder, which imposed grief and unforeseen adjustments on his wives. Moreover, the number of Joseph Smith’s sealings, as well as those of Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball, is not representative of Mormon polygamy in the nineteenth century. These leaders set examples of willingness to obey the principle, but Stanley Ivins found that 66.3 percent of Utah polygamists had two wives, and another 21.2 percent had
three wives.\textsuperscript{2} \textit{In Sacred Loneliness} goes beyond its narrative and anecdotal scope in making subjective judgments on plural marriage.

The Prologue

\textit{In Sacred Loneliness} opens with a survey chapter: “A Trajectory of Plurality: An Overview of Joseph Smith’s Wives.”\textsuperscript{3} If readers assume that Compton’s list of thirty-three “well-documented wives” (p. 1) is grossly exaggerated, they will be surprised to know that his enumeration is actually quite conservative. He singles out the lists of Fawn M. Brodie, D. Michael Quinn, and George D. Smith, which range from forty-three to forty-eight wives in total (see pp. 1, 632). The present reviewers agree with Compton that such numbers are inflated. We know that Joseph Smith had multiple wives. The relevant research questions are: “Precisely how many wives?” and “What was the nature of their marital relationship?” Compton addresses these core issues in his prologue. Historians must weigh what little reliable evidence exists and decide whether sufficient information is available to include a woman as one of the Prophet’s wives. Compton’s list of thirty-three wives is generally supported by one or two of the following sources: early church journals and records, personal writings or affidavits from the women themselves, and recollections of family or friends. Also, Compton adds a group of “possible wives” (pp. 8–9), who are not included with the thirty-three because solid evidence does not support their marriages to Joseph Smith.

Two decades ago, Danel Bachman was the first to set a higher standard for carefully testing evidence in this matter by producing a historically defensible list of Joseph Smith sealings during his lifetime.\textsuperscript{4} Though Compton acknowledges Bachman’s research in


\textsuperscript{3} This was originally published as “A Trajectory of Plurality: An Overview of Joseph Smith’s Thirty-Three Plural Wives,” \textit{Dialogue} 29/2 (1996): 1–38.

notes, he categorizes it as one of several general studies (see p. 632). Yet Bachman’s master’s thesis is a book-length, specialized study of the very area Compton is focusing on. That work is underplayed by classifying it with Richard Van Wagoner’s Dialogue article as “pioneering treatments” (p. 639). Bachman’s thesis remains a necessary reference on the subject of Joseph Smith’s wives; he felt reliable evidence existed for thirty-one wives. Our evaluation would reduce the number of proved sealings in Joseph Smith’s lifetime to twenty-nine. In our judgment, of the thirty-three wives listed by Compton, the present evidence is not adequate for the following four marriages to the Prophet: Lucinda Morgan Harris, Elizabeth Durfee, Sarah Cleveland, and Nancy Maria Winchester. Since three of these were married at the time of their supposed sealings to Joseph Smith, this more conservative approach modifies Compton’s view of “polyandry,” which we will address later in this review.

Method of Determining the Number of Wives

As mentioned, scholars disagree on the caliber of evidence required to determine the number of wives sealed to Joseph Smith. On one end of the research spectrum, Fawn Brodie listed forty-eight, while Compton brings the number down to thirty-three by demanding a higher level of verification. Compton points out that since Brodie’s investigation in the 1940s, “scholars have faulted her for relying on antagonistic sources that have since proven unreliable” (p. ix). Compton evaluated many of these “antagonistic sources,” asserting that “certain lists have proved to be reliable” (p. 1). But this reasoning is the Achilles heel of attempts at objectivity in enumerating the Prophet’s wives. A compilation of names does not reveal the source of its information. From the viewpoint of strict history, such lists are secondary, unverified documents, unless the author furnishes detail or annotation. Following are a few of these surveys or inventories of the wives of Joseph Smith, with comments on their use in Todd Compton’s work.

1. John C. Bennett left the church in 1842 and soon published his malicious exposé, The History of the Saints, which gives initials of seven women married to Joseph Smith, adding stars
equaling the remaining letters in their names.\textsuperscript{5} In \textit{Sacred Loneliness} concludes that this list has been “adequately substantiated” (p. 1). No discussion or explanation is given to support how Bennett’s grouping was “substantiated” by Compton or anyone else. This is not critical enough. Bennett names the sealers in two out of seven cases, but he may not have had dependable information on the other five women. This literary chameleon used names unreliably in some very tall tales of Nauvoo. T. B. H. Stenhouse, who sought negative but accurate information on the Prophet, gave the following caution: “There is, no doubt, much truth in Bennett’s book . . . but no statement that he makes can be received with confidence.”\textsuperscript{6} This means that historians should not depend only on that source. In fact, \textit{In Sacred Loneliness} does not always take Bennett’s list at face value; two women that appear there are named only as Joseph Smith’s “possible wives” (p. 8, nos. 3–4).

2. Assistant church historian Andrew Jenson later named twenty-seven women who were sealed to Joseph Smith while the Prophet was alive.\textsuperscript{7} Yet Jenson’s compilation itself is secondary, without information on why he included a given person. In a majority of cases Jenson gave the date of sealing, adding who performed it. But Jenson’s naming of a woman without particulars is really a research clue needing verification. His research was imperfect, for he failed to name several women where adequate evidence shows they were sealed to the Prophet.

3. In the case of a temple sealing to Joseph Smith after his death, most researchers would not consider that by itself evidence of a living marriage, in spite of the fact that most of these 1846 ordinations involved the Prophet’s living wives. Compton acknowledges the problematic nature of these “early posthumous marriages” (p. 8)—in several instances he does not use later sealings as proof of marriages to Joseph Smith during his lifetime (see

\textsuperscript{5} See John C. Bennett, \textit{The History of the Saints} (Boston: Leland & Whiting, 1842), 256.

\textsuperscript{6} T. B. H. Stenhouse, \textit{The Rocky Mountain Saints} (New York: Appleton, 1873), 184 n.

\textsuperscript{7} See Andrew Jenson, \textit{The Historical Record} (Salt Lake City: Jenson, 1887), 6:233–34.
p. 2). Other reasons are possible for these postmartyrdom sealings.

Wives Included on Inadequate Evidence

In the following cases, In Sacred Loneliness depends too heavily on some secondary compilations. The author is generally discriminating; for instance, he claims that his eight "possible wives" are “supported by limited, problematic, or contradictory evidence, sometimes only one attestation in a late source" (p. 2). The root of the problem here is the criterion of “only one.” Compton does not classify a woman as a wife of Joseph if she appears on only one of the above numbered lists, but he may do so if she appears on more than one. However, assembling several flawed diamonds does not produce a perfect stone. The appearance of a woman on more than one list should be verified by early records, by the woman herself, or at least by someone who had personal knowledge. This more careful standard results in a consistent method, and adequate validation is lacking in the case of the following four women.

Lucinda Morgan Harris. Compton’s claim that Lucinda was sealed to Joseph Smith is not based on impressive evidence. Compton says that Jenson furnishes a “sympathetic attestation,” though Jenson “gives no date for the marriage and his source is not specified” (p. 43). Compton then adds weak support by quoting Sarah Pratt, whose bitter quotations in late years were probably intensified by her interviewer, vitriolic anti-Mormon journalist W. Wyl. This reporter exposed what scandal he could find against Joseph Smith in Mormon Portraits or the Truth about Mormon Leaders, published in Salt Lake City in 1886 by the Tribune Press. In Wyl’s version, Sarah said that Lucinda Harris admitted she had been Joseph Smith’s “mistress” before the Nauvoo period (see p. 650). Compton acknowledges this statement is “antagonistic, third-hand, and late” (p. 650), but claims it carries weight if revised to fit the polygamy format. But such upgrading transforms a smear into a sanitized recollection. Without solid evidence, Lucinda Morgan Harris should not be considered a plural wife of Joseph Smith.
Elizabeth Durfee. Compton overargues the evidence for Mrs. Durfee (see p. 260). Yet his “many” sources boil down to two—her name abbreviated on Bennett’s list and an ambiguous statement attributed to Sarah Pratt by the hostile journalist Wyl. The remaining bits of Compton’s “strong case” are inferences. As mentioned, no one knows whether Bennett relied on knowledge or rumor, particularly when he provides a name without any supporting information on the supposed marriage. And assuming Sarah Pratt is accurately quoted, we are still in doubt about where she obtained her information. In Sacred Loneliness misleads the reader by claiming that “Sarah Pratt mentions that she heard a Mrs. Durfee in Salt Lake City profess to have been one of Smith’s wives” (p. 260). But this changes the actual report of Sarah’s comments on Mrs. Durfee: “I don’t think she was ever sealed to him, though it may have been the case after Joseph’s death. . . . At all events, she boasted here in Salt Lake of having been one of Joseph’s wives” (p. 701). So the document is not clear on whether Sarah heard Mrs. Durfee’s comments firsthand. Since Mrs. Durfee helped the Prophet in contacting prospective wives, her connection with teaching polygamy could easily evolve into an assumption of participation in the practice.

Sarah Cleveland. Compton supplies two reasons for naming Sarah Cleveland as a wife of Joseph Smith (see p. 277). First is her listing by Andrew Jenson without any supporting data—strangely, she appears at the end of his list. Second, Eliza Snow’s manuscript affidavit says she was married to the Prophet in the presence of Sarah Cleveland. This suggests to Compton that Sarah was involved with polygamy at that time. However, that is only a guess, since Eliza’s marriage to Joseph possibly took place in Mrs. Cleveland’s home only because Eliza was living there (see p. 714).

Nancy Maria Winchester. Nancy’s chapter is entitled “Outline of a Shadow,” which suggests how little is known about a possible sealing to the Prophet. Compton gives two lines of unsupported information (see p. 606). Nancy appears on Jenson’s list without additional data, except for an incorrect identification of her father. She is also named by Orson F. Whitney in a group of women Heber C. Kimball later married who had been Joseph Smith’s
wives. However, Elder Whitney’s list also includes Mary Houston and Sarah Scott, both of whom Compton considers as only “possible wives” (p. 8). Thus the author picks out Nancy Winchester as meeting historical standards but treats Whitney’s list as questionable in the case of these other women on that list. Compton claims a difference because Nancy is also named by Jenson, but no one knows where Whitney or Jenson got their information. The cumulative evidence argument for such marginal references does not meet historical guidelines: “These two witnesses, taken together, make a good case for Nancy as a plural spouse of Joseph” (p. 606). The logic is lacking—two tanks of ordinary gas do not produce a high-octane mix.

This survey of the above alleged marriages shows that the “solid list” of this book is not solid enough (p. 2). Thus in this review, four women discussed by Compton as wives of Joseph Smith are subtracted for insufficient evidence, which requires adjustment in some conclusions of his book. The table below will aid in the following discussion of categories and several specific marriages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status of Women at the Time They Were Sealed to Joseph Smith</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single with no prior marriage</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single and widowed</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married to a husband with good church standing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married to a disaffected or non-member husband</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Younger Wives—Two Biographical Corrections

In Sacred Loneliness does not stipulate the age of younger women sealed to Joseph Smith. Its base figure of thirty-three “well documented wives” is divided into three age groups. The youngest group is represented by those twenty and under, the middle group is twenty-one to thirty years of age, and the last

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compasses women thirty-one and older. However, the youngest group is described as follows: "Eleven (33 percent) were 14 to 20 when they married him" (p. 11). Despite the prior appearance of names and ages, that sentence gives the wrong impression, since age fourteen is a major exception. For reasons given above, we have removed Nancy Winchester from the list of wives. This subtraction means Compton’s list will have only one fourteen-year-old girl, Helen Mar Kimball, whom we will discuss shortly. Compton’s list has one woman sealed at sixteen, Fanny Alger, but we would revise that age to about eighteen, as discussed below. Compton’s tabulation is correct after this: three sealed at seventeen; evidently one at eighteen (Fanny Alger); three sealed at nineteen; and one sealed at twenty (see pp. 4, 6). Several times the book calls Melissa Lott “a teenage wife of the prophet,” which is unduly vague (p. 595). Melissa married him three months before her twentieth birthday. In nineteenth-century frontier America, many women married between the ages of sixteen and nineteen. Unlike many teenage mothers of today, these brides were generally trained in what their society knew of homemaking, caring for children, and other domestic responsibilities.

*In Sacred Loneliness* argues that Fanny Alger was sealed to Joseph Smith at sixteen, but that reasoning is open to question. Compton’s analysis of the sources regarding Fanny Alger is generally sound, but he takes Mosiah Hancock (born 1834) as virtually definitive in relating how the Prophet requested permission of Fanny’s parents through their relatives, the Hancock’s. The family tradition is no doubt correct in general circumstances of Fanny’s Kirtland sealing, a term which her parents and brother later used in Utah. But pressing Mosiah’s secondhand details for a date of 1833 is asking too much when better evidence suggests a later date. No direct information is currently available about when Joseph and Fanny were married, a fact Compton readily admits (see p. 25). But Benjamin Johnson was a young adult in Kirtland when he heard of Fanny’s relationship to the Prophet, and Benjamin’s recollections furnish the most reliable chronology available. A relative close to the Prophet told Benjamin that ancient polygamy would be restored. Johnson said this was “in 1835, in Kirtland,” and he continued: “There then lived with his family a neighbor’s daughter, Fanny Alger, a very nice and
comely young woman about my own age . . . and it was whispered even then that Joseph loved her.” Since Fanny moved out of the Smith home soon after the marriage, it evidently took place around 1835, the year when Fanny turned nineteen.

In Sacred Loneliness quotes Johnson on another significant issue but ignores his informed opinion. The book traces Fanny’s later marriage and life with Solomon Custer in Indiana, and his obituary reports that a universalist minister delivered his funeral sermon, which, according to Compton, is “the only clue to the family’s religion” (p. 41). But a husband’s final services may indicate his preference and have no bearing on the wife’s convictions. The bare facts of remarriage and a funeral sermon hardly sustain the view that Fanny’s later life “involved her rejection of Joseph Smith, plural marriage, and possibly Mormonism” (p. 26).

On the other hand, Benjamin Johnson had information that gave him a different understanding. He correctly spoke of Fanny’s marriage and life in Indiana and added: “Although she never left the state, she did not turn from the Church nor from her friendship with the Prophet while she lived” (quoted on p. 37). It is important to have the personal testimony of a knowledgeable Kirtland Saint. Johnson said: “Without a doubt in my mind, Fanny Alger was, at Kirtland, the Prophet’s first plural wife.”

This was the first step in applying the doctrine probably revealed during the 1831 revelatory translation of Genesis, as the opening of Doctrine and Covenants 132 suggests.

Though listed as fourteen at the time of her sealing to the Prophet, Helen Mar Kimball was nearly fifteen (see pp. 487, 499). She herself explains that her father took the initiative to arrange the marriage: “Having a great desire to be connected with the Prophet Joseph, he offered me to him; this I afterwards learned from the Prophet’s own mouth” (quoted on p. 498). Helen was approaching eligibility, and a vital social life was opening up with possible proposals. Since some young women married at sixteen,

9 Benjamin F. Johnson to George S. Gibbs, 1903, in E. Dale LeBaron, Benjamin Franklin Johnson, Friend to the Prophets (Provo, Utah: Grandin Book, 1997), 225. Quotations in this review are modernized in punctuation and spelling.
11 Ibid., 227.
Heber C. Kimball and the Prophet evidently arranged an early marriage to insure the desired personal and family relationships. However, Helen continued to live with her parents. Because Helen’s circumstances were exceptional, there is every reason not to assume a sexual dimension in her sealing to Joseph Smith. Compton considers the evidence on this question “ambiguous” (p. 14), but writes as though it is likely that Helen’s sealing to Joseph Smith included marital relations: “Helen Mar Kimball, a non-polyandrous wife, found her marriage to mean much more, on an earthly plane, than she had expected. . . . In Nauvoo-period theological terminology, there was some ambiguity in the terms ‘sealing’ and ‘marriage,’ and it is possible that some men and women did not grasp that ‘sealing’ also meant ‘marriage’ and therefore sexual relations” (p. 22). But such an inevitable connection between sealing and sexual relations is not at all proved—and Helen provides the following details of what was unexplained to her.

*In Sacred Loneliness* walks the reader through Helen’s crisis of accepting plural marriage, including the adjustment afterward. The question is adjusting to what? By concentrating mainly on Helen’s feelings of shock at a new way of life, Compton leaves it open to assume this was a sexual adjustment (see pp. 498–99), although he does not clearly specify that in the Helen Mar Kimball chapter. There all we learn is that “she initially had a different perception of the meaning of the marriage than the reality turned out to be” (p. 501). This conclusion rests on Helen’s autobiography for her descendants, which was specific about being “Bar’d out from social scenes by this thy destiny” (p. 500). Her cross was not a close relationship with Joseph Smith, but the elimination of laughing and dancing with her peers, who now accepted her with reservations. When Helen’s explicit complaint is understood, the second line of her poem on the sealing becomes clearer: “The step I now am taking’s for eternity alone” (quoted on p. 499). Helen clearly understood nothing would change for the present—she was sure she would be free for social life, and “no one need be the wiser” about the sealing (quoted on p. 499). She, her parents, and the Prophet counseled together before the marriage, and the parties to prospective Nauvoo marriages had far more practical sense than Compton accords them (see p. 22). If a
sexual relationship was expected, she would know that in advance. "Eternity alone" meant her prior understanding that her status would not be altered, either in social or sexual dimensions. Thus historian Stanley B. Kimball interpreted the phrase to mean that the marriage was "unconsummated."  

**Sexual Relations and Polyandry**

The above table shows that about one-fourth of Joseph's wives were married women, which Mormon historians have characterized as "polyandry" in a general sense. *In Sacred Loneliness*, however, uses the term specifically for a woman's marriage to more than one husband, with full physical intimacy. This is also the connotation of the standard definition: "having more than one husband or male mate at one time." However, polyandry applies to Joseph Smith in a more limited sense, for with one exception, there is no reliable information on sexual relations after his being sealed to a married woman. In these cases, we simply know that an eternal marriage to Joseph was performed with the continuation of the temporal marriage to an existing husband. By 1846, most of these husbands accepted the eternal sealing to the Prophet. Compton overinterprets the phrase *time and eternity*, which some married women said was used in their sealings to Joseph Smith. The sealings established an eternal relationship with the Prophet from that point, but *time* did not necessarily imply present marital relations with two men. A verbal argument to that effect lacks substance. Polyandry should indicate a category of Joseph's sealings to some married women, without implying simultaneous sexual partners.

In the discussion of Compton's prologue, we subtracted four wives for lack of documentation. Three of these were married women, which means that Joseph Smith was sealed to eight women with living husbands. *In Sacred Loneliness* debunks the idea that these marriages came about because husbands did not believe or were unworthy of a celestial sealing (see p. 16). But this reflects some tendency of the book toward either-or thinking, since

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individualized reasons for plurality probably operate in these married cases. These include two nonmember husbands, plus Presendia Huntington’s husband, Norman Buell, whose bitterness against the church is evident, even in Compton’s somewhat apologetic treatment. The author is confident that Windsor Lyon, husband of Sylvia Sessions, was in full fellowship at the time of her sealing to the Prophet in early 1842, but his evidence that Lyon was friendly to the Prophet does not establish faith and activity. Windsor was excommunicated in late 1842 and rebaptized in early 1846. His behavior and attitude causing excommunication no doubt preceded the official action. Many “unequally yoked” Mormon women have faith in an eternal relationship with a worthy husband, and several of the Prophet’s sealings to married women fit that situation.

That leaves four cases in which the Prophet married women whose husbands were faithful Mormons and remained so afterward. These marriages have been explained by various doctrinal speculations, which Compton surveys. Was there a spiritual basis for Joseph Smith’s selection of certain married women? That issue is virtually lost in the historical probings of this long study, though Compton touches on religious roots of polygamy in quoting the Prophet’s conversations with Mary Elizabeth Lightner: “Joseph said I was his before I came here” (quoted on pp. 19, 212). The published revelation on plural marriage records that certain women “have been given unto my servant Joseph” (D&C 132:52). After some chapters, readers may wonder, “Did God inspire or lead Joseph to be sealed to women who were already married?” The most direct response is “Yes.” As believing Latter-day Saints and research historians, we interpret Joseph Smith’s involvement with the introduction of plural (celestial) marriage as being firmly grounded in both moral and inspired eternal principles. This conclusion is based on a consistent picture in early documents, including the faithful lives and personal revelations of the first participants, and their remarkable perseverance in overcoming obstacles to accepting and living this celestial principle of marriage.

What is left to our imaginations, and Compton’s speculations, is the nature of these “polyandrous” marriages. Were these unions simply dynastic sealings—the practice of sealing women to
certain senior priesthood leaders for eternity only, with little or no temporal relationship—or were they relationships including intimacy and offspring? Compton points to about a half-dozen marriages to single women where physical intimacy is documented. But arguing parallels does not establish such relationships. There is a logical chasm between single and married sealings, and, for the latter, there is no responsible report of sexual intercourse except for Sylvia Sessions Lyon. In 1915, her daughter, Josephine Lyon Fisher, signed a statement that in 1882 Sylvia “told me that I was the daughter of the Prophet Joseph Smith, she having been sealed to the Prophet at the time that her husband Mr. Lyon was out of fellowship with the Church” (quoted on p. 183). The Fisher document is somewhat supported by Angus Cannon’s recollection of hearing that Patty Sessions said the Prophet fathered Sylvia’s child (see p. 637). Compton acknowledges Sylvia may have meant that her 1844 child was conceived during Windsor’s four years out of the church, from 1842 to 1846 (see p. 183). Though he thinks it “unlikely” that Sylvia denied her husband cohabitation during this period (p. 183), that is a serious possibility. This is implied in the family tradition of her daughter some three decades later.

Reliable evidence indicates that Joseph Smith fathered some children through his plural marriages with single women, but that evidence does not necessarily support intimacy with polyandrous wives. Compton’s own discussion of “Sexuality in Joseph Smith’s Plural Marriages” (pp. 12–15) is muddled. He generalizes without specifying which category (single, widowed, divorced, separated, married) of plural wives supposedly took part in this most private aspect of plural marriage. For example, Compton concludes this discussion: “Though it is possible that Joseph had some marriages in which there were no sexual relations, there is no explicit or convincing evidence for this. . . . And in a significant number of marriages, there is evidence for sexual relations” (p. 15). Which marriages? Compton does not specify or quantify or document his generalized conclusion that “in a significant number” of these plural marriages Joseph Smith had sexual contact with his partner. If by “significant” Compton implies that a majority of these marriages had what he terms the “sexual dimension,” his statement is not supported by the data he presents. But
Compton several times extrapolates with unwarranted confidence, as in the case of Zina Huntington Jacobs: “Nothing specific is known about sexuality in their marriage, though judging from Smith’s other marriages, sexuality was probably included” (p. 82). This is an example of many questionable conclusions in this book that are overly broad, nonspecific, or undocumented.

**Emma’s Knowledge of Joseph’s Marriages**

The Prophet’s confidential letter to the Whitneys in August 1842 has been conveniently available since Dean Jessee published a photocopy and transcription in 1984.\(^{14}\) The Prophet had been sealed to their daughter a month before, and he asked for a secret meeting “to get the fulness of my blessings sealed upon our heads, etc.” (quoted on p. 350). Here Compton accurately observes: “This is not just a meeting of husband and plural wife; it is a meeting with Sarah’s family, with a religious aspect” (p. 350). In the letter, Joseph Smith asked the Whitneys to be careful to visit him in exile only if they determined Emma was not coming that night: “But when she is not here, there is the most perfect safety” (quoted on p. 350). Obviously the Prophet sought the right atmosphere for the performance of sacred ceremonies. But as far as keeping the visit secret, Compton jumps to a conclusion: “Clearly, Emma does not know of the marriage to Sarah Ann, so Joseph must meet Sarah only when there is no risk of his first wife finding out” (p. 350). Compton is not the first in drawing this conclusion that ignores other possibilities. Emma was frequently angry when Joseph had contact with wives she knew about. This August 1842 letter simply shows that Joseph sought to avoid conflict, without giving any definite insight into whether Emma knew of his recent sealing to Sarah Ann.

In a sweeping statement Compton gives his overview on this theme: Emma’s “anger was probably aggravated when her husband married without informing her, which he apparently generally did” (p. 388). How do we know this? Since information on Emma’s consent is missing for most of Joseph Smith’s wives, those making generalizations are guessing. To repeat, Emma’s

\(^{14}\) See *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, ed. Dean C. Jessee (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984), 539–42.
anger after a sealing may logically arise from disclosure at the outset rather than later discovery. In *Sacred Loneliness* discusses Emma’s ambivalent mid-1843 permissions for Joseph to marry the Partridge and Lawrence sisters. And the Prophet’s revelation of 12 July 1843 directly addresses the problem, recapitulating his interaction with Emma. It was of course given at the height of her resentment against plural marriage, and the Prophet was sealed to but few wives afterward. Thus the main plural marriage revelation is retrospective, and the Prophet dictated it in a form to communicate to Emma in terms of her own experience: “And let mine handmaid, Emma Smith, receive all those that have been given unto my servant Joseph” (D&C 132:52). “All those” does not suggest that she was aware of only a small number. Though the revelation goes on to mention taking “ten virgins” (D&C 132:62), that is probably a biblical symbol (see Matthew 25:1), not the number of marriages the couple had discussed by July 1843. This revelation closes by explaining the Prophet’s obligation to seek Emma’s permission, explaining she would not have a veto on God’s commands to Joseph, who was required to establish the principle even if she rebelled against it (see D&C 132:64–65). This suggests prior attempts on the part of the Prophet to gain Emma’s approval and the requirement that he proceed on occasion without it. From the point of view of divine foreknowledge, Joseph was martyred one year from this revelation. If he had waited indefinitely for Emma’s full conversion, plural marriage would not have been instituted during his lifetime.

Since Joseph explained his Kirtland relationship with Fanny Alger to the Missouri High Council, those mid-1830s circumstances were public enough that Emma had necessarily discussed them with her husband.15 It was not until 1841 that we are aware of another plural wife being sealed to the Prophet, which fact tells us that there was an interim of waiting until—as he explained to Lorenzo Snow and others—he was commanded to proceed or be destroyed. Under this kind of pressure, the Prophet surely sought

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Emma’s consent in taking other wives. According to In Sacred Loneliness, “Emma was consistently implacable in her opposition to the ‘principle’” (p. 388). It would probably be more accurate to say that she alternately cooperated and rebelled, as Orson Pratt maintained.16 After the July 1843 crisis that produced Doctrine and Covenants 132, Clayton wrote a journal entry dated 19 October 1843 about a conversation with Joseph Smith, in which he claimed that, in a polygamy and temple-sealing context, Emma “was turned quite friendly and kind.”17 This was a month after Hyrum married Joseph to Melissa Lott in the presence of her parents, and Melissa understood this was done with Emma’s permission. In the transcript of Salt Lake City depositions in the 1892 Temple Lot Case, Melissa answered “Yes, sir,” when the lawyer asked if Emma gave her consent to Melissa’s marriage to Joseph. Asked who told her that Emma had given her consent, Melissa said, “My father and mother.” And asked whether they went to Emma for this consent, Melissa answered: “I don’t know that they went to her or she came there. I know they were both there at the time with Brother Joseph—father and mother—the whole of them, talking a good many times.”18

Compton thinks several items of evidence from the Snow family are “impressive”; they report that Emma consented to, or was present at, the marriage of Joseph and Eliza in mid-1842 (see pp. 714–15, 313). Other historical records, including some not mentioned here, indicate Joseph’s good faith in trying to persuade Emma that plural marriage was revealed of God, and evidence confirms Emma’s consent to a half-dozen wives. This much should make authors more cautious in claiming that the Prophet did not seek or gain Emma’s permission in the majority of unknown situations.

Melissa Lott Willes

The Temple Lot Case, just mentioned, was filed by the Reorganized Church in 1891 in an attempt to gain title to the Jackson

18 Temple Lot Case transcript of testimony, LDS Church Archives, 100.
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County site Joseph Smith had dedicated in 1831. One legal strategy was trying to prove the Reorganization was the successor church, continuing those doctrines taught by Joseph Smith, though that quest was illogical, partly because the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was not a party to the suit. Defendants were the Independence group known as the Church of Christ, who took formal testimony from a number of early Latter-day Saints in Salt Lake City. Three wives of Joseph Smith were called as witnesses, but Melissa Lott’s examination is not well handled by Compton’s book, which claims that “Melissa recalled the wedding vow: “You both mutually agree to be each other’s companion, husband and wife, observing the legal rights belonging to this condition; that is, keeping yourselves wholly for each other, and from all others, during your lives’” (pp. 597–98). In Sacred Loneliness fails to note that these words were put in Melissa’s mouth on cross-examination and are taken from the 1835 article on marriage that continued to be published in the RLDS Doctrine and Covenants.

The problem here arises from two different versions of trial testimony—the full transcripts plus a voluminous but ragged synopsis subtitled Complainant’s Abstract of Pleading and Evidence, which inaccurately suggests that Melissa volunteered the above words as her marriage ceremony to Joseph.19 But the opposite is true in the full transcript, carbon copies of which are in the LDS Church Archives. Under aggressive interrogation, Melissa insisted a half-dozen times that she could not remember the ceremony, other than that it was “for time and all eternity.” Then the RLDS lawyer sought to gain her admission that her Nauvoo ceremony was identical to that first published in the Kirtland Doctrine and Covenants. Her answer was, “To the best of my recollection, I don’t think it was.” Persisting, he then read the above words that were still in the RLDS Doctrine and Covenants and obtained her weary response, “That is as I understand it, as nearly as I can remember.” But the witness obviously did not remember, as she had avowed repeatedly. When the RLDS attorney pressed the point that the 1835 language would restrict Joseph from marital

19 See The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Complainant, vs. The Church of Christ at Independence, Missouri (Lamoni, Iowa: Herald Publishing House, 1893), 314.
relations with Emma, Melissa answered: “I don’t think that he made any particular promise of that kind.” In spite of courtroom manipulation, Melissa reiterated that she did not remember the Nauvoo ceremony beyond its promise of time and eternity.

