# INTERPRETER
## A Journal of Mormon Scripture

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# Charity in Defending the Kingdom

*Daniel C. Peterson*

## On Maintaining Fairness and Charity

With one striking exception, leaders and members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are, and always have been, flawed people. (No better quality of human is available.) "We have this treasure in earthen vessels," the apostle Paul said, referring to the gospel and its mortal ministers, "that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us" (2 Corinthians 4:7).

Although we obviously shouldn't be surprised at it, the church's human side is sometimes jarring and, if permitted, can cause disillusionment. It's urgently important, therefore, even for our own sake, that we "clothe [our]selves with the bond of charity, as with a mantle, which is the bond of perfectness and peace" (Doctrine and Covenants 88:125). Failure to do so can be spiritually lethal.

"For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged," taught Jesus, "and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again" (Matthew 7:2). Christians worldwide regularly pray, rather dangerously, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." Why is this dangerous? "If ye forgive men their trespasses," the Savior explained, "your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:12, 14–15). And nobody is guiltless. "Use every man after his

desert," says Shakespeare's Hamlet, "and who should 'scape whipping?"[1]

"My disciples, in days of old," says the Lord, "sought occasion against one another and forgave not one another in their hearts; and for this evil they were afflicted and sorely chastened" (Doctrine and Covenants 64:8).

In our dispensation, Thomas Marsh became so preoccupied with Joseph Smith's perceived imperfections that he forfeited his apostleship and was excommunicated in 1839. This wasn't because Joseph was perfect. "He has sinned," the Lord flatly declared. (Fortunately, my sins aren't announced in scripture.) But, adds the Lord, "he that forgiveth not his brother his trespasses standeth condemned before the Lord; for there remaineth in him the greater sin" (Doctrine and Covenants 64:7, 9).

Rebaptized in 1857, Marsh expressed regret for his nearly two decades outside the Church. "I got a beam in my eye and thought I could discover a mote in Joseph's eye. . . . I was . . . completely darkened."[2]

Contrast his attitude with that of the well-educated Lorenzo Snow, who boarded with the Smiths for a time: "I can fellowship the President of the Church, [even] if he does not know everything I know. . . . I saw the . . . imperfections in [Joseph]. . . . I thanked God that he would put upon a man who had those imperfections the power and authority he placed upon him . . . for I knew that I myself had weakness[es], and I thought there was a chance for me. . . . I thanked God that I saw those imperfections."[3]

1. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, act 2, scene 2, lines 529–31.

2. Thomas Baldwin Marsh, "History of Thomas Baldwin Marsh," *Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star* 26 (25 June 1864): 406.

3. George Q. Cannon Journal, 7 Jan. 1898, Church Archives, Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, UT, quoted in part in Stanley B. Kimball, *Heber C. Kimball: Mormon Patriarch and Pioneer* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), xvn1.

"I feel like shouting hallelujah, all the time," declared Joseph's close friend and disciple Brigham Young, "when I think that I ever knew Joseph Smith."[4] Significantly, his dying words were "Joseph, Joseph, Joseph!"[5]

Observing others' weaknesses, perhaps even with sorrow, is very different from dwelling on them. Charity, wrote the apostle Paul, "rejoiceth not in iniquity" (1 Corinthians 13:6). This surely applies to our fellow members, Bishops, Relief Society presidents, and Stake presidents, and to the good but imperfect men who have been and are called to lead the Church. It also applies to those who write books for the Saints, and, yes, to those who write for and edit *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture.*

A year after leaving the American presidency, Theodore Roosevelt delivered a speech in Paris entitled "Citizenship in a Republic": "It is not the critic who counts," he said,

> not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall

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4. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 3:51.

5. Quoted in B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: Century 1* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1930), 5:509.

never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.[6]

It would be unrealistic, though, to expect indulgent charity toward our foibles and flaws from all those outside the church. Some will grant it, surely. But some—and particularly those residing in the "great and spacious building" of Lehi's vision (1 Nephi 8:26–28)—will certainly not.

Scriptural prophecies seem to indicate that, while the restored gospel will spread throughout the earth, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints will always be a minority.[7] Which is to say that the majority of humankind will continue to be either ignorant of or indifferent toward the Church's claims, or, as depicted in Lehi's vision, will sneer at them and find them (and us) ridiculous.[8] We should not be dismayed when we encounter such reactions. They were predicted many centuries ago.

Sometime in the Fall of 1974, I read an article in the Georgetown University newspaper about the open house for the newly built Washington D.C. Temple. I particularly remember its mockery of the temple's new president, a retired Singer Corporation executive whose hand the author had shaken during a press reception. It was a hand, the article sneered, that had undoubtedly demonstrated and sold many sewing machines in its time.

Georgetown is a Catholic school, and I recall wondering whether the article would have been as contemptuous toward Peter, whom Catholics revere as the first pope but whose hands had, undoubtedly, mended and cast a great many fishing nets in

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6. Theodore Roosevelt, "Citizenship In A Republic," (speech, The Sorbonne, Paris, France, 23 April 1910, http://www.theodore-roosevelt.com/images/research/speeches/maninthearena.pdf.

7. 1 Nephi 14:12; Matthew 24:37–41; Luke 17:31–36.

8. 1 Nephi 8:26–28; 11:35–36.

his earlier years. Or, even, toward Jesus himself, whose youthful hands, we're told, were busy in his father's workshop.

Ironically, such smug elitism would have been quite congenial to those who eventually killed Jesus. In the Gospel of John, for example, the leaders of the Jews send officers to arrest the Savior, but their plans fail: "Then came the officers to the chief priests and Pharisees; and they said unto them, Why have ye not brought him? The officers answered, Never man spake like this man. Then answered them the Pharisees, Are ye also deceived? Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him? But this people who knoweth not the law are cursed" (John 7:45–49).

Today some secular critics find American Mormons culturally unfashionable because, among other things, we're overwhelmingly middle class, which simply isn't cool. (By contrast, such critics sometimes romanticize poverty.) In that light, it has amused me to notice, while rereading Peter Brown's classic *The World of Late Antiquity*, how often Brown refers to the "middle class" character and the "middlebrow" culture of Christianity during that period.[9]

"By 200," he writes, "the Christian communities were not recruited from among the 'humble and oppressed'; they were groupings of the lower middle classes and of the respectable artisans of the cities. Far from being deprived, these people had found fresh opportunities and prosperity in the Roman empire."[10] (It's debatable, by the way, whether even the earliest Christians were truly poor; Peter owned his own fishing boat, and his house in Capernaum was fairly substantial.)

Brown's description recalls nineteenth-century English Mormon converts, who were primarily craftsmen and industrial laborers, not the desperately poor. Charles Dickens

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9. Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity: AD 150–750* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1989), 62, 64, 86, etc.

10. Brown, *World of Late Antiquity*, 62.

noticed this when, in June 1863, he visited the London docks to watch eight hundred Latter-day Saints board an emigrant ship for America:

"I should say," he wrote, "that most familiar kinds of handicraft trades were represented here. Farm-laborers, shepherds, and the like, had their full share of representation, but I doubt if they preponderated." "To the rout and overthrow of all my expectations," he reported, the emigrants were "the pick and flower of England."[11]

Another point of elite criticism focuses on Mormonism's simple teachings, sometimes dismissed as shallow, and the absence of trained theologians among its lay leaders. Listen again, however, to Peter Brown on ancient Christianity:

"Already, some writers looked down from the high battlements of their classical culture at the obscure world pressing in upon them." Yet the second-century physician and philosopher Galen "noticed that the Christians were apparently enabled by their brutally simple parables and commands to live according to the highest maxims of ancient ethics. The Christian Apologists boasted of just this achievement. Plato, they said, had served good food with fancy dressings, but the Apostles cooked for the masses in a wholesome soup-kitchen!"[12]

But now, with all this in mind, is there any place in the Kingdom for such a publication as *Interpreter*?

Emphatically yes!

Many years ago, during the early days of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS), which would eventually become the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship at Brigham Young University, a very prominent leader of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day

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11.  Charles Dickens, "Bound for the Great Salt Lake," in *The Uncommercial Traveller* (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1869), 324, 317, 316, http://books.google.com/books?id=t_5B568YPsQC&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false.

12.  Brown, *World of Late Antiquity*, 64.

Saints counseled one of the leaders of FARMS never to forget "the Relief Society sister in Parowan."

It's a principle that we who were the leaders of FARMS and then of the Maxwell Institute tried never to forget: While we certainly attempted to make our publications and arguments academically rigorous, we also strove to ensure that they were clear, and that they would, on the whole, be relevant and helpful to interested but non-academic members of the Church. We knew, for example, that a principal interest of our audience, and of our subscribers and among the donors who generously supported our work, was defense of the faith, apologetics. They cared, and we cared, about the impact of our work upon Latter-day Saints who might be challenged by seeming difficulties in Mormon history and scripture, as well as upon outsiders who might be considering the claims of the Restoration.

*Interpreter* has been founded, at least in part, to ensure that that principle, of caring not merely for professional scholars and academic libraries but for ordinary Latter-day Saints and for religiously-interested outsiders, continues to be honored. Though we hope to adhere to high academic standards, we will not forget our wider audience.

But isn't the very act of engaging in academic disputes, and especially of writing and publishing reviews—unless, of course, they're entirely positive, and perhaps even saccharine and fawning—an offense against charity? (*Interpreter* intends to carry on the tradition, established with the *FARMS Review*, of publishing book reviews, and sometimes very substantial ones.) How can the former editor of the *FARMS Review* (briefly, under his tenure, renamed the *Mormon Studies Review*) write about charity with a straight face?

There can be no question that scholars, and especially reviewers, who seek to be and behave as Christians, walk a very difficult line. And this is particularly true when the issues at stake involve religion, contentious, disputed matters of ultimate

concern and value. Such writers must be fair, and they must not be abusive. But they must tell the truth. And sometimes the truth is that evidence has been deliberately or inadvertently misused or misrepresented, that an argument is invalid, that a thesis doesn't hold water, that an agenda is misguided, that something is poorly written. And, if a reviewer is committed to seeking and telling the truth, such things must be pointed out where they seem to occur.

I've encountered a few people who believe that the sheer writing of a less-than-positive book review constitutes an illegitimate attack. But I can't possibly agree. Writing such a review is no more intrinsically wrong than is penning a critique of a play or a musical composition, writing a critical restaurant review, or, for that matter, assigning a less-than-perfect grade to a student paper.

Everything depends upon manner and tone, and upon fairness. Fortunately, although the *Review* enjoyed a well-earned reputation for its irony and wit, as well as for telling the truth as its authors perceived the truth to be, I can report that, in my sincere and serious judgment, those who wrote for it did a very good job, through nearly a quarter of a century, of maintaining fairness and charity.

I was very proud of the *FARMS Review* and the *Mormon Studies Review.*

And *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* is going to be even better. As is plainly evident from this first volume, it has established a high standard for itself. We pledge that we will maintain that standard.

No introduction would be complete without acknowledging the tremendous help given by so many people to make this publication possible. I am especially grateful to Don Brugger and his editing team at the Maxwell Institute who had prepared several of the pieces in this volume for publication before the *Review* was put on hold. Members of the editorial board of

*Interpreter* have put in many hours to adhere to our schedule of posting an article a week on our website, and now completing this first volume. I'm deeply, deeply grateful to all those who have contributed thus far.

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# "Thou Knowest That I Believe" Invoking The Spirit of the Lord as Council Witness in 1 Nephi 11

*David Bokovoy*

*The Book of Mormon features an esoteric exchange between the prophet Nephi and the Spirit of the Lord on an exceedingly high mountain. The following essay explores some of the ways in which an Israelite familiar with ancient religious experiences and scribal techniques might have interpreted this event. The analysis shows that Nephi's conversation, as well as other similar accounts in the Book of Mormon, echoes an ancient temple motif. As part of this paradigm, the essay explores the manner in which the text depicts the Spirit of the Lord in a role associated with members of the divine council in both biblical and general Near Eastern conceptions.*

The opening chapters of the Book of Mormon feature an interesting conversation between Nephi and the Spirit of the Lord. This discussion includes a question-and-answer session on a mountaintop that results in Nephi receiving a sacred "sign" (1 Nephi 11:1–7). A careful reading of 1 Nephi 11 illustrates that this esoteric exchange follows an ancient configuration reflected in Israelite ritual performances. The conversation in 1 Nephi 11 not only echoes an ancient temple motif, it also depicts the Spirit of the Lord as a witness in a manner that typifies one of the traditional roles fulfilled by members of the divine council in both biblical and general Near Eastern conceptions. By successfully expressing his testimony in the truthfulness of Lehi's teachings, Nephi invoked the Spirit of the

Lord as a divine witness to the prophet's worthiness to receive advanced spiritual insights.

**Nephi's Vision**

Nephi's description of his exchange with the Spirit of the Lord commences with the prophet in the act of pondering the words his father had shared regarding a sacred dream: "As I sat pondering in mine heart I was caught away in the Spirit of the Lord, yea, into an exceedingly high mountain, which I never had before seen, and upon which I never had before set my foot" (1 Nephi 11:1).

While not a part of Lehi's parallel vision, Nephi's experience of being "caught away" reflects his father's initial dream recorded in the Book of Mormon in which Lehi was "carried away" to God's throne (1 Nephi 1:8). From a biblical perspective, references to an individual being "caught away" function as a technical expression denoting an extraordinary spiritual encounter. A textual parallel with Nephi's language appears, for instance, in Acts 8:39 concerning Philip the Evangelist: "And when they [Philip and the eunuch] were come up out of the water, *the Spirit of the Lord caught away* Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more" (Acts 8:39; emphasis added).

The term translated in this New Testament passage as "caught away" is the Greek word *herpazen*, which derives from the form *harpazō* meaning "to steal" or "to take away forcefully."[1] The verb can carry the nuance of a type of spiritual abduction, referring to the process of a "divine power transferring a person marvelously and swiftly from one place to another."[2] In the New Testament, the same grammatical form appears in Revelation 12:5 in reference to the manchild "*caught*

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1. Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 1: 156.

2. Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson 1996), 74–75.

*up* unto God, and to his throne," and in 2 Corinthians 12:2–4 in reference to Paul who was "*caught up* into paradise, and heard unspeakable words." Nephi's statement that while pondering over his father's teaching, Nephi was suddenly "caught away in the Spirit of the Lord," and taken into an "exceedingly high mountain," parallels these biblical experiences.

Reading the account of Nephi's spiritual journey from an Old Testament perspective, the prophet's reference to an "exceedingly high mountain" suggests that the Spirit of the Lord brought Nephi to the heavenly temple, the traditional meeting place of God's divine assembly. As one scholar has observed:

> The events taking place on earth are rigidly informed and determined by heavenly decree; the sites that facilitate the flow of information from above attain amplified significance. These pertain especially to mountains, traditionally associated with theophanies in many Ancient Near Eastern cultures, and temples or places connected with temples that are directly or indirectly derived from or related to mountains.[3]

According to this, mountains functioned as sacred places connected with spiritual manifestations and prophetic interaction with members of the heavenly host. The fact that Nephi's mountain was not only depicted as "high," but with the extra descriptive element that it was "exceedingly" high, suggests that it was a place on earth that allowed access to the heavenly court.

### The Cosmic Mountain and Divine Assembly

All throughout the Bible, mountains appear as sacred space. Ezekiel 28:13–15 places the Garden of Eden on a mountain;

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3. Carla Sulzbach, "The Function of the Sacred Geography in the Book of Jubilees," *Journal for Semitics* 14 (2005): 290.

Abraham proves his faithfulness to the Lord on a mountain-top (Gen. 22:1–14); and similarly, God appears to both Moses and Elijah on an exceedingly high mountain (Ex. 3:1–2; 1 Kgs. 19:8–18). Isaiah's great eschatological vision featured in Isaiah 2 directly links the temple with the "mountain of the Lord's house." As the setting of the celestial temple, the holy mountain appears in early Northwest Semitic conceptions influencing both the Bible and the Book of Mormon as the traditional residence of the divine council of gods, and hence, the heavenly temple.

In Ugaritic mythology, for example, the two terms *phr m'd* "Great Assembly" and *gér il* the "Divine Mountain" appear as synonymous expressions (see KTU 1.2 I lines 19–21). This ancient account from the world of the Bible depicts the messengers of the Semitic god Yam arriving on the holy mountain, or assembly of El, the high god in the Canaanite pantheon:

> The messengers depart, they do not delay.
> Immediately they head to the divine mountain.
> To the Great Assembly.[4]

The text concerning the god Yam's messengers from ancient Canaan illustrates the commonly held Semitic tradition that links the cosmic mountain with the divine assembly. An ancient audience reading Nephi's description of being carried away to an exceedingly high mountain, would have connected this experience to a prophetic interaction with the divine council.

Like early Northwest Semitic traditions, biblical theology features an attestation of a heavenly council of Gods that gov-

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4.   As translated by the author. For a transliteration of the cuneiform text, see M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartín, *The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani and other Places*, 2nd ed. (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1995). The meaning of the mountain's name has been highly contested.  For an analysis of emending *gér ll* as *gér il*, see Mark S. Smith, "Mt. Ll in KTU 1.2 I 19-20." *Ugarit-Forschungen* 18 (1986): 458.

erned the affairs of the universe. "God has taken his place in the divine council," reports the Psalmist, "in the midst of the gods he holds judgment" (Psalm 82:1; NRSV). Though somewhat obscured in the King James translation of the Bible, the ancient Semitic view that places the divine council on a holy mountain, appears in Deuteronomy 33:2:

> He said, 'the Lord came from Sinai. He beamed
> forth from his Seir.[5] He shone from Mount
> Paran. With him were myriads of Holy Ones.
> At his right hand proceeded the gods.[6]

In terms of textual criticism, this biblical passage presents scholars with many challenges. While some of the grammatical details concerning the text remain open for debate, beyond these difficulties lies the clear contextual representation of the God of Israel and his divine assembly appearing in glory from their abode in the holy mount.[7]

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5. Following O'Connor's proposal that the term functions as a periphrastic genitive, modifying the proper noun Yahweh which grammatically cannot take a suffix, see Michael Patrick O'Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1980), 208.

6. As translated by the author from *Biblia hebraica stuttgartensia (BHS)*. The latter half of v. 2 contains multiple challenges and has probably suffered a similar textual tampering to that witnessed in Deut. 32:8. In light of the context and parallelism, I have followed Clifford's proposal with "gods," since no matter what the original form, the line certainly referred to the heavenly host; see Richard J. Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), 114; Cross renders the final term as "the divine ones;" see Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 101.

7. As Levinson explains, "the Hebrew can also be understood . . . as 'with Him were thousands of holy ones,' i.e., the divine council who accompany God into battle (32:8 n.; Pss. 68:18; 89:8). This alternative translation, which only changes the vowels of one word in the MT, (from *approached* to *with Him*,) is to be preferred since it preserves the poem's representation of God as Divine Warrior." Bernard M. Levinson, "Deuteronomy," in *The Jewish Study Bible* ed. Adele Berlin, Marc Zvi Brettler, and Michael A Fishbane (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 446, note 2.

In an interesting link with these Near Eastern perspectives, the Book of Mormon reports that after the Spirit of the Lord transported Nephi to the "exceedingly high mountain," the Spirit repeatedly praised the Lord as "the most High God," one of the traditional biblical terms for the head God of the divine assembly (see 1 Nephi 11:6). In the King James translation of the Old Testament, the expression "most High God" appears as a reflection of the Hebrew title El Elyon or its Aramaic equivalent (see for example Gen. 14:18, 19, 20, 22; Ps. 78:56; Dan. 3:26; 5:18, 21). As a divine name, Elyon derives from the Hebraic root *ʿālâ* meaning "to ascend."[8] It is a reflection of the fact that the deity serves as the "most high" God over the gods of the heavenly council.

As a result of his position in the assembly, the deity Elyon appears in the Bible as the recipient of both human and divine praise: "I will sing praise to thy name, O thou most High [Elyon]" (Ps. 9:2). In the Book of Mormon, the title "most High God" appears a total of seven times (see 1 Nephi 11:6; 2 Nephi 24:14; Jacob 2:13; Alma 26:14; 3 Nephi 4:32; 11:17). With the exception of 2 Nephi 24:14 (which is a citation of Isaiah 14), all of the Book of Mormon references to deity by the title "most High God" appear specifically in the context of praise. "Hosanna to the Most High God," cried the Nephite armies after defeating the Gadianton Robbers, "blessed be the name of the Lord God Almighty, the Most High God" (3 Nephi 4:32). Texts such as Psalm 103:20–21 demonstrate that praising the highest deity of the council appears as an action frequently associated with the heavenly host in biblical tradition:

> Praise the Lord, O his angels . . .
> Praise the Lord, all his host . . . [9]

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8. E. E. Elnes and P. D. Miller, "Elyon," in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, ed. Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 560.

9. As translated by the author from *BHS*.

By offering the words, "Hosanna to the Lord, the most high God; for he is God over all the earth, yea, even above all," in the physical setting of the "exceedingly high mountain," the Spirit of the Lord appears engaged in an activity frequently conceptualized with members of the heavenly host. He was therefore an important member of the divine council that governed heaven and earth.

In biblical and general Near Eastern conceptions, the divine council served in a type of cosmic judicial capacity. Though the Book of Mormon does not specify the reason that Nephi was brought to the location of the divine council, or heavenly temple, a careful reading of the account suggests that as a representative of the assembly, the Spirit of the Lord assumed the customary role of council witness, meaning one who could offer testimony in a legal setting.

The view of the council and/or its members serving as a judicial institution appears prominently in ancient Near Eastern thought.[10] In one of the Akkadian literary texts from Ur, the invocation of the gods of the assembly to act as witnesses in a judicial decision assumes an important role in the appeal made by one Kuzulum against his adversary Elani:

> He swore, 'I am doing you no wrong;
> He said, 'These gods are my witnesses.'[11]

For Kuzulum, as members of the divine assembly, the gods could be invoked as witnesses of his "righteousness." Similarly, in Esarhaddon's memorial stele commemorating the restoration of the city of Babylon, the Assyrian king invoked a curse upon any ruler who in future days might destroy Esarhaddon's inscribed name, shatter the record, or eradicate Babylon's freedom: "In Upshuginna, the court of the assembly of the gods,

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10.  See David E. Bokovoy, "שמעו והעירי בבית יעקב: Invoking the Council as Witness in Amos 3:13," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 127 (2008): 37–51.

11.  U.I6900 F as cited in C.J. Gadd, "Two Sketches From the Life at Ur," *Iraq* (1963): 179.

the abode of judgment, may he (i.e., Marduk) impugn (*lit.*, make evil) his word. May he command that his life (last) not a single day."[12]

Conceptually, these Mesopotamian texts provide an important link with biblical and, by extension, Book of Mormon depictions of council administration, including the role apparently fulfilled by the Spirit of the Lord in 1 Nephi 11 as a divine witness.

A few passages in the Old Testament which present the council presided over by God acting as a type of law court include Daniel 7:9–14, Isaiah 6, and I Kings 22:19ff. One of the clearest attestations, however, of a biblical text describing the responsibility of the council to render judgments and to serve as witnesses is Psalm 82, a text that presents a view of the Lord standing in the *'edāh* or "assembly" accusing the gods in the heavenly court of rendering poor decisions.[13] This use of the Hebrew word *'edāh* as a term for the heavenly council in Psalm 82 provides important evidence for the judiciary nature of the assembly in Israelite thought. As biblical scholar Jacob Milgrom has illustrated, though *'edāh* frequently carries the general nuance "assembly," as a bureaucratic expression, the term describes: "A political body invested with legislative and judicial functions, such as I) to bring trial and punish violators of the covenant, be they individuals (Num. 35:12, 24–25; Josh. 20:5, 9), cities, or tribes (Josh. 22:16; Judg. 21:10); 2) arbitrate intertribal disputes (Judg. 21:22; cf. v. 16); 3) crown kings (I Kings 12:20) and 4) reprimand its own leaders (Josh. 9:18–19)."[14]

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12. Daniel David Lukenbill, "Esarhaddon; The Building Inscriptions," *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), 2:249.

13. For a historical survey of Psalm 82 that remains sensitive to these issues see Simon Parker, "The Beginning of the Reign of God: Psalm 82 as Myth and Liturgy," *Revue Biblique* 102 (1995): 532–59.

14. Jacob Milgrom, *Studies in Cultic Theology and Terminology* (Leiden: Brill, 1983), 5–6.

In Israelite thought, the heavenly *'edāh* mirrored the functions and purposes of the earthly *'edāh*. Several texts from the Bible parallel the view of the heavenly host operating as a judicial court featured in Psalm 82, including the account of the "angel of the Lord" in Genesis 22.

### Divine Witnesses

Though seldom read in this manner, the story of Abraham's near sacrifice of his son Isaac on a mountain peak can be interpreted to provide an example of a member of the heavenly host serving as an official witness of human righteousness.[15] While Abraham experienced his trial on the mountain, the "angel of the Lord" appeared suddenly, informing the biblical patriarch that he had successfully passed God's test: "Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me" (Genesis 22:12).

The immediate switch between the words expressed personally by the angel to the statement spoken by God through his messenger need not present interpretive challenges. As a messenger sent by God, the angel spoke the words of the Lord as direct speech. The clause, "for now I know that thou fearest God" may simply reflect the view of the angel serving as an official witness able to testify concerning Abraham's righteousness.

Including Genesis 22:12, the expression "for now I know that" appears only four times in the Old Testament (see Ex. 18:11; Jdg. 17:13; Ps. 20:7). Significantly, the Lord himself never speaks any of the attestations of this declaration. Instead, outside of Genesis 22, the phrase in Hebrew appears in the mouth of a human being who can serve as a witness of the Lord's extraordinary power. Based on this evidence, it seems most likely that the initial portion of the utterance spoken by the angel in

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15. This proposal first appeared in the author's previously cited *JBL* article "Invoking the Council as Witness."

Genesis 22:12 reflects the role of this heavenly being as a witness for God's ability to fulfill the covenant described in verses 15–18 followed by the message of direct speech, "seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me."

This interpretation of the technical role assumed by members of the heavenly host in the Old Testament parallels religious concepts held by the Prophet Joseph Smith regarding the possibility of invoking God and angels as official witnesses in human acts. Toward the end of his earthly ministry, Joseph stood before the Saints in Nauvoo and declared: "I call God and angels to witness that I have unsheathed my sword with a firm and unalterable determination that this people shall have their legal rights, and be protected from mob violence, or my blood shall be spilt upon the ground like water."[16]

Joseph's testimony reveals that the Prophet believed that God and angels could function as official witnesses in a covenant-making occasion. This same perspective appears in the Book of Mormon in the context of God's promise given to the prophet Nephi: "Behold, thou are Nephi, and I am God. Behold, I declare it unto thee in the presence of mine angels, that ye shall have power over this people, and shall smite the earth, with famine, and with pestilence, and destruction, according to the wickedness of this people" (Helaman 10:6).

The view concerning the role of heavenly beings was also important to President Brigham Young, who specifically linked the heavenly witnesses motif with the sacred temple endowment administered in the House of the Lord:

> Your endowment is, to receive all those ordinances in the house of the Lord, which are necessary for you, after you have departed this life, to enable you to walk back to the presence of the Father, passing the angels who stand as sentinels, being enabled to give them the

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16. Joseph Smith in *History of the Church* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 5:499.

key words, the signs and tokens, pertaining to the holy Priesthood, and gain your eternal exaltation in spite of earth and hell.[17]

Conceptually, these examples of heavenly beings serving as official witness in the process of covenant making and the determination of spiritual worthiness to receive sacred blessings appear to parallel the role fulfilled by the Spirit of the Lord in 1 Nephi 11.

By applying this background as an interpretive lens to Nephi's experience, the account depicts Nephi arriving at the mountain (the heavenly temple/setting for the divine assembly), and the Spirit of the Lord questioning Nephi regarding what was wanted: "And the Spirit of the Lord said unto me: Behold, what desirest thou?" (v. 2). When Nephi responded by stating that he desired to behold the things that his father saw, the Spirit of the Lord presented a second question directly related to Nephi's spiritual preparation to comprehend these sacred matters: "Believest thou that thy father saw the tree of which he hath spoken?" (v. 4). Clearly, the Spirit of the Lord knew prior to presenting the question that Nephi believed his Father's vision. It would seem, therefore, that the Spirit of the Lord simply needed to hear the words spoken of Nephi's mouth. This exchange may have served a profound purpose reflecting the common Near Eastern motif of invoking members of the heavenly host as council witnesses who could testify of human righteousness. By presenting Nephi with an opportunity to officially declare his testimony, the Spirit of the Lord could, from a Near Eastern perspective, function as a divine witness concerning Nephi's worthiness to be introduced to further revelatory knowledge.

Though later in the Book of Mormon, Moroni clearly uses the word *witness* to refer to a spiritual manifestation of truth

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17. Brigham Young, *Discourses of Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 416.

rather than a person who can offer testimony, this reading of 1 Nephi 11 can be seen to parallel Moroni's doctrinal statement concerning the trial of one's faith: "And now, I, Moroni, would speak somewhat concerning these things; I would show unto the world that faith is things which are hoped for and not seen; wherefore, dispute not because ye see not, for *ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith*" (Ether 12:6).

By asking Nephi a question regarding his belief, the Spirit of the Lord presented Nephi with a trial that once successfully completed, allowed the Spirit to function as an official witness of Nephi's worthiness to see those things that he had hoped for in faith. The fact that this exchange takes place on a mountain, i.e. the traditional residence of the divine council in Semitic conceptions, provides additional support for this reading.

**Parallels with Temple Rituals**

*1. Nephi*

As previously noted, Nephi's act of verbally speaking his testimony that he believed "all" of his father's words to a council witness on an "exceedingly high mountain" parallels religious concepts associated with temple rituals in the Old Testament: "Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart" (Psalm 15:1–2).

By speaking the truth concerning his belief, Nephi demonstrated that he was worthy to receive spiritual knowledge in the holy hill. This interaction with the Spirit, together with the physical setting in which it occurred, may reflect the fact that in ancient Israel, temple worshippers would apparently address priests sitting at the temple gates, serving as guardians of sacred space (see, for example, 1 Sam. 1:9). Evidence from the biblical psalms suggest that much like the Spirit of the Lord in

Nephi's vision, these priests would ask worshippers questions in order to judge their worthiness.

In his classic study of ancient Near Eastern iconography, Othmar Keel specifies Psalms 15 and 24 as two examples of this ancient ritual exchange: "The pilgrim addressed the priest (or priests) sitting at the temple gates (cf. 1 Sam. 1:9), asking who might set foot on the mountain of Yahweh (c.f. Pss 15:1; 24:3). The gates of the Jerusalem temple, as 'Gates of Righteousness,' were open only to the 'righteous' (Ps. 118:19–20)."[18]

In this system, the priest would act as sentinel, presenting questions such as "who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place?," which would then elicit the temple worshipper's response, "he that hath clean hands, and a pure heart" (Ps. 24:3–4). This temple-based imagery whereby an individual proved himself worthy to "set foot on the mountain of Yahweh," and pass through the sacred temple "gates of righteousness," had an important impact upon Nephi's writings.

In the psalm composed in connection with his father Lehi's death, Nephi incorporated these traditional temple/ascent themes: "Because that my heart is broken and my spirit is contrite, O Lord, wilt thou not shut the gates of thy righteousness before me . . . O Lord, wilt thou encircle me around in the robe of thy righteousness!" (2 Nephi 4:32–33)[19]

From an Old Testament perspective, this poetic passage shares a notable thematic connection with the spiritual ascent and inquiry that Nephi experienced on the holy mountain,

18.   Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms*, trans. Timothy J. Hallett (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 126.

19.   In accordance with the pattern of verbal ellipsis in biblical poetry, I have ignored the standard punctuation and linked the opening clause with Nephi's subsequent statement. For an introduction to the literary technique, see Cynthia L. Miller, "A Linguistic Approach to Ellipsis in Biblical Poetry: O, What to Do When Exegesis of What is There Depends on What Isn't," *Bulletin For Biblical Research* 13/2 (2003): 251–70.

whereby Nephi established his worthiness to understand the things his father saw.

In his psalm, Nephi declared that as a result of his "broken heart" and "contrite spirit," the Lord could rightfully open the temple gates, encircle Nephi in the sacred robe of righteousness, and allow Nephi access to the heavenly realm. Through this passage, Nephi demonstrated that he possessed the qualities that would enable him to successfully pass a divine trial and "ascend into the hill of the Lord" and "stand in his holy place." Conceptually, therefore, Nephi's psalm in 2 Nephi 4 and his exchange with the Spirit of the Lord in 1 Nephi 11 appear theoretically linked. By bearing his testimony to the Spirit of the Lord who assumed the traditional role of temple priest/guardian, Nephi was able to receive the greater light and knowledge he desired on the mountain of God. Later in the Book of Mormon, the connections between Nephi's question-and-answer exchange and ancient Israelite temple inquires reappears in the account of King Benjamin's sermon delivered at the Nephite temple (see Mosiah 2:6–7).

### 2. King Benjamin

At the conclusion of his speech, the account reports that Benjamin "sent among [his people] *desiring* to *know* . . . if they *believed* the words which he had spoken unto them" (Mosiah 5:1). In this context, Benjamin appears to function in the same religious capacity as the Spirit of the Lord in 1 Nephi 11 who asks Nephi what *he* desired to know (v. 2). Both accounts present an authorized witness (Benjamin in Mosiah 5, the Spirit of the Lord in 1 Nephi 11) asking candidates if they believe the words spoken by a prophet of God as a condition of offering spiritual blessings.

The fact that Mosiah 6:1 states that Benjamin gathered up the names of all those who believed his words and entered into a covenant with God, illustrates that Benjamin's inquiry did not

reflect a mere casual interest on the part of the Nephite king. From a Near Eastern legal perspective, Benjamin's inquisition and the subsequent collecting of names allowed Benjamin to serve as an official witness of the people's covenant with the Lord. Benjamin's desire to know whether or not his people believed, directly parallels the question presented to Nephi by the Spirit of the Lord, "believest thou that thy father saw the tree of which he hath spoken?" (1 Nephi 11:4). Significantly, even though each account assigns the key verbs to *desire*, *know*, and *believe* in different ways, both narratives incorporate these specific terms in describing interactions between witness and worshipper.

When like Nephi, Benjamin's people confirmed their testimony to the Lord's witness, the account states: "And now, these are the words which king Benjamin *desired* of them; and therefore he said unto them: Ye have spoken the words that I *desired*; and the covenant which ye have made is a righteous covenant" (v. 6).

Benjamin then completed his sermon, explaining to his people the great spiritual benefits of their new covenant: "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" (v. 7).

King Benjamin's interaction with his people at the temple provides a strong literary and conceptual link with Nephi's exchange with the Spirit of the Lord. In terms of Book of Mormon narratives, both of these stories parallel the account of the Brother of Jared in the book of Ether.

### 3. The Brother of Jared

Like Nephi, who was taken to an "exceedingly high mountain," the Brother of Jared ascended the ancient mount Shelem, which the account in Ether indicates received *its* name "because of its exceeding height" (Ether 2:1).[20] While on the mountain,

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20. Since according to the Book of Mormon itself, the writings of Ether derive from a distinct time and cultural context, these connections, and the

the Lord addressed the Brother of Jared in the form of a question that directly parallels Nephi's exchange with the "Spirit of the Lord," as well as Benjamin's temple-based inquiry: "Believest thou the words which I shall speak?" (Ether 2:11). The Brother of Jared then responded like Nephi, declaring his testimony, and is so doing, provided evidence for his spiritual preparation for further revelatory truth: "And he answered: 'Yea, Lord, I know that thou speakest the truth, for thou art a God of truth, and canst not lie'" (v.12). The account reports that the Brother of Jared then received advanced spiritual insights: "And when he had said these words, behold, the Lord showed himself unto him, and said: Because thou knowest these things ye are redeemed from the fall; therefore ye are brought back into my presence; therefore I show myself unto you" (Ether 3:13).

This narrative from Ether illustrates that these Book of Mormon stories follow a well-established pattern. As an additional literary marker connecting the story of the Brother of Jared with Nephi and Benjamin's accounts, Ether 3 contains explicit references to the words *desire*, *believe*, and *know*. "From thee we may receive according to our *desires*," testified the Brother of Jared (Ether 3:2). "*Believest* thou the words," the Lord asked (v. 11). And the Brother of Jared's response: "Yea, Lord, I *know*" (v. 12).

Analyzing these three narratives as a whole suggests the possibility of a Book of Mormon "type scene" for a spiritual exchange between witness and worshiper. In his analysis of this

identification of a type scene, represent a synchronic literary observation (treating the Book of Mormon as a whole), rather than a diachronic, historical analysis. In this section, I am presenting an argument for the way an Israelite familiar with ancient religious experiences and scribal techniques might have interpreted these Book of Mormon texts, rather than an analysis of original authorial intent. However, taking the Book of Mormon claims seriously, the book of Ether appears in the text because of Mosiah's translation, which seems to have been informed by not only early Nephite writings, but also his understanding of brass plate, and therefore, "biblical" material.

ancient literary device, R. L. Fowler has provided the following useful explanation:

> A type scene is a literary convention employed by a narrator across a set of scenes, or related to scenes (place, action) already familiar to the audience. The similarities with, and differences from, the established type are used to illuminate developments in plot and character. The technique of the type-scene offers the poet a basic scaffolding, but it also allows the poet to adapt each scene for specific purposes.[21]

Studies in the area of "form criticism" have shown that Old Testament authors relied heavily upon the use of type scenes in the formation of biblical narrative and poetry. In their literary efforts, Israelite authors made use of this rhetoric as a type of template to recount stories of everything from patriarchal encounters at a well, to highly structured narratives regarding prophetic commission.

Reading the accounts of Nephi, Benjamin, and the Brother of Jared as a reflection of a Book of Mormon type scene allows for the identification of the following commonly shared literary motifs:

1. Attestation of sacred space: temple/mountain
2. Expression of a desire to know
3. Inquiry regarding the words spoken by God or his prophet
4. Testimony that the tried believes the words
5. Introduction to advanced religious truths

Though each Book of Mormon story incorporates these elements in its own unique way, these motifs appear to provide a type of template for depicting an official encounter between witness and worshiper in preparation for the introduction

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21. R. L. Fowler, *The Cambridge Companion to Homer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

to advanced revelatory truths. In addition to their reflection of ancient temple ritual, these Book of Mormon narratives preserve a well-known literary pattern from antiquity. Similar accounts abound in Near Eastern tradition.

### 4. Moses in the Book of Jubilees

The second century BC religious work, the book of Jubilees, reports that during the first year of the Exodus, the prophet Moses experienced a forty-day epiphany on a sacred mountain in which God shared with his prophet a panoramic vision concerning the history of the world (see Jubilees 1:1–4). According to the account, the Lord intended this vision and the subsequent testimony Moses would record to provide a witness to the descendants of Israel concerning the covenants of the Lord. The account presents God's words to Moses:

> Set your mind on every thing which I shall tell you on this mountain, and write it in a book so that [Israel's] descendants might see that I have not abandoned them on account of all of the evil which they have done to instigate transgression of the covenant which I am establishing between me and you today on Mount Sinai for their descendants. (Jubilees 1:5–6)[22]

In a manner that reflects the pattern witnessed in the Book of Mormon stories of Nephi and the Brother of Jared, Jubilees states that while Moses was on Mount Sinai, the prophet interacted with a heavenly messenger sent as a guide to interpret the vision and assist in recording the revelation (2:1).

### 5. Enoch

An even closer parallel to 1 Nephi 11 appears in the book 1 Enoch, a Jewish religious work written between the third through first centuries BC. The account states that during a celestial ascent and vision of a tall mountain, Enoch interacted per-

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22. As cited in OTP 2:52.

sonally with the angel Michael through a question and answer session. In his vision, the ancient patriarch witnessed a beautiful tree of life and expressed to the angel a desire to understand the tree's meaning:

> At that moment I said, 'This is a beautiful tree, beautiful to view, with leaves (so) handsome and blossoms (so) magnificent in appearance.' Then Michael, one of the holy and revered angels—he is their chief—who was with me, responded to me. And he said unto me, Enoch, 'What is it that you are asking me concerning this fragrance of this tree and you are so inquisitive about?' At that moment, I answered saying, 'I am desirous of knowing everything, but specifically about this thing.' He answered, saying, 'This tall mountain which you saw whose summit resembles the throne of God is (indeed) his throne, on which the Holy and Great Lord of Glory, the Eternal King, will sit when he descends to visit the earth with goodness. And as for this fragrant tree, not a single human being has the authority to touch it until the great judgment, when he shall take vengeance on all and conclude (everything) forever. This is for the righteous and the pious. And the elect will be presented with its fruit for life. (1 Enoch 24:5–25:5)[23]

Surveying the popular heavenly ascent motif in ancient sources illustrates that in addition to connections with other Book of Mormon narratives, Nephi's encounter with the Spirit of the Lord in 1 Nephi 11 parallels many important ancient religious beliefs.

