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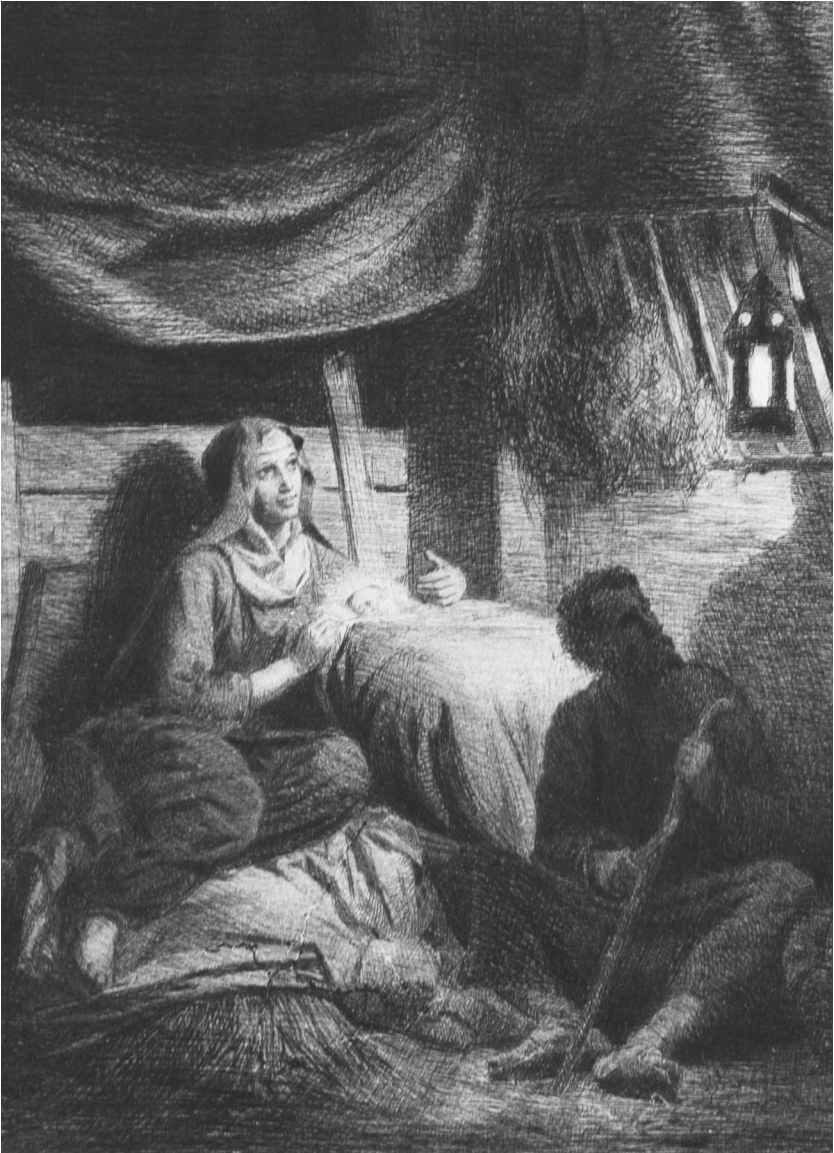
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The Nativity, etching, 6 $\frac{5}{16}$ " x 8", 1881, by Carl Heinrich Bloch (1834–1890). Brigham Young University Museum of Art, purchased with funds provided by Robert and Lisa Wheatley.

Dating the Birth of Jesus Christ

Jeffrey R. Chadwick

In his 1915 classic entitled *Jesus the Christ*, Elder James E. Talmage maintained that Jesus Christ was born on April 6 in the year 1 BC.¹ Talmage was apparently the first LDS writer to propose this particular date. Nearly a century has passed since his book appeared, and in that time it has become practically axiomatic among Latter-day Saints that Jesus was born on April 6 of 1 BC. But was he?

In the last century, much new information has come to light about the New Testament. New data from archaeological and historical sources, combined with a reexamination of the scriptural accounts involved, suggest that the April 6 dating should be reconsidered. This article will demonstrate why I prefer a narrow window of time at the beginning of winter for the birth of the Savior and propose that Jesus was most likely born in December of the year 5 BC.

This proposal will probably come as a surprise, and perhaps even as a shock, to some Latter-day Saints. Aware that some readers suppose April 6 must be regarded, without question, as the authoritatively established birth date of Jesus, and thus that they may be inclined to reject this proposition from the outset, I invite readers to review the evidence presented below. A large amount of data is introduced in this study, and at first, some of these items may seem disconnected from others, but I hope to bring them all together in a series of coherent conclusions at the end of the study.

Published Views of LDS General Authorities

Before considering any other data, a brief review of LDS thinking on this subject is in order. During the nineteenth century, latter-day prophets from Joseph Smith to Lorenzo Snow evidently made no specific comments on the date of Jesus's birth. It is known that Joseph Smith celebrated Christmas day on December 25, but none of his recorded remarks attempt to

Jeffrey R. Chadwick

I have been interested in Herodian period history and archaeology for many years now, and in the implications of the dating of Herod's death for the New Testament narratives of Jesus's birth. I also noticed, years ago, that President J. Reuben Clark and Elder Bruce R. McConkie, in studies they had written on the life of Christ, did not parallel some conclusions Elder Talmage had drawn in *Jesus the Christ*. These issues led to a decade-long study



(about 1996 to 2006) on many matters regarding the dating of Jesus's birth and death, which are brought together in this article.

My interests in these topics are the natural result of my faith, my career choices, and my professional academic training. I currently serve at BYU as Jerusalem Center Professor of Archaeology and Near Eastern Studies, as well as Associate Professor of Church History and Doctrine. I earned my PhD in anthropology/archaeology from the University of Utah Middle East Center, after having studied and excavated in Israel with projects of Tel Aviv University and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. I am now a Senior Research Fellow at the W. F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research in Jerusalem and serve on the board of trustees of the American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR). I also direct excavations in Area F of the Tell es-Safi/Gath Archeological Project in Israel at the biblical site of Gath, the hometown of Goliath (see 1 Samuel 17). My wife, Kim, and I have lived with our six children in Jerusalem, and I have been teaching, researching, and excavating each year in Israel since 1982.

justify that date, or any other date, as the birth date of Christ.² Nor did he ever interpret the wording of Doctrine and Covenants 20:1 to suggest that April 6 should be regarded as the Savior's birth date, although he said that it was "by the spirit of prophecy and revelation" that April 6 was pointed out to him as the precise day on which he "should proceed to organize" the Church of Jesus Christ in this dispensation.³ Similarly, as far as I have been able to ascertain, Brigham Young, John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, and Lorenzo Snow recorded no comments on the subject of Christ's birth either.

One LDS Apostle in the 1800s did offer a proposal for Jesus's birth date that was different from the traditional Christian date of December 25. Elder Orson Pratt proposed the date of April 11 in the year 4 BC as the Savior's birthday, based on his own calculation of the number of days between the signs of Jesus's birth and death as described in the Book of Mormon.⁴ But Elder Pratt's suggestion of April 11 never captured the imagination of the LDS public in his day and has been largely forgotten. Elder B. H. Roberts, however, felt that the passage in Doctrine and Covenants 20:1 did support the year 1 BC as the year of Jesus's birth, agreeing with what he called the "Dionysian computation" that produced the numbering of years in our current calendar.⁵ And the notion of Jesus having been born in the spring season was not uncommon among the Latter-day Saints in the late 1800s. In a 1901 Christmas message from the First Presidency, President Anthon H. Lund mentioned April as the month he preferred for the birth of the Savior.⁶

During the twentieth century, three different LDS Apostles published major studies on the life and ministry of Jesus Christ and in them offered models for the date of Jesus's birth. The diversity of opinion in these three studies is of particular interest. The first, as already mentioned, was *Jesus the Christ* by Elder James E. Talmage. This book was commissioned by the First Presidency, written in the Salt Lake Temple, and officially published by the Church, becoming the first systematic commentary on the life of Christ prepared by a Latter-day Saint authority. Talmage based his statement about Jesus's birth date on the idea that D&C 20:1—which names Tuesday, April 6, 1830, as the date of the organization of the latter-day Church—means that exactly 1,830 years had passed (to the day) since the Savior's birth. President Joseph F. Smith immediately endorsed Talmage's book,⁷ while Elder Hyrum M. Smith of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, in his 1919 commentary on the Doctrine and Covenants, expressed less certainty about the meaning of D&C 20:1. Although Elder Smith agreed that "in all probability the 6th of April is the anniversary of the birthday of our Lord," he acknowledged that "the organization of the Church in the year 1830 is hardly to be regarded as giving divine authority to the commonly accepted

calendar. There are reasons for believing that those who . . . tried to ascertain the correct time” of the Savior’s birth “erred in their calculations, and that the Nativity occurred four years before our era. . . . All that this Revelation means to say is that the Church was organized in the year that is commonly accepted as 1830, A.D.”⁸ A significant number of later General Authorities, including Church Presidents Harold B. Lee,⁹ Spencer W. Kimball,¹⁰ and Gordon B. Hinckley,¹¹ have commented on the April 6 date warmly and acceptingly but without explanation or greater specificity.¹²

Elder Talmage had stated his position in words perhaps implying that this view or belief was obligatory on the entire membership of the Church: “We believe that Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem of Judea, April 6, B.C. 1.”¹³ This statement notwithstanding, the two highest-ranking General Authorities who subsequently published their writings on Jesus’s life and ministry took positions different from Elder Talmage’s. President J. Reuben Clark, who served as both First and Second Counselor in the First Presidency, published *Our Lord of the Gospels* in 1954. This book was reprinted as an official publication of the Church when it was released as a Melchizedek Priesthood manual for 1958. In *Our Lord of the Gospels*, Clark pointed to the traditional early winter time frame for the date of Jesus’s birth. He explained: “I am not proposing any date as the true date. But in order to be as helpful to students as I could, I have taken as the date of the Savior’s birth the date now accepted by many scholars,—late 5 B.C. or early 4 B.C.”¹⁴ In the timetables he employed in his book, Clark listed his preferred time range for Jesus’s nativity as December of 5 BC, and the time range of the Annunciation to Mary as nine months earlier in March of 5 BC.¹⁵ While not insisting on a specific date (such as December 25), President Clark noted the historical strength of the early winter tradition.¹⁶