In 1885 Joseph III visited Melissa’s home in Lehi, Utah, to discuss her marriage to his father. In Sacred Loneliness shows how differently both parties later reported this conversation, (see pp. 594–95), but the book misses Melissa’s other important recollections about this conversation and her marriage. At the end of her testimony in the legal case, the RLDS attorney asked if she did not tell Joseph III that she was sealed to his father, but that the marriage was un Consummated. Her quick reaction: “I didn’t tell him anything of the kind. I told him the same as I have answered you here today.” But what was said in court on that subject was edited out of the printed Complainant’s Abstract. The full testimony, partially quoted in a Compton footnote, maintains that she cohabited with Joseph Smith “as his wife” in Room 1 of the Mansion House (p. 765), information relevant to judging whether Emma knew of this marriage. Yet In Sacred Loneliness gathers data on sexual relationships and should have added Melissa’s recorded testimony in the full transcript. She was asked whether she roomed with Joseph Smith at the Mansion House “more than once.” “Yes sir, and more than twice.” She was asked whether she roomed with Joseph Smith elsewhere “as his wife.” Referring to the farm outside of Nauvoo, she answered, “At my father’s house.” These are important, firsthand responses, contradicting Joseph III’s claim that Melissa answered “no” to his question about his father (see p. 595): “Did you ever live with him as his wife anywhere?” Her 1892 replies were sworn testimony taken down by a court stenographer.

The Partridge and Lawrence Sisters

Emma was at the peak of resentment against plural marriage in July and August of 1843, demanding about this time that Emily and Eliza Partridge leave the Mansion House, though she had earlier given permission for their marriages. From Emma’s view-

20 Temple Lot Case transcript of testimony, 108, also Complainant’s Abstract, 316.
point, there were several problems, including the proximity of young wives in the family residence that doubled as a hotel. Relying on Emily’s candid memoirs, Compton tells how the Partridge sisters were evicted and resettled elsewhere in Nauvoo. And as he suggests, the Clayton journal of 16 August indicates that Emma threatened divorce, which forced Joseph to agree to these sisters leaving the household (see p. 411). *In Sacred Loneliness* gives an ambiguous picture of what this meant to the Prophet, first saying that “Joseph seems to have agreed to separate from his two young wives” (p. 410). This fits Emily’s understanding, if it means they were to end a marriage for time in favor of one for eternity. She says that Emma “wanted us immediately divorced ... but we thought different. We looked upon the covenants we had made as sacred.”

Emily’s statements are informative and introspective, and she always treated her sealing to Joseph Smith as eternally binding (see p. 733). However, *In Sacred Loneliness* further concludes that Joseph “allowed the marriages to lapse” (p. 432). The author explains that Joseph shook hands with the sisters, granting that “the marriage is over” (p. 411). That statement, however, is doctrinally incorrect because nothing says the priesthood sealing was canceled.

The author reasons from Emily’s “Autobiography,” which tells how Emma confronted Joseph and these sisters: “She insisted that we should promise to break our covenants, that we had made before God. Joseph asked her if we made her the promises she required, if she would cease to trouble us, and not persist in our marrying some one else. She made the promise. Joseph came to us and shook hands with us, and the understanding was that all was ended between us” (quoted on p. 410). So the earthly marriage was suspended, but nothing was said or done to terminate the eternal sealing that had also taken place. Joseph was apparently protecting that—otherwise why would he ask Emma not to insist on the sisters “marrying some one else.”

Joseph’s intention in these conflicts is given in the 16 August 1843 Clayton journal entry, quoted and paraphrased by Compton (see pp. 411, 732), as the secretary reported the Prophet’s frank

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21 E. D. Young, “Incidents of the Life of a Mormon Girl,” typescript. in LDS Church Archives, 54.
conversation. Since Emma was unyielding, "he had to tell her he would relinquish all for her sake. She said she would give him E[mily] and E[liza] P[artridge], but he knew if he took them she would pitch on him and obtain a divorce and leave him. He, however, told me he should not relinquish anything."22 One could read this as ambivalence on the part of Joseph Smith, but he was a highly decisive person. He sincerely negotiated to keep Emma, for after her fierce rejection of the polygamy revelation of 12 July 1843, Clayton tells how they spent the next morning in expressing their feelings and working out "an agreement they had mutually entered into." In fact, Joseph showed his willingness to "relinquish all" for Emma, including his earthly relationship with the Partridge sisters. But as just discussed, he also asked Emma not to insist that they marry someone else. This furnishes the clue to consistency in the 16 August Clayton journal entry, ending with his intention, "he should not relinquish anything." This would be true for the life to come, since the sealings for eternity were still in force.

The Lawrence sisters continued to live in the Mansion House after the Partridge sisters moved to other Nauvoo homes. In Sacred Loneliness mentions several reliable documents indicating that Emma approved and was present when Maria and Sarah Lawrence were sealed to Joseph Smith (see pp. 743–44). So the author's tentative conclusion is puzzling: "It is entirely possible that she gave her permission for these marriages, as Emily asserts" (p. 475). The Lawrence family was converted in Canada and moved to Illinois before the father died, after which time Joseph Smith was appointed guardian of the children who had not reached legal majority. The Prophet managed the whole estate under court supervision. Ex-Mormon William Law gave exaggerated figures in later accusing Joseph Smith of mismanagement. However, author Compton recognizes that Gordon Madsen discovered new documents (see p. 475) and summarizes part of Madsen's 1996 Mormon History Association paper (see pp. 742–43). Madsen, a senior attorney and meticulous historian, gave expert interpretations on the meaning of the entries preserved in

22 Richard L. Anderson's notes from Clayton journal, also with slight modification in George Smith, ed., 117.
the Illinois probate records and in existing Joseph Smith account books. Compton accepts these new insights in his notes, but straddles the fence by using William Law’s incorrect version in the chapter that weaves the Lawrence estate in and out of the narrative. 

In Sacred Loneliness quotes Law’s interview on the subject, as printed in 1887 in the Salt Lake Daily Tribune (see pp. 742–43). Compton says the interview “contains some factual errors,” undervaluing Madsen’s paper, which showed that most of what Law said about the estate itself was incorrect. Law claimed that its assets were worth $8,000, and that Joseph charged $3,000 for boarding Maria and Sarah Lawrence (quoted on pp. 742–43). Compton correctly rounds off the actual inventory of assets, as recovered by Madsen in court records: “The inheritance was $3,831.54 . . . in a farm in Lima ($1,000) and promissory notes ($3,000)” (p. 743). However, Compton publicizes Law’s story that in 1845 Joseph’s estate “still owed the young women $5,000” (p. 478). Compton adds: “While this is too large a figure, there was apparently money due them” (p. 478). However, Madsen’s paper quoted the will, under which Maria and Sarah would share equal parts of the estate with several siblings, but the distribution was not due during the life of their widowed mother, who was entitled to her share of annual interest on the undivided assets. Compton does not report other important findings of Madsen. Between 1841 and early 1844, Joseph Smith charged nothing for boarding Maria and Sarah, nor did he bill the estate for management fees. Furthermore, in mid-1843, the probate court approved his accounts, including annual interest payments to the widow, as required by the will. Surprisingly, Compton seems to rely somewhat on Law’s claim of dishonesty: “Law blamed both Joseph and Emma for fraudulently taking possession of the Lawrence estate, but perhaps Emma was less to blame. Joseph may have already borrowed the funds while alive, and Emma may not have had the money to pay back after his death” (p. 478). However, at Joseph’s death, perhaps a third of the Lawrence assets were not in cash, but in unpaid accounts receivable. Gordon Madsen’s overall point was that the Prophet met his legal responsibilities in being entrusted with the Lawrence assets. There is no hint of fraud.
Problems in LDS Historical Background

Naturalistic Tendencies

In Sacred Loneliness occasionally suggests environmental influences, once in connection with the Prophet’s private view that at least some men and women made premortal covenants with each other. In this context, the book notes some similarities in Swedenborg’s views and in a vision of upstate New Yorker Erasmus Stone, who claimed to see male and female spirits seeking their counterparts (see pp. 20, 640). Because this doctrine of kindred spirits appears in the Finger Lakes region, Compton comes close to saying that Joseph Smith borrowed it there: “Perhaps the Mormon doctrine of the pre-existence derived in part from this influence” (p. 212). Yet when his sources are examined on this point, Erasmus Stone turns up near Syracuse, some 60 miles east of Joseph Smith’s Palmyra, and that minister is involved in a local movement in the mid-1830s, some years after the Prophet left the area. Many conservative Mormon historians tire of such shadow-chasing in much of Michael Quinn’s Early Mormonism and the Magic World View. When one cannot make direct connections, it is too easy to argue cultural borrowing. However, Compton’s western New York parallel is taken from a handful of Methodist perfectionists in a restricted neighborhood, and they used “spiritual wife” for the unique soul companion they sought for a more congenial marriage. Polygamy or polyandry was not their program, contrary to Compton’s indications. Without noting such significant differences, he writes that the concept of “spiritual wives” was “part of Joseph Smith’s Zeitgeist” (p. 21). But even if that intellectual apparition hovers a couple of counties away, we need particular evidence from Joseph Smith before assuming it crossed his threshold.

As far as faith in spiritual power is concerned, In Sacred Loneliness displays a spectrum, ranging from sympathetic description to psychological explanations and occasional veiled irony. After Helen Mar Kimball had married Horace Whitney, she reached the valley devastated in body and spirit, having lost her baby in a dif-

ficult childbirth. Her biographer gets high marks for letting her
tell of near-death and miraculous recovery. Yet his narrative is
cushioned by the reminder that “in the Kimball family sickness
was often interpreted as demonic attack” (pp. 509–10), as though
natural and supernatural cannot coexist. Believers in “signs fol-
lowing” (Mark 16:17–18) will be impressed by Helen’s incredi-
ble faith to gain the victory over evil spirits in a miraculous heal-
ing. But the reader, it seems, needs a tour guide: “Acceptance of
the demands and ideology of her community allowed Helen to
begin immediate convalescence” (p. 511).

Discovering Danites

The discussion of thirty-three women involves as well a discus-
sion of the men in their families, including participation of many
in the Mormon resistance in Missouri. Several are listed as Danites,
“like most Mormon men” (p. 259). The accuracy of that state-
ment depends on definition. The best early survey of that organi-
"zation came from ex-Mormon John Corrill, who attended some of
their meetings and in 1839 described their loose relationship with
the Missouri church during the previous year. He and others give
specifics on the Danites as a group of loyalists led by Sampson
Avard with secret oaths and military readiness to defend the
church against further persecution. They were organized in June
1838, and Corrill concludes: “This society increased, as near as I
could learn, to the number of three hundred.”24 In Sacred Lon-
eliness relies on Michael Quinn’s larger figure of about a thousand
Danites, based on the questionable affidavit of otherwise unknown
John N. Sapp, who claims he is a former Mormon and sworn
Danite. But this number exceeds the total force the Mormons
fielded at the final Far West siege. Taking Corrill’s informed
figure, Missouri specialist Alex Baugh shows that “the majority of
Mormon men” were not initiated into the secret organization.25
For instance, Brigham’s brother, Lorenzo D. Young attended
some Danite meetings and finally refused to take the oath of

24 John Corrill, A Brief History of the Church of Christ of Latter Day
Saints (St. Louis: Author, 1839), 32.
25 See Alexander L. Baugh, “A Call to Arms: The 1838 Mormon Defense
of Northern Missouri” (Ph.D. diss., Brigham Young University, 1996), 96–97.
On the other hand, Danite has a broader meaning, for the name finally evolved as a synonym for any Mormon soldier at the close of Missouri hostilities. Jessee and Whittaker highlighted the Albert P. Rockwood journal entry a week before Far West was occupied—units openly drilling were described as both “armies of Israel” and “Danites.” In Sacred Loneliness consistently uses the narrower, “oath-bound” definition, however, and describes Vinson Knight: “According to some sources, he was associated with the Mormon para-military forces, the Danites, and as a bishop received Danite plunder at ‘Diahmon’ which he divided among church members” (p. 367). The notes give court testimony of three eyewitnesses, who simply say Mormon squads brought in confiscated property to the bishop’s storehouse controlled by Knight. But none of them say Knight was a Danite, even though Quinn uses the same sources to place him on his list of known Danites. However, this is only the loose association that Quinn uses regularly in his historical work. It is disappointing to see Compton follow this method.

Authority of the Twelve in 1843–44

The Twelve returned from England in the summer of 1841 to be the second administrative body in the church, not limited to managing the mission fields. The official History of the Church gives the Prophet’s words at the 16 August 1841 conference just as they were published afterward in the church newspaper, the Times and Seasons: “The time had come when the Twelve should be called upon to stand in their place next to the First Presidency,

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and attend to . . . the business of the Church at the stakes."29 *In Sacred Loneliness* makes some comments at odds with this ongoing Nauvoo reality. William Marks was a Nauvoo stake president when the pretemple endowment group held one of their many meetings on 1 October 1843 and his wife was among some women then endowed.30 Compton comments: "It should be remembered that local stake leaders had more central authority than apostles at this time, which may explain why the apostles' wives were not found in this group" (p. 254). Besides the administrative inaccuracy, it should be noted that Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, and Willard Richards were with the First Presidency and President Marks when the original endowments were given the year before.31 And Hyrum Smith, Brigham, and Willard were sealed to their wives the day after the Prophet was sealed to Emma the previous spring.32 William Marks was given recognition in the pretemple ordinances, but his counselors were excluded, and the importance of the Twelve is apparent, even though endowments of their wives were at intervals, possibly as a matter of convenience in the gradual initiation of small groups.

*In Sacred Loneliness* further comments on the Twelve and stake authorities in connection with the Nauvoo high council meeting of 30 November 1844. On that date Josiah Ells, Hannah Ells's brother, was disfellowshipped for supporting Sidney Rigdon's claim to the presidency of the church. Referring to the presence and influence of John Taylor and Orson Hyde, the book comments: "It was a high council session and yet the apostles—technically a traveling high council—were present without

32 See the Prophet's journal as kept by Willard Richards, 28–29 May 1843, in Faulring, *An American Prophet's Record*, 381.
formal authority to be there. . . . The apostles were on the ascendent in the church, and the high council, even of the central stake, would gradually become less important” (pp. 539–40). As just indicated, the Twelve assisted the First Presidency in all affairs after mid-1841, and by the time of the martyrdom, the Nauvoo high council did little in church administration, being mainly a judicial body. As far as the authority of apostles to participate in high council meetings is concerned, the precedent was set in Kirtland and Missouri that Joseph Smith and other presidency members attended the high council at will and participated in decisions. Even in Nauvoo, where there was a continuous stake presidency, Hyrum Smith regularly attended and led out in high council sessions. On the afternoon of 8 August 1844, Brigham Young defined the authority of the Twelve, which was then accepted by an overwhelming majority of the assembled conference: “Do the Saints want the Twelve to stand as the head, the First Presidency of the Church and at the head of this kingdom in all the world?”

Hyde and Taylor were well within their presiding responsibilities to participate with the high council in general succession issues in Nauvoo. In fact, the most important item before the 30 November meeting was the influence former stake president Marks might have on the whole church by not supporting the Twelve, which differences were temporarily resolved in the council dialogue with him. The executive and financial direction of the Twelve was vigorous immediately after church approval in early August 1844 and by no means developed gradually, as claimed in the above comments.

The Fate of the Plural Wives of Joseph Smith

Some themes of Todd Compton’s book are sensationalized on the dust jacket. Eliza Snow and others would hardly accept the characterization that Joseph’s wives had to “forfeit their dreams of meeting and falling in love with a man of their choice.” The inside front cover adds maltreatment to catastrophe, as we learn of the Prophet’s wives after the martyrdom: “Most were claimed by

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33 Scott G. Kenney, ed., Wilford Woodruff’s Journal (Midvale, Utah: Signature Books, 1983), 2:439; compare the very similar wording in the minutes appearing in History of the Church, 7:240.
the twelve apostles, who fathered their children but proved unreliable as husbands, resulting in more than one divorce.” Here “one size fits all.” That simplistic explanation cuts through a complex saga involving multiple personalities and circumstances. In evaluating this cover comment, we find that fifteen of Joseph’s twenty-nine proved wives were later sealed to apostles. This figure of about 50% hardly conforms to the jacket description of “most wives.” Of this number, a few were sealed to apostles in Nauvoo but disregarded the relationship (e.g., Sylvia Sessions) or did not leave Nauvoo when sent for (e.g., Agnes Smith). But almost all the remaining living wives were supported in coming west, and were taken care of for life, unless they chose to live with relatives (e.g., Rhoda Richards, and Martha McBride part of the time) or with a husband for time (e.g., Mary Elizabeth Lightner). Eliza Partridge divorced Amasa Lyman because of his apostasy and excommunication. In retrospect, Brigham Young gets top marks for consistent support of Louisa Beaman, Zina Huntington, and Eliza Snow, and Heber Kimball the same for Sarah Ann Whitney, Lucy Walker, and Presendia Huntington, who often moved but was settled to her satisfaction. Concerning Sarah Lawrence, Heber supported her until she decided to leave.

The author influenced the tone of the dust jacket, since he claims his negative interpretation of Emily Partridge is the norm. She is “a classic example of the central pattern examined in this book” (p. 432). Yet mood is one of her problems, which Compton recognizes in her chapter and in other insightful material on the trials of pioneer women in fighting depression. In this regard, Emily is not the norm but the extreme, overwhelmed with discouragement one day and afterward relieved that she can cope. But it would take a second book on Brigham’s wives to determine whether data will sustain the author’s charge concerning Emily: “Brigham evidently viewed her as less than his own eternal wives and demanded that she support herself” (p. 432). But “evidently” here betrays selective evidence. At times Emily did not ask and then blamed Brigham for not being aware of her needs. Instead of showing neglect, Compton’s material exposes the innate stresses in the relationship of the pragmatic pioneer and the sensitive idealist. Brigham furnished major support when Emily lived in his homes, and he later deeded her a house. In Sacred
Loneliness prefers to keep Emily’s complaints in the record and claim she idealized the past in commending Brigham Young. However, intelligent Emily should be the best judge of that total relationship: “I believe President Young has done his whole duty towards Joseph Smith’s family. They have sometimes felt that their lot was hard, but no blame or censure rests upon him” (quoted on p. 423).

Those members of the Twelve who married Joseph Smith’s widows were partially motivated by love and loyalty to their leader. Independent Lucy Walker gave her understanding of Heber C. Kimball’s commitment: “The contract on the part of Mr. Kimball was that he would take care of me during my lifetime” (quoted on p. 467). Compton pictures Heber’s plural wives as living together in the early pioneering period, and afterward set up in their own households (see p. 468). Compton also includes Lucy Walker’s evaluation of Kimball as “a noble, whole-souled son of God . . . as capable of loving more than one woman as God himself is capable of loving all his creations” (quoted on p. 467). Lucy said that in Heber’s last conversation with her, he asked: “What can you tell Joseph when you meet him? Cannot you say that I have been kind to you as it was possible to be under the circumstances?” (quoted on p. 457).

Peripheral Comments on the Church

In Sacred Loneliness relates the conversion of Vinson Knight, first husband of Martha McBride, and quotes an 1835 letter testifying that the foundation of traditional religion is an “abomination” before God. Compton’s words follow: “For early Mormons, who were fleeing theological and ecclesiastical pluralism, there was no room for more than one true church in the pre-millennial latter days” (p. 366). In context, this is an example of “the judgmental, tactless fervor of the new convert” (p. 366). Though Compton makes an important point on tolerance, this sentence understates the restoration message, since church periodicals and missionary journals of the Joseph Smith period use similar descriptions. The author seems troubled by the concept of an organization with exclusive divine authority—early members accepted polygamy because they accepted “practically infallible,
authoritative prophets, especially Joseph Smith. This was the reason why missionaries could teach that only Latter-day Saint baptism was recognized by God” (p. 456). Is this the author’s own retreat to “theological and ecclesiastical pluralism”? As far as belief in “one true church” today, the first section of the Doctrine and Covenants and the Prophet’s first vision (see JS—H 1:18–20) are still basics.

In Sacred Loneliness at times pontificates from “our late-twentieth-century monogamous and feminist perspectives” (pp. 455–56). We are told that “the church has become increasingly less tolerant of women’s independent voices,” that “alternative voice” periodicals and organizations are “generally viewed with suspicion, if not hostility, by members of the exclusively male Mormon hierarchy” (p. 706). We fail to see the relevance of such opinions in a study of Joseph Smith and his plural wives. If we need to debate that issue, the fact is the church is cautious about all alternative voices, not only female alternative voices. The Mormon women’s movement in the nineteenth century was doctrinally in harmony with church leaders, as are most Mormon women today.

Conclusion

This large book of biographies of thirty-three women leaves a gap in meaning and interpretation, with about twenty-three pages of introductory explanation and six hundred pages of information and speculation about these individuals. Readers should be forewarned that In Sacred Loneliness avoids a detailed discussion of the deeply religious and moral principles undergirding the implementation of Mormon plural marriage. Compton’s presentation offers little that could be considered faithful or sympathetic understanding of the doctrinal foundations of the practice. The book’s negativism might be balanced by reading the scholarly article “Plural Marriage” in the Encyclopedia of Mormonism. The major flaw in Todd Compton’s work is the unjustified theorizing on what he calls “polyandry,” in practice using it in the traditional definition of a woman with full relations with multiple husbands. As the table and discussion above show, Joseph was sealed to twenty-one women who were unmarried or widowed.
Nearly all indications of sexual relations pertain to these marriages. The table and discussion also show that Joseph was sealed to eight women with an existing marriage. In one marriage, that of Sylvia Sessions Lyon, there was a pregnancy, which, according to family tradition, Sylvia related to the time when her husband "was out of fellowship with the Church" (p. 183). As stated in the above discussion on polyandry, even this is not shown to be a concurrent sexual relationship with two husbands. For the remaining seven sealings of Joseph to married women, there is no reliable evidence that these involved sexual relationships. With one known exception, we know only that the ceremony gave these married women the right to be joined to Joseph Smith in the next world. Sources simply do not show a "marital triangulation" in these cases.

*In Sacred Loneliness* is inconsistent in the standards of judgment applied to polyandry. For woman after woman in this book, the following statement or its equivalent is made: "Absolutely nothing is known of this marriage after the ceremony" (p. 465, regarding Lucy Walker). Good history is characterized by careful interpretation of reliable documents, together with disclosing what cannot be determined. But Compton reverses these responsible methods in discussing sexuality, particularly in regard to the eight sealings to women with living husbands. He begins by probing the relatively small number of statements on physical relations in all marriages. These add up to first-, second-, and thirdhand statements about some eight women, about a fourth of the Prophet’s polygamous wives (see pp. 12–13). This uneven mixture is then characterized as "a great deal of evidence that Joseph Smith had sexual relations with his wives" (p. 13). That judgment is next intensified without further information: "In conclusion, though it is possible that Joseph had some marriages in which there were no sexual relations, there is no explicit or convincing evidence for this (except, perhaps, in the cases of the older wives, judging from later Mormon polygamy)" (p. 15). Stripped of verbiage, this deduction moves in three steps: (1) About 28 percent of Joseph’s marriages had full physical dimensions; (2) Evidence for the part may be taken for the whole; (3) Therefore, sexual relations characterized most of his marriages. However, the middle span of this
bridge badly sags. *In Sacred Loneliness* does not have a factual basis for its conclusions regarding polyandry.

An undercurrent swirls through Compton's study: dissatisfaction with Joseph Smith's plural marriage revelation. Church leaders and plural wives were “given an impossible task” that they could not avoid because both groups “accepted him as an infallible prophet” (p. 456; compare pp. 22-23, 296). Since this overstated theology permeates the book, it is useful to glance at both sides of the coin as explained by the Prophet in a near-final discourse: “I never told you I was perfect; but there is no error in the revelations which I have taught.” Joseph bluntly told converts arriving at Nauvoo that he “was but a man,” and they could not expect perfection from him. This lack of public intimidation suggests private coercion was not the Prophet’s style, though Compton often sees this otherwise. Since Joseph told Emily Partridge the Lord had given her to him, “it was sacrilegious to doubt. It was the woman’s duty to comply with the fact that she was already Joseph’s possession” (p. 407). But this comment illustrates how sources can be overshadowed by the historical interpreter, who acknowledges that the Prophet was patient while Emily learned and adjusted. She is quoted: “[In] those few months I received a testimony of the words that Joseph would have said to me and their nature before they were told me, and being convinced I received them readily” (quoted on p. 407). Indeed, Compton observes that Emily was “like many of Joseph’s wives” in receiving “a conversion to the principle” (p. 407). It was not the Prophet’s supposed infallibility, but personal revelation through promptings and visions that induced the men and women around the Prophet to accept plural marriage. Many of their spiritual verifications are quoted by the author, whose industry and honesty are admirable in liberally presenting the words of these early Saints.

If we had the benefit of Joseph Smith’s explanation for each of his plural marriages, we would be in a better position to judge the motives and depth of his relationships but, since we do not, wisdom and prudence dictate that we withhold many judgments until we do. Biographers in this area are tempted to create

34 History of the Church, 6:366.
historical fiction, which purports to read minds and furnish all answers, but serious history cannot run ahead of responsible source materials. This collection of biographies is not a definitive study of Joseph Smith and plural marriage, or of the Prophet’s relationship with his plural wives. Yet, much to his credit, Todd Compton has done an amazing amount of research, and for that effort he should be commended. But in certain aspects of the author’s presentation—especially the speculative interpretation of data—we disagree with his rendition and find reason to caution unsuspecting readers.

In closing the chapter on Emily Partridge, the author writes an early epilogue, which rejects Joseph Smith’s “polygamy revelations” (p. 456). Though this marriage system was a noble failure, he reasons, Joseph Smith’s generation too blindly believed to be liberated: “If nineteenth-century Mormons had concluded that Smith had been wrong in what he taught was the crowning revelation of his life, they would have been left with a very different Mormonism than the faith they followed” (p. 456). Though Compton interprets Joseph Smith’s wives with tender concern, it is ironic that this advocate really believes in the futility, even stupidity, of their dedication to the Prophet’s calling. That generation could not face “polygamy’s impracticality and tragic consequences” (p. 456). Of course, the nineteenth century regularly gave women an unfair measure of hardships. Moreover, Mormon women at midcentury faced displacement and harsh pioneering, endured with difficulty by monogamous or plural wives. Compton unfortunately overemphasizes the “tragic ambiguity” that he found in the lives of the women sealed to Joseph Smith (p. xiii). But we need to be mindful that almost all of them remained believers in the Prophet’s mission, and most died as faithful Latter-day Saints. Several, as did Lucy Walker Kimball, explained their spiritual growth in response to polygamy’s challenges: “You learn self-control, self-denial; it brings out the noble traits of our fallen natures . . . and the lessons learned in a few years, are worth the experience of a lifetime” (quoted on p. 468).

We approach the doctrine of plural marriage (and Compton’s book) from our personal and professional perspectives as believers in the Prophet’s divinely appointed mission and his inspired revelations. We have a comforting assurance in our minds and
hearts that Joseph Smith told the truth about the first vision, Moroni’s appearances, and the restoration of priesthood through the coming of the apostles of Jesus Christ. Accordingly we find no reason to doubt his revelation on the plurality of worlds and how they are populated. There is breathtaking beauty in the concepts of eternal growth and celestial relationships. The Prophet Joseph Smith said similar things about his vision of the degrees of glory, and we deeply agree. Yet, strangely, that vision (D&C 76), given in early 1832, tried the faith of many early Saints who saw God’s justice as eroded by allowing eternal rewards in some measure for almost all. Brigham Young was one who struggled, and he put the doctrine on the shelf until he could understand it better, which he came to do: “I was not prepared to say that I believed it, and I had to wait. What did I do? I handed this over to the Lord in my feelings, and said I, ‘I will wait until the Spirit of God manifests to me, for or against.’ I did not judge the matter, I did not argue against it, not in the least. I never argued the least against anything Joseph proposed, but if I could not see or understand it, I handed it over to the Lord.”

We have learned from Todd Compton’s work but are disturbed by its dissonances. We advise readers of this book to consider all aspects of Joseph Smith’s life to determine for themselves whether he was a living prophet or a religious opportunist. Together we count our serious studies of Joseph Smith by many decades. Having examined virtually all extant manuscript sources documenting the life and teachings of Joseph Smith, we believe he was an honest and moral servant of God. His calling as the Prophet of the restoration is bolstered by the scriptural works he produced—the Book of Mormon, the revelatory revision of the Bible, modern revelations, the book of Abraham, as well as his teachings, and his dedicated ministry punctuated by persecution. Like many religious and moral heroes of history, he was targeted and slandered by the forces of evil. Those who knew Joseph best stood by him most firmly. We discern a purity of soul in the power of his discourses, as recorded by the Nauvoo scribes and in Latter-day Saint journals. We see his constant sacrifices for his

36 See ibid., 2:252–53.
people, including knowingly giving his life at the end to preserve Nauvoo from attack and plundering. Our minds and hearts testify that Joseph Smith is certainly a prophet sent from God.