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23.   As cited in OTP 1:26.

**Divine Witnesses in Modern Revelation**

In what was ultimately, from an Old Testament perspective, a council setting, the Spirit of the Lord presented a trial of Nephi's faith through a formal question-and-answer exchange. Having heard Nephi's testimony, the Spirit was able to function in the role of a testator regarding Nephi's personal righteousness. Hence, the account of Nephi's declaration of faith and the subsequent reaction of the Spirit of the Lord parallels revelation given to the Prophet Joseph Smith regarding the effect in the heavenly realm of bearing testimony: " Nevertheless, ye are blessed, for the testimony which ye have borne is recorded in heaven for the angels to look upon; and they rejoice over you, and your sins are forgiven you" (D&C 62:3).

The Lord's authorized servants render the same judgment in an earthly context. As a Bishop in Zion, Edward Partridge, for instance, was commanded in modern revelation to "judge his people *by the testimony of the just*, and by the assistance of his councilors according to the laws of the kingdom which are given by the prophets of God" (D&C 58:18; emphasis added).

In 1 Nephi 11, the precise identity of the Spirit who served as an official witness bearing record of Nephi's testimony remains somewhat of a mystery. Many Latter-day commentators, including Elder James E. Talmage, have understood the Spirit of the Lord in Nephi's initial encounter as the Holy Ghost.[24] This

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24.    "The Holy Ghost undoubtedly possesses personal powers and affections; these attributes exist in him in perfection. . . . That the Spirit of the Lord is capable of manifesting himself in the form and figure of man, is indicated by the wonderful interview between the Spirit and Nephi in which he revealed himself to the prophet, question him concerning his desires and belief, instructed him in the things of God, speaking face to face with the man" James E. Talmage, *Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 144. After analyzing all occurrences of the phrase *Spirit of the Lord* in the Book of Mormon, Dr. Sidney B. Sperry concluded, "In not a single passage where it occurs can there be shown a clear-cut example favoring the interpretation that it represents the pre-existent Christ instead of the Holy Ghost," in *The Problems of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1964), 29.

interpretation works well with the perspective that the Spirit served as an official witness in the council setting depicted in 1 Nephi 11.[25] As Elder Talmage wrote, "the Holy Ghost may be regarded as the minister of the Godhead, carrying into effect the decisions of the Supreme Council."[26] In a sermon describing the fundamental administrative roles assumed by the members of the Godhead prior to the organization of the earth, the Prophet Joseph specifically referred to the Holy Ghost as *the* "Witness" or *the* "Testator": "[An] Everlasting covenant was made between three personages before the organization of this earth, and relates to their dispensation of things to men on the earth; these personages… are called God the first, the Creator; God the second, the Redeemer; and God the third, the witness or Testator."[27]

While it is natural for Latter-day Saints to recognize that the Holy Ghost serves as an official witness of truth *for* man, in the administration of God, the Holy Ghost also functions as a witness or testator *of* man *for* God. Fulfilling this role as witness, the Holy Ghost serves as the scriptural "Holy Spirit of promise," ratifying or sealing the testimonies and righteous acts of believers. As explained by Elder Bruce R. McConkie: "The Holy Ghost is the Holy Spirit; he is the Holy Spirit promised the saints at baptism, or in other words the Holy Spirit of Promise . . . any act which is sealed by the Holy Spirit of

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25. Elder Bruce R. McConkie, however, was of the opinion that the Spirit of the Lord in 1 Nephi was Christ: "When we read the account of the appearance of 'the Spirit of the Lord' to Nephi (1 Ne. 11), we are left to our own interpretive powers to determine whether the messenger is the Spirit of Christ or the Holy Ghost. Presumptively it is the Spirit of Christ ministering to Nephi much as he did to the Brother of Jared" in *Mormon Doctrine*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1996), 752.

26. Talmage, *Articles of Faith*, 145.

27. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 190.

Promise is one which is justified by the Spirit, one which is approved by the Lord, one which is ratified by the Holy Ghost."[28]

In this capacity as witness *of* man *for* God, the Holy Ghost serves as the testator of all righteous acts. As declared in modern revelation, "All covenants, contracts, bonds, obligations, oaths, vows, performances, connections, associations, or expectations, that are not made and entered into and sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise . . . are of no efficacy, virtue, or force in and after the resurrection from the dead" (D&C 132:7).

Significantly, having had this spiritual encounter ratified by the Spirit of the Lord, Nephi specifically introduced the retelling of his narrative with the statement, "the Holy Ghost giveth authority that I should speak these things, and deny them not" (1 Nephi 10:22).

## Conclusion

Having been taught the mysteries of godliness by Lehi, Nephi demonstrated a sincere desire to come to know all the great truths his father saw. As a result of this yearning, Nephi participated in a celestial ascent to an exceedingly high mountain possessed by the most high God. The description of this experience in 1 Nephi 11 shares much in common with traditional Near Eastern imagery concerning the divine assembly and invocation of heavenly beings as council witnesses. In this context, Nephi's exchange with the Spirit of the Lord provides a dramatic portrayal of the faith necessary to receive introduction to advanced spiritual truth. Through his testimony, as born to the Spirit of the Lord, Nephi proved himself worthy to pass by the heavenly sentinel and enter the realm of greater light and knowledge.

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28.   Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1992), 3:333–34.

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# The Cultural Context of
# Nephite Apostasy

*Mark Alan Wright and Brant A. Gardner*

*Abstract: Nephite apostates turned away from true worship in consistent and predictable ways throughout the Book of Mormon. Their beliefs and practices may have been the result of influence from the larger socioreligious context in which the Nephites lived. A Mesoamerican setting provides a plausible cultural background that explains why Nephite apostasy took the particular form it did and may help us gain a deeper understanding of some specific references that Nephite prophets used when combating that apostasy. We propose that apostate Nephite religion resulted from the syncretization of certain beliefs and practices from normative Nephite religion with those attested in ancient Mesoamerica. We suggest that orthodox Nephite expectations of the "heavenly king" were supplanted by the more present and tangible "divine king."*

Scriptures frequently call us back to walking in the Lord's way. Ancient Israel received repeated prophetic calls to return from a specific type of apostasy. A typical report of Israelite apostasy is found in Judges 2:13: "And they forsook the Lord, and served Baal and Ashtaroth."[1] Israelite apostasy typically occurred when Israel embraced certain religious and cultural elements from a nearby people with whom they shared similar traits and merged them with their own.[2]

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1. See also, among others, Judges 2:11; 3:7; 6:25, 30; 8:33; 10:6–10; 1 Samuel 7:3–4; 12:10; 1 Kings 16:31–32; 18:18–26; 22:53; 2 Kings 3:2; 10:18–28; 11:18; 17:16; 21:3–5; Jeremiah 2:23; 7:9; Hosea 2:8; Zephaniah 1:4.

2. See, for example, Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism, Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); and William G. Dever, *Did God Have a Wife? Archaeology and Folk Religion in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005).

In the New World, Nephites frequently received similar calls to repentance. For them there was no Baal to lure them away from the God of Israel. Nevertheless, something tempted them to turn away from their covenantal obligations. This influence was strong enough that within perhaps only forty years in the New World, Jacob was moved to call his people to repentance: "I can tell you concerning your thoughts how that ye are beginning to labor in sin, which sin appeareth very abominable unto me, yea, and abominable unto God" (Jacob 2:2, 5). After some 320 years, this early Nephite apostasy eventually had become sufficiently generalized that, as Omni noted, "the more wicked part of the Nephites were destroyed" (Omni 1:5). The record of the reign of Alma$_2$ (as the first chief judge) began not with preaching the "pleasing word of God" (Jacob 2:8), but with exhortations against the apostate teachings of Nehor, who "did teach these things so much that many did believe on his words" (Alma 1:5). The New World scriptures, like the Bible, trace a history of apostasy and consequent calls to repentance.

We do not suggest that all instances of syncretism invariably result in apostasy. To the contrary, the Lord typically manifests himself and his will to the faithful according to the cultural context in which they find themselves.[3] Our concern here is with those cultural borrowings that allow some to distort truth and lead people away from correct beliefs and proper worship. *Apostasy* (from the Greek ἀποστασία) literally means "defection" or "revolt" and typically refers to the renunciation of a religious or political belief system. The word *apostasy* never appears in the Book of Mormon, but the process is described throughout the text by expressions such as "dwindling in unbelief" (occurring in some form twenty-six times) or being in

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3. Mark Alan Wright, "'According to Their Language, Unto Their Understanding': The Cultural Context of Hierophanies and Theophanies in Latter-day Saint Canon," *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* 3 (2011): 51–65.

"open rebellion against God" (occurring in some form fifteen times).

On an individual level, ancient apostasy was more dangerous than our contemporary versions. In many parts of the modern world, one may turn away from the teachings of a particular church yet remain a solid member of society. Such compartmentalization was inconceivable in the ancient world: religion, politics, economics, and even culture were thoroughly intertwined. As Bruce Malina and Richard Rohrbaugh note:

> Our new social arrangements, with the separation of religion and economics from kinship and politics, would have been inconceivable to [biblical authors and their primary audiences]. In fact, the separation of church and state, and of economics and state, are truly radical and unthinkable departures from what has heretofore been normal on the planet.[4]

This complicated interaction of socioreligious elements may help explain why Nephite apostasy often led to intense social and political divisions and even to armed rebellion or civil war. The seriousness of Nephite apostasy suggests a need to better understand how it occurred and why it so often resulted in violent upheavals.

### Elements of Nephite Apostasy

Descriptions of Nephite apostasy remain remarkably consistent throughout that people's thousand-year history. Daniel C. Peterson has noted that "common factors repeatedly spoken of in the Book of Mormon that lure people into apostasy

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4. Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1998), 1. See also the brief note of the same idea in Marcus J. Borg, *Reading the Bible Again for the First Time: Taking the Bible Seriously but Not Literally* (San Francisco: Harper, 2001), 245.

include (1) pride and the quest for status . . . ; (2) an exaggerated trust in human learning or wisdom . . . ; and (3) material wealth/prosperity and ease."[5] The most complete summary of apostasy is found in the way Alma₂ describes the religion to which he attaches Nehor's name:

> And he [Nehor] had gone about among the people, preaching to them that which he termed to be the word of God, bearing down against the church; declaring unto the people that every priest and teacher ought to become popular; and they ought not to labor with their hands, but that they ought to be supported by the people. And he also testified unto the people that all mankind should be saved at the last day, and that they need not fear nor tremble, but that they might lift up their heads and rejoice; for the Lord had created all men, and had also redeemed all men; and, in the end, all men should have eternal life. And it came to pass that he did teach these things so much that many did believe on his words, even so many that they began to support him and give him money. And he began to be lifted up in the pride of his heart, and to wear very costly apparel, yea, and even began to establish a church after the manner of his preaching. (Alma 1:3–6)

These verses contain what Mormon believed were the essential elements of the order of the Nehors. These elements appear as the common descriptions of virtually all Nephite apostasies.[6] In order of appearance, they are as follows:

5. Daniel C. Peterson, "Apostasy," in *The Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, ed. Dennis L. Largey (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 69.

6. Although Alma₂ discusses an order of the Nehors ("order of Nehor," Alma 14:16; 24:29; "order of the Nehors," Alma 21:4; 24:28), the same traits can be identified among the priests of King Noah. For a more detailed discussion of the characteristics and spread of this apostate religious/political/economic system,

- Nehor claims he preaches "the word of God." Nehorism appears to maintain a connection to the "brass plates" Israelite religion (though clearly "looking beyond the mark," Jacob 4:14).
- Nehor emphasizes a different role for priests. They "ought to be supported by the people" rather than laboring to support themselves. This is an endorsement of social hierarchies and a blatant rejection of equality.
- All are saved and redeemed and will have eternal life (i.e., there is no need for an atoning Messiah).
- A manifestation of Nehor's social and religious position was the wearing of "very costly apparel."

## Cultural Manifestations of Apostasy

Although Alma$_2$ describes the religion Nehor preached, many elements of this religion were manifested in social or cultural traits that the modern mind might separate from religion. For example, moderns might quite naturally ascribe the wearing of "very costly apparel" to a cultural norm, whereas Alma$_2$ saw it as a sign of apostasy.[7] The earliest occurrences of Nephite apostasy as recorded by Jacob prompted similar concerns: "The hand of providence hath smiled upon you most pleasingly, that you have obtained many riches; and because some of you have obtained more abundantly than that of your brethren *ye are lifted up in the pride of your hearts*, and wear stiff necks and high heads because of the *costliness of your apparel*, and persecute your brethren because *ye suppose that ye are better than they*" (Jacob 2:13).

Jacob specifically condemns those who imagine they are better than those who do not wear costly apparel. This tendency

see Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Kofford, 2007), 4:41–51.

7.   Gardner, *Second Witness*, 6:257–58, discusses costly apparel as a general sign of apostasy signaling a shift in social and economic patterns.

toward social segregation was probably much more economic in nature than religious at that early point.[8] However, it becomes clear after the Nephites relocate to Zarahemla that such economic pressures gave rise not only to social stratification but also to changes in Zarahemla's religious climate. The political and religious unity that King Benjamin achieved (Mosiah 4:12–16; 5:5–10) had sufficiently disintegrated during Alma$_2$'s tenure as the chief judge, that Alma had to relinquish the judgment seat to spend all of his time in missionary efforts among his fellow Nephites (Alma 4:6–19).

Two interrelated additions to the catalog of apostate ideas appear late in the book of Mosiah: a desire for a particular kind of king and a denial of the existence and mission of the heavenly king, Jesus Christ. The desire for a king was not inherently apostate. Indeed, King Mosiah$_2$ affirmed, "If it were possible that ye could always have just men to be your kings it would be well for you to have a king" (Mosiah 23:8). In the Book of Mormon, righteous kings sought to bring their people closer to the Lord. Jarom rejoiced that "our kings and our leaders were mighty men in the faith of the Lord; and they taught the people the ways of the Lord" (Jarom 1:7). In contrast, unrighteous kings led their people away from correct beliefs and practices. The story of King Noah is the earliest manifestation of this particular type of apostasy in the Book of Mormon. Noah became a king who was very clearly contrary to the egalitarian ideals King Benjamin had espoused and modeled (Mosiah 2:14). King Noah's priests clearly held to a version of what might be called "brass plates religion," but they also quite clearly denied the atoning Messiah.[9]

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8.  Brant A. Gardner, "A Social History of the Early Nephites," at http://www.fairlds.org/pubs/conf/2001GarB.html.

9.  While it is not clear from Alma's brief synopsis, Nehorite religion appears to have maintained belief in some aspects of the Mosaic law. During Alma$_2$'s discourse to the Ammonihahites, he pointedly remarked, "The scriptures are before you" (Alma 13:20). Unless the people of Ammonihah believed in those scriptures, Alma$_2$'s admonition makes no sense. Further, the Ammonihahite

The connection between apostasy in Zarahemla and the Nehorites' desire for a king begins early in the book of Alma:

> And it came to pass in the commencement of the fifth year of their reign there began to be a contention among the people; for a certain man, being called Amlici, he being a very cunning man, yea, a wise man as to the wisdom of the world, he being after the order of the man that slew Gideon by the sword, who was executed according to the law—Now this Amlici had, by his cunning, drawn away much people after him; even so much that they began to be very powerful; and they began to endeavor to establish Amlici to be a king over the people. (Alma 2:1–2)

## Syncretization of Nephite Beliefs

Until recently, we lacked the ability to trace the cultural influences that created Nephite apostasy in the same way that we could see how the Canaanite religion influenced Israelite apostasy. New information about the plausible location of the Book of Mormon in the New World opens the possibility of tracing the ways in which Mesoamerican religion served as the model for Nephite apostasy.[10] Important to our understanding of Nephite apostasy is the realization that when Lehi and his family landed in the New World, they found other peoples in

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demand to hear more than one person declare Alma$_2$'s message may be related to the Deuteronomic law of witnesses (Deuteronomy 19:15). The most obvious instance of Nehorite believers accepting the law of Moses comes from Abinadi's testimony before Noah's priests, who declared, "We teach the law of Moses" (Mosiah 12:28).

10. John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1985); Lawrence Poulsen, "Lawrence Poulsen's Book of Mormon Geography," at http://www.poulsenll.org/bom/index.html. While their geographies differ in some aspects, Sorenson and Poulsen agree on the essential culture areas where Nephite history would have taken place.

the land. Abundant evidence from the archaeological record attests that the New World was inhabited long before Lehi's colony arrived, including the Mesoamerican region.[11] Though the authors of the Book of Mormon do not explicitly discuss the preexisting populations they encountered, they do provide clues about their presence.[12] This suggestion, while novel to some, is certainly not new. Matthew Roper notes that

> many Latter-day Saints over the years, including a number of church leaders, have acknowledged the likelihood that before, during, and following the events recounted in the Book of Mormon, the American hemisphere has been visited and inhabited by nations, kindreds, tongues, and peoples not mentioned in the text. They also concede that these groups may have significantly impacted the populations of the Americas genetically, culturally, linguistically, and in many other ways.[13]

As with the Israelite acculturation to the cults of Baal and Asherah, the New World Nephites also became acculturated to aspects of the prevailing Mesoamerican cults.[14] The process of combining elements from different religions into a new religion is known as syncretism. Syncretism occurs when different beliefs are seen to have sufficient similarities to bridge the differ-

11. Frederick Joseph Bové, *The Evolution of Chiefdoms and States on the Pacific Slope of Guatemala: A Spatial Analysis* (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1981), 302.

12. John L. Sorenson, "When Lehi's Party Arrived in the Land, Did They Find Others There?" in *Nephite Culture and Society,* ed. Matthew R. Sorenson (Salt Lake City: New Sage Books, 1997), 65–104, originally published in *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1/1 (1993): 1–34. See also Matthew Roper, "Nephi's Neighbors: Book of Mormon Peoples and Pre-Columbian Populations," *FARMS Review* 15/2 (2003): 91–128; and James E. Smith, "Nephi's Descendants? Historical Demography and the Book of Mormon," *FARMS Review* 6/1 (1994): 255–96.

13. Roper, "Nephi's Neighbors," 127.

14. *Cult* is here defined in the anthropological sense as a system of religious veneration and devotion directed toward a particular figure or object.

ences.[15] The process begins with the ability to accept and merge different ideas into one's worldview and becomes formalized when a sufficient number of people come to accept the same amalgam. In that case, a new cult is created that merges elements from the two different systems. How did Nephite apostates manage to form a new religion by combining two systems of belief that modern readers would find totally incompatible? They were able to see similarities where we see only irreconcilable differences, just as their distant descendants were able to syncretize their pagan religion with the Spaniards' Roman Catholicism.[16] Mesoamerican scholar Michael E. Smith describes that process:

> The Nahuas [i.e., the indigenous peoples of Mexico, also referred to as Aztecs] did not have the concept of a "faith" or "religion" as a domain separable from the rest of culture, and their new religion is best seen as a syncretism or blend of Aztec beliefs and Christian beliefs. Conversion involved the adoption of essential Christian rites and practices while the basic mind set remained that of traditional Nahua culture. Rather than passively accepting a completely new and foreign religion, people created their own adaptation of Christianity, compatible with their colonial situation and with many of their traditional beliefs and values.[17]

15. Michio Kitahara, "A Formal Model of Syncretism in Scales," *1970 Yearbook of the International Folk Music Council* 2 (1970): 121–22. Kitahara provides a model of five elements underlying syncretism. While his model is given in the context of syncretism in music, the concepts hold for any two disparate systems that merge to create a third system.

16. *Pagan* is a blanket term referring to polytheistic, non-Abrahamic religions.

17. Michael E. Smith, *The Aztecs* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1996), 284. See also Enrique Florescano, *Memory, Myth, and Time in Mexico: From the Aztecs to Independence*, trans. Albert G. Bork (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 114. The conversion of European pagans to Christianity followed an analogous syncretic path. See Lewis R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New

We propose that certain Nephite beliefs and practices were syncretized with those of the surrounding native cultures, analogous to what would happen well over one thousand years later in the aftermath of the Spanish conquest of Mesoamerica. As we examine the potential perceptual similarities between Nephite and Mesoamerican religion, it is important to bear in mind that we are not describing normative Nephite religion but, rather, the ways in which those perceived similarities accommodated apostate Nephite religion.

## Bridging the Nature of God

Syncretizing Nephite and Mesoamerican religions had to deal with concepts of deity. On this most fundamental point, where modern monotheists would see tremendous differences with the Mesoamerican polytheists, there were sufficient perceived similarities that the Nephite explanation of deity could accommodate, or be accommodated to, Mesoamerican ideas about the nature of the divine.

Although the Nephites cannot be equated with the Maya, Maya culture was already widespread in Mesoamerica in the Preclassic period (400 BC–AD 250) and appears to have exerted great influence on surrounding cultures.[18] We have the best data for this culture, thanks to the preponderance of carved stone monuments and ceramic vessels painted with historical and mythological scenes and texts that have been preserved archaeologically. As plausibly influential neighbors of the Nephites, the Maya exemplify the kind of religious ideas to which some Nephites accommodated. Though certainly not homogenous, Maya beliefs and practices bear fundamen-

Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 77: "Conversion of European peoples [to Christianity] did not involve the complete rejection of pagan religious practices; more often than not it brought about a blending of those elements into the new religion."

18. Francisco Estrada Belli, *The First Maya Civilization* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 61–63.

tal similarities to other Mesoamerican cultures and therefore exemplify the points of congruence along which our proposed syncretism occurred.[19]

Maya scholars use the terms *god* and *deity* interchangeably in the scholarly literature on the Maya. The problem with the terminology is that our modern ideas of "god" and "deity" may not replicate the Maya notion of "supernatural sentient beings that appear in sacred narrative."[20] Maya scholars Stephen Houston and David Stuart lament a scholarly ethnocentrism that has hindered understanding of Classic-period Maya deities. They argue that the western conception of gods as perfect, immortal, and discrete beings is not applicable to the Mesoamerican pantheon.[21] Gabrielle Vail's assessment of the Postclassic Maya (AD 900–1521) representations of gods found in their bark-paper books can usefully be applied to the earlier Classic depictions of gods found on ceramics and monuments. She observes that "the picture that emerges is one of a series of deity complexes or clusters, composed of a small number of underlying divinities, each having various aspects, or manifestations."[22] Vail argues that in a deity complex a variety of distinctive gods could be lumped together into a single category, predicated on a core cluster of bodily features or costume elements. Conversely, a single god could be represented with a variety of differing characteristics or manifestations. Their names, attributes, and domains of influence were fluid, yet they retained their individual identity. Each of the elaborations that

19. Lars Kirkhusmo Pharo, "The Concept of 'Religion' in Mesoamerican Languages," *Numen* 54/1 (2007): 28–70.

20. Karl Taube, *The Major Gods of Ancient Yucatan* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1992), 8. This definition will be recalled several times throughout this paper; it is a key insight for drawing comparisons to the Book of Mormon.

21. Stephen D. Houston and David Stuart, "Of Gods, Glyphs, and Kings: Divinity and Rulership among the Classic Maya," *Antiquity* 70 (1996): 290.

22. Gabrielle Vail, "Pre-Hispanic Maya Religion," *Ancient Mesoamerica* 11 (2000): 123.

a modern reader might see as a different deity was actually considered to be merely an elaboration of the complex essence of one particular deity.

Although not precisely the same concept, Nephite religion understood a proliferation of "names" for the Messiah. For example, Isaiah declares that "his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6; 2 Nephi 19:6). Each of these names is different, each proclaims a different quality, yet all of these names apply to the same God. The Maya deity complexes similarly expanded the qualities of the underlying deity, albeit with a more complete elaboration than just a name.

An example from the modern Ch'orti' demonstrates how this Mesoamerican deity complex expands the names and manifestations of an underlying deity according to different conditions. One particular god manifests itself as a solar being during the dry season but transforms into a maize spirit during the rainy season.[23] Even in the form of the solar deity, it has multiple manifestations throughout the course of a single day that also demonstrate syncretism with Christian ideals:

> They say that the sun has not just one name. The one which is best known by people continues to be Jesus Christ. They say that when it is just getting light its name is Child Redeemer of the World. One name is San Gregorio the Illuminator. One name is San Antonio of Judgement. One name is Child Guardian. One is Child Refuge. One is Child San Pascual. One is Child Succor. One is Child Creator. They say that at each hour, one of these is its name.[24]

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23. Rafael Girard, *People of the Chan,* trans. B. Preble (Chino Valley, AZ: Continuum, 1995), 350.

24. John G. Fought, *Chorti (Mayan) Texts*, ed. Sarah S. Fought (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972), 485. Among the Ch'orti', San Antonio

Although it is foreign to the way we understand our Christian tradition, a people who lived in the context of a world that saw manifestations of the divine in deity complexes might easily reenvision the Nephite God (with multiple names) as a deity complex, being composed of distinctive manifestations in different circumstances. For example, God the Father and Christ the Son are considered "one Eternal God" (Alma 11:44). From a syncretic perspective, the Book of Mormon can be read as teaching that each deity had his own identity and at times was described in terms of different manifestations. When the text declares, "Behold, I am Jesus Christ. I am the Father and the Son" (Ether 3:14), the syncretist might easily interpret it as a deity complex. Abinadi's explanation in Mosiah 15 of how Christ is both the Father and the Son could also be read as an example of multiple manifestations of a single deity:

> And because he dwelleth in flesh he shall be called the Son of God, and having subjected the flesh to the will of the Father, being the Father and the Son—The Father, because he was conceived by the power of God; and the Son, because of the flesh; thus becoming the Father and Son—And they are one God, yea, the very Eternal Father of heaven and of earth. And thus the flesh becoming subject to the Spirit, or the Son to the Father, being one God, suffereth temptation, and yieldeth not to the temptation, but suffereth himself to be mocked, and scourged, and cast out, and disowned by his people. . . . Yea, even so he shall be led, crucified, and slain, the flesh becoming subject even unto death, the will of the Son being swallowed up in the will of the Father. (Mosiah 15:2–5, 7)

is the fire god, San Gregorio emits beams of light, and San Pascual is Venus as morning star.

Once a Nephite apostate accommodated the idea of a deity complex, that concept could easily be read into the scriptural tradition, and the Nephite God of many names could be reinterpreted in a much more fluid Mesoamerican light. Such a syncretic perspective would reread descriptions of God as differing manifestations, such as a creator deity (Jacob 2:5), a destroyer (3 Nephi 9), a rain god (Ether 9:35), a god of agricultural fertility (Alma 34:24), a solar deity (1 Nephi 1:9; Helaman 14:4, 20), a fire god (1 Nephi 1:6; Helaman 13:13), a king (Mosiah 2:19), a god of medicine (Alma 46:40), a shepherd (Alma 5:38), a lamb (1 Nephi 14), and even a rock (Helaman 5:12). Clearly, some of these manifestations are metaphorical in their appropriate context, but the ancient Maya similarly used rich metaphorical language, and they often used visual metaphors in their works of art. In an apostate/syncretic mindset, the metaphor shifted to a different underlying meaning.[25]

## Bridging Heavenly Expectations

A similar recasting of Book of Mormon theology can link the future goal of both Nephite and Mesoamerican religion. Just as the concept of a deity complex could tie together Mesoamerican and Nephite ideas about God, so could perceived similarities in the nature of the afterlife create another syncretic thread. The early Nephite declaration of a king allowed for a direct point of parallelism with surrounding cultures that similarly proclaimed a king. Apostate Nephite religion accepted a king who was modeled after Mesoamerican ideals of what a king was and did.

Classic-period rulers considered themselves holy, but they never explicitly claimed they were gods during their lifetimes.[26] After death, however, kings were clearly venerated and

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25. Kerry M. Hull, *Verbal Art and Performance in Ch'orti' and Maya Hieroglyphic Writing* (University of Texas at Austin, 2003), 337.

26. Houston and Stuart, "Of Gods, Glyphs, and Kings," 296.

eventually were apotheosized as deities, merging with one of the gods.[27] Although rulers were apotheosized as a variety of deities, the maize god and sun god seem to have been the most popular choices because they both were linked to cycles of birth, life, death, and resurrection—the sun in its daily journey and maize in its seasons of planting and harvest.

Perhaps the most well-known example of apotheosis as the maize god among the ancient Maya comes from Pakal's sarcophagus at the site of Palenque. The scene depicts Pakal's simultaneous descent into the jaws of the underworld and his resurrection as the maize god. A beautiful example of deification occurs as the sun god comes from the Rosalila temple, which was built to honor *K'inich Yax K'uk Mo'*, the founder of the Copan dynasty. The artist plays with multiple themes to show his change to deity status. In addition to this visual sign, the artist included visual puns to identify this particular emerging ancestor as *K'inich Yax K'uk Mo'*. The head of the sun god (*K'inich*) is shown emerging from the mouths of serpent-winged birds, which are marked with features of both quetzal birds (*k'uk'*) and macaws (*mo'*). The imagery not only visually depicts the name *K'inich Yax K'uk' Mo'* but also conveys the message that he had merged with—and had therefore been apotheosized after his death as—the sun god.

Apostate Nephites would see a parallel in a similar expectation of apotheosis after death: "And for this cause ye shall have fulness of joy; and ye shall sit down in the kingdom of my Father; yea, your joy shall be full, even as the Father hath given me fulness of joy; and *ye shall be even as I am, and I am even as the Father; and the Father and I are one*" (3 Nephi 28:10). The ancient Maya kings expected to be merged with the sun and/or maize gods—gods of death and rebirth. The Nephite apostates

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27. Mary Miller and Karl Taube, *An Illustrated Dictionary of the Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993), 76.

would draw a parallel expectation of being merged with the resurrecting Christ and the Father.

The Nephite heaven was "a place where God dwells and all his holy angels. . . . He looketh down upon all the children of men; and he knows all the thoughts and intents of the heart; for by his hand were they all created from the beginning" (Alma 18:30, 32). The ancient Maya parallel associated the sky with the glorious celestial realm and frequently depicted deified ancestors looking down from the skyband, or heavens. For example, on Tikal Stela 31 the deceased *Yax Nuun Ahiin* takes on the form of the ancestral sun god as he overlooks his son *Sihyaj Chan K'awiil II*.[28] This Mesoamerican practice of depicting ancestors or gods overseeing the affairs of the earth from the heavens has its origins in Olmec art.[29]

The celestial paradise that Mesoamerican rulers hoped for has been dubbed "Flower Mountain" by scholars because it is portrayed in the iconography as a place lush with plant and animal life.[30] Flower Mountain is depicted in Maya art as both the paradise of creation and origin as well as the desired destination after a ruler's death, where he would be deified as the sun god. Evidence for the belief in Flower Mountain dates to the Middle Formative Olmec (900–400 BC), and is attested among the Late Preclassic and Classic Maya as well (300 BC–AD 900).[31] Maya scholar Karl Taube argues that "although the notion of a floral paradise recalls Christian ideals of the original Garden of Eden and the afterlife, the solar component is wholly

28. Simon Martin and Nikolai Grube, *Chronicle of the Maya Kings and Queens: Deciphering the Dynasties of the Ancient Maya*, 2nd ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 2008), 34–35.

29. Martin and Grube, *Chronicle of the Maya Kings and Queens*, 26.

30. Jane H. Hill, "The Flower World of Old Uto-Aztecan," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 48/2 (1992). Similar imagery is also found among ancient and modern southwestern Native American tribes, and scholars refer to it as "Flower World."

31. Karl A. Taube, "Flower Mountain: Concepts of Life, Beauty, and Paradise among the Classic Maya," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 45 (2004): 69.

Mesoamerican."[32] To Nephites, however, that solar component would have resonated with their beliefs about Christ. Alma alluded to the correlation between Christ's celestial glory and the radiance of the sun when he stated, "Behold the glory of the King of all the earth; and also the King of heaven shall very soon *shine forth* among all the children of men" (Alma 5:50). He later uses the same language to liken the state of the faithful unto Christ after their resurrection: "then shall the righteous *shine forth* in the kingdom of God" (Alma 40:25).

Only minimal recontextualization of Book of Mormon categories is required to make them resemble the Mesoamerican worldview (and vice versa). All these points of perceptual parallelism in Nephite and Mesoamerican theology could have provided an adequate basis for the emergence of a syncretic religion. If so, the foundational elements of the Nephite apostasy were in place. This would have facilitated the acceptance of the principal element of Mesoamerican theology, one that had the greatest impact on Nephite history—the Mesoamerican divine king.

### The Divine King Replaces the Heavenly King

At the beginning of King Benjamin's remarkable discourse recorded in Mosiah 2–4, he describes several things that he is *not,* or *has not done*—for example, he is not divine, idle, or a seeker of status, and he has not suffered his people to be enslaved or to go to war for plunder:[33]

> I have not commanded you to come up hither that ye should fear me, or that ye should think that I of myself am more than a mortal man. But I am like as yourselves, subject to all manner of infirmities in body and mind; yet I have been chosen by this people, and con-

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32. Taube, "Flower Mountain," 70.

33. Gardner, *Second Witness*, 4:649, examines the set of terms *murder and plunder* as literary codes representing warfare undertaken with the intention of creating a tributary relationship with the dominated city.

secrated by my father, and was suffered by the hand of the Lord that I should be a ruler and a king over this people; and have been kept and preserved by his matchless power, to serve you with all the might, mind and strength which the Lord hath granted unto me. I say unto you that as I have been suffered to spend my days in your service, even up to this time, and have not sought gold nor silver nor any manner of riches of you; Neither have I suffered that ye should be confined in dungeons, nor that ye should make slaves one of another, nor that ye should murder, or plunder, or steal, or commit adultery; nor even have I suffered that ye should commit any manner of wickedness, and have taught you that ye should keep the commandments of the Lord, in all things which he hath commanded you. (Mosiah 2:10–13)

Such descriptions make little sense unless the conditions he described as absent under his reign were actually common elsewhere.[34] Benjamin seems to be contrasting his reign with a well-known set of traits from the surrounding cultures.[35]

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34.  Terrence L. Szink and John W. Welch, "King Benjamin's Speech in the Context of Ancient Israelite Festivals," in *King Benjamin's Speech: "That Ye May Learn Wisdom,"* ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 172. "The text of [the Babylonian king's] negative confession is as follows: 'I did not sin, lord of the countries. I was not neglectful of the requirements of your godship. I did not destroy Babylon; I did not command its overthrow; I did not . [broken] . . the temple Esagil, I did not forget its rites; I did not rain blows on the cheek of a subordinate. . . . I did not humiliate them. I watched out for Babylon; I did not smash its walls.'" The parallel suggests that the format of the negative confession may have had a traditional base. However, the elements of the Babylonian king's confession make sense only if they could have been reversed. Similarly for Benjamin, regardless of the ritual format of a negative confession, the individual elements require the possibility that they could have happened. The people's great love for Benjamin (Mosiah 2:4) also suggests that they saw these possibilities as actual, not merely theoretical or rhetorical.

35.  For a detailed reading of these verses against Mesoamerican cultural environment, see Gardner, *Second Witness,* 3:125–30.

Virtually all of these elements appear in apostate Nephite religion, which likely explains the reason Benjamin highlighted them. In particular, Benjamin's desire that "ye should [not] think that I of myself am more than a mortal man" (Mosiah 2:10) is pointed directly at the Mesoamerican divine king. Benjamin's speech underscores the competing ideas. In the nature of those divine kings, we find further lines of coincidence upon which Nephite apostates appear to have built a syncretic religion.

As was true for the vast majority of ancient civilizations, ancient Maya kings were linked to the supernatural realm and were believed to have divinely sanctioned authority.[36] By the Classic period (AD 250–900), virtually all rulers of large polities wielded the title *k'uhul ajaw*, which has been variously translated as "holy," "sacred," or "divine" lord.[37] Among Mesoamericanists, the issue of how "divine" these rulers actually were is still a matter of debate, but it is clear that during certain rituals they stood as intermediaries who bridged the gap between the natural and supernatural realms. The rulers often depicted themselves in communion with deities and emphasized their special role as intermediaries between the human and the divine realms.[38]

For the ancient Maya, the right to rule came by descent from the gods, but typically these gods were historical ancestors that became gods only after their deaths. On Altar Q from Copan, we see a literal passing of the torch of rulership from *K'inich Yax K'uk Mo,* the dynasty's long-dead but apotheosized ancestor, to the sixteenth ruler, *Yax Pasaj Chan Yoaat.* By claiming descent from a deified ancestor, a king imbued himself with a portion of his ancestor's divinity through birthright, and his

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36. Houston and Stuart, "Of Gods, Glyphs, and Kings," 289.

37. Houston and Stuart, "Of Gods, Glyphs, and Kings," 307–8.

38. Julia L. J. Sanchez, "Ancient Maya Royal Strategies: Creating power and identity through art," *Ancient Mesoamerica* 16/2 (2006): 264.

legitimacy as ruler thus became firmly established in the mind of the people.[39] Nephite rulers similarly traced their right to rule through their lineages, albeit to an honored rather than deified ancestor. Nevertheless, the similarity of the genealogical component is a parallel concept that allowed for syncretism.

King Benjamin did not rehearse his own genealogy back to a prominent apotheosized ruler, but he did declare that all of his people were descended from the "heavenly King" (Mosiah 2:19). In addition, they had become "children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters; for behold, this day he hath spiritually begotten you" (Mosiah 5:7). Benjamin, as representative of his people, might have been seen as claiming a connection with the heavenly king, as could his entire people (who were about to make a covenant with God).

Perhaps at least the Mesoamerican idea of tracing one's lineage to a dynastic founder is easily set parallel to Book of Mormon practice. Lamoni traced his genealogy back to Ishmael (Alma 17:21), King Ammoron (Alma 52:3) traced his genealogy back to Zoram (Alma 54:23), and among the Nephites "the kingdom had been conferred upon none but those who were descendants of Nephi" (Mosiah 25:13). Zarahemla, a descendant of Mulek, who had even tighter links to indigenous Mesoamerican ideas, claimed links back to Zedekiah of Judah (Omni 1:15–18). Even after the institution of kingship was eliminated, many of the chief judges who sat in rulership were Nephi's descendants (Alma$_2$, Helaman$_2$, Nephi$_3$). Even Nephi, the first king among his people, is careful to tell us he is a son of Lehi, who is a descendant of Joseph, ruler over Egypt (1 Nephi 5:14). Among the Jaredites, Ether traced his genealogy through nearly thirty predecessors back to Jared, their dynastic founder (Ether 1). Because Israel was also patriarchal, the idea of transmitting rights through lineage was firmly established as part of

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39.  Houston and Stuart, "Of Gods, Glyphs, and Kings," 290.

early Israel's cultural tradition, and this practice seems to have continued in the New World.

We are not suggesting that either the Israelite or Mesoamerican tradition of lineage-based authority influenced the other to develop the concept. The idea was sufficiently widespread in the ancient world that it was clearly the result of multiple instances of independent invention. However, where the Nephites and native Mesoamericans were two otherwise disparate cultures, sharing that concept of lineage-based authority provided a point of similarity conducive to syncretism. The Nephite genealogical principle could easily have acquired the more mythological Mesoamerican overtones.

### The King, Ritual, and the Replacement of the Messianic Expectation

Two things combined to create the most dangerous instances of Nephite apostasy. The first was the notion of the divine king, and the second was the communal rituals by which that king's place in the community and universe was made real. We have examined some of the ideas and related ideological parallels that possibly underlay the apostate Nephites' creation of a new, syncretized religion. What we have yet to understand is how that syncretism took place and why the syncretic religion took the specific form of denying the Nephite God (Yahweh being understood as the heavenly manifestation who would become the atoning Messiah in an earthly manifestation; see Mosiah 3–4).[40] We suggest that it was the didactic nature of ritual that created both the focal point and indoctrination method for the religious change.