Elder Bruce R. McConkie was the third General Authority to prepare a systematic study of the life of Christ. Deseret Book Company published the four-volume series *The Mortal Messiah* beginning in 1979. In a lengthy study note appended to chapter 20 of the first volume (on the Savior’s nativity), McConkie discussed several models for dating the birth of Jesus. In contrast to Talmage, McConkie stated: “We do not believe it is possible with the present state of our knowledge—including that which is known both in and out of the Church—to state with finality when the natal day of the Lord Jesus actually occurred.”¹⁷ McConkie then reviewed the positions and reasoning of both Talmage and Clark with regard to Jesus’s birth date and stated that he would follow Clark’s course. Accordingly, McConkie dated the Annunciation to Mary in March or April of 5 BC, and the birth of Jesus in December of 5 BC (with the caveat that his birth could also have occurred from January to April of 4 BC). He also opined that the story of

the arrival of the wise men could perhaps be construed to point to a birth date earlier than December of 5 BC, perhaps as early as April of 5 BC, again repeating that “this is not a settled issue.” For a review of the substance of Elder McConkie’s study, see the endnotes.¹⁸

It seems clear from the different approaches presented in these three studies that there is no authoritative agreement or position on the issue of the birth date of Christ that must be regarded as binding on the membership of the Church. Comments by other General Authorities on the April 6 proposal have tended almost always to be heartfelt remarks that occurred during talks given on subjects other than the actual dating of the birth of Jesus.¹⁹ Thus, as far as General Authority statements are concerned, the only three sources offering data that may be scrutinized are Talmage’s *Jesus the Christ*, Clark’s *Our Lord of the Gospels*, and McConkie’s *The Mortal Messiah*. And of these three, the latter two prefer a different time frame than Talmage’s proposal of April 6 in 1 BC. In this regard, the present reexamination of the dating of Jesus’s birth seems appropriate. Toward that end, this article undertakes to address this perennial LDS topic, setting forth the pros and cons of various elements in this complex subject matter and hoping to contribute some new ideas to the discussion, especially about the possible dates for the death of Jesus, about the change in the Nephite reckoning of years at the beginning of 3 Nephi, and about the timing of the angel Gabriel’s Annunciation to Mary.

Other LDS Researchers

Since the first volume of *The Mortal Messiah* appeared in 1979, surprisingly little has been done by LDS researchers with regard to identifying or analyzing models for dating Jesus’s birth. In 1980, *April Sixth*, a short, nonscholarly book appeared, authored by John C. Lefgren.²⁰ The book, which attempted to support the April 6 of 1 BC proposal for Jesus’s birth, was criticized in a 1982 review published in *BYU Studies* by S. Kent Brown, C. Wilfred Griggs, and H. Kimball Hansen, all professors at BYU.²¹ They noted the impossibility of a 1 BC birth year for Jesus, based on the accepted historical fact that king Herod the Great died no later than April of 4 BC and the clear indication in the second chapter of the Gospel of Matthew that Jesus was born prior to Herod’s death (see Matt. 2:1–20). A response to the review of Brown, Griggs, and Hansen was published by John P. Pratt in *BYU Studies* in 1983, arguing in favor of Lefgren’s interpretations and an April 6 birth date in 1 BC.²² Brown, Griggs, and Hansen replied to Pratt’s arguments in the same issue, repeating the fact that Herod had died at least three years too early for Jesus to have been born in 1 BC.²³

Since that exchange, John P. Pratt has written a series of articles in favor of both a birth date for Jesus on April 6 of 1 BC and a date for his death on April 1 of AD 33, utilizing Gregorian calendar dating. Articles in which he argued for these dates appeared in the *Ensign* in 1985 and 1994.²⁴ LDS-oriented website *Meridian Magazine* has featured others of his articles on numerous occasions.²⁵ Pratt also maintains his own website, where many of his studies, published and otherwise, can be accessed.²⁶ Pratt is, without question, the most prolific LDS writer to advocate the April 6 of 1 BC date for Jesus’s birth. One of his most significant articles, “Yet Another Eclipse for Herod,” was published in 1990 in a non-LDS venue, a journal called the *Planetarian*.²⁷ The proposition in that article, which suggests a date early in AD 1 for Herod’s death (thus accommodating an April 6 of 1 BC birth date for Jesus), will be examined later in the present study.

Most recently, a study published by BYU professor Thomas A. Wayment appeared in 2005 as an appendix to the first volume of *The Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ*, a three-volume scholarly anthology published by Deseret Book. Wayment’s appendix, “The Birth and Death Dates of Jesus Christ,” began by saying, “To assume that there is anything like a consensus on the birth date of the Savior would be to underestimate the complexity of the issue.”²⁸ Wayment then discussed a series of ancient historical references and modern scholarly interpretations of New Testament passages. Like President Clark, Elder McConkie, and Professors Brown, Griggs, and Hansen, Wayment also noted that the most important historical consideration in dating Jesus’s birth must be the date of the death of

Table 1
Dates Proposed by Latter-day Saints for the Birth of Jesus Christ

Orson Pratt (1870)	April 11, 4 BC
James E. Talmage (1915)	April 6, 1 BC
J. Reuben Clark (1954)	December, 5 BC (or early 4 BC)
Sidney B. Sperry (1970)	April 6, 1 BC
Bruce R. McConkie (1979)	December, 5 BC (or January to April, 4 BC; alternatively, as early as April, 5 BC)
John C. Lefgren (1980)	April 6, 1 BC
John P. Pratt (1982)	April 6, 1 BC
Thomas A. Wayment (2005)	Between spring and winter, 5 BC

Herod the Great, which occurred in the spring of 4 BC. Wayment maintained: “The first weekend of April A.D. 30 is the most likely time of the death of Jesus. His birth took place between spring and winter of 5 B.C.”²⁹ As summarized in table 1, Latter-day Saints have proposed a range of dates for the birth of Christ.

Notably, Elder McConkie, who rejected a 1 BC birth year and seemed to prefer an early winter window of time for Jesus’s birth, expanded that window to include at least the possibility of a birth date in either April of 4 BC or April of 5 BC. Likewise, Wayment, who rejects a 1 BC birth year and mentions winter of 5 BC in his window of time, also extends that window back to the spring of 5 BC, thus still allowing for the possibility of an April birth. Only President Clark’s analysis ruled out an April birth entirely. Aspects of each of these proposals will eventually be addressed below.

First, however, three primary issues involved in dating Jesus’s birth need to be discussed. These are (1) the date of the death of Herod the Great, (2) the date of the death of Jesus himself, and (3) the length of Jesus’s mortal life. The first two issues can be confidently addressed in relation to historical, archaeological, and astronomical evidence that has become generally available in recent times, and important information regarding the length of Jesus’s mortal life can be found in the Book of Mormon.

The Death of Herod the Great

The New Testament’s Gospel of Matthew reports that “Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king” (Matt. 2:1). This means, of course, that Herod the king was alive at the time of Jesus’s birth.³⁰ Sometime after the baby Jesus was taken to Egypt, Joseph was told by an angel that “Herod was dead” (Matt. 2:19). That this Herod is the king known to history as Herod the Great is clear from Matthew’s explanation that after the king’s death his son “Archelaus did reign in Judea in the room of his father Herod” (Matt. 2:22). It is well known from historical sources that Herod the Great ruled the entire land of Israel until 4 BC as a client king appointed by Rome, and that he had many sons, among whom were Archelaus, who inherited rule of Judea and Samaria in 4 BC, and Antipas, who inherited rule of the Galilee and Perea in 4 BC (both of these sons also carried the name “Herod”). The main source for this information is *Jewish Antiquities*, written by the late-first-century Jewish historian Flavius Josephus.³¹

Josephus noted that an eclipse of the moon occurred in the days directly preceding the death of Herod the Great.³² It is the only lunar eclipse mentioned by Josephus in all of his works. Following that eclipse,

Herod, who was extremely ill, was taken for a short time to mineral baths at Calirrhoe, across the Jordan River, and then finally to his palace at Jericho, where he expired.³³ The combination of events reported by Josephus places Herod's death about ten days to two weeks after the eclipse and about ten days to two weeks before Passover. Astronomical research has indicated that the only lunar eclipse to occur during the final years of Herod's life that was visible in Jerusalem and that occurred near the season of Passover took place on the night of March 13 of the year 4 BC. This eclipse is recognized by an overwhelming majority of researchers as the event referred to by Josephus. From the account provided by Josephus, it appears that Herod the Great died at the end of March or beginning of April in 4 BC.³⁴

A lunar eclipse that had occurred six months earlier, on the night of September 15 of 5 BC, has been proposed by a few commentators as the eclipse referred to by Josephus, with the suggestion that Herod died in early winter of 5 BC (which is consistent with a late Jewish tradition that he died on the seventh day of the Jewish month of Kislev—late November by the



The Herodion, site of a sumptuous palace complex and hilltop fortress of Herod the Great. Herod was buried here in April of 4 BC in a special mausoleum built for his tomb on the eastern slope of the artificially built-up, cone-shaped hill. Courtesy Jeffrey R. Chadwick.



Excavated remains of the podium of Herod's tomb at the Herodion. Courtesy Jeffrey R. Chadwick.

Roman calendar).³⁵ However, this date fell months prior to Passover and is otherwise difficult to reconcile with the known length of time Herod is recorded to have reigned, as noted by Thomas A. Wayment's study. Wayment—and Brown, Griggs, and Hansen before him—seem willing to at least consider the September 15 eclipse of 5 BC as the one mentioned by Josephus, but they seem more convinced by the 4 BC eclipse of March 13.³⁶ The present study argues that a September eclipse and November death date for Herod in 5 BC are not possible in view of what is known about the length of Jesus's life.