Reviewed by Danel W. Bachman

**Prologue to the Study of Joseph Smith’s Marital Theology**

“There is never a proper ending to reasoning which proceeds on a false foundation.”

---Cicero

**Introduction**

The seemingly ever-fascinating subject of Joseph Smith and plural marriage has found its most recent book-length treatment in Todd Compton’s *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith*, published by Signature Books. Over 600 pages of this book include an introduction, a prologue, and thirty short biographical chapters dealing with the thirty-three women whom Compton accepts as legitimate plural wives of Joseph Smith. A list of abbreviations and bibliographies is followed by 143 pages

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1 I am grateful for the helpful suggestions of my friends Ken Godfrey and Alma Allred, who read drafts of this review and offered valuable suggestions. However, I alone am responsible for the views expressed herein.


3 He disagrees with some longer lists of alleged wives of the Prophet, notably that of Fawn Brodie. He bases his evaluation for accepting these women on primary and secondary source materials. This type of evaluation is not new; I examined this question in 1975 with very similar results. See Danel W. Bachman, “A Study of the Mormon Practice of Plural Marriage before the Death of Joseph Smith” (master’s thesis, Purdue University, 1975), 104–43.
of reference notes (pp. 628–771). Although the notes are extensive and demonstrate that the author has mined a remarkable amount of material for the book, they are very difficult for the reader to use because they are not given in standard scholarly format with numbers in the text that refer to footnotes or endnotes. Rather, the endnotes, not identified with numbers in the text, are grouped by chapter and refer to topics as they sequentially arise in the text. This system works, but in a very cumbersome and arduous way. Nevertheless, most issues of import for which one would like to examine the sources have been documented.4

The tone of the book is mild and scholarly. Though it comes to uncomplimentary conclusions about plural marriage, it does not have, in respect to Joseph Smith, the skeptical edge of Brodie or Newell and Avery, or the harsh and strident tone of an anti-Mormon.5 Nevertheless, Compton’s adverse evaluation of plural marriage may explain the negative tone of the title, the general direction of the book, and perhaps his choice of Signature Books as a publisher. While a general air of fairness permeates the book and its tone is not shrill, its overall impact is nevertheless critical.6

4 Compton is well aware of good footnote formatting. He was critical of FARMS for moving the footnotes to endnotes in their reproduction of several of Hugh Nibley’s works; see his review of Lehi in the Desert, The World of the Jaredites, There Were Jaredites; An Approach to the Book of Mormon; and Since Cumorah, by Hugh W. Nibley, Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1 (1989): 117–18. So one wonders why he made an even worse mistake with Signature’s publication of his volume.


6 Unfortunately, as might have been expected, critics of the church have already begun to latch on to Compton’s book in support of their opposition to Mormonism. For example, Jerald and Sandra Tanner praised it in the August 1998 issue of their Salt Lake City Messenger and are now selling it in their bookstore along with many anti-Mormon books, several of which come from Signature Press. Also, the Institute for Religious Research in Michigan is highly critical of Mormonism. Joel B. Groat has reviewed the book for IRR’s web site. In praise of this “balanced,” “calmly crafted,” and “thorough, well-documented work,” Groat notes that in the past this segment of Latter-day Saint history “too often has been characterized by either deliberate obfuscation or shameless sensationalism.” However, with Compton’s book, Groat thinks, “The result is that
It is evident from material cited below that for Compton plural marriage is an experiment rather than a divinely revealed principle. If one wonders what Compton really believes about Mormonism and its doctrine of revelation, this single self-characterization provided in a footnote may or may not be helpful:

"If one wonders what Compton really believes about Mormonism and its doctrine of revelation, this single self-characterization provided in a footnote may or may not be helpful:

Now those who would either vilify or glorify Smith's actions based on incomplete evidence are without excuse." While this comment may be interpreted as praise for Compton's thoroughness, one also wonders if it is not also implying that now critics may vilify Joseph Smith with more complete "evidence." This suspicion is not lessened by the analysis in the remainder of Groat's review. For example, of the thirty-three biographies in the book, Groat reviews only the most sensational stories that cast Joseph's character in a negative light. Thus the true value of the book for Groat is that "It also, and perhaps most importantly, provides the historical evidence whereby a religious leader's actions and his claims to be a prophet of God can be evaluated based on historical truth."

Joseph's motivations in engaging in plural marriage are at the heart of this for Groat. It is not surprising that he sees sexual desire leading the list. "If there is any aspect of Compton's work that may be less than satisfying," he writes, "it is the ease with which he attributes a chiefly sociological motivation to Joseph Smith's plural marriages and avoids raising the issue of sexual impropriety." What does Groat mean by "sociological motivation"? He is referring to Compton's notion of dynasticism. That is, in several instances Compton argues that Joseph selected plural wives from the families of church leaders or those to whom he was close in hopes of linking the families together dynastically in the leadership of the church and perhaps in future worlds. To read Groat, this is the primary motivation Compton attributes to Joseph, but here he has either greatly oversimplified Compton's analysis or simply misunderstands him. Moreover, Groat is also in error when he speaks of the concept of dynasticism as a "sociological" rather than a theological motivation. Compton clearly sees dynasticism as part of Joseph's theology.

But to continue with Groat's stress on Joseph's improper libidinous motivations, Groat observes, "Since it would be naive to ignore the nature of the human heart, the tendency of power to corrupt, and the all too common use of a position of authority for sexual advantage, can one be judged too severely for considering an alternate motivation?" And later, with almost a note of satisfaction, he comments, "While Compton never even suggests sexual impropriety on Joseph's part, perhaps it is enough that he provides sufficient documentation to enable the reader to draw his own conclusions." Clearly, although Groat would like to have stressed Joseph's alleged sexual improprieties more, the reader is left with little doubt about the conclusions he has drawn from Compton's book. See Joel B. Groat, "Sacrificing Time for Eternity," at www. irr.org/mit/sacredlron.html.
I am a practicing Mormon who considers himself believing but who rejects absolutist elements of the fundamentalist world view, e.g., the view of Joseph Smith as omniscient or morally perfect or receiving revelation unmixed with human and cultural limitations. However, I do accept non-absolutist incursions of the supernatural into human experience. (p. 629)

**Some Observations on Methodology**

Because of the numerous sources found in the notes, this tome appears to be thoroughly researched, and, indeed, the reader will be exposed to a great deal of interesting church history. Nonetheless, a number of knotty methodological issues beset the work and cast doubt on its thoroughness. Any historian has to deal with gaps in the records pertaining to his subject matter. In using incomplete and conflicting evidence, the historian is frequently forced to guess. A reasonable amount of responsible speculation is tolerated, indeed expected, because it often spawns additional dialogue and research. On the other hand, Compton engages in far too much guesswork far too frequently. He uses literally hundreds of speculative terms such as probably, perhaps, may have, might have, must have, undoubtedly, apparently, seems likely, or unlikely. The pervasive nature of this language and its effect is evident in the following excerpt about Agnes Moulton Coolbrith Smith, widow of Joseph’s brother Don Carlos, who is thought to have married Joseph early in 1842:

> Perhaps Emma did not yet believe the rumor, since her husband had only married approximately nine women

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7 This comment is puzzling. What “fundamentalists”? I do not know any well-informed Latter-day Saint who thinks that Joseph Smith was either omniscient or morally perfect. However, on several occasions in the book, Compton speaks of the early Saints as looking upon Joseph as “nearly, practically infallible” (see, for example, the quotation from page 455, cited on page 107 below. But that too is baffling in light of statements by Joseph and his contemporaries to the contrary.

8 One colleague at BYU said that if all this language were left out, the book would be a pamphlet. An exaggeration, to be sure, but it does demonstrate the very noticeable degree of historical guesswork in the book.
in Nauvoo by this time, and she might have known about only a few of them. The fact that the rumor was connected with her beloved, bereaved sister-in-law may have given her particular reason to be incensed. (p. 155, emphasis added)

Another example provides some humor about the way historians sometimes see and express things. The following excerpt from chapter 5 about Presendia Huntington, with the unique oxymoron in fact he probably, may be more an indication of a historian caught up in modern colloquialisms than of a malicious one.

Her marriage to Joseph Smith obviously had great religious meaning to her, yet she never lived with him as man and wife, and in fact he probably instructed her to continue living with her first husband after their marriage, as was the case with all of Smith’s polyandrous wives. (p. 143, emphasis added)

While most speculations of this sort are harmless, on occasion Compton draws conclusions based on his speculations. The result is dubious history. If the premises are in doubt to begin with, then conclusions based on them are extremely tenuous and may be misleading. While this may not be intentional, in matters of faith it can nonetheless be lethal to trusting but ill-informed readers or those not sophisticated in dealing with matters of historical evidence and rhetoric. In a number of instances Compton’s historical guesswork is crucial to the reliability of his analysis and conclusions.

For example, chapter 2 discusses George Harris’s role in the destruction of the Nauvoo Expositor. Compton explains that Harris presided over the 10 June city council meeting that decided the tabloid’s fate. He notes that Harris expressed his feelings that the press ought to be demolished and then concludes, “The council quickly agreed, passing a resolution that brought about the press’s destruction. Harris undoubtedly acted under Smith’s direction, so once again we find the phenomenon of a ‘first husband’ acting as an unmistakable Smith loyalist” (p. 51, emphasis added).
The discussion gives the impression that the council arrived at a rash decision, railroaded by Joseph Smith with Harris as his point man. However, the *History of the Church* indicates that Joseph Smith met with the city council for seven hours and thirty minutes discussing the issue. Minutes published both in the *Nauvoo Neighbor* newspaper and the *History of the Church* speak of the council checking the constitutions of both the United States and the state of Illinois as well as the Nauvoo Charter regarding freedom of the press. They also consulted Blackstone for legal precedents to determine the extent of their authority in such matters. Thus, while Joseph argued for abatement, the assertion that George Harris "undoubtedly" acted under Joseph's direction expresses an opinion, not a fact. It is one more example of Compton's frequently expressed view of the power which Joseph exerted over early Mormons. As for Harris—a first husband—acting as a firm loyalist, the point is muted and perhaps even moot when we learn that the decision to declare the *Nauvoo Expositor* a public nuisance and abate it was one vote shy of being unanimous. Following the day-long inquiry, only one of the city council that evening offered even mild resistance to the proposed action—and he was a non-Mormon.

Another example from the same chapter concerns Compton's speculations about possible tension between Lucinda Harris and Emma Smith. Compton explains:

In 1842 Harris continued to fill high ecclesiastical and civic callings, and on September 9 he was referred to as "President City Council at Nauvoo." In the same

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9 See *History of the Church*, 6:432.
11 See, for example, comments on pages 347, 349, 407, 408, 456, 463–64, and 496.
12 Councilor Warrington was a non-Mormon and argued for assessing fines before declaring the press a public nuisance. Later, when Joseph expressed sorrow at having a dissenting vote, Warrington said he was not against the proposition, but that he preferred not to act in haste.
year the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo received its genesis, but it is a striking fact that Lucinda’s name never shows up in the society’s minutes. Perhaps the explanation for this anomaly lies in the fact that Emma Smith was president of the society, and there may have been tension between Lucinda and Emma at this time. (p. 51, emphasis added)

No reason is given for the assertion that this is a “striking fact” nor for the conclusion that it is an “anomaly” that Lucinda did not attend Relief Society. Nonetheless, the statement is consistent with Compton’s thesis that conflict was inherent in plural marriage. But this supposition is a little too easy and convenient. In a more balanced approach the historian might ask if there may have been other reasons for Lucinda’s noninvolvement in the Relief Society, such as illness, disinterest, or preoccupation with other matters. After all, were all the women of Nauvoo involved in the Relief Society? If not, why is Lucinda’s absence any more of an “anomaly” than the absence of any other sister in the community?13 The choice of language gives this paragraph a subtle, suspicious tone, but Compton has read and written too much not to understand this. Certainly the perceptions of the reader may be colored by speculations and subtleties of this type. What is the reason for such language? It suggests to me that Compton myopically views his evidence through the lens of his thesis and fails to consider other possibilities. This is only one of many examples of this phenomenon that might be cited.

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13 The Relief Society, organized 17 March 1842, grew rapidly. In July 1842, 1,179 women were on the rolls, and the group was divided into fourths according to wards; however, society historians attribute a dwindling attendance in the summer of 1843 to premature organizational changes. By the society’s last meeting on 16 March 1844, 1,341 women were enrolled. Women were initially admitted by simple vote, but in June 1842, Joseph recommended the admittance process be by petition signed by two or three members in good standing. While the growth was rapid and the number large, it is questionable what percentage of the women of Nauvoo this enrollment represents. Moreover, the society met weekly on Thursdays at 10:00 A.M. This could not have been convenient for some women, especially those home with children. See Jill M. Derr et al., Women of the Covenant: The Story of the Relief Society (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 35, 37.
Speculative conclusions are not limited to historical issues alone. In the prologue and elsewhere they are an important element of his reconstruction and analysis of Joseph’s theology of marriage as well. For example, in the chapter on Mary Elizabeth Rollins, she is quoted as saying that Joseph told her she was his before she came here, that she was created for him in the pre-mortal life. Compton then concludes:

So we have the doctrine of spirits matched in the pre-existence, a concept that gives important insight into Smith’s practice of polyandry. It fits him into the context of the broader “spiritual wife” doctrine of the Burned-over District, in which spiritual affinities between a man and a woman took precedence over legal but nonsacral marriage. *Perhaps the Mormon doctrine of the pre-existence derived in part from this influence.* (p. 212, emphasis added)

The above illustrates Compton’s naturalistic conception of Mormon theology. Although Compton maintains he believes in divine revelation, his unique characterization of revelation mixed “with human and cultural limitations” apparently refers to the rather popular secular scholarly view that Mormonism’s fundamental doctrines were derived from prevalent influences in Joseph’s environment—thus hinting that the Latter-day Saint doctrine of the premortal life may have been adopted from the theology of the Burned-Over District to permit the practice of polyandry.

A final example of how conclusions are frequently based on guesswork comes from the chapter on Melissa Lott. Following the martyrdom, James Monroe, a Nauvoo school teacher, apparently sought to date Melissa, one of Joseph’s widows, but her father, Cornelius Lott, who ran Joseph’s farm, interfered. Compton concludes, consistent with his view of LDS practice, that “Melissa, as a Smith widow, was probably being reserved for marriage to an older, more prestigious church leader.” Two paragraphs later the speculative conclusion becomes fact as he writes, “The marriage to the older, prestigious church leader now took place. On February 8 Melissa was sealed to Joseph Smith ‘for eternity,’ with John Milton Bernhisel standing proxy, then was sealed to Bernhisel ‘for
time” (p. 599). This seems to be a rather obvious case of a situation in which Compton’s knowing the outcome ahead of time allows him to lead up to it with his own speculation as to why it turned out the way it did. However, a less narrow approach might be to ask, in the spirit of his own speculative methods, were there other possibilities?

Compton also relies heavily on generalization. He is fond of such words as typical or typically, usual, and often. While generalization is useful in historical writing, it is also fraught with potential pitfalls, such as the observation that, “Relatives of Smith’s plural wives were often awarded increased salvation after helping arrange the marriage” (pp. 123, emphasis added). Not only is the generalization debatable, but it is based on a questionable conception of Joseph’s theology, as will be discussed below.

Speculation and generalization are sometimes combined to give a particularly loose view of history, but one which conforms to his thesis, as illustrated in the following quotation about Patty Sessions.

On July 31 Patty wrote, “I have seen many a lonesome hours this week Mr Sessions has found some fault with me.” Conflicts with her husband, probably ignited by friction with the second wife, would cloud her trip west. As was typical of many “first wives,” she probably felt abandoned and betrayed when David spent time away from her with a younger, more attractive wife. (p. 187, emphasis added)

The Thesis

Todd Compton maintains that the purpose of his book is to provide biographies of the thirty-three women he accepts as plural wives of Joseph Smith, and that the Prophet himself is only a secondary figure in the work. In one sense this is true. The biographies cover an extensive amount of church history from the New York period on into the twentieth century, and it is fair to say that

14 See, e.g., pages 113 and 123 for examples.
15 Compton expressed this to me in a conversation the day following his appearance to autograph copies of his book at a Logan, Utah, bookstore.
Joseph Smith is not the focus of these chapters. Of course his plural marriages to each of these women are discussed, but in most instances little is provided about Joseph’s relationships with them beyond what has been known for the last twenty years or more.16 What is new here are the histories of the women themselves. In another sense, however, Joseph Smith is at the core of this book—theologically—and this is examined in greater detail below.

The thesis of the book articulated in the introduction concerns plural marriage generally. Compton first dismisses anti-Mormon polemicists who have consistently characterized plural marriage as pure evil. He also acknowledges that most Mormon polygamists “were generally sincere, intensely religious, often intelligent and able, and men and women of good will” (p. xiii.). “Nevertheless,” he writes,

my central thesis is that Mormon polygamy was characterized by a tragic ambiguity. On the one hand, it was more than secular, monogamous marriage—it was the new and everlasting covenant, having eternal significance, a restoration from the prophetic, patriarchal milieu of Abraham which gave the participant infinite dominion in the next life. On the other hand, day-to-day practical polygamous living, for many women, was less than monogamous marriage—it was a social system that simply did not work in nineteenth-century America. Polygamous wives often experienced what

was essentially acute neglect. Despite the husband's sincere efforts, he could only give a specific wife a fraction of his time and means. (p. xiii.)

Polygamous marriage, by modern monogamous standards, often does not seem like marriage at all. Instead, sometimes polygamous wives consciously steeled themselves to limit affection for their husbands, as a strategy for emotional survival during absences.

Thus the title of the book, *In Sacred Loneliness*. Often plural wives who experienced loneliness also reported feelings of depression, despair, anxiety, helplessness, abandonment, anger, psychosomatic symptoms, and low self-esteem. Certainly polygamous marriage was accepted by nineteenth-century Mormons as thoroughly sacred—it almost defined what was most holy to them—but its practical result, for the woman, was solitude. (pp. xiv–xv)

Thus for Compton "sacred loneliness" expands into a term with a much wider message than the simple denotative meaning of the words. It is used to describe the problems, pain, and trials that the widows of Joseph Smith experienced as a result of their involvement in the new marital system of Mormonism. Indeed, *In Sacred Loneliness* chronicles an amazing array of hardships and trauma these women endured—most of it having little to do directly with the Prophet—especially coping with death, which was well-nigh ubiquitous among them during the last sixty years of the nineteenth century. Most dealt with the death of loved ones—parents, siblings, spouses and children—repeatedly. The pity and

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17 One wonders if it is fair to evaluate Mormon polygamy in view of modern monogamous standards, such as they are. Though polygamy was considered aberrant by nineteenth-century American society, its defenders consistently argued that Latter-day Saints were acting more morally than their secular counterparts. Recent high public approval for Mr. Clinton despite his dalliances, and gloomy statements from President Hinckley about the state of modern marriage in his remarks in the April 1998 General Conference and to the women of the church in September 1998, reinforce the doubt about the appropriateness of the analogy. Indeed, the opposite comparison might be more accurate. Modern monogamous marriage, by early Mormon standards, often does not seem like marriage at all.
sorrow this arouses in the reader is almost overwhelming at times.
Was the practical result solitude? The frequency with which Compton refers to the widows of Joseph getting together during the exodus and early Utah period, in what are called “blessing meetings,” to bless and prophesy over each other, in part at least seems to suggest this generalization is too sweeping.

Compton also exhibits a slightly feminist bias in this book. Not only is his thesis of sacred loneliness not new or novel, but it too is borrowed from feminist approaches to sociology and history (see references on p. 630). It also surfaces in the frequency with which he refers to women acting as if they had the priesthood, particularly in giving blessings to the sick. Indeed, a close tabulation of the times he mentions this leads me to think that he included it in his text almost every time it showed up in his sources whether it was relevant to his storyline or not. Clearly, he does not want his readers to miss the point.

It is noteworthy, however, that Compton otherwise devotes very little time or space to the upbeat side of these women’s lives. Given the extensive resources surveyed in order to write these sketches, one wonders if there were so few times of happiness, peace, contentment, or prosperity that could have been written about at length. Although I am not in a position to contradict the thesis because I have not researched the lives of these women, I nonetheless have the impression that the harsh and painful side of their lives was intentionally emphasized. Frequently Compton helps intensify his thesis with speculative opinion, as in the previous quotation about Patty Sessions in which he observes, “she probably felt abandoned and betrayed when David spent time away from her with a younger, more attractive wife” (p. 187). After I read the book, I wondered if a study of a random sample of thirty-three pioneer women, monogamous or polygamous, which covered approximately the same time period as for the wives of Joseph, would reveal similar stories of hardship, suffering, and trial, simply because of the difficult nature of carving out a civilization in a harsh wilderness. I also wondered if many monogamous wives were equally “neglected” in pioneer Utah.

But something here is as important as selectively editing the biographies of these women, and that is the conclusion articulated late in the volume—consistent with the view expressed in the
introduction—to the effect that plural marriage “was a social system that simply did not work.” Plural marriage is judged to be a mistake because it produced these horrific trials, as an excerpt from the chapter on Eliza Maria Partridge shows. In Utah she became a plural wife of Amasa Lyman—though as Compton points out, Lyman was unable to provide for the wives he already had. He attributes this to pressure from the First Presidency to “marry many wives as an example for others.” In this, he asserts, “Brigham Young was merely following Joseph Smith’s theology of degree of exaltation by quantity of family” (p. 455). As a result Eliza suffered greatly, and Compton opines:

It is one of the great ironies of Mormon history that Smith, who set the polygamous movement in motion, never experienced it in practical terms. He was content to marry the teenaged women who lived in his home and then let them depart when Emma objected. [He is referring here to the Partridge sisters themselves.] And he was content to let his polyandrous wives live with their first husbands, so he never bore the responsibility of providing for them, financially or emotionally, on a day-to-day basis. He never witnessed the toll that practical polygamy would take on an Eliza Partridge, married to an apostle in the patriarchal order. (p. 455)

So Joseph Smith merely provided the theological rationale for the practice of plural marriage, but was not around to see its adverse practical consequences. Compton continues his conclusions with revealing insights into his own perceptions of the failure of plural marriage. Again he finds it “striking” that Eliza’s daughters experienced similar hardships, which for him “shows that the problems with plural marriage were systemic [and] not merely the result of a few extraordinarily insensitive men.” Moreover, looking at plural marriage from a contemporary “monogamous and feminist perspective,” he

wonders why Latter-day Saint leaders did not see more clearly the problematic nature of such relationships

18 For comments on this doctrine, see pages 124–25 below.
and retreat from them. In fact, the opposite happened. . . . If they accepted him as an infallible prophet, and if they wanted full exaltation, they had no recourse but to marry many plural wives. Their devotion to Joseph the seer outweighed their experience of polygamy’s impracticality and tragic consequences for women, which many men probably did not even recognize. . . . If nineteenth-century Mormons had concluded that Smith had been wrong in what he taught was the crowning revelation of his life, they would have been left with a very different Mormonism than the faith they followed. Neither Mormon men nor women were willing to jettison that much of their religion.

It is useless to judge nineteenth-century Mormons by late twentieth-century standards. Both men and women were given an impossible task and failed at it. (pp. 455–56, emphasis added)

Though these observations are couched in a historical analysis of the nineteenth-century mindset, they nonetheless show that for Compton plural marriage was a mistake—a failed practice that should have been jettisoned. Questions naturally arise as to whether his conclusions were derived from his research or were the result of a priori assumptions. Did his presuppositions shape the study as he sought evidence to validate them? The latter would explain what appears to be the selective nature of his work.

**Problems with the Prologue?**

However, for me the most problematic portion of the book does not reside in the biographical chapters on the wives of Joseph Smith. Rather, it lies in the introduction and prologue. Without a doubt, that which will disturb Latter-day Saints the most is the statement on pages 15 and 16 that eleven of the thirty-three wives of Joseph Smith (or 33 percent) were polyandrous, that is, married to two men, and that none of them divorced their first husbands. While all continued to live with their first husbands subsequent to
their marriage to Joseph Smith, a number of these women apparently cohabited with him. 19

In searching for possible explanations of this unusual situation, Compton sets aside most of the standard reasons heretofore given by informed Mormons. Last to be shelved is the notion that most, if not all, of these women were married to nonmembers or inactive Mormons, or in some way had unhappy marriages. Of the eleven husbands, Compton tells us, only three were nonmembers. Most of the other first husbands were faithful and some were even prominent church members; of these only Norman Buell was disaffected. For Compton, this suggests that these men, including the nonmembers, knew of and consented to their wives’ plural marriages to Joseph Smith.

Compton’s explanation for Joseph’s involvement in polyandry is theological. I also think that this is ultimately where we will find the answers to this issue; however, his approach is riddled with difficulties and creates more problems than it solves. His analysis of Joseph’s theology to account for polyandry is neither thorough nor sophisticated and leaves the reader unsatisfied. Two concerns are paramount. The first relates to the sources of his theological reconstructions that are attributed to Joseph Smith. Second, considerable evidence can be mounted to show that Compton has over- or misinterpreted many of these sources.

19 I suspect Joel Groat’s brief statement about the prologue may not be entirely typical of Mormonism’s critics because he overlooks the issue of polyandry. He calls the prologue “excellent” and says that it contains,

an overview summary of Joseph’s polygamy which briefly covers the timing of Joseph’s marriages, the issue of how many women he married, their ages and Joseph’s sexual involvement with them. Compton also addresses the marital status of these women and possible motives behind Joseph’s plural relationships. The highlight of the prologue, however, is a six-page chart listing Joseph’s plural wives. It contains the date of each marriage, their marital status prior to marrying Smith (11 already married to other men), the age at which they married Smith, and a short summary of their later lives.

So it puzzles me that Groat misses the fact that nearly 40 percent of the prologue (nine of twenty-three pages) is devoted to a discussion of polyandry and the theology that justified its practice. Moreover, what Groat characterizes as “possible motives behind Joseph’s plural wives,” Compton sees as theology. It permeates much of the prologue. Groat gives no notice of this in his review; see Groat, “Sacrificing Time for Eternity.”
In considering Compton’s re-creation of Joseph Smith’s theology of marriage, it is important to note at the outset that we presently have much more historical data about the practice than we do about the theology of plural marriage—even with sections 131 and 132 of the Doctrine and Covenants. Over the past two and a half decades we have accrued a considerable, though still inadequate, amount of historical information about Joseph Smith and the origins of plural marriage, his involvement in it, and its practice up to 1890 and beyond. We have a good idea of whom Joseph married, their ages, the dates of their marriages, some of the details of those relationships, and a growing understanding of the historical environment in which these things transpired. By contrast, Compton is left to construct a theological rationale for the practice of polyandry from a handful of statements made by men and women who often gave secondhand accounts of what Joseph Smith or others taught.

Let us consider the sources Compton uses to define the theology of plural marriage and that he believes explain why Joseph Smith would allow some plural wives to engage in polyandry. Compton produces a hodgepodge theology from quotations and memoirs of church leaders, secondary and tertiary figures in church history, disaffected Mormons, and even an anti-Mormon. The primary contributors are John D. Lee, Brigham Young, Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner, William Hall, William Smith, Orson Pratt, Benjamin F. Johnson, Helen Fisher, and Jedediah M. Grant (see pp. 17–23 and associated notes). It is important to note that the statements of these people are scavenged from the five decades following the martyrdom; some are very late memoirs. Unfortunately, Compton fails to provide an adequate evaluation of these reminiscences as a thorough historian should. Therefore, when these oral traditions are added to the canonical statements, reconstructing the theology of plural marriage—and especially polyandry—is not greatly facilitated; rather, in Compton’s hands it is hindered.

Compton is not ignorant of these problems; however, he is not inhibited by such concerns. He writes, “Whatever the uncertainties in documenting this aspect of Latter-day Saint practice, there is a clearly discernible outline of ideology in the historical record that explains the development and rationale for the practice of Smith’s
polyandry" (p. 22). The following is his brief reconstruction of that theology.

Gentile (i.e., non-Mormon) marriages were "illegal," of no eternal value or even earthly validity; marriages authorized by the Mormon priesthood and prophets took precedence. Sometimes these sacred marriages were felt to fulfill pre-mortal linkings and so justified a sacred marriage superimposed over a secular one. Mormonism's intensely hierarchical nature allowed a man with the highest earthly authority—a Joseph Smith or Brigham Young—to request the wives of men holding lesser Mormon priesthood, or no priesthood. The authority of the prophet would allow him to promise higher exaltation to those involved in the triangle, both the wife and her first husband. (pp. 22–23)

Compton too easily dismisses the "uncertainties in documenting" this theology and gets too quickly to the "clearly discernible outline of ideology" he finds in the historical record. By ignoring the uncertainties, he has reconstructed the doctrines incorrectly. Unfortunately, conclusions based on dubious premises lead to Compton's misunderstanding of the doctrine and the practice, which in turn also misleads his readers. These are not insignificant concerns, as will be shown below. Even if Compton's sources accurately report things as they were taught or understood, the reminiscences may be incomplete in content as well as context. Moreover, how can we be sure that his outline, taken together, represents a theological whole as Joseph Smith understood it? We may simply have a patchwork that seems like a "discernible outline of ideology" to Compton, but which may not really be so. To demonstrate the point, in the following section I will reproduce the quotations from which Compton derives his outline, with his analysis and conclusions, followed by some observations of my own.