The Nephite community's background in the law of Moses necessarily provided an expectation of certain types of communal ritual. The Book of Mormon clearly describes temples

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40.  Gardner, *Second Witness,* 1:216–17.

as focal points of Nephite communal life, being the location for speeches, sacrifices, and eventually the sacred appearance of their God in their midst. In these communal rituals, the Nephites shared common traits with most state-level societies. Anthropologist William Y. Adams notes:

> The principal rituals of which we have evidence, from texts and mural depictions, were the great state ceremonies, which often lasted over many days. They were carried on in and around the temples, which were the principal architectural monuments as well as the foci of religion in all the early states. The most sacred parts of the ceremonies were rites of adoration, offering, and sacrifice, conducted by the professional priests within sacred precincts from which the laity were often excluded. But there were also public parades, pageantry, and feasting. Costumed religious pageantry, already well developed in tribal societies and chiefdoms, undoubtedly reached its peak of elaboration in the early states.[41]

In addition to any possible entertainment value, communal rituals served as public instruction that underscored and reinforced the shared communal understanding of how the world worked. Lewis Rambo, professor of psychology and religion at the San Francisco Theological Seminary, reports that

> scholars have come to recognize that ritual can play a vital part in religious life. Indeed, some argue that ritual precedes all other aspects of religion: people first *perform* religiously, and then *rationalize* the process by way of theology. Whichever comes first, it is clear that ritual may have an important effect on the conversion process. It is my view that religious action—

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41. William Y. Adams, *Religion and Adaptation* (Palo Alto, CA: Leland Stanford Junior University, 2005), 263.

regularized, sustained, and intentional—is funda-mental to the conversion experience. Ritual fosters the necessary orientation, the readiness of mind and soul to have a conversion experience, and it consolidates conversion after the initial experience.[42]

The law of Moses required communal, visual ritual that centered on the performance of sacrifices. One was a bloody sacrifice of a lamb (or whatever constituted the lamb surrogate in the New World) intended as a symbol and enactor of communal atonement. The Nephite perception of this particular sacrifice had to have been expanded by their understanding that the symbol foreshadowed the Messiah's atoning mission. Thus Nephite communal ritual provided a focus on the bloody sacrifice of an animal that represented a future sacrifice of a deity (Mosiah 3). The doctrine made it clear that it was the person and not the animal that provided atonement, regardless of the enacted symbol.

As Nephites accommodated to the surrounding cultures, the idea of social hierarchies became more and more appealing.[43] At the summit of Mesoamerican hierarchical society was a king who represented a divine lineage and whose ritual presence enacted both the presence of deity and the power of blood sacrifice. The connection between king, blood, and communal ritual provided a powerful means of educating, or reeducating,

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42. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion,* 114.

43. For example: "And it came to pass in the commencement of the ninth year, Alma saw the wickedness of the church, and he saw also that the example of the church began to lead those who were unbelievers on from one piece of iniquity to another, thus bringing on the destruction of the people. Yea, *he saw great inequality among the people, some lifting themselves up with their pride,* despising others, turning their backs upon the needy and the naked and those who were hungry, and those who were athirst, and those who were sick and afflicted" (Alma 4:11–12).

the Nephites, who were already economically motivated to some kind of accommodation with surrounding cultures.[44]

The parallel of place combined ideas of Nephite and Mesoamerican ritual space. For the Nephites, their temple was the focus of their ritual. Similarly, the Maya temple complexes were designed with public performances in mind.[45] Mesoamerican temples "served as a 'focusing lens' to concentrate attention on ideal models of existence and behavior."[46] Mesoamerican rulers used temples as places to "communicate with and influence the gods on behalf of the community."[47] Similarly, Nephite kings acted as intermediaries between the people and their god in association with temples. Benjamin, in his address at the temple, taught his people the words that "the angel of the Lord" had given him (Mosiah 4:1).[48] For both cultures, place and practice were sufficiently similar to allow the temple and the rites performed at the temple to be conduits of syncretism.

Most important to the syncretistic emergence of a religion that denied the atoning Messiah was the replacement of that person and function with a more present substitute. The Mesoamerican king fulfilled that conceptual place with a presence at once more comprehensible and "real" than the predicted Messiah, whose presence was far in the future and geographically distant from the Nephites (Helaman 16:20).

The living Mesoamerican king became, in ritual circumstances, the living and present deity. There were rituals where

44. Gardner, *Second Witness,* 2:487–90.

45. William M. Ringle and George J. Bey III, "Post-Classic and Terminal Classic Courts of the Northern Maya Lowlands," in *Royal Courts of the Ancient Maya, Volume Two: Data and Case Studies*, ed. Takeshi Inomata and Stephen D. Houston (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001), 278.

46. Jeff K. Kowalski, "Temple Complexes," in *Oxford Encyclopedia of Mesoamerican Cultures,* ed. Davíd Carrasco (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3:196.

47. Kowalski, "Temple Complexes," 194.

48. Jacob delivers the Lord's message in a temple setting. See Jacob 2:2–5.

the king not only put on the mask of deity but, for ritual time and in ritual space, became that deity—commonly called god impersonation or "deity concurrence."[49] In deity concurrence, a ritual specialist, typically the ruler, puts on an engraved mask or elaborate headdress and transforms himself into the god whose mask or headdress is being worn. There is a glyphic formula that essentially says, "His holy image (*u-b'aah-il*), [that of] God X, [is upon] Ruler Y." The Maya used the head metaphorically as a mark of individuality, and it stood as a representation of the whole body.[50] In their minds, they were not playacting— they would actually become that god, acting as he would act and performing the godly duties pertaining to that particular deity. As Houston et al. state, "There is no evident 'fiction,' but there is, apparently, a belief in godly immanence and transubstantiation, of specific people who become, in special moments, figures from sacred legend and the Maya pantheon."[51] There are many situations where deity concurrence takes place and a wide variety of deities are impersonated, such as wind gods, gods of incense burning, gods of ball playing, even major gods such as the sun god or the supreme creator deity, Itzamnaaj.[52] This practice goes back to the Formative period (1500 BC–AD 200), as cave paintings in Oxtotitlan dating to the eighth century BC attest.[53]

Against that context, Alma's question "Have you received *his image* in your countenances?" (Alma 5:14) and its rhetorical companion, "Can you look up, having the image of God [Jehovah] *engraven* upon your countenances?" (v. 19), become

49. Stephen Houston, David Stuart, and Karl Taube, *The Memory of Bones: Body, Being, and Experience among the Classic Maya* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 64.

50. Houston, et al., *Memory of Bones*, 64.

51. Houston, et al., *Memory of Bones*, 270.

52. Houston, et al., *Memory of Bones*, 274.

53. David C. Grove, *The Olmec Paintings of Oxtotitlan Cave, Guerrero, Mexico,* Studies in Pre-Columbian Art and Archaeology, no. 6 (Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1970).

highly nuanced. Alma may have been referencing a concept that he expected his listeners to understand and attempted to shift that understanding into a more appropriate gospel context. The masks and headdresses that deity impersonators wore were literally *graven*; numerous ancient Maya ceramics depict artists in the act of carving them.[54]

## Explaining Nephite Apostasy

Nephite prophets exhorted their people to walk steadfastly in the ways of the Lord. There was another option. As social and economic pressures led apostate Nephites to desire a Mesoamerican-style king, the king's accepted and expected ritual roles made deity present rather than distant and merely predicted. The deity before them became a more real and important symbol than the one who was predicted to come in the distant future. This is precisely the argument that Korihor employs to diminish the belief in the future Messiah:

> O ye that are bound down under a foolish and a vain hope, why do ye yoke yourselves with such foolish things? Why do ye look for a Christ? For no man can know of anything which is to come. Behold, these things which ye call prophecies, which ye say are handed down by holy prophets, behold, they are foolish traditions of your fathers. How do ye know of their surety? Behold, ye cannot know of things which ye do not see; therefore ye cannot know that there shall be a Christ. (Alma 30:13–15)

When Alma$_2$ praised the people of Gideon, he did so by contrasting them with Nephite apostates: "I *trust that ye are not in a state of so much unbelief* as were your brethren; I trust that ye are not lifted up in the pride of your hearts; yea, I *trust*

54.  Dorie Reents-Budet, *Painting the Maya Universe: Royal Ceramics of the Classic Period* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 38, 316.

*that ye have not set your hearts upon riches* and the vain things of the world; yea, *I trust that you do not worship idols*, but that ye do worship the true and the living God, and that ye look forward for the remission of your sins, with an everlasting faith, *which is to come*" (Alma 7:6). The people of Gideon were not in apostasy (as were their "brethren" at Zarahemla). They had not set their hearts upon riches (one of the standard traits of Nephite apostasy). They did not worship idols (implying that their "brethren" did). The final result was that the people of Gideon "worship[ped] the true and the living God . . . [who] *is to come*." The people of Gideon had not altered their religion by supplanting the future God for a present idol. Although Alma$_2$'s statement does not specifically mention the Mesoamerican king, it does highlight all the points of similarity upon which the adoption of such a king eventually replaced the "true and the living God . . . [who] is to come" with the person of the king enacting ritual before them.

The refocusing of apostate Nephite belief from atoning Messiah to Mesoamerican divine king plausibly hinged on the fulcrum of similarities in God's sacred blood. Faithful Nephites "believe[d] that salvation was, and is, and is to come, in and through the atoning blood of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent" (Mosiah 3:18). The Mesoamerican king's blood was similarly highly significant and culturally potent. Importantly, it was also a voluntary sacrifice. The Maya kings voluntarily shed their blood as an offering on behalf of their people. They used thorns, stingray spines, and obsidian blades to draw blood from their tongues and genitals. The blood was sometimes dripped onto bark paper and burned, and the smoke was considered both an offering to the gods and a medium for the gods to manifest themselves to the living. The voluntary self-sacrifice was turned from physical blood into divine substance through its ritual transformation as sacrifice.

The conceptual distance between the voluntary blood sacrifice of the king and the voluntary bloody sacrifice of the future Messiah was short. In fact, it appears likely that many Nephites had already made that substitution. Perhaps we are seeing clues to the process of apostasy when Amulek is teaching Zoramite outcasts and specifically defines Christ's sacrifice by what it was *not:* "it shall not be a human sacrifice" (Alma 34:10). Amulek explains (as did Benjamin) in contrast to an accepted belief: "There is *not any man* that can *sacrifice his own blood* which will atone for the sins of another. . . .Therefore, it is expedient that there should be a great and last sacrifice, and then shall there be, or it is expedient there should be, a stop to the shedding of blood; then shall the law of Moses be fulfilled; yea, it shall be all fulfilled, every jot and tittle, and none shall have passed away" (Alma 34:11, 13).[55]

As a point of coincidence by which syncretic tendencies could form, the presence of a king on earth enacting the role of a heavenly king who shed blood for his people was not only an available theological conduit, but one that came with powerful cultural and social overtones. In addition to the ritual presence of the king, there was the daily presence of the culture he represented, with all of the economic benefits and desired social stratification that he embodied.

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55. Although all blood was considered sacred by the Maya, the blood of kings was believed to be the most potent. While some scholars have argued that there may be evidence that human sacrifice among the Aztec served an expiatory function (Michel Graulich, "Aztec Human Sacrifice as Expiation," *History of Religions* 39/4 [2000]: 352–71), there is currently no archaeological evidence that bloodletting by ancient Mesoamerican rulers was done to atone for the sins of their people. Bloodletting was associated with agricultural fertility, which is linked to the cycle of death and rebirth, not with an expiatory sacrifice believed to atone for the sins of a ruler's people. The Nephites, living among the larger Mesoamerican culture, would surely have been aware of the sacred nature of royal blood and the power it had to bring new life.

Nephite apostasy was much more than a change in the way God was perceived. Not a simple change of religion, it could foment a violent disruption:

> And it came to pass that the voice of the people came against Amlici, that he was not made king over the people. Now this did cause much joy in the hearts of those who were against him; but Amlici did stir up those who were in his favor to anger against those who were not in his favor. And it came to pass that they gathered themselves together, and did consecrate Amlici to be their king. Now when Amlici was made king over them he commanded them that they should take up arms against their brethren; and this he did that he might subject them to him. Now the people of Amlici were distinguished by the name of Amlici, being called Amlicites; and the remainder were called Nephites, or the people of God. (Alma 2:7–11)

Even when the apostates did not specifically raise arms, they were important factors in a violent disruption. Alma 51:13 informs us: "And it came to pass that when the men who were called king-men had heard that the Lamanites were coming down to battle against them, they were glad in their hearts; and they refused to take up arms, for they were so wroth with the chief judge, and also with the people of liberty, that they would not take up arms to defend their country."

Why was a religious apostasy so socially disruptive? The splintering of the restored church after the Prophet Joseph Smith's martyrdom certainly resulted in different religious bodies, but not in civil war. The difference is explained by the ability of the modern world to separate religion from politics and culture. For the Nephites, religious apostasy included an alteration of the social order. When the pressures for the new type of king became strong enough, the matter was not only

religious and political—it also included a desire to transform society. As the apostate religion syncretized religious ideas, its adherents longed for the social prestige, wealth, and privilege associated with those religious ideas in surrounding cities and cultures.

The fascinating similarities in multiple Nephite apostasies at different times and in different locations are best explained by the continued presence of a religious and cultural model to which they were adapted.[56] Not only does the Mesoamerican context provide the cultural background that explains why

56.  Kitahara, "Formal Model of Syncretism in Scales," 121–22, provides five points that allow for syncretism. They are listed here with an explanation of how the Book of Mormon case fits the examples:

(1) "Two different cultures must be involved. Members of one culture are exposed to the [culture] of the other, and the two . . . traditions merge." The best reconstruction of Nephite culture places them in Mesoamerica as initially a smaller population inside the larger, more dominant culture. This circumstance inevitably led to the culture clash that created the possibility of (and the desire for) syncretism. That process certainly began with the adoption of Mesoamerican material culture and eventually moved to the adoption of ideology.

(2) "The process itself is based on 'associationism'. . . . One may fairly safely assume that a concept rooted in one culture will be associated with a different concept in another culture, whenever syncretism takes place." We should not expect Nephite religion to demonstrate overt adoption of Mesoamerican deities nor, conversely, Mesoamerican religions to adopt Nephite religion. The general direction of cultural transfer should be from dominant to less dominant. Both the historical information of Mesoamerica and a close reading of the Book of Mormon indicate that the Nephites were not in the dominant position. Nevertheless, there were concepts that might have been associated and that thus could have provided the pathways for syncretic creation.

(3) "Syncretism results from two sets of conceptual configurations, rather than two single concepts." Nephite and Mesoamerican religions were clearly different and operated on different principles. The differences preclude wholesale adoption. The similarities allowed for syncretism.

(4) "The two conceptual configurations must be sufficiently similar to, as well as significantly different from, each other." As noted in this paper, there were a number of areas where commonality might be found. None of these suggest or depend upon an ideological loan from one culture to the other. They began in completely separate worlds, but the perceived parallels allowed for the conceptual paths along which a synthesis could have emerged.

Nephite apostasy took the particular form it did, it also helps us understand some of the specific references Nephite prophets used when combating that apostasy.

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(5) "The end result of syncretism must contain recognizable features of both configurations." We certainly recognize the remnants of Israelite religion in Nephite apostasy. Understanding the specific nature of that apostasy requires a cultural background that has previously been unavailable to LDS researchers.

# Book Review

*George L. Mitton*

*Jeffrey M. Bradshaw.* Temple Themes in the Book of Moses. *Salt Lake City: Eborn Publishing, 2010. xvi + 382 pp., with appendix. $59.95 (paperback with color illustrations). $19.95 (paperback with black-and-white illustrations).*

In an earlier work entitled *In God's Image and Likeness*,[1] Jeffrey Bradshaw provided a remarkable commentary on much of the Book of Moses from the Pearl of Great Price, relating its details to many examples and parallels from ancient literature and summarizing recent scholarly work and commentary on this important scripture received from the Prophet Joseph Smith.[2] *Temple Themes in the Book of Moses* expands on that commentary in a special way, emphasizing those aspects of the Book of Moses that help explain and illuminate the customs, teachings, and ordinances of the temple.

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1    Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, *In God's Image and Likeness: Ancient and Modern Perspectives on the Book of Moses* (Salt Lake City: Eborn, 2010).

2.    See Brian M. Hauglid's review "A New Resource on the Book of Moses," *Mormon Studies Review* 23/1 (2011): 57–60.

It should be noted that the Book of Moses resulted from the Prophet's inspired work with Genesis and was an early revelation that followed the publication of the Book of Mormon in 1830. What is clear today, and a fact duly noted by Bradshaw, is that the Book of Moses anticipated in many ways Joseph's teachings and instructions on temple ordinances more than a decade later during the Nauvoo period of church history. The greater understanding of the ancient temple proceeding from recent scholarship helps demonstrate Joseph's prophetic foresight to those who consider these solemn things. Bradshaw's *Temple Themes* is very instructive in this regard. It is especially so in bringing the reader's attention to many resources, ancient and modern, that are important for a serious consideration of the temple.

Of much interest is the chapter "The Vision of Moses as a Heavenly Ascent." This ascent refers to revelations in which prophets receive a vision of the heavens, usually with God on his throne surrounded by angels in the heavenly court or temple, there to receive instruction and a commission. The temple ritual is related to this ascent and what is learned from it. Bradshaw was assisted in writing this chapter by David J. Larsen, a Latter-day Saint student of the important, extensive, and growing literature on the heavenly ascent (p. 23). The discussion is informed by a review of the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, an ancient Jewish ascent account discovered after Joseph Smith's day, in which are seen many striking parallels to the Book of Moses. I was particularly interested in how each text tends to throw light on the others. Bradshaw reproduces, for the first time in more than a century, the remarkable illustrations of the *Apocalypse* found in the Sylvester Codex, a fourteenth-century manuscript. The illustrations help us to know how the Christians of that time interpreted these interesting writings.

Among the temple-related themes treated by Bradshaw, we find discussions of creation and the Garden of Eden as models

for temple architecture, the symbolisms of the tree of life and the tree of knowledge, the symbolism of the "sacred center," the concept of the "keeper of the gate," the tree of knowledge as a symbol of death and rebirth, the question of whether Eve was beguiled, and the concept of "standing" in holy places. He further discusses the clothing of Adam and Eve and the symbolism associated with it, the prayer and temple work of Adam and Eve, and the new and everlasting covenant.

The book has more than one hundred informative illustrations and concludes with an appendix discussing the relationship of the Book of Moses with Genesis in the Old Testament.

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# "I Have Revealed Your Name": The Hidden Temple in John 17

*William J. Hamblin*

*Abstract: John 17 contains a richly symbolic Last Discourse by Jesus, in which the disciples are assured a place in the Father's celestial house or temple. To fulfill this promise Christ reveals both the Father's name and his glory to his disciples. Jesus's discourse concludes with the promise of sanctification of the disciples, and their unification—or deification—with Christ and the Father. This paper explores how each of these ideas reflects the temple theology of the Bible and contemporary first-century Judaism.*

## Introduction

One of the most important trends in the past decade of Johannine studies is the increasing recognition of the centrality of temple theology in the Fourth Gospel.[1] While John 17 has been called Christ's "High Priestly Prayer" since at least the sixteenth century,[2] recognition of this chapter's temple theology is often not fully appreciated.

John 17 should be contextualized within the larger Passover narrative of the last days of the life of Jesus. In John 11 and 12, Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, followed by his anointing by Mary of Bethany (John 12:1–11), and his triumphal entry

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1. See Appendix 1 for major studies.

2. By David Chytraeus (1530–1600), cited by D. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 552–53.

into Jerusalem (John 12:12–19). In John 13, Jesus washes the feet of the disciples (John 13:1–11)—which parallels a temple ritual, since feet needed to be clean before entering the temple precincts. As the *Mishnah* emphasizes: a man "may not enter into the Temple Mount . . . with the dust upon his feet."[3] Then, on Passover eve, Jesus gives his Last Discourse to his disciples, found in John 13–17. John 17, the conclusion of this discourse, is an extended prayer, in which Jesus blesses the disciples. It is immediately followed by Jesus's departure to Gethsemane, arrest (John 18:1–19), trial (John 18:20–9:16), crucifixion (John 19:16–37), and resurrection (John 20:1–30). John 17 thus holds a central position in the Gospel: the transition point between Jesus's mortal ministry and the return to the celestial glory of the Christ. In this regard, John 17 serves as a symbolic temple for the Gospel of John—it is the meeting place of heaven and earth, where man encounters God. In this paper I will briefly examine six temple themes in John 17.

## 1– "My Father's House"

The temple context of John 17 is made explicit at the beginning of the Last Discourse in John 14:2, where Jesus says, "in my Father's house are many rooms (*monai pollai*). If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?"[4] The only other use of the phrase "my Father's house" by Jesus occurs in John 2:16, where, during his purification of the temple, Jesus objects: "do not make my Father's house a house of trade." When Jesus says "my Father's house" it is his unique way of saying "the temple," since God is his Father, and the temple was commonly known in the biblical traditions as the

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3. *Mishnah, Berakoth* 9.5. Note, also, that whereas the disciple Abraham washes the feet of God in Genesis 18:4, now God washes the feet of his disciples in John 13:1–11.

4. Translations throughout are mine. J. McCaffrey, *The House with Many Rooms: The Temple Theme of Jn. 14,2–3* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1988).

"house of God."[5] So, the most straightforward reading of John 14:2 is that Jesus begins his Last Discourse saying that there are many rooms in the temple, and he is going to prepare a place for his disciples there.

What does Jesus mean when he says that his "Father's house has many rooms" (*monai pollai*, pl. of *monē*; John 14:2)? Of course, in a purely practical and material sense the temple of Jerusalem at the time of Jesus did indeed have many rooms and courts, as can be seen from the detailed descriptions found in Josephus and the Mishnah.[6] But on the eve of his crucifixion and resurrection Jesus is not saying that he is going to the physical temple to prepare a place for his disciples. In the next verse, John 14:3, he makes this clear: "If I go and prepare a place [*topos*] for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that **where I am**, there you may be also. And you know the **way** [*hodos*] to the place where I am going." Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" (John 14:3–5).

In a sense, then, the rest of the last discourse, John 14–17, is an answer to Thomas's questions, "where are you going?" and "what is the way there?" The answer is that Christ is returning to the presence of his Father in the celestial temple, and the way there is the Christian Way, or *hodos*. Remember that Christianity was originally known as "the Way" in the first

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5. In the Hebrew Bible the temple is called "house of Yʜwʜ" 243 times, the "house of God" 81 times, "temple of Yʜwʜ" 27 times. It is also called the "temple of God" 9 times in the New Testament. Yʜwʜ is the Hebrew for Lᴏʀᴅ or Jehovah.

6. Josephus *Antiquities* 15.11; *Wars* 5.5; *Mishnah, Middoth*; M. Ben-Dov, *In the Shadow of the Temple: The Discovery of Ancient Jerusalem* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 72–183; J. Hayward, *The Jewish Temple: A Non-biblical Source Book* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 142–53; J. Patrich, "Reconstructing the Magnificent Temple Herod Built," *Biblical Review* 4/5 (1988): 16–29; L. Ritmeyer, *The Quest: Revealing the Temple Mount in Jerusalem* (Jerusalem: Carta, 2006); A. Kaufman, *The Temple Mount: Where is the Holy of Holies?* (Jerusalem, Har Year'eh, 2004).

decades before non-Christians started calling Jesus's followers Christians in Antioch (Acts 11:26).[7] The Way of Christ is the Way to the presence of the Father in the celestial temple, as is expressly stated in Hebrews 10:19–20 (cf. Hebrews 9:8). "Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living *way* that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh" (Hebrews 10:19–20).

The phrase *where I am* occurs four times in the New Testament, only in John, and always as a technical term describing Jesus's return to the Father.[8] Jesus repeatedly claims that he has "come down from heaven" (John 6:38), and that the Father has sent him.[9] He also frequently alludes to returning to "him who sent me" (*ho pempsanta me*),[10] a clear allusion to the Father. In Greek "where I am" is *hopou eimi egō*, and may be related to the esoteric "I Aᴍ" (*egō eimi*) statements of Jesus in John.[11] Jesus tells his disbelieving critics, "You will seek me and you will not find me. *Where I am* you cannot come" (John 7:34, 36; see also John 8:21; 13:33). On the other hand, he says to his disciples at the beginning of his Last Discourse, "*where I am* there you may be also" (John 14:3, 12:26). Likewise, at the

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7. Christians are initially called "those of The Way" (Acts 9:2; Greek: *hodos*), see W. Bauer and F. Danker (eds.), *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 556–7 (hereafter BDAG), cf. "Way of the Lord" (Acts 18:25), "Way of God" (Acts 18:26); Acts 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22; Christ is "the Way," John 14:6; "the Way" to the heavenly Temple, Hebrews 9:8; Hebrews 10:19–20.

8. John 7:34–36; John 12:26; John 14:3; John 17:24; see also the related "where I am going" statements: John 7:33; 8:14, 21; 13:33, 36; 14:3–5; 16:5.

9. John 5:36–37, 6:44, 57, 7:16, 29, 8:16–18, 42, 12:49, 14:24, 17:8, 18, 21, 23, 25, 20:21.

10. John 7:33, 5:30, 6:38–39, 7:16, 28, 8:26, 29, 9:4, 12:24, 13:20, 16:5.

11. John 6:35, 48, 8:12, 24, 28, 58, 10:9, 11, 36, 11:25, 13:19, 14:6, 15:1; see C. Williams, *I Am He: The Interpretation of "Ani Hu" in Jewish and Early Christian Literature* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1999); D. Ball, *'I Am' in John's Gospel: Literary Function, Background, and Theological Implications* (Sheffield: Academic, 1996); P. Harner, *The 'I Am' in the Fourth Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970).

close of the Last Discourse, Jesus prays that the disciples may be "may be with me *where I am*, to see my glory" (John 17:24).

The *where I am* language clearly refers to being in the presence of the Father in heaven. Thus, as I understand these passages, the "Father's house" is the temple by which means Jesus returns to the Father's presence. In the context of first-century biblical traditions, this can only mean the celestial temple. If most modern Christians were to consider where the Father dwells, they would probably say "in Heaven."[12] By this they generally don't mean the visible sky—which is the literal translation of the biblical terms for heaven[13]—but an ultra-dimensional place beyond time and space.[14] On the other hand, if you were to ask a first-century Jews or Christians where God dwells, they would undoubtedly respond, "in his temple in the sky." The vast majority of modern Christians have lost an understanding of the mythos of the celestial temple, even though it is central to the biblical traditions.[15] In the Hebrew Bible, Psalm 11:4 is explicit: "Yhwh is in his holy temple (*hêkal*); Yhwh's throne is in heaven." The Psalmist likewise tells us that God "has looked down from the height of his holy place/temple (*qodeš*), from heaven Yhwh beholds the earth" (Psalm 102:19). The clear idea

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12.  For ancient conceptions of the heaven, see E. Wright, *The Early History of Heaven* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); W. Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1998).

13.  Hebrew (*šāmayīm*) and Greek (*ouranos*).

14.  For general surveys of the history of the idea of Heaven, see: J. Russell, *A History of Heaven: The Singing Silence* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998); C. McDannell and B. Lang, *Heaven: A History*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001); A. McGrath, *A Brief History of Heaven* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003); K. Rushby, *Paradise: A History of the Idea that Rules the World* (New York: Basic Books, 2006); C. Muessig and A. Putter, *Envisaging Heaven in the Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

15.  J. Parry and D. Parry, "The Temple in Heaven: Its Description and Significance," in *Temples of the Ancient World* ed. S. Ricks and D. Parry (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 515–32.

behind these passages and related passages[16] is that God dwells in a temple in heaven.[17] If anything, this idea is even more clear in the New Testament, particularly in Hebrews 8–10 and in scattered passages throughout the book of Revelation, which is set almost entirely in the celestial temple.[18] This is where Christ is going to prepare a place for the disciples, who are called the "pillars in the temple of my God" (Revelation 3:12), who will sit enthroned beside the throne of God.[19]

As a brief digression here, it is worth noting that recent studies of early Jewish mysticism, known as the *hêkalot* tradition, also demonstrate the importance of visionary experiences of the throne of God and the celestial temple among Jews in the first few centuries after Jesus.[20] From these and related texts we are now able to better understand first-century Jewish ideas about the celestial temple and throne of God as a context for related early Christian concepts. If we read John 17 in this context, its temple motifs become quite significant.

Thus, the Last Discourse of Jesus is framed at both the beginning and end by two *where I am* temple statements, telling the disciples in John 14:2 that Jesus is going to prepare a place for them, so that, in the end, they will be with Jesus in the celestial temple and see his glory (John 17:24). This explicit framing of the Last Discourse with temple imagery should alert us

16. See also Psalm 18:6; Wisdom of Solomon 3:14; *Testament of Levi* 5:1, 18:6; *1 Enoch* 14:18–20; Philo, *Laws*, 1.66

17. This is also clear from the *Song of the Sabbath Sacrifice* in the Dead Sea Scrolls; see Jared C. Calaway, "Heavenly Sabbath, Heavenly Sanctuary: The Transformation of Priestly Sacred Space and Sacred Time in the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* and the Epistle to the Hebrews" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2010), and more broadly, P. Alexander, *Mystical Texts: Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice and Related Manuscripts* (New York: Continuum, 2006).

18. Revelation 7:15, 11:19, 14:15–17, 15:5–6, 8, 16:1, 17.

19. Revelation 3:21, 4:4; Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:30.

20. C. Rowland and C. Morray-Jones, *The Mystery of God: Early Jewish Mysticism and the New Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 2009); R. Elior, *The Three Temples: On the Emergence of Jewish Mysticism* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2005).

to the probability of additional temple language and motifs throughout John 17.

## 2– Revelation of the Name of the Father (John 17:6, 11)[21]

In John 17, Christ is *given* the Name of the Father by the Father (John 17:11–12), and later *reveals* or *makes known*[22] this divine Name to the disciples (John 17:6, 26). How would a first-century Jew have understood this claim that Jesus knew and revealed the name of the Father?[23]

In Old Testament traditions, God personally revealed his true name Yʜwʜ (יהוה)—generally Anglicized as Jehovah—to Moses (Exodus 3:15), claiming that before the time of Moses, God had not been known by this name Yʜwʜ (Exodus 6:3).[24]

21. A. Kerr, *The Temple of Jesus' Body: The Temple Theme in the Gospel of John* (Sheffield: Academic, 2002), 323–45; J. Fossum "In the Beginning was the Name: Onomanology as the Key to Johannine Christology," in his *The Image of the Invisible God: Essays on the Influence of Jewish Mysticism on Early Christology* (Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 1995), 109–34; G. Shirbroun, "The Giving of the Name of God to Jesus in John 1:11, 12" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1985); For later Christian interpretations: N. Janowitz, "Theories of Divine Names in Origen and Pseudo-Dionysius," *History of Religion* 30 (1991): 359–72.

22. Reveals = *phaneroō*; makes known = *gnōrizō*, cognate with *gnosis*/knowledge.

23. General background on the Divine Name: G. Kittel and G. Friedrich (eds.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 vols. (Eerdmans, 1964–1977), 5:242–82 (hereafter, TDNT); G. Parke-Taylor, *Yahweh: The Divine Name in the Bible* (Waterloo, Ont: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1975); S. Richter, *The Deuteronomistic History and the Name Theology* (New York: De Gruyter, 2002); C. Dodd, *Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 93–96; J. Danielou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity* (New York: Westminster, 1964), 147–63; L. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 381–9; J. Ronning, *The Jewish Targums and John's Logos Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 70–83.

24. However, the name Yʜwʜ is used in the book of Genesis: For example, Cain and Abel make offerings to Yʜwʜ (Genesis 4:3–4), and Seth and Enosh "called upon the name Yʜwʜ" (Genesis 4:26). This paradox is one of the factors behind the formation of the Documentary Hypothesis, which posits several different sources for the Pentateuch.

Up to that point, the name of God had been secret. Israel there-after makes its covenant with Yʜᴡʜ,[25] to only worship "Yʜᴡʜ your God."[26] At the same time, God also revealed another name to Moses, "I ᴀᴍ" (אהיה) (Exodus 3:14).

The importance of the divine Name Yʜᴡʜ is found throughout the Hebrew Bible. Israel is consistently command-ed to "call upon the name of Yʜᴡʜ."[27] Likewise, they are to glorify or praise the name of Yʜᴡʜ.[28] Hymns praising the name Yʜᴡʜ are found throughout the Psalms. Many Israelite names are theophoric, and include the name Yʜᴡʜ in personal names in one form or another.[29] The Divine Name is also found written in ancient nonbiblical sources from Israel, including inscriptions, letters, and seals.[30] As far as we can tell, there was originally no prohibition against writing or saying the name Yʜᴡʜ in ancient Israel; only against blaspheming or misusing the name, or falsely claiming to speak in the name of Yʜᴡʜ (Exodus 20:7; Deuteronomy 5:11).

A major transformation in Israelite Name theology, how-ever, occurred in the Second Temple period, between the con-clusion of the Hebrew Bible and the time of Jesus.[31] Restrictions on the ritual writing and pronunciation of the name Yʜᴡʜ de-

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25. Exodus 24:7, 34:10; Leviticus 26:45; Deuteronomy 5:2–3, etc.

26. Exodus 20:2–5, 34:14; Deuteronomy 5:6–9, 6:4.

27. Genesis 4:26; Psalm 105:1, 116:17, Isaiah 12:4

28. 1 Chronicles 16:29; Psalm 29:2, 86:9, 12, 96:8, 115:1; Isaiah 24:15; Revelation 15:4; 3 Nephi 9:15; 3 Nephi 11:7, 23:9; Ether 3:21; Doctrine and Covenants 45:4, 76:43.

29. For example, Isaiah = *yĕšaʿ-yāhû* = "Yʜᴡʜ saves"; Jeremiah = *yirmĕ-yāhû* = "Yʜᴡʜ establishes."

30. General: R. Hess, *Israelite Religions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 269–90; inscriptions: Z. Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel* (New York: Continuum, 2001), 350–438; letters: J. Lindenberger, *Ancient Aramaic and Hebrew Letters* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 61–80, 112–33; seals: L Gorelick (ed), *Ancient Seals and the Bible* (Malibu, CA: Undena, 1983).

31. For a general survey of Rabbinic concepts of the Name of God, see S. Cohon, "The Name of God: A Study in Rabbinic Theology," *Hebrew Union College Annual*, 23/1 (1950–51): 579–604; E. Urbach, *The Sages*, 2ⁿᵈ ed. (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1987), 124–34.

veloped by at least the third century before Christ. Instead of actually pronouncing the name Yʜwʜ when reading scriptures or praying, Jews increasingly used the Hebrew *ădōnāy* (אדני), which becomes *kurios* (κύριος) in Greek, both meaning simply "lord."[32] In Hebrew biblical manuscripts from this period they often wrote the name of God in the Paleo-Hebrew script indicating its special status and unique pronunciation.[33] By the time of Jesus many Jews had begun to simply say *ha-šēm* ("the Name" [of God]) when they came across the name Yʜwʜ in reading a text. An early form of this practice can already be found in Leviticus 24:11, 16 where an Israelite is described as blaspheming "the Name" (*ha-šēm*), meaning the name Yʜwʜ. These practices still continue among Orthodox Jews today, who, when reading aloud or speaking the name Yʜwʜ, will say *ădōnāy*, *ha-šēm*, or vocally spell the name, *yôd-hê-vāv-hê*.

These practices derived in large part from contemporary interpretations of the biblical prohibition against "taking the name of Yʜwʜ your God in vain" (Exodus 20:7; Deuteronomy 5:11). There was a Rabbinic inclination to "make a hedge for the Law,"[34]—which is to say, interpret the law in the broadest sense possible to prevent one from even coming close to breaking a commandment. From fear of inadvertently "taking the name of Yʜwʜ in vain," Jews increasingly refused to say God's name at all. The transformed nature of this prohibition is clearly

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32. The sages of the Talmud described this tradition: "The Holy One, blessed be He, said: 'I am not called as I am written: I am written with [the letters] *yod he* [*waw he*, that is יהוה, or Yʜwʜ], but I am read, [with the letters] *alef daleth* [*nun yod*, that is אדני, or ᴀᴅɴʏ, *ădōnāy*]'" (*Babylonian Talmud, Kiddushim* 71a). The English practice of writing Lᴏʀᴅ in small capital letters for the Hebrew Yʜwʜ derives from the ancient Greek and Latin Bibles, where the proper name Yʜwʜ is consistently rendered *kurios* and *dominus* respectively.

33. L. Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 99–110; this is reflected in many of the biblical manuscripts in the Dead Sea Scrolls, especially the *Exodus Scroll*; L. Schiffman and J. VanderKam (eds.), *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 2 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 2:600–602.

34. *Pirke Avot*, 1.1.

reflected in interpretations of Leviticus 24:11–16. The Hebrew text of verse 16 reads: "whoever blasphemes/slanders the name of Yʜwʜ shall surely be put to death" (Leviticus 24:16). But the Greek Septuagint, reflecting Jewish beliefs and practices in the second century BC, reads: "whoever names the name (*onomazōn de to onoma*) of the Lord (*kurios*) shall surely be put to death." In other words an original prohibition against *misusing* the name Yʜwʜ had become transformed by at least the second century BC into a prohibition against even *pronouncing* the name at all.[35]

The Rabbis creatively misread Exodus 3:15 along similar lines. There Yʜwʜ is to be God's name "forever," in Hebrew *lĕ-ʿōlām*. The Rabbis, however, vocalized the word *lĕ-ʿōlām* as *lĕ-ʿallēm*, meaning "concealed."[36] Thus, they took this passage as a command to conceal rather than pronounce the divine name revealed by God to Moses.[37] This is part of the Rabbinic tradition of God's hidden, unpronounceable, and "ineffable name," the *šēm ha-mĕfôrāš*. This phrase is not found explicitly in the Hebrew Bible, but derives from an Aramaic Targum interpretation of Judges 13:18, where an angel asks, "Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful (Hebrew: *pelīʾy*, פלאי)?" The Aramaic Targum of Judges, however, translates "wonderful" as *mĕpāraš* "ineffable," meaning that the name of God is unpronounceable or unknowable.[38]

There were two exceptions to this general prohibition against naming the Divine Name. The first, and foremost, was the pronunciation of the name Yʜwʜ by the High Priest in the temple on the Day of Atonement. The biblical text of the Day

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35. Philo (*Life of Moses*, 2.114, 205) and Josephus (*Antiquities*, 2.276), both near contemporaries of Jesus, confirm these concerns for proper use for the name of God in the first century AD.

36. In the unvoweled Hebrew texts of this era, both variants were written לעלם (ʟʿʟᴍ), and could in theory be pronounced either way.

37. *Babylonian Talmud, Kiddushim* 71a; TDNT 5:269.

38. Ronning, *Jewish Targums*, 78.

of Atonement ritual in Leviticus 16 does not mention a specific benediction to be said in the name of Yнwн. Our information on the ritual pronunciation of the Name on the Day of Atonement comes from the *Mishnah*, a collection of Rabbinic oral traditions recorded around AD 200. "When the priest and the people which stood in the Temple Court [on the Day of Atonement] heard the Expressed Name [Yнwн] come from the mouth of the High Priest, they used to kneel and bow themselves and fall down on their faces."[39]

The book of the Wisdom of Sirach 50 also contains a detailed description of the Day of Atonement ritual performed by the High Priest Simon the Just (219–196 BC), which likewise mentions the people prostrating themselves at the mention of the Name (Sirach 50:20–21), just as described in the Mishnah.[40] The Talmud records a tradition that after the death of Simon people ceased to speak the Name aloud.[41]

The name of Yнwн was also invoked during the daily recitation of the priestly benediction described in Numbers 6:22–27.[42] The *Mishnah* tells us that when the priests pronounced this blessing, "in the Temple they pronounced the Name as it was written, but in the provinces by a substituted word,"[43] probably *ha-šēm* or *ădōnāy*. The *Talmud*, a fourth to sixth century AD commentary on the *Mishnah*, describes this practice: "R. Tarfon said: 'I once ascended the dais [of the temple] . . . and inclined my ear to the High Priest, and heard him swallowing

39. *Mishnah*, *Yoma* 6.2, 3.8, 4.2.

40. The Book of Sirach was written around 180 BC. In Hebrew his name is Šimʿôn ha-Ṣaddîq ("Simon the Righteous/Just"); he is often conflated by rabbinic tradition with Simon I, who was the High Priest around 300 BC. His purported tomb is still venerated by Ultra-Orthodox Jews in northern Jerusalem.