John P. Pratt's 1 BC Eclipse Proposal

For all intents and purposes, the strength of the evidence for the 4 BC eclipse of March 13 and a death date for Herod at the end of March or beginning of April that same year should settle the question of how early Jesus was born—the historical and astronomical facts cannot accommodate Talmage's 1 BC model. However, John P. Pratt again attempted to defend the 1 BC model in his 1990 article "Yet Another Eclipse for Herod"

by proposing the occurrence of an eclipse on December 29 of 1 BC, one that previous researchers had not noticed or taken into account. Pratt identified this eclipse as the one referred to by Josephus and proposed that the death of Herod the Great must have occurred shortly thereafter, early in AD 1.³⁷ Because both of these suggested dates fall several months after April of 1 BC, Pratt concluded that the birth of Jesus can indeed have occurred on April 6 of 1 BC as proposed by Talmage.

But there is a flaw in Pratt's approach to the whole problem of dating Jesus's birth. In attempting to ascertain Herod the Great's death date, Pratt (like many other researchers) relies solely on Josephus's reference to the eclipse preceding Herod's death and takes no other data, historical or otherwise, into consideration. There is, however, other significant historical information offered by Josephus, entirely separate from the eclipse, that places Herod's death in 4 BC. As previously mentioned, Herod's son Archelaus succeeded him as the ruler of Judea—this is noted in both the New Testament (Matt. 2:22) and also in Josephus's *Antiquities*.³⁸ Josephus also reported that Archelaus reigned over Judea and Samaria for ten years and that in his tenth year, due to severe complaints against him from both Jews and Samaritans, he was deposed by Caesar Augustus, who removed him from his office in Judea and banished him to Vienna.³⁹ The legate or governor of Syria, whose name was Quirinius,⁴⁰ was assigned by the emperor to travel to Jerusalem and liquidate the estate of Archelaus, as well as to conduct a registration of persons and property in Archelaus's former realm. This occurred immediately after Archelaus was deposed and was specifically dated by Josephus to the thirty-seventh year after Caesar's victory over Mark Anthony at Actium.⁴¹ The Battle of Actium is a well-known event in Roman history that took place in the Ionian Sea off the shore of Greece on September 2 of the year 31 BC. This is a secular Roman historical date, not in any way dependent on the New Testament chronology. Counting thirty-seven years forward from the 31 BC Battle of Actium yields a date of AD 6 for the tenth year of Archelaus and his banishment from Judea. And since Archelaus was in his tenth year, counting back ten years from AD 6 yields a date of 4 BC for the year in which Herod the Great died. (In this counting, the beginning and ending years are both included in the count, since regnal years for both Augustus and the Herodians were so figured.) These calculations provide compelling evidence for the generally accepted date of Herod's death in 4 BC, independent of any particular eclipse date. Based on reliable historical evidence, Herod the Great could not have died in AD 1.

The Date of Jesus's Death

All four New Testament gospels appear to report that Jesus's death occurred on the day of the Passover preparation, when lambs for the festival were being sacrificed.⁴² In the Jewish calendar, this occurred on the fourteenth day of the spring month of Nisan. The Passover Seder meal took place that very evening. The four gospels also indicate that Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the week, the day we know as Sunday (see Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1; John 20:1). Jesus had been specific in explaining that he would rise again on the third day following his death (see Matt. 16:21; 17:23; 20:19; Mark 9:31; 10:34; Luke 9:22; 18:33).⁴³ Another relevant fact is that Jesus was sentenced to death by Pontius Pilate, the Roman prefect/governor of Judea and Samaria (see Matt. 27:24; Mark 15:15; Luke 23:24; John 19:16). Pilate's administration lasted from AD 26 to AD 36. These specific references allow identification of candidates for the year in which Jesus died.

The Jewish festival calendar was based on months that began with the new moon. The spring month of Nisan, for example, always began with the first day of that month marked by the new moon. Since it is possible through astronomical calculation to identify in the past the date and weekday of any new moon, and also the time of its observation on that date and day, the first of Nisan can often be figured to the exact day, and always within a tolerance of one additional day, in any year in antiquity. Through simple counting, the fourteenth day of Nisan can likewise be calculated.

Another factor to keep in mind is that Passover must occur after the onset of spring (after the vernal equinox, which usually occurs around March 20 or 21). Thus, the fourteenth of Nisan on which Jesus died has to have fallen in the few weeks following March 21. And it must also have occurred on a weekday no earlier in the week than Thursday so that no more than three days passed before the arrival of Sunday, the day on which he rose from the dead. (Tradition holds that Jesus died on a Friday, but alternative models have suggested Thursday as the more probable day).⁴⁴ Jesus cannot have died on a Saturday, since three days cannot have passed by the time Sunday arrived. Likewise, Jesus cannot have died on a Sunday, Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday, since the arrival of the following Sunday would be more than three days later. Jesus must have died on a Thursday or a Friday.

From table 2, which has been adapted from the respected study of Colin J. Humphreys and W. G. Waddington (who utilized Julian calendar dates),⁴⁵ it is evident that during the years when Pontius Pilate was prefect/governor of Judea and Samaria (AD 26–36) there were only three years when the fourteenth of Nisan fell on a Thursday or a Friday, late enough in the

Table 2
Weekdays and Julian Dates for the Fourteenth of Nisan during the
Administration of Pontius Pilate as Prefect of Judea and Samaria, AD 26–36

Year	New Moon Time	Earliest Possible Day for 14th of Nisan
AD 26	06:40, April 6	Sunday, April 21
AD 27*	20:05, March 26	Thursday, April 10, or Friday, April 11
AD 28	02:30, March 15	Tuesday, March 30
AD 29	19:40, April 2	Sunday, April 17, or Monday, April 18
AD 30*	19:55, March 22	Thursday, April 6, or Friday, April 7
AD 31	00:25, March 12	Tuesday, March 27
AD 32	22:10, March 29	Sunday, April 13, or Monday, April 14
AD 33*	12:45, March 19	Friday, April 3
AD 34	05:25, March 9	Wednesday, March 24
AD 35	06:10, March 28	Tuesday, April 12
AD 36	17:50, March 16	Saturday, March 31

* The only instances when the fourteenth of Nisan fell on a Thursday or a Friday.

week for three days to be counted as having passed away, or for Sunday to be noted as the “third day.” These three years were AD 27, AD 30, and AD 33.

The time of the new moon on the first day of Nisan in AD 33 leaves no doubt that the fourteenth of Nisan fell on a Friday that year. In AD 27 and AD 30, however, the time of the new moon on the first of Nisan was such that astronomical calculations can only say that the earliest possible day for the fourteenth of the month was a Thursday. This was the likely weekday, of course, since in Judea the new moons were counted mechanically from the date of the previously sighted new moon (meaning that the Aaronic priests would have counted either 29 or 30 days since the actual sighting of the previous new moon of the month of Adar). But because of the post-sundown appearance of that new moon (at 20:05 hours in AD 27 and at 19:55 in AD 30) there is a possibility that the new month of Nisan might have been counted from sundown the following day, putting the fourteenth of Nisan on a Friday rather than Thursday. This is as much as astronomical calculation can reveal, so the question of whether the fourteenth of Nisan fell on Thursday or Friday in AD 27 or in AD 30 must be settled from other evidence. But for

the purposes of this study, it is significant that both Thursday and Friday fall within a window of time three days prior to Sunday.

Having established that there were only three years when the day of Jesus's death, the fourteenth of Nisan, could have fallen on a Thursday or Friday—namely, the years AD 27, AD 30, and AD 33—the issue that remains for us to determine is the exact length of Jesus's mortal life, and which of those three years was the most likely for his death. That information will narrow the possibilities for the year of Jesus's death to only AD 30.

The Length of Jesus's Mortal Life

The New Testament itself does not specify how long Jesus lived. The record in Luke notes that Jesus “began to be about thirty years of age” (Luke 4:23) at the time of his temptations, but this is a rather imprecise statement. He may have been somewhat younger than thirty or, more likely, somewhat older than thirty. He may have been as old as thirty-one by the time he commenced his ministry. There is also no direct statement in the gospels of how long Jesus's ministry lasted prior to his Crucifixion. However, John gives some helpful evidence in this regard, since he notes three specific Passover festivals that occurred during Jesus's teaching activities. The first (see John 2:13–23) was at the very outset of his ministry, which involved his initial casting out of merchants from the temple. The second (see John 6:4) occurred while Jesus taught in Galilee. And the third (see John 12:1 and 19:14) was the Passover at which Jesus was crucified, which was also mentioned in the synoptic gospels (see Matt. 26:2, Mark 14:1, Luke 22:1). These references would seem to suggest that Jesus's teaching ministry lasted two years—the first year being the period from the Passover of John 2 to the Passover of John 6, and the second year being the period from the Passover of John 6 to the Passover of John 12.