Compton's first point is that

Smith regarded marriages performed without Mormon priesthood authority as invalid (see D&C
132:7), just as he regarded baptisms performed without Mormon priesthood authority as invalid. Thus all couples in Nauvoo who accepted Mormonism were suddenly unmarried, granted Joseph’s absolutist, exclusivist claims to divine authority. (p. 17)

Subsequently Compton will say, “Here we have the doctrine that previous marriages are of no effect, ‘illegal,’ in Orson Pratt’s words” (p. 18). He cites three sources for this doctrine. The first comes from John D. Lee:

About the same time the doctrine of “sealing” for an eternal state was introduced, and the Saints were given to understand that their marriage relations with each other were not valid. That those who had solemnized the rites of matrimony had no authority of God to do so. That the true priesthood was taken from the earth with the death of the Apostles . . . They were married to each other only by their own covenants, and that if their marriage relations had not been productive of blessings and peace, and they felt it oppressive to remain together, they were at liberty to make their own choice, as much as if they had not been married. That it was a sin for people to live together, and raise or beget children in alienation from each other. There should be an affinity between each other, not a lustful one, as that can never cement that love and affection that should exist between a man and his wife. (p. 17, quoting John D. Lee, Mormonism Unveiled, 146)

Compton then observes, “This is a radical, almost utopian rejection of civil, secular, sectarian, non-Mormon marriage. Civil marriage was even a ‘sin,’ unless a higher ‘affinity’ ‘cemented’ spouses together” (p. 17).

The second quotation comes from Brigham Young, who in an 1861 speech postulates two circumstances in which a man may be released from his marriage without a formal divorce.

If a woman can find a man holding the keys of the priesthood with higher power and authority than her husband, and he is disposed to take her he can do so,
otherwise she has got to remain where she is. . . . there is no need for a bill of divorcement.

. . . To recapitulate. First if a man forfeits [sic] his covenants with a wife, or wives, becoming unfaithful to his God, and his priesthood, that wife or wives are free from him without a bill of divorcement. (p. 17, quoting Brigham Young, speech at the tabernacle 8 October 1861)

Finally, in a footnote he cites the following from Orson Pratt:

As all the ordinances of the gospel Administered by the world since the Aposticy of the Church was illegal, in like manner was the marriage Cerimony illegal. (pp. 639–640, quoting a statement by Orson Pratt in the journal of Wilford Woodruff, 15 August 1846)

Joseph Smith understood and taught that marriage is a religious ordinance that must be performed by the proper priesthood authority in order to be recognized and accepted in heaven. The knowledge that civil marriages were not valid in the eyes of God in eternity did not mean, however, that Joseph considered every civil marriage meaningless, or a sin, or illegal in some religious sense. The issue that Compton raises here goes beyond what Joseph taught and practiced. It is true that, in an instance which I documented in 1975, Lydia Bailey, who left an abusive husband, was permitted to remarry in Kirtland without having a divorce from him.20 And in Nauvoo one can find several cases where people with bad marriages, such as women who joined the church in England and immigrated to the United States without their husbands, were later permitted to remarry without securing a divorce from the husband who remained in England.21

This limited practice is understandable in view of Joseph’s belief that he was God’s prophet and his position allowed him to perform marriages as a religious ordinance or to set aside previous civil marriages. It appears that in the few instances where the

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original marriages were performed prior to one's acceptance of the gospel but subsequently went bad, Joseph felt they could be abrogated for practical reasons if the candidates wanted to marry someone else.

But Compton goes way too far in saying, "Thus all couples in Nauvoo who accepted Mormonism were suddenly unmarried, granted Joseph's absolutist, exclusivist claims to divine authority." There is no evidence, to my knowledge, of a wholesale rejection of civil marriage on the part of Joseph, either theologically or practically. The practice of remarriage without a prior divorce seems to have been implemented on a case-by-case basis. The majority of the civil marriages of faithful Saints were left intact. At the same time Joseph taught the Saints that they must be married again by the proper authority in the proper manner in order for that marriage to be eternal (see D&C 132:7). This was to be done in special temple sealing ordinances. In a discourse of 8 April 1844, Hyrum Smith explained his understanding of this principle.

I read, that what God joins together let no man put asunder[.] I see magistrates and priests in the world, but not one who is empowered to join together by the authority of God. Nor yet have I seen any priest that dare say that he has the authority of God, there is not a sectarian Priest in Christendom that dare say he has the authority by direct revelation from God. When I look at the seal of the new Covenant, & reflect that all the old covenants made by the authority of man are only made to be in force during the natural life and end there I rejoice that what is done by the Lord has an endless duration. No marriage is valid in the morn of the resurrection unless the marriage covenant be sealed on earth by one having the keys and power from the

Evidence showing that the Saints did not reject civil marriage in any wholesale way is in Lyndon W. Cook's compilation of just over four hundred civil marriages performed in Nauvoo between the years 1839 and 1845. See his Nauvoo Deaths and Marriages, 1839–1845 (Orem, Utah: Grandin Book, 1994), 89–114.
Almighty God to seal on earth as it shall be bound in heaven.\(^{23}\)

Compton has created a false impression of the views of Joseph Smith about civil marriages, and his analysis is only marginally helpful in understanding the polyandrous nature of eleven of his marriages.

Now on to several questions about Compton’s use and interpretation of the John D. Lee citation. First, Lee is making a distinction, which Compton overlooks, between marriages of the Saints and gentiles. Did not Joseph distinguish between the knowledge and therefore the responsibility of the Saints regarding proper marriage and that of uninformed and therefore less responsible gentiles? Second, Lee’s statement seems to permit Saints who understand these things to divorce or make other choices as if they weren’t married. Does this necessarily apply to all civil marriages outside the church? Third, the context of this quotation is considerably different than Compton’s interpretation allows. Lee said,

They were married to each other only by their own covenants, and that if their marriage relations had not been productive of blessings and peace, and they felt it oppressive to remain together, they were at liberty to make their own choice, as much as if they had not been married. That it was a sin for people to live together, and raise or beget children in alienation from each other. There should be an affinity between each other, not a lustful one, as that can never cement that love and affection that should exist between a man and his wife.

(p. 17)

This seems consistent with the position explained above that when Joseph granted someone the privilege to marry a second spouse without a divorce from the first, the marriage was not only

\(^{23}\) Hyrum Smith, discourse of 8 April 1844, original manuscripts in the Minutes Collection in the LDS Church Archives, Salt Lake City. Two manuscript copies are extant. The one followed here is in the handwriting of Jonathan Grimshaw, which appears to be the earliest of the two as evidenced by its obvious rough-draft nature.
a bad one but usually involved a separation because the member lived in a church center while the nonmember did not. For all we know, this may have been considered sufficient evidence that the marriage was not highly valued by either partner.

These ideas also seem consistent with the first of Brigham’s statements. That is, if a man “forfeits his covenants with a wife,” she then is free from him without a divorce. The second citation from Brigham seems to place the responsibility for the initial decision about remaining with her first husband on the woman. Nothing is said by Brigham or discussed by Compton about such questions as, What if the first husband doesn’t consent? Is the second marriage then not permitted? If not, doesn’t that implicitly recognize in some degree the validity of the civil marriage? Or, can the husband seek a divorce? If so, under what circumstances? Clearly, here is an excellent example of having more historical data than we have theological understanding.

Another question Compton does not raise about the Brigham Young quotations relates to the 1861 date of this statement, because he implies that what Joseph did in the 1840s is reflected in what Brigham said in 1861. This may or may not be true, but it is not sufficient to pass it off as certain simply because Brigham once said that all his doctrine came from Joseph Smith. Although that may also be true, a greater degree of certainty of the relationship between the two is demanded if Brigham’s statement is to be considered an authoritative explanation of Joseph’s conduct. Further, even if we assume that Brigham’s doctrine originated with the Prophet Joseph, must we not also raise again the question about the completeness of his exposition of that theology in 1861? The statement leaves me with the sense that Brigham knew and understood more than this citation reveals. It has an air of incompleteness about it, as suggested by the questions mentioned above. It is easy to present the Young, Lee, and Pratt statements together, because they seem related, and to think we have an adequate, if not complete, story, sufficient to explain what Joseph Smith was thinking and doing. I am less confident that we can do that than Compton is.

“Another doctrine that apparently served as underpinning for Smith’s polyandry,” he writes, “was his doctrine of a pre-existence” (p. 19). He begins with Mary Lightner, who said,
“Joseph said I was his, before I came here. He said all the Devils in Hell should never get me from him” (p. 19, quoting Mary Elizabeth Lightner, “Statement,” 8 Feb. 1902). Elsewhere she wrote that Smith told her he had been commanded to marry her, “or suffer condemnation—for I [Mary] was created for him before the foundation of the Earth was laid” (p. 19, quoting Mary Elizabeth Lightner, Autobiography). Compton now elaborates with a further interpretation of John D. Lee’s statement: “John D. Lee wrote that a spiritual ‘affinity’ took precedence over secular ceremonies. Perhaps Joseph Smith also felt, as the Brigham Young statement suggests, that men with higher priesthood had a greater aptitude for spiritual affinity” (p. 19). The “discernible outline” of Joseph’s theology is further expanded when Compton writes, “According to an early, though antagonistic, eyewitness source, William Hall, the doctrine of ‘kindred spirits’ was found in Nauvoo polyandry. According to this report, Smith taught that ‘all real marriages were made in heaven before the birth of the parties,’ which coincides neatly with Lightner” (p. 19, quoting Hall, The Abominations of Mormonism, 12–13). And finally, Compton garners “at least one early ‘friendly’” reference for the doctrine of kindred spirits in the person of Joseph’s brother William, who said in 1845, “But the fullness of her salvation cannot be made perfect until her companion is with her and those who are of his Kingdom, for the kindred spirits are gathered up and are united in the Celestial Kingdom of one” (p. 19, quoting patriarchal blessing by William Smith, 16 July 1845 at Nauvoo, on Mary Ann Peterson, “sitting as proxy for Ann B. Peterson, deceased”).

Compton doesn’t explain why the doctrine of premortal life “apparently served as an underpinning for Smith’s polyandry.” Apparently he believes that the four sources cited establish the relationship. But do they? Has he interpreted them correctly? To

24 This statement was made sixty years after the event. Yet Compton makes no allowance for, nor evaluation of, this fact as it may relate to the reliability of the memoir. However, he does make the case that in Utah she had been alone and felt slighted by church leaders. One must, therefore, at least entertain the possibility that at this point in her life perhaps Mary was trying to recover a modicum of status and importance as she spoke to students at the Brigham Young Academy.
begin with, I disagree with Compton's interpretation of the Lightner statement. He wrote,

Apparently, if Smith had a spiritual intuition that he was linked to a woman, he asserted that she had been sealed to him in the pre-existence, even though she was legally married to another man. But, as we have seen, he taught that civil marriages performed without the priesthood sealing power were not valid, even at times sinful. Therefore, the link in the pre-existence would take immediate priority over a marriage performed by invalid, secular or 'sectarian,' authority in this life. (p. 19.)

He softens her "I was his, before I came here" to "spiritual intuition," which is considerably less definite, but more in harmony with the hypothesis he is formulating. Elsewhere we learn, and Compton cites the fact, that Joseph claimed it had been revealed to him who his plural wives should be. Could that be what Joseph means here? Is it possible that revelation enlightened him about premortal covenants between God, himself, and these women? But Compton doesn't entertain these or other possibilities. Instead, his substitution of "intuition" will serve him well when he gets to the "affinity" and "kindred spirit" doctrines later in the analysis. Thus Compton's slippery theology allows him to slide Joseph easily into the ideological camp of others in and around the Burned-Over District of New York, with their doctrine of spiritual wifery (see pp. 20–21). His analysis also implies that such statements made by Joseph Smith are really used to manipulate subordinates.

At the same time we must ask if Lightner's statement justifies Compton's remark that "he asserted that she had been sealed to him in the pre-existence." Lightner does not use the word sealed in the statements he quotes, and his remark is therefore unwarranted and quite misleading. Does Mormonism have a doctrine of premortal sealing in the normal understanding of that term in the church? No, it does not. Thus we see that, when it suits his theological purposes, Compton softens some statements and makes others more explicit—neither practice being justifiable on the basis of the texts he is interpreting.
Similar objections may be raised about the use of John D. Lee's statement. He says that Lee "wrote that a spiritual 'affinity' took precedence over secular ceremonies" (p. 19). Actually Lee said no such thing. Lee's use of the word *affinity* is nothing like what we find in the doctrines of Immanuel Swedenborg or the Reverend Erasmus Stone, to which Compton leads us in this discussion. A careful consideration of the quotation shows that, in context, Lee's "affinity" refers to people already married and to the pure affection that should exist between them. Their affections were not to be based on lust because that could "never cement that love and affection that should exist between a man and his wife." Lee was not referring to some mystical affinity, intuition, or attraction between unmarried but "kindred spirits," which justified entering into a romantic relationship. Compton has misread his source here and, in so doing, has misapplied it as well.

The William Hall reference fares no better. Compton asserts that Hall said the doctrine of kindred spirits was part of Nauvoo polyandry and that Joseph taught "all real marriages were made in heaven" (p. 19). From this quotation it appears that the doctrine of "kindred spirits" is Hall's, although one senses he wants his audience to believe it is an accurate representation of Joseph's teaching. Compton might have assisted his readers better by inquiring whether Hall might have had some ulterior motive in so doing, since even Compton acknowledges that Hall is an antagonistic source. Might it not have served Hall's purposes to link Mormon plural marriage, especially polyandry, to the ill thought-of doctrines of spiritual wifery and free love?

The connection between Mormon plural marriage, "kindred spirits," and "spiritual wives" was not original with William Hall. The term *spiritual wives* or *spiritual wifery* may have originated from practices in Europe where, in part at least, it referred to marriages that were "to be for all time and eternity."25 Later in

25 E. Royston Pike, *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Religions* (New York: Meridian, 1958). 360. Pike says the term referred to "Women married or unmarried, who enter into a 'spiritual marriage' with 'soul-mates' of the opposite sex, sometimes when they have a lawful spouse already. Such spiritual marriages are supposed to be for all time and eternity—not merely, as are legal unions, until death does part. In the history of Christianity there have been many attempts to establish this form of extra-marital relationship, e.g. amongst the
America, the term was applied to the unique marital practices of nineteenth-century perfectionist groups in New England and New York. Some nonconformists taught that if unmarried men and women felt a spontaneous spiritual affinity toward each other they were justified in considering themselves spiritual husbands and wives. Such a relationship was allegedly purged of its sinfulness as the participants perfected their character and affections through repentance and regeneration. It is unclear if this idea initially allowed conjugal relationships, but the complex marriage system of John Humphrey Noyes's Oneida Community did.²⁶ The term *spiritual wifery* eventually widened to refer to several types of marital experiments in nineteenth-century America.²⁷

As far as the Latter-day Saints are concerned, the term began to be applied to them following the spring 1842 excommunication of pro-tem member of the First Presidency John C. Bennett for sexual immorality. He claimed special authorization from Joseph Smith for his extramarital relations. In letters written to the *Sangamo Journal* newspaper in Springfield, Illinois, in June and July 1842, Bennett charged the church with corruption. In his first letter, dated 27 June, he refers to "clandestine" and "secret" wives, but his second missive, published on 15 July, accuses Joseph Smith of attempting to persuade Sarah M. Pratt to become his spiritual wife. Bennett also said that in May 1842 Joseph threatened to make catfish bait of him if he did not sign an affidavit exonerating Joseph "from all participation whatever . . . in the *spiritual wife* doctrine."²⁸

Another apostate from the Nauvoo years, Joseph Jackson, was more detailed in his description of Mormon "spiritual wives." He said the doctrine was called the "spirit of Elijah" among the Mormons and "is kept a profound secret from the people at 


large," except from those privileged to "know the 'fullness of the kingdom.'" He claimed the doctrine came from Hosea 3 (passages relating to Solomon and David) and Matthew 18:18. From these sources he said,

The doctrine is derived that there is no harm in a man having more wives than one, provided his extra wives are married to him spiritually. A spiritual wife is a woman who, by revelation, is bound up to a man, in body, parts, and passions, both for this life and for all eternity; whereas the union of a carnal wife and her husband ceases at death. When the Scripture forbids a man from taking to himself more wives than one, Joe made it refer to carnal, and not spiritual wives.29

Obviously Bennett and Jackson want their readers to believe that plural marriages and associated doctrines were little more than rationalizations for sexual immorality. It appears that Compton has taken the bait.

Latter-day Saints, on the other hand, say that Bennett was the author of the doctrine and that it was nothing more than a rationalization for his adultery and prostitution.30 However, the term's association with plural marriage spawned considerable confusion among some in the church and the Brethren took some pains to clarify the issue. One John Taylor (not the third president of the church) left a late memoir in which he recalled hearing Hyrum Smith speak to a meeting of the high priests and seventy in the Seventy's Hall. Taylor said "he referred to spiritual wifery, and in strong and emphatic language denounced it and declared that there was no such doctrine believed in or taught by Joseph,

29 Joseph H. Jackson, A Narrative of the Adventures and Experiences of Joseph H. Jackson: Disclosing the Depths of Mormon Villainy Practiced in Nauvoo (Warsaw, Ill.: Printed for the publisher, 1846), 13–14. This pamphlet was originally published in 1844, but I have not been able to examine an original.

30 In October 1842, twelve men and nineteen women signed a denial of "John C. Bennett's 'secret wife system' . . . a disclosure of his own make." Eliza R. Snow, who signed this document, later remarked that it was aimed specifically at Bennett's system of prostitution. Eliza R. Snow to Joseph F. Smith, undated; original in the Joseph F. Smith Collection, LDS Church Archives, Salt Lake City.
himself, or any of the heads of the church; and authorized those present to so state; and to report to him if they heard any one so teaching such doctrine.”

Taylor may have been referring to the 8 April 1844 speech by Hyrum cited above. At the time the unauthorized sexual and marital practices of John C. Bennett and one Hiram Brown in Michigan, and perhaps others, apparently put Hyrum in a bellicose mood. That day he responded to “the 10,000 reports” daily coming in about the existence of the spiritual wife doctrine. “Almost every foolish man runs to me to inquire if such things are true, & how many spiritual wives a man may have,” he said. “I know nothing about it; what he might call a spiritual wife, I should not know anything about. In about half an hour after he has gone another begins to say: the Elders tell such & such things all over the country. I am authorized to tell you from henceforth,” he asserted, “that any man who comes in and tells you such damn fool doctrine to tell him to give up his license. None but a fool teaches such stuff,” he continued. “The devil himself is not such a fool, and every Elder who teaches such stuff ought to have his nose wrung.” In Hyrum’s view Mormon doctrines were “made to have an evil effect through the foolishness of some.”

Also contemporary with these events, Parley P. Pratt wrote in the newspaper The Prophet, which he was then editing, that “‘The Spiritual Wife Doctrine,’ of J. C. Bennett, and numerous other apostates, is as foreign from the real principles of


33 Hyrum Smith, discourse of 8 April 1844. Hyrum continued by explaining the church doctrine of eternal marriage, which was apparently being confused with the idea of “spiritual wifery.” He said:

I married me a wife, and I am the only man who has any right to her. We had five children, the covenant was made four [sic] our lives. She fell into the grave before God showed us his order. God has shown me that the covenant is dead, and had no more force, neither could I have her in the resurrection, but we should be as the angels—it troubled me. Prd. Joseph said you can have her sealed to you upon the same principles as you can be baptized for the dead. I enquired [sic] what can I do for any second wife? You can also make a covenant with her for eternity and have her sealed to you by the authority of the priesthood.
the church as the devil is from God." Orson F. Whitney also said Bennett imposed the "jargon" of spiritual wives on the church. "The phrase was his, but it was never the accepted title of the principle it pretended to describe. This and his other jargons . . . were invented to cover up his own iniquity, and to wreak revenge upon the Prophet."35

Later on, some outsiders and apostates accused the Mormons of having a "community of wives" or of "swapping wives" and used the term spiritual wifery to deprecate Mormonism. John C. Bennett made those same connections in 1842, and his purposes were as inimical to the church as were those of William Hall. It would appear that Hall conveniently appropriated Bennett's ideas for the same purpose—that is, to cast negative reflections on Joseph Smith and Mormonism. Compton has been too easily persuaded over to the side of Hall and Bennett by these loose linguistic links, and he would have us see it his way too. We must ask, is there any other compelling evidence that Joseph taught the doctrine of spiritual affinity that could be construed as spiritual wifery? If not, are we obligated to accept and believe it as Todd Compton has recounted it?

Last, some concerns about the William Smith citation remain. Most knowledgeable Mormon historians would not classify William Smith as friendly to Mormonism in 1845. He had his own problems, a number of them stemming from the doctrine of plural marriage. Therefore I question whether his statements really reflect Joseph's teachings. He too may have been persuaded by doctrines such as those of kindred spirits, free love, and spiritual wifery. In 1845 William was probably theologically closer to John C. Bennett than Joseph Smith in his thinking and acting in relationship to plural marriage.

The above analysis illustrates why Latter-day Saints should be especially uncomfortable with Compton's conclusion about how this doctrine played out in Mormonism: "But when the kindred spirits recognized each other, the 'illegal' marriages became of no effect from a religious, eternal perspective and the 'kindred' partners were free to marry each other" (p. 19). This is pure fantasy.

with little or no relationship to what really happened in the early church.

A third point of doctrine that Compton emphasizes is the proposal that the "extent" or number of wives a man has is related directly to his degree of salvation. Here are two statements from him:

However, the church president apparently believed that complete salvation (in Mormon terminology, exaltation, including the concept of deification) depended on the extent of a man’s family sealed to him in this life. (p. 10, emphasis in original)

Thus in Smith’s Nauvoo ideology, a fullness of salvation depended on the quantity of family members sealed to a person in this life. This puts the number of women Joseph married into an understandable context. (p. 11, emphasis in original)

He cites Benjamin F. Johnson, Joseph Fielding, and Helen Fisher Smith, respectively, as authority for the following ideas.

The First Command was to “Multiply” and the Prophet taught us that Dominion & powr in the great Future would be Comensurate with the no [number] of “Wives Childin & Friends” that we inheret here and that our great mission to earth was to Organize a Neculi [nucleus] of Heaven to take with us. To the increase of which there would be no end—(p. 10, quoting Benjamin F. Johnson to George F. Gibbs)

I understand that a Man,s Dominion will be as God,s is, over his own Creatures and the more numerous they greater his dominion. (p. 636, quoting Andrew F. Ehat, “‘They Might Have Known That He Was Not a Fallen Prophet’—The Nauvoo Journal of Joseph Fielding” BYU Studies 19/2 [1979]: 154)

I care not how many he gits now, the ice is broke as the old saing is, the more the greater glory. (p. 636,
quoting Helen Smith to Joseph F. Smith, 4 April 1857, as cited in Bates and Smith, *Lost Legacy*, 127)

Compton further suggests that the importance of numbers is reinforced by the frequent mention by Mormons of the promises of eternal posterity given to Abraham (see p. 10). Collectively these statements do not justify his assertion that the “extent” or “quantity” of wives and family determined whether one received a fulness of salvation. Nor is it obvious from them that this was the view of Joseph Smith. Compton does not clearly distinguish between being exalted in the celestial kingdom, which is commonly understood by Latter-day Saints to be the fulness of salvation, and the “extent” of one’s kingdom once it is reached. Numbers do not seem to be a relevant factor in the former, but may be in the latter.

Moreover, where does Johnson say “complete salvation” is dependent on the size of one’s family? Compton has misread his sources and made assumptions about their meaning, apparently based on later “sayings” of those who may also have misunderstood the differences pointed out here. Johnson’s point is not about salvation, but about “dominion and power,” and Joseph Fielding is helpful here when he says that his understanding was that “dominion” had reference to a man’s own “creatures” or family. The greater the number, the greater the dominion, but neither man equates dominion with salvation as does Compton.

The above analysis reveals Compton’s weakness as both historian and theologian. He is imprecise in analyzing texts. His historical analysis is elementary, as evidenced by his too quickly and easily linking ideas and statements from disparate authorities scattered over decades as if they all reflect the thinking and practice of Joseph Smith. All this produces a Swiss cheese exegesis of Mormon doctrine. To change metaphors, his use of flimsy theological timber results in the construction of a toothpick theological superstructure that is unable to bear the weight of explaining polyandry or in understanding the practice of plural marriage generally.

Compton’s discussion of polyandry in the prologue, though only obliquely characterized there as an experiment, nevertheless fits with his view of the experimental nature of plural marriage. He
says as much at least three times in the book. My emphasis is added to each of the following statements:

As we trace the trajectory of Smith’s marriages, we see that he apparently experimented with plural marriage in the 1830s in Ohio and Missouri. (p. 2)

The secret, experimental polygamy of Nauvoo would be replaced by the practical, open polygamy of a larger frontier family—by the time [Brigham] Young left Nauvoo he had married some forty-one women. (p. 61)

Because of the complexity of Mormon marriage practice and experimentation, there is a great deal of ambiguity concerning what constituted marriage in early Mormonism.36 (p. 632)

Thus for Compton the doctrines were not revealed, but are a creative conglomerate of the ideas prevalent in Joseph’s social and religious environment. He writes,

Stone’s story, like Joseph Smith’s, was the product of the Burned-over District in New York, where a Protestant revival atmosphere served as a seeding ground for a great deal of religious and marital experimentation. The “Spiritual Wives” polyandrous doctrine, so foreign to twentieth-century Mormons, was part of Joseph Smith’s Zeitgeist. (p. 21)

Conclusion

The above analysis is an attempt to show that the Compton book exhibits critical signs of weakness both as to its methodology and thesis. Methodologically, Compton is inadequate in several areas, including relying extensively on speculation and generalization, both of which are often based on opinion or on a natu-

36 The ambiguity lies more within the mind of Compton than of church members in either Nauvoo or Utah, as shown in Cook, Nauvoo Deaths and Marriages, previously mentioned.
ralistic view of the growth and development of Mormonism. At
critical points conclusions and generalizations rest on dubious
historical or theological premises and reasoning. In addition, I
have examined numerous examples from the prologue, showing
that Compton’s analysis of historical texts relating to the theology
of plural marriage is in error. Suspicion from this carries over into
his analysis of the lives of the women about whom he writes. Has
he made similar mistakes in analysis there?

Compton’s biases also seem to be at the core of his thesis that
plural marriage was harmful to the women involved. He conceives
of plural marriage as an experiment, born in the speculative theo-
logical environment of upstate New York. His collective biog-
ographical approach seeks to show that it was a fundamentally
flawed marital institution. His nearly exclusive emphasis on the
harsh and difficult lives he portrays raises the question as to
whether he has allowed his bias to filter out contrary positive
evidence.

The second element of Compton’s thesis is that early Mormon
marital ideology explains why Joseph Smith had so many wives,
some of whom were quite young, and a third of whom were al-
ready married and thus living in polyandry once they married
him. Most certainly it is necessary to understand Joseph’s theol-
ogy to understand his conduct, but my analysis of the prologue
clearly demonstrates that much more research into this area is re-
quired to give us an adequate picture of both Joseph’s doctrinal
understanding and his actions as plural marriage was introduced
into the church. Thus Todd Compton’s analysis turns out to be an
inadequate prologue to a study of the marital theology of Joseph
Smith.

Reviewed by Lindon J. Robison

Lucas and Woodworth’s *Working toward Zion* is a thoughtful analysis of united order principles and how we might apply them in the modern world. To begin, Lucas and Woodworth note important demographic changes occurring in the membership of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. If church membership in the past could be characterized as white, middle-class, English-speaking, in the future we may characterize them as non-English speaking, tan- or dark-skinned, and urban poor. The average incomes of new converts, especially in developing countries, stand in stark contrast to the incomes of members living in North America.

As we confront the very real gap between living conditions along the Wasatch Front with those of the new converts in the Philippines, Peru, and Paraguay, Lucas and Woodworth ask us to consider a significant issue facing our worldwide church. How do we respond to the Lord’s challenge to be equal in material and spiritual goods? Answering this question is a mighty task. I applaud Lucas and Woodworth for their honest effort to focus our attention on the trailhead if not the path to Zion, where “there are no poor among us.”

The scope of Lucas and Woodworth’s challenging theme requires them to paint with a broad brush. The wide range of topics they address includes the writings of Adam Smith, the Industrial Revolution, finance in today’s world, social Darwinian concepts, contrasts between capitalism, socialism, the united order, and the Mondragon cooperative. Such a breadth of topics comes at some sacrifice of depth. This tradeoff is inevitable, but I think a proper one for the task Lucas and Woodworth set out for themselves to accomplish.
Lucas and Woodworth compensate for their tradeoff between breadth and depth of coverage by selecting specific examples to illustrate the challenges of working toward Zion in a modern age. One of their case studies is a returned Philippine missionary forced by circumstances to face opportunities significantly different from those available to his white, English-speaking companions. Another of Lucas and Woodworth’s examples is a successful corporate executive who chooses Zion principles over the corporate bottom line and loses his employment as a result. These two examples and others describe the terrain likely to be traveled as we work our way to Zion.

The collection of topics contained in chapters 1 through 9 of *Working toward Zion* at first appears disconnected from those in chapters 10 through 21. In the first three chapters, Lucas and Woodworth set the stage for what follows. They review the changing demographics of the church and remind us of the challenge to build a Zion characterized by love, harmony, and peace in which the Lord’s children are one. In chapters 4 through 9, Lucas and Woodworth outline the economic history of ideas and choices that have produced our current economic conditions. Included in these chapters is a review of early experiences with united orders, the vehicle for implementing the law of consecration. In these early chapters Lucas and Woodworth pay particular attention to the patron saint of modern economics and capitalist economies, Adam Smith. They give evidence that Adam Smith never intended what is promoted in his name, an economy in which the unbridled pursuit of selfishness is encouraged without regard for the slow and the weak.