41. *Babylonian Talmud, Yoma* 30b.

42. The words of the blessing are found in Numbers 6.24–26, where the name Yнwн is repeated three times; see also Psalm 67:1, 80:3, 19, 119:135.

43. *Mishnah*, *Tamid* 6.2; see also *Sifre Numbers* 43.

[i.e. whispering or pronouncing indistinctly] the Name [Yʜwʜ] during the chanting by his brother priests.'"[44]

If this report is accurate, it means that the name may have been whispered or mumbled so that only nearby priests could hear it distinctly, but not the people receiving the blessing, thus not revealing the sacred name to the non-priests.[45] When the temple was destroyed and the ritual pronunciation of the name ceased, priestly and rabbinic scholars preserved the correct pronunciation for several centuries by whispering the name to their disciples once every seven years,[46] but eventually the correct pronunciation of the sacred name was lost.

It is in this context of Jewish name theology that we need to examine John's account of Jesus revealing the name of the Father while blessing his disciples. By the time of Jesus there was a strong tradition of the sacred secrecy of God's name, which could only be pronounced by priests in the temple. In the context of first century Judaism, then, when Jesus reveals the name of the Father, he is acting within the framework of two important biblical traditions. First, the revelation of the names Yʜwʜ and I Aᴍ to Moses on Sinai, making Jesus the "prophet like unto Moses," to whom God revealed his name.[47] Second, for a Jewish reader, the claim that Jesus *revealed* the name of the Father to his disciples would also imply that Jesus claimed the authority of the High Priest to reveal the Name, reflecting the divine authority/*eksousia* Jesus claims in John 17:2, where the Father gives "Jesus authority over all flesh, to give eternal life." He was thus acting to bring about the eternal atonement and reconciliation of Israel with God.[48] In time, these traditions of the secret name of God would develop into

44. *Babylonian Talmud, Kiddushim* 71a.
45. See TDNT 5:268–9 for more references.
46. *Babylonian Talmud, Kiddushim* 71a.
47. Deuteronomy 18:15; Acts 3:22; 7:37.
48. Kerr, *Temple of Jesus' Body*, 314–70.

widespread Name mysticism in Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and related magical traditions.[49]

The paradox here is that Jesus does not actually reveal the name of the Father in John 17:6 and 26, or anywhere else for that matter. Rather he simply says that he already *has* revealed it. Now it may be that the Name is not explicitly mentioned in John precisely because the Divine Name that Jesus revealed cannot be made public. Knowing that Jesus revealed the Name to the disciples is enough. On the other hand, it is possible that the Divine Name Jesus revealed is the word *Father*, for early Christians prayed and perform their rituals and liturgy not in the name of Yнwн—though their use of *kurios*/Lord probably implies this—but expressly in the name of the *Father* and the Son and the Holy Ghost.[50]

### 3– Christ as the Manifestation of God's Glory (John 17:4–5)

In John 17:1 Christ prays: "May you [Father] glorify your Son that your Son might glorify you;" and adds that he has "glorified [the Father] upon the earth" (John 17:4). What is this glory? And how does Jesus glorify the Father? In Greek, the verb to glorify is *doksazō* (δοξάζω), meaning, "to praise, honor, extol," or "make glorious or splendid."[51] The nominal form *doksa* (δόξα), means "brightness, splendor, radiance, magnificence, greatness, honor, fame, or prestige" (BDAG 257). While human beings, such as kings, can have glory, to fully understand the background of the idea of glorification in John 17, we need look at the concept of "glory" in the Hebrew Bible.

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49. For some of these later traditions, see V. Izmirlieva, *All the Names of the Lord* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

50. The belief that the Divine Name was the word *Father* is reflected in some later third-century Gnostic writers. See Appendix 2 for examples.

51. BDAG 258; TDNT 2:232–55.

In the Septuagint the Greek word *doksa*/glory generally translates the Hebrew term *kābôd* (כבוד).[52] Thus the ultimate background for the glorification language in John is the technical meaning of the phrase the "glory of Yʜwʜ" (*kābôd Yʜwʜ*) in the Hebrew Bible.[53] In its most narrow and technical sense, the Glory of Yʜwʜ is the visible manifestation of the presence of God in the Temple or Tabernacle.[54] This Glory of Yʜwʜ is most clearly described in the great theophanies at the tabernacle and temple.[55] It is represented as a blazing fire or a dazzling light,[56] though often enshrouded in a cloud.[57] In Ezekiel's vision, the shining anthropomorphic figure on the chariot-throne is explicitly called the "Glory of Yʜwʜ" (Ezekiel 1:28), implying that the *kābôd*/glory has a human form. For Ezekiel, the departure of the Glory of Yʜwʜ from the temple is tantamount to its desecration, leaving it ripe for destruction by the Babylonians (Ezekiel 10–11).

When Moses saw Yʜwʜ on Mount Sinai, the *kābôd*/glory was so overwhelming that Moses's face was transfigured, thereafter reflecting God's Glory and forcing him to wear a veil to protect the Israelites from its stunning radiance.[58] In this context, when Hebrews 1:3 says that Christ "is the radiance of the

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52. *Kābôd* means "heaviness, weightiness, importance, glory, splendor, distinction, or honor," L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner (eds.), *The Hebrew Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), hereafter HALOT 457.

53. T. Mettinger, *The Dethronement of Sabaoth: Studies in the Shem and Kabod Theologies* (Gleerup, 1982).

54. Exodus 16:7, 10, 24:17; Leviticus 9:23; Numbers 14:10; 1 Kings 8:11; 2 Chronicles 7:1–3; Isaiah 6:3; Ezekiel 1:28, 3:12, 23, 10:4, 18, 43:2–5, 44:4–8; Psalms 26:8, 29:9, 63:2.

55. Sinai: Exodus 16:7, 10, 24:16–17, 33:22. Tabernacle: Exodus 29:43, 40:34–35; Leviticus 9:23; Numbers 14:10, 16:19, 42, 20:6. Temple: 2 Kings 8:11; 2 Chronicles 7:1–3.

56. Exodus 24:16–17; Deuteronomy 5:24; 2 Chronicles 7:1–3; Isaiah 4:5, 60:1, 19; Revelation 21:23.

57. Exodus 40:34–38; Numbers 16:42; 1 Kings 8:10–11; d 2 Chronicles15:4.

58. Exodus 34:33–34; 2 Corinthians 3:13; this is part of the source for modern concepts of halos around holy persons in art.

**glory of God** and the **exact imprint** of his nature" (*charaktēr tēs hupostaseōs*, χαρακτήρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως), it is simply a way of saying that Christ is the "glory of Yнwн," which is to say, the physical and visible manifestation of the presence of God on earth.[59] On the other hand, on occasion the prophets proclaim that God's *kābôd*/glory is not restricted to the temple, but fills the whole world.[60]

There are a number of ways in which John describes the glory of Jesus. Christ had glory with the Father before the world was (John 1:14; John 17:5). Christ's glory comes from "the one God" (John 5:44; John 8:54), but his glory is the glory of the "one Son" (*monogenos*, John 1:14). The miracles of Jesus manifest God's glory.[61] When John describes Christ as the "light of the world,"[62] the overall context probably has at least partial reference to God's shining glory/*kābôd*. This is reiterated by the fact that for John, glory is something that can be seen.[63] The Father gives his glory to the Son, who will in turn give it to the disciples (John 17:22).[64] On the other hand, the ultimate glorification of Jesus will only occur after the resurrection, for during his mortal ministry he "was not yet glorified."[65]

What does it mean that Christ glorifies the Father? Christ does not *make* God more glorious, but *reveals* God's already existing luminous glory to an uncomprehending world (John

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59.   See also 1 Corinthians 2:8. This is in part why medieval Christian artists generally depicted Jesus, the Glory of God on earth, as the anthropomorphic Glory of God figure in Ezekiel's chariot.

60.   Numbers 14:21; Isaiah 6:3, 66:18; Psalms 97:6, 19:1; Habakkuk 2:14.

61.   John 2:11, 11:4, 40.

62.   John 1:9, 3:19, 8:12, 9:5, 11:9, 12:46.

63.   John 1:14, 11:40, 12:41, 17:24.

64.   The idea that the Father glorifies the Son is somewhat paradoxical in light of the statements by Isaiah that God does not share his glory (Isaiah 42:8, 48:11). The Father is also glorified not only by the Son, but by the faith and deeds of Christ's disciples (John 14:13, 15:8; Peter likewise glorified the Father by his martyrdom, John 21:18–19.)

65.   John 7:39,12:16, 23, 13:31; Matthew 24:30, 25:31; Mark 8:38, 13:26; Luke 21:27, 24:26.

1:5, 10, 14). When the Father makes the Son glorious, the Son thereby *reveals* the glory of the Father. One element of this concept is that the resurrection will reveal the glory of the Son, and thereby the Son will reveal the ultimate glory of the Father. "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once" (John 13:31–32).

In other words, there is a reciprocal glorification of the Father and the Son. The glorification of Christ also comes in part through his departure out of this world (John 13:1)—where his glory is masked—and his return to the glory he had in the celestial temple with the Father before the world was.

With this ancient temple context for the idea of *kābôd*/glory in mind, we can examine the importance of the concept in John 17. Remarkably, six of the twenty-six verses of John 17 speak of glory and glorification.

- "Father, the hour has come; **glorify** your Son so that the Son may **glorify** you." (John 17:1)
- "I **glorified** you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, **glorify** me *in your own presence* with the **glory** that I had *in your presence* before the world existed." (John 17:4–5)
- "All mine [the disciples] are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been **glorified in them**." (John 17:10)
- "The **glory** that you have given me I have given them, so that <u>they may be one, as we are one</u>," (John 17:22)
- "Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may *be with me where I am*, **to see my glory,** which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world." (John 17:24)

This glorification language in John 17 has three themes. (1) Mutual shared glorification of the Father, Son and disciples. (2) Through this mutual glorification comes mutual oneness (John 17:22). (3) The disciples will be where Jesus is, in the presence of

the Father, where they will see Christ's full glory. Among first-century readers this glorification language in John 17 would have evoked ideas of God's glorious theophanies in the temple, and Christ's postmortal glorification by the Father would imply a glory-theophany in the Celestial Temple.

## 4– Expulsion of the Evil One (John 17:15)

One of the unique rituals of the Israelite Day of Atonement[66] was the scapegoat, or *ʿAzāʾzel* (עֲזָאזֵל), described in Leviticus 16.[67] While the precise meaning of *ʿAzāʾzel* is debated, the most widely accepted interpretation is that it is the name of a demonic power. This is also reflected in Second Temple pseudepigraphic literature, especially *1 Enoch* and the *Apocalypse of Abraham*.[68] The sins of Israel were transferred to the head of the goat which was driven into the wilderness "for *ʿAzāʾzel*," representing the expulsion of sin and evil from the community

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66. For a collection of primary sources, see: D. Instone-Brewer, *Traditions of the Rabbis from the Era of the New Testament, vol. 2A: Feasts and Sabbaths: Passover and Atonement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 253–340. For studies, see: J. Baumgarten, "Yom Kippur in the Qumran Scrolls and Second Temple Sources," *Dead Sea Discoveries*, 6/2 (1999): 184–91; D. Stokl Ben Ezra, *The Impact of Yom Kippur on Early Christianity: The Day of Atonement from the Second Temple to the Fifth Century* (Tübingen: Mohr, 2003); D. Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 1:72–75 (hereafter, ABD).

67. Leviticus 16, 23:26–32; Numbers 29:7–11; Exodus 30:10. For studies see: J. Collins (ed.), *The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 241–42; ABD 1:536–537; E. Feinberg, "The Scapegoat of Leviticus Sixteen," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 115 (1958): 320–31; L. Grabbe, "The Scapegoat Tradition: A Study in Early Jewish Interpretation," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 18 (1987): 152–67; H. Tawil, "Azazel the Prince of the Steppe: A Comparative Study," *Zeitschrift fur altestamentliche Wissenschaft* 92 (1980): 43–59.

68. *1 Enoch* 8:1; 9:6; 10:4–8; 13:1; cf. 54:5–6; 55:4; 69:2; *Apocalypse of Abraham* 13:6–14; 14:4–6; 20:5–7; 22:5; 23:11; 29:6–7; 31:5. For studies see G. Nickelsburg, "Apocalyptic and Myth in 1 Enoch 6–11," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 96 (1977): 383–405; P. Hanson, "Rebellion in Heaven, Azazel, and Euhemeristic Heroes in 1 Enoch 6–11," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 96 (1977): 195–233; L. Grabbe, "The Scapegoat Tradition: A Study in Early Jewish Interpretation," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 18 (1987): 152–67.

of Israel (Leviticus 16:21).[69] This rite is a prerequisite for the purification of Israel in preparation for the visitation of Yнwн with the High Priest in the Holy of Holies of the tabernacle or temple. At the culmination of the ceremony, the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies and made "atonement for the priests and for all the people of the assembly" (Leviticus 16:33), thereby reconciling Israel with God.

What does all this have to do with John 17? In John 17:15, Jesus asks the Father to protect the disciples from the Evil One .

> I do not ask that you take them out of the *world* [*kosmos*]
> but that you protect them from *the evil one* [*ho ponēros*].
> (John 17:15)

This phrase is often understood by modern Christians as a prayer for protection from evil in an abstract sense. But in its first century context, *ho ponēros* meant the Evil One, that is Satan.[70] This is made clear by a quick survey of related New Testament descriptions of Satan. The Evil One here is described elsewhere in John as the *archōn tou kosmou* (ἄρχων του κόσμου)—the "ruler of the world."[71] In 2 Corinthians 4:4 Paul calls Satan the "god of this Age" (*theos tou aiōnos*). First John tells us that "the whole world [*kosmos*] lies [in the power] of the Evil One" (1 John 5:19).

At the beginning of the Last Discourse, Jesus says explicitly that "the ruler [*archōn*] of this world [*kosmos*] will be cast out" (John 12:31). Because Satan is cast out by Christ, the disciples are protected from his power, as described in John 17:15. The ritual expulsion of evil from the community of Israel was symbolized in ancient times by the temple scapegoat ritual. With evil banished, the community could be purified and prepared

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69.  Or perhaps archaically, the placation of ʿAzāʾzel by a goat-offering.

70.  BDAG 851.

71.  John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11; see also Paul in Ephesians 2:2; 1 Corinthians 2:6–8.

for the presence of Yнwн. Likewise, by casting out the Evil One, and atoning for sin, Christ prepares the disciples to be where Christ is, that is, in the celestial temple with the Father.

## 5– Sanctification or Consecration of Christ and the disciples (John 17:17–19)

With the expulsion of Satan, the stage is now set for the sanctification of the disciples. The concept of sanctification is an important one in the Israelite temple mythos. Fundamentally, anything associated with the temple or the presence of God must be holy. There are many examples of this in the Hebrew Bible.

- The Israelites were required to consecrate themselves for the Sinai theophany, including washing themselves and donning clean garments.[72]
- Aaron and the Levite priests must be consecrated to serve in the Tabernacle.[73]
- Sacrificial offerings made to God must be consecrated.[74]
- The tabernacle, temple, furniture, utensils, and clothing associated with it must likewise be consecrated.[75]

The verb in most of these passages is *qaddeš* (קדש), which means literally to make something *qōdeš*, or holy. Unfortunately, because of the nature of English, we often use several different words to translate this one idea: consecrate, make holy, and sanctify and their variants. In most English translations these three different English roots nearly always translate the

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72. Exodus 19:10, 14, 22; Leviticus 11:44; Numbers 3:13, 8:17, 11:18; Joshua 3:5, 7:13; 1 Samuel 16:5; Joel 2:16.

73. Exodus 28:3, 38, 41, 40:13; Leviticus 8:10–12, 21:10; 1 Chronicles 15:12–14; 2 Chronicles 5:11, 18, 29:15, 30:17, 24; 2, 35:6; Ezekiel 48:11.

74. Exodus 29:27; 2 Chronicles 29:33.

75. Exodus 29:36, 44, 40:9–13; Leviticus 8:15, 8:30; Numbers 7:1; 1 Kings 9:3, 7; 2 Chronicles 7:7, 16, 20, 29:17, 30:8; Ezekiel 43:26. This includes Mount Sinai as a proto-temple (Exodus 19:23), on which, see J. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible* (San Francisco: Harper, 1987).

Hebrew *qōdeš* in its various forms. Holiness language is temple language. The Septuagint, the ancient Greek Bible, consistently translates *qōdeš* as *hagios* and its variants.

In other words, throughout the Hebrew Bible, everything associated with the temple must be consecrated, or made holy. Only rarely do we find things not closely associated with the temple, described as being consecrated. Fundamentally, language of holiness, sanctity, and consecration is the language of the temple. This language is consistent throughout all books and periods of Israelite history.

Why is this important for our understanding of John 17? These verses contain the following prayer by Jesus. "**Sanctify** [the disciples] in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I **sanctify** myself, that they also may be **sanctified** in truth" (John 17:17–19).

That is to say, Jesus sanctifies himself so that the disciples may become sanctified.

This is, of course, precisely what the High Priest does in the Day of Atonement ritual (Leviticus 16). In a ritual of consecration (Leviticus 16:32) the High Priest first washes himself (Leviticus 16:4b), dons holy garments (Leviticus 16:4a), then offers a bull for a sin offering for *himself* (Leviticus 16:6). In other words, he first sanctifies himself, after which, in his sanctified state, he can officiate in the temple to sanctify the community of Israel through the other Day of Atonement rituals. Christ's language here parallels that pattern. He says explicitly, "For their sake I make myself holy (*hagiazō*, singular present active = consecrate myself, sanctify myself) so that they [the disciples] may be made holy (*hēgiasmenoi* (plural passive) = consecrated, sanctified) in truth" (John 17:19).

To first-century Jewish readers, this language of consecration would have evoked the temple, with its rituals of purification, consecration, and atonement.

## 6– Celestial Ascent and Unification (or Deification) (John 17:20–24)

The last temple theme I'd like to discuss is the idea of celestial ascent and unification with God found in John 17:20–24.[76] This passage is the culmination of Jesus's prayer and Final Discourse, and I believe it defines the ultimate purpose of his mortal ministry.

> I do not ask for these [disciples] only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, <u>that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us</u>, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The **glory that you have given me I have given to them**, that <u>they may be one even as we are one</u>, I in them and you in me, <u>that they may become perfectly one</u>, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may *be with me where I am, to see my **glory*** that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. (John 17:20–24)

This passage describes three interrelated themes: **glorification**, *ascent*, and <u>unification</u>.

First, I have already discussed the importance of the idea of the Glory of God and its relation to the temple. Here, however, the focus shifts from the mutual glorification of the Father and the Son, to the Son sharing his glory with the disciples, as Jesus says: the "glory that you have given me I have given to them" (John 17:22). The idea here is not that the disciples merely *see* or *recognize* Jesus's glory. Rather, they are *given* the glory by the Son precisely as the Son is *given* the glory by the Father. Why is this glory given? "That they may be one even as we are one" (John 17:22). That is,

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76.  Kerr, *Temple of Jesus' Body*, 354–361.

being given the glory of Jesus is a necessary prerequisite for unification, the third theme I'll discuss in a moment.

Second, Christ prays that the disciples may "*be with me where I am, to see my glory*" (John 17:24). That is, Christ is not fully glorified until after his resurrection and ascent to heaven. Only when the disciples are "where he is" can they fully "see his glory" (John 17:24). As I discussed earlier, the temple is the place where we see the glory of God. The language describing Jesus's descent to earth and return to the Father in the Father's house with many rooms (John 14:2–3) alludes to the celestial temple.

Here Jesus is praying that the disciples may "be where I am," that is ascend to heaven. This is generally understood by modern Christians to refer to the postmortal ascent of the soul to God, as is implied in John 13:36, where Jesus tells Peter "where I am going, you cannot follow me now; but you will follow afterward," which means, presumably, after death. However, in the context of the first century, visionary ascent by *mortals* to the heavenly temple was a widespread belief and practice among both Jews and Christians.[77] This is most clear from the book of Revelation, in which John has an explicit vision of the temple in heaven.[78] Paul also famously describes his visionary ascent to heaven in 2 Corinthians 12:1–9.[79] Early Christian literature likewise con-

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77.  For a general introduction see M. Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), and C. Rowland and C. Morray-Jones, *The Mystery of God: Early Jewish Mysticism and the New Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 2009). P. Gooder, *Only the Third Heaven? 2 Corinthians 12.1–10 and Heavenly Ascent* (London: T&T Clark, 2006), surveys the scholarly literature and debates.

78.  Revelation 1:5–20, 4–5, 7, 11:3–13, 19:1–10, 21, 22:1–7. The Transfiguration may also be understood as a visionary celestial ascent of Jesus: Matthew 17:1–9 ; Mark 9:2–10; Luke 9:28–36.

79.  See also allusive language in Galatians 1:11–17; 2 Corinthians 3:18–4:6; 1 Corinthians 15. On Paul's celestial ascent, see: C. R. A. Morray-Jones, "Paradise Revisited (2 Cor. 12:1–12): The Jewish Mystical Background of Paul's Apostolate. Part 1: The Jewish Sources," *Harvard Theological Review*, 86/2 (1993): 177–217, and "Paradise Revisited (2 Cor 12:1–12): The Jewish Mystical Background of Paul's Apostolate. Part 2: Paul's Heavenly Ascent and Its Significance," *Harvard Theological Review*, 86/3 (1993): 265–92; Alan F. Segal, "Paul's Ecstasy," in his

tains numerous accounts of celestial ascent,[80] as do the contemporary Jewish texts of Hekhalot and Merkabah mystics, written after the destruction of the temple in AD 70.[81] Jesus's call to his disciples to come to "where he is going" to "see his glory" fits well into this mythos of ascents to the celestial temple.

Third, the unification language in this passage is powerful and direct. Jesus prays:

- that [the disciples] may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us (John 17:21)
- they may be one even as we are one (John 17:22), and
- that they may become perfectly one (John 17:23)

Christians have been exploring the meaning of this glorification and unification language for two thousand years, and many different interpretations have been offered from different perspectives and periods. I suspect it can only be fully understood by one who has actually attained that state. But what is clear is that, according to John 17, the disciples can somehow receive the glory of God and become one with the Father and the Son.

Many early Christians believed that this and related language in the New Testament describes what they called *theōsis*, or deification. (In appendix 3 I have listed two dozen books on Christian *theōsis* published in the last decade alone.) The Greek

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*Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (New Haven, CT: Yale, 1990), 34–71; J. Tabor, *Things Unutterable: Paul's Ascent to Paradise in its Greco-Roman, Judaic, and Early Christian Contexts* (Lanham, MD: University Press, 1986).

80. See: *Apocalypse of Peter*, in K. Elliott, ed., *The Apocryphal New Testament* (New York: Oxford, 1994), 591–615 (hereafter ANT); *Apocalypse of Paul* (ANT 617–644); *The Assumption of the Virgin*; *Acts of Andrew and Mathias* 17 (ANT 290); *Question of Bartholomew* (ANT 652–72); *Letter of James* 14–16 (ANT 680–1); *Ascension of Isaiah*.

81. For a basic bibliography of Hekhalot and Merkabah mysticism, see: Don Karr, http://www.digital-brilliance.com/contributed/Karr/Biblios/mmhie.pdf. For a survey with relevance to early Christianity, see Rowland and Morray-Jones, *Mystery of God*; for general background on early Jewish mysticism, see: P. Schäfer, *The Origins of Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2011).

Orthodox tradition has retained the most continuity with this ancient Christian idea. Among Catholics it has largely faded into a vague background,[82] while many Protestants are unaware that deification is an important ancient Christian idea.[83] Basically, many Protestants see the idea of the deification of Man as *challenging* the omnipotence of God, whereas many Greek Orthodox see the deification of Man as the ultimate *manifestation* of the omnipotence of God.

Nevertheless, several allusions to deification are expressed in the New Testament. In Revelation 3:21 Christ tells John, "the one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I [Jesus] also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne." The idea that the righteous disciples will sit enthroned with God in the celestial temple in heaven—based on Psalm 110:1—is also found elsewhere in Revelation (Revelation 4:2–6, 11:16, 20:4), as well as in the Gospels (Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:29–30). For many early Christians this idea of *synthronos*—enthronement beside God—can only be allusion to deification.

Paul makes this rather explicit: "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another" (2 Corinthians 3:18; cf. Romans 8:29).[84] Note here that "seeing the glory of the Lord [Jesus]" transforms us into that glorious image, just as Jesus says in John 17:24, where the disciples go to where Christ is to see and receive his glory. First John also describes it: "when [Christ] appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:1–3, at 2). Paul teaches

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82.   A recent study from the perspective of Catholic theology is D. Keating, *Deification and Grace* (Naples, FL: Sapientia Press, 2007).

83.   On the idea of deification in Protestant theology, see M. Habets, "Reforming Theōsis," in *Theōsis: Deification in Christian Theology*, ed. S. Finlan and V. Kharlamov (Eugene OR: Pickwick, 2006.) 146–67.

84.   For deification in Paul, see M. Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology* (Grand Rapid, MI: Eerdmans, 2009).

that the disciples can become "heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ," and can "share the likeness of the image of the Son" (Romans 8:17, 29; cf. Galatians 4:4–7). Second Peter describes this as becoming "partakers of the divine nature" (*theias phuseōs*) (2 Peter 1:4).

As I understand it, this glorification, ascent and unification language in John 17 and elsewhere in the New Testament is describing the ultimate goal of Christian *theōsis*. But that is another paper. For my purpose here, it is sufficient to recognize that ascent to the celestial temple to see the glory of God is a key concept in the first-century temple mythos, and thus further reflects the centrality of the temple in John 17.

## Conclusion

Although the word *temple* is never explicitly used in John 17, the temple mythos is foundational to this chapter. We have seen that the Last Discourse begins with Jesus preparing a place for the disciples in the Father's House, or the celestial temple. When Jesus reveals the Name of God to his disciples, he is acting in the context of first century temple Name theology that restricts pronunciation of the Name to the temple. The temple was the site of the manifestation of the glory of God. The expulsion of evil and sanctification of the disciples likewise alludes to temple rites. Finally, the celestial ascent and glorification of the disciples is closely related to the mythos of ascent to the celestial temple. In conclusion, the temple mythos is central to John 17, and it is thus rightly called Jesus's High Priestly prayer.

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*Neil Newell):* The Book of Malchus, *(Deseret Book, 2010). A fanatical traveler and photographer, he spent 2010 teaching at the BYU Jerusalem Center, and has lived in Israel, England, Egypt, and Italy, and traveled to dozens of other countries.*

## Appendix 1: Recent Studies on Temple Themes in the Gospel of John

**Chronological Order**

Coloe, M. *God Dwells With Us: Temple Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel* (Liturgical Press, 2001).

Kerr, A. *The Temple of Jesus' Body: The Temple Theme in the Gospel of John* (Sheffield, 2002).

Fuglseth, K. *Johannine Sectarianism in Perspective: A Sociological, Historical, and Comparative Analysis of Temple and Social Relationships in the Gospel of John, Philo, and Qumran* (Brill, 2005).

Um, S. *The Theme of Temple Christology in John's Gospel* (T&T Clark, 2006).

Hoskins, P. *Jesus as the Fulfillment of the Temple in the Gospel of John* (Wipf and Stock, 2007).

Daise, M. *Feasts in John* (Mohr Siebeck, 2007).

Perrin, N. *Jesus the Temple* (Baker Academic, 2010).

## Appendix 2: Gnostic Sources on the Divine Name

M. Meyer, *et.al.* (eds.), *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures* (2007).

> Because of the coming of Christ it was said publicly: Seek, and those that are disturbed will receive restoration, and he [Christ] will anoint them with oil. The oil is the mercy of the Father, who will be merciful to them; and those whom he has anointed are the perfected. (*Gospel of Truth*, 36:13–20)

He [the Father] begot a Son, and gave him His name. . . . The name [of the Father] is invisible, for it alone is the mystery of the invisible, which comes into the ears that are completely filled with it by him. For indeed, the Father's name is not spoken, but it is apparent through a Son. (*Gospel of Truth,* 38:10, 15)

In this way, then, the name is a great thing. Who, therefore, will be able to utter a name for him, the great name, except him alone to whom the name belongs and the sons of the name in whom rested the name of the Father, who in turn themselves rested in his name. (*Gospel of Truth,* 38:25)

Only one name is not uttered in the world, the name that the Father bestowed on the Son; it is above every other—that is, the name of the Father. For son would not become father had he not put on the name of the father. Those who possess this name think it but do not speak it. Those who do not possess it do not think it. (*Gospel of Philip*, 54:5–12)

## Appendix 3: Bibliography of Recent Books on Deification

### Alphabetical Order

Bartos, E. and K. Ware, *Deification in Eastern Orthodox Theology* (Gorgias, 2007).

Burns, Charlene, *Divine Becoming: Rethinking Jesus and Incarnation* (Fortress, 2001).

Casey, Michael, *Fully Human-Fully Divine: An Interactive Christology* (Liguori, 2004).

Choufrine, Arkadi, *Gnosis, Theophany, Theōsis: Studies in Clement of Alexandria's Appropriation of his Background.* (Lang, 2002).

Christiansen Michael J. and Jeffery A. Wittung (eds.), *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions* (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2007).

Collins, Paul, *Partaking in Divine Nature: Deification and Communion* (T&T Clark, 2012).

Cooper, Adam, *The Body in St. Maximus the Confessor: Wholly Flesh, Wholly Deified* (Oxford, 2005).

Finlan, Stephen and V. Kharlamov (eds.), *Theōsis: Deification in Christian Theology.* (Eugene OR: Pickwick Publications, 2006).

George of Mount Athos, *Theosis: The True Purpose of Human Life* (Holy Monastery of Mount Athos, 2006) .

Gorman, M. *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology* (Eerdmanns, 2009).

Gross, Jules. *The Divinization of the Christian According to the Greek Fathers*, trans. Paul A. Onica. (Anaheim, Calif.: A & C Press, 1938, rep. 2002).

Hudson, Nancy J. *Becoming God: The Doctrine of Theosis in Nicholas of Cusa* (Catholic University of America Press, 2007).

Karkkainen, V. *One with God: Salvation As Deification and Justification* (Liturgical Press, 2004).

Keating, D. *Deification and Grace (*Sapientia Press, 2007).

Keating, D. *The Appropriation of Divine Life in Cyril of Alexandria* (Oxford, 2004).

Kharlamov, V. *The Beauty of the Unity and the Harmony of the Whole: The Concept of Theosis in the Theology of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite* (Wipf & Stock, 2008).

Kharlamov, V. (ed.) *Theosis II: Deification in Christian Theology, Volume Two* (James Clark, 2012).

Maloney, Geroge, *The Undreamed has Happened: God Lives Within Us* (University of Scranton, 2005).

Norman, Keith, *Deification: The Content of Athanasian Soteriology* (FARMS Occasional Papers, Vol. 1, 2000).

Russell, Norman. *Fellow Workers with God: Orthodox Thinking on Theosis* (St. Vladimir's Press, 2009).

Russell, N. *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford University Press, 2004).

Staniloae, Dumitru, *The Experience of God: Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, vol. 2, The World, Creation and Deification* (2005).

Thomas, S. *Deification in the Eastern Orthodox Tradition: A Biblical Perspective* (Gorgias Press, 2008).

# An Open Letter to
# Dr. Michael Coe

*John L. Sorenson*

*Abstract: In August 2011 John Dehlin conducted a three-part interview with famed Mesoamericanist Michael Coe.[1] Dehlin operates the podcast series* Mormon Stories, *which features interviews discussing the faith and culture of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This article examines a large number of dubious claims made in those interviews, providing clarifications, responses, and references to numerous sources dealing with those issues. Much more detail will be forthcoming in Dr. Sorenson's new book,* Mormon's Codex.

Dear Mike:

Some people see a placid stream ahead of them and think the water must be safe to cross, only to find that their depth perception was faulty and deep holes await them. Something like that has happened to you in regard to your podcast with Mr. Dehlin about the Book of Mormon. Before you and other readers repeat the difficulties you encountered, I venture to offer some corrections.

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1.  Michael Coe, "Dr. Michael Coe—An Outsider's View of Book of Mormon Archaeology," podcast interview by John Dehlin, parts 1–3, at http://mormon-stories.org/?p=1880; hereafter cited as "Coe interview." Approximate time stamps are included in individual citations. A version of this open letter is also available on Sorenson's own website and the FAIR website: http://johnlsorenson. com/docs/OpenLetterCoe.pdf. http://www.fairlds.org/authors/sorenson-john/ an-open-letter-to-dr-michael-coe; the editors are grateful to Dr. Sorenson and FAIR for permission to reprint it here.

**About Archaeology**

- "These things don't disappear forever. They leave traces. . . . If you had iron or steel, you would expect to find these things, even if they were all rusted. . . . You'd find chemical remains." [Part 1, 24:27]

It is interesting to see your loyalty to the ideals of archaeology, but surely you know that the realities are quite different. The first place where the two collide is in sampling. Probably no more than two hundred ancient Mesoamerican sites have been seriously excavated, and those excavations have rarely dug into more than a small portion of the inhabited area of those sites. It would be surprising if as much as one ten-thousandth of the information potentially obtainable by studying the material remains has so far been disclosed. Sure, much of the rest would no doubt yield data mainly duplicative of what is already known, but some would not. And a large proportion of what has already been excavated has not been studied by contemporary methods or is not accessible for study.

So ancient remains of metals may "leave traces." But can anybody name even a single site where "chemical remains" have been widely sought by modern methods? I doubt it.

An example of the sampling problem is evident at the site of Utatlan (in Guatemala, dated AD 1300–1500). Fox, Wallace, and Brown reported finding by chance a location "just outside" the site proper where two hundred molds for the manufacture of copper at an industrial level came to light.[2] The facility would have been far larger than what was needed for the city's requirements. What is the chance that such an isolated facility *outside* the central ceremonial centers where excavation usually goes on would ever be discovered at other places?

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2. John W. Fox, Dwight T. Wallace, and Kenneth L. Brown, "The Emergence of the Quiche Elite: The Putun-Palenque Connection," in *Mesoamerican Elites: An Archaeological Assessment*, ed. Diane Z. Chase and Arlen F. Chase (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 185.

Then there is the problem of accessing the information that does exist. I have spent considerable time searching site reports for mentions of metal objects that have been found that apparently date before the "metal curtain" of about AD 900 in Mesoamerica in the area but are conventionally ignored in discussions of the history of metallurgy.[3] There have proved to be several hundred such specimens dating from 400 BC to AD 900, 153 of which were excavated by professional archaeologists.[4] (Why bother to seek "chemical traces" of metal when actual specimens are totally ignored?) This incidence of metal objects would be even more surprising were it not for the fact that terms have been reconstructed in *five* major Mesoamerican language families that mean "metal" or "(metal) bell," all the words thought to refer to times prior to 1000 BC.[5]

Obviously, excavational archaeology still has a long way to go in reconstructing a complete history of Mesoamerican metallurgy, including both terrestrial and meteoric iron among

3. See, for example, "Preclassic Metal?," *American Antiquity* 20 (1954): 64; "Indications of Early Metal in Mesoamerica," *University Archaeological Society Bulletin* 5 (Provo, UT, 1954): 1–15; and "A Reconsideration of Early Metal in Mesoamerica," *Katunob* 9 (March 1976): 1–18.

4. See John L. Sorenson, *Metals and Metallurgy Relating to the Book of Mormon Text* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1992).

5. Byron Cummings, "Cuicuilco and the Archaic of Mexico," University of Arizona, Bulletin IV, no. 8, *Social Science Bulletin* 4 (Tucson, 1933): 38–39; Robert F. Heizer and James A. Bennyhoff, "Archaeological Investigation of Cuicuilco, Valley of Mexico, 1957," *Science* 127/3292 (31 January 1958): 232–33; R. E. Longacre and Rene Millon, "Proto-Mixtecan and Proto-Amuzgo-Mixtecan Vocabularies: A Preliminary Cultural Analysis," *Anthropological Linguistics* 3 (1961): 22; Terrence Kaufman, "El Proto-Tzeltal-Tzotzil: Fonologia Comparada y Diccionario Reconstruido," *Cuadernos* 5 (Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico, Centro de Estudios Mayas, 1972): 118; Marcelo Alejandre, *Cartilla Huasteca con su Gramatica, Diccionario y Varias Reglas para Aprender el Idioma* (Mexico: Secretaria de Fomento, 1899), 84, 88; Hyacinthe de Charency, "Les Norns des Metaux chez Differents Peuples de la Nouvelle Espagne," *Compte-Rendu, Congres International des Americanistes, Paris, 1890* (Paris, 1892), 539–41; and "A Linguistic Look at the Olmecs," *American Antiquity* 41 (1976): 80–89. See discussion in John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1985), 278–88.

more than a dozen known metals and alloys. Eminent metallurgical expert Dudley Easby commented regarding this history, "The relative [apparent] absence of metals in the early Americas constitutes one of the most infuriatingly enigmatic subjects in the history of technology."[6]

The question of the presence of the horse in civilized Mesoamerica further illustrates the problem of what is "adequate" archaeological sampling and documentation. C. E. Ray's report[7] of finding horse bones in deep layers of the water hole at Mayapan (Yucatan) raised anew an issue that Mercer[8] and Hatt[9] had earlier noted with their finds of horse bones in Yucatan caves. The matter was compounded by Peter Schmidt's 1988 work in Loltun Cave that found horse bones scattered through a number of layers of early pottery-bearing debris. He observed, "Something went on here that is still difficult to explain."[10] (Interestingly, he was not aware of Ray's finds.) There are also further evidences for pre-AD 1500 dates of other horse bones (including three radiocarbon-dated finds from North America).[11] This, like the metals, is an "unfinished" archaeological story, in this case defying the dictum that "there were no horses" for the last ten thousand years in America. Simultaneously it shows the limits of the data revealed by excavations about which so much is said.

6. Dudley T. Easby Jr., "Early Metallurgy in the New World," *Scientific American* 214 (April 1966): 72–83.

7. C. E. Ray, "Pre-Columbian horses from Yucatan," *Journal of Mammalogy* 38 (1957): 278.

8. Henry C. Mercer, *The Hill-Caves of Yucatan: A Search for Evidence of Man's Antiquity in the Caverns of Central America* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1896), 172.

9. Robert T. Hatt, "Faunal and Archaeological Researches in Yucatan Caves," *Cranbrook Institute of Science, Bulletin* 33 (1953).

10. Peter J. Schmidt, "La entrada del hombre a la peninsula de Yucatan," in *Origines del Hombre Americano,* comp. Alba Gonzalez Jacome (Mexico: Secretaria de Educación Publica, 1988), 250.

11. Wade E. Miller, *Science and the Book of Mormon: Cureloms, Cumoms, Horses and More.* (Laguna Niguel, CA: KCT Associates, 2009), 75–78.

Another possibility is that some other species was counted as a horse. For example, upon seeing Spanish horses, the Aztecs referred to them as "the deer that people ride," and there are artistic representations of riders-on-deer. So what is a "horse"?[12]

### About the Book of Mormon

- The Jaredites "didn't really survive terribly long." [Part 1, 18:30]
- The Jaredites "go back, what, something like four, five hundred BC." [Part 1, 28:00]

The Jaredites left Mesopotamia at the time of the "great tower," presumed to have been around the time of the earliest ziggurat, perhaps a little before 2500 BC. Their demise as a functioning society was after 600 BC.

- The Nephites "were highly civilized people." [Part 1, 18:30]

In origin, yes, except that their small initial party (fewer than thirty-five men, women, and children) slogged twelve hundred miles through the rugged mountains of western Arabia over an eight-year period and subsisted mainly on uncooked meat. This would take most of the "civilization" out of anyone. When they embarked from the coast of Oman on a voyage of more than twenty thousand miles, they took no animals with them and little technology except what knowledge they carried in their heads. Upon landing, Lehi's crew must have been about as *de*culturated as a frazzled band of people could be.

- "They had cattle, they had horses, they had wheat." [Part 1, 18:30]
- "Maize, by the way, isn't really mentioned in the Book of Mormon." [Part 1, 24:35]

See above regarding horses. Immediately after landing (probably in coastal Guatemala), Lehi's people "did find . . .