Many LDS commentaries, however, are keyed to the so-called “four Passover theory,” which postulates that the “feast of the Jews” mentioned in John 5:1 was also a Passover, thus allowing for a ministry model of three years rather than two. Taking the “thirty years” of Luke 4:23 as a precise statement of age and utilizing a three-year ministry model, LDS commentaries generally assume that the New Testament is reporting Jesus's lifetime as having lasted thirty-three years, a figure coinciding with information from the Book of Mormon. It must be noted, however, that while the Book of Mormon may be relied upon for accuracy in its report for the length of Jesus's life, this does not necessarily mean that Jesus's ministry lasted three years. For one thing, there is a more likely festival than Passover for the “feast of the Jews” mentioned in John 5:1, namely, the Jewish New Year

known as Rosh HaShannah.⁴⁶ The imprecision of the reference to “thirty years” in Luke 4:23 could well indicate that Jesus did not actually begin his teaching activities until he was thirty-one, and that his ministry was indeed only two years long. The issue remains unsettled.⁴⁷

It is the Book of Mormon that gives a specific count to the number of years Jesus lived.⁴⁸ The book of 3 Nephi reports that a sign appeared in ancient America on the very day that Jesus was born on the other side of the world (see 3 Ne. 1:12–19). Some nine years later, “the Nephites began to reckon their time from this period when the sign was given, or from the coming of Christ” (3 Ne. 2:8). Then, thirty-three full years after the sign of Jesus’s birth, a great storm occurred, accompanied by significant destruction and three days of darkness, marking the day on which Jesus died (see 3 Ne. 8:5–23). In connection with this destructive sign of Jesus’s death, Mormon recorded that “the thirty and third year had passed away” (3 Ne. 8:2) and that the storm hit “in the thirty and fourth year, in the first month, on the fourth day of the month” (3 Ne. 8:5). In terms of how many years Jesus lived in mortality, the record in 3 Nephi seems clear.⁴⁹ Jesus lived thirty-three full years, not a year more or a year less.⁵⁰

The Length of Nephite Years

It is also virtually certain that the years referred to in 3 Nephi were 365 days long, the same length as the ancient Jewish lunar-solar year, and the same length as the modern secular calendar year.⁵¹ The Nephites were still observing the Law of Moses during the 3 Nephi period. The performances of the Law of Moses, as found in biblical writings available to the Nephites (on the brass plates of Laban), were keyed to the seasons of the 365-day solar year, beginning with a “first month” (see Ex. 12:2, 18), which was the spring month that the biblical record called Aviv (KJV “Abib,” a name that actually means “spring”; see Ex. 23:15; 34:18; Deut. 16:1). But the solar count notwithstanding, those biblical months ran on a lunar cycle, beginning with each new moon. In other words, the ancient biblical months were lunar counts, even though the Jewish agricultural and festival year was based on the seasons of the solar count. This is why the Jewish year is referred to as lunar-solar. The lunar count was intercalated to coincide with the solar count. A twelve-month lunar year is only 354 days long, on average, which is eleven days shorter than the 365-day year. Without adjustment, the first month of the lunar year would occur eleven days earlier each solar year. Within just a few years it would fall back to winter rather than spring, and within a few more to autumn instead of winter, and so on. So the ancient Israelites devised a system of intercalation that added an extra month to their year every three

years or so in order to ensure that their first month (according to lunar count) always stayed in early spring (according to solar count). Thus the Jewish way of counting months and years evolved as a lunar-solar system.

The Nephites apparently had a method of counting lunar months (as noted in the counting of “nine moons” in Omni 1:21), but their agricultural calendar, like that of the Jews and virtually every other ancient society on the planet, would undoubtedly have been a solar calendar that accounted for the equinoxes and solstices that mark the four seasons of the 365-day year. To properly observe the Law of Moses, the Nephites would have observed Passover in the “first month” (Ex. 12:2; 12:18), which their biblical record would have called Aviv, or spring (Ex. 23:15; 34:18; Deut. 16:1). That the first Nephite month did indeed fall in spring, at least at the time of Jesus’s death, seems clear from the account in 3 Nephi 8:5.

So, notwithstanding differences that must have developed between the ways the ancient Near Eastern Jewish calendar and the ancient American Nephite calendar separately evolved, it seems a reasonable conclusion that the Nephites were (1) observing a 365-day solar count, which (2) accommodated a first month that began in close proximity to the vernal equinox. LDS scholarly consensus currently identifies Nephite-Lamanite culture in general as a component of ancient Mesoamerican society and, in particular, the preclassic Mayan society of southern Mexico and Guatemala.⁵² The ancient Mayan calendar system is quite well understood by modern scholars. It featured a solar year of 365 days, which was called *Haab* and which was the primary annual count.⁵³ Other counts, including lunar cycles, were known and utilized by the Maya, but the primary annual count for agriculture and human events was the *Haab*. This, too, points to the likelihood that the years referred to in 3 Nephi were 365 days long.

Thirty-three Years and a Few Months

The reference to thirty-three full years in 3 Nephi is most helpful in determining the *general* time of the birth of Jesus. But there is yet another factor involved, because thirty-three full years counted back from April of AD 30 arrives at April of 4 BC, a month impossible for the birth of Jesus to have occurred if we accept the historically established fact that Herod the Great died within days of the beginning of that very month. Jesus has to have been born a minimum of eight weeks prior to Herod’s death in order to accommodate the events reported in Luke 2 and Matthew 2 that occurred between his birth and Herod’s death. Those events include Jesus’s naming and circumcision at age eight days (see Luke 2:21) as well as the forty-day purification period Mary would have completed (see Luke 2:22) before she

and Joseph traveled to Jerusalem for a day to present the baby Jesus in the temple (see Luke 2:22–38)—this all equals six weeks. And it was only after the presentation in the temple that the “wise men from the east” arrived at Joseph and Mary’s house in Bethlehem seeking the newborn “King of the Jews” (Matt. 2:1–11). After the Magi departed, Joseph and Mary immediately took Jesus to Egypt (see Matt. 2:13–16), a trip of more than two hundred miles, which would have taken some two weeks. And it was only after their arrival in Egypt that an angel revealed to Joseph in a dream that Herod had died (see Matt. 2:19).

So, at a minimum, Jesus would have been born eight weeks prior to Herod’s death at the beginning of April. And it is likely that the above events were not compressed together without any intervening days, meaning that there were probably a few weeks between the presentation at the Temple in Jerusalem in Luke 2 and the arrival of the Magi in Matthew 2, and likewise a few weeks of Joseph and Mary living in Egypt prior to Herod’s death. All this would put the birth of Jesus as much as three or four months prior to Herod’s passing and points to a window of time around December of 5 BC for the birth of Jesus.

But this would also mean that Jesus was not exactly thirty-three years old when he died at the beginning of April in AD 30, but was closer to thirty-three years and three or four months. Of course, nothing in the New Testament would conflict with such a calculation of his age. But can the account in the Book of Mormon accommodate this suggestion? The answer is yes. One thing that the account in 3 Nephi does *not* specifically explain is whether the Nephites counted back to the actual day of the sign of Jesus’s birth (3 Ne. 1:15–19) as the beginning day of their new “year one,” or whether they had continued to utilize their regular monthly count and had simply regarded the normal arrival of their next New Year’s Day after the sign of his birth as the onset of their new “year one.” This is where evidence from the New Testament and Roman/Jewish history actually allows for a more precise understanding of a Book of Mormon issue, because from the discussion of historical and New Testament issues presented earlier it seems clear that Jesus must have lived a few months longer than thirty-three full years. Therefore, the Book of Mormon question can be answered: the Nephites, after deciding to count their years from the sign of Jesus’s birth, seem to have designated their new “year one” not from the very day of that sign, but from the arrival of their regular new year a few months later. As a consequence, and based on 3 Nephi 8:5, it seems that the Nephite year continued to begin in the spring, which is to be expected since the Nephites in 3 Nephi were still observing the Law of Moses and were likely still utilizing the month count noted in Exodus 12:2. In other words, from the Book

of Mormon it is clear that Jesus lived at least thirty-three full years, and absolutely not thirty-four years. And from the New Testament and Roman/Jewish history, it is demonstrable that Jesus lived about three months or so longer than thirty-three years. In any event, there is nothing in the Book of Mormon account that would necessarily conflict with this conclusion. A flexible reading of the Book of Mormon regarding the length of Jesus's life, one that does not arbitrarily impose the idea that Jesus lived exactly thirty-three years and no more, would allow for his birth to have occurred in December of 5 BC.

The Annunciation to Mary and the Timing of Her Conception

Another significant piece of evidence that points to a December date of birth for Jesus is actually the first event reported in the story of his birth. It is the account of the Annunciation to Mary found in the first chapter of Luke. That record reports that "in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God" (Luke 1:26) to announce to Mary that she would conceive and bring forth a son to be named Jesus (see Luke 1:27–31). In the Jewish context of the account, this would mean the month of Adar, the sixth month of the Jewish year. Adar was the late-winter month that paralleled the period from mid-to-late February through mid-to-late March. Adar was followed by the month of Nisan, which was the spring month in which Passover fell.

Even though for centuries, since Moses's time, the spring month of Aviv had been regarded as the first month of the year, major changes had occurred in Jewish calendar terminology by the time Jesus was born. For one thing, Mesopotamian names for lunar months had become adopted by the Jewish nation after the Babylonian captivity in the sixth century BC. The name Nisan came to replace the name Aviv for the spring month in which Passover occurred. Additionally, by the first century BC, the early autumn month called Tishri had come to be regarded as the first month of the Jewish year. Tishri parallels the period from mid-to-late September through mid-to-late October. The first day of Tishri had become known to Jews as Rosh HaShannah, which means "head of the year"—the Jewish New Year.⁵⁴ And even though the Jewish months had Mesopotamian names, they were often designated numerically, rather than by name, so that to say "the first month" or "the second month" or "the sixth month" was a common figure of speech. Thus, at the time of Jesus's birth, the "first month" of the Jewish year was the autumn month of Tishri, and the "sixth month" of the Jewish year was the late winter month of Adar.

So the angel Gabriel's announcement to Mary concerning her imminent conception took place in Adar, the "sixth month." And from the account in Luke it appears that the Annunciation actually occurred near the end of Adar (mid-to-late March) and that Mary conceived immediately or within a day or two of the angel's visit. This is all evident because Luke reported that after the Annunciation Mary traveled "with haste" (immediately) to Judea, where she stayed for three months with her older kinswoman Elisabeth, and that the older woman, six months pregnant with her own child, instantly recognized that Mary was also carrying a child in her womb (see Luke 2:39–43). (Coincidentally, the "sixth month" spoken of in Luke 1:26 was also the sixth month of pregnancy for Elisabeth.)⁵⁵ A young woman like Mary (who was probably not older than seventeen) would not have traveled alone from the Galilee to Judea, a distance of nearly one hundred miles on foot. She probably traveled with family or community members in a journey that is not specifically explained in the Luke account. The unstated reason for this trip could well have been to attend the Passover festival at Jerusalem, which took place during mid-Nisan, just two weeks following Adar. Because of the crowds at Passover, as well as the need to secure lodging, obtain a lamb and other supplies for the feast, and perform requisite washings and purifications, most Passover attendees arrived at Jerusalem several days in advance of the festival. Thus, Mary and her family probably arrived at Jerusalem by the seventh of Nisan or thereabouts, which means they had departed Nazareth four or five days prior to that, about the second or third of Nisan. And remember, Mary (and her travel party) had come very soon ("with haste") after the Annunciation.