Lucas and Woodworth are careful to explain united order principles and contrast these with the principles of other economic systems. United order principles include care for the poor, equality, consecration, stewardship, storehouses, and moral motivation. These principles are clearly different from those that guide modern capitalism with its emphasis on efficiency, and principles of socialism that limit agency to promote equality.

Lucas and Woodworth point out that property is privately owned in the united order. Property is publicly held in socialism. Membership in united orders is voluntary, while, in socialism, the state can mandate. United orders are organized from the bottom
up with no conflict between workers and owners because they are the same. Socialism functions from the top down with the focus on the goals of the organization rather than the elevation of the individual. Finally, Lucas and Woodworth point out that neither socialism nor capitalism is based entirely on united order principles—but if a choice is mandatory, capitalism is preferred because it preserves the principle of stewardship.

Lucas and Woodworth’s extensive list of endnotes gives evidence of their careful preparation. In these endnotes are hidden some gems. For example, note 26 of chapter 18 provides a helpful summary of literature on the topic of worker motivation when workers are stimulated by opportunities to participate in decision-making and shared ownership.

I agree with an earlier reviewer of *Working toward Zion* that the heart of Lucas and Woodworth’s book is chapters 11 through 21.¹ In these chapters the authors suggest ways we individually might practice united order principles and they provide examples of the efforts of some who have already begun working toward Zion. Lucas and Woodworth ask us to consider if there are not some ways we could practice united order principles though we have not been formally called to do so.

Lucas and Woodworth could improve their text by including chapter summaries. In addition, there was some repetition in the text and sometimes I felt the book did not hang together as well as it might with more polishing. These concerns, however, are minor when compared to the overall contributions of *Working toward Zion* and should not discourage readers from examining this important work.

*Working toward Zion* is an uncomfortable book to read. There must be a spiritual law of inertia that suggests we are resistant to change if our current conditions are comfortable. So one’s first response to Lucas and Woodworth’s book is likely to be: aren’t the payments of tithes and fast offerings enough? The answer I read in *Working toward Zion* is, not if you can do more.


Reviewed by S. Kent Brown

At last, Latter-day Saints can hold in their hands a volume of responsible studies on the Dead Sea Scrolls that takes up issues of interest and importance to them. Heretofore, too many among us have suffered from the misleading information that has been disguised in the bright, seductive hues of sensationalism. By far the most important tour de force in the volume is the essay by Florentino García Martínez on the messianic hopes portrayed in the scrolls. García Martínez is a scholar of international repute. That he allowed his study to be published in this volume enhances its value far beyond a Latter-day Saint readership. In addition, the presence of his essay speaks volumes for the respect that he feels toward the other authors.

On the other hand, the essay of García Martínez does not fit the broad purposes of the volume, except perhaps in a very narrow sense. Of course, it serves to review thoroughly the passages that deal with or allude to messianic figures in the scrolls. In its solid and penetrating analysis lies its importance. The only evaluation on this subject by a Latter-day Saint that approaches García Martínez's study is the master's thesis written by Gaye Strathearn.¹ But Latter-day Saint readers must be aware that García Martínez begins with a different set of assumptions when he approaches a study of the Messiah. For him, everything has been a "development" from the Old Testament. That is, during the New Testament era when there was a lot of interest in a messiah, conceptions about the Messiah grew out of certain Old Testament passages that people examined for possible clues. For example, García Martínez sees Isaiah 53 and other chapters speaking of a "mysterious figure" (p. 118) who was appropriated by Christians

¹ See Gaye Strathearn, "A New Messianic Fragment (4Q521) from the Dead Sea Scrolls" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1992).
to point to Jesus, their suffering Messiah. In addition, the title *Son of Man* was merely “derived from Daniel 7” (p. 118). By contrast, the prophet Abinadi ties the prophesied person of Isaiah 53 directly with the coming Christ (Mosiah 14–15). And other scripture illumines *Son of Man* as a title of the coming Messiah that was known by revelation centuries before Jesus’ birth (Moses 7:24, 54–55, 59, 65). On one level, scholars such as García Martínez may use terms familiar to Latter-day Saints but mean something very different and think of their origin in very different ways.

Furthermore, the essay of García Martínez points up the ambiguity in the collection. Some authors clearly wrote for Latter-day Saints; others seemingly did so only as an afterthought. Does one detect an unsettled editorial stance here? Perhaps not. But the title of the volume leads one to believe that its pages bring forward issues of interest to Latter-day Saints. And that is not uniformly true. To be sure, one must not overstate or understate one’s perceptions. For heretofore control of the field has often been wrested by people who ran helter-skelter with the ball. In this volume, all the authors are persons of skill and demonstrated accomplishment, which brings a high degree of reassurance.

Andrew Skinner has taken on the largest of the subjects. True to the title of the volume, in his first paragraph Skinner mentions Latter-day Saints as persons who would be interested in the broad dimensions of the scrolls. And he is right. Keeping Latter-day Saints in mind, he offers his usually fine presentation in reviewing the complex story of the discovery of and early work on the scrolls. He also skillfully weaves a tapestry that reveals what can be said about the people who produced the scrolls, showing his abilities as a historian. But as he would be the first to admit, questions remain. For instance, one might ask why one should rely on James VanderKam for reconstructing events of the early days of scroll research in preference to Yigael Yadin and John Trever, who were principal participants. Further, the note that the Essene Gate of ancient Jerusalem was located on the northwest corner of the city has to be questioned (p. 30). Bargil Pixner showed the remains of the Essene Gate to me and others on the southwest corner of the ancient city, on the edge of the property belonging to the former
Institute of Holy Land Studies. Recent scholarship now apparently favors this spot.²

The excellent piece by Donald W. Parry, one of the editors of the volume, seems aimed at a non-LDS audience, as if it had originally been prepared for a professional conference. As is his custom, Parry has supported his observations very fittingly from reputable sources, an aspect of his general scholarship. I was particularly pleased to find Parry’s discussion of some aspects of the book of I Samuel as it appears in the scrolls (pp. 59–60, 62–64). Because he has been working on this text for a long time, he is in a position to make significant comment. Fortunately for us, he chose to do so. As one might expect, problems exist. Let me note three. First, it is not clear why the author draws attention to “our knowledge of the development of . . . Greek” (p. 48). Is there illuminating evidence that the Greek language developed on a path parallel to “the development of Hebrew [and] Aramaic”? Second, the usual caricature of the pseudepigrapha is adopted without challenge (p. 67 n. 17). One can show pseudonymous authorship rather readily for some ancient texts, but not all. Others, such as the Enoch texts, may go back to a very early source.³ Third, I was surprised to find reference to the name Elohim (pp. 62–64). Unlike Jehovah, which is properly a name, Elohim was used ancien tally as a title.⁴

The kind of treatment that one hopes for in this volume we find in the essay by Dana Pike. Like the others, he supports his conclusions properly from reliable sources, including those of Latter-day Saint writers. He takes up the topic of the plan of salvation by limiting his discussion to three important areas of doctrine: (a) premortal life, (b) purpose of life, and (c) postmortal life. One finds a nice balance throughout his discussion. When Pike explores comparisons, he finds significant differences between Latter-day Saint beliefs and those mirrored in the scrolls. Because these differences are not just minor, he answers the

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² See Anchor Bible Dictionary, s.v. “Essene Gate.”
question about possible LDS or Christian affinities to doctrines in the scrolls with a firm "no" (p. 74), as did Skinner (pp. 36–37).

The contribution by David Seely comes in for high praise. Here we see the work of a person who is familiar with Dead Sea Scroll materials and whose work serves as a helpful guide to the worship practices of the people at Qumran, insofar as one can reclaim them from the scrolls and other sources. Seely sensitively paints a landscape that the general reader can easily visualize. However, one misses the considerable analytical skills of the author in this piece, for the essay is chiefly descriptive. Further, the study provides no connections, except in the conclusion, to issues of interest to Latter-day Saints. Did the author initially write the essay for a different audience? Quite possibly. In another vein, one minor matter deserves comment. There is nothing to assist the reader in distinguishing between rabbinic and Pharisaical (p. 101), terms which at times mean the same thing and in other contexts do not.

The study by Stephen Ricks lays out some of the most important passages associated with matters featured in the Book of Mormon, bringing focus on a broad array of topics from covenant to priesthood. Hence, his effort matches the intent of the volume. But the study may be incomplete, perhaps rushed into the book before the subject had received Ricks’s full attention. A very gifted researcher, Ricks shows off only a few of his skills in this piece. To me, it appears that he hastily gathered and set out a few notable passages from the scrolls. Unfortunately, little of his usual careful analysis appears in these pages.

Scott Woodward’s research results have captured the imagination of students of the scrolls everywhere. Conference organizers have shrewdly scheduled his presentations into the last slots so that crowds stay until the end. That was certainly the case in the conference held at the BYU Jerusalem Center in April 1995, in which Woodward gave a presentation on the DNA analysis of the scrolls. His work is in a preliminary state, as his paper shows. The value will come in identifying the animal herds from which the skins came for the copying of sacred texts that were to be read on special occasions and in holy places. How so? Because there were religious laws that restricted what kinds of animal skins could be used for the texts read in the temple. Identifying the types of ani-
mal skins preferred by scribes at Qumran may tell researchers, among other things, whether these scribes followed the rules with which they were already familiar.

The length of the chapter on the Dead Sea Scrolls Database (seven pages) belies the huge amount of work that has gone into this superb product. Those who have been associated with its creation and development receive my heartiest congratulations. They deserve all the kudos that may come their way. There is only one drawback. Unless one is a subscriber to FARMS or has been involved in the production of the database program, one cannot purchase this most useful of computer programs without walking through an offset door as it were. Because of contractual obligations, BYU and FARMS cannot sell the software to an interested person unless the person first purchases a vastly inferior product from Oxford University Press that supposedly performs the same function, but does not. It is enough to make one cry.

Flaws in Production

As one might guess, there are a number of tiny flaws here and there that have more to do with the production of the book than anything else. Let me set out a few because they involve both photographs and text. First, the caption below the photograph of Cave 1 (p. 49) is inaccurate and, disappointingly, does not show the remains of the wall still standing at the entry. It was not “excavators” who made “larger openings” into the cave in modern times. The ancient people of the Dead Sea walled up the entry with stones (there are a lot of them lying about) and modern excavators have removed only parts of that original wall. Second, the photograph of the excavations at Qumran on page 187 is backward.

Third, throughout the volume one finds occasional misspellings and related mistakes. (1) For example, on page vii, line 2 from the bottom, the expression practices of the Jews should be altered to practices of Jews since not all Jews of the era were followers of the people of the Dead Sea. (2) On page 106, line 5 of the quotation, a space needs to be added: we should read “(founded) on” rather than “(founded)on . . . .” (4) On page 110, line 15, the reading should be “one of the texts reads” instead of “one of the text read.” (5) On page 133, line 3, the
word *Bible* needs a capital even if García Martínez may not have capitalized it in his original piece. (6) On page 186, nine lines from the bottom, the preposition *in* is missing.

Fourth, two articles feature the translation of García Martínez in passages excerpted from the scrolls. It is not clear why the articles did not draw from the second edition of this translation (1996), which had appeared before this volume went to press. Presumably, García Martínez had made a number of improvements in his translation between the two editions.

Notwithstanding the difficulties—some larger than others—I would judge the volume to be an important contribution to the understanding of Latter-day Saints who have become interested in the set of issues raised by the discovery and translation of the scrolls. I am particularly heartened by the number of young Latter-day Saint scholars who have prepared themselves to engage in serious work on this sort of enterprise. I highly recommend it to readers who are the least bit curious about the Dead Sea Scrolls.

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Reviewed by John A. Tvedtnes

**Jewish Seafaring and the Book of Mormon**

Raphael Patai, who died in 1996, was an eminent Jewish scholar who published more than 30 books and numerous articles in the United States and abroad. Born in Budapest, Hungary, he received the very first Ph.D. degree granted by the Hebrew University in Jerusalem in 1935 and went on to become renowned for his work in Jewish history, sociology, and folklore, as well as in biblical studies and Middle Eastern culture.

Patai’s name first came to my attention in 1968, when I purchased a book, *Hebrew Myths: The Book of Genesis*, which he coauthored with Robert Graves (1963). A decade later, I read his *The Arab Mind* (1973), which fascinated me because I had authored a paper on the subject¹ and had expanded it to a book-length manuscript that has not yet been submitted for publication.²

I was subsequently impressed by Patai’s book *The Hebrew Goddess* (1968), which, to a Latter-day Saint, suggests that at least


² Even before I had encountered Patai’s book, I had read another of the same title by a reporter, John Laffin, published by Cassell in 1975. Both books confirmed my observations about how Arabs think, though my own work on the subject goes more into the reasons that their system of logic differs from ours. I have long contended that we cannot assume that everyone else in the world sees things from our perspective and that the State Department would do well to try to see things through other eyes—in the case of the Middle East, through Arab eyes.
some Jews in ancient times believed God was married. It was this book that prompted me, in 1981, while serving as chair of the annual Symposium on the Archaeology of the Scriptures and Allied Fields, to invite Professor Patai to speak on the subject on the BYU campus in Provo. He expressed surprise that we should be interested in the topic, and when I explained the Latter-day Saint concepts of God and eternal marriage, he asked that I send him some materials, which I did. His presentation at the symposium was well received, and Patai later returned to Provo for other presentations.

In 1996, while researching material on medieval stories of books delivered by angels, I read another of Patai’s books, The Jewish Alchemists: A History and Source Book (1994). I was already aware of the story of thirteenth-century French alchemist Nicolas Flamel, who told how an angel had delivered to him a copper-bound book that he translated by divine inspiration, but I was interested in Patai’s note: “The idea that sacred texts were originally inscribed on metal tablets recurs in the Mormon belief that the Book of Mormon came down inscribed on gold tablets. Important documents were in fact inscribed on metal tablets and preserved in stone or marble boxes in Mesopotamia, Egypt, etc.”

The note referenced the article by LDS scholar H. Curtis Wright in a book published by FARMS and thanked one of the editors of that book, John M. Lundquist, for bringing this information to his attention. When I mentioned the reference to Lundquist, he told me that Patai had asked him to contribute an appendix to The Children of Noah: Jewish Seafaring in Ancient Times.

Patai’s latest book, sixty-three years in the making, had its origins in his 1935 dissertation (published in Hebrew in 1936), which he began to translate into English in 1947. Subsequent to receiving additional information on ancient seafaring from James

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3 Patai’s 1947 book, Man and Temple in Ancient Jewish Myth and Ritual (New York: Nelson, 1947) has, as far as I can determine, drawn little or no attention from LDS scholars.


Hornell, he realized that he would have to rewrite the English manuscript. But the work lay dormant until 1993, when he began writing in earnest. Patai credits John Lundquist for breaking the "writer's block" so that he was able to complete the volume. In the preface (pp. xii–xiii), he writes:

Then, in the late 1980s, I was asked by my friend Dr. John M. Lundquist, head of the Oriental Division of the New York Public Library, to contribute a paper to the Festschrift he, together with Dr. Stephen D. Ricks of Brigham Young University, planned to publish in honor of the eightieth birthday of Hugh W. Nibley. Thinking about what would be most suitable for a collection of essays in honor of an outstanding Mormon scholar, and knowing that according to the traditions of the Mormons their ancestors sailed to America from the Land of Israel about the time of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, I felt that a paper discussing some aspect of Jewish seafaring in ancient times would be most appropriate. So I went back to the seafaring typescript, and reworked the chapter that dealt with Rabbinic legal provisions related to seafaring.6 It was published in volume one of the Nibley Festschrift in 1990, and is reprinted here in a slightly changed format as Chapter 10.7

Aside from the misconception that Latter-day Saints are descended from Book of Mormon peoples, found in a few other non-LDS writings, one is impressed with Patai's openness on the subject of the Book of Mormon.

At the end of chapter 2, "Ships and Seafaring in the Bible," Patai refers back to his earlier mention about the first sailors going out beyond the Straits of Gilbraltar, then adds (see p. 21):

This daring feat of striking out into unknown waters is dwarfed by what the Mormon tradition attributes to a

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7 The chapter suggests that Jewish laws originally designed for land use were reinterpreted in application to sea and river travel and commerce.
group of Jews who lived in the days of King Zedekiah in Jerusalem, that is, in the early sixth century B.C.E.\(^8\) (the same time in which the Phocaean skippers were supposed to have sailed through the Strait of Gibraltar). According to Mormon tradition, their venture into unknown waters took place in the year 589 B.C.E., that is, three years before the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, and it was thanks to this extraordinary navigational feat that the American continent was populated by a remnant of biblical Israel.

In friendly response to my request, Dr. John M. Lundquist has summarized for this volume the Mormon version of the origins of the Mormons from sixth-century B.C.E. Palestine, at which period, according to the Mormon tradition, the biblical Hebrews had a highly developed seafaring trade (see appendix).\(^9\)

The appendix by Lundquist (pp. 171–75) is entitled “Biblical Seafaring and the Book of Mormon.” Indeed, the volume’s title page lists the author of the book as “Raphael Patai with Contributions by James Hornell and John M. Lundquist.” It seems somehow fitting that, amidst all the criticism leveled against the Book of Mormon by anti-Mormon “ministries,” a top Jewish scholar should write favorable comments about that volume of scripture, that was published by a major university press.

It was not clear whether some of the minor errors in Lundquist’s appendix were of his own making or if they came from the editors. Joseph Smith’s birth date is incorrectly given as “1804” instead of “1805” (p. 171). More serious, however, is the statement that Joseph Smith “received a box containing metal plates . . . from the Angel Moroni” (p. 171). While the plates and

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\(^8\) The Jewish practice is to use “B.C.E.” and “C.E.” rather than the Christian “B.C.” and “A.D.” Many non-Jewish scholars now use the former in their writings, in deference to their Jewish colleagues.

\(^9\) “Mormon tradition,” of course, says nothing about the extensive nature of Jewish seafaring in the sixth century B.C.E. Indeed, Nephi, who constructed the ship that brought his people to the New World, knew nothing about shipbuilding and had to learn from the Lord (see 1 Nephi 17:17–19; 18:1–2).
other artifacts had been concealed in a stone box, Joseph simply removed the plates therefrom and did not “receive” the large stone box. I was also perplexed to see Lundquist writing that Lehi’s group “turned eastward, traveling along the shores of the Indian Ocean, until finally, after eight years, they settled along the seashore” (p. 173). From Nehem to Wadi Sayq, which Lundquist accepts as the Nahom and Bountiful of the Book of Mormon, one does not travel “along the shores of the Indian Ocean.” While Lundquist discusses both the Nephite and Jaredite voyages to the New World, he does not cite the building of ships by Hagoth mentioned in Alma 63:5–8.

Patai’s book blends true stories with parables and traditions of seafaring, calling on the Old and New Testaments, rabbinic writings, and modern research. He deals with such diverse topics as ship construction, seafaring, maritime trade, sailing crews, harbors, naval warfare, and maritime law, especially as they relate to Jewish seafaring. The book is replete with details that were new to me, such as the fact that earth was carried aboard ship to provide soil for quick-growing vegetables and to provide a means to fulfill the requirement of Jewish law that the blood of sacrificed animals (in this case also brought on board) be covered with earth (see p. 67). Illustrations of ships prepared in ancient times supplement the text, and notes are relegated to the end of the book so both the average reader and the scholar can enjoy the reading.

During the course of my reading, I occasionally found myself asking why Patai had omitted this or that piece of information that I was aware of. Surely, I thought, this learned man should have known such facts. But with few exceptions I found my mind being placed at ease as I continued reading and discovered the “missing” data in later chapters rather than where I would have placed them. It was merely a question of author’s preference.

Lay readers of the Bible will learn much from Patai that will help them better understand seafaring in biblical times. Chapter 3 draws heavily on the Bible to describe how ships were built anciently, while a section in chapter 11 speaks of “Ships in Biblical Similes” (p. 103). I was pleased that Patai, though Jewish, had a good grasp of the New Testament and frequently referred to it in discussing Jewish seafaring.
Regarding the biblical flood story, Patai notes that Noah's sending of birds (see Genesis 8:6–12) to determine if there was land nearby (found in other ancient flood stories) was a common practice of ancient mariners, who regularly carried such birds on board to help them locate the direction of the nearest landmass (see p. 10).

Writing of Paul's opposition to the fasting of the sailors on the foundering ship in which he was a passenger (see Acts 27:34), Patai cites a talmudic passage that prohibits fasting while a ship is in danger (see p. 69). He draws a comparison between Paul's shipwreck and the shipwreck of the vessel in which Flavius Josephus sailed to Rome (see pp. 69–70) and then cites a similar account of the fifth-century Christian bishop Sinesius (see pp. 70–71), demonstrating the resemblance of the peril in which each found himself.

I have often been perplexed by the apostle Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 10:4 that the Israelites with Moses "drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ." How, I wondered, could a rock follow them, and why doesn't the Old Testament speak of such a thing? Thanks to Patai's book, I have now become aware of the Jewish tradition that the rock from which the water gushed forth actually went with the Israelites wherever they traveled in the wilderness and positioned itself before the door of the tabernacle at each stopping point. Patai cites the tradition—which must predate Paul—at length (see pp. 128–29).

Patai cites Psalm 107:23–32 as "a remarkable description of a storm on the sea, the deadly fright that grips the people in the endangered ship, and their relief upon seeing the tempest abate" (pp. 16–17). Though he adds that "no comment is needed on this powerful passage," he goes on to describe the storm on board the ship that the prophet Jonah took (Jonah 1:3–17) to escape his commission from the Lord (see pp. 17–18), which has very close parallels to the psalm, including the storm, prayers, ensuing heaven-sent calm, and arrival at a safe haven. Christian readers might see the psalm as a prophecy of Christ's calming the storm on the Sea of Galilee (see Mark 4:36–5:1). They would also find a parallel (as does Patai in a later chapter, pp. 120–21) in the fact that both Jonah and Jesus slept during the storm, while their ship-
mates were beset by great anxiety. In the Jonah story, “the ship-master came to him, and said unto him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not” (Jonah 1:6). Similarly, Jesus “was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow: and they awake him, and say unto him, Master, carest thou not that we perish?” (Mark 4:38). Elsewhere, Jesus compared himself to Jonah, noting that the prophet’s three days in the belly of the whale would be paralleled by his own three-day stay in the tomb (see Matthew 12:39-41).

Another story that Christian readers will readily associate with the New Testament is that of Rabbi Bar Kappara (see pp. 114–15), who witnessed the sinking of a ship near Caesarea and saw the Roman proconsul coming ashore naked. He took the man home, provided him with food and drink, and gave him money, much as the good Samaritan of Luke 10:30–35 provided for the man who had been attacked by thieves. In both cases, the hero of the story helps a man who is not of his own people. In time, Bar Kappara’s kindness was rewarded when the proconsul released some Jews who had been unjustly imprisoned.

Patai’s book also contains items of particular interest to Latter-day Saint readers. He notes, for example, that “according to a popular [Jewish] belief, the malevolent activities of Satan are greatest in times of danger,” including when a man “sails on the great sea” (p. 64), and even cites an early rabbinic story that has demons as the cause of storms at sea (see p. 72). This accords well with a modern revelation that declares that God has “cursed the waters. Wherefore, the days will come that no flesh shall be safe upon the waters . . . [for] the destroyer rideth upon the face thereof” (D&C 61:14–15, 19).

Patai cites some of the early Jewish texts that speak of Noah’s hanging glowing pearls or stones inside the ark to provide light (see p. 9).10 Though he deals with this nonbiblical aspect of the

10 As early as 1927, LDS writer Janne Sjodahl had compared the Jewish traditions with the glowing stones used in the Jaredite barges, as noted in Ether 3:1-4. See Janne M. Sjodahl, An Introduction to the Study of the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1927), 248. Hugh Nibley also discussed the subject at length in “There Were Jaredites: The Shining Stones,” Improvement Era (September 1956): 630–32, 672–75; Lehi in the Desert, The World of the Jaredites, There Were Jaredites (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and
Noah story, Patai’s main point is that the description of the ark was probably patterned after later ships known to the author of Genesis.\textsuperscript{11}

A section entitled “The Sand and Sea in Biblical Similes” (pp. 101–2) contains several examples of similes, some of which remind us of Lehi’s exhortations to his two elder sons: “He spake unto Laman, saying: O that thou mightest be like unto this river, continually running into the fountain of all righteousness! And he also spake unto Lemuel: O that thou mightest be like unto this valley, firm and steadfast, and immovable in keeping the commandments of the Lord!” (1 Nephi 2:9–10). Of the passages cited by Patai, Isaiah 48:18 most closely parallels Lehi’s words: “O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea.”

To be sure, a few things are missing from Patai’s book. He did not include some rock and coin depictions of ships from the Holy Land, as well as another early Jewish story of a foundering ship. Unlike another famous Jewish scholar, Cyrus Gordon\textsuperscript{12}, Patai did not discuss the possibility of Jewish sea travelers from the Roman era coming to the New World. He does note that papyrus boats like those used in ancient Egypt are still known on the South American lake Titicaca, though he cites not Thor Heyerdahl, who discovered this connection, but a private communication from James Hornell (see p. 40).

\textsuperscript{11} I was initially disappointed in thinking that Patai had left out important material when describing the glowing stones in Noah’s ark. He did not discuss the story found in Pirqa de Rabbi Eliezer 10 and Zohar Exodus 48a, where the description of the “great fish” God “prepared” for Jonah (Jonah 1:17) suggests a submarine and that the fish, like Noah’s ark, was equipped with a pearl that gave light to Jonah. I was therefore delighted to see that Patai recited the Jonah tradition in detail in a later chapter (see pp. 118–19).

\textsuperscript{12} See for example, Cyrus H. Gordon, Before Columbus: Links between the Old World and Ancient America (New York: Crown, 1971).
But these minor omissions in no way detract from this fine contribution of Raphael Patai, the production of which spanned much of a lifetime of helping us better understand the peoples of the Middle East.

Reviewed by
Bruce A. Chadwick

Stark combines historical and social science analyses to produce a fascinating account of the rise of Christianity in the four centuries following its founding. He challenges, with data and logic, many cherished myths about the emergence of Christianity. The book opens with an intriguing discussion that the well-to-do, not the socially deprived underclass, were overrepresented among early converts to Christianity. Obviously, this more influential membership strengthened the early Christian movement. In a subsequent chapter, Stark contends the mission to the Jews was much more successful than generally thought. He "cautiously suggest[s] that a very substantial conversion of the Jews actually did take place" (p. 70). His analysis indicates that Jews in the Diaspora provided the preponderance of the early converts which contribution sustained the initial growth of Christianity. Stark makes a pervasive case that the misery of the urban life of the times, as well as natural disasters such as epidemics, earthquakes, and fires, contributed significantly to the emergence of Christianity. The argument is that Christians more efficiently dealt with such life-threatening conditions and thus enjoyed a higher quality of life and a longer life span. He cites inscriptions on grave markers as evidence that Christians in the early times lived longer than their non-Christian neighbors. This favorable quality of life was a powerful missionary attraction that drew converts to the church. The fact that members lived longer also increased their proportion of the population. Christian views about women and the resultant relationships between men and women, according to Stark, generated higher natural growth among members of the early church than among the general population. He discusses how Christian family practices, especially the rejection of female infanticide, in-
creased the number of women who survived to child-bearing age. In addition, Stark argues, Christians had lower rates of contraception and abortion, which increased their fertility. Thus Christian women bore considerably more children than non-Christian women. Finally, the book points out how martyrs’ pious acceptance of torture and agonizing death was interpreted by member and nonmember alike as evidence of God’s miraculous support of Christianity. Members’ commitment to Christianity was enhanced, and nonmembers were convincingly impressed, by the faith of the martyrs. In most of the chapters Stark derives two or three social science hypotheses that link characteristics such as membership in the Christian church to greater longevity. These hypotheses facilitate the development of a general theory or model explaining the emergence of new religions. Of special interest to the Latter-day Saint reader is Stark’s focus on the LDS Church and its growth in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a case study illustrating several of the social science hypotheses. He presents some interesting data about the rather spectacular growth of the LDS Church and makes some interesting projections of future expansion. This book is an interesting read. Stark actually brings off the synthesis of historical and social science analyses and gives the reader some fascinating insights into the emergence of Christianity to the dominant religious force in the modern Western world.

Reviewed by John Gee

**The Hagiography of Doubting Thomas**

A glooming peace this morning with it brings,
The sun, for sorrow, will not show his head.
Go hence to have more talk of these sad things;
Some shall be pardon’d, and some punished:
For never was a story of more woe . . .
—William Shakespeare

One of the main reasons biographies are written is to hold someone up as a model worthy of emulation. The subject of a biography is typically an example for good, but occasionally for ill.² While apostasy is certainly not the greatest object of contemplation for mortals, its study can nevertheless be both fascinating and productive. Moroni, at least at one point, considered his narrative to be a study in apostasy.³ The study of apostasy and apostates, like all tragedy, points out the way not to go; it serves as a negative example. Stan Larson, in his latest book, lovingly portrays Thomas Stuart Ferguson as a man who for years postured as a believer in the Book of Mormon and a devout Latter-day Saint, but who secretly disbelieved and covertly tried to dissuade others from believing.