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12.   See the discussion in Sorenson, *Ancient American Setting*, 293–97.

beasts in the forests" ("cow," "ox," "ass," "horse," "goat," "wild goat," 1 Nephi 18:25). At length some of those creatures ended up domesticated, by means and hands not described. Clearly the animals consisted of native American species to which the newcomers, by a process familiar to groups encountering exotic fauna, applied "nearest look-alike names" to the newly encountered critters.[13]

The first mention of grain cultivation occurred nearly four hundred years later—"corn" (maize, contrary to your claim), "wheat," and "barley"; corn was the grain of choice (Mosiah 7:22; 9:9).[14] What crop the name "wheat" was given to is never clarified, but of course it probably would have been some native one (eventually Mesoamericans cultivated at least thirteen species of grains). Domesticated barley was discovered in archaeological sites in Arizona and midwestern states twenty-five years ago, and it could well have grown in Mexico too.[15]

- "They had the compass to navigate by." [Part 1, 19:00]

Not at all. What they had was a device that gave Lehi's original party travel instructions, but it worked by "faith," not on any mechanical ("compass") principle.

- [Dehlin:] "There are steel swords mentioned in the Book of Mormon, or shields or helmets or whatever." [Coe:] "Yes, that's correct." [Part 1, 23:00]

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13. In *Ancient American Setting*, 288–99, I suggest candidate native American species that might have been those listed/labeled animals.

14. Terry B. Ball and Wilford M. Hess, "Agriculture in Lehi's World: Some Textual, Historical, Archaeological, and Botanical Insights," in *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem*, ed. John W. Welch, David R. Seely, and JoAnn H. Seely (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004), 149–92.

15. See discussion in John L. Sorenson and Robert F. Smith, "Barley in Ancient America," in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992): 130–32; Robert R. Bennett, "Barley and Wheat in the Book of Mormon" (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute), updated August 2000, http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/publications/transcripts/?id=126. The original paper on domesticated barley is Daniel B. Adams, "Last Ditch Archeology," *Science 83* 4/10 (December 1983): 32.

Lehi's party carried with them on their trek a sword of steel that was preserved as a sacred relic. When Nephites and Lamanites by the thousands were armed with swords, they obviously would not necessarily have been of metal, nor is there any reason from the text to suppose that they were. At one point a large group of Lamanites fled from military service by going to "the place of arms" to defend themselves. The description of the situation makes it appear to be an obsidian outcrop (possibly El Chayal). Their swords were very probably the obsidian-edged weapons called *macuahuitl* by the Aztecs. However, at one point in Jaredite history the record says that they made "swords out of steel." This is clearly an unexplained anomaly. (However, note that the term that is read "steel" in the King James Bible is currently translated by experts as "bronze.")[16]

A large variety of shields is known to have been used by Mesoamerican warriors from Pre-Classic times onward, but "helmets" are *not* mentioned at all in the Book of Mormon.

- "Wheeled toys are known in Classic times . . . in Vera Cruz." [Part 1, 33:51]

Actually these begin, at Teotihuacan at least, immediately after the time of Christ, not just in the Classic.[17]

- "Let's do the coins. . . . If there were coins they would be chocolate beans. Why aren't chocolate beans mentioned in the Book of Mormon?" [Part 1, 24:45]

Years ago the word *coinage* was gratuitously inserted in the heading of Alma 11 by LDS editors (it has since been removed). There is no use of the term *coins* in the text. The Nephites used "money," but evidently Nephite money, like that in the Israelite

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16. See John L. Sorenson, "Steel in Early Metallurgy," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 15/2 (2006): 108–9, at http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/publications/jbms/?vol=15&num=2&id=423. See also William Hamblin and Stephen D Ricks, eds, *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, at maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/publications/books/?bookid=66.

17. Florencia Müller, *La cerámica del centro ceremonial de Teotihuacán* (Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1978), 82.

homeland (the "shekel"), was in weight-determined units of some valued substance.

Cocoa beans were in use (how early we do not know) among the Maya, but throughout Mesoamerica a variety of other materials also served as "money." The constant fallback on Maya culture is understandable in the podcast and in terms of your archaeological background, but Nephite culture was not closely congruent with Maya culture.

- "Silk. Nothing." [Part 1, 31:50]

The Spaniards described at least five Mesoamerican varieties of what they termed "silk" or its equivalent; none of them used the species of silkworm that prevailed in East Asia.[18]

- "Seven-day calendar was unknown in Mesoamerica." [Part 1, 31:55]

Helen Neuenswander agreed with Eric Thompson that there was a seven-day-week feature, one based on a logical division (one-fourth) of a twenty-eight-day lunar month.[19] In any case, the three mentions in the Book of Mormon of "week" do not say that the period was seven days; "weeks" of other lengths are known in various cultures around the world.

- "Chariots? They [Mesoamericans] never had chariots." [Part 1, 33:45]

This may be correct. The meaning of "chariots" mentioned in the Book of Mormon text remains mysterious. They are mentioned only on two occasions, in very limited geographical areas, in connection with horses. And, by the way, no chariot has ever been excavated in Palestine, despite documentary statements implying that they were very numerous.

18. A treatment of this topic appeared in Sorenson, *Ancient American Setting*, 232. The Mesoamerican "silk" materials were from various plant and animal fibers.

19. Helen Neuenswander, "Vestiges of Early Maya Time Concepts in Contemporary Maya (Cubulco Achi) Community: Implications for Community," *Estudios de Cultura Maya* 13 (1981): 125–63.

- "Pig. Zero. Not one pig bone has ever shown up in pre-Columbian excavations." [Part 1, 38:00]

Oh, come now. Peccaries were hunted, kept, and even herded, and they surely are "pigs."[20]

- "Elephants, there's nothing. Absolutely zero." "The Clovis people . . . about . . . 10,000 BC . . . killed them all." [Part 1, 42:00]

You have converted Paul Martin's hypothesis into "fact" without checking the data. Mastodon remains have been dated by radiocarbon to around 5000 BC in Florida,[21] around the Great Lakes to 4000 BC,[22] in the Mississippi Valley to near 3300 BC,[23] perhaps to near 100 BC near St. Petersburg, Florida ("low terminal [C-14] dates for the mastodon indicate . . . lingering survival in isolated areas"),[24] and at sites in Alaska and Utah dating around 5000 BC.[25] In the Book of Mormon, mention of elephants occurs in a single verse, in the Jaredite account ("There were elephants," Ether 9:19), dated in the third millennium BC, after which the record is silent (indicating spot extinction?).

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20. Brian D. Dillon, "Meatless Maya? Ethnoarchaeological Implications for Ancient Subsistence," *Journal of New World Archaeology* 7/2–3 (June 1988): 59–70; and Lyle K. Sowls, *The Peccaries* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1984), 1–3.

21. Robert A. Martin and S. David Webb, "Late Pleistocene Mammals from the Devil's Den Fauna, Levy County," in *Pleistocene Mammals of Florida*, ed. S. David Webb (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1974), 144–45.

22. Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, Inc., *Report for 1974* (New York, 1975), 22, reporting work by Dr. Warren L. Wittry.

23. Steven Williams, "The Island 35 Mastodon: Its Bearing on the Age of Archaic Cultures in the East," *American Antiquity* 22/4 (April 1957): 359–72.

24. Jim J. Hester, "Late Pleistocene Extinction and Radiocarbon Dating," *American Antiquity* 26/1 (1 July 1960): 74. See also Jim J. Hester, "Agency of Man in Animal Extinction," in "Pleistocene Extinctions: The Search for a Cause," ed. Paul S. Martin and H. E. Wright Jr., *Proceedings of the International Association for Quaternary Research, VII Congress* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967), 6:185.

25. Paleontologist Wade Miller, personal communication.

- "Every time you look at the illustrations in the popular edition of the Book of Mormon, you see that's a Maya city." [Part 1, 54:18]

What do popular illustrations have to do with actual history? And even then, how would you know that the illustrator had in mind a "Maya" city instead of merely a Mesoamerican city? There is too much gratuitous "Mayanization" going on throughout this entire discussion. The text's "Nephites" were not Maya in all probability; the "Lamanites" may have been in part.

- "There are no King Benjamins or anybody like that" in Maya literature. [Part 1, 56:00]

Fallacious thinking. Would you say, "There are no Jesus Christs or anybody like that in Roman (or Greek, Egyptian, Syrian, Jewish, etc.) monuments or literature"? Would you expect there to be? This has no relevance to the question of whether there was a Jesus Christ. Furthermore, "history" was often rewritten by successors. Islamic records of Tunisia make no mention of St. Augustine or Hannibal, the most famous theologian and warrior of pre-Islamic times. As Nigel Davies noted, "I am more than ever convinced the codices were destroyed at intervals and history was then rewritten to suit the ruler of the day."[26]

- When "we start getting extensive Maya inscriptions, . . . they don't mention any of these wonderful people out of the Book of Mormon. Nothing." [Part 1, 1:03:00]

See the point immediately above. But how do you know the Nephites are not mentioned? "Mention" is a matter of using a name or ethnic label, but what name would "the Maya" use if they *had* referred to the Nephites? Surely not the English

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26.   Nigel Davies, "The Aztec Concept of History: Teotihuacan and Tula," in *The Native Sources and the History of the Valley of Mexico,* Proceedings of the 44th International Congress of Americanists, ed. Jacqueline de Durand-Forest (Oxford: BAR, 1984), 10.

translation, "Nephites." Of course we do not know the "native" name, in any language, that the "Nephites" bore.

- There is no writing for the Olmec, "which is peculiar if these people came from the Middle East." [Part 1, 1:00]

Not quite. The Cascajal "block" is joined by the tread-upon figure at San José Mogote[27] and the item reported by Rust et al. from near San Lorenzo.[28] All are dated to the "Olmec" era. Mike, in 2006 you coauthored a paper on the Cascajal block in *Science* describing it as the "oldest writing in the New World."[29] Your discussion and description seem confused because you tell Dehlin that this block contains "Olmec writing" dating to 900–800 BC immediately after claiming that there is "no writing for the Olmec, none, zero."

Moreover, Fred Peterson found a cylinder seal at Tlatilco that was reported on by Dave Kelley[30] and that both he and John Graham at Berkeley believe to bear writing. That seal has been dated at Oxford by thermoluminescence at "2000 to 3200 years ago." Coming from Tlatilco and dating so, it is probably Olmec. (It has tentatively been connected stylistically to cylinder seals in Iran of the third millennium by a Near East seals expert, who was not told of its Mexican provenience!)[31]

27. Joyce Marcus, "Origins of Mesoamerican Writing," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 5 (1976): 35–67. For a contrary view, see Robert Cahn and Marcus Winter, "The San José Mogote Danzante," *Indiana* 13 (1993): 39–64, at http://www.iai.spk-berlin.de/es/publicaciones/indiana/numeros-publicados/indiana-13.html.

28. William F. Rust, "Olmec Settlement Evidence from La Venta," paper presented at the 54th Annual Meeting of the Society for American Archaeology, Atlanta (1989); William F. Rust III and R. J. Sharer, "Olmec Settlement Data from La Venta, Tabasco, México," *Science* 242 (1988): 102–4.

29. Ma. del Carmen Rodríguez Martínez, Ponciano Ortíz Ceballos, Michael D. Coe, Richard A. Diehl, Stephen D. Houston, Karl A. Taube, and Alfredo Delgado Calderón, "Oldest Writing in the New World," *Science* 313/5793 (September 2006): 1610–14, at http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/16973873.

30. David H. Kelley, "A Cylinder Seal from Tlatilco," *American Antiquity* 31/5 (1966): 744–45.

31. Professor Victor L. Mair, personal communication.

- Population: "The Aztecs could field fairly good-sized armies, but never that size [hundreds of thousands]." [Part 2, 36:00]

The following facts are documented: The Quiché force opposing the Spaniards numbered 232,000 despite the fact that some groups abstained from the alliance. The Aztecs mustered a force of 400,000 in a fairly routine campaign against a nearby kingdom. More problematic is Alba Ixtlilxochitl's account of central Mexican history, according to which a combined Aztec army at one point consisted of 700,000 men. Of the hazier past, the historian said that in the last war of the "Tultecs," which lasted three years and two months, a total (including women) of 5,600,000 persons were slain.[32] Even if we skeptically and arbitrarily reduce that figure by 90 percent, the number would be of the same order of magnitude as that reported in the Book of Mormon for the final battle at Cumorah.

- "There are no Semitic words whatsoever in it [Mayan]. It's got no relation whatsoever with any languages that we know of in the Old World." [Part 1, 56:00]

No archaeologist is qualified to speak in these absolute terms on this abstruse subject. Brian Stubbs, a leading scholar on the Uto-Aztecan language family, has shown that languages of that group show major similarities with Hebrew and Egyptian.[33] He concludes that the Uto-Aztecan family devel-

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32. Don Domingo Juarros, *A Statistical History of the Kingdom of Guatemala, in Spanish America*, trans. J. Baily (London: Dove, 1823), 389; Fray Diego Durán, *The History of the Indies of New Spain* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 420; Ross Hassig, *Aztec Warfare: Imperial Expansion and Political Control* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 55; Alfred Chavero, trans., *Obras Históricas de Don Fernando De Alva Ixtlilxochitl* (Mexico: Editora Nacional, 1959), 58; and Milton R. Hunter and Thomas Stuart Ferguson, *Ancient America and the Book of Mormon* (Oakland, CA: Kolob, 1950), 385.

33. He did so preliminarily *in A Few Hundred Hints of Egyptian and Two Dialects of Hebrew (or Northwest Semitic) in Uto-Aztecan*, a 142-page manuscript, 2004; it is presently in revision as a book, *More on Uto-Aztecan*. See earlier treatments in Brian D. Stubbs, "Looking Over vs. Overlooking Native American Languages: Let's Void the Void," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*

oped as a creole tongue formed from Hebrew, Egyptian, and a native ancestral language of central Mexico that then divided multiple times. Some, but not all, other Mesoamerican tongues show similar characteristics.

Meanwhile, a number of other Native American languages have been shown to be connected to Old World sources, few of which had been suspected.[34] Morris Swadesh was among other linguists who felt that "it is perfectly possible that a group of people having arrived speaking a new language [in the New World] eventually was absorbed into an already established linguistic community."[35]

The phenomenon he describes would be like what took place with native "Toltecs" who migrated into Guatemala, where they came to dominate local populations: "Linguistic patterns of highland Guatemala suggest that Toltec influence involved no mass migration of Nahua speakers to the highlands. Only small numbers of the Toltecs must have come in contact with a well-established indigenous population, the invaders' tongue being absorbed within the linguistic milieu of the more numerous indigenous population."[36] After only about five hundred years, Robert Carmack found very little linguistic or cultural, let alone archaeological, evidence for their presence there as their history in the Popol Vuh reported. Yet today no Mesoamericanist scholar considers the Popol Vuh anything

5/1 (1996): 1–49; "Elements of Hebrew in Uto-Aztecan: A Summary of the Data" (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1988); and "Hebrew and Uto-Aztecan: Possible Linguistic Connections," in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 279–81.

34.   Bede Fahey, "Mayan: A Sino-Tibetan language? A comparative study," *Sino-Platonic Papers*, no. 130 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, Department of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, 2004).

35.   Morris Swadesh, "Linguistic Relations Across Bering Strait," *American Anthropologist* 64/6 (December 1962): 1262.

36.   Robert M. Carmack, "Toltec Influence on the Postclassic Culture History of Highland Guatemala," in *Archaeological Studies in Middle America*, Middle American Research Institute, Publication 26, ed. E. Wyllys Andrews IV et al. (New Orleans: Tulane University, 1970), 46–92.

but a fundamental source on the native pre-Spanish culture. The Book of Mormon is in the same situation.

**About Joseph Smith**

- [Dehlin:] "Joseph Smith himself, you know, would walk around and see a pile of bones and say that was the famous Nephite warrior Zelph, or whatever; he would see a city and say this was the ancient city of blah, blah, blah." (Not contradicted by Coe.) [Part 1, 48:30]

This statement is vastly overblown in terms of Smith's real history. He made no such practice.

- Joseph Smith "claimed that it [the Book of Abraham] was in reformed Egyptian and that he could read it." [Part 2, 29:00]

Factually untrue. Joseph never said the record was in "reformed Egyptian." He said he translated the Abraham record from "Egyptian" by inspiration, not because "he could read it."

- Joseph Smith "sees the incredible people like the Comanche and the Sioux and Cheyenne and people like that. . . . That probably would have influenced him a lot. He had to have horses." [Part 1, 37:30]

Patently impossible. Nothing was known in the eastern United States about horse-using Plains Indians in Joseph's day, the 1820s. In any case, the Book of Mormon never suggests that horses were ridden by anybody.

**About "Book of Mormon Archaeology" and the NWAF**

On the New World Archaeological Foundation:
- "They really never found plates of gold or wheels, or steel swords, or anything of the sort. . . . Constantly arriving there in early days were slight screwballs out of Salt Lake and places like that, coming down with metal de-

tectors, . . . running around trying to find plates of gold and whatnot." [Part 3, 00:00–14:00]

This must be based on gossip or rumor at best. The NWAF's history yields nothing that suggests such an objective was held or that such weird visits ever took place, nor do surviving personnel know of anything like this.[37]

- John Robertson, a "fantastically good linguist . . ." [Part 1, 55:30]

Perhaps of interest: after Robertson retired from the BYU faculty, he and his wife served an LDS mission during which, among other things, they averred the authenticity of the Book of Mormon.

- "Land bridge into Asia—this is something the Book of Mormon archaeologists don't really like to talk about." [Part 3, 36:50]

Why this statement was made is a complete mystery, in the first place because the frequent expression "Book of Mormon archaeologists" has no actual referents.[38] Not a single archaeologist I know, or of whom I have heard, does or would call him- or herself a "Book of Mormon archaeologist." I know of only two who ever did so, Wells Jakeman and Ross Christenson, both of whom have been deceased for quite a while. A few pseudo-archaeologists of a journalistic stripe lurk around the fringes of the Mormon intellectual community, but they are all pretension and no substance. Moreover, there is no reason that archaeologists who are Mormon would hesitate to discuss the Bering Strait route.

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37. For more details on the history of the NWAF, see Daniel C. Peterson, "On the New World Archaeological Foundation," *FARMS Review* 16/1 (2004): 221–34.

38. Dehlin refers to John Gee and Daniel Peterson, and Coe classes them as "Book of Mormon archaeologists, essentially" (part 3, 15:20). Gee's expertise is in Egyptology, and Peterson is an Islamicist. Neither has claimed or does claim to be a "Book of Mormon archaeologist."

"Book of Mormon archaeologist" implies someone trained to a professional level who focuses inordinately on relating that book to the results of archaeology, to the exclusion of following professional archaeological goals. Frankly, none exist.

Assertions or intimations that NWAF archaeologists have striven to find "proof" for the Book of Mormon are completely false. Nothing could be further from the truth. Starting with the first season of the NWAF (in 1953), even before it had any connection with the LDS Church, the operational guidelines were that the research be conducted according to professional standards without any reference to the Book of Mormon, although the funding was from private LDS donors. Pedro Armillas was chosen as the first year's field director upon the advice of Drs. Alfred V. Kidder, Gordon Willey, and Gordon Ekholm, who constituted a professional advisory committee for Tom Ferguson. Gareth Lowe and I were the only archaeological people aboard the first season who were LDS. Other student staff members included Bill Sanders and Román Piña Chan (both of whom later became premier Mesoamericanists), who could hardly be supposed to be closet Mormons. From the beginning, non-LDS archaeologists working for the NWAF have outnumbered the archaeologists there who were LDS believers.

From 1955 on, after Ferguson had appealed to the church for support funds (having exhausted his private funding sources), the eminent J. Alden Mason, an emeritus professor at the University of Pennsylvania who had become editor of NWAF publications (and who also assisted with archaeology), supported a judgment from Ed Shook (Carnegie) about the NWAF when Mason made a definitive statement on the noninvolvement of the LDS Church authorities in planning or reporting the NWAF research.[39] That position never varied from then to

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39.   Mason's statement reads in part as follows: "No statement respecting the landing places of these groups or the identification of any of the lands settled and cities established by them has ever been officially made by the Church.

the present. With such powerful professional assurances, your own assessment visit to the Chiapas operation was hardly necessary. Moreover, your current intimation that there was a hidden church agenda behind its generous support of the NWAF is both flat-out wrong and prejudicial to any fair discussion of the foundation's role.

- "The whole business of . . . Book of Mormon archaeology [is] to find Zarahemla, to find the plates of gold that were inscribed at the last trump, so to speak." [Part 1, 19:30]

This deserves to be called nonsense, without the slightest basis in fact.

### Near Eastern Links

- "So, basically, if you are looking for Old World connections and looking at the Near East, you're looking in the wrong place." [Part 1, 42:30]

Nevertheless, some individual Mormons have made speculative deductions attempting to identify ethnic groups, archeological ruins, and geographical features of the New World with those described in the Book of Mormon. None of these interpretations to date has received either ecclesiastical or scientific approval.

As advocates of advanced education, Mormons always pride themselves for maintaining the doctrine that ignorance should be replaced by knowledge gained through intelligent research and study. Observing the lack of unanimity in professional opinions respecting the development of the early high civilizations in America as well as the dearth of scientific data, many Mormons hope that archeological research may be effective in filling this void in our knowledge. Support of the present New World Archaeological Foundation investigations is a demonstration of that attitude.

The stated purpose of this Foundation is not to seek corroboration of the Book of Mormon account, but to help to resolve the problem of whether civilization in Middle America developed autochthonously or as a result of diffused or migrated influence from some area of the Old World, and to shed light on the culture and way of life of the ancients during the formative period.

There should be no underestimation of the difficulty of this assignment to reconstruct through archeology the lost history of the once great early Mesoamerican civilizations. The task is tremendous." J. Alden Mason, foreword to *Research in Chiapas, Mexico*, Papers of the New World Archaeological Foundation, nos. 1–4, ed. J. Alden Mason (Orinda, CA: NWAF, 1959), iii.

- "All sorts of things that are typically American. . . . Nothing to do with the Middle East at all. . . . There's nothing in the slightest bit Middle East about the Olmec." [Part 1, 28:49]

You might plead ignorance of any purely Mormon efforts to demonstrate a relationship between Mesoamerica and the Near East, but how could you not be aware of my 1971 article that discussed this very point?[40] Yet that piece is now superseded by a 2009 paper accessible on-line.[41]

You might well not yet have seen this recent item since the outlet is relatively obscure. It contains a list, along with extensive references to the literature for each item, of 380 correspondences between cult and ideology aspects of culture between the Near East in the second and first half of the first millennium BC on the one hand and Mesoamerica on the other. The striking nature and number of the correspondences make it certain that there was a direct diffusionary event that anciently linked the two areas.

I choose not to go further with this commentary; it has become rather tedious. My intention has been to inform you about errors in your statements in the podcast. I am sure you would not wish to continue saying what is not factual.

Finally, I have a large book in the editing process that deals with these matters in greater depth.[42] (The ninety-seven-page list of references includes twenty-one of your writings.) When it is in print, I will be pleased to send you a copy. It presents 420

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40. John L. Sorenson, "The significance of an apparent relationship between the ancient Near East and Mesoamerica," in *Man across the Sea: Problems of Pre-Columbian Contacts*, ed. C. L. Riley (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), 219–41.

41. "A Complex of Ritual and Ideology Shared by Mesoamerica and the Ancient Near East," *Sino-Platonic Papers*, no. 195 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Department of East Asian Language and Civilization, 2009), at http://sino-platonic.org/complete/spp195_mesoamerica.pdf.

42. John L. Sorenson, *Mormon's Codex* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, Brigham Young University, forthcoming).

correspondences between the text of the Book of Mormon and Mesoamerican cultural patterns and archaeological sequences. On that basis, I maintain there is no alternative to understanding that the Book of Mormon ("Mormon's Codex") could only have originated from the hands of a native Mesoamerican writer and that scholars will do well to study it seriously, not flippantly.

John Sorenson

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# Atheist Piety:
# A Religion of Dogmatic Dubiety

*Louis C. Midgley*

*Abstract: The "Special Feature" of this mass-market secular humanist magazine consists of an introduction to "America's Peculiar Piety" followed by a miscellany of brief, nonscholarly essays critical of The Church of Jesus Christ. The questions posed in the introduction to this flagship atheist magazine go unaddressed in the essays. Some of the essays are personal exit stories by former Latter-day Saints. One is an effort by Robert M. Price to explain away the Book of Mormon without confronting its contents. This is done by ignoring the details of Joseph Smith's career in order to picture him as the equivalent of a bizarre, emotionally conflicted figure like Charles Manson or as the embodiment of one of a wide range of mythical trickster figures like Brer Rabbit, Felix the Cat, or Doctor Who. The assumed link between these mythical or legendary figures and Joseph Smith is said to be a Jungian archetype lodged in his presumably deranged psyche, leading him to fashion the Book of Mormon.*

*Another essay merely mentions the well-known criticisms of Joseph Smith by Abner Cole (a.k.a. Obadiah Dogberry), while others complain that the faith of the Saints tends to meet emotional needs or that their religious community has various ways of reinforcing their own moral demands. In no instance do these authors see their own deeply held ideology as serving similar personal and community-sustaining religious functions.*

*All of the essays reflect a fashionable, dogmatic, naive, and deeply religious enmity toward the faith of Latter-day Saints. The essays are also shown to be instances of a modern*

*militant atheism, which is contrasted with earlier and much less bold and aggressive doubts about divine things. The ideological links between those responsible for Free Inquiry and some critics on the fringes of the LDS community are also clearly identified.*

*Review of Tom Flynn et al. "America's Peculiar Piety: Why Did Mormonism Grow? Why Does It Endure?"* Free Inquiry, *October/November 2011, 21–41.*

Louis C. Midgley

> So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles . . . were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God [*atheos*] in the world. (Ephesians 2:11–12 NRSV)

This "Special Feature" in *Free Inquiry* is not a typical Protestant *sectarian* criticism of the Church of Jesus Christ. Instead, the seven essays fit snugly into a currently fashionable strain of *secular* criticism of the faith of the Saints. They are also examples of objections to any faith in divine things. Since atheism is diverse and divided, each of the sometimes competing ideologies has a complex, interesting history. I will begin by locating the particular variety of atheism reflected in *Free Inquiry* on a larger historical and ideological map.

### Modern Militant Activism

Though doubts about deities were present among ancient Greek philosophers, the adjective *atheist* (from *atheos*, meaning "without God")[1] surfaced only rather recently to describe

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1. The word *atheos* is found in Ephesians 2:12, where it is virtually always translated as "without God." This verse reads: "Remember at that time you [gentiles] were without Christ, being alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and *without God* in the world" (NRSV, emphasis added).

unbelief. Specifically, it can be seen in the writings of Paul-Henri Thiry, Baron d'Holbach (1723–1789), who published a series of books with titles such as *Christianity Unveiled* (1761) and *The Sacred Contagion* (1768), leading eventually to his book *The System of Nature, or, Laws of the Moral and Physical World* (1770), in which he argued that faith in God is a pernicious, dangerous force in human affairs.[2] A profoundly bold, public atheism can be found in the writings of Karl Marx (1818–1883), Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), and Sigmund Freud (1856–1939)—those Martin Marty once called the "God Killers."[3]

It was Marx whose ideas generated a political mass movement with an explicitly atheist agenda. His target was "religion," in which category he included not only faith in God but also the material and ideological grounds for the entire social structure. According to Marx,

> The foundation of the criticism of religion is: Man makes religion, religion does not make man. Religion indeed is man's self-consciousness and self-estimation while he has not found his feet in the universe. But Man is no abstract being, squatting outside the world. Man is the world of men, the State, society. This State, this society, produces religion, which is an inverted world-consciousness, because they are an inverted world. Religion is the general theory of this world, its encyclopaedic compendium, its logic in popular form, its spiritualistic Point d'honneur, its enthusiasm, its moral sanction, its solemn complement, its general basis of consolation and justification. It is the fantastic realization of the human being, inasmuch as the

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2. For a recent collection of these items, see *Christianity Unveiled by Baron d'Holbach: A Controversy in Documents*, trans. David Holohan (Kingston upon Thames, England: Hodgson Press, 2008).

3. Martin Marty, *A Short History of Christianity* (New York: Meridian, 1959, 1967), 298–301.

human being possesses no true reality. The struggle against religion is therefore indirectly the struggle against that world whose spiritual aroma is religion.

Religious misery is in one mouth the expression of real misery, and in another is a protestation against real misery. Religion is the moan of the oppressed creature, the sentiment of a heartless world, as it is the spirit of spiritless conditions. It is the opium of the people.

The abolition of religion, as the illusory happiness of the people, is the demand for their real happiness. The demand to abandon the illusions about their condition is a demand to abandon a condition which requires illusions. The criticism of religion therefore contains potentially the criticism of the Vale of Tears whose aureole is religion.[4]

Those following in the footsteps of the Enlightenment tended to boast of their own emancipation or liberation from what they pictured as the silly myth and magic, as well as the soul-destroying dominance and control, that they routinely attributed to faith in God. However, beginning with Marx, public atheism moved from salons in Paris to the streets to become the foundation for a militant mass movement. As a result, modern atheists are not satisfied with being merely doubters, unchurched, or, again following Paul's language in Ephesians 2:12, *atheos.* Following Marx, atheists are no longer satisfied with merely understanding the world; they want to change it. Hence, behind the current rash of atheism is a passionate faith that science and/or philosophy, however conceived, must now liberate both individuals and society from emotionally grounded faith in God and other evils encountered in this world. The editors of *Free Inquiry* and many who opine in its pages boast

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4. Karl Marx, "A Criticism of the Hegelian Philosophy of Right," in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, ed. David McLellan (New York: Classic Books International, 2010), 4–5.

that they are not hemmed in by or dependent on wishful thinking, driven by mere feelings, or otherwise devoted to religious delusion. This "faith" is the ground for the religion promoted in *Free Inquiry*.

## An Originally Shy and Retiring Skepticism

In the premodern world there were those who in various ways struggled with fear of divine retribution by angry gods. There were, of course, doubts about divine things in the ancient world. Those who entertained such doubts did not, however, self-identify as atheists. An early manifestation of what, without the use of the word, can be called an "atheism" seems to have been, if not exactly cowardly, at least cautious. By contrast, modern critics of faith in God tend to picture themselves as heroic Invictus-like masters of their own destiny[5] who have no need for the consolation and hope offered by faith in God and often found among the so-called Peoples of the Book (or books).[6] They are boastfully proud of being *atheos*. In addition, much like the Prometheus of Greek fable,[7] they see themselves as heroic warriors engaged in a Titan-like battle to save humans from terrible dominance by delusions about a sublime-divine. They fight this battle in a valiant effort to liberate others, as well as themselves, from the oppression of false faith and to substitute a new, presumably true faith. In this they are unlike earlier doubters of deities, who were not at all Promethean

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5. See William Ernest Henley's (1849–1903) famous poem entitled "Invictus," which is a Latin word meaning something like "unconquered" or "undefeated," which Henley asserts he is, despite whatever fate brings his way.

6. I have in mind those whose faith is rooted in the Koran, the Book of Mormon, and the Bible, as well as in various authoritative interpretative confessions and creeds.

7. Prometheus, we are told by Hesiod (somewhere between about 750 and 650 bc) in his *Theogany* (lines 507–616), stole fire from the gods and gave it to humans. For his audacious challenge to the gods, Zeus had him chained so that by day a bird ate his liver, which regenerated by night. He subsequently became a symbol of resistance to authority.

but were often Epicureans seeking, given the accident of their circumstances, to avoid as much pain as possible before being liberated from all pain by death.

In the premodern western world, the gods were routinely regarded as the ultimate source of the laws of regimes, and hence also as the guarantors of the moral and legal order. One good reason for caution in challenging or even questioning such deities was fear of persecution by outraged public authorities. To see the possible or likely consequence of public expressions of doubt about what the poets of a given regime proclaimed about the gods, and hence about a regime's "theology,"[8] one only has to be reminded of the fate of Socrates.[9] But, of course, fear of persecution did not silence rational endeavors and doubts about divine things. Instead, it led to cautious questions and speculation—sometimes set out in esoteric passages as philosophers sought to address both a narrow guild of discreet disciples and also a less-discerning general audience. Be that as it may, what seemed good for a questioning philosopher and perhaps his faithful acolytes was not necessarily thought to be good for the social order. Private intellectual virtues may at times compete with public virtue. Those with doubts about divine things sensed that a public fuss about such things might impair the moral fabric of their regimes, which was a good thing that even they badly needed. Put another way, doubters seem to have sensed that without the fear of divine retribution, the necessary, salutary, habitual obedience to moral and legal rules would evaporate, especially for those driven by avarice, ambition, and so forth. Children and childish adults thus were thought to need additional sanctions supporting moral and le-

8. The Greek word *theologia* first appears in Plato's *Republic* (see 378a) to describe what poets say about the gods that are of use in a well-ordered regime.

9. Plato, in his *Apology*, tells the story of Socrates being accused by Meletus of impiety for questioning the Athenian gods, as well as their laws. Found guilty, Socrates was sentenced to death for impiety as well as for corrupting the minds of Athenian youth.

gal restraints. Those who entertained their own deep doubts also recognized the social utility of belief in the gods; divine retribution was even pictured as a useful myth or "noble lie" that supported the legal and moral rules necessary for a civilized society.[10] This tended to make the critiques of a regime's gods a private matter.

But eventually there was what can be called a public atheism. For example, Epicureans sought to eliminate fear of active gods, which opened the door for a hedonist (or utilitarian-type pleasure-seeking/pain-avoiding) ethic. The core Epicurean argument was that, in a world properly bereft of active gods, minimizing as much pain as possible, and thereby maximizing pleasure, was the prudent way of life. They argued that if the gods are somehow indifferent to human behavior and its attendant miseries, or are mere illusions, then humans have no need to fear divine retribution. Such fear even spoils whatever pleasures are available. No longer, they insisted, must one wince as one pleasures oneself since the gods are passive and have no interest in human affairs. Epicureans taught a strictly mercenary way of life grounded on a theoretical explanation of how things really are. Their basic theoretical argument was that humans, like everything, are merely a temporary, fortuitous coming together of atoms. But the driving motive behind Epicurean criticism of divine things was essentially practical and not primarily theoretical. Epicurean morality celebrates pleasure seeking, which necessarily involves a prudent assessment of the likelihood of either pleasure or pain resulting from some course of action.

One obvious problem with the Epicurean brand of atheism is that pleasure seeking always involves an awareness and an

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10. For a detailed treatment, as well as criticism, of the very old idea that the "truth" of faith in God is to be found in its role as the grounds for a civilized regime, see Louis Midgley, "The Utility of Faith Reconsidered," in *Revelation, Reason, and Faith: Essays in Honor of Truman G. Madsen*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002), 139–86.

assessment of the risk of pain. Momentary pleasures are likely to be followed by devastating and lasting pains. In addition, there simply is no impregnable fortress of scientific and philosophical argumentation that safeguards anyone from either experiencing a sudden end in death or eventually confronting the reality that pleasure, either pure or mixed with pain, gradually withers as one approaches death, when all pleasures presumably end.

However, the good news is that all pain is believed to end with death. There will be, they assured themselves, no divine retribution. Something like this is the message of a remarkable didactic poem by Lucretius (ca. 99–55 BC).[11] Death, it is argued, is no evil since it ends all pain. This is certainly not a shout of joy. It is merely at best cautious advice to seek whatever pleasures one can find and avoid as much pain as possible, coupled to the hope that whatever mess one makes of the pleasure-pain calculus, it all ends sooner or later with death. The conclusion is that one need not fear death, for it is ultimate liberation from this miserable world. While struggling to avoid pain, one need not be set upon by false notions of divine beings who have even more pain planned for disobedient mortals after their miserable deaths.

The atheism that the Saints, and others who have faith in God, now confront is a practical or moral revolt against divine things.[12] This takes the form of a criticism not merely of confused, false, or mistaken understandings of God[13] (of which I believe there are many) but of the very possibility of God. Modern militant atheists insist that the consolation for evil

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11.   See Titus Lucretius Carus, *De Rerum Natura*, available in several translations under several English titles.

12.   During the Reformation, various partisan zealots used the word *atheism* ("without God") as a slur aimed at opposing, and presumably heretical, factions of Christians.

13.   See Louis Midgley, "The First Steps," *FARMS Review* 17/1 (2005): xxiv–xxvi.

provided by faith in God is no longer necessary; no one need live with an illusion of a future paradise. Instead, one must now strive to change the world for the better through education, ideological enlightenment, and resolute political action. The best (or worst) examples of regimes made to rest on an atheist ideology are those with an explicit atheist agenda. This has not, however, deterred atheist political activism.

## Paul Kurtz, Prometheus Books, and *Free Inquiry*

The failure and eventual collapse of Communism came as both a shock and a disappointment to many atheists. Paul Kurtz (b. 1925) claims to have been shocked to discover at the end of World War II that prisoners of war from the Soviet Union were not eager to return home. But even with his illusions of a godless "worker's paradise" shattered and his youthful hopes dashed, he did not abandon atheism. Instead, in addition to founding Prometheus Books in August 1969, Kurtz also launched the Center for Inquiry, the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry, and the Council for Secular Humanism. In 1980, through his Council for Secular Humanism, he began *Free Inquiry*. He has managed thereby to bring a measure of ideological solidarity and institutional structure to atheism in America. Before Kurtz became a force, it was common for atheists to picture themselves as religious and also as forming a kind of surrogate church.[14] He has sought to put a stop to this atheist self-understanding. The practical failures of Marxism have perhaps sobered but have not deterred atheists. The fact is that one no longer encounters the shy, cautious, and retiring "atheism" of antiquity, or even the remnants of Enlightenment skepticism about divine things, but rather an active, aggressive, rhetorically violent public atheism.

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14. See Louis Midgley, "The Signature Books Saga," *FARMS Review* 16/1 (2004): 371–72.

The so-called New Atheists—Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens, and Richard Dawkins—have recently drawn wide public attention. Although Kurtz is not a household name, even among Latter-day Saint scholars, he has published more than fifty books and eight hundred essays and reviews.[15] And he has, as I will demonstrate, also been responsible for an assortment of attacks on Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. It is not clear that he had a hand in the most recent batch of essays in *Free Inquiry*, since on 18 May 2010 he resigned from all of his executive/editorial positions with the agencies he had founded since 1976.[16] Tom Flynn, a close associate of Kurtz, is now the official editor of *Free Inquiry*, as well as executive director of the Council for Secular Humanism.

## The October/November Seven

The October/November issue of *Free Inquiry* comprises a total of sixty-six pages, of which twenty-one constitute a miscellany of opinion on Mormon topics. None of these essays make a contribution to understanding the faith of the Saints or the crucial history of the restoration. Some of the authors assume the conclusions they reach. None of these essays give the appearance of having been written with much understanding of Latter-day Saint history or faith. Each of the seven essays is reviewed separately below.

15. See Wikipedia, s.v. "Paul Kurtz," last modified 23 December 2011, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Kurtz. Another version can found at http://kurtz.pragmatism.org.

16. On 18 May 2010, in an "open letter" to his "friends and colleagues," Paul Kurtz announced his "resignation from the boards of the Center for Inquiry, Committee for Skeptical Inquiry, and the Council for Secular Humanism, all organizations that [he] founded beginning in 1976." He also resigned "as editor-in-chief of *Free Inquiry* magazine." He had, he indicated, "already been shorn of all effective authority in these organizations and magazines and 'shoved on an ice flow' [*sic*] so to speak." It was, he wrote, "merely a formality to divest myself of any pretensions that I have anything any longer to say within the organizations or magazines that I founded." See his "Apologia," 18 May 2010, http://paulkurtz.net/apologia.html.

*1. Thomas (Tom) Flynn, introduction to the special feature entitled "America's Peculiar Piety: Why Did Mormonism Grow? Why Does It Endure?" (p. 21).*[17]

Tom Flynn (b. 1955), in addition to being a journalist, novelist, entertainer, folklorist, and editor of Free Inquiry,[18] has published two atheist handbooks.[19] He considers himself knowledgeable about the faith of Latter-day Saints. However, he raises serious doubts about his qualifications by insisting that The Church of Jesus Christ is "headquartered at that spectacular temple in Salt Lake City." He also assures his readers, "After years of avocational reading and research, I strongly suspect that Joseph Smith Jr. conceived his homespun faith as a conscious fraud but later, fatally, came to believe in his own messianic pretensions." He grants that other secular humanists have different explanations for what he believes was "so transparently born of chicanery." He promises that other essays in this issue of his magazine will sort such questions as "How can secular humanists and Mormons most constructively interact?" or "What is it like to leave Mormon beliefs and heritage behind?" However, in none of the essays is either question addressed.