All these indicators point to the Annunciation and conception having happened near the end of the month of Adar, which would be sometime in mid-to-late March. This would place the birth of Mary's child nine months later, near the end of the Jewish month of Kislev, sometime in December. And since the Jewish festival of Hanukkah began on the twenty-fifth day of Kislev and lasted for eight days, it is quite possible, perhaps even probable, that Jesus was born during Hanukkah at the end of 5 BC.

As noted earlier, the primary model for the timing of events surrounding Jesus's conception and birth, which was accepted by President Clark and followed by Elder McConkie, was that the Annunciation and conception took place in March of 5 BC, with the birth of Jesus nine months later in December of 5 BC. The above explanation of events, including the Passover festival in Jerusalem as the likely reason for Mary's journey to Judea, accounts for why the widely accepted March and December dates are so plausible.

Evaluating the Historical Possibilities

The celebrated mystery novelist Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, through the mouth of his famous character, the detective Sherlock Holmes, often made this observation: "It is an old maxim of mine that when you have excluded the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth."⁵⁶ With this in mind, the summary list of possibilities for Jesus's birth date, which was outlined earlier, can now be evaluated to see which proposals are unlikely, if not impossible, at least in view of what is known from the scriptural records, historical records, and archaeological and astronomical research. What remains will be the most likely date for Jesus's nativity, a day in December of 5 BC. However, in contrast to the qualifier in Holmes's maxim, this date is not at all improbable.

April of 1 BC. It does not appear possible for any date in April of 1 BC to have been the time of the birth of Jesus. The New Testament indicates Jesus was born prior to the death of Herod the Great. Herod is known, with a high degree of historical certainty, to have died within a few days of the beginning of April in the year 4 BC. This timing is secured not only by Josephus's notation of the lunar eclipse that occurred shortly before Herod died (dated positively to March 13 in 4 BC), but also independently by Josephus's explanation of the years of the reign of Herod and his son Archelaus in relation to the Battle of Actium. In short, Herod died in 4 BC. Jesus cannot have been born after that year.

April of 4 BC. Though the reasoning is somewhat redundant to the preceding explanation, this month, too, can also be ruled out as the time of Jesus's birth. Orson Pratt's suggestion of April 11 of 4 BC as the Nativity date and McConkie's caveat regarding April of 4 BC cannot be accommodated by the historical evidence. The reasons just outlined concerning Herod's death apply to April of 4 BC as much as to any later date. Herod died within days of the beginning of April that year, and Jesus has to have been born at least two months, and more likely three to four months, prior to Herod's death in order for all of the events described in Luke and Matthew to have taken place before Herod's passing. This would push the latest historically plausible date for Jesus's birth back to late December of 5 BC.

April of 5 BC. Any date in April of 5 BC, whether it be April 6 or some other day, is likewise unworkable as the natal date of Jesus. The death of Jesus must have occurred in early April of AD 30, the only year in which Passover fell late in the week and which also allows Jesus to have lived thirty-three full years from his birth. But April of 5 BC was thirty-four full years prior to Jesus's death, and the language of the Book of Mormon

does not allow for thirty-four full years to have passed from Jesus's birth to his death.

The report in Matthew 2 that Herod had the children of Bethlehem "from two years old and under" slain has led some commentators to suggest that the wise men did not arrive until a year or more after Jesus's birth. However, since it is virtually certain that Herod's death occurred at the beginning of April in 4 BC, to count a full year or more back from that event (that is, to suggest a birth date for Jesus in April of 5 BC or April of 6 BC) does not yield feasible results, since those dates would be thirty-four or thirty-five full years prior to the death of Jesus in April of AD 30, and the Book of Mormon reckoning does not allow for that much time.

Spring to Autumn of 5 BC. For the reasons just stated, a date anytime in the spring of 5 BC, as suggested by Wayment, does not appear possible. Summer and autumn of that year can likewise, for all practical purposes, be ruled out. The date of Jesus's death, in April of AD 30, was more than thirty-three and a half years after the end of the summer of 5 BC, a span too long to fall within even a flexible model of what the 3 Nephi account would allow for Jesus's lifespan. A date in autumn of 5 BC might fall within such a flexible model, but another factor disqualifies autumn: the reference in Luke 1 to the "sixth month" for the Annunciation to Mary. Elizabeth's pregnancy notwithstanding, the term "sixth month" is an unmistakable reference to the Jewish month of Adar, indicating that Gabriel's visit to Mary and the miraculous conception she experienced immediately afterward occurred in March. This necessarily places the birth of Mary's son nine months later, near the end of the Jewish month of Kislev, which would fall in December.⁵⁷

Any Time Prior to 5 BC, Such as 6 BC or 7 BC. While proposals as early as these are not among the LDS models noted earlier, it is important to eliminate them anyway. A date in 6 BC might be postulated on account of Herod having the children of Bethlehem "from two years old and under" slain (Matt. 2:16). But a birth date in 6 BC would not match Jesus's thirty-three-year (and a few months) lifespan to any date AD when it was possible for him to have been executed (he cannot have been crucified in AD 28, since the fourteenth of Nisan fell on a Tuesday that year). The year 7 BC could mathematically be reconciled with a death date in AD 27, when the fourteenth of Nisan fell on either a Thursday or a Friday. But AD 27 is too early for Jesus to have died, since Luke noted that John the Baptist's ministry began "in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar" (Luke 3:1), the commencement of which can be confidently dated to autumn AD 27.⁵⁸ Jesus cannot have died the same year John began preaching, since Jesus himself only began preaching at Passover (spring AD 28), just months after John's advent.



Manger Square and the Church of the Nativity (traditional birthplace of Christ, and not at all improbable that it is the actual birthplace). Courtesy Jeffrey R. Chadwick.

December of 5 BC. Because the above proposals all contradict some part of the historical and scriptural evidence, the beginning of winter in 5 BC, specifically the month we know as December, remains as the only proposed window of time in which the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem can logically have occurred. In its favor, this period falls nine months after the Annunciation to Mary in late Adar (March), making it consistent with the time of the Nativity from the perspective of Luke's gospel. It also falls thirty-three full years and three to four months prior to April of AD 30, accommodating the Book of Mormon reference to the thirty-third year having passed away at the time of Jesus's death. As noted, President Clark utilized the December of 5 BC date in his book *Our Lord of the Gospels*. And this was also Elder McConkie's primary preference. Wayment also allowed for the winter of 5 BC in his dating model. When all is said and done, the facts from the New Testament, the Book of Mormon, and the history of Josephus, combined with input from archaeological and astronomical research, all point to a day in December of 5 BC (late in the Jewish month of Kislev) for the date of Jesus's birth.

Conclusions

Two conclusions emerge from this study. The first is this: in the five-year period examined (5 BC to 1 BC), there is no year in which April 6 could have been the birth date of Jesus. This conclusion may disappoint some Latter-day Saints who have been conditioned to think of April 6 as the Savior's birthday. However, Latter-day Saints' appreciation for this calendar date should in no way be diminished, because the intent of D&C 20:1 was not to fix the date of Jesus's nativity; rather, the intent (as with D&C 21:3) was to designate April 6 as the day on which the Church of Jesus Christ was organized in its latter-day dispensation. This noble and divinely inspired event makes the date of April 6 a sacred latter-day anniversary in its own right.⁵⁹

The second conclusion perhaps goes without saying: the traditional date of Christmas, December 25, falls within the window of time in which it would appear that Jesus must have been born. It is just as possible that Jesus was born on the calendar date we call December 25 as on any other date in the few weeks preceding it or the week following it. But this study in no way concludes that December 25 was actually the birth date of Jesus.⁶⁰ While people may always see things differently, the totality of the evidence presented above allows only one conclusion: that his birth occurred within those December weeks that we now commonly refer to as the Christmas season.

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1. James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ: A Study of the Messiah and His Mission According to the Holy Scriptures Both Ancient and Modern* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1915), 102–4.

2. Joseph Smith mentioned having received the revelation known as Doctrine and Covenants 87 on Christmas day of 1832. Joseph Smith Jr., *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2d ed., rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971), 1:301 (hereafter cited as *History of the Church*). He mentioned enjoying himself with his family at home in Kirtland, Ohio, on Christmas day in 1835 (*History of the Church*, 2:345, December 25, 1835). He further mentioned preparations on December 23, 1843, for a Christmas dinner party at his Nauvoo, Illinois, home (*History of the Church*, 6:133), and enjoying the party with about fifty other couples on the afternoon of Christmas day (*History of the Church*, 6:134).

3. *History of the Church*, 1:64; also current headnote to Doctrine and Covenants 20. For a discussion of D&C 20:1, see note 12 below.

4. Orson Pratt, in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855–86), 13:126–27, April 10, 1870; and 15:256–57, December 29, 1872.

5. B. H. Roberts, *Outlines of Ecclesiastical History* (1893; repr., Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1927), 17.

6. Anthon H. Lund, “Christmas Reflections,” in *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, comp. James R. Clark, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965–75), 4:29, December 21, 1901.

7. Joseph F. Smith, Charles W. Penrose, and James E. Talmage, “‘Tidings of Comfort and Joy’ from the First Presidency,” in *Messages of the First Presidency*, 4:347, December 18, 1915.

8. Hyrum M. Smith and Janne M. Sjodahl, *The Doctrine and Covenants: Containing Revelations Given to Joseph Smith, Jr., the Prophet* (1919; repr., Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1923), 138. See also note 18 below.