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³ “Give thanks unto God that he hath made manifest unto you our imperfections, that ye may learn to be more wise than we have been” (Mormon 9:31).
Biographies like the book under review are deliberate, intentional acts; they do not occur by accident. Ferguson is largely unknown to the vast majority of Latter-day Saints; his impact on Book of Mormon studies is minimal. So, of all the lives that could be celebrated, why hold up that of a “double-acting souppuss?” Is there anything admirable, virtuous, lovely, of good report, praiseworthy, or Christlike about Thomas Stuart Ferguson’s apparent dishonesty or hypocrisy? Larson seems to think so: “I feel confident,” Larson writes, “that Ferguson would want his intriguing story to be recounted as honestly and sympathetically as possible” (p. xiv). Why? Do we not have enough doubters? Yet Larson does not even intend to provide the reader with a full or complete biographical sketch of Ferguson’s life, since he chose to include “almost nothing . . . concerning his professional career as a lawyer, his various real estate investments, his talent as a singer, his activities as a tennis player, or his family life” (p. xi). In his opening paragraph, Larson warns the reader that he is not interested in a well-rounded portrait of Ferguson. Nevertheless, he finds time to discourse on topics that do not deal with Ferguson’s life and only tangentially with his research interest. A glance at a few of these is most illuminating; his excurses include:

- The diversity of theories on Book of Mormon geography, without any attempt to evaluate them (see pp. 7–9).
- An attempt to show that an anonymous piece published under the general editorship of Joseph Smith proves that Joseph Smith identified Palenque as a Book of Mormon site (see pp. 20–22).

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6 The phrase is John Sorenson’s. This was changed to “double-acting cynic” in the published version; John Sorenson, “Addendum,” *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 4 (1992): 119.
Another attempt, using the same logic, to show that Joseph Smith identified Quiriguá as a Book of Mormon site (see pp. 22-29).

M. Wells Jakeman’s interpretations of Izapa Stela 5 (see pp. 64-65).

The Joseph Smith Egyptian Papyri (see pp. 85-89).

The restorations of Facsimile 1 of the book of Abraham (see pp. 99-100).

The so-called Book of Breathings (see pp. 101-4).

Larson’s understandings of the so-called Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar (see pp. 104-8).

Whether or not there is red ink on the Joseph Smith Papyri (see pp. 112-15).  

Thus, with the deliberate inclusion of this material and the deliberate suppression of the fuller picture of Ferguson, Larson demonstrates an interest in fashioning propaganda. With this book Larson advocates (perhaps unintentionally) the view that Latter-day Saint doubters should mouth pieties in public and do as they please in private, and, most particularly, that they should covertly seek to undermine the faith of the weak and the faltering. I am not convinced that this is unintentional, since Larson (1) attempts to marshal as many reasons to create doubt as he can, (2) introduces controversies and arguments brought forth after Ferguson’s death, and (3) consistently misrepresents the arguments of supporters of the Book of Mormon or the book of Abraham. In an attempt to subvert the weak, weigh down the hands that hang down, and weaken the feeble knees, Larson has carefully fashioned the hagiography of a hypocrite.

In addition to his proselytizing efforts, perhaps Larson’s personal fascination with Ferguson (see pp. xiii–xiv)—spurred on both in conversations with Ferguson in 1977 (at church expense) to discuss his doubt (see p. xiv) and by access to some of Ferguson’s papers in 1993 (see p. xi)—explains why he thinks...

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7 The Improvement Era photographs were printed in color, even if they were not printed in four-color. Larson seems to think that somehow this meant that people were denying that there were rubrics on the papyri. I have never made that claim. It is somewhat amusing to be misrepresented in such a fashion.
“the tortuous odyssey of Thomas Stuart Ferguson deserves to be told” (p. xiv).

“Tortuous” is putting it mildly—the book is a tedious read. Not only has Larson suppressed the fuller picture of Ferguson, but he also tortures his reader by his presentation of evidence. For example, should one look up the note after this sentence—“Due to the influence of M. Wells Jakeman, a fellow LDS student at Berkeley, Ferguson developed a keen interest in the history, culture, and archaeology of Mesoamerica” (p. 2)—one would find not documentation of Jakeman’s influence on Ferguson, not evidence of Ferguson’s interests, but a definition by Norman Hammond of the term “Mesoamerica” (pp. 30–31). Thus, granted Ferguson’s “lifelong fascination with these fields [history, culture, and archaeology of Mesoamerica], he did not pursue a degree in any of these subjects” (p. 2). Did he even take any courses, and if so would that coursework have been worth anything today? This question is relevant because Ferguson’s approach to archaeology was both naïve and dated. For his entire life, “Ferguson remained an amateur in archaeology” (p. 3).

Ferguson’s enthusiastic amateur naïveté plagues his arguments, whether for or against the Book of Mormon. For example, Ferguson’s plant-life test (see pp. 238–39) provides an excellent example of a problematic argument that critics would be wary of using if they thought it through to its logical conclusion. Ferguson professes to be dismayed that “no wheat, barley, figs, or grapes” have been found “in the regions proposed by Norman and Sorenson” as Book of Mormon lands (p. 239). The argument runs as follows: we have as yet found no evidence of these crops in Mesoamerica and therefore they were not cultivated there. The Book of Mormon, however, mentions them; therefore, the Book of Mormon could not have come from Mesoamerica. But the crushing logic of this argument actually works against those who propose that Joseph Smith wrote the Book of Mormon in upstate New York in the nineteenth century since figs and grapes do not appear there either.8 If the original author(s) of the

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8 The common farmer in upstate New York cultivated apples, sugar maples, wheat, corn, rye, oats, buckwheat, beans, wild berries, and root crops; see Donald L. Enders, “The Joseph Smith, Sr., Family: Farmers of the Genesee,” in
Book of Mormon must needs have lived in a land where figs and grapes were grown, then Joseph Smith could not possibly have written the Book of Mormon. If the critic responds that Joseph Smith was basing his assessment on biblical passages, then one can also reply that the Book of Mormon passages that mention grapes and figs are also biblical quotations and in turn need not imply that such were available to the Nephites any more than they were available to Joseph Smith. This leaves only one passage that mentions wheat (see Mosiah 9:9) and four passages mentioning barley. Besides the inherent problems of nomenclature, pre-Columbian barley has in fact been found in the New World. Perhaps no wheat, barley, figs, or grapes have been found in Mesoamerica because “few really good studies of plant remains have been done in Mesoamerica.” Unfortunately, Larson’s book reveals an archaeological ignorance and lack of sophistication to equal Ferguson’s.

The Archaeology of Punt

Discussing Book of Mormon archaeology is much like discussing the archaeology of the land of Punt. (We choose Punt although Magan, Meluhha, Dilmun, or Washshukani could

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10 See ibid., 341–42.
11 Ibid., 340.
12 This has been equated with the border of Oman and the United Arab Emirates; see Michael Roaf, Cultural Atlas of Mesopotamia and the Ancient Near East (New York: Facts on File, 1990), 97, but see also the list of locations (including Egypt) proposed in Wolfgang Heimpel, “Magan,” in Reallexikon der Assyriologie und Vorderasiatischen Archäologie (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1932–90), 7:195–96.
14 Normally equated with Qatar or Bahrain. See Heimpel, “Magan,” 195; Roaf, Cultural Atlas of Mesopotamia, 97; Kramer, The Sumerians, 281: “There is
serve equally well.) Punt was a land best known from the inscriptions of the Eighteenth Dynasty queen Hatshepsut (ca. 1472-1458 B.C.), who, after sending trading expeditions there, had the expedition recorded complete with scenes on the walls of her temple at Deir el-Bahri. These scenes depict specific plants, animals, and people.16

A variety of locations have been proposed for Punt.17 In the nineteenth century, it was thought to be in Arabia.18 At various

even some possibility that Dilmun may turn out to include the region in Pakistan

15 Washshukanni is, according to one authority, “a site to the west of Nisibin which has not yet been located.” Seton Lloyd, The Archaeology of Mesopotamia (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984), 160. “Šuṣṭatar had his seat in the town of Waššukanni. It has generally been assumed that this name developed to Uṣšukani in the Middle Assyrian period and then to Sīkānī. According to an Assyrian inscription, the latter place lies at the ‘source of the Habur’ that is, at what is now Ra’s al-'Ain, and it has just recently proved possible to identify it conclusively with Tell Fakhariyeh. It is, however, open to doubt whether Sīkānī is really a later form of Waššukanni/Uṣšukani, because there was already a town Sigan existing in the Hāētūr region in the Ur III period. Further, neutron activation analysis of the letters of king Tušratta of Mittani, probably written in Waššukanni, has shown that the trace elements in these clay tablets are very different from those of the tablets from the Middle Assyrian period found in Tell Fахharija itself. Waššukanni probably lay further to the north, somewhere around Mardin, or more likely, to its west or north-west.” Gernot Wilhelm, The Hurrians, trans. Jennifer Barnes (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1989), 27 (parenthetical references dropped).


times locations for Punt have been proposed in northern Africa, the entire region from Persia to the coast of the Red Sea, India, or all of East Africa from the Somali peninsula to the cape. Some thought that it was not a geographic location at all, but an ethnic designation. One scholar thinks that there were two Punts: the location changed from 'Aqiq during the Old and


18 This was the standard viewpoint of the nineteenth century. References have been gathered in Herzog, Punt, 25–43. An Arabian location was favored by the Egyptologists Brugsch, Mariette, Dümichen, Krall, and Naville.

19 Uhlemanns thought it was in Mauritania; Herzog, Punt, 26.

20 “Le pays de Pount était un vast territoire comprenant la région du golfe Persique, la côte méridionale de l’Arabie et certainement la côte de ce qui est aujourd’hui la mer Rouge.” So Naville, as cited in Herzog, Punt, 48.

21 This speculation was once put forward by Karl Peters; see Herzog, Punt, 41.

22 Krall, Glaser, Peters, and Quiring have all advanced this geography; see Herzog, Punt, 35 (Krall), 40 (Glaser), 41 (Peters), 52 (Quiring), though Krall did not have it stretch as far as the others did.

23 Thus Golenishev, Wiedemann, and Petrie, in Herzog, Punt, 32, 39. Meinhof equated the Puntites with the Bantu tribes (ibid., 50).

24 Longtime readers of this periodical will remember a similar situation with the two Bountifuls proposed in F. Richard Hauck, Deciphering the Geography of the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 31–35; for evaluations of this position, see John Clark, “A Key for Evaluating Nephiite
Middle Kingdom to Somalia during the New Kingdom. At present no more than a general consensus has been reached (along the coast of Eastern Africa, not Arabia).

The problem with discussing the archaeology of Punt is that it depends on the correct identification of its location. Thus, if one believed with the Egyptologist Karl Peters that Punt was located in Zimbabwe (earlier Rhodesia), one would be looking in a much different place than if one believed like David O’Connor that Punt is located on the Red Sea, north of Tokar or in the Gash-Baraka region. Either of these notions is much different from Rolf Herzog’s view that Punt is located along the White or Blue Nile. Yet the disagreements among scholars about the location of Punt do not mean that the place never existed. They do, however, make it difficult to discuss the archaeology of the land of Punt, which, thanks to the Egyptian pictographic record, is provided with far greater potential for archaeological confirmation than the Book of Mormon. To my knowledge, no Egyptologist has felt confident enough about its geographic location to be willing to conduct an archaeological expedition to the land of Punt.


This opinion was laid out in Karl Peters, Im Goldland des Altertums (Munich: Lehmann, 1902). For a refutation, see Heinrich Schäfer, “Die angebliche ägyptische Figur aus Rhodesia,” Zeitschrift für Ethnologie 38 (1906): 902–4.

See ibid., 8.


Although Hans Winkler thought that it always belonged “to the sphere of mythical and half-mythical narrative” (quoted in Herzog, Punt, 50–51), his is a minority sentiment, if not unique.

“The region occupied by Punt has not been explored archaeologically.” O’Connor, “New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period,” 270. This may no longer be true, though I have not yet seen R. Fattovich, “The Problem of Punt in
Furthermore, if someone, convinced by the flawed arguments of Peters, announced because there was no archaeological evidence of Punt from Zimbabwe that he no longer believed that the Hatshepsut inscriptions were historical, one would be inclined to think that person foolish.\(^{33}\) (Nevertheless, any hopes for the eventual solution to the location are pinned to archaeology.)\(^{34}\) Eventually, we may find archaeological confirmation of the location of the land of Punt, Washshukani, Wawat, or Zarahemla. But, then again, we might not. Thus, rejection of the historicity of the Hatshepsut inscriptions, the Mittani letter, the Biography of Harkhuf, or the Book of Mormon based on the lack of archaeological confirmation of someone’s theory of the geographical location of these places demonstrates not wisdom but impatience.

Even in cases where the site is known, there may be no archaeological evidence. A mere one hundred sixty years ago, my ancestors lived along with others of the saints in Kirtland, Ohio. Most of the houses of the saints who lived there at that time are no longer standing. The same holds true for Nauvoo. Furthermore, if archaeological excavations were to be conducted at the sites and nothing found, that would neither prove that the saints did not exist nor that they never lived there; it would show only that no archaeological trace remained, which is a common occurrence. I have surveyed the archaeological remains of the houses where two of my wife’s ancestors lived about one hundred ninety years ago. The father’s house has only the crude remnants of the foundation stones left, while only the hearthstone of the daughter’s house remains. Most people leave little or no archaeologically identifiable

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33 Such a person would have to explain the stumps of trees still standing in front of Deir el-Bahari that are said in Hatshepsut’s inscriptions to have come from Punt.

34 “At all periods the evidence is too slight to allow an identification of Punt. . . . Until archaeological work uncovers the early history of the Red Sea littoral, Punt will remain a vague designation of the south-eastern commerce of Pharaonic Egypt.” *The British Museum Book of Ancient Egypt*, ed. Stephen Quirke and Jeffrey Spencer (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992), 201–2.
trace. Thus it is a cause of some rejoicing when we can find anything.\(^{35}\)

Nor when archaeological evidence is found does it necessarily demonstrate the sort of things we might wish. Take for example the Old Kingdom inscriptions of the Egyptian officials Weni, Harkhuf, and Pepynakhth.\(^{36}\) These three inscriptions attest the presence of several Nubian political entities comprised of groups of people at war with each other. As a result of the salvage archaeology of the 1960s, Nubia is one of the most thoroughly investigated places on earth archaeologically. Yet any hope of using material culture (i.e., archaeological evidence) to distinguish the various entities described in Old Egyptian texts has proved fruitless, as the whole length of Nubia during Egypt’s Old Kingdom is all undifferentiated C-group culture.\(^{37}\) (Could we determine merely by the material remains where the border was between western Canada and the western United States in the twentieth century?) In Nubia during the Old Kingdom, the archaeology does not match the inscriptions and serves as a warning that politically distinct peoples might not be culturally distinct from their neighbors. The archaeology of Israel reflects a similar situation because religiously distinct peoples are not necessarily culturally distinct.

This is all directly relevant to the case of Thomas Ferguson and Larson’s treatment of him. In May 1953 Ferguson picked a spot (Tabasco) that he thought was the land of Zarahemla, and then was disappointed that he could not find any evidence of the Book of Mormon there (see p. 48). He was unwise in this. He assumed that if he simply dug in the ground he would come up with demonstrable proof of the Book of Mormon. But even if the archaeologist digs in the right place, there is no guarantee of finding anything, much less the proof that was sought. If anything,

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\(^{35}\) Another recent example of this may be found in Daniel C. Peterson, “Editor’s Introduction: Through a Glass, Darkly,” FARMS Review of Books 9/2 (1997): xxiii–xxvi.


archaeological digs are notorious for discovering things that the archaeologists did not suspect, so that the archaeologist often ends up having to ask different questions from the ones whose answers he set out to find.

In his presentation of Ferguson’s disappointment, Larson is also misguided. It appears to be Larson’s goal to show that no evidence whatsoever exists for the Book of Mormon or the book of Abraham and that it is impossible for there ever to be such. But to suggest that the Book of Mormon is not historical because individuals do not agree on the location of Book of Mormon places (see pp. 7–8) is not a sound argument, even if some of the theories about Book of Mormon geography are likewise unsound.

Maya Archaeology and the Book of Mormon

Larson goes to some length to try to equate Maya and Book of Mormon archaeology. This, of course, begs an important question. Are the two the same? With all the pains Larson takes to attack John Sorenson’s views, he neglects to acknowledge that Sorenson’s geography has little if any overlap with Maya lands. Thus Larson’s critique of Ferguson’s naïveté in dealing with Maya archaeology is irrelevant to Sorenson’s geographic model. Of the major Book of Mormon geographic models today, the only one on which Larson’s critique has an impact is that of Joseph Allen. Other models, such as those proposed by Richard Hauck, David Palmer, and any model that proposes a narrow neck of land south of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, also survive unscathed. These proposed geographies at most touch only marginally on Maya lands; Sorenson’s, for example, only overlaps Maya areas in southern Guatemala and in Chiapas. But “in many ways the Southern Area hardly seems Maya at all from a purely archaeological standpoint, while some of it, such as the central and eastern Chiapas highlands, was only occupied by Maya-speakers at a relatively late date.”

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Larson has demonstrated that Ferguson’s theory of Book of Mormon geography is unlikely, that all theories of Book of Mormon geography are unfounded.

It is a common trap to assume that because the Maya produced impressive architecture, beautiful artwork, and intriguing writing they must somehow be connected with the Nephites. In the Old World, the Egyptians hold a similar position to the Maya in the New World. By comparison, the Israelites produced less impressive architecture, cruder artwork, and a less elegant script than the Egyptians; they did, however, produce the Bible. The Nephites may not have been that much different from their Israelite ancestors; at least evidence indicates this is the case.

Nephite architecture, for example, need not be as elaborate, impressive, or durable as Maya architecture. While the Maya are noted for their limestone-block-over-rubble-core construction with limestone plaster overlays, building with stone is mentioned only once in the Book of Mormon and only for city walls (see Alma 48:8). More common techniques are building with earth (see Alma 48:8; 49:2; 50:2; 53:4) and wood (see 2 Nephi 5:15; Jarom 1:8; Mosiah 11:8–10; Alma 50:2–3; 53:4; Helaman 3:9–11). Cement (limestone plaster?) was used only in the land northward and only when there were not enough trees (see Helaman 3:5–11). Wood was clearly the preferred Nephite building material, but it does not survive well archaeologically, especially in Mesoamerica. The one significant overlap between Sorenson’s geography and Maya lands, Kaminaljuyu, has only “the remnants of adobe-plastered earthen platforms that once

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40 For cautions on this, see Sorenson, “Viva Zapato!” 315.
42 For a discussion of the techniques, see Sorenson, “Viva Zapato!” 351–52.
43 “The hearting of Puuc buildings is a solidified lime-based concrete.” Sharer, The Ancient Maya, 638. For what it may be worth, the Puuc are the northernmost of the Maya.
44 The archaeologists excavating the Maya site of Piedras Negras, for example, must rebuild the wooden framework of their camp annually because termites completely destroy the previous year’s camp. Any wood not living is subject to this problem in addition to whatever rotting it might suffer from the damp climate (Jessica Childs, personal communication).
supported buildings of wood, plaster, and thatch (basalt and other volcanic stones of the southern areas being used primarily for artifacts such as grinding stones and monuments—and occasionally for drains, steps, and other architectural elements).”

This is typical for most of the southern lands of the Maya (i.e., those overlapping with Sorenson’s geography):

Ancient building platforms in the southern Maya area were usually earthen-cored and faced with adobe plaster (typically mixed with volcanic ash, which is abundant in the southern area). Owing to the scarcity of suitable, easily worked building stone, even the largest and most elaborate southern Maya buildings were usually constructed of perishable materials, such as pole and thatch, wood, or adobe blocks. Stonework, when encountered, was usually used for pavements, steps, and occasional decorative elements.

In fact, for most of Mesoamerica, “a pole framework supports a thatched roof; walls are usually wattle and daub, a woven lattice of sticks plastered with a thick coating of adobe (mud mixed with straw or other binder). In the hottest regions, house walls are often plastered, allowing the passage of cooling breezes.” To compare the architecture of the Nephites with that found in any particular area, careful attention must be paid to what the Book of Mormon says about architecture, something Larson has not bothered to do.

Though the Nephites seem to have had artwork, little description of it appears in the text. Statues are not mentioned, but idols were had among the Nephites (see Mosiah 27:8; Alma 1:32; 7:6; 50:21; Helaman 6:31), the Lamanites (see Enos 1:20; Mosiah 9:12; 11:6–7; Alma 17:15; Mormon 4:14, 21; 5:15), the Jaredites (see Ether 7:23), and the Zoramites (see Alma 31:1) but the size or any other characteristics are not discussed. Only one stele (?) is mentioned in the Book of Mormon (see Omni 1:20), but nothing other than “engravings” is mentioned on it. The Nephites have

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45 Share, *The Ancient Maya*, 95.
46 Ibid., 631.
47 Ibid.
altars (see Alma 15:17; 17:4), but these are also not described; whether they were made of stone or earth is not even specified. Thus there are no real descriptions of artwork from the Book of Mormon with which to compare the archaeological material.

Nephite script, if the so-called Anthon transcript is any indication, is not as calligraphic as Mayan script. Though the so-called Anthon transcript contains a mere seven lines of text, it contains about eighty different characters; however, since the sample size is small, one is not able to determine whether the script is syllabic (like Ethiopian) or logographic (like Egyptian or Mayan).48 The transcript was in the possession of Oliver Cowdery, who gave it to David Whitmer;49 it then passed to the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints with the rest of David Whitmer’s manuscripts. If this is the copy of the characters that was taken to Anthon, then it comes from the part of the Book of Mormon that was translated while Martin Harris was the scribe, and thus is from the missing 116 pages. If this were the case, we should expect it to be from Mormon’s abridgment of the Nephite record (see Words of Mormon 1:3–7; D&C 10:30, 38–42). This would mean that it would be from the handwriting of Mormon (after ca. A.D. 362; see Mormon 3:8–11) and not from the small plates. We would then expect it to be a Semitic language written in an Egyptian script,50—a Semitic language that had been modified by time and creolization with the American languages,51 and an Egyptian script that had been modified not only by being engraved on

48 “If a known script has a sign-list totalling between 20 and 35 signs, it is probably a system like an alphabet; if between 40 and 90 signs, the likelihood is that we are dealing with a ‘pure’ syllabary; and if above a few hundred, the system is surely logographic.” Michael D. Coe, Breaking the Maya Code (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992), 43; cf. Johannes Friedrich, Extinct Languages (New York: Dorset, 1957), 152–53. Coe was involved in the decipherment of Mayan; Friedrich, in the decipherment of hieroglyphic Hittite.


metal plates, but also changed along with the handwriting styles and modifications of the Nephites (see Mormon 9:32). This has then been copied by a nineteenth-century hand in pen and ink. Larson’s discussion of the Anthon transcript (see pp. 51–54) shows no understanding of the basic problems of what the Anthon transcript would be if it is genuinely what it is claimed to be. Ferguson’s approach (followed by Larson) was naïve; send a copy of a document that dates to the fourth century A.D. to Sir Alan Gardiner, an Egyptologist of wide interests but few after about 1,000 B.C., and ask if it matches the Egyptian scripts that he is familiar with. I am not denigrating Gardiner’s phenomenal learning at all. The Anthon transcript does not look like hieratic or Mayan but we would not expect it to. Some of the individual signs could make sense as Roman period demotic, but there is no reason to expect the script of the Nephites to develop the same way as Egyptian demotic across the ocean. Why then should we necessarily expect it to look identical to the Egyptian scripts so well-known from the Old World? Likewise, if the major geographies do not place the Nephites in the area of the Maya, why should the Anthon transcript resemble Mayan?

Thus nothing from the Book of Mormon indicates that the archaeological grandeur of the Maya should be identified with that of the Nephites. But the Maya are certainly not the only people in

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54 As a look at his bibliography will attest, Gardiner was very prolific on a wide variety of topics over his long career. Most of his text editions are still the standard works on the subject. Perhaps, however, it is significant that the transcription of the demotic in Alan H. Gardiner, Egyptian Grammar, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1957), plate II, was actually done by Francis Lt. Griffith (see ibid., xiv).
Mesoamerica, and it would be wrong to treat them as though they were.55 Surely no one should lose his or her testimony over this.

The Book of Abraham as an Excuse

Larson depicts Ferguson as losing his testimony over the book of Abraham and the Joseph Smith Papyri. In this, Larson would have us believe that Ferguson grew out of his naïve beliefs about Book of Mormon archaeology and through his study of the Joseph Smith Papyri matured into the wiser course of being a doubter. Nothing could be further from the truth. If Ferguson was naïve about Book of Mormon archaeology—something he had actually studied—he brought that full naïveté into his study of the Joseph Smith Papyri, a field about which he knew nothing. If Ferguson did lose his testimony of the church through the book of Abraham in the fashion Larson claims that he did, then he exhibited a number of follies that Larson apparently wishes to propagate.

Whether Ferguson recognized that he knew nothing about Egyptian papyri, or not, he sought outside help. But he brought certain assumptions into this quest that doomed his conclusions: (1) Ferguson assumed that the church had all the papyri that Joseph Smith had. (2) He assumed that the individuals whom he consulted about the papyri were experts on them. (3) He assumed that the information he was given was accurate. (4) He assumed that he knew what the so-called Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar was. All of Ferguson’s assumptions were incorrect.

Ferguson assumed that the church possessed all the relevant papyri. We know that Joseph Smith originally had at least five papyri,56 but we now have only small fragments of three of them, a tiny fraction of what he once had. It is somewhat presumptuous to

55 Some students of Mesoamerican archaeology think that a justifiable case can be made for identity or overlap between the Maya and the Nephites. They are welcome to make their case; I do not think that it has been made yet. Until they can make a cogent case, it would be a mistake to restrict the case for the Nephites to the Maya.

base a case about what cannot be on what we no longer have, as Larson and Ferguson have done. It would be like complaining that, because a fragmentary copy of a Bible had nothing about Isaiah, there never was any copy of Isaiah. The first order of business in studying the Joseph Smith Papyri from a strictly Egyptological perspective is not to assume that we have all the relevant papyri (as Ferguson did and Larson does), but to determine the nature and extent of the papyri in Joseph Smith’s possession. Only when we know what was on all the papyri in Joseph Smith’s possession can we then proceed to match Joseph’s translation with what was actually on the papyri. Determining the nature and extent of the papyri requires some knowledge of both Egyptology and LDS Church history, and a careful evaluation of the historical evidence. Unfortunately, although several attempts have been made to assemble the information to answer this question, the question itself has rarely been addressed and has not yet been adequately answered. More is required than simply matching some of the descriptions of vignettes with the vignettes on the remnants of the Joseph Smith Papyri; one must account for all such descriptions. Larson spends several pages matching vignettes from the Tsemminis papyrus (PJS VII+VIII+V+VI+VI+II)58 with Oliver Cowdery’s description of the papyri (see pp. 108–12). Cowdery notes that there was a judgment scene on the interior of that roll,59 but the remaining fragments from the Tsemminis roll contain no such judgment scene. Of course, another possibility remains: The judgment scene described by Cowdery could be from the Neferirtnoub papyrus and the other vignettes could be from that roll as well; in that instance, the whole case as built up by Larson is invalid. Either way, the roll contained more than we have at present. Thus if we had all the papyri that Joseph Smith did, the absence of the text of the book of Abraham would present


58 The usage here is a standard papyrological notation. Papyri with separate identification numbers that are later found to be part of the same papyrus are indicated as joins (+) and listed in the order in which they would have occurred.

a problem. Since we do not, it does not. Larson and Ferguson underestimate the amount of papyri that are missing. If the Joseph Smith Papyri were standard-sized rolls, then the remaining fragments amount to, at best, approximately 13 percent of what Joseph Smith had, including two entire scrolls of which not a scrap of original papyrus remains.

Since more of the original Joseph Smith Papyri existed in Joseph Smith's day than we have at present, we need to know whether it is possible for a papyrus containing a funerary text to contain other texts as well. It is. Several examples of such papyri are extant.60 Therefore, it is fallacious to argue that if the preserved fragments of the Joseph Smith Papyri contained funerary texts in the papyri in their original state would have consisted only of funerary texts. Although this fact does not prove that they did contain something else, it does show that such a possibility must be seriously considered.

Ferguson assumed that any Egyptologist of his day would certainly be an expert on the Joseph Smith Papyri. This is not necessarily so. I am in no way attempting to demean the qualifi-

cations of the scholars who commented on the Joseph Smith Papyri in 1967, but merely acknowledging that Egyptology covers over three thousand years of a major civilization spread over thousands of square miles and treats every conceivable facet of that civilization. It is impossible to be an expert on all that material, and most Egyptologists are interested in neither the time period to which the Joseph Smith Papyri date nor the genre to which the remaining fragments of the Joseph Smith Papyri belong. Of the Egyptian scholars who voiced their opinion on the papyri either to Ferguson or in print at the time, only Richard Parker specialized in late period texts (mainly astronomical and business documents, not religious). Parker's modest contribution of five printed pages is nothing more than a very preliminary report, and his translation of one of the texts introduced a misreading of one of the key names. Of all the scholars who worked on the papyri, Hugh Nibley and Klaus Baer spent the most time on them, though they were trained mainly in the Egypt of another era.

Ferguson unquestioningly accepted the opinion of the experts. Anti-Mormons, almost all of whom have absolutely no competence in the relevant areas, usually follow the same method. Since I have a Ph.D. in Egyptology, I am an expert. All anti-Mormons should therefore unquestioningly accept my opinion. Because they regularly employ a double standard, however, I actually do not anticipate any of them unquestioningly accepting my opinion. But should they unquestioningly accept other experts' opinions? This is usually known as "the fallacy of argument ad verecundiam," which is

an appeal to authority. . . . This form of error is an egregious but effective rhetorical technique which puts an opponent in the awkward position of appearing to commit the sin of pride if he persists in his opposition.