*2. Brian Dalton, "My Journey into 'Formonism'" (pp. 22–24).*[20]

Dalton is known for having created a serial comic sketch in which he plays "Mr. Deity," the lead role.[21] "My Journey" is

17. Tom Flynn is a former Roman Catholic.

18. For details, see Tom Flynn, "The Real War on Christmas," Point of Inquiry, published 22 December 2006, http://www.pointofinquiry.org/tom_flynn_the_real_war_on_christmas/.

19. See Flynn's *The New Encyclopedia of Unbelief*, foreword by Richard Dawkins (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2007). His best-selling *The Trouble with Christmas* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1993) has led to "hundreds of radio and TV appearances" in which he plays the "role of the curmudgeonly 'anti-Claus.'" See his "Real War on Christmas" for details.

20. Brian Dalton was briefly a Latter-day Saint.

21. For details, see "Mr. Deity," last modified 13 January 2012, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mr._Deity.

clearly an exit story. As is common in this genre, Dalton includes a fashionable complaint about the sense of betrayal and pain that he experienced when he went missing. A more naive, candid, and revealing version of Dalton's exit story has been made available in an interview by John Dehlin.[22] It turns out that Dalton grew up with a guitar and not faith. Then there was a brief moment when he gave faith a whirl. He even accepted a missionary call but left the Missionary Training Center when he was offered a pop music gig. He joined the sybaritic/demonic world of drugs and casual sex. He now sees that bizarre world as profoundly evil. For a living, he has turned instead to graphic design. He admits that his loss of faith has occasionally troubled him because he has found nothing to counter the dreadful thought of his utter annihilation, and also the ultimate futility of all his endeavors, given the ideology he now entertains.[23] His way of dealing with such thoughts seems to be making fun of faith by playing the role of Mr. Deity in the spoof he created. An example of his wit is his use of the snappy label *Formon* to describe himself, hence the word *Formonism* in the title of his exit story.

Dalton, led by Dehlin, actually claims to have read much LDS apologetic literature prior to his aborted mission call. But nothing in his interview indicates that either Dalton or Dehlin has even an elementary grasp of contemporary LDS scholarship. Dehlin gently coaches Mr. Deity to claim that DNA stud-

22. See John Dehlin, "205–206: Mr. Deity's Brian Dalton," Mormon Stories Podcast, 20 October 2010, http://mormonstories.org/?p=1286. Much of what follows concerning "Mr. Deity" will be drawn from this interview, though without specific citations.

23. However, the "Mr. Deity" described for Dehlin has acquired a passion for promises, agreements, or covenants in his sense of how husbands and wives ought to relate to each other. Dehlin did not pursue the question of how such moral restraints on personal freedom can possibly be grounded in an atheist world. Dalton has, it seems, somehow discovered that there really is a difference between virtue and vice, or between noble and base, and that these and other similar and related distinctions entail moral rules that restrain the temptations that lured him away from the MTC.

ies, along with hearing about seer stones, led him to reject the Book of Mormon. But did this realization come long after he had lapsed back into the pop music world, with its abundance of moral evil? Neither Dalton nor Dehlin sort any such questions.

Mr. Deity's exit story clearly does not address the questions "Why did Mormonism grow?" and "Why does it endure?" with which Tom Flynn introduced this "Special Feature." Is the "curmudgeonly 'anti-Claus'" that Flynn has a special affinity for a befuddled Mr. Deity?

*3. Robert M. Price, "Joseph Smith: Liar, Lunatic, or Lord" (pp. 25–29).*[24]

Dr. Price (b. 1954), depending on his mood, either doubts or flatly denies that there ever was a Jesus of Nazareth. Even as fellow of the Westar Institute's rather bizarre Jesus Seminar, he goes much further than many or most of his skeptical associates by turning Jesus into a mere literary figure with no historical reality.[25] Be that as it may, he boasts that he has undergone a "faith journey." He tells of having once been a fundamentalist. He is now anxious to exorcize his initial pugnacious, passionate fundamentalist background.[26] He likes to explain that he began when he was in his teens by being "born again" in a fun-

24.  Robert M. Price has two doctorates from Drew University. The first one (1981) was in theology, and the second (1993) was in New Testament criticism. Dr. Price is currently one of three "core faculty" at the Johnnie Colemon Theological Seminary, which without residence requirements provides ministerial credentials. See http://divinityschool.net/jcSeminary/johnnie_colemon_theological_seminary.htm, and also http://www.jctseminary.org/Courses.aspx for details. In addition, Price is also currently a research fellow (or a "professor of biblical criticism") at the Council for Secular Humanism's Center for Inquiry, which is not a university. See his web page at http://www.robertmprice.mind-vendor.com/bio.htm for details.

25.  See Robert M. Price, *Incredible Shrinking Son of Man: How Reliable Is the Gospel Tradition?* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 2003), as well as his *Deconstructing Jesus* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 2000) and *Jesus is Dead* (Cranford, NJ: American Atheist Press, 2007).

26.  See Price's autobiographical account of his "spiritual journey" entitled "From Fundamentalist to Humanist" (1997), at http://www.infidels.org/library/

damentalist Baptist church. He zealously engaged in witnessing to the unsaved. But he soon realized that "accepting Jesus" didn't seem to change anything here and now. His new "enthusiasm" turned sour; it was, as is often the case, both poorly grounded and ephemeral.

So "he began to reassess his faith, deciding at length that traditional Christianity simply did not have either the historical credentials or the intellectual cogency its defenders claimed for it." In 1977–78 he began "reading religious thinkers and theologians from other traditions, as well as the sociology, anthropology, and psychology of religion." He soon "considered himself a theological liberal in the camp of Paul Tillich."[27] He seems to have taught in the religious studies department of Mount Olive College in North Carolina for a while before he became the pastor of the very "liberal" First Baptist Church of Montclair, New Jersey (1989–1994). He did not prosper as a Protestant preacher. His liberal piety faded as he began to see himself as a Christian atheist.[28]

In a recent interview with Clay Painter, Dr. Price provides additional information on his religious odyssey. He indicates how he came to write essays on the Book of Mormon.[29] Soon af-

modern/testimonials/price.html. What follows is taken from this and other biographical materials that Price has posted on the Internet.

27. See Price's "Biography," at http://www.robertmprice.mindvendor.com/bio.htm. As far as I have been able to determine, Price has published three ephemeral essays on Tillich, beginning in 1979 and ending in 2004.

28. Price has published many hundreds of essays, reviews, translations, and books. See "Theological Publications by Robert M. Price," updated 4 October 2009, http://www.robertmprice.mindvendor.com/theolist.htm for his bibliography. He lists thirteen books, seven of which were published by Prometheus Books, one by Signature Books, and one by American Atheist Press. He has also published essays in such atheist magazines as *Religious Humanism*, *American Rationalist*, and *Skeptical Inquirer*, in addition to many essays in *Free Inquiry*. Price was the founding editor of the *Journal of Higher Criticism* in 1994. This journal ceased publication in 2003.

29. For this interview, see "Episode 183: Bible Geek Bob Price," *Mormon Expression*, online at http://mormonexpression.com/2012/01/19/episode-183-bible-geek-bob-price/.

ter his Southern Baptist family moved from Mississippi to New Jersey when he was ten, he was socialized in a fundamentalist Baptist congregation. This indoctrination persisted until he started working on a master's degree, at which time his born-again faith melted away. He turned initially to an "extreme liberal theology," then to "religious humanism," but he eventually settled on atheism, or what he calls "secular humanism."[30] Price describes himself as "hot and cold" or "back and forth" on religious matters. Despite his ardent atheism, he indicates that he still enjoys religious liturgy and has had some unidentified "religious experiences."

In 1990 and 1993, Signature Books introduced Price to two collections of essays critical of the Book of Mormon. He indicates that he was enthralled by essays in those volumes written by Mark D. Thomas.[31] Price invited Thomas to contribute an article on "critical research" on the Book of Mormon to the *Journal of Higher Criticism*, which Price once edited.[32] (In

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30. These are the labels used by Price to describe his shifting religious ideology.

31. See Mark D. Thomas, "Scholarship and the Book of Mormon," in *The Word of God: Essays in Mormon Scripture*, ed. Dan Vogel (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990), 63–79, which was reprinted, with editorial changes, from "Scholarship and the Future of the Book of Mormon," *Sunstone* 5/3 (May–June 1980): 24–29; and also Thomas, "A Rhetorical Approach to the Book of Mormon: Rediscovering Nephite Sacramental Language," in *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology*, ed. Brent Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993), 58–80. I have exposed the flaws in the way Thomas reads the Book of Mormon in my essay "'To Remember and Keep': On the Book of Mormon as an Ancient Book," in *The Disciple as Scholar: Essays on Scripture and the Ancient World in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks, Donald W. Parry, and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000), 124–32, 135–37.

32. Mark D. Thomas, "The Emergence of Critical Research on the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Higher Criticism* 3/1 (Spring 1996): 123–35. This essay is an *apologia* by Thomas for his own *critical* approach to the Book of Mormon. This "critical scholarship" (see pp. 126, 134) is, he claims, "academically sanctioned scholarship" and hence not the "apologetic scholarship" (p. 126) being fashioned by "apologetic Mormon scholars" (p. 130) associated with FARMS (see pp. 127, 131) who argue for "the antiquity of the text" (p. 128). The contest between these

2000, Signature Books published Thomas's argument that the Book of Mormon is Joseph Smith's effort to resolve theological puzzles.)[33] Then, during the summers of 2003–2006, Thomas held what he called a Book of Mormon Roundtable. Price was a prize participant at those meetings.[34]

In the Painter interview, Price describes what he terms a "friendly confrontation" on the historical authenticity of the Book of Mormon with one he called "Jack Sullivan" (John W. Welch?) and with "other people from FARMS." This encoun-

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two clashing and competing types of "scholarship" (and "scholars") involves a radically differing assessment of "religious authority" (p. 128). The reason is that "if the book is ancient, then Joseph Smith's prophetic claims are true" (p. 128). "Critical scholars who focus on historical criticism focus on demonstrating that the text is nineteenth century fiction" (p. 128). Where exactly does Thomas stand on this crucial issue? "I do interpret the Book of Mormon in a nineteenth-century context" (p. 133), a stance that places him among the "critical scholars" (pp. 124, 127, 128). Thomas explains that, unlike those who have been excommunicated for their "critical scholarship" (p. 126)—he has in mind Brent Lee Metcalfe and David P. Wright (see p. 126)—with his "rhetorical approach" he has "been able to sidestep the question of historicity" (p. 133). However, in this essay written for Dr. Price, he relaxes his fancy footwork and explains clearly that what he calls "critical scholarship" (pp. 124, 126, 134) is an attempt to prove that the Book of Mormon was fashioned by Joseph Smith and hence is merely nineteenth-century religious fiction and not a divine special revelation. He boasts that "critical scholarship distances the scholar from the text [of the Book of Mormon] so that a more objective reading is possible. However," he also admits, "that distance often creates a hermeneutical difficulty—the text is less personal and less meaningful for the reader" (p. 134). Put another way, when the Book of Mormon is read as merely nineteenth-century fiction devised by Joseph Smith, it becomes a mere curiosity or annoyance rather than the ground for a genuine faith in God.

33. See *Digging in Cumorah: Reclaiming the Book of Mormon Narratives* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2000). Thomas indicated in his essay "Emergence of Critical Research" (p. 124 n. 3) that *Digging in Cumorah* would be published by Signature Books in 1996.

34. Price "published" his contributions to Thomas's conferences under the title *Latter-day Scripture: Studies in the Book of Mormon* (available in both electronic and print-on-demand formats though ebookIt.com in 2011). Given Price's close association with Signature Books, it is not clear why he opted to self-publish his work. See my review of this e-book at http://www.mormoninterpreter.com/review-latter-day-scripture-price/.

ter, Price indicates, brought an end to the Book of Mormon Roundtable.[35]

Price believes that it would be wise for Latter-day Saints to accept the way he has framed the debate on the Book of Mormon. In the Painter interview, he argues that while the Book of Mormon is in his estimation a fraud in much the same way that the Bible is fraudulent, it is also a work of a "literary genius" and "creative theologian." Read this way, the Book of Mormon, like all scripture, is a "pious fraud," which is how he understands prophets. By reading the Book of Mormon as a fraudulent history fashioned by Joseph Smith, one would, Price insists, enhance Joseph Smith's stature as a prophet. And yet Price also boasts of finding the Book of Mormon "rather turgid" and unedifying. He thinks that *The Lord of the Rings* is "better scripture." He is certain that the Book of Mormon is a hoax since, in his words, "the DNA thing shot the whole premise of the thing to hell." Price opines without having given any attention to Latter-day Saint scholarship. Armed with a fundamentalist-style atheist certainty, he merely sneers at inconvenient arguments and evidence. This is understandable if not laudable: if one is a dogmatic atheist, why take seriously the scholarship of people who actually believe that there is something beyond the mundane world?

Price has made a minor career out of pestering Latter-day Saints in an effort to lure them into going down the same path he has taken.[36] His argument is that if there was no Jesus (as he

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35. It is not clear who financed the Book of Mormon Roundtable.

36. See Robert Price, "Prophecy and Palimpsest," *Dialogue* 35/3 (2002): 67–82. An enlarged version of this essay appeared under the title "Joseph Smith: Inspired Author of the Book of Mormon," in *American Apocrypha: Essays on the Book of Mormon*, ed. Dan Vogel and Brent Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), 321–66. William J. Hamblin responded to Price in a devastating essay impishly entitled "'There Really Is a God, and He Dwells in the Temporal Parietal Lobe of Joseph Smith's Brain,'" *Dialogue* 36/4 (2003): 79–87. See the revised version of Professor Hamblin's response entitled "Priced to Sell," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 16/1 (2004): 37–47. Price was back at it

now insists), then there is no good reason for taking the Book of Mormon or Joseph Smith's prophetic truth claims seriously. Given this premise, with much celerity Price celebrates a circular argument. He merely brushes aside the Book of Mormon. In doing this, as Professor William Hamblin has demonstrated, Price has ignored all the literature published by Latter-day Saints on the Book of Mormon.[37]

Since the argument is circular, one can reverse it, which is what Tom Flynn has done: "If today's LDS church can be accounted for without once imagining that there really were golden plates, then how much more confidently can we suppose that Christianity can be understood without any need to presume that there really was a Jesus, much less that he rose from the dead?" (p. 21). The answer is, of course, not a bit more confidently. In addition, in both formulations the conclusion is packed into the premise. Flynn provides no evidence for his premise; it is merely asserted. And since Price has dogmatically removed Jesus entirely from history, there is no need for him to examine the Book of Mormon.

So it comes as no surprise that Price has "been convinced for some time that Joseph Smith's claims about the discovery of Golden Plates were a hoax" (p. 25). He thus dogmatically rules out even considering whether Joseph Smith was seer and prophet. He asks instead if Joseph Smith was a "Liar, Lunatic, or Lord" (p. 25). These are clearly not the only possibilities. Prior to caving in to a driving agenda, one ought to at least

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again with an essay entitled "Joseph Smith in the Book of Mormon," *Dialogue* 36/4 (2003): 89–96. See also his self-published essays in *Latter-day Scripture*.

37.    See Hamblin's complaints about this devastating lacuna in his "'There Really Is a God,'" 79 n. 2 (see n. 36 above). In addition to the studies mentioned by Hamblin, the list could now be increased substantially. Price also ignored Terryl Givens's *By the Hand of Mormon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

sketch the alternative accounts and then weigh the appropriate evidences.[38]

Price does not explain why the Saints, whose faith (he grants), "embodies stolid values and provides meaning and purpose for millions of devotees who would never think of committing fraud themselves" (p. 25), believe that Joseph was a genuine prophet and not a lunatic or a liar, and certainly not the Lord.

For Price, given his controlling atheist agenda, the explanation for Joseph Smith must be that he was a liar who also somehow came to believe he was Lord and hence was also a lunatic. In his essay, Price performs this magic by briefly mentioning such bizarre figures as Charles Manson (p. 26); Rinpoche Chögyam Trungpa, "the great apostle of Tibetan Buddhism in North America" (p. 26); and Sabbatai Sevi, a notorious Jewish/Muslim false messiah (p. 27), who all seem to Price to embody what he describes as a bizarre trickster/deity syndrome (p. 29).

However, Price cannot distinguish between the "trickster" as found in fable and fiction, such as Bugs Bunny or Felix the Cat, and actual human beings. In his essay he muddles the two notions together, making it possible for him to neglect to demonstrate a historical influence or connection between, say, Charles Manson or Doctor Who and Joseph Smith. Instead, he turns the most exotic and bizarre into a "deep-seated archetype in the Jungian sense" (p. 29). Presumably, one whose psyche is somehow caught up in such an archetype may then experience "psychic inflation"—a kind of swelling in which one so possessed thinks he is beyond moral restraints because he is God.

Then, Price asserts, "the archetype begins to split at the seams of the merely human self, and one boasts prerogatives, immunities, privileges that befit an imagined god but

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38. See Louis C. Midgley, "Who Really Wrote the Book of Mormon? The Critics and Their Theories," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997), 101–39.

soon corrupt the mere mortal" (p. 29). This claim grounds his conclusion: "*This is what I think happened to Joseph Smith.* Somewhere along the line, he became inflated with the trickster archetype. The creation of the Book of Mormon was a trick in this sense" (p. 29, emphasis in original). This language presumably explains Price's absurd notion that Joseph, while a liar and a lunatic, also imagined he was Lord. Please note that Price does not deal with any unruly historical details. He merely argues by bad analogy and bald assertion. He does not confront the actual content of the Book of Mormon nor explain how it was written by one who, barely able to write a letter, was in the grips of such an inflated, split-apart "trickster archetype." Nor does he defend his novel explanation against the many competing explanations.

### 4. Tom Flynn, "Obadiah Dogberry: Mormonism's First Critic" (pp. 30–31).

This essay is the best example of Flynn's failure to cover the issues he indicated would be addressed in the special-feature section of his magazine. He merely rehashes some of what has appeared elsewhere concerning Abner Cole. There is one other tiny problem: it seems that when Cole reached Palmyra and became editor of the *Palmyra Reflector*, his first "Obadiah Dogberry" foray against Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon appeared on 2 September 1829. If this is true, and I believe it is, then Cole was not the first critic of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. With one exception (an item in the *Wayne Sentinel*, 26 June 1828), the first published critical remarks on Joseph Smith appeared in the magazine *Paul Pry's Weekly Bulletin*. The first item in this "bulletin" on the Book of Mormon was published on 8 August 1829, nearly a month before Cole's criticisms appeared.[39]

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39.   Could Abner Cole have somehow authored those items on Joseph Smith that appeared in Rochester, New York, in the *Paul Pry Weekly Bulletin*? Not according to Dan Vogel. In his excellent *Early Mormon Documents* (Salt Lake

*5. Michael Nielsen and Ryan T. Cragun, "The Price of Free Inquiry in Mormonism" (pp. 32–35).*[40]

Michael Nielsen and Ryan Cragun point out the obvious—that faith serves deep needs by providing, among other things, a "sense of purpose and meaning" (p. 32). Faith also provides a "set of rules that guide behavior" as well as a way of finding "comfort and a way to deal with stress." They recognize that the beliefs that do this the best are those that make the most demands. Nielsen and Cragun set out a kind of exterior social-psychological explanation for why the faith of the Saints has endured despite always facing hostile secular and sectarian worlds. They then identify behaviors among Latter-day Saints that maintain social solidarity in the face of opposition and doubts. All this, the authors opine, works rather well for "devout and orthodox believers" (p. 32). But there are, of course, some who are uncomfortable being faithful Latter-day Saints. These former or nominal Latter-day Saints—dissidents or cultural Mormons—surrender something when they choose to go missing; they must pay an emotional price for abandoning their faith.

Nielsen and Cragun also muse about the possibility of a kind of "liberal Mormon movement," something warm and fuzzy like "cafeteria Catholics," among Latter-day Saints (p. 33). At this point they seem to have forgotten that those faiths that

City: Signature Books, 1998), Vogel points out that "Cole names [Jeremiah O.] Block as the editor of the Rochester *Bulletin*." Vogel sees evidence for this identification in the *Palmyra Freeman*, 17 November 1829: "the masons in Newark, as about establishing a paper, to be conducted by a certain Mr. Block of 'Paul Pry' memory" (Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:224 n. 2). Thus it seems likely that the *Paul Pry Weekly Bulletin* was actually the work of Jeremiah O. Block.

40.  Dr. Nielsen is chair of the Psychology Department at Georgia Southern University, and Dr. Cragun is a research associate of the Center for Atheist Research who also teaches sociology at the University of Tampa. Cragan served an LDS mission (1996–1998), but soon after he finished his undergraduate degree in 2000, he left the church because he came to the conclusion that the Book of Mormon is fiction.

prosper are the ones that make the most demands, both moral and otherwise, while those anxiously seeking an accommodation with the dominant secular culture seem to go into decline. Presumably in an effort to make it less emotionally costly for those who do not choose to believe and behave, they want the church to modify the moral demands that faith necessarily involves. The conclusion that they reach, which is perfectly unexceptional, is that being or becoming a "free inquirer inside the religion is challenging" because it involves costs (p. 35).[41] However, Nielsen and Cragun don't seem to sense that this is also true within their own atheist community. One who begins to have doubts about atheism or who challenges the fashionable atheist dogmas and behaviors will also pay an emotional price—namely, feeling alienated from a community that no longer meets certain emotional or intellectual needs.

*6. James Alcock, "What Is So Strange about Believing as the Mormons Do?" (pp. 36–39).*[42]

Alcock (b. 1942) is an amateur magician who, much like Nielsen and Cragun, is a severe critic of parapsychology. He argues—correctly, I believe—that "religion is attractive to many people because of the emotional needs that it serves" (p. 39). His own religion, from my perspective, must do for him something very much like what he attributes to the religion of others. It is true that religion "provides a structure for comprehending the world and giving meaning to our existence; it provides a sense of certainty and stability in times when uncertainty and ambiguity seem to reign; it provides a social network that furnishes friendship and a sense of belonging; it provides succor in times of grief;

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41.    It should be noted that "free inquirer" is Nielsen and Cragun's code language for not being a believer.

42.    Alcock does not appear to have been a Latter-day Saint. He is a fellow of the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry (more on this later) and teaches psychology at the Glendon Campus of York University in Toronto, Canada.

it provides relief from loneliness, for one's God is always there; and . . . it provides a powerful bulwark against anxiety" (p. 39).

From Alcock's apparently atheist perspective, the intellectual/emotional products of faith in God involve many odd things, including such things as "eating and drinking the flesh and blood of their Lord, either symbolically in Protestant denominations or supposedly literally in Roman Catholicism" (p. 36). These sorts of things appear "unusual or irrational" to those with a different faith or religion (p. 36). But he grants that "while it is easy for skeptical monotheists to smirk, we [atheists] should be careful when throwing stones, for we all live in glass houses where beliefs are concerned, and it is doubtful that any of us are free from significant pockets of irrationality within our own belief systems" (p. 36). He grants that what he labels "irrational" beliefs "seem no different from those that do correspond to reality" (p. 36).

Alcock then recommends what he calls "reality testing, logical analysis, and critical scrutiny of information" as necessary correctives for the "magical thinking" he attributes to those with faith in God (p. 37) rather than faith in various human endeavors and belief systems. He complains about those for whom "faith is allowed to trump reason" (p. 37), but without clearly identifying exactly what constitutes either "reason" or "faith."

Hence he opines that what he labels as a "transcendental" system, in which category he includes "beliefs of a supernatural, religious, or mystical nature,"[43] demands "deliberate suppression of logical analysis in favor of acceptance based on faith alone" (p. 37). He does not, of course, include his own atheist/humanist religious belief system in his negative stereotype. And he does not sense that his own "belief system" seems to function in the same way, the primary difference being the

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43. Each of these labels identifies human propensities to worship merely vagaries or abstractions and hence at the wrong altar.

content of what is held on "faith alone." He is correct in holding that emotions are necessarily involved in any religion (or belief system), but he does not think that the content of a religion makes any difference. He is wrong. Marxism as a secular religion has demonstrated that content is crucial.

### 7. C. L. Hanson, "Building on a Religious Background" (pp. 40–41).[44]

Ms. Hanson proclaims that she is an atheist but "grew up Mormon" (p. 40). She can presumably "translate between [the] two communities" (p. 40). Why? Her once having been LDS makes her, she imagines, sort of "bilingual." She is ready and willing, she claims, to correct "those who believe the usual stereotypes about atheists" because she knows that they are not really "amoral nihilists, or whatever." She can, she claims, also correct mistakes that atheists make about the faith of Latter-day Saints. She does these things "sometimes on the *Bloggernacle* (network of faithful-Mormon blogs)."

She pictures herself as "a mild mannered mom" who posts up a storm on the Internet promoting what she calls "the middle ground where 'nice,' tactful atheism can occur" (p. 41). Her blogs—*Main Street Plaza* and *Letters from a Broad*—strike me as a bit raunchy and as lacking intellectual content.[45] Hanson needs a sense of solidarity with Latter-day Saints, even though her own nice "atheist community" (p. 41) should take care of her emotional needs by providing her with friends, a sense of

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44. Hanson is an atheist housewife who blogs from Zurich, Switzerland (at *Letters from a Broad* and *Main Street Plaza*). She self-published in 2006 a novel entitled *Ex Mormon*. The issue of *Free Inquiry* under review has a half-page advertisement for her novel and one of her blogs (p. 24) in which she asks others to join her in what she calls the "Mormon Alumni Association: Gone for Good."

45. For example, it really is ludicrous for Hanson to describe her teenage efforts to seduce boys or to describe what she claims to have managed in the library at BYU. See http://lfab-uvm.blogspot.com/2006/07/my-deconversion-part-3-tipping-point.html, including the comments for one of many similar examples of childish rubbish.

meaning, and an identity. She believes that "atheists who were raised in other religions can form the same sort of bridges with their own communities" (p. 41).

The fact is, however, that both substance and civility are in rather short supply on lists, boards, and blogs, where the most violent and uninformed are free to opine up a storm. And this goes, unfortunately, for both Latter-day Saints as well as their critics.

Some of Hanson's remarks, however, actually almost seem to address Tom Flynn's desires for an answer to the question of how atheists and Latter-day Saints can have something "to say to one another" (p. 21), presumably in addition to bashing each other on blogs. Unfortunately, she does not address the two questions—"Why did Mormonism grow?" and "Why does it endure?"—that constitute the subtitle of Tom Flynn's introduction. This fact highlights a problem with the seven items in *Free Inquiry*.

## A Strange Obsession with Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon

It is not exactly clear, though that is not to say that it is entirely unclear, why Paul Kurtz and his associates have had a fascination with Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon and have attempted to critique the faith of the Saints. No Protestant denomination has drawn the same attention from those in charge of this atheist movement. What is clear is that George D. Smith, the owner of Signature Books, has had a hand in this.

Beginning in 1984, through various conferences and publishing ventures, including *Free Inquiry*, Kurtz and Company, at times working with George D. Smith and Signature Books, have sponsored or published a series of attacks on Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. The October/November 2011 issue of *Free Inquiry* now adds to this bit of sniping, which in the past has included the following items:

- Paul Kurtz, "The Mormon Church," *Free Inquiry*, Winter 1983–84, 20, introduced Kurtz's first two essays critical of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. Then came George D. Smith's "Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon" (pp. 21–31), which was subsequently reprinted in *On the Barricades: Religion and Free Inquiry in Conflict*, ed. Robert Basil, Mary Beth Gehrman, and Tim Madigan (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1989), 137–56.[46] These essays were followed by a version of "The History of Mormonism and Church Authorities: An Interview with Sterling M. McMurrin" (pp. 32–34).
- George D. Smith, "Polygamy and the Mormon Church," *Free Inquiry*, Winter 1986, 55–57.
- George D. Smith, "Mormon Plural Marriage," *Free Inquiry*, Summer 1992, 32–37, 60.
- George D. Smith and Paul Kurtz jointly sponsored a three-day "Mormon/Humanist Dialogue" in Salt Lake City on 24–26 September 1993. This allowed cultural Mormons to scold Latter-day Saints for not allowing "freedom of conscience" and also for not embracing radical feminist ideologies. The participants included Brent Lee Metcalfe, Lavina F. Anderson, L. Jackson Newell, Cecilia Konchar Farr, Gary James Bergera, Allen Dale Roberts, Fred Buchanan, Martha S. Bradley, F. Ross Peterson, Paul Kurtz, George D. Smith, Bonnie and Vern Bullough, and Robert S. Alley. The Bulloughs and Alley were speakers provided by Kurtz. These talks were published under the title *Religion, Feminism, and Freedom of Conscience*, ed. and with an introduction by George D. Smith (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books and Signature

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46. For a review of George D. Smith's essays in *On the Barricades*, see Louis Midgley, "George Dempster Smith, Jr., on the Book of Mormon," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 4 (1992): 5–12, with attention to the religious and ideological links between Kurtz and Smith (see pp. 6–7).

Books, 1994), vii–viii.[47] Tom Flynn then drew favorable attention to this volume in "The Humanist/Mormon Dialogue," *Free Inquiry*, Winter 1994–95, 55–57.

- George D. Smith, "Strange Bedfellows: Mormon Polygamy and Baptist History," *Free Inquiry*, Spring 1996, 41–45. This essay was eventually reprinted in *Freedom of Conscience: A Baptist/Humanist Dialogue*, ed. Paul D. Simmons (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2000), 207–16. It appears that Baptists who have not capitulated to atheist importuning also abjure something called "freedom of conscience." Why George D. Smith was involved in this conference is not clear, except that it seems to have given him an opportunity to opine about polygamy, which seems to be his favorite topic.

- George D. Smith, "The Freedom of Inquiry: Introduction," *Free Inquiry*, Spring 1997, 14–16, in which Smith comments on the ideology advanced by Paul Kurtz.

- Mark D. Thomas, "Was Joseph Smith for Real? How He Lied, Perhaps Even to Himself," *Free Inquiry*, Winter 1999–2000, 37–39.[48]

- Paul Kurtz, "On Entering the Third Decade: Personal Reminiscences, a Humanist Journey," *Free Inquiry*, Spring 2000, 29–38. In this retelling of past experiences as an advocate for atheist causes, Kurtz draws attention to George D. Smith's contributions to *Free Inquiry*.[49]

- On 6–8 July 2001 the editors of *Free Inquiry* sponsored a conference entitled "Mormon Origins in Ingersoll Land." Tom Flynn, founder and director of the Robert Green Ingersoll Birthplace Museum, and now chief editor of *Free Inquiry*, gave an introductory address entitled

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47. Excluded from this publication was Brent Metcalfe's talk.

48. This essay is available online at http://www.secularhumanism.org/index.php?section=library&page=thomas_20_1.

49. See http://www.secularhumanism.org/library/fi/kurtz_20_2.html.

"A New Religion under History's Microscope." This was followed by a talk by George D. Smith entitled "The Mormons: Pathology, Prognosis, and Why They are Going to Eat Our Lunch." Clay Chandler then opined on the topic "Scrying for the Lord: Magic, Mysticism, and the Origins of the Book of Mormon," followed by Robert M. Price's "Nephites and Neophytes: The Book of Mormon as a 'New' New Testament." Dr. Price's address was subsequently published under the title "Prophecy and Palimpsest," *Dialogue* 36/4 (2002): 67–82, and then in a revised version this essay was published by Signature Books under the title "Joseph Smith: Inspired Author of the Book of Mormon," in Vogel and Metcalfe, *American Apocrypha*, 321–66.[50] Clay L. Chandler's address was published in *Dialogue* 36/4 (2002): 43–78.

- George D. Smith, "Mormon Polygamy: We Call It Celestial Marriage," *Free Inquiry*, April/May 2008, 44–46. This is a much less polished version of his introduction to his book *Nauvoo Polygamy: ". . . but we called it celestial marriage"* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2008). For a thorough, devastating critique of

50. There seems to be something approaching a symbiotic relationship between Dr. Price and the editors at Signature Books. In addition to essays in anthologies critical of the Book of Mormon, Signature Books has published Price's *The Pre-Nicene New Testament: Fifty-four Formative Texts* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2006). For a review of this volume, see Thomas A. Wayment, "Maverick Scholarship and the Apocrypha," *FARMS Review* 19/2 )2007): 209–14. In 2012, Signature Books published Price's *The Amazing Colossal Apostle: The Search for the Historical Paul*. Unlike his opinion on Jesus of Nazareth, Price grants there was a Paul, only that he was not the author of any of the letters in the New Testament. They were, he claims, all written by others attempting to use Paul's name to advance various competing opinions. In the Painter interview, Price explained that his opinions concerning Paul, though not original since he borrowed them from some obscure nineteenth-century Dutch writers, are also, to say the least, highly controversial. From my perspective, Price's opinions on Paul are much like his opinions on Jesus—on the extreme fringe of scholarly opinions even for those who share much of his secular religious ideology.

this book, see Gregory L. Smith, "George D. Smith's *Nauvoo Polygamy*," *FARMS Review* 20/2 (2008): 39–123; and for a whimsical and yet insightful review, see Robert B. White, "A Review of the Dust Jacket and the First Two Pages," *FARMS Review* 20/2 (2008): 125–29. For my comments on the publication of *Nauvoo Polygamy*, see "Debating Evangelicals," *FARMS Review* 20/2 (2008): xlvi–xlviii.

- Paul Kurtz, "Polygamy in the Name of God," *Free Inquiry*, February/March 2009, 58–60, in which he comments on George D. Smith's *Nauvoo Polygamy*.

### Religion as a Bogeyman, or . . .

The essays in *Free Inquiry* seem to me to expose a flaw in atheist hostility to *religion*. What those committed to "free inquiry" call "religion" is what they see as the absurd, bizarre, "magical" beliefs and practices of those with whom they disagree. They fail to see that their own community-grounding, meaning-granting belief system, or ultimate concern, constitutes their struggle to meet their own emotional or intellectual needs. Put bluntly, militant atheism is a secular religion at war with both the moral discipline and consolation provided by faith in God. And this atheist self-help religious industry can and must be understood, from a Christian perspective, as an element in the desperate darkness of this world. There is precedent for this assessment. Until rather recently, except in America, this was the way the word *religion* was understood. As recently as the end of World War II, Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–1945) was calling for a religionless (but not, of course, an atheist) Christianity, and Karl Barth (1886–1968) was busy describing religion as the darkness of a fallen world.

From my perspective, what is promoted in *Free Inquiry* under the label "secular humanism" is a religion replete with its

own teachers and preachers, its own assortment of authoritative scriptures and creeds,[51] and even, it turns out, an odd pilgrimage site. Tom Flynn created for the Council of Secular Humanists a so-called Freethought Trail in the Finger Lakes area of New York, as well as a museum, to venerate the memory of Robert Ingersoll, an exemplary atheist hero. The emotional needs of adherents attached to this version of a purely secular religion would seem to need some sustenance. Conferences are held to provide nourishment. However, for several reasons, Kurtz very passionately led secular humanists to strongly object to being seen as religious.

One reason for not wanting to be known as a religion is that, in the United States, if secular humanism is seen as a religion, then it could face big trouble in the courts because of the First Amendment. One can understand Kurtz's concern over this matter. But otherwise, efforts to shed the religion label seem to me to be a bit callow, given the fact that secular humanists have not abandoned the idea that there is an atheist community and in this sense even a kind of church or assemblage of peoples.

## Modern Militant Public Atheism and the Faith of the Saints

Can a book with the title *On the Barricades: Religion and Free Inquiry in Conflict* be seen as mildly Epicurean? It seems it cannot. Instead, those engaged in "free inquiry," with their ideological swords in hand, are pictured as there on the barricades ready to fight and die for their religious ideal— liberation from the religion of false faith in God.

Leo Strauss once pointed out that "Epicureanism is so radically mercenary that it conceives of its theoretical doctrines

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51.   Kurtz is fond of manifestos. See, for example, his "Humanist Manifesto 2000: A Call for a Planetary Humanism," *Free Inquiry*, Fall 1999, 4–20, eventually followed by "The Promise of Manifesto 2000," *Free Inquiry*, Winter 1999/2000), 5. And for some additional details, see Midgley, "Signature Books Saga," 371–72.

as a means of liberating the mind from the terrors of religious fear, of the fear of death, and of natural necessity."[52] Again, according to Strauss,

> The modern manifestation of unbelief is indeed no longer Epicurean. It is no longer cautious or retiring, not to say cowardly, but bold and active. Whereas Epicureanism fights the religious 'delusion' because it is a delusion; regardless of whether religion is terrible or comforting, qua delusion it makes men oblivious of the real goods, of the enjoyment of the real goods, and thus seduces them into being cheated of the real 'this-worldly' goods by their spiritual or temporal rulers who live from that delusion.[53]

Strauss was not himself a believer, but he was also not a village atheist. He saw that no theoretical account of the whole of reality had rendered faith in God impossible, and he also had a high regard for the social utility of faith in God. His was not entirely unlike the stance taken by Alexis de Tocqueville in his *Democracy in America*.[54] Tocqueville, roughly a contemporary of Karl Marx, seems in his youth to have lost his Roman Catholic faith. But this did not please him; he seems to have deeply regretted his inability to believe. Be that as it may, Tocqueville set out arguments for the utility of faith in God and in immortality as the necessary ground for the virtues necessary for a civilized society. Of course, from the perspective of those with genuine faith in God, the notion that its utility is its only truth is blasphemy. But the more sober, thoughtful doubters have sometimes made common cause with the faithful in

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52. Leo Strauss, "Preface to the English Translation," *Spinoza's Critique of Religion* (New York: Schocken Books, 1965), 29. This famous "Preface" has been published in collections of the essays of Strauss.

53. Strauss, "Preface," 29.

54. See Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Debra Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

struggling to hold back the inevitable moral collapse that militant public atheism offers to "liberated" childish adults when they begin to realize that, given their new religion, it is either now or never with pleasure—or that, if there is no God, despite what Kurtz and Company claim, everything is permitted.

What militant atheists see as the religious delusion is ultimately rejected not because it is terrible but because it is comforting—that is, it actually has an emotional and social utility. This can be seen in several essays in this issue of *Free Inquiry*. All comforting delusions, it is implied, must be jettisoned. What is presumably now necessary, from this perspective, is the willingness to face the ultimate terrors of this world without any consolation other than a strong feeling that those others are deluded.

Secular criticisms of the faith of the Saints are not new. Even prior to the rash of sectarian complaints, Joseph Smith faced criticisms essentially resting on at least an Enlightenment fear of superstition, if not entirely or coherently on a dogmatic atheism. Paul Pry and Obediah Dogberry are thus the first in a long line of secular critics of the faith of the Saints.

To this point, none of these criticisms seem to have risen all that far from the launching pad. This is not, of course, to say that what Paul called *atheos*—being "without God in the world"—is not common when people see no necessity for God since they have the welfare state to support themselves, electronic toys to entertain themselves, or drugs to pleasure themselves. All of these, and many more similar things, are commonly worshipped. Idolatry has not disappeared, even among militant atheists. The reason is that there are many whose "hearts are upon their treasures; wherefore, their treasure is their god" (2 Nephi 9:30).

There is another wonderful passage in our scriptures that describes *atheos*. In the preface to the Doctrine and Covenants, we learn that there are those who "seek not the Lord to establish

his righteousness, but every man walketh in his own way, and after the image of his own god, whose image is in the likeness of the world, and whose substance is that of an idol" (D&C 1:16).

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# Book Review

*Louis C. Midgley*

*Robert M. Price.* Latter-day Scripture: Studies in the Book of Mormon. *Self-published e-book, 2011 (http://www.eBookIt. com). 78 pp., no index, no pagination. $10.95.*

*Latter-day Scripture* is a potpourri of nine essays, eight of which are, as the subtitle of the introduction indicates, "*critical* studies in the Book of Mormon" (p. 1, emphasis added).[1] Price's title for his e-book, his promotional blurb,[2] and his introduction constitute what is sometimes called *paratext*, ancillary textual matter that an author or publisher can use to manage the way a book will be read by its intended audience. Price's introduction, "The Golden Bible *of* Joseph Smith" (p. 1, emphasis added), seems to be an effort to coach his potential readers on how to understand his endeavors. He reassures his fellow atheists, "I am not a Mormon. I am a Religious Humanist" (p. 1).