9. Harold B. Lee, “Strengthen the Stakes of Zion,” *Ensign* 3, no. 7 (July 1973): 2. At the annual conference of the Church on April 6, 1973, President Lee noted: This “is a particularly significant date because it commemorates not only the anniversary of the organization of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in this dispensation, but also the anniversary of the birth of the Savior, our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ.” He went on to explain that “Joseph Smith wrote this, *preceding a revelation* given at that same date” and, after quoting D&C 20:1, added, “*Traditionally* since that time, the spring conferences of the Church are held on the days of each year which include April 6.” Lee, “Strengthen the Stakes,” 2, emphasis added. President Lee seems have struck a sensitive balance between profound regard for this inspired commemorative date and the fact that this information was written in a preface that perhaps only preceded the beginning of the actual words of revelation. See note 12.

10. Spencer W. Kimball, “Remarks and Dedication of the Fayette, New York, Buildings,” *Ensign* 10, no. 5 (May 1980): 54. At a landmark occasion celebrating four great moments in time, President Spencer W. Kimball was thrilled to speak by a videotaped broadcast to the entire Church from the Peter Whitmer farm home, where the Church was organized, and then from the chapel in Fayette, New York. He saw that occasion as representing “something of the marvelous progress made by the Church during the 150 years of its history,” and said, “My brothers and sisters, today we not only celebrate the Sesquicentennial of the organization of the Church, but also the greatest event in human history since the birth of Christ on this day 1,980 years ago. Today is Easter Sunday.” Kimball, “Remarks and Dedication,” 54. It would understandably appear that President Kimball’s attention was focused on the organization of the Church that day and hence solely on D&C 20:1. Edward Kimball, the son and biographer of Spencer W. Kimball, reports in an email to John W. Welch dated November 16, 2010, that he is unaware of any other comment by President Kimball about the dating of the birth of Jesus.

11. Gordon B. Hinckley, First Presidency Christmas Devotional, December 7, 1997, in *Discourses of President Gordon B. Hinckley, Volume 1: 1995–1999* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005), 409. While President Hinckley did not specifically mention the date of April 6 in this address, the implication is obvious: “While we now know through revelation the time of the Savior’s birth, we observe the 25th of December with the rest of the Christian world.”

On several December occasions in the 1990s, President Gordon B. Hinckley voiced his gratitude “beyond power of expression” during the “glorious and wonderful” Christmas season “for the plan of salvation, for the gift of the Son of God, who gave His life that we might have eternal life,” testifying “of His living reality [and] of the divinity of His nature. . . . This is what Christmas is really all about.” *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 60–61. While he indeed said in December 1997, “While we now know through revelation the time of the Savior’s birth,” we may assume (although he did not say) that he had D&C 20:1 in mind, in the context of explaining to a public audience that Latter-day Saints gladly celebrate Christmas on December 25. *Discourses of President Gordon B. Hinckley*, 409. Latter-day Saints are not committed by revelation to any particular date. At least one knowledgeable publication by Deseret Book since the time of this statement by President Hinckley has not taken notice of it in discussing the dating of the birth of Christ. On that publication, see text accompanying notes 28 and 29 below.

12. It appears that whenever Latter-day Saints connect the date of Jesus’s birth with April 6, they have D&C 20:1 in mind. This verse is the opening preface that dates the “Church Articles & Covenants,” which were evidently transcribed on April 10, 1830, after the Church was organized as a religious association (which is different from a religious corporation) under New York law on April 6, 1830. For this date and the earliest manuscript of this document, see Robin Scott Jensen, Robert J. Woodford, and Steven C. Harper, eds., *Manuscript Revelations Book*, facsimile edition, first volume of the Revelations and Translations series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2009), 75, which is page 52 in the Book of Commandments and Revelations. Without detracting from the overall revelatory importance of D&C section 20 as a whole, it appears that this verse, which is part of the initial heading of the section, is not a part of the revelation proper. If the Lord were speaking in 20:1, one would wonder why he would speak of “the coming of *our* Lord” and of “the laws of *our* country,” as this verse reads. Likewise, it would seem significant that what is now D&C 21:3 originally read, “which church was organized and established in the year of *our* Lord eighteen hundred and thirty, in the fourth month, and on the sixth day of the month which is called April,” as it reads in the 1831 manuscript (*Manuscript Revelations Book*, 27, which is page 28 in the Book of Commandments and Revelations) and also in the 1833 Book of Commandments. This phrase, “year of our Lord,” was changed to read “year of your Lord” when these words appeared as part of section 46 in the 1835 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants, apparently to make the grammar of this verse blend with the preceding and following verses. For this reason, many people have thought, and probably correctly so, that these words are simply a way of stating the date on which the Church was organized. Indeed, in the historical record the Lord commanded John Whitmer to keep (see D&C 47:1), Whitmer used the exact language employed in D&C 20:1, but in reference to a different date: “It is now June the twelfth, one thousand eight hundred and thirty one years, since the coming of our Lord and Savior in the flesh.” F. Mark McKiernan and Roger D. Launius, eds., *An Early Latter Day Saint History: The Book of John Whitmer* (Independence, Miss.: Herald Publishing House, 1980), 25; see also <http://www.boap.org/LDS/Early-Saints/JWhitmer-history.html> (accessed November 18, 2010).

It is interesting that John Whitmer was also the scribe who recorded the “Church Articles & Covenants” (D&C 20) in the Book of Commandments and Revelations (BCR) and composed the headnotes to the revelations. Steven C. Harper, one of the Joseph Smith Papers editors who prepared the BCR for publication, made this observation: “Another significant chronological contribution of the BCR is Whitmer’s preface to the text he titled ‘Church Articles & Covenants,’ Doctrine and Covenants section 20, which he dated April 10, 1830, four days *after* the Church’s organization on April 6. In my judgment, the fact that this text was written after, not on or before April 6, strengthens the argument that its introduction is not necessarily revealing, as some have argued, the day and year of Christ’s birth.” Steven C. Harper, “Historical Headnotes and the Index of Contents in the Book of Commandments and Revelations,” *BYU Studies* 48, no. 3 (2009): 57.

One may certainly argue that the main (if not exclusive) purpose of this dating information in D&C 20:1 and 21:3 is to give the date of the organization of the Church, a date directed by God as a monumentally important date in its own right identified on the calendar used by people in that day and age. D&C 20:1 speaks of “the rise of the Church of Christ in these last days, being one thousand eight hundred and thirty years since the coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in the flesh, it being regularly organized and established agreeable to the laws of our country, by the will and commandments of God, in the fourth month, and on the sixth day of the month which is called April.” The points here seem to emphasize (1) the fact that the Church was rising again “in these last days,” (2) that these are the “last days,” even 1,830 years since the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh, and then (3) that the Church was legally organized by commandment of God on April 6. As Joseph wrote several years later in *History of the Church*, 1:64, it was “by the spirit of prophecy and revelation” that “the precise day upon which . . . we should proceed to organize His Church once more here upon the earth” was given. Two points seem clear in this regard: first, D&C 20:1 does not directly connect the specific date of April 6 with the coming of Christ, for that date appears in the second half of the verse and modifies “it,” meaning the legal organization of the Church; and second, Joseph’s statement in *History of the Church* makes no mention of the coming or birth of Christ. I thank John W. Welch for providing the historical context of D&C 20 reproduced in this note and Roger Terry for making me aware of the quotation from the Book of John Whitmer.

13. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 104.

14. J. Reuben Clark, *Our Lord of the Gospels* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1954), vii.

15. Clark, *Our Lord of the Gospels*, 31–33, 168, 174. For the Annunciation to Mary, President Clark follows the dating of Andrews, which is expressed as March–April of 5 BC (essentially Adar).

16. Clark, *Our Lord of the Gospels*, 162.

17. Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah*, 4 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979), 1:349.

18. From note 2 at the end of chapter 20 in McConkie, *Mortal Messiah*, 1:349–50: “We do not believe it is possible with the present state of our knowledge—including that which is known both in and out of the Church—to state with finality when the natal day of the Lord Jesus actually occurred. Elder James E. Talmage takes the view that he was born on April 6, 1 B.C., basing his conclusion on

Doctrine and Covenants 20:1, which speaks of the day on which the Church was organized, saying it was ‘one thousand eight hundred and thirty years since the coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in the flesh.’ April 6 is then named as the specific day for the formal organization. Elder Talmage notes the Book of Mormon chronology, which says that the Lord Jesus would be born six hundred years after Lehi left Jerusalem. (Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 102–4.)

“Elder Hyrum M. Smith of the Council of the Twelve wrote in the *Doctrine and Covenants Commentary*: ‘The organization of the Church in the year 1830 is hardly to be regarded as giving divine authority to the commonly accepted calendar. There are reasons for believing that those who, a long time after our Savior’s birth, tried to ascertain the correct time, erred in their calculations, and that the Nativity occurred four years before our era, or in the year of Rome 750. All that this Revelation means to say is that the Church was organized in the year commonly accepted as 1830, A.D.’ Rome 750 is equivalent, as indicated, to 4 B.C.

“President J. Reuben Clark, Jr., in *Our Lord of the Gospels*, a scholarly and thoughtful work, says in his preface that many scholars ‘fix the date of the Savior’s birth at the end of 5 B.C., or the beginning or early part of 4 B.C.’ He then quotes the explanation of Doctrine and Covenants 20:1 as found in the *Commentary*, notes that it has been omitted in a later edition, and says: ‘I am not proposing any date as the true date. But in order to be as helpful to students as I could, I have taken as the date of the Savior’s birth the date now accepted by many scholars, —late 5 B.C. or early 4 B.C., because Bible Commentaries and the writings of scholars are frequently keyed upon that chronology and because I believe that so to do will facilitate and make easier the work of those studying the life and works of the Savior from sources using this accepted chronology.’ This is the course being followed in this present work, which means, for instance, that Gabriel came to Zacharias in October of 6 B.C.; that he came to Mary in March or April of 5 B.C.; that John was born in June of 5 B.C.; and that Jesus was born in December 5 B.C., or from January to April in 4 B.C.