62 See Parker, "The Book of Breathings," 99. The name Parker read as "Remenykay" is actually "Taykhebyt." This misreading has found its way into works by both Nibley and myself, as well as untold anti-Mormon propaganda pieces.
The most crude and ugly form of an argument *ad verecundiam* in historical writing is an appeal to professional status. Ferguson was gullible. He put his trust in an opinion based on someone’s professional status. He relied on someone who did not believe in something to tell him whether that thing was true; on one level he had predetermined the outcome. This does not mean that the experts were dishonest; they were doing what they were asked to do to the best of their ability. Ferguson took it for granted that the information the experts gave him, often off the top of their heads, was accurate. It was not. For example, Larson erroneously asserts that the Joseph Smith Papyrus I+XI+X "dates to the two-hundred-year period covering the first century B.C. through the first century A.D." (p. 101). Larson has followed Klaus Baer, who dated the papyri to as early as 100 B.C. (see p. 125 n. 63). Baer based his date on Georg Möller’s paleography. Paleographic dates, however, are only as good as the series of dated manuscripts upon which the paleography is based. Möller’s paleography, currently the best work available, is weak in the Late Period because few dated hieratic manuscripts upon which to base a hieratic paleography were available. Nibley dated the papyri to the end of the first century A.D. based on the same paleography and his belief that the Joseph Smith Papyri were connected with the Soter find excavated, like the Joseph Smith Papyri, by Antonio Lebolo. The Soter find can now be dated to the first half of the second century A.D., but though the

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65 Möller’s dated manuscripts are (see ibid., 3:7-14): year 14 of Takelot II (837 B.C.), Darius I, year 12 of Alexander (312-311 B.C.), year 12 of Augustus (9 B.C.), year 21 of Augustus (A.D. 1), A.D. 53, and between A.D. 79 and 138. Thus six dated papyri cover one thousand years. As this averages one dated papyrus every 167 years, it is not a firm sequence upon which to date handwriting.
67 Soter, on his coffin, is called the archon of Thebes. and Soter is indeed given as the archon of Thebes in *P. Brem*. 41 line 5 (dated 107 A.D.), in Ulrich
items from the Soter find all have interlocking genealogies, none of the genealogies of the owners of the Joseph Smith Papyri interlocks with the Soter find. The late Jan Quaegebeur, on the basis of prosopography and the use of certain titles, dates Joseph Smith Papyrus I+XI+X to the first half of the second century B.C.68 This, however, is the date of the papyrus manuscript and not of the text or texts recorded on it (a mistake Ferguson made which Larson did not). But this illustrates how following the opinions of the experts rather than looking at the evidence can lead one astray.

Is Larson Reliable?

Few people are so important or of such interest historically that their papers merit full publication. Thus the biographer’s summary is often all that is published on an individual. The reader is thus at the mercy of the author to present a fair and accurate picture of the evidence. How reliable, then, is Larson’s presentation of the evidence? This is an important question because Larson acknowledges he is not interested in providing a full picture of Ferguson; he is fashioning an argument to support his own beliefs. Yet Ferguson’s family believes that he never apostatized.

Larson claims that he started working on Ferguson’s biography because of “a box of office files documenting Ferguson’s research activities in the 1970s and early 1980s,” obtained from an anonymous “friend” (p. xi) and now housed in an archive to which Larson controls access.69 One cannot help but recall similar provenances given for the Hofmann forgeries. How do we know that these documents are genuine? Can we rely on Larson to pre-

Wilcken, Die Bremer Papyri (Berlin: Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1936), 95–98.


69 Larson is listed as “the librarian in charge of . . . the Utah History, Philosophy, and Religion Archives of the Manuscripts Division, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah” on the dust jacket of the book.
sent the issues accurately? For one thing, if this box of office files prompted the biography, it is astounding that Larson rarely refers to this correspondence. My confidence is also weakened by his consistent refusal to deal with certain of the arguments that he attacks. Many examples could be given, but a few will have to suffice.

Larson spends ten pages in an effort to make the case that Joseph Smith identified Palenque and Quiriguá as Book of Mormon places (see pp. 20–29). What does all of this have to do with the life of Thomas Ferguson? Nothing. Larson is not including it to round out the picture of Ferguson’s life but, it would seem, as a rhetorical trick designed to mislead the reader. He begins his discussion by noting that “it may very well be true that Joseph Smith did not have ‘specific knowledge of ancient Book of Mormon geography’” (p. 20).\(^7^0\) Nevertheless, although he acknowledges that Joseph Smith’s views on the subject are moot, he spends ten pages discussing this supposed item, reserving for a footnote the problem that these views (which he attributes to Joseph Smith), were not written by Smith (see pp. 38–39 n. 95). This tactic leaves the reader with the impression that these are authoritative views on Book of Mormon geography issued by Joseph Smith, and this is disingenuous at best and mendacious at worst.

Larson cites articles and books but shows no indication that he has understood the argument contained in them. Anyone who has read and understood them can only be embarrased at Larson’s misunderstanding and mishandling of the issues. The implications of having only a small portion of the Joseph Smith Papyri have already been discussed in this review, as they were in the review that Larson cites,\(^7^1\) yet he avoids dealing with these implications in his book. The reader is mortified for Larson when he cites classic studies on Book of Mormon geography by John Sorenson\(^7^2\) (see p. 36 n. 67) and John Clark\(^7^3\) (see p. 32 n. 19) and never comes to grips with the need to demonstrate that an area must


\(^7^1\) See above note 56.

\(^7^2\) See Sorenson, *Geography of Book of Mormon Events*.

\(^7^3\) See Clark, “A Key for Evaluating Nephite Geographies,” 20–70.
match the Book of Mormon’s internal geography before one can even think about comparing any archaeological evidence from the area. In fact, Larson seems blissfully unaware of the basic problems of reconstructing an ancient geography and never deals with this issue (which is a serious difficulty for the point he is trying to make). These problems are clearly laid out in William Hamblin’s article, “Basic Methodological Problems with the Anti-Mormon Approach to the Geography and Archaeology of the Book of Mormon.” How could Larson have missed this important work? But he did not miss it. He quotes from it on page 84, note 148. Perhaps this was an inadvertent slip, perhaps not. Larson also cites Hamblin’s review of Jerald and Sandra Tanner’s book on Book of Mormon archaeology but ignores Hamblin’s comments on their method, which Larson happens to use:

The Tanners seem to be making two fundamental arguments in their booklet, although they do not make these explicit: (1) Latter-day Saints disagree among themselves about Book of Mormon geography and archaeology; and (2) many archaeological discoveries which some Latter-day Saints have attempted to use to authenticate the Book of Mormon are either fraudulent, or have been misinterpreted. Both of these statements are accurate. However, they seem to draw the further conclusion that these two propositions somehow imply that there is therefore no archaeological evidence for, or defensible interpretation of, the Book of Mormon. . . . Even if Latter-day Saints disagree about various aspects of Book of Mormon history, archaeology, and geography, and even if all of the antiquities examined by the Tanners are not authentic, these would still not

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demonstrate that the Book of Mormon is un-
historical.\footnote{Ibid., 256.}

This, briefly encapsulated, is Larson’s own approach to the Book of Mormon and the book of Abraham: the same argument, the same logical flaws. These are just a few examples of works that registered only in Larson’s footnotes, but evidently not in his brain.

When Larson does engage in argument, he often reaches, as Ferguson did, for some professional opinion rather than for evidence and analysis and, even then, the professional opinion is sometimes not reliably presented.\footnote{On p. 127 n. 81, where Larson endeavors to show a history of my thought on a particular subject, he unaccountably omits my fullest treatment of the subject: John Gee, “Abracadabra, Isaac and Jacob,” \textit{Review of Books on the Book of Mormon} 7/1 (1995): 19–84.} For example, in presenting most of the proposed Book of Mormon geographies, Larson simply cites them. But with his especial target, John L. Sorenson, he takes space to criticize Sorenson’s proposed directional system at length (see p. 32 n. 18). In doing so he is less than forthcoming. He cites Freidel, Schele, and Parker as showing that “the Mayan east is oriented to the sun” (p. 32 n. 18).\footnote{Citing David Freidel, Linda Schele, and Joy Parker, \textit{Maya Cosmos: Three Thousand Years on the Shaman’s Path} (New York: Morrow, 1993), 419.} Yet Freidel, Schele, and Parker—on the very page Larson cites—indicate that in Mo-
mostenango the directions are based on local mountains, not astronomical phenomena.\footnote{Ibid., 419 n. 24.} The ancient Mayan words show no distinct primacy: “East is \textit{ah k’}in (‘he of the sun’); west is \textit{ah ak’bal} (‘he of the night’); north is \textit{ah uh} (‘he of the moon’); and the south is \textit{ah Lamat} (‘he of Venus’).”\footnote{Ibid. Note that, since both the moon and Venus move along the ecliptic plane, there is no astronomical reason for them to be associated with north and south.} On the same page these authors note major differences between ancient and modern Maya cosmology and orientation.\footnote{See ibid., 419–20 n. 26.} The pages Larson cites are the notes to the text that discusses correlations between the “Eight-
House-Partitions” described in the Tablet of the Cross, the eight
partitions of the cosmos shown in the Madrid Codex, and the names of the eight partitions in the Rio Azul tomb. This evidence actually supports Sorenson’s contentions that directionality is modified by local phenomena and that correlations between our directions and individual directions in other cultures are problematic at best. If Schele and Freidel “had been arguing about the nature of north and south in Classic Maya thought,” the problem of directions is hardly as pat as Larson makes it out to be.

At What Cost?

Larson never deals with one issue that lurks in the background: the cost of renouncing the Latter-day Saint faith for what amounts to atheism. If the atheists are right, and the gospel is not true, there is no resurrection of the dead; when a man is dead, that is the end thereof. If the gospel is true, however, death is not the end. If atheism is true, at death Latter-day Saints suffer the same fate as the atheists, but the atheists will not even be around to gloat about it. Less than twenty years after his death, Ferguson has largely been forgotten by those who study the Book of Mormon or work in Mesoamerican archaeology. Twenty years from now, it seems likely that relatively few people will read Larson’s arguments or this review of them. Two hundred years from now, Stan Larson and Thomas Stuart Ferguson will be probably be known only to a handful of academics, if that. Two thousand years from now, who would possibly be interested?

If, however, the gospel is true, all of this changes: Stan Larson will still be around, as will the author of this review and anyone who reads it. We can all laugh ourselves silly (or weep) at the flawed arguments that Larson tries to muster. Only if the gospel is

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82 See ibid., 71-73.
84 Freidel, Schele, and Parker, Maya Cosmos, 75.
true does any of this mean anything at all. Larson seemingly wants the reader to give up the meaning of life and the weight of eternal glory, and offers nothing in return. Like the mugger who demands one’s wallet, and takes the credit cards as well as the cash, those who seek to steal the testimonies of Latter-day Saints never inform their victims of the other things they are taking away. A decent atheist may not believe that life has meaning for himself but he would not take away that which gives joy to others.

Of the many problems and flaws of this book, I have dealt here with only a few. Why should the reader waste time on this book when there are more pleasant, important, and worthwhile ways on which to spend it?

Reviewed by John A. Tvedtnes

“The Dead Shall Hear the Voice”

Luke Wilson heads up the Institute for Religious Research, which publishes Heart and Mind, an anti-Mormon quarterly. In the beginning of 1995, he published the first part of a two-part article on the Latter-day Saint concept of salvation and baptism for the dead. The second part was not published for another two years. Now that we have both parts and have received inquiries about them, it seems appropriate to review them.¹

Book of Mormon Silence

Wilson notes that “the Book of Mormon is silent about salvation for the dead and baptism for the dead” (I.1; cf. II.1) and that “although baptism for the dead is a central teaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ, according to the LDS church, the Book of Mormon contains no reference whatever to the practice” (II.1). He implies that the Nephite record should discuss the subject because “the Book of Mormon is described as containing ‘the fulness of my everlasting gospel’ (Doctrine and Covenants 27:5)” (II.1). The definition of gospel in the Book of Mormon and latter-day

¹ In doing so, I shall use roman numerals I and II to refer to the two articles, followed by the page number. Thus, I.1 would be page 1 of the January–March 1995 issue, while II.1 would be page 1 of the January–March 1997 issue.
revelation is the "good news" of Christ's atonement, and its first principles are faith, repentance, baptism, and receiving the Holy Ghost. Since the Book of Mormon contains the most lucid explanation of the atonement of Christ (see especially 2 Nephi 2, 9; Mosiah 15; Alma 34, 42), it clearly qualifies as containing the fullness of the gospel. Because the term gospel refers specifically to the atonement, we need not understand it to encompass all truth. The LDS (and evangelical) misuse of the term in this latter sense is no excuse for misreading the LDS standard works.

Since most of the Book of Mormon predates the atonement of Christ, there would have been no valid work for the dead prior to that time, so we should not expect to find baptism for the dead mentioned there any more than it is in the Old Testament. When Wilson asks, "Did Jesus Establish Baptism for the Dead?" (II.1), he evidently has in mind the fact that, in the New Testament

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2 See 1 Nephi 10:14; 15:13–14; 3 Nephi 27:13–21; Ether 4:18; D&C 3:20; 13:1; 20:9; 27:5; 33:11–12; 39:5–6; 42:12; 76:40–42; 84:26–27; 107:20; 135:3; 138:2–4, 57; JS—H 1:34; Articles of Faith 3–4. Doctrine and Covenants 93:51 speaks of "the gospel of salvation," while Abraham 2:11 refers to "the blessings of the Gospel, which are the blessings of salvation, even of life eternal" (cf. D&C 128:5, 17). In Jacob 7:6, the gospel is defined as "the doctrine of Christ," referring to the doctrine concerning Christ, rather than the totality of Christ's teachings, since he had not yet been born when these words were uttered (cf. Mormon 3:21; D&C 76:82). Elsewhere, the Book of Mormon equates the "fullness of the gospel" with coming "to the knowledge of the true Messiah... their Redeemer" (1 Nephi 10:14; 15:13–14; cf. 3 Nephi 20:30–31; D&C 19:27).

3 There is, nevertheless, evidence that at least some Jews before the coming of Christ believed in work for the dead. Following the battle of Marisa in 163 B.C., it was discovered that each of the Jewish soldiers killed in the fight had been guilty of concealing pagan idols beneath his clothing. In order to atone for their wrong, Judas Maccabaeus collected money from the survivors in order to purchase sacrificial animals for their comrades.

And when he had made a gathering throughout the company to the sum of two thousand drachmas of silver, he sent it to Jerusalem to offer a sin offering, doing therein very well and honestly, in that he was mindful of the resurrection: for if he had not hoped that they that were slain should have risen again, it had been superfluous and vain to pray for the dead. And also in that he perceived that there was great favour laid up for those that died godly, it was an holy and good thought. Whereupon he made a reconciliation for the dead, that they might be delivered from sin. (2 Maccabees 12:43–45, KJV)
Gospel accounts, Christ does not teach such a principle. But since he had not yet wrought the atonement, we should not expect him to institute a practice that would not be valid until after his resurrection. One could counter Wilson’s question with another: “Did Christ establish the office of bishop?” From the testimony of the Gospel accounts, one would have to say, “No.” And yet Paul wrote about the qualifications for this office in the early Christian church (see 1 Timothy 3:1–8; Titus 1:6–9). By Wilson’s reasoning, shouldn’t we reject the concept of a bishop since Christ never mentioned it?

**Salvation for the Dead**

Wilson suggests that the Latter-day Saint belief in work for the dead comprises “largely interpretations of a handful of Bible passages (two in particular—1 Peter 3:19ff and 1 Corinthians 15:29)” (I.1). But when he begins his discussion of 1 Peter 3:19–22, he says, “as with all biblical interpretation, it is important that we examine these verses in their context, so that our interpretation truly comes out of the sacred text (exegesis), in contrast to reading preconceived ideas into it (eisegesis)” (I.2). By this, he hints that Joseph Smith read his own interpretation into the Bible passage, which contradicts Wilson’s earlier assertion that the prophet’s interpretation derived from the text. Wilson wants it both ways. In any event, his understanding of the passage is at variance with that of the early Christians and most modern scholars.

I was amused by Wilson’s conclusion regarding 1 Peter 4:6: “Peter evidently means Christians who are now deceased, but who were alive when they heard and believed the gospel” (I.4). “Evidently”? Now, here’s a good example of eisegesis! But Wilson doesn’t see it that way. He continues, “This interpretation fits the passage’s theme of comforting Christians who are suffering for Christ. . . . On the other hand, the view of D&C 138 that 1 Peter 4:6 is teaching salvation for the dead . . . does not fit Peter’s motive” (I.4). He should really read verse 5 again; it speaks of Christ being “ready to judge the quick and the dead.” In view of those words, verse 6 is a natural follow-on, explaining that the dead must receive the gospel message in order that they can be judged on the same basis as those who are alive (which is what the Greek word
behind “quick” means). Wilson’s objection that 1 Peter 4:6 cannot reflect the event depicted in 3:19 because the former reads “for this cause was the gospel preached,” rather than “is preached” (I.4) is just so much nonsense. By the time Peter wrote his epistle, Christ had already visited the spirit world. Peter was not writing about ongoing preaching in that realm, but about Christ’s one-time visit, which calls for the past tense.

Regarding 1 Peter 4:1–5, Wilson notes that its theme is to encourage persecuted Christians and questions how knowledge that the dead could hear the gospel in the spirit world could help them (see I.4). But he further notes that 1 Peter 4:6 “is in essence a footnote to 4:5” (I.4). Should we expect a footnote to adhere to the main theme? Along the same line, I would say that 1 Peter 3:19–21 is a footnote to verse 18. That’s the reason that Elder Bruce R. McConkie noted that Peter introduced “the doctrine of salvation for the dead ‘in an almost casual and offhand way’” (I.3). In other words, this is not Peter’s main theme but, in each case, he adds additional information related to the preceding verse. Perhaps the “footnoted” verses should be set off by parentheses to make the reading easier for all of us.

In order to counter the LDS view that God would not hold accountable those who die in ignorance of Christ, Wilson cites passages from Romans 1–2 (see I.2). However, these have nothing to say about the atonement of Christ, only that nature itself bears witness of the existence of God. Wilson then goes on to declare that “the Bible assures us that where there are truly searching hearts, God providentially provides the light necessary for salvation,” and gives the examples of the Ethiopian in Acts 8:26–40 and the centurion Cornelius in Acts 10:1–48 (I.2). Out of the billions of people who have lived in the world without even learning of the existence of Jesus Christ, much less his atonement, Wilson picks examples of two who did get the word and accepted the message. From these two examples, he concludes that everybody who seeks truth gets a chance in this life. It is rather like the saying, “All Indians walk in single file—at least, the one I saw did.”

Wilson maintains that Hebrews 9:27 indicates that “our eternal destiny is fixed at death” (I.2; cf. II.1). But the passage never makes such a declaration, noting only that the judgment comes at some point after death. Wilson also uses Jesus’ parable in Luke
16:19–31 as evidence that “there is no opportunity to repent after death.” But the rich man in that parable was not ignorant of what God required of him; in life he had “Moses and the prophets,” but did not follow them. In the Latter-day Saint view, only those who did not adequately have the chance to accept the gospel get a chance to do so in the spirit world. If man’s final judgment took place at the time of death, why would Peter say, “For for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit” (1 Peter 4:6)? And why does Revelation 20:11–13 claim that the judgment takes place at the time of the resurrection of men, while Jesus spoke of the future role of the apostles in judging the twelve tribes of Israel (see Matthew 19:28)?

Wilson notes that, in the story of the rich man and Lazarus, a “gulf” separates the righteous from the wicked, making it impossible for Lazarus to come to help the rich man (see I.2). That there was such a gulf prior to Christ’s mission to the spirit world is confirmed in various Book of Mormon passages and in Doctrine and Covenants 138. But the latter makes it clear that Christ bridged that gulf, making it possible for the gospel to be preached in the spirit world. At the time Jesus gave the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, he was still in mortality and the gulf had not yet been bridged.

Wilson claims that “the general teaching of the Bible clearly excludes the possibility of repentance after death (as does the Book of Mormon—Alma 34:31–35; 42:4, 13, 28; Helaman 13:38)” (I.2; cf. II.1). He gives no references from the Bible to support this contention and the ones drawn from the Book of Mormon refer only to the very wicked who have already rejected the message in mortality. It is true that some Latter-day Saints have misread Alma 34:34 as meaning that a person’s spirit remains the same from the time of death until the resurrection. But the “same spirit which doth possess your bodies” in mortality, “that same spirit [that] will have power to possess your body in that eternal world,” is not the individual’s spirit, but, as verse 35 makes clear, “the spirit of the devil,” to whom the wicked “have become subjected,” who “doth seal you his” and who “hath all power over you.” So we are dealing here only with those who
have rejected God and opted to follow the devil, not with people who ignorantly sin or who sin but have not rejected God.4

Wilson’s sequence of events for 1 Peter 3:18–19 is contrived: first Christ is put to death, then is resurrected, and then goes to preach to the spirits in prison (see I.2), making impossible a visit to the spirit world during the time his body was in the tomb. But Peter’s addition of Christ’s visit to the spirits in prison plays off the words “but quickened by the Spirit.” This is no more a chronological issue than is the fact that Peter then goes on to describe the “spirits in prison” as “disobedient . . . in the days of Noah” and then speaks of how many were saved on the ark and the symbolism of the flood as a type of baptism (see 1 Peter 3:20–21). All of these are merely digressions, after which Peter returns, at the end of verse 21, to his previous topic, “the resurrection of Jesus Christ,” then speaks of his ascension into heaven (verse 22). Were we to follow Wilson’s sequence, Christ would be resurrected (verse 18), go to the spirits in prison (verse 19), then be resurrected again (verse 21), and ascend to heaven (verse 22). Wilson’s argument doesn’t “hold water” and were he called upon to build an ark of such material, it would sink. To illustrate, let us look at John 11:1–2 which, in introducing the story of the raising of Lazarus, notes that Lazarus’s sister Mary had anointed Christ and “wiped his feet with her hair.” One might think, using Wilson’s reasoning, that this event had already taken place. But this would be incorrect. Mary’s anointing of Christ and wiping his feet with her hair did not take place until later, as recorded in the next chapter, John 12:1–3. It is clear that John’s statement about Mary in chapter 11 is written in retrospect since, at the time he recorded his words, both events had already taken place. Peter, too, was writing in retrospect. Ironically, Wilson departs from his “sequence” argument on page I.3, when he suggests that “an alternate interpretation is that the pre-incarnate Christ preached in the Spirit through Noah to his contemporaries.” It seems that he will grasp at any straw to deny the LDS interpretation of the passage.

4 On page I.4, he cites Alma 34:31–35 and declares that “the Book of Mormon forcefully and repeatedly teaches that the eternal destiny of those who hear and reject the truth in mortality is fixed at death.”
Wilson’s contention that Christ’s visit to the spirits in prison took place after the resurrection rather than during the time his body was in the tomb is at variance with the majority of modern scholars and with early Christian beliefs about the “harrowing of hell.” Several early Christian creeds declare that Christ “descended into hell” after his crucifixion. This is found in the fifth article of the so-called Apostles’ Creed. It is also found in part 2 of the Faith of Saint Athanasius. The Greek word rendered “hell” in English (inferno in Latin) is hades, the same word used elsewhere by Peter to denote the location where Christ went before the resurrection (see Acts 2:29–32). The passage cited is Psalm 16:10, in which the Hebrew word sheol denotes the abode of the dead. A number of early church fathers (Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Athanasius, and Cyril of Jerusalem) taught that Christ rescued some spirits from Hades.

Wilson objects to the term descent in connection with Christ’s visit and notes that Peter never uses the word (see I.2). The word, though used in other early Christian literature, including some creeds, is not critical to Latter-day Saint belief, since we consider that the spirit world is in the same physical location as the earth. We don’t care whether Christ descended, ascended, walked, or took a cab. It is all irrelevant, making Wilson’s argument (to paraphrase Will Rogers) so much applesauce.

At one point Wilson objects that the Greek word used in 1 Peter 3:19 (where it reads ejkhvrxen) is not the word one would expect if it referred to preaching the gospel (see I.3). But one Protestant scholar, commenting on this passage, notes that “the word is used throughout the Gospels of preaching the gospel of the kingdom (Matt. iv.23), and the glad tidings of remission of sins following upon repentance.” In any event, if Wilson were right that the Greek implied only an announcement by Christ, rather than actual preaching to the disobedient, this would lend support to Doctrine and Covenants 138, which relates that Christ organized the righteous spirits to preach to the disobedient spirits


6 G. F. Maclear, An Introduction to the Creeds (New York: Macmillan, 1890), 141, emphasis added.
in prison. One of Wilson’s notes also supports this idea. Of Ephesians 2:17, in which Christ preaches to the gentiles, Wilson writes, “This can not mean that Jesus himself literally preached to the Gentiles; . . . rather, his apostles, under his direction . . . carried the gospel to the Gentile world” (I.4 n.5). Why should Wilson deny us the same kind of interpretation for Christ’s mission to the spirits in prison.

Wilson demands to know why Peter singles out “Noah’s contemporaries” when speaking of Christ’s visit to the spirits in prison (I.2). It is a valid question, but one that only Peter could answer definitively. Unlike Wilson (see I.2), I do not view Moses 8:19–24 as evidence that all of Noah’s generation rejected his message. How many people could he have reached while, at the same time, constructing an ark? It is unreasonable to expect that everyone then living heard his message.

Wilson argues that “the fact that 2 Peter 2:4ff uses Noah’s contemporaries as an example of those being reserved for eternal punishment, poses a major obstacle to the LDS interpretation of 1 Peter 3:19ff as an offer of the gospel to those in the spirit world. Why? Because it would mean there is an outright contradiction between 1 Peter and 2 Peter” (I.3). The fact that Peter is writing two different letters and dealing with different topics hardly makes this a contradiction, even by Latter-day Saint interpretation. Moreover, Wilson’s use of ellipsis in his quote of 2 Peter 2:4, 5, 9 gives the impression that Peter only speaks of the wicked of Noah’s time when, in fact, he also speaks of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. A careful reading of 2 Peter 2:5–9 shows that Peter is speaking about the rescue of the righteous from earthly destruction (Noah’s family from the flood and Lot’s family from the destruction of the cities of the plain), coupled with the destruction of the wicked. He is not speaking of the final judgment at all, but of the judgment that befell these wicked people in times past and from which a few righteous souls were rescued by God.

When Wilson protests that the word spirit does not “refer to human beings” because “human beings have spirits” (I.3), “methinks the gentleman doth protest too much,” to paraphrase Shakespeare. So when Wilson objects that 1 Peter 4:6 refers to “them that are dead,” he says it cannot refer to the “spirits” of 1 Peter 3:19 (see I.3). While it is true that living human beings
have spirits, dead human beings are spirits. Are there any Christians out there who really disagree with this?

At one point Wilson suggests that Christ’s victory was extended to include “the realm of fallen angels,” based on 1 Peter 3:22 (1.3). However, the angels, authorities, and powers in that verse are not said to be among the fallen ones; we cannot assume that all the angels fell. But what surprises me most is that Wilson is willing to allow Christ’s victory to extend to the fallen angels, but not to dead mortals. Moreover, I fail to see how the fallen angels are a continuation of Peter’s theme of encouraging suffering Christians, while a visit to the dead could not be related to that theme, as Wilson maintains.

Wilson does not like Bruce R. McConkie’s suggestion that Peter introduced the doctrine of salvation for the dead “in an almost casual and offhand way” (1.3). One wonders how he reconciles similar “offhand” comments in the Bible. For example, how is it that Christ sandwiches his comment about not casting pearls before swine between his admonition to rid ourselves of faults before judging the faults of others and admonishing us to ask, seek, and knock (see Matthew 7:5–7)? I note that, like many anti-Mormon writers, Wilson delights in throwing in a comment by an “LDS apostle” (McConkie, in this case), the alternate term used being “LDS scholar.” Somehow, such writers seem to think that if they can find fault with anyone to whom they have attributed one of these titles, their case is stronger.

I note that Wilson brings up the concept of the fallen angels mating with mortal women (see I.3), even referring to the pseudepigraphic 1 Enoch, which gives this explanation for Genesis 6:1–3 (see I: 4 n. 4). Does he—does any evangelical—really believe that angels mated with mortal women, as the Enoch account says? And if he’s going to refer to one pseudepigraphic text to support his point, why does he ignore the dozens of pseudepigraphic texts that speak of baptism for the dead or of the descent of Christ into the world of spirits?

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7 The book of Moses describes the “sons of God” of Genesis 6 as the righteous among human beings (Moses 5:52–56; 6:1–8, 13, 21–22, 27, 68; 7:1; 8:13), and this idea is supported by some pseudepigraphic texts (Jubilees 1:24–25; Book of the Rolls f.102b, f.105b; Conflict of Adam and Eve II, 11:3–4; 19:8–20:38).
In regard to Christ’s visit to the spirit world, I think it appropriate to draw Wilson’s attention to another statement made by Peter, i.e., his warning to those who wrest the scriptures (see 2 Peter 3:16). It is not Joseph Smith who was guilty of eisegesis or the imposition of preconceived ideas on New Testament passages. Indeed, Joseph’s understanding of this subject was the same as that of the early church fathers and is finding more and more support among Bible scholars. Wilson, on the other hand, is imposing a very late, contrived theology on ancient texts with preconceived ideas about what Christianity should be, rather than what it actually was in the early centuries.

Wilson criticizes Doctrine and Covenants 138 (which he calls “the most detailed explanation of salvation for the dead in Latter-day scripture”) for contradicting 1 Peter 3:19–20 by indicating that Christ went to the righteous in the former, to the disobedient in the latter, making Doctrine and Covenants 138 a contradiction of Peter’s words (see I.4).8 The fact is that, as is always the case when dealing with revelation, later prophets get additional information not revealed to the earlier prophets, or at least not recorded by them. Peter simply wrote about Christ’s visit to the spirit world, while Joseph F. Smith experienced a vision of what took place during that visit and hence got more details. I realize that this answer will not satisfy one who believes in the inerrancy of the Bible, but it manifests the same phenomenon as the Bible, in that the revelation of Christ in the Old Testament was incomplete compared with what we have in the New Testament.