Price further assures his atheist audience that he follows Nietzsche in believing that "God is dead" (p. 1). He cobbles together atheist platitudes (pp. 1–3) and claims that "even if there were a God, his would be but one more opinion, though theoretically we might be in danger, as less powerful beings, if we did not hold it, or pretend to" (p. 1). He admits that atheists face

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1. Beginning with the introduction, I have provided page numbers.

2. See http://www.ebookit.com/books/0000000288/Latter-day-Scripture. html. See also http://www.amazon.com/Latter-day-Scripture-ebook/dp/ B004TSCLSI/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1325529941&sr=8-1.

an abyss because the "human ability to know is so limited that we can never, by ourselves, know that there is nothing to know" (p. 1). The only meaning in a "terrifying universe, indifferent to our needs, indeed, to our very existence" (p. 4), is that which human beings fashion or imagine for themselves. He also believes, as "a Nietzschean," that "the Universe is devoid of intrinsic and objective rules of right and wrong" (p. 2), but for him "this godlessness is no bleak vision" (p. 1). Why? Because "it is up to us [humans] to write the inscription of meaning onto the blank sheet of the world" (pp. 1–2).

While conceding that religion is "very often . . . noble and edifying," Price insists "that both New Testament Christianity and Book of Mormon Christianity are human creations from page one" (p. 3). It follows from this credo that "both are creations of the boundless and glorious human imagination. And as a Humanist," he adds, "I cannot but stand amazed at the accomplishment of Joseph Smith, a man who willed a fictive universe into being" (p. 3). Price reads the Book of Mormon as imaginative fiction fashioned by Joseph Smith. After all, "virtually all critical scholars agree that Joseph Smith did not discover the Book of Mormon but rather created it" (p. 12). Of course, the word *critical* begs the question, turning the claim into an empty tautology. There is little that is really new in Price's amphigory since he merely scrapes together the work of hypercritical biblical scholarship and lashes it to the slogan of his dogmatic atheism.

When Price addresses his cultural Mormon audience in his introductory essay, he announces that he will not read the Book of Mormon as an authentic ancient text *recovered* by Joseph Smith, but rather as "a genuine scripture *authored* by Joseph Smith" (p. 1, emphasis added). This approach, he claims, overcomes the "stalemated" and "rancorous debate over the date and authorship of the Book of Mormon" (p. 1). Reading the Book of Mormon as a kind of prophetic fiction will make "pos-

sible a rebirth of Book of Mormon scholarship" (p. 1), with his miscellany of essays opening "a flood of new light . . . on the sacred American text" (p. 1). Price promises to uncover "new levels of meaning in the Book of Mormon, as well as hitherto-unguessed literary and theological acumen on the part of its author, Joseph Smith. Such an approach," he insists, "vindicates his role as a genuine prophetic writer, not merely as an amateur archeologist stumbling on a buried book in upper New York State" (p. 1). It also "actually turns out to elevate the importance of [Mormonism's] founder and [its] scripture, not the least in the eyes of non-Mormons" (p. 1).

In a promotional blurb, Price indicates that he "lays out a case for considering the Mormon scripture as . . . merely another case of 'pseudepigraphy,' the genre of fictive 'as if' authorship common to the Bible as well."[3] Since there is no God, the Book of Mormon cannot be an authentic history. It must be, instead, a pastiche of New Testament texts, which were themselves a rehashing of Old Testament texts and hence are not genuine history. This is spelled out in chapter 2, "Prophecy and Palimpsest."[4] Seeing the Book of Mormon this way, Price claims, "will bring Mormon and non-Mormon Americans closer together by revealing their common scriptural heritage" (p. 1).

Price goes on to explain that the Book of Mormon is the American story of the conquering of a wilderness, coupled with a war against evil. He ends his introduction by claiming that "the Mormon paradigm makes sense of our world crisis like nothing else does. In the present moment, we are all Mormons" (p. 5). What could this possibly mean? "Christian civilization, already perversely despised, is the target of obliteration" by Muslims/Lamanites; and the Americans/Nephites "must not

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3. See http://www.ebookit.com/books/0000000288/Latter-day-Scripture. html or the promotional blurb on Amazon. Subsequent references to this blub will not be cited.

4. A version of chapter 2 was originally published in *Dialogue* 35/3 (Fall 2002): 67–82.

wait till it is too late to steel our will and resist the onslaught, perhaps nuclear, of the Lamanites" (p. 5).

Price boasts that his way of reading the Book of Mormon is "championed by liberal Mormons and sympathetic non-Mormons" (p. 1), none of whom are identified in his introduction. But elsewhere he opines that these "liberal Mormons and fellow travelers tend to recognize Joseph Smith as the author of the book" (p. 21). As an example, he refers his readers to an effort to show that Joseph Smith cribbed the Book of Mormon from Ethan Smith's *View of the Hebrews* (p. 21).[5] In addition, one of his close cultural Mormon comrades is indirectly identified in his promotional blurb, where it is revealed that this self-published e-book is "a series of papers presented mainly at the Book of Mormon Round Table."[6] This was a series of conferences that Mark Thomas held in Provo in the summers of 2003 to 2006. The purpose of this aborted endeavor was to find non-LDS authors who would argue that the Book of Mormon is merely a nineteenth-century imaginative reworking of biblical language and not an authentic ancient history.[7] It seems that Price saw this as an opportunity to opine about the Book of Mormon from his strictly "Religious Humanist" perspective. Other than Price's self-published e-book, nothing seems to have come from Thomas's project.

In his final chapter, "Morton Smith as Joseph Smith," Price argues that Morton Smith's controversial "discovery" of a fragment of a "Secret Gospel of Mark,"[8] though a hoax, makes

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5. Price cites the second (1991) printing of David Persuitte's *Joseph Smith and the Origins of the Book of Mormon* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1985), not the revised edition published in 2000. See Tom Flynn's "Powerful Advocacy, Concise Biography," *Free Inquiry*, Fall 2001, for a glowing review of the revised edition of Persuitte's book.

6. See http://www.ebookit.com/books/0000000288/Latter-day-Scripture. html or the promotional blurb on Amazon.

7. See Mark D. Thomas, "Was Joseph Smith for Real? How He Lied, Perhaps Even to Himself," *Free Inquiry*, Fall 2001.

8. Morton Smith, *The Secret Gospel* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973).

forger Morton Smith "one of the writers of scripture" (p. 76). Price claims that Morton Smith once told him that the spurious New Age gospels (and apparently by implication the forged Markan fragment too) were authentic, "no matter who wrote them or when," since they "embodied someone's faith" (p. 74). Of course, this all implies that the Book of Mormon is likewise merely a human and altogether fictive production that, to Price's way of thinking, nevertheless passes off as authentic scripture.

When Price actually confronts Latter-day Saint scholarship on the Book of Mormon, he lashes out with sarcasm and bald assertions. The sole indication that he is familiar with this scholarship turns up in chapter 7 of his book. He is aware of several essays by John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks[9] showing the presence of subtle, authentic ancient rituals found in the first chapters of Mosiah. Though he grants, for example, that Ricks has set out in great detail ancient coronation rituals and "a fascinating series of correspondences with Benjamin's speech" (p. 69), Price merely opines that "if there is a Kingship Renewal rite behind this story, it has been completely distorted, concealing the very different import of the hypothesized original" (p. 70). This is an assertion and not a demonstration. "Mosiah chapters 1–5," according to Price, "are analogous to a ransom note in an old gangster movie. Just as the kidnapper's note appears to have been pasted together from isolated bits of typed pages and magazine ads, the Book of Mormon is a pasting together, a 'sampling,' of biblical texts split and spliced in new combinations" (p. 62). This is sarcasm and not an argument (for other examples, see pp. 37, 59, 64). It seems that the problem with the effort to read the Book of Mormon

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9. Price cites (p. 70 nn. 3–4) the following essays from John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks, eds., *King Benjamin's Speech: "That Ye May Learn Wisdom"* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998): Welch, "Benjamin's Speech: A Masterful Oration," 55–87; Welch, "Parallelism and Chiasmus in Benjamin's Speech," 315–410; and Ricks, "Kingship, Coronation, and Covenant in Mosiah 1–6," 233–75.

as Joseph Smith's theological speculation is that the non-LDS scholars that Mark Thomas hoped would open a flood of new light on the Book of Mormon fizzled.

Price claims to have provided his readers with a new appreciation of Joseph Smith's supposed imaginative rewriting of the Bible in the Book of Mormon. However, reading the Book of Mormon as a hocus-pocus hodgepodge has not yielded a new and presumably positive assessment of the primary ground for the faith of Latter-day Saints. The Saints should easily see through Price's "religious" secular humanist ruse.

*Louis Midgley (PhD, Brown University) is an emeritus professor of political science at Brigham Young University. Dr. Midgley has had an abiding interest in the history of Christian theology. He wrote his doctoral dissertation on Paul Tillich, the then-famous German-American Protestant theologian and political theorist/ religious-socialist activist. Midgley also studied the writings of other influential Protestant theologians such as Karl Barth. Eventually he took an interest in contemporary Roman Catholic theology, and was also impacted by the work of important Jewish philosophers, including especially Leo Strauss and his disciples.*

# Mormonism and Wikipedia: The Church History That "Anyone Can Edit"

*Roger Nicholson*

*Abstract: The ability to quickly and easily access literature critical of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has been made significantly easier through the advent of the Internet. One of the primary sites that dominates search engine results is Wikipedia, an online encyclopedia that "anyone can edit." Wikipedia contains a large number of articles related to Mormonism that are edited by believers, critics, and neutral parties. The reliability of information regarding the Church and its history is subject to the biases of the editors who choose to modify those articles. Even if a wiki article is thoroughly sourced, editors sometimes employ source material in a manner that supports their bias. This essay explores the dynamics behind the creation of Wikipedia articles about the Church, the role that believers and critics play in that process, and the reliability of the information produced in the resulting wiki articles.*

> The fact that this [Wikipedia] article has been stable for months suggests that other Mormons have found the evidence unassailable.[1]

### Access to "Anti-Mormon" Literature: Then and Now

Growing up as a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints during the '60s and '70s, I was aware that there was a body of work called "anti-Mormon literature." This

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1. Comment posted by Wikipedia editor "John Foxe," responding to an LDS editor on the "Three Witnesses" Wikipedia talk page, 27 January 2009.

was understood to be a dangerous collection of literature that was capable of destroying testimonies. Encounters I had with such literature as a young person were usually limited to a few anti-Mormon pamphlets that one might come upon outside a church-sponsored event. It wasn't easy to become exposed to critical arguments: the literature produced by critics simply wasn't readily accessible to a young person. Thus I was unaware of Joseph Smith's involvement in plural marriage until I encountered at the BYU Bookstore in 1978 a copy of Fawn Brodie's *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith*.

Brodie was my first encounter with a truly substantial work that was critical of the truth claims of the Church. As I browsed through the book, I found myself integrating some of this new information and mentally tagging it with some degree of skepticism. But that was the late 1970s, and discovering even those few bits of information required some effort. Now our youth have access to a quantity of information that is simply astounding. Information on any LDS Church–related topic is available not only on our nearest networked computer but also on our cell phones. One evening when my family had the missionaries over to dinner, I asked them what new investigators did after they were taught the Joseph Smith story. I was told that they went home and googled "Joseph Smith." By the time the elders returned for their next visit, their investigator had perused a variety of sources containing information about Joseph Smith. Some of this information came from Church-sponsored websites. Some of it, however, came from countercult ministries determined to pull the Church from its foundations. The previously shadowy and mysterious body of anti-Mormon work is now available at the touch of a button, and it is as easy to access as the latest YouTube video.

Internet search engines, such as Google, Yahoo, and Bing, place thousands of references at our fingertips. When one googles "Joseph Smith," the search returns approximately

twenty million results in one-tenth of a second. Regardless of how many search results appear, the investigator will usually examine only the ten results that appear on the first page. Therefore, it is the goal of those who wish to spread their message to cause links to their website to appear on the first page of Google results. The closer to the top the information appears, the better the chance that someone will look at their website. For this reason, the Church now expends considerable effort to make sure that positive information appears high in search engine results. A Catholic reporter recently noted: "When you search on Google for 'Old Testament,' the first result is from Wikipedia but the second is from LDS.org. Likewise, if you search for 'church,' LDS.org appears fourth, ahead of any Catholic entry."[2]

Among all of the search results that may appear, there is one website in particular that dominates. This site will typically appear in the number-one position on a Google search of practically any subject. The site is called "Wikipedia."

## What Is Wikipedia?

Wikipedia is a free online encyclopedia that "anyone can edit."[3] Quite literally, anyone who has a connection to the Internet may choose to create an article for Wikipedia or to edit any article in its vast collection of thousands of articles. So powerful is the lure of editing this popular encyclopedia that it has the ability to "induce people to work for free."[4] Wikipedia addresses just about any subject imaginable, from

2. Brandon Vogt, "What Mormons can teach Catholics about online evangelization," *OSV Newsweekly*, 2 October 2011, http://www.osv.com/tabid/7621/itemid/8447/What-Mormons-can-teach-Catholics-about-online-evan.aspx.

3. Quote found on the Wikipedia main page, at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page.

4. Seth Finkelstein, "I'm on Wikipedia, get me out of here," *The Guardian*, 27 September 2006, http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2006/sep/28/wikipedia.web20.

the mundane and obscure to the topical and controversial. In a process known as "collaborative editing," self-selected editors from all over the world voluntarily work together to shape and craft an article until it is acceptable to the majority.

Popular thinking dictates that if enough different people collaborate together on an article, it will eventually approach a balanced and neutral state. According to Wikipedia,

> The Wikipedia model allows anyone to edit, and relies on a large number of well-intentioned editors to overcome issues raised by a smaller number of problematic editors. It is inherent in Wikipedia's editing model that misleading information can be added, but over time quality is anticipated to improve in a form of group learning as editors reach consensus, so that substandard edits will very rapidly be removed.[5]

In general, this philosophy tends to be effective as regards many Wikipedia articles. Errors that bring an article out of balance tend to be corrected given sufficient time, and the article progresses toward a stable and "neutral" state. However, articles dealing with highly controversial subjects, such as Joseph Smith's first vision or polygamy, do not tend to stabilize themselves over time. These types of articles become magnets for editors who have an agenda to push. Wikipedia becomes an attractive way for such editors to "publish" their opinions with immediate worldwide visibility and considerable credibility.

**Wikipedia Culture**

Wikipedia has developed its own online culture and language. It maintains its own complex set of rules and even has its own loose, informal judiciary system. When one chooses

5. "Reliability of Wikipedia," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reliability_of_Wikipedia.

to edit Wikipedia, one immediately becomes immersed in its unique culture. Acronyms and rule citations are thrown about in general discussions. Expressions of kindness are called "wikilove." An editor who goes on hiatus is said to have taken a "wikiholiday." An editor that attempts to bias an article has added "POV" (point of view). In the eyes of the Wikipedia community, editors who add their own POV to an article are often viewed in the same manner as people who paint their houses bright orange in a community of tans and browns.

Wikipedia editors are required to treat one another in a civil manner and to "assume good faith" on the part of all other editors. This presents a challenge when dealing with editors with whom one disagrees. Criticism of the structure and content of an article is encouraged, while criticism of another editor's editing tactics is not. The wiki editor is required to come to the negotiation without allowing the conversation to devolve into insults and personal attacks. It becomes a particular challenge to "assume good faith" when an editor is seen to be blatantly working with an agenda to spin an article in a particular direction.

## Are Wikipedia Articles "Neutral"?

The goal of every Wikipedia article is to achieve a state of "neutral point of view" (NPOV). Neutrality, however, tends to reside in the eyes of the beholder. One editor's view of "neutrality" may appear to be blatant bias in the eyes of another editor. Wikipedia's policy on article neutrality states:

> Editing from a neutral point of view (NPOV) means representing fairly, proportionately, and as far as possible without bias, all significant views that have been published by reliable sources. All Wikipedia articles and other encyclopedic content must be written from a neutral point of view. NPOV is a fundamental principle of Wikipedia and of other Wikimedia projects.

This policy is non-negotiable and all editors and articles must follow it.[6]

Controversial subjects present a challenge to Wikipedia's goal of NPOV. When believers and critics come together to craft an article about Joseph Smith, Jr., who is to ultimately define what is "neutral"? Is neutrality even possible about such a topic unless one is utterly apathetic about it (and thus unlikely to spend much time or energy in writing about it)? Editors with polarized points of view sometimes attempt to impose their way of seeing things on an article by making controversial changes without consulting other editors first. The extended arguments that can take place over the wording in these articles can turn into what is known in Wikipedia as an "edit war." A Wikipedia editor who wishes to deal with controversial subjects must have sufficient time and determination to persist in order to outlast the opponents. One of Wikipedia's academic editors notes:

> In a recent (and excellent) article in the *Journal of American History* (June 2006), "Can History Be Open Source? Wikipedia and the Future of the Past," the author, Roy Rosenzweig, notes how "academics and other highly-qualified people" who were initially excited by the project were "slowly worn down and driven away by having to deal with difficult people." I refuse to be worn down and driven away.[7]

### The Church of Jesus Christ and Wikipedia

When one googles "Joseph Smith," the first site to appear is the Church's josephsmith.net website. The next result

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6. "Wikipedia: Neutral point of view," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:NPOV.

7. Comment by Wikipedia editor "John Foxe," posted to the Wikipedia article "Bob Jones University" talk page on 7 July 2006, at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Bob_Jones_University/Archive_0003#Bibb_Graves.

is Wikipedia's "Joseph Smith" article. However, if one googles "Martin Harris," "Oliver Cowdery," "golden plates," or "first vision," the number-one result is the Wikipedia article about each topic. Thus whatever Wikipedia has to say about these subjects becomes the first thing that anyone is likely to read. This quality makes Wikipedia extremely attractive to both believers and critics who wish to promote their particular point of view in a forum that is highly likely to be taken seriously. How can an unpublished amateur guarantee that whatever he or she writes will immediately be visible to thousands of people all over the world? It is as simple as adding one's work to the Wikipedia article on the subject.

Unfortunately, such open access also encourages vandals to modify controversial articles. Anonymous editors posting from IP addresses regularly attack articles such as "Joseph Smith" in order to add ridiculous or profane modifications. Such vandalism is usually quickly spotted and corrected by other editors who monitor the article on their own Wikipedia "watch list." Vandalism occurs with depressing regularity on articles such as "Book of Mormon," "Mormon," or "Joseph Smith," with the zealous vandal often modifying the article to declare that Latter-day Saints are practitioners of a false religion or that Joseph Smith was a "convicted con-man."[8]

8. For example, on 12 October 2011 an anonymous editor modified the Wikipedia article "Early life of Joseph Smith" to read "Joseph Smith, Jr. was a convicted con-man and the founder and principal prophet of the Latter Day Saint movement." The vandalism was reverted by editor "John Foxe" sixty-nine minutes later. On 7 September 2001 an anonymous editor modified the introductory line of the Wikipedia article "Book of Mormon" to read "The Book of Mormon is a fictional sacred text." The vandalism was reverted within sixty seconds. On 3 April 2011 an anonymous editor added "cocaine distributor" to Joseph Smith's list of accomplishments in the "Joseph Smith" article. This vandalism was reverted within two minutes. Generally, vandalism such as this on high profile articles is quickly taken care of by regular editors who keep articles of interest on their Wikipedia "watch list."

**Wikipedia as a Credible Source**

Given the diversity of the types of editors who may choose to work on an article, how credible might a Wikipedia article be? One never knows if an article is being edited by a scholarly expert on the subject or by a young teenager in high school. In a humorous self-referential article, Wikipedia provides one definition of itself as "a group of 12-year-olds debating the alleged 'notability' of some ancient dude named Frank Sinatra."[9] This characterization is not as far from the truth as one might think. The inclusion of a subject in Wikipedia depends upon whether or not that subject is considered "notable." And who defines the standard of notability? The very editors who come together to create the article in the first place.

However, for noncontroversial subjects, Wikipedia can be surprisingly accurate and complete. Wikipedia is an extremely valuable resource for looking up references on a wide variety of subjects. Its uncontrolled nature, however, has caused it to be banned as a reference work by many academic institutions.

> "If you look at the Encyclopedia Britannica, you can be fairly sure that somebody writing an article is an acknowledged expert in that field, and you can take his or her words as being at least a scholarly point of view," said Michael Gorman, president of the American Library Association and dean of library services at Cal State Fresno. "The problem with an online encyclopedia created by anybody is that you have no idea whether you are reading an established person in the field or somebody with an ax to grind. For all I know, Wikipedia may contain articles of great scholarly value. The question is, how do you choose between those and the other kind?"[10]

9.  "Wikipedia:Wikispeak," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiSpeak.

10.  Michael Gorman, quoted by Carolyn Said in "The online credibility gap: Wikipedia article's false claim on JFK killing stirs debate," *SFGate*, 6 December

## Collaborative Editing between Believers and Critics

For subjects related to The Church of Jesus Christ, Wikipedia provides a unique environment in which believers, critics, and "impartial" editors must collaborate with the goal of producing a written article. The discussions involved in these negotiations are as spirited and engaging as any found on an online message board in which critics and believers interact. Negotiation over the construction of a single sentence, or even the use of a single word, can take days to resolve. Edit wars can last for months, depending upon the tenacity of the individual editors involved. Often a consensus can be reached if all of the editors involved are willing to compromise. Sometimes, however, the "winner" of such battles is the editor who has the persistence to outlast the others.

Staking out the middle ground on subjects related to Mormonism is a particularly daunting challenge. Joseph Fielding Smith once stated that there is no middle ground between "prophet" and "fraud."[11] A Wikipedia article about Joseph Smith can make neither of these claims as a definitive fact, although that does not stop editors from attempting to do so. This leads to a dance of sorts between believers and critics in an effort to insert as many citations and facts as possible to support their opinion. The overall tone of the article ultimately takes on the attitude of the sum of its references and the manner in which citations are arranged. Wikipedia rules state that "Wikipedia articles should be based on reliable, published secondary sources and, to a lesser extent, on tertiary sources."[12]

2005, at http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2005/12/06/WIKI.TMP&ao=all.

11. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954), 1:188. "Mormonism, as it is called, must *stand or fall on the story of Joseph Smith*. He was either a prophet of God, divinely called, properly appointed and commissioned, or he was one of the biggest frauds this world has ever seen. *There is no middle ground*" (emphasis in original).

12. Statement from Wikipedia policy "No Original Research," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:No_original_research.

This does not, however, prevent determined editors from assembling statements from primary sources and arranging them to achieve the desired tone. Thus the Wikipedia article "Golden Plates" reads like a choppy collection of disjointed facts arranged to emphasize contradictions between primary and secondary witness accounts.

One might assume that believers could simply add supporting references from LDS scholars to balance out critical ones. Unfortunately, LDS scholars are often reclassified by critical editors as "LDS apologists." Sources such as any LDS Church-sponsored publication are often classified as "biased" and unacceptable by Wikipedia standards. Even when LDS sources are used, critics will sometimes "cherry pick" citations that can be used to cast the Church in an unflattering light. Richard L. Bushman, whose own work *Rough Stone Rolling* is heavily referenced in Wikipedia's "Joseph Smith" article, complains that the article "picks its way along from one little fact to another little fact, all of them ending up making Joseph Smith an ignoble character of some kind."[13]

Despite Wikipedia's standing rule that all articles should display a neutral point of view, those who are willing to devote a substantial amount of their time to editing and maintaining Wikipedia articles will persist in having their particular point of view dominate the articles in which they are interested. This is demonstrated on the Wikipedia article "Three Witnesses," which clearly reflects the opinion of the dominant editor, an evangelical Christian professor of history at Bob Jones University. The article is structured and referenced in such a way as to discredit the witnesses. Most of the numerous positive references to the witnesses' experiences are minimized or ignored, while the opinions of critics are given precedence. This

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13.  Richard L. Bushman, quoted in Michael DeGroote, "Wiki Wars: In battle to define beliefs, Mormons and foes wage battle on Wikipedia," *Deseret News*, 30 January 2011.

is ostensibly done to reflect "majority opinion"—the thinking being that since the majority of humanity is not Latter-day Saint, any article should give precedence to the opinion of that majority. In the case of the Three Witnesses of the Book of Mormon, however, the majority is not even aware of the pertinent events. Thus the article simply reflects the opinion of an evangelical Christian regarding the witnesses to the Book of Mormon, resulting in an article that is predictably negative in tone and content.

**The Wikipedia "Talk Page"**

The conversations on the Wikipedia "talk page" on any given article can be just as spirited as those found on any Mormonism-related message board—critics and believers argue the specific points about which they disagree. What is unique about the Wikipedia environment, however, is that the critic and believer must ultimately reach some sort of compromise and then place the resulting language in an article.

The talk page environment, coupled with anonymity, sometimes emboldens some editors to verbally abuse LDS believers. Thus we see comments such as this one from an editor in New York who posted under the screen name "Duke53": "You are even simpler than I imagined; as far as 'guffaws' go, look in the mirror . . . your lds church is more often the subject of ridicule here, by many [Wikipedia] editors."[14] "Duke53" rarely contributed substantive input to the LDS Wikipedia articles on which he participated, choosing instead to taunt LDS editors by maintaining a picture of LDS temple garments on the Wikipedia "Underwear" page as well as on his own Wikipedia home page. "Duke53" would wait for the inevitable removal of the image by an anonymous editor, after which he would triumphantly

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14. Comment posted by editor "Duke53" to editor "Storm Rider" on "Joseph Smith" Wikipedia talk page on 15 January 2010, http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Talk:Joseph_Smith&diff=prev&oldid=338030693.

replace it with a stern message to the presumed LDS editor stating that he or she would not be allowed to "censor" Wikipedia. "Duke53" also once uploaded an image of a temple recommend, claiming that it was not under copyright. After five years of abusive verbal harassment of LDS editors, "Duke53" was finally permanently banned from editing Wikipedia.

Such bias even occasionally extends to Wikipedia administrators. Consider this comment from Wikipedia administrator JzG "Guy": "I'd love to ban all Mormons from editing those articles due to bias, but that's never going to happen, so in this case we just have to let the opposing parties work it out between themselves."[15] This expression of blatant bias did not go unchallenged, however. Another editor responded, "I wonder how far your logic goes. Would you ban all scientists from editing articles about science? Would you ban all doctors from editing articles about health? Would you ban all Native Americans from editing articles about their tribes? I hope you see where this logic leads."[16]

### "Good Faith" Editing

Wikipedia requires that editors "assume good faith" when interacting with one another. Editor "John Foxe," commenting to another editor on the article "Reformed Egyptian," insisted:

> I haven't called you a liar, and I won't. Nevertheless, your position is an attempt to deceive the reader. Find a non-Mormon who will agree that relevant material about Martin Harris's extreme superstitiousness should be excluded from an article in which the reader

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15. Comment posted by Wikipedia administrator "JzG" to his user page on 11 June 2007, http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=User_talk:JzG/Archives/August_2007&diff=prev&oldid=137452565.

16. Response to "JzG" by editor "Friendly Neighbour" on 11 June 2007, http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=User_talk:JzG/Archives/August_2007&diff=prev&oldid=137466315.

has to decide between two completely different accounts of an interview. That's a simple matter of good faith.[17]

During a months-long edit war on the Wikipedia article "First Vision," Foxe responded to one LDS editor, "Frankly, Les, every time you start citing Wikipedia rules, I tune them out as Mormon smokescreen."[18] A Latter-day Saint editor objected to a modification made to the article "Three Witnesses" by Foxe, stating:

> I think you have a problem recognizing when you are interjecting what you view as important or "true" versus just reporting facts. . . . Any attempt on your part to belittle the beliefs of others is rejected in toto. Furthermore, my personal beliefs are irrelevant here on Wikipedia just as yours. To attempt to make this a soap box for one's beliefs is to distort, twist, and pervert the role of Wikipedia.

To which Foxe responded, "I often have sympathy for the practitioners of false religions, but unlike you, I have no 'deep respect' for the religions themselves. That's because they're false. They're lies. 'What communion hath light with darkness?'"[19]

John Foxe is somewhat unique among editors of LDS Wikipedia articles. A professor of history at Bob Jones University,[20] this wiki editor takes his screen name from the

17.  Comment by Wikipedia editor "John Foxe" to editor "FyzixFighter," posted at "Reformed Egyptian" Wikipedia talk page on 2 January 2008, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Reformed_Egyptian#Harris's character.

18.  Comment posted by editor "John Foxe" to LDS editor "74s181" on "First Vision" Wikipedia talk page on 23 July 2007, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:First_Vision/Archive_6#Breaking_the_collaborative_truce.

19.  Conversation between Wikipedia editor "Storm Rider" and "John Foxe," posted at "Three Witnesses" Wikipedia talk page, 28 January 2009, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Three_Witnesses#Biographical%20Material%20on%20the%20Witnesses#Magic_world_view?.

20.  DeGroote, "Wiki Wars."

author of *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* (first published in English in 1563). He comments about his namesake, "Like all historians, a man of his own era, yet one who followed truth. He sometimes got the story wrong, but as his duty to God, he tried to get it right."[21]

Bob Jones University is a fundamentalist Christian university located in Greenville, South Carolina, that has "historically been hostile to the LDS church." Foxe became interested in LDS history while attending a summer seminar on the subject at Brigham Young University, even meeting LDS scholar Richard L. Bushman. It was at some point after this encounter that Foxe decided to edit LDS articles on Wikipedia.[22]

In his Wikipedia edits, Foxe emphasizes any aspect of Joseph Smith's life that would make him appear to be contradicting himself. Anything having to do with "treasure seeking" or "magic" is emphasized as much as possible. Any Wikipedia article mentioning Martin Harris must emphasize his visions and his joining of different churches throughout his life. The "Three Witnesses" articles must emphasize a "magic world view" and minimize any historical data that indicates that they never denied their testimonies of the Book of Mormon. Foxe's persistence is legendary among Wikipedia editors, and he can simply outlast any LDS editor who attempts to neutralize the article. One LDS editor provides a revealing summary of what it is like for LDS editors to work with John Foxe:

> LDS editor: Here's a statement that gives a good balanced summary of Smith's background.
> Everyone but Foxe: Okay.
> Foxe: It has to mention treasure-seeking.
> Everyone else: No, that's undue detail for the lede

21.   Comment by Wikipedia editor "John Foxe," posted on his own user page "User:John Foxe," at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User:John_Foxe.

22.   DeGroote, "Wiki Wars."

[lead article].

Foxe: Let's compromise by weakening the reference to Christianity and adding a statement about treasure-seeking.

Everyone else: No, that's undue detail for the lede.

Foxe: I'd be willing to throw out the sentence about Smith's background and just to have a statement about treasure-seeking.

Everyone else: [Heads explode.][23]

## No Original Research

Wikipedia articles are required to rely "mainly on reliable, published secondary sources and, to a lesser extent, on tertiary sources. All interpretive claims, analyses, or synthetic claims about primary sources must be referenced to a secondary source, rather than original analysis of the primary source material by Wikipedia editors."[24] Wikipedia is intended to summarize the work of others rather than act as a forum for creating original work. In the case of contentious articles such as "First Vision" or "Golden Plates," it is extremely tempting to take advantage of the "immediate publication" of material in order to create new interpretive material. The "no original research" rule is often ignored. This can lead to situations in which the wiki editor's own thinking is reflected in the article. Consider this example, which appears in the wiki article "First Vision" as of 18 October 2011: "However, when in October 1830 the author Peter Bauder interviewed Smith for a religious book he was writing, he said Smith was unable to recount a 'Christian experience.'"

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23. Wikipedia editor "Alanyst," comments posted on "Joseph Smith" Wikipedia talk page, 11 June 2011, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Joseph_Smith/Archive_18.

24. Statement from Wikipedia policy "No Original Research."

There are several issues with the above statement. It does correctly represent the source, which was an interview between Peter Bauder and Joseph Smith. Bauder was attempting to expose false religions, and he notes that "among these imposters there has one arisen by the name of Joseph Smith, Jr."[25] The wiki editor introduces the quotation with the word *however*, thus implying that this statement is a possible disqualifier for the validity of the first vision. Nowhere in the wiki article is it noted that Bauder was a strong critic of Joseph Smith and that Joseph may not have desired to share the experience of his vision with such an interviewer. The earliest known extant attempt by Joseph to put the vision in writing occurred two years later. In 2009, however, the LDS wiki editor added his own interpretation of this interview by drawing the conclusion that "either Smith did not view this early remission of sins or vision as a 'Christian experience,' he forgot about the experience when asked by Bauder, or Smith and Bauder somehow miscommunicated."?[26]

Not only did this blatantly violate Wikipedia's "no original research" rule, it was also an absurd interpretation. How would Joseph *not* view a remission of his sins as a "Christian experience"? Would he truly have "forgotten" about his theophany? The simplest and most obvious explanation was completely ignored: Joseph may have simply chosen not to share the experience of his vision with an obvious enemy of the church. The wiki editor eventually recognized that the original research could not remain and removed the paragraph. The unqualified statement

25. Peter Bauder, *The Kingdom and Gospel of Jesus Christ: Contrasted with That of Anti-Christ. A Brief Review of Some of the Most Interesting Circumstances, Which Have Transpired Since the Institution of the Gospel of Christ, from the Days of the Apostles* (Canajoharie, NY: A. H. Calhoun, 1834); republished in Dan Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996), 1:16–17.

26. Edit made to Wikipedia article "First Vision" by LDS editor "COgden" on 20 November 2009, at http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=First_Vision&diff=326979723&oldid=326976733.

about Joseph not recounting a "Christian experience," however, remains in the wiki article as of September 2011.

**Qualifying the Sources**

Talk page collaboration between critics and believers can lead to some rather oddly constructed prose in Wikipedia articles on topics relating to Mormonism. Thus we find the Wikipedia article "First Vision" filled with awkward qualifiers that would not normally appear in any other encyclopedia.

- *LDS member* and Columbia University Professor Richard Bushman wrote that . . .
- *LDS apologist* Milton Backman wrote that . . .
- In the opinion of *non-Mormon author* Wesley Walters, *apologists for the Mormon position* treat Smith's reference to the "whole district of country" as if . . .
- As the *sympathetic but non-Mormon* historian Jan Shipps has written . . .[27]

Yet, there is selectivity in the application of these qualifiers. Note the lack of a qualifier in the earlier reference to Peter Bauder, "when in October 1830 the *author* Peter Bauder interviewed Smith for a religious book he was writing." The prose offers no hint of whether Bauder was a believer or a critic. If Bauder were treated in the article as believing authors are treated, the sentence ought to have read "non-Mormon critic and author Peter Bauder interviewed Smith," which then would have placed his comment about Smith being "unable to recount a 'Christian experience'" in proper perspective. Instead, Bauder is simply granted the status of "author," with its implications of neutrality.

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27.   All examples listed are from the Wikipedia article "First Vision" as of 18 October 2011, emphasis added, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Vision.

### Misrepresenting LDS Sources

Wikipedia's requirement that an article be "balanced" requires the inclusion of some positive sources from faithful LDS scholars. The fact that an assertion is sourced to a Latter-day Saint reference is still no guarantee that it is accurate. During the edit war on the "First Vision" article, an assertion credited to LDS historian James B. Allen by editor John Foxe caught the attention of several LDS editors. Allen is claimed to have said that "none of the available contemporary writings about Joseph Smith in the 1830s, none of the Church publications in that decade and no contemporary journal or correspondence yet discovered mentions the story in convincing fashion."[28]

The Wikipedia article cited Allen's 1966 essay entitled "The Significance of Joseph Smith's First Vision in Mormon Thought."[29] It seemed odd that an LDS historian would claim that no reference to the story of the first vision in early writings mentioned the story "in convincing fashion," thus implying that Allen himself found none of the references convincing. However, upon examining Professor Allen's essay, we discover that his opinion was exactly the *opposite* of what was attributed to him by Wikipedia editor John Foxe. LDS editor "74s181" pointed out to him that the quotation was "inaccurate and out of context, changing the meaning" and that he was "not sure what to do with the words that were rearranged."[30] The actual James B. Allen quote reads, "The fact that none of the available contemporary writings about Joseph Smith in the 1830s, none of the publications of the Church in that decade, and no con-

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28. The edit was performed by "John Foxe" on 5 October 2007, http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=First_Vision$diff=162430597&oldid=162429711.

29. James B. Allen, "The Significance of Joseph Smith's 'First Vision' in Mormon Thought," *Dialogue* 1/3 (Autumn 1966): 30.

30. Comment by "74s181" posted on "First Vision" Wikipedia talk page on 13 October 2007, http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Talk:First_Vision&diff=prev&oldid=164187300.

temporary journal or correspondence yet discovered mentions the story of the first vision is convincing evidence that at best it received only limited circulation in those early days."[31]

Correctly noting the difference in what the word *convincing* modifies in the two versions of Allen's remark, LDS editor "Alanyst" noted that Foxe's version "suggests that the story was indeed mentioned in certain places but in such an unreliable way as to make even a Mormon historian deem them unconvincing." Always the diplomat, with a willingness to grant another editor "good faith," Alanyst indicates that he believes that "this shift in meaning by John Foxe was unintentional and in good faith; it's hard to paraphrase something and capture the exact nuance of the original quote. That said, since the original is not much larger than the paraphrase, it's better to have the full original quote."[32]

Foxe agreed to change what he had written, but not without claiming that the change was insignificant: "I apologize for what was almost certainly my transcription error. But I think if there's any change of meaning, it's trifling."[33] Thus without the intervention of two LDS editors, the assertion that an LDS historian had expressed doubt about the validity of early references to the first vision would have remained in the article. Most casual readers of the Wikipedia article would not have taken the time to check the sources to discover that Allen's words had been subtly rearranged in a way that reversed his intended meaning.

31. Allen, "Significance of Joseph Smith's First Vision," 30.

32. Comment by "Alanyst" posted on "First Vision" Wikipedia talk page on 13 October 2007, http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Talk:First_Vision&diff=next&oldid=164255019.

33. Comment by "John Foxe" posted on "First Vision" Wikipedia talk page on 13 October 2007, http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Talk:First_Vision&diff=164252531&oldid=164187300.

### "Fact" Creation in LDS Wikipedia Articles

Among all LDS Wikipedia articles, the article "First Vision" has experienced some of the most intense and long-running edit wars. The overall emphasis of the article tends toward discounting and discrediting the vision, and this becomes apparent when one examines how the sources are used. It is very easy for a Wikipedia editor to represent a mere opinion as an established "fact." Consider this statement from the Wikipedia article "First Vision": "No members of the Smith family were church members in 1820, the reported date of the first vision."[34]

Wikipedia's implication is that Joseph Smith lied about his family becoming associated with the Presbyterians in the 1820 time frame. Note that Joseph Smith's own words regarding this issue are not presented. Casual readers may simply accept this idea as "encyclopedic fact" and move on. However, Latter-day Saints familiar with Joseph Smith's history will immediately notice that this contradicts Joseph's own statement that members of his family became associated with the Presbyterians around the time of the religious excitement in 1820. How does Wikipedia support such a clear and definitive claim? The editors refer to the source used to support the assertion, D. Michael Quinn's *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, wherein "Quinn calls the Smiths 'unchurched Christians' who "possessed . . . seer stones, a dagger for drawing the required circles, as well as magic parchments to ward off thieves and communicate with good spirits to help find treasures."[35]

The editor synthesizes a conclusion that is not explicitly stated in the supporting source in order to diminish the Smith family's Christianity and emphasize "magic." The Wikipedia article neglects to mention that Lucy Mack Smith sought out

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34.    18 October 2011, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Vision.