“To illustrate how the scholars go about determining the day of Christ’s Nativity, we quote the following from Edersheim: ‘The first and most certain date is that of the death of Herod the Great. Our Lord was born *before* the death of Herod, and, as we judge from the Gospel-history, very shortly before that event. Now the year of Herod’s death has been ascertained with, we may say, absolute certainty, as shortly before the Passover of the year 750 A.U.C., which corresponds to about the 12th of April of the year 4 before Christ, according to our common reckoning. More particularly, shortly before the death of Herod there was a lunar eclipse which, it is astronomically ascertained, occurred on the night from the 12th to the 13th of March of the year 4 before Christ. Thus the death of Herod must have taken place between the 12th of March and the 12th of April—or, say, about the end of March. Again, the Gospel-history necessitates an interval of, at the least, seven or eight weeks before that date for the birth of Christ (we have to insert the purification of the Virgin—at the earliest, six weeks after the Birth—The Visit of the Magi, and the murder of the children at Bethlehem, and, at any rate, some days more before the death of Herod). Thus the birth of Christ could not have possibly occurred after the beginning of February 4 B.C., and most likely several weeks earlier.’ (Edersheim 2:704.)

“We should add that if the slaughter of the Innocents by Herod occurred not weeks but a year or so after our Lord’s birth, as some have concluded from the recitation in Matthew 2, then this whole reasoning of Edersheim would be extended an appreciable period, so that Christ could have been born on April 6 of 5 B.C. We repeat, as President Clark suggested, that this is not a settled issue.”

19. See notes 9–11 above for examples of such remarks.
20. John C. Lefgren, *April Sixth* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1980).
21. S. Kent Brown, C. Wilfred Griggs, and H. Kimball Hansen, review of *April Sixth*, by John C. Lefgren, *BYU Studies* 22, no. 3 (1982): 375–83.
22. John P. Pratt, letter to the editor, *BYU Studies* 23, no. 2 (1983): 252–54.
23. S. Kent Brown, C. Wilfred Griggs, and H. Kimball Hansen, untitled response, *BYU Studies* 23, no. 2 (1983): 255.
24. John P. Pratt, “The Restoration of Priesthood Keys on Easter 1836, Part 1: Dating the First Easter,” *Ensign* 15 (June 1985): 59–68; John P. Pratt, “The Restoration of Priesthood Keys on Easter 1836, Part 2: Symbolism of Passover and of Elijah’s Return,” *Ensign* 15 (July 1985): 55–64; John P. Pratt, “Passover: Was It Symbolic of His Coming?” *Ensign* 24 (January 1994): 38–45.
25. *Meridian Magazine*, an online publication, is found at www.meridianmagazine.com. John P. Pratt’s contributions to this online publication can be found by utilizing the *Meridian Magazine* search function and the “exact phrase” option when searching for “John P. Pratt” (accessed October 20, 2010).
26. John P. Pratt’s articles are all available online at his website, www.johnpratt.com (accessed October 21, 2010).
27. John P. Pratt, “Yet Another Eclipse for Herod,” *The Planetarian* 19 (December 1990): 8–14.
28. Thomas A. Wayment, “The Birth and Death Dates of Jesus Christ,” in *The Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ, Volume One*, ed. Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Thomas A. Wayment (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005), 383.
29. Wayment, “Birth and Death Dates,” 394.
30. Some commentaries (see, for example, Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah* [New York: Doubleday, 1977, 1993], 412–14, 547–56) suggest that Matthew’s report of Jesus’s birth during the reign of Herod the Great (Matt. 2:1, 18–22) cannot be reconciled with Luke’s report (Luke 2:1–2) of a census (KJV “taxing”) conducted during the administration of the Syrian legate Quirinius (KJV “Cyrenius”). That census, which was conducted in Judea in AD 6–7, followed a ten-year reign by Herod Archelaus, who had succeeded his father Herod the Great following the latter’s death in 4 BC. If, indeed, the setting of Luke 2 is placed in the year AD 6–7, it is at least a decade out of harmony with the setting of Matthew 2, which must be dated no later than 5–4 BC. However, other commentaries see no contradiction between the dates implied in Matthew and Luke. For example, noted New Testament historian Frederick Fyvie Bruce suggested that “it may be best to follow those commentators and grammarians who translate Luke 2:2 as ‘This census was before that which Quirinius, governor of Syria, held.’” F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents—Are They Reliable?* 6th ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1981), 88. The Greek term translated in KJV Luke 2:2 as “first” is *proto*, a word that can legitimately be understood as “first,” “prior,” or “before,” always indicating an ultimate priority. Reading *proto* in Luke 2:2 as “before” rather than “first” places the events of Luke 2 *before* or *prior to* the administration of Quirinius and his

census. Another consideration is that Greek terms in Luke 2 translated in KJV as “taxed” and “taxing,” are *apographesthai* and *apographi*, and literally mean “registered” and “registration.” And though modern New Testament translations have usually interpreted the Greek terms to mean that Caesar Augustus ordered a census of the Roman Empire, this idea cannot be correct. Augustus never ordered any census on an empirewide basis. Conducting a census was very expensive, so the procedure was infrequently employed. And whenever a census was conducted, it was on a provincial basis or smaller, certainly not empirewide. It is known, however, that city registers were kept in the Roman Empire as early as the reign of Augustus. City registers were functions of the local governments and included the recording of names and residential locations of people living in each town, as well as rural locations in the vicinity of those communities. This is probably the process referred to in Luke 2, where each person went to be registered in his own city. The registers were used for taxing purposes, of course, as well as certifying residency. They could also be totaled together to come up with regional population counts. Such counts were more practical than actual census taking. In any event, such registrations would be different than the census made by Quirinius, and thus the Luke 2 account of Joseph and Mary registering in Bethlehem would not be a contradiction with the Matthew 2 account of Jesus’s birth during the reign of Herod the Great.

31. Flavius Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, Books 15–17, ed. G. P. Goold, trans. Ralph Marcus, Loeb Classical Library, 10 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press and London: William Heinemann, 1963), 8:459.

32. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 8:449.

33. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 8:449–55, 459–61.

34. Josephus’s record indicates that Herod’s lavish funeral and subsequent burial at the Herodion (southeast of Bethlehem) took place less than a week after his death. His immediate heir, Archelaus, is reported to have observed the seven days of mourning known as *Shiva*. At the Passover festival that occurred just a few days later, a major riot broke out that led to harsh military reprisals ordered by Archelaus against the Jewish rioters. This was followed by further unrest and reprisals that lasted throughout the summer and into autumn, resulting in thousands of Jewish deaths. Some commentators have argued that events directly following Herod’s death, which led to the Passover riots, must have taken a considerable amount of time and therefore argue that while Herod died in the spring of 4 BC, the Passover of the rioting must have been a year later in 3 BC. However, a careful reading of Josephus reveals that the events following his *Shiva* (seven day mourning period) and the subsequently mentioned Passover (of the rioting) can easily have taken place in four or five days, thus assuring that Josephus was indeed describing the Passover of 4 BC as the Passover of the rioting. This means that Herod must have died about midway between the March 13 eclipse and the mid-April Passover of 4 BC, that is, at the very end of March or in the first few days of April. See Josephus, *Antiquities*, 8:459–75.

35. See, for example, Timothy D. Barnes, “The Date of Herod’s Death,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 19 (April 1968): 209.

36. Wayment, “Birth and Death Dates,” 386 and note 9. See also Brown, Griggs, and Hansen, book review, 378, contrasted with Brown, Griggs, and Hansen, untitled response, 255.

37. Pratt, "Yet Another Eclipse," 9.

38. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 8:459.

39. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 8:531.

40. As mentioned in note 27, this Quirinius was the "Cyrenius" of KJV Luke 2:2, although the registration of AD 6 was not the same event as the "taxing" (KJV) (more properly "registration") ordered by Augustus prior to the birth of Jesus.

41. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 9:23.

42. John specifically noted that the day of the Crucifixion was "the preparation of the Passover" (John 19:14, compare John 18:28). Matthew notes simply that the day was "the preparation." Mark and Luke state that it would be followed by "the sabbath" (Matt. 27:62, Mark 15:42, Luke 23:54). This has led some commentators to suggest that the synoptic gospels were recording Jesus's death on a day other than the fourteenth of Nisan. However, John, who noted that the day was "the preparation" followed by "the sabbath" (John 19:31), also clarified the situation by explaining "that sabbath was an high day" (John 19:31), a reference to the first day of Passover, which was always considered a Sabbath regardless of what day of the week it fell upon. This in turn clarifies the references in the synoptics—the clear implication is that they, too, were referring to the Passover preparation. This also suggests that Jesus's death need not be necessarily considered to have occurred on a Friday, the day prior to the Saturday Sabbath, since the only clear reference to the nature of the Sabbath in question is that it was a holiday Sabbath, namely, the first day of Passover. This leaves wide open the question of whether Jesus died on a Friday or on a Thursday.

43. Seven passages portray Jesus as saying he would rise "the third day" after his death (Matt. 16:21; 17:23; 20:19; Mark 9:31; 10:34; Luke 9:22; 18:33). Jesus's statement in John about rebuilding the temple "in three days" was taken by his disciples to be a prediction of his Resurrection (John 2:19–22). Jesus also specifically said that he would be in the grave "three days and three nights" (Matthew 12:40). His foes remembered that he had said he would rise "after three days" (Matt. 27:63), and Mark as well reports that Jesus said he would rise "after three days" (Mark 8:31). On the Sunday of the Resurrection, Cleopas explained that it was "the third day since" the Crucifixion. In all of these cases, the phraseology is more supportive of a Thursday crucifixion than a Friday crucifixion, Christian tradition notwithstanding.