Noting that “D&C 138 directly contradicts 1 Peter” on the question of whether the spirits Christ visited were disobedient (see 1 Peter 3:20) or not (see D&C 138:29), Wilson adds a footnote that reads, “Joseph Smith tried to resolve this conflict in his ‘Inspired Version’ (JST) of the Bible by changing the text of 1 Peter 3:20 to read ‘some of whom were disobedient in the days of

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8 In II.4 n. 2, Wilson notes that “the 1977 edition of the Topical Guide to the Scriptures does not list Doctrine and Covenants 138:33 under its entry for ‘baptism for the dead,’ though the practice is explicitly mentioned there.” What seems to Wilson to be an oversight is readily explained by the fact that section 138 was not added to the Doctrine and Covenants until 1979, two years after the publication of the Topical Guide to which he refers. It was incorporated into the Pearl of Great Price in 1976, but the Topical Guide had already been completed.
Noah" (I.4 n. 7). Somehow, though, I fail to see how Joseph Smith was trying to reconcile 1 Peter with a revelation (see D&C 138) that would not be recorded until 1918, some 74 years after Joseph Smith’s death! If that’s what he was trying to do, then how could anyone deny his prophetic gift? What is significant in Wilson’s statement is that Joseph Smith’s version of 1 Peter 3:20 agrees with the later revelation given to his nephew, Joseph F. Smith.

At this point, it seems appropriate to note a Jewish text that attributes to the Messiah a visit to hell to liberate the sinners imprisoned there:

R[abbi]. Joshua, son of Levi, tells further: “I asked the Messiah to allow me to look into Hell, but he did not allow me, as the righteous should never behold Hell.” So I sent to the angel called Komm that he might describe Hell for me. But it was impossible, for at that moment R. Ishmael, the high priest, and R. Simeon, son of Gamaliel, and ten just men were killed, and the news reached us, so I could not go with the angel. I went afterwards with the angel Kipod and the light went with me up to the gates of Hell, and the Messiah came with me, and they were open. The sinners who were there saw the light of the Messiah, and rejoiced, and said to one another: This will bring us out from here.”

I find it ironic that a Jewish text could express belief in the Messiah’s visit to the spirit prison that a modern Christian denies.

**Baptism for the Dead**

In his second article, Wilson maintains that “a single verse in the Bible—1 Corinthians 15:29—constitutes [the] sole mention” of baptism for the dead “in ancient Christian Scripture” (II.1). He stops short of accusing Joseph Smith of building the doctrine of baptism for the dead on that verse, though this is what critics

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usually claim. Latter-day Saints, on the other hand, believe that the Prophet Joseph received that doctrine by revelation and that he would have instituted the practice even had Paul not mentioned it.

It is on this latter point that we find ourselves in agreement with Wilson, who wrote that, in 1 Corinthians 15:29, “baptism for the dead is only mentioned, it is not actually taught” (II.1). Wilson suggests that “given the scanty nature of the evidence, it is especially important to follow sound principles of Scriptural interpretation in seeking to understand this verse” (II.1). To do this, he recommends “two basic principles” with which Latter-day Saints would agree: (1) to consider a verse “in its context” and (2) to “use clear, unambiguous Scriptural passages to interpret what is less obscure or less clear, not the other way around” (II.1).

Wilson tends to break his own rules, as we shall soon see. But he also buys into the false notion that the Bible is complete and therefore lacks nothing. He concludes that because baptism for the dead is not “taught,” only “mentioned,” it must not have been a Christian practice. To me, by contrast, the fact that Paul merely mentions the topic in passing demonstrates that it was so common that he didn’t need to explain it to his audience.

In his examination of 1 Corinthians 15:29, Wilson looks at “the broader context” and “the immediate context” of the passage (II.2). The first is contrived, the second misunderstood. Let us begin by looking at the immediate context, since it is the only one that really bears on the question. We concur with Wilson’s declaration that “the first rule for interpreting any single verse of Scripture is to study it in connection with the surrounding verses,” and that the context in 1 Corinthians 15 is “resurrection, not baptism” (II.2). Wilson agrees with the LDS view that Paul was using baptism for the dead as a point favoring the existence of a resurrection. But he finds it necessary to interpolate the passage: “The false teachers who deny the resurrection are inconsistent when they baptize for the dead, for the practice is based on the hope of resurrection” (II.2, emphasis added). He derives the concept of “false teachers” from verse 12, in which Paul notes that some of the Corinthians said “that there is no resurrection of the dead” (II.2). But here his evidence falls apart.

Like other critics of the LDS practice who preceded him, Wilson places stress on the pronoun they in Paul’s comments. He
writes, "The fact that Paul’s mention of baptism for the dead is not an endorsement is signaled by the impersonal manner in which he refers to the practitioners: ‘Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? Why are they then baptized for the dead?’ If the rite was a legitimate part of apostolic teaching, we might have expected the apostle to say ‘what shall you do . . .’ or ‘what shall we do . . .’" (II.2). By using the pronoun they, Wilson declares, Paul “exclude[s] himself from those who practiced the rite” (II.2).

However, the Greek original of 1 Corinthians 15:29 does not use the pronoun they. It says, “Otherwise, what will do the ones being baptized for the dead?” The text uses a passive participle form, “the being baptized [ones],” as a substantive (where it is usually accompanied by the definite article). Participles reflect gender, number, and case, but not person. Hence, there is no third-person plural (they) in the Greek original. Stressing the pronoun supplied by the English Bible translators for flow in English distorts Paul’s meaning. Being devoid of reference to person, the passage, does not restrict the practice to “false teachers” as Wilson contends. So Wilson is patently wrong when he says that “if we ask who the ‘they’ in verse 29 refers to, the context clearly points us back to verse 12. It is those within the Corinthian congregation who are denying the resurrection, and whom the entire passage is written to refute” (II.3). Wilson’s case is made of thin air, nothing more. But since most of his readers rely on the English passage, I suspect that they will be taken in by his arguments.

Anticipating that Latter-day Saints might ask “why didn’t Paul refute the practice?” (II.3), Wilson draws again upon his unwarranted assumption (based upon the nonexistent pronoun they) that “Paul has already associated the rite with false teachers. So in this sense, it has no positive standing and needed no special refutation” (II.3).

Wilson cites Tertullian’s interpretation of Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 15:29, noting his belief that Paul referred to those “who were vainly baptized for the dead” yet didn’t believe in the resurrection (II.3). While it is certainly appropriate to cite Tertullian’s opinion of the passage, in all fairness one must note that his was not the only voice. Dozens of early Christian texts speak of
baptism for the dead and the practice became so distorted by the fourth century that some were baptizing the bodies of the dead rather than using proxies, resulting in the prohibition of such practices at the Synod of Hippo and the third Council of Carthage. But proxy baptism for the dead continued even after that time among the Christians of Egypt and Ethiopia and among the Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran, all of whom still continue the practice, albeit on a restricted basis. Wilson may be correct in saying that “the practice of baptism for the dead in fact never became widespread,” but he clearly ignores the fact that it was practiced in early Christianity outside the area of Corinth.

Is Baptism Necessary for Salvation?

I found it significant that, when listing what is required “to receive forgiveness of sins and escape the judgment of God,” Wilson follows the evangelical line that it is necessary only to “believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ” (1.1). He fails to note that the Bible specifies that baptism is for the remission of sins (see Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3; Acts 2:38). Jesus indicated that rebirth by water and the Spirit were necessary to enter into the kingdom of God (see John 3:5, 7). According to Mark 16:15–16, his last words to the apostles before his ascension were “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be

10 Among these groups, baptism is performed only for deceased relatives; no corresponding attempt to do genealogical research is performed. Such was also the earliest LDS practice (in Nauvoo, for instance), until revelation came to Wilford Woodruff and the Genealogical Society of Utah was established, see Thomas G. Alexander, Things in Heaven and Earth: The Life and Times of Wilford Woodruff, a Mormon Prophet (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1991), 322–23. A Syrian Orthodox priest informed me that his church also continues the practice, but he has not yet provided me any documentation to support his statement.

11 In a forthcoming FARMS volume on ancient temples (a follow-up to Temples of the Ancient World), I discuss the subject at length— with numerous textual examples—in an article entitled, “Baptism for the Dead in Early Christianity.” The article will put to rest any doubts about the widespread belief in baptism for the dead among early Christians. Wilson does note its practice by “the heretical Marcionite sect in the second century and the Ephrata Society, a Christian occult group in Pennsylvania in the 1700s” (11.3).
damned.” This, of course, bears on the question of how the dead can receive this essential ordinance.

Wilson takes exception to Bible passages that mention baptism. For example, after noting that Latter-day Saints cite Peter’s statement in Acts 2:38 ("repent, and be baptized . . . for the remission of your sins"), he adds that elsewhere, in Acts 3:19 and Acts 10:43, Peter speaks of being converted and believing in order to have one’s sins remitted, without mentioning baptism (see II.3). Reasoning that this means that baptism is unnecessary for a remission of sins is simply begging the question. The fact that Peter mentions only one or two principles of the gospel in one place and others in another does not mean that we can exclude any of them. To read the other passages and exclude Acts 2:38 is a mistake. Neither Wilson nor anyone else can, by such reasoning, erase the clear meaning of Peter’s words about being “baptized for the remission of your sins.” Consequently, Wilson is wrong in his dogmatic declaration that “it goes beyond Biblical teaching to say that baptism is an absolute necessity, in the sense of having saving value” (II.4).

His conclusion is based, in part, on the fact that “the New Testament presents baptism as the virtual equivalent of the Old Testament rite of circumcision (Colossians 2:12–13), and it declares explicitly that circumcision did not have saving value” (II.3). However, the Colossians passage is specific that, through the ordinance of baptism, we become “dead in [our] sins,” Christ “having forgiven you all trespasses.” Moreover, verse 11, which Wilson does not cite, makes it clear that Paul was writing of “the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ.” That is, through baptism, which is “the circumcision without hands,” we put off sins in the same way that, through regular circumcision, the foreskin is removed from the body. Paul was using a simple analogy and was not equating the saving ordinance of baptism with the nonsaving ordinance of circumcision.

In discussing “the broader context” of Paul’s mention of baptism for the dead, Wilson notes “three other references to baptism in 1 Corinthians 1:14–17, 10:2, and 12:13” and concludes that Paul’s frequent mention of the topic was prompted by the fact that the Corinthians had an “inflated view of baptism”—a
statement that appears twice in his analysis (II.2). From this and from his illogical—and sometimes blind—approach, it seems that it is his religious bias against baptism as a saving ordinance that has most influenced Wilson’s attack on the LDS practice of baptism for the dead.

If there is anything predictable about Wilson’s Heart and Mind newsletter, it is that it constantly repeats that “Mormonism” is at variance with “historic Christianity.” Thus, in connection with the topic discussed in this review, Wilson wrote that “salvation for the dead is one of the distinctive doctrines of Mormonism that separates it from historic Christianity” (I.1) and that “proxy baptism . . . is one of the distinctive doctrines of Mormonism that separates it from historic, Biblical Christianity” (II.1). I suppose that, if they are repeated often enough, some will believe these statements, despite the fact that the evidence points in the other direction. A large number of early Christian documents support both the belief in salvation of the dead and proxy baptism for the dead. The historic connections favor the Latter-day Saint position.
Mormonism on the Internet II
Reviewed by Gregory Taggart

Last year I wrote a brief review called “Mormonism on the Internet: Now Everybody Has a Printing Press.”¹ A couple of months ago, FARMS asked me if I was interested in doing an update and in reviewing Lauramaery Gold’s book, Mormons on the Internet² for good measure. With an eye toward keeping my name in print in hopes that someone would mistake me for a writer, I accepted and began my review of Gold’s book.

I soon discovered that not only had Gold written a fine guide to the church on the Internet, she was constructing a web site that would feature all of her reviews, *****, and †s included. I saw no reason to duplicate her efforts. On her site—when it is completed—you will find all her reviews and a link to each site reviewed.³ I also discovered that I had been reviewed, not by Gold but by the webmaster of one of the web sites I had reviewed.⁴ What a thrill: A review of something other than my backhand!

My joy was short-lived, however. The webmaster, in response to my published comments, said, “It’s probably safe to say that FARMS is not in favor of freedom of information.”⁵ Now, I have

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² I assure you that, in spite of the similarities in the title of my review and Gold’s book, neither finds its origin in anything written by Solomon Spaulding.
³ See members.aol.com/MormonNet/index.htm. You will need a password to enter the site.
⁴ See www.california.com/~rpcman/FARMS.HTM.
⁵ See FARMS.HTM, pg. 1, where Mr. rpcman writes of my review, “In his first paragraph we read, . . . any . . . html-literate with time on his hands and a bone to pick with the Latter-day Saint Church can set up shop right across the superhighway from the Church Office Building. Sadly, there is no way to eradicate this blight on the highway, so you are going to have to deal with it or learn to ignore it.”
never considered myself a big enough tail to wag that dog, but there it was in print. Sorry, FARMS. I got carried away with . . . well, let me quote what I tried to e-mail the webmaster, Mr. rpcman:

Dear Mr. rpcman,

I just read your response to my review of your site in the FARMS Review. Your point about my blight metaphor is misguided but appreciated nonetheless. I am not big on suppression, though I grow very tired of what passes for knowledge these days among those pointing their fingers at the church I love. Still, I may have been too caught up in the cuteness of the super-highway/blight metaphor to realize that it would be interpreted the way you did. That said, it amazes me how many times FARMS (or anyone else) can spray Weed Be Gone on some of the blight. It never dies. Like morning glory, its interlocking roots spread all over the place. Stomp it out here, and it grows over there. What you get is nothing new, just more of the same old weed. (So you don’t mistake my point: There are a ton of arguments used against Mormonism that have been thoroughly discredited. Do they go away? No. Should they? In the name of Honest Intellectual Inquiry, I think they should.)

Your response to my statement that “answers exist to everything you read out there” was a little self-serving. To infer from what I wrote that just any old answer would do is not accurate. I agree that correct answers are needed. My guess is that you knew that. (And who but you said anything about “hid[ing] the ‘answers’” anyway?)

By the way, I do know what “<g>” means. I just found the juxtapositioning—intentionally or otherwise—of your (tongue-in-cheek?) jab at FARMS and the nearby link to ad hominemizing too rich to ignore.

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6 This phrase appears as a banner at the bottom of Mr. rpcman’s pages; therefore, he must be engaged in it.
One of the drawbacks of the written word in general and Internetspeak like <g> in particular is that they are generally not up to the task of conveying all the nuances of emotion and humor. Your <g> could easily be read as “doesn’t this make FARMS look silly?”

Now, I quote this to give you an idea of my frame of mind when I stumbled on to some of the best Mormon web sites out there. I was frustrated. I was tired of sites posing as honest intellectual inquiry, when they were little more than efforts to vent against Mormonism. I was not really interested in reviewing them. And then it happened: I stumbled onto Wade Englund’s site, Anti-LDS Point/Counterpoint at www.aros.net/~wenglund/frame2.htm. To quote Monty Python, “And now for something completely different.”

**Where the Web Shines**

Englund’s site, and two others mentioned below, take responding to online critics to a new level. Englund’s site is interesting for a number of reasons. First, he takes on thirteen anti-Mormon sites by mirroring them on his site—mirrors like those in a fun house, I should add. For example, you can visit both Ed Decker’s site www.saintsalive.com and Englund’s mirror site from Englund’s site. On the Decker site, you can read the truth according to Decker. On Englund’s mirror of it, you can read the truth about Ed. Fair enough? But Englund doesn’t stop there. He provides links to Daniel Peterson’s review of *Decker’s Complete Handbook on Mormonism*,7 James Carver’s review of *To Moroni with Love*, and a variety of responses to the movie, *The God Makers*.

Englund’s site should appeal to all those interested in honest intellectual inquiry since the links to the anti-sites are side-by-side with their mirrors. A click here and another click there, and pretty soon you’ll have all the information you need to assess whether

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Ed Decker, Sharon Doty, or Peter Elias, among others, fairly present Mormon beliefs.8

I am a little disappointed that Englund apparently is not going to do mirrors or counterpoints for a number of sites, including the Tanners'. Given the task he has taken on with his site, though, I can understand why. I am also bothered that Englund's frame setup makes it difficult to find the origin of some of the articles he links to. For example, his link to Daniel Peterson's article on Decker's book acknowledges Peterson's authorship, but someone unfamiliar with Peterson's writing wouldn't know that FARMS was the publisher.

Another positive feature on Englund's site is the section entitled "Similarities in Approach in Anti-LDS and Anti-Christians." There he sets up a series of paired links comparing the criticisms of Latter-day Saint and Christian beliefs on various subjects such as scripture, "what they don't tell you," and "strange sayings/teachings of." A review of any one of Englund's paired links ought to alert anti-Mormons that the same methods they use against the goose are being used to "discredit" the gander.

Englund links to a number of other satisfying and very well-organized sites that also deal in apologetics. My favorite is SHIELDs, or Scholarly & Historical Information Exchange for Latter-day Saints (www.shields-research.org). Click on the Topics box, then Critics Corner, and voila! You will find a hypertext list of ministries that maintain web sites, including John Ankerberg, Alpha & Omega, and Bill McKeever. As SHIELDs is quick to point out, "links below are not to critics' web sites. These links are to information and comments about the critics on the SHIELDs web site."

Click on Alpha & Omega and you are treated to the correspondence of William Hamblin, Louis Midgley, Daniel Peterson, and Eugene Seaich with James White, the director of this ministry. You will also find Ara Norwood's review of White's book, Letters

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8 At the time of this review, a number of mirror sites, including the mirrors of Bill McKeever's and Dennis Robbins's sites, were still under construction.
to a Mormon Elder. If your tastes run to the Tanners’ Utah Lighthouse Ministry, a click will get you a bushel of reviews and a peck of letters, all very interesting.

If you are interested in what’s new—and in some cases, what’s old but still pertinent today—on the standard works, you might click on Scriptures and Apocryphal for a look at recent writing on the Book of Mormon and the Pearl of Great Price. I will soon be returning to the site to read B. H. Roberts’s response to Theodore Schroeder’s turn-of-the-century articles on the Spaulding theory. I have never read it before. Most of the articles on these pages are from FARMS Review of Books. You will also find links to articles by Jeff Lindsay, Kerry Shirts, and Mike Parker.

An interesting section and project is SHIELDS’s response to appendix B of Walter Martin’s book, The Maze of Mormonism. The appendix consisted of 42 “Unanswered Questions on the Mormon Gospel,” according to Stanley Barker of SHIELDS. Now Barker is working to answer the questions. Again. This project may be of interest to the gospel author in search of a publisher. Barker would apparently appreciate your help.

Another nifty feature of the SHIELDS site is its index of authors. Functioning much like a bibliography for the site, the index lists each article and letter original to the site. It would be nice if authors of linked articles were also listed.

The last of the three sites belongs to FAIR, or Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research (www.fair-lds.org). Like SHIELDS, FAIR is the work of many people. Like both the Englund and SHIELDS sites, this effort is well-organized and offers some interesting and important information to help truth-seekers deal with online anti-Mormonism. I was glad to see Apologetics 101 featured on the site. A cram course in logic and apologetics, this page is a must for anybody who is a premise short of a syllogism.

The FAIR site also has an extensive list of links to various book reviews listed by author. Decker, the Tanners, McKeever,

10 FARMS is required by our copyright policy to request a link to our site, rather than sanction copying our documents to other sites.
and Ankerberg are all there with more attention from responsible scholars than they probably hoped to generate.

What excites me most about each of these sites is the way they are organized and the effort they make to help people understand the tactics of those opposed to the Lord’s work. Understand that each site is a fairly new effort. There is much construction left to do. Still, because of what is onsite already, I will be returning again and again to see what’s up. I will say that I hope that the people behind these sites are supporting FARMS research (www.farmsresearch.com), since they rely heavily though hardly exclusively on it. They do contribute perhaps by essentially categorizing FARMS and other online articles according to various topics, be they ministry, question, or author.

Consequently, inquiring minds are generally just a click or two away from a researched and reasoned answer to virtually any question they find on the Internet about Mormonism. And if the answer is not on-site, an e-mail to the site owners would no doubt result in an answer.

There is much good happening on the Internet. Take some time to visit the sites I have discussed in this article, and I am certain you will agree that the rock cut out of a mountain is sure to fill the whole earth. Web sites such as these are there to help.

Reviewed by Gregory Taggart

If a URL is all Greek to you, Lauramaery Gold’s book, *Mormons on the Internet*, is an excellent resource for discovering what the Internet has to offer faithful Mormons and those with “a sincere heart and real intent.” However, let me refer to an article in the Saturday, 9 May 1998, *Deseret News* to illustrate a couple of minor shortcomings that I find with her book. Titled “Bishop pays big bucks to buy, clean up ‘Mormon.com’ Web site,” the article tells how Orem businessman “Warren Osborn paid tens of thousands of dollars to rescue the domain name Mormon.com” from the hands of its apparently anti-Mormon founder. Now that Osborn has removed what the *News* called “pornography and vile alterations of scriptures,” www.Mormon.com is worth a visit by inquiring minds interested in Mormonism. Unfortunately, Gold doesn’t mention the site since it only became a Mormon-friendly site in 1998 after *Mormons on the Internet* was published in 1997, and Gold chose not to review web sites “that appear to exist solely to trash what Latter-day Saints hold sacred.”¹ Since the Internet is dynamic and changes daily, while the printed word is static, Gold’s book already lags what is new on the Internet by almost a year.²

But even if Mormon.com were reviewed in her book, I defy you to find it without reading the entire book, paying close attention to each and every URL. The otherwise complete subject index is of little help since it only lists Gold’s topics, not actual URLs.

¹ In spite of this standard, she did review some controversial web sites, mailing lists, and newsgroups, one of which she calls the “nastiest LDS site on the Web”; see news:alt.religion.mormon (p. 189).

² This defect may soon be remedied by Gold’s web site of the same name at members.aol.com/MormonNet/index.htm. Though the site is apparently under construction, it promises a dynamic, ongoing review of Mormon web sites. I’ve bookmarked the site to follow its progress.
That is not entirely Gold's fault. URLs are often long, unwieldy, and don’t fit neatly into a subject index. Still, if you want to see what Gold has to say about your favorite web site, it would be nice if you could “back into” the review from the subject index by using the URL. Fortunately, news groups—alt.genealogy, news:alt.genealogy, for example—and mailing lists—LDS-GE M S, www.xmission.com/~dkenison/lds/gems, for instance—are easier to find in the index.

Mormon.com also illustrates a problem that I would like to see Gold deal with in her reviews. For some reason, web publishers are reluctant, unwilling, or just forgetting to tell us who they are. Were it not for the Deseret News article, I wouldn’t know that Warren Osborn was behind Mormon.com. Is it too much to ask that web publishers follow the example of their siblings in print and provide some information about the who, what, where, and why of their cyber offerings? An excellent example of such a site is SHIELD S, shields-r.simplenet.com/index.html, the acronym for Scholarly & Historical Information Exchange for Latter-day Saints. Gold should reserve her highest rating, *****, for those that follow this simple netiquette. Imitating SHIELD S would be a good start.

These problems aside, Mormons on the Internet is a great introduction to what is where with cyber Mormonism. From describing the many things a faithful member can do online to “proclaim, redeem, and perfect,” to explaining how to log on and which search engines do the best job finding Mormon sites, Gold’s effort of covering the power of the Internet as it pertains to the Lord’s church is a good one.

3 Through the magic of e-mail, I learned that Osborn bought the site near the middle of March 1998. Now, Osborn’s executive assistant, Greg Hahn, is the only person working on the site and then only part time. He promises to add a biography soon. Until then, you might want to know that Osborn is the bishop of the BYU 24th Ward, and Hahn is the ward clerk.

4 See the accompanying review in this issue, “Mormonism on the Internet II,” pages 200–205.
Lead Me, Guide Me

Chapters 1 through 4 are a must for a Mormon new to the Internet. In fact, I found them useful, and I have been wandering around out there for over two years now. Chapter 1 covers the online Mormon experience in general. Through interviews, newsgroup postings, and mailing lists, Gold documents the online experience of a variety of faithful Mormons. Her correspondents explain how they have used the Internet to prepare Primary lessons, work on their genealogy, or, in a few cases, stay active. My favorite is the member in Kyrgyzstan, on China’s western border, who uses the Internet to stay connected to the church by browsing LDS-oriented web sites on Sunday. “My mom’s home teachers have been in touch with me by e-mail, as have friends from her home ward” (p. 10). Though he has no formal contact with the church because of his location, he carries on conversations with members on the AML-List\(^5\) and EYRING-List\(^6\) mailing Listservs, “which has been very helpful to me” (p. 10).

In chapter 4, Gold performs a great service for new converts to the Net by listing Mormon-friendly sites full of links to other good Mormon sites. Yes, if you want, you can use Yahoo, Excite, or one of the other search engines to find web sites about Mormonism. But if you do, the results of your search are as likely to be anti-Mormon as they are Mormon. For someone new to the Internet, this can be a real shock, distraction, and time waster. Trust me, your time is better spent linking from quality sites like www.mormons.org and www.ldsworld.com/index.asp, than it is reading the rehashed, recycled, and ridiculous anti-Mormon arguments you are bound to stumble into with a search engine.\(^7\)

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\(^5\) Send subscription requests to aml-request@cc.weber.edu.
\(^6\) Send subscription requests to majordomo@majordomo.netcom.com.
\(^7\) Although I do not wish to press on this point too hard, it took me three tries to find a URL listed on pages 49 and 53 of Mormons on the Internet before I found one that worked for purposes of this sentence. The URL for LDS Web Ring (page 53) no longer worked, and the new URL for PEARLS www.ldschurch.net/pearls/ (the one on page 49 is old) was apparently having problems the day I checked it. Again, the Internet changes daily. A book does not. Also, note that on pages 47–49, Gold makes a pitch for her own web site, Mormons on the Internet Registry members.aol.com/MormonNet as “absolutely the best site for locating information on LDS Web sites.” She then names it as one of her “Top
Gold’s discussion of search engines in chapter 4 is also helpful. For example, I did not realize that +Mormon +Zion –Moab “will return documents containing the keywords Mormon and Zion, but only if those documents do not contain the word Moab.” I am logging on the Internet right now to see what +Mormon –Jerald –Sandra –Tanner will return. This may be happy news indeed!

Dewey Has Nothing on Lauramaery Gold

*Mormons on the Internet* is well-organized. Other than the subject index not listing URLs, the book’s contents are easily accessible. If Gold does the same on her web site, the Saints will be able to find the ****✓ sites easily on the Web.

The Church’s Three-fold Mission

Part 2 has one chapter each for the subjects of proclaiming the gospel, perfecting the saints, and redeeming the dead. In each chapter one will find a further breakdown of the church’s mission. For example, under proclaiming the gospel, web sites are listed and reviewed under such topics as testimonies, introduction to the church, responses to criticism, and missionary pages, with further subcategories under each. Gold not only reviews web sites in each category, but she also often shares stories to illustrate what is available in a particular area. For example, in the “Missionary Pages” section she includes Priscilla Staines’s conversion story found on the LDS gems web site at www.xmission.com/~dkenison/lds/gems (pp. 97–98. She also laces her book with sidebars, containing e-mail she has received from webmasters, websurfers, and other sundry online Mormons. For readers with no experience on the Internet or without e-mail, this is a nice and instructive touch.

[20 Sites’ on pages 322–25. As I have explained above, the site is still under construction as of the date of this review. If she follows through, her site will surely rank in everyone’s top twenty for links. Right now, it is just another site.]
Living a Latter-day Saint Life

Part 3 covers such topics as the living church, auxiliaries, interest groups, pursuit of excellence, “the glory of God is intelligence,” and what’s missing. If you want help with your Primary lesson, Gold’s book lists a number of sources, including a mailing list, LDSPRIMARY www.panix.com/~klarsen/ldsprimary.html (p. 198), and a web site she calls Primary Idea Page www.primarypage.com (p. 199). If home schooling is your passion, Gold suggests what she calls the LDS Home Schooling Page homelgte.net/shannon2/index.htm (p. 234). If your heart is heavy, she recommends www.sas.upenn.edu/~dbowie/armlc/armlc.htm (p. 268), among others, for some good old Mormon humor.

Conclusion

Gold covers a lot of cyberspace and hundreds of sites in her book and performs a service to the reader in the process. From her rating system, explained on page 24, to her top twenty sites on pages 322–25, she offers her reader a fairly comprehensive look at web sites, newsgroups, and mailing lists devoted to things Mormon. Yes, she may give short shrift to those web folks who work so hard to lead Mormons to the light, but she doesn’t ignore them. To my knowledge, Gold is the only person to catalogue web sites devoted to Mormonism. Her book has some drawbacks, some of which she can remedy in her next edition. Others are inherent with the web. Most drawbacks she can correct on her web site when it is up and running.

After reading Gold’s book and wandering around the Internet, I agree with her conclusion on page 320, in which she lists a number of topics that are not covered well enough by Mormon sites: The life and mission of Jesus Christ, including the atonement and the plan of salvation, faith, repentance, baptism, the Godhead, and the nature of God. If she is right, then we need to repent of our need for constant response to critics and our penchant for dealing in the auxiliary matters of the church and give more attention to testifying of Jesus and his gospel.
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