35    D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998), 322. The source reference is present in the Wikipedia article "First Vision" as of 16 October 2011 (see n. 27 above).

baptism without wanting to be formally associated with a particular congregation sometime before her son Alvin reached his "twenty-second year," which would place the baptism prior to 11 February 1820. Lucy describes attending a sermon at the Presbyterian church and being disappointed that the sermon "did not fill the aching void within nor satisfy the craving hunger of the soul." After her baptism, Lucy relied on her Bible for spiritual support.[36]

Another instance of synthesis of new "facts" is based on the apparent *lack* of sources. Wikipedia's "First Vision" article makes the following assertion: "In the Palmyra area itself, the only large multi-denominational revivals occurred in 1816–1817 and 1824–1825."[37] Two sources—one by Richard Bushman and the other by Dan Vogel—are used to support the synthesized conclusion that no "revival" occurred in 1820:

> The great revival of 1816 and 1817, which nearly doubled the number of Palmyra Presbyterians, was in progress when the Smiths arrived.[38]

> Indeed, it was the revival of 1824–25 . . . rather than the revival of 1817 or the one he 'remembered' for 1820.[39]

Bushman's and Vogel's opinions are used to establish the statement that since there were *recorded* revivals in the two time frames specified, there was no "revival" during 1820. This ignores the fact that Joseph never even claimed there was a "revival" in

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36. Lucy Mack Smith, "Lucy Smith History, 1845," quoted in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:242. Vogel notes that "Alvin became twenty-two on 11 February 1820. However, Lucy misdates Alvin's birth to 1799, rather than 1798, and his death to 1824, instead of 1823. Later she states that she joined the Presbyterian church after Alvin's death."

37. Statement from Wikipedia article "First Vision" (see n. 27 above).

38. Richard Lyman Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), 36, 46.

39. Dan Vogel, *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004), 60; see pp. 26, 58–60.

the Palmyra area: he stated that there was "an unusual excite-ment on the subject of religion" (Joseph Smith—History 1:5). There is, in fact, evidence that Methodist camp meetings did oc-cur in the area that did not normally receive newspaper cover-age, with one 1820 camp meeting only making it into the news as the result of a death that appeared to be associated with it.[40]

Wikipedia does not specifically discuss the 1820 camp meeting, even though it is the topic of a referenced second-ary source from D. Michael Quinn. Wikipedia only mentions that "D. Michael Quinn notes a Methodist camp meeting in Palmyra in June 1818." However, the source used to support this statement is Quinn's "Joseph Smith's Experience of a Methodist 'Camp-Meeting' in 1820." Note that Wikipedia uti-lizes the Quinn essay only to discuss the 1818 revival and com-pletely ignores any discussion of the 1820 camp meeting. This effort by critics to ignore the possible significance of the 1820 meeting in favor of the 1818 revival is, ironically, the very focus of Quinn's essay.[41]

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40. *Palmyra Register*, 5 July 1820, 2. The Methodists objected to the news-paper's implication that the death of James Couser was associated with their meeting at the "camp-ground." The newspaper issued a correction, stating, "We committed 'an error in point of fact,' in saying the Couser 'obtained his liquor at the camp-ground.' By this expression we did not mean to insinuate that he obtained it within the enclosure of their place of worship or that he procured it of *them*, but at the grog-shops that were established at, or near if you please, their camp-ground. It was far from our intention to charge the Methodists with retailing ardent spirits while professedly met for worship of their God." This indirectly establishes that the Methodists held at least one meeting at the "camp-ground" in June of 1820.

41. D. Michael Quinn, "Joseph Smith's Experience of a Methodist 'Camp-Meeting' in 1820," Dialogue Paperless E-Paper 3, 20 December 2006, 4. Regarding the 1820 camp meeting, Quinn notes that "Palmyra's weekly news-paper . . . edition of 28 June 1820 referred to out-of town visitor James Couser, who died on June 26th, the day after he drunkenly left 'the Campground' fol-lowing the evening services of 'a camp-meeting which was held in this vicinity.' The *Palmyra Register*'s next edition denied that its editor intended 'to charge the Methodists' with selling alcohol at 'their camp-ground' while they 'professedly met for the worship of their God.'"

Some interesting contrasts can be observed by comparing elements of the Wikipedia "First Vision" article to John Matzko's 2007 essay "The Encounter of the Young Joseph Smith with Presbyterianism." Matzko, a professor of history at Bob Jones University, thoroughly examines the influence that events in Palmyra related to the Presbyterians may have had on the young Joseph Smith. Similar topics are addressed by John Foxe in the Wikipedia "First Vision" article, and it is useful to contrast the two approaches. For example, in contrast to the obscure treatment of the Quinn essay in the Wikipedia article, Dr. Matzko correctly and directly acknowledges it in his *Dialogue* essay: "D. Michael Quinn argues that, on the contrary, a Methodist camp meeting of 1820 can be fairly interpreted as the religious revival to which Joseph Smith refers and that Methodists typically only asked permission to use property for camp meetings rather than purchase the land."[42]

While Matzko's acknowledgment of the camp meeting is clear, the Wikipedia article attempts to obscure its possible significance. An inclusion of the Matzko citation in the Wikipedia article would easily clear up the confusing treatment that the camp meeting currently receives.

For discussion of an 1820 camp meeting near Palmyra, see the following studies (all but the first appeared before Quinn's essay): Richard Lloyd Anderson, "Probing the Lives of Christ and Joseph Smith," *FARMS Review* 21/2 (2009): 16–18; Davis Bitton, "The Charge of a Man with a Broken Lance (But Look What He Doesn't Tell Us)," review of *An Insider's View of Mormon Origins*, by Grant H. Palmer, *FARMS Review* 15/2 (2003): 261; Steven C. Harper, "Trustworthy History?," review of *An Insider's View of Mormon Origins*, by Grant H. Palmer, *FARMS Review* 15/2 (2003): 294–96; Larry C. Porter, "Reinventing Mormonism: To Remake or Redo," review of *Inventing Mormonism: Tradition and the Historical Record*, by H. Michael Marquardt and Wesley P. Walters, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 7/2 (1995): 128–31; and Richard L. Bushman, "Just the Facts Please," review of *Inventing Mormonism: Tradition and the Historical Record*, by H. Michael Marquardt and Wesley P. Walters, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/2 (1994): 126–27.

42. John A. Matzko, "The Encounter of the Young Joseph Smith with Presbyterianism," *Dialogue* 40/3 (Fall 2007): 78 n. 2.

Such negative "fact creation" is by no means limited to Wikipedia's "First Vision" article. The Wikipedia article "Mormonism and Christianity," by the very nature of its subject matter, is a magnet for speculative statements. As of 11 October 2011, the article asserts, "An important part of this pioneer Mormonism is the Adam–God doctrine, which became the most prominent (but not exclusive) theology of 19th-century Mormonism."[43]

The idea that the Adam–God theory became the "most prominent" theology of nineteenth-century Mormonism would no doubt come as a surprise to any LDS historian. Yet this "fact," cited to Kurt Widmer's *Mormonism and the Nature of God: A Theological Evolution*, presents itself in the Wikipedia article as *the* LDS historical position on the Adam–God theory, without any qualification whatsoever. Ari D. Bruening and David L. Paulsen counter that "the Adam–God theory may have been taught by Brigham Young, but it was never the dominant position of the church," adding that "the church was silent on the subject."[44] This more accurate representation of the prominence of the Adam–God theory is not included in the Wikipedia article.

43. Statement from Wikipedia article "Mormonism and Christianity," accessed 11 November 2011, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mormonism_and_Christianity. The statement is cited to several sources: Kurt Widmer, *Mormonism and the Nature of God: A Theological Evolution, 1830–1915* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2000), 131; Gary James Bergera, "The Orson Pratt–Brigham Young Controversies: Conflict within the Quorums, 1853 to 1868," *Dialogue* 13/2 (1980): 41, describing the Adam–God doctrine as "Adam was at once the spiritual as well as the physical father of all persons born on this world, including Jesus Christ"); Boyd Kirkland, "Jehovah as the Father: The Development of the Mormon Jehovah Doctrine," *Sunstone* 44 (Autumn): 39, stating that Adam "later begot Jesus, his firstborn spirit son, in the flesh."

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

The "Mormonism and Christianity" article further asserts that nineteenth-century Latter-day Saints believed that "Adam returned to physically father Jesus by Mary" and that modern church members believe that "Heavenly Father and Mother then gave birth to the spirits of humanity through a sexual union."[45] Such "facts," however, reside more in the realm of Mormon folklore than they do in actual doctrine. In the hands of a determined Wikipedia editor, however, any published author's opinion on a subject can become a dominant "encyclopedic fact" per current Wikipedia standards.

The creation of new "facts" illustrates the important difference between publishing in Wikipedia versus publishing in a periodical requiring genuine peer review. A good example of this difference is illustrated in Wikipedia's "First Vision" article. The following assertion appeared in the 14 July 2009 revision of the article: "While [Joseph Smith] almost certainly never formally joined the Methodist church, he did associate himself with the Methodists *eight years* after he said he had been instructed by God not to join any established denomination" (emphasis added). The footnote reads: "Bushman, 69–70. The Methodists did not acquire property on the Vienna Road until July 1821, so it is likely that Smith's first dabble with Methodism occurred during the 1824–25 revival in Palmyra."[46]

45. Statement from Wikipedia article "Mormonism and Christianity." The endnote states: "Widmer (2000, p. 137) (20th century Mormon theologians retained Young's idea that spirit children were born in the same way that material children are born); Alexander (1980, p. 31) (noting the Heavenly Mother doctrine, Roberts and Widtsoe taught that '[s]exual relations will continue into eternity both for joy and for procreation.').

46. The phrase originally inserted into the article on 19 August 2006 by editor "John Foxe" was "Smith's name appears on a Methodist class roll in June of 1828. While the appearance of his name does not necessarily indicate membership in the Methodist Church, attending a Methodist class was curious behavior for one who had been instructed by God not to join any established denomination eight years previous." The reference cited was Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, pp. 69–70. The wiki editor has synthesized a statement that is not supported by the

On 17 July 2009 this paragraph was corrected to say: "While he almost certainly never formally joined the Methodist church, he did associate himself with the Methodists *'at some point between 1821 and 1829'* after he said he had been instructed by God not to join any established denomination" (emphasis added). The footnote was changed to read as follows:

> Bushman, 69–70; John A. Matzko, "The Encounter of Young Joseph Smith with Presbyterianism," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought.* Non-Mormon historian Matzko notes: "At some point between 1821 and 1829, Smith served as 'a very passable exhorter' at Methodist camp meetings 'away down in the woods, on the Vienna Road.'" Matzko also makes the point that "[s]ince the Methodists did not acquire property on the Vienna Road until July 1821, the camp meetings were almost certainly held after that date."[47]

Matzko's assertion, having passed through the routine publication process, is somewhat more accurate and less biased than Foxe's assertion.[48] Foxe's original sentence was crafted to imply that Joseph may have disobeyed a commandment from God not to join any church eight years *after* the first vision, thus bolstering the idea that the story of the first vision was invented well after the event was claimed to have taken place. In contrast, Matzko more accurately represents the primary source and places Joseph's exhortation somewhere *within* the eight-year period.[49] Richard L. Anderson, however, states that

source used. See http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=First_Vision&diff=70600843&oldid=70600094.

47.    Statement from Wikipedia article "First Vision," at http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=First_Vision&diff=302519006&oldid=301964238.

48.    It should be noted the Matzko's assertion that "camp meetings were almost certainly held after" July 1821 does not account for the *Palymra Register* reference to a Methodist camp meeting in the area in June 1820.

49.    Orsamus Turner, *History of the Pioneer Settlement of Phelps and Gorham's Purchase* (Rochester, NY: 1852), 214: "After catching a spark of Methodism in the

"the time is probably during the editor's [Orsamus Turner] Palmyra apprenticeship, presumably 1820 or before, and is certainly no later than the summer of 1822."[50] This opinion is not cited in the Wikipedia article, even though the Anderson article is listed in the reference section.

### Reinventing John Taylor

Wikipedia uses popular critical views to portray John Taylor's understanding of the first vision. Note the following passage from the 18 October 2011 version of the Wikipedia article "First Vision," which represents a classic critical attempt to discredit the importance of the vision to the early Saints:

> The canonical First Vision story was not emphasized in the sermons of Smith's immediate successors Brigham Young and John Taylor. . . . John Taylor gave a complete account of the First Vision story in an 1850 letter written as he began missionary work in France, and he may have alluded to it in a discourse given in 1859. However, when Taylor discussed the origins of Mormonism in 1863, he did so without alluding to the canonical First Vision story, and in 1879, he referred to Joseph Smith having asked "the angel" which of the sects was correct.

camp meeting, away down in the woods, on the Vienna road, [Joseph Smith] was a very passable exhorter in evening meetings." Turner does not provide a date for this event; however, the context of his narrative places Joseph's "exhortation" within the period of time of the recovery of the gold plates."

50.   Richard L. Anderson, "Circumstantial Confirmation of the First Vision Through Reminiscences," *BYU Studies* 9/3 (1969): "Turner gives from his personal contact the time, place, and subject of the Prophet's early conversion. The time is probably during the editor's Palmyra apprenticeship, presumably 1820 or before, and is certainly no later than the summer of 1822. The semi-conversion is to Methodism, precisely the belief that Joseph Smith said he was partial to. The place is a 'camp meeting' *away from Palmyra*" (p. 379, emphasis in original).

The key turning point in this paragraph is the word *however*, which is designed to make a point that later in Taylor's life he deemphasized and perhaps even *forgot* details of the first vision by noting that "in 1879, he referred to Joseph Smith having asked 'the angel' which of the sects was correct." The selection of this particular citation is very informative since there are *two* discourses by John Taylor recorded for 2 March 1879. In each of these, Taylor refers to the first vision:

> None of them was right, just as it was when the Prophet Joseph asked the angel which of the sects was right that he might join it. (*Journal of Discourses*, 20:167)

> When the Father and the Son and Moroni and others came to Joseph Smith . . ." (*Journal of Discourses*, 20:257)

Both references are taken from the *Journal of Discourses*, and both record sermons by Taylor made the very same day. Both reference the first vision. So why is the sermon mentioning an "angel" included in the Wikipedia article while the other mentioning the Father and the Son is not? This is done so that certain wiki editors can portray Taylor as being "confused" about the details of the vision, and they wish to demonstrate that the event held little importance in his mind. Rather than explore the historical fact that early Church leaders sometimes referred to visits by deity as "angelic" visitations, the wiki editors simply choose to apply their own logic in order to make a factual assertion that Taylor didn't know what he was talking about.

The choice of John Taylor as the subject of this demonstration is ironic. Numerous references to the visit of the Father and the Son in his letters, sermons, and other writings are re-

corded in the *Journal of Discourses* and elsewhere.[51] Taylor not only fully understood the significance of the first vision, he also *repeatedly* promoted it over the pulpit and in his writings.

If such a blatant inaccuracy exists in Wikipedia, why not correct it? After all, Wikipedia's philosophy is that "anyone can edit." In actuality, the task of correcting such egregious errors is not as straightforward as it might appear to be. Consider this interaction with partisan sectarian wiki editor John Foxe regarding the treatment of John Taylor. While still unaware of the multitude of Taylor's references to the Father and the Son in

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51. **25 February 1879**: "God Himself, accompanied by the Savior, appeared to Joseph" (letter to A. K. Thurber at Richfield, Utah); **28 November 1879**: "He came himself, accompanied by his Son Jesus, to the Prophet Joseph Smith" (*Journal of Discourses*, 21:116); **7 December 1879**: "the Lord revealed himself to him together with his Son Jesus, and, pointing to the latter, said: 'This is my beloved Son, hear him'" (*Journal of Discourses*, 21:161); **4 January 1880**: "the Lord appeared unto Joseph Smith, both the Father and the Son, the Father pointing to the Son said 'this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased, hear ye him'" (*Journal of Discourses*, 21:65); **27 June 1881**: "And hence when the heavens were opened and the Father and Son appeared and revealed unto Joseph the principles of the Gospel" (*Journal of Discourses*, 22:218); **28 August 1881**: "the Father and the Son appeared to the youth Joseph Smith to introduce the great work of the latter days" (*Journal of Discourses*, 22:299); **20 October 1881**: "In the commencement of the work, the Father and the Son appeared to Joseph Smith. And when they appeared to him, the Father, pointing to the Son, said, 'This is my beloved Son, hear him'" (*Journal of Discourses*, 26:106–7); **1882**: *Mediation and Atonement* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret News Co., 1882; photo lithographic reprint, Salt Lake City, 1964), 138; **5 March 1882**: "After the Lord had spoken to Joseph Smith, and Jesus had manifested himself to him . . ." (*Journal of Discourses*, 23:32); **29 May 1882**: "God the Father, and God the Son, both appeared to him; and the Father, pointing, said, this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, hear ye him" (*Millennial Star*, 29 May 1882), 337–38; **23 November 1882**: "It is true that God appeared to Joseph Smith, and that His Son Jesus did" (*Journal of Discourses*, 23:323); **18 May 1884**: "When our Heavenly Father appeared unto Joseph Smith, the Prophet, He pointed to the Savior who was with him, (and who, it is said, is the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of His person) and said: 'This is my beloved Son, hear Him'" (*Journal of Discourses*, 25:177); **1892**: "God revealed Himself, as also the Lord Jesus Christ, unto His servant the Prophet Joseph Smith, when the Father pointed to the Son and said: 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, hear ye Him'" (cited in B. H. Roberts, *Life of John Taylor*, 1892), 394.

Joseph Smith's first vision, Foxe responded to an LDS editor, "I accept that John Taylor mentioned the first vision at least twice. That he did not emphasize it during his tenure as President is just as true as ever." Yet when Taylor's numerous citations of the vision were explicitly pointed out to him, he persisted in maintaining his position by attempting to qualify their validity:

> Taylor obviously made more references to the First Vision than I had suspected. Nevertheless, those statements given above were made quite late in his life and at about the time when the canonical story was beginning to be promoted by Taylor's nephew by marriage, George Q. Cannon. When Taylor discussed the origins of Mormonism in 1863, he did so without alluding to the canonical First Vision story: "We read that an angel came down and revealed himself to Joseph Smith and manifested unto him in vision the true position of the world in a religious point of view. He was surrounded with light and glory while the heavenly messenger communicated these things unto him, after a series of visitations and communications from the Apostle Peter and others who held the authority of the holy Priesthood, not only on the earth formerly but in the heavens afterwards." *Journal of Discourses* 10:127 [52]

Foxe chooses to concentrate on "the angel" and discounts the multiple references to the Father and the Son by claiming that they were "late in his life." Yet, this contradicts his earlier assertion that Taylor "did not emphasize it during his tenure." In fact, the *majority* of the references to the Father and the Son occurred during Taylor's tenure as president of the church between 1880 and 1887. This hostile wiki editor simply does not concede that an examination of the sources contradicts such

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52.   Comment by editor "John Foxe" posted to "First Vision" Wikipedia talk page on 12 November 2009, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:First_Vision.

a popular critical claim. In spite of the fact that Taylor noted the visit of the Father and the Son multiple times both before and after the 1863 reference to the "angel," it is the "angel" that receives priority treatment by Wikipedia. John Taylor's legacy of expounding the importance of the first vision thus becomes a victim of Wikipedia's version of "truth."

### The "Attack Biography"

One popular way that editors with agendas can express themselves on Wikipedia is to modify the Wikipedia biography of a person with whom they are displeased. The most well-known instance of biography tampering was the modification by an anonymous editor of John Seigenthaler's Wikipedia biography to claim, among other things, that he was "thought to have been directly involved in the Kennedy assassinations." Seigenthaler responded, "This is a highly personal story about Internet character assassination. It could be your story. I have no idea whose sick mind conceived the false, malicious 'biography' that appeared under my name for 132 days on Wikipedia, the popular, online, free encyclopedia whose authors are unknown and virtually untraceable."[53] One Wikipedia watcher notes that

> Wikipedia biographies can be an "attractive nuisance." It says, to every troll, vandal, and score-settler: "Here's an article about a person where you can, with no accountability whatsoever, write any libel, defamation, or smear. It won't be a marginal comment with the social status of an inconsequential rant, but rather will be made prominent about the person and

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53. John Seigenthaler, "A false Wikipedia 'biography,'" *USA Today*, 29 November 2005, www.usatoday.com/news/opinion/editorials/2005-11-29-wikipedia-edit_x.htm.

reputation-laundered with the institutional status of an encyclopedia."[54]

The Wikipedia biographies of Latter-day Saint scholars who have some involvement with apologetics are an attractive target for those who are disaffected with the church. A typical approach is to modify the biography so that it both emphasizes the person's involvement with apologetics and highlights any negative or controversial aspects of that person's life. For example, on 28 August 2008, an ex-Mormon using the screen name "Descartes1979" edited the Wikipedia biography of Daniel C. Peterson. The introductory paragraph of the biography originally read, "Daniel C. Peterson is a professor of Islamic Studies and Arabic . . . at Brigham Young University and currently serves as editor-in-chief of BYU's Middle Eastern Texts Initiative." The editor moved this information elsewhere and replaced the introductory paragraph with "Daniel C. Peterson is a Mormon apologist and professor at Brigham Young University."

In addition to this change, the editor expanded the 205-word article by adding a new "Controversy" section comprising 451 words. The "Controversy" section remained in place for ten months before it was removed by another editor. The "Mormon apologist" designation remained for sixteen months before the introductory paragraph was restored to its original state.

The same Wikipedia editor, "Descartes1979," gave similar treatment to the Wikipedia biography of William Hamblin: "William James Hamblin (born 1954) is a Mormon apologist and associate professor of history at Brigham Young University (BYU)." Descartes1979 noted in his edit summary that "Hamblin is by far best known in his apologetic role," as justification for this change.[55] Without a citation to back up that

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54. Finkelstein, "I'm on Wikipedia" (see note 4 herein).

55. Edit performed on Wikipedia article "William J. Hamblin" by editor "Descartes1979" on 13 January 2011, http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.

assertion, this is simply one person's opinion. As of 16 October 2011, this assertion continues to be the introductory line of the Hamblin biography.

## Anonymity and Sock Puppetry

There are many valid reasons to maintain anonymity online. The use of one's real name on message boards and in Wikipedia editing can provide too much information about one's life to those who would use the information for dishonest purposes. It is therefore recommended that Wikipedia editors create a screen name under which to perform their edits. The majority of Wikipedia editors edit using some sort of pseudonym, and they express the same courtesy toward others that one might expect them to display in "real life." There are also other advantages. A "pseudo persona" has no claimed academic credentials—hence there is no reputation to maintain. If mistakes are made, they will not be included in or reflect upon that person's corpus of academic work.

The use of an anonymous pseudonym sometimes allows one to safely reflect the true inner thoughts of the corresponding "real world" editor without the danger of having any of the persona's activities reflect upon his or her "real world" reputation and credentials. One LDS editor expresses his frustration: "At last, the truth comes out. Now your condescending attitude towards all of us amateurs makes more sense. It has long been obvious that you are a better wordsmith than I, that doesn't make your words any more or less true. Joseph Smith, Jr. was barely literate when he first saw God the Father and Jesus Christ, I am glad to stand with them."[56]

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php?title=William_J._Hamblin&diff=407616288&oldid=407438080.

56. Comment by Latter-day Saint Wikipedia editor "74s181" posted to the "First Vision" Wikipedia talk page on 5 November 2007, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:First_Vision/Archive_8#.22Drivel.22.

Unfortunately, anonymity can also have its dark side. Good, intelligent people who would normally act in a sensible and civilized manner succumb to the temptation to create alternate personalities with which to express their true feelings without restraint. The ability to edit Wikipedia anonymously under a screen name provides the tantalizing opportunity to create alternate editing accounts, each with a different personality. Such an alternate account is called a "sock puppet." They are strictly prohibited by Wikipedia and are considered a way for an editor to "evade" the Wikipedia community. Sock puppets can be used to make it appear that multiple individuals are participating in the editing process when in fact there is only a single individual. Sock puppets are often used to portray a different attitude or point of view than the master editor. Sometimes they will play a game of "good cop/bad cop" by pretending to hold opposing points of view.

### The Foxe and the Chicken Coop

A prime example of sock puppetry and the effect that editing LDS articles can have on an editor occurred on the "Joseph Smith" Wikipedia article during late 2008 to late 2009. Editor John Foxe makes no secret of his feelings toward Joseph Smith, Jr.: "My editing objective is not to convince the world that Joseph Smith was 'a lecherous fraud'—although he was."[57] And then the following: "You have to understand that from my perspective, Joseph not only lied, he committed serial adultery."[58]

Casting himself as the lone non-LDS voice on LDS articles, Foxe portrays himself as a "man of good faith," but he wishes

57. Comment by editor "John Foxe" posted to "Golden plates" Wikipedia talk page on 10 March 2007, http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Talk:Golden_plates&diff=prev&oldid=114092102.

58. Comment by editor "John Foxe" posted to "Seer stone" Wikipedia talk page on 13 January 2009, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Seer_stone_(Latter_Day_Saints)#Revelation_2.17_and_the_white_stone.

that he had an ally to assist him in his effort to edit LDS-related articles.

> In the meantime I will continue, in a gentlemanly fashion, to revert the article to its earlier, and in my view, more NPOV condition. I certainly want to avoid incivility or personal attacks. (You may have heard the story of the chicken farmer who refused to press charges against the chicken thief because he didn't want to be associated with chicken thieves.) And there will be no sock puppetry or meat puppetry on my part. It would be nice to have an ally occasionally, but I won't stoop to creating or recruiting them.[59]

This promise not to create an alternate editing account was repeated just four weeks later. "I admit that it would be nice to have a non-Mormon ally at Mormon articles, but I long ago promised long ago not to create sock puppets or attempt to recruit others to support my views. That's a promise I've kept and intend to keep."[60]

Thus the appearance of a new participant on the "Joseph Smith" article in September 2008 named "Hi540" was perplexing. The name "Hi540" is the course designation of the Bob Jones University course *Historical Research and Writing*,[61] and the account was deliberately designed to look like Foxe's real-world

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59. Comment by editor "John Foxe" posted to "First Vision" Wikipedia talk page on 3 November 2007, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:First_Vision/Archive_8#Arbitration. The opening *I* in this quotation has been corrected to *In* for ease of reading.

60. Comment posted by "John Foxe" to his own Wikipedia User Page on 6 December 2007, http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=User_talk:John_Foxe&diff=176231278&oldid=176219280.

61. Course Catalog, Bob Jones University. "Hi 540 - Historical Research & Writing. Techniques of historical research, analysis and composition culminating in a formal article-length paper based in part on primary documentation. Required of all students majoring in History," at http://www.bju.edu/academics/courses/?subject=History.

identity.[62] It was only when the Hi540 account was used to support the Foxe account in an edit war on the "Joseph Smith" article, however, that a problem became apparent. While the Foxe account remained guardedly civil toward LDS editors, the Hi540 account expressed open hostility toward Joseph Smith and editing performed by Latter-day Saints, including going so far as to mistakenly accuse one non-LDS editor of being a "Mormon."[63] The disdain of Joseph Smith by Hi540 becomes apparent in an edit summary: "Replaced section with better wording mostly from Foxe; [Joseph] Smith's words are junk: POV, non-encyclopedic, and tell us nothing except about his hubris."[64]

The Foxe account represented the calm voice of reason while the Hi540 account was allowed to voice provocative opinions. On 13 January 2009 Foxe posted the following comment:

> The [Joseph Smith] article has remarkable balance right now. Any attempts to deliberately add Mormon

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62. The "Hi540" account was used as a class exercise to edit Wikipedia articles on a variety of non-LDS related subjects. The account behaved as a very competent and generally civil editor, with the glaring exception being its misbehavior on articles related to Mormonism. According to John Foxe, "The intent was a sort of privacy account in reverse with John Foxe being my private account and Hi540 being tagged with all sorts [of] clues as to my real identity, including a dated childhood picture. Even the quotation is a give-away to folks who know me because I was a seasonal NPS ranger at Robert E. Lee's Arlington House for several summers. (I'd doubt many sockpuppet creators add helpful clues about their real identities to the home pages of their creatures.)" Posted on John Foxe's Wikipedia user page on 21 August 2011, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User_talk:John_Foxe/Archive_5#Hi540.

63. On 15 September 2008 on the "Joseph Smith" Wikipedia talk page, "Hi540" accused non-LDS editor "A Sniper" of being a Mormon: "I think you're a Mormon because you accused Foxe of pushing the material of 'a small cabal of Mormon/ex-Mormon writers.' . . . I notice that you don't actually deny being a Mormon." Editor "A Sniper" responded, "I'm not a Mormon or member of any Latter Day Saint church." Upon learning this, "Hi540" apologized to the editor "for misjudging him." See http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Talk:Joseph_Smith&diff=prev&oldid=238900920.

64. Edit summary posted by "Hi540" on 20 September 2008 while editing Wikipedia article "Joseph Smith," http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Joseph_Smith&diff=prev&oldid=239869039.

POV will both spark an edit war and in the end degrade the literary quality of the current article because of the difficulty of clearing the corpses from the battlefield when it concludes. Improvements in this article are more likely to come from deletions than additions.

Two and one-half hours later, Hi540 added this comment:

I think Smith is handled with kid gloves in this article. There needs to be more emphasis on the fraudulent means that he used to start his religion and also the emphasis on sex at the end of his life.[65]

This was a classic case of "good cop/bad cop" sock puppetry, with the two accounts representing different personalities. Hi540 continued to express disgust for LDS-related subjects and support his alter-ego Foxe until the Hi540 account abruptly ceased editing LDS articles in late October 2009 after being reminded that he "ought not to pretend to act like a chicken thief . . . every time you converse with a believer."[66] The account remained active on other, noncontroversial articles and behaved in a respectable manner until Foxe's sock puppetry was confirmed by Wikipedia administrators in August 2011, almost two years later. This resulted in the Hi540 account being permanently banned and the Foxe account being given a

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65. Comments posted by "Hi540" on 13 January 2009 to the "Joseph Smith" Wikipedia talk page, http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Talk:Joseph_Smith&diff=prev&oldid=263815036.

66. "Hi540" ceased editing LDS-related articles after responding to a comment posted by Roger Nicholson under the screen name "Roger Penumbra" on the "Joseph Smith" talk page on 27 October 2009: "You really ought to be embarrassed by your rhetoric, Hi540. There's an old story about a farmer who caught a thief stealing his chickens. The sheriff was called, but the farmer said he didn't want to press charges. 'Why not?' said the sheriff. 'Because I don't want to be associated with a chicken thief,' said he. You ought not to pretend to act like a chicken thief (even though you are not) every time you converse with a believer." Two days later, the Hi540 account made its final edit to the "Joseph Smith" Wikipedia article. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk_Joseph_Smith/Archive_13.

two-week suspension. Foxe apologized to LDS Wikipedia editor Alanyst:

> I'm greatly embarrassed about my behavior in editing with two accounts at Joseph Smith during the thirteen months between September 2008 and October 2009. It was especially painful to read my promise not to create a sock puppet nine months before using one. (At least the record bears out my memory that I created Hi540 a year before I actually used the account illegitimately.) I apologize to you personally and to the community at large.[67]

**The FAIR Wiki**

The popularity and accessibility of Wikipedia demonstrates the power of the wiki format, and other wikis have been built upon the same model. If Wikipedia can aspire to become a repository for all knowledge, why not create such a wiki for the purpose of collecting and improving responses to all known critical claims against the church? Such a wiki exists as part of the Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research (FAIR), a volunteer online organization that provides well-researched answers to critical claims against the church.

The FAIR Wiki was created in 2006 with the purpose of serving as a location to store and easily access reference material for use by FAIR members. The wiki, however, soon demonstrated its utility as a way for FAIR members to collaboratively edit responses to critical claims. As questions came in through FAIR's "Ask the Apologist," the best answers provided by FAIR members made their way into wiki articles. The number of wiki articles grew to several thousand over the next five years, and the wiki became a very valuable resource. The number of claims that critics make against the Church is finite, and it is

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67.   Comment by "John Foxe" posted to his Wikipedia user page on 22 August 2011, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User_talk:John_Foxe/Archive_5#Hi540.

possible using the wiki to index and provide scholarly responses. The wiki began to include claim-by-claim examinations of popular critical books and films.

As the FAIR Wiki grew in size and complexity, it began appearing within the first ten Google search results (the first page). In fact, for a number of specific subject searches related to apologetics, the wiki appeared in the number-one or number-two positions on the first page. Such is the case with a Google search on the subject of Jesus and Satan being "brothers," a popular search topic during the last few years since it was brought to the forefront during the 2008 presidential campaign.[68]

As of 1 October 2011, a Google search of the text string "are Jesus and Satan brothers" showed the FAIR Wiki in the number-two position, immediately after a website belonging to a counter-cult ministry. However, a search for "Jesus Christ brother of Satan" shows the FAIR Wiki as the number-one result. Wikipedia does not appear at all because there is not a specific Wikipedia article written on the subject of Jesus and Satan being brothers. Note that even a slight difference in the construction of a search phrase can produce a difference in the result ranking. Subjects related to LDS apologetics that are currently discussed in the media comprise the majority of search engine hits on the FAIR Wiki.

## How Should Latter-day Saints Treat Wikipedia?

This is not a "call to arms" for massive numbers of Latter-day Saints to go and attempt to edit Wikipedia articles about the Church. The nature of Wikipedia is such that an LDS-themed article will never be considered "faith promoting." What is needed is for intelligent and well-read Church members to calmly participate in the editing process, joining a

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68.  Laurie Goodstein, "Huckabee Is Not Alone in Ignorance on Mormonism," *New York Times*, 14 December 2007, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/14/us/politics/14mormon.html.

number of such LDS editors who already participate heavily in this process. Editing LDS articles requires a significant investment of time and patience, particularly when dealing with editors who do not demonstrate any amount of respect for The Church of Jesus Christ or the faith of Latter-day Saints. A cool head coupled with a fair dose of patience is always best. LDS editors should behave with civility, even in the face of mockery.

Equally important is the need for wiki editors to be educated on the subject being edited. As Dr. Matzko correctly notes, "It is easy enough to spin webs of speculation" when attempting to document the history of Joseph Smith Jr.[69] Acquiring a thorough knowledge of the available sources is the key to success on Wikipedia. Editors' own opinions should not remain in Wikipedia articles; cited facts will stand a much better chance of remaining. Editors also should not remove citations, even if they appear disagreeable, unless the source used is obviously in violation of Wikipedia policy. An editor who consistently behaves in a civil manner toward others and patiently works to achieve consensus with those editors with whom he or she may disagree will build a solid reputation within the Wikipedia community. Over time, misrepresentations about our faith can be corrected.

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69.   Matzko, "Encounter of Young Joseph Smith with Presbyterianism," 76. Dr. Matzko is a historian and the chairperson of the Division of Social Science College of Arts and Science at Bob Jones University. The context of the quote specifically refers to the possibility that Joseph Smith may have attended the dedication ceremony for the Western Presbyterian Church in Palmyra at age thirteen, with the speculation based on circumstantial evidence that it may have influenced the dedication ceremony of the Kirtland Temple years later in 1836.

# To Really Read
# the Book of Mormon

*Ralph C. Hancock*

*Review of Grant Hardy.* Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide. *New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. xix + 346 pp., with index. $29.95.*

Grant Hardy, chair of the history department at the University of North Carolina at Asheville, studied Chinese history at Yale and clearly has read a lot of ancient texts with the greatest care. Somewhere along the line, he learned to really read a text: to savor it, to interrogate it, to listen to every voice, to compare and contrast, to hear resonances of one voice in another, and, not least, to hear silences. We are all fortunate that he has not limited the employment of his finely honed textual skills to his academic specialty. We thought we were reading the Book of Mormon all along, but it turns out we weren't yet really reading it—not in this full sense, not with this loving attention, this openness to possibilities, this exposed humanity.

The key to Hardy's basic strategy is to take seriously the authorship of the Book of Mormon, not by Joseph Smith (although Hardy allows skeptics to hold on to that assumption), nor simply and immediately by God (though Hardy is in no way inclined to slight faithful readings), but by those who are the principal authors according to the book itself: Nephi, Mormon, Moroni. The result of trusting what the book says about its own composition and keeping the key authors in mind relentlessly, meticulously, and with a human sensitivity that can only come from openness to the humanity we share with the authors, is,

well, a revelation. Hardy's reading of the Book of Mormon is in a way more religious than any other because it is more rational—that is, by allowing natural questions to arise and to resonate, he reveals characters to us (especially the three authors) that are more miraculous because they are more human. Hardy has read the Book of Mormon with fresh eyes, as if it were just what it purports to be—a text with multiple, interrelated human authors with deeply human concerns that are partly shared and partly distinctive of each individual author. And now we too can start again in our journey of understanding the Book of Mormon, but thanks to Grant Hardy, we can start miles ahead of where we were.

Here I can give only the slightest sample of the revelatory moments and rich suggestions with which Hardy's book is rife. Let me focus on some high points of his deft exploration of the character of Nephi, which is what I found most moving in the whole book. Hardy shows what I think I had sensed but had not clearly seen, namely, that "there is an undercurrent of grief and weariness that runs throughout his writings. Nephi certainly affirms that he was blessed by the Lord, but it may not always have been in ways he expected or desired." To be sure, Hardy's reflections on Nephi's personal travails are some of the most speculative in the book, relying at critical points on puzzling silences we probably hadn't even noticed, though he does not present them as the only possible readings. Central to Hardy's reading is the observation that "Nephi's blessing [under the hands of Lehi] is conspicuous for its absence, despite his admission that Lehi 'had spoken to all his household' and precedents in the Hebrew Bible" (p. 51). This leads Hardy to some most penetrating wondering about what might have been Nephi's fondest hopes and dreams, a wondering that is possible only because Hardy opens his heart to Nephi's humanity, especially Nephi's condition as a father. Then he brings this deeply

human Nephi back to his reception of the vision of the tree of life and to the prophecies that follow this vision.

What Hardy can then hear in the text is a Nephi who "is using these scriptural interpretations to assuage deep personal frustrations and resolve theological difficulties that he only hints at in his narrative. Clearly, there is an active mind at work here, one that is colored by his experiences, his sense of audience, and his desire for order" (p. 51). Showing a fine rhetorical gift himself, Hardy saves the clinching punch line for the end of part 1 (which deals with Nephi's authorship). I will not give away his stirring conclusion, except to say that it turns on Nephi's very personal answer to the Spirit's very personal question in 1 Nephi 11:2: "What desirest thou?" To understand Nephi's answer to this question in the light of what we can know about Nephi from what he says, and even more from what he does not say, is already to understand the Book of Mormon as never before. It is also to honor Nephi more than ever as a prophet because we can now truly love, admire, and commune with him as a human being.

You can see that this reader has found Hardy's presentation of the soul of the first great Book of Mormon author so deep, so poignant, and so compelling that I'm sure I will never read Nephi's voice again without hearing Hardy's questions and suggestions. Despite its sometimes speculative character, Hardy's reading connects so many dots at such a deep level that I do not see how he could not be on to something vitally important. And the effect is similar in the cases of Mormon and Moroni, which I will leave to the reader to discover.

Some Latter-day Saint readers may be put off by the stance of "objectivity" that Hardy adopts regarding the origins and status of the Book of Mormon. Clearly he wishes to remove all possible barriers to entry at the outset by inviting all comers— believers and nonbelievers, those moved by intellectual curiosity and professional discipline as much as those seeking divine

guidance or the confirmation of testimony. He is content to *defer* (but not to suppress or forget) "questions of ultimate significance until we better understand the text and how it operates" (p. 4). He is also content to examine the book as "a human artifact" that "draws on the same narrative tools used by both novelists and historians" (p. 9). This he does without denying that the book can also be more than simply a human artifact.

The most prominent and underappreciated feature of the book as a human artifact is that "its basic structure is derived from the three narrators" (p. 10). But Hardy also notices (how could one not?), though he doesn't insist, that "this is a book designed to polarize readers, and subtlety about its central message is not among its virtues" (p. 9). Indeed, the great question by the Book of Mormon (in its very last verse, for example) finally interpellates each of us is how we will be doing when we meet Moroni and, presumably, the book's other primary authors "before the pleasing bar of the great Jehovah, the Eternal Judge of both quick and dead" (Moroni 10:34). Just where the eventual "polarization" on this great question stands in relation to the various interests and incentives that different readers bring to Grant Hardy's book is a question Professor Hardy is content to let arise by its own force.

In his afterword, Hardy shows himself to be the same master of understatement he has been throughout the whole book, at least concerning the implications of his reading for the unavoidable religious and existential question it raises. Turning Mark Twain's joke about Wagner's music against Twain's own clueless dismissal of the Book of Mormon, he writes: "It is better than it sounds." I'll say it is. And for me, after reading Hardy, it will never sound the same again.

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