44. Jesus's prophecy concerning the duration of his burial, found in Matthew 12:40, specifically notes three days and three nights—"so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." A Friday crucifixion allows for the counting of three days, if one includes Friday, Saturday, and Sunday in the count, but cannot accommodate three nights, since only Friday night and Saturday night would have passed before dawn on Sunday. A Thursday crucifixion, however, allows for three nights to have passed prior to the Resurrection on Sunday morning, as well as something closer to three real days. See also above, notes 42 and 43.

45. Colin J. Humphreys and W. G. Waddington, "Dating the Crucifixion," *Nature* 306 (December 22, 1983): 743–46 (tables, p. 744).

46. See my discussion of this issue in Jeffrey R. Chadwick, "The Temple, the Sadducees, and the Opposition to Jesus," in *Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ, Volume One*, ed. Holzapfel and Wayment, 84–85 and note.

47. While the length of Jesus's ministry, two years or three years, remains an unsettled issue, I prefer the two-year model.

48. Caution may be in order when considering at least some of the year counts listed in the Book of Mormon. It would seem that there were occasions when Mormon himself was not absolutely sure of the year count or the exact year in which an event he was reporting actually happened. See, for example, his use of the word "about" in Mosiah 6:4 when calculating the year count connected to the beginning of the reign of king Mosiah. Even in 3 Nephi 8:2, Mormon accommodates the possibility of errors in the Nephite year count with the caveat "if there was no mistake made." That having been said, the rather short passage of thirty-three years (the life span of Jesus) indicated in 3 Nephi 8:2 seems reliable for our purposes, and even to Mormon himself. I am indebted to John W. Welch for pointing out to me the passage in Mosiah 6:4 and its significance.

49. There is a potential ambiguity in the wording of 3 Nephi 2:5–8, and it is thus possible to read the passage alone in such a way as to conclude that Jesus was only thirty-two years old at the time of his death. In my opinion, however, when the passage is read in connection with 3 Nephi 1:1, it becomes clearer that Jesus must have been thirty-three years old at the time of his death (which has been the usual consensus among LDS readers). I am indebted to Roger Terry, who suggested that this issue be addressed.

The problem is as follows: 3 Nephi 1:1–19 indicates that the sign of Jesus's birth was given during year 92 of the Nephite judges. Later in the text, 3 Nephi 2:5 notes that one hundred years had passed away since the end of the Nephite monarchy (the one hundredth "year of the judges" had passed away). Immediately thereafter, 3 Nephi 2:6–8 notes three things: (1) that 609 years had passed away since Lehi left Jerusalem, (2) that nine years had passed away since the sign of Jesus's birth had been given, and (3) that the Nephites began to reckon their time (essentially their year count) from the time of that sign. In my opinion, it is a mistake to read verse 5 as referring to the same year referred to in verses 6–8. Such a reading would equate year 100 of the judges with year 9 since the sign of Jesus's birth (the 609th year since Lehi's departure). Since Jesus was born during year 92 of the judges, and would have turned eight years old during year 100 of the judges, this incorrect reading would place Jesus's eighth birthday during the ninth year since the sign was given (year 609 since Lehi's departure). And that interpretation would lead to the conclusion that Jesus turned thirty-two years old during the thirty-third year since the sign was given, and would have been only thirty-two years and a few months old (rather than thirty-three years and a few months old) at the time of his death, which occurred just days after year 33 ended (see 3 Ne. 8:2–5).

This interpretation, however, is incorrect if one understands that the ninth year spoken of in 3 Nephi 2:7 is not the same year as the one hundredth year spoken of in 3 Nephi 2:5. It seems clear that 3 Nephi 2:7 is referring to the year following the one hundredth year of the judges, namely the 101st year of the judges. However, since the Nephites had abandoned the "year of the judges" terminology in that very year, Mormon had to refer to it as the ninth year since the sign of Jesus's birth, rather than referring to it as year 101. The statement in 3 Nephi 2:6, referring to the 609th year since Lehi's departure, was Mormon's segue from the old dating terminology to the new dating terminology. Having mentioned that the one hundredth year had passed away, Mormon then referenced the passing

of the following year, but instead of calling it year 101 he refers to an even older counting system and calls it the 609th year since Lehi's departure, then notes that it was simultaneously the ninth year since the sign of Jesus's birth. Thus, Jesus would have turned nine years old (not eight) during the ninth year, and thirty-three years old (not thirty-two) during the thirty-third year, and would have died at age thirty-three and a few months just days after the end of year 33, as alluded to in 3 Nephi 8:2–5. Support for this interpretation of 3 Nephi 2:5–8 also comes from a careful reading of 3 Nephi 1:1, which notes that the ninety-first year of the judges had passed away, and then says "it was six hundred years from the time that Lehi left Jerusalem." Important here is the fact that it does not say six hundred years had *passed away* since Lehi's departure, but rather that "it was six hundred years" since that departure. Because Mormon was so careful in his use of language, the conclusion to be drawn is that the 600th year since Lehi's departure had commenced, not ended, with the onset of the 92nd year of the judges, the year in which Jesus was born. And since Jesus was born in year 92 (or 600), it means he turned eight in year 100 (or 608), and that year 101 (or 609), the ninth year since the sign of his birth, would have been the year of his ninth birthday. Thus, the year of Jesus's thirty-third birthday was year 33 of the new Nephite count, and he died just days after the end of year 33, at age thirty-three years and a few months.

50. Thomas A. Wayment maintains that "the time period between the sign of Jesus's birth and the signs of His death was thirty-four years" and then adds parenthetically "thirty-three years if counted inclusively." See Wayment, "Birth and Death Dates," 393. But a thirty-four year count is not correct. A thirty-fourth year could not be counted unless the year had passed away, but the text of 3 Nephi 8:5 specifies that the thirty-fourth year had just barely begun and also specifies that thirty-three years had passed away (3 Ne. 7:23, 26). Therefore, the number of years that had passed was not "thirty-three years if counted inclusively," as Wayment suggests, but simply thirty-three years.

51. Thomas A. Wayment maintains that "we do not know whether the Book of Mormon peoples used a solar or a lunar calendar or exactly how their years correspond to our Julian calendar." See Wayment, "Birth and Death Dates," 393. But all indications in the Book of Mormon, and particularly in 3 Nephi, are that a solar calendar was in place and utilized by the Nephites. The scholarly consensus that Nephite society was a part of greater preclassic Mayan culture suggests that it was almost certainly the Mayan solar year, known as *Haab*, which was counted by the Nephites. The Mayan calendar, and how it relates to other modern calendar systems, is quite well understood.

52. See John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985).

53. See Michael D. Coe, *The Maya*, 7th ed. (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2005), 60–65, 223–25.

54. The designation of Tishri as the first month of the Jewish calendar, placing the Jewish New Year (Rosh HaShannah) at the beginning of autumn, was a development of the late Second Temple Period but was influenced by trends coming out of the Babylonian captivity. The same month was noted as the "seventh month" in the Hebrew Bible (the autumn holidays are noted as occurring in the "seventh month" in Leviticus 23:23–36). During the First Temple Period, the era of the Israelite and Judean monarchies, the first month of the Israelite year was

indeed during the spring month of Aviv (Nisan). But the change to counting the initial autumn month of Tishri as the first month, for strictly practical reasons, had occurred by the time of Hillel and Shammai, a generation prior to Joseph and Mary, and two generations prior to Jesus's birth. This is clear from Mishnah Rosh HaShannah 1:1 (Talmud, tractate Rosh HaShannah) where the positions of both Hillel and Shammai are mentioned in the same passage that states, "On the first of Tishri is the new year for years." This Mishnah, put into writing in the late second century AD, reflects the practical and literary counting of the Jewish calendar in the time of Hillel and Shammai, namely, the late first century BC and into the first century AD. In other words, the first of Tishri was known as Rosh HaShannah by the time Jesus was born, which means that Tishri was regarded as the first month and Adar as the sixth even before the nativity of Jesus.

55. In some commentaries, the phrase "in the sixth month" is explained by claiming that Luke was referring to the sixth month of Elisabeth's pregnancy, since Luke 1:36 records the angel Gabriel as telling Mary, "This is the sixth month with her, who was called barren." The phrasing of Luke 1:24, which reports that "Elisabeth conceived, and hid herself five months," is cited to justify this interpretation. However, the use of the phrase "in the sixth month" in Luke 1:26, in a separate sentence by itself, without any qualifying clause identifying it as Elisabeth's sixth month of pregnancy, is still more satisfactorily explained by the common Jewish usage of the term "sixth month" as a reference to the month of Adar. Actually, a combination of these explanations likely offers the best understanding—that Adar, the sixth Jewish month, also happened to be the sixth month of Elisabeth's pregnancy. This would also mean that Zacharias's ministration in the temple of Herod at Jerusalem, six months earlier, had been during the autumn holiday season during the month of Tishri, which includes Rosh HaShannah (the first day of Tishri), the Days of Awe (second through ninth of Tishri), Yom Kippur (the tenth of Tishri) and Sukkot, also known as the Feast of Tabernacles (fifteenth through twenty-first of Tishri), with Elisabeth having conceived within a few days of Zacharias finishing his priestly assignment. The priestly course of Abijah, to which Zacharias belonged, would have been serving at the temple of Herod by mandate during the fall holidays, as would all other of the Aaronic courses.

56. Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Adventure of the Beryl Coronet," in *The Original Illustrated Sherlock Holmes* (Secaucus, N.J.: Castle Books, 1979), 164. The quotation appears in roughly the same wording in several other Sherlock Holmes adventures.

57. The reference to the "sixth month" in Luke 1:26 can work only in the Jewish monthly count that regards late-winter Adar as the sixth month. It cannot refer to Elul, the late-summer sixth month in the Hebrew Bible (or Old Testament) monthly count, since a nine-month gestation would place birth near the end of March or early in April, a time frame not possible for Jesus's nativity in either 5 BC or in 4 BC, as noted in this study.

58. On the dating of the commencement of Tiberius's fifteenth year, see Bruce, *New Testament Documents*, 6.

59. For the discussion of D&C 20:1, see note 12 above.

60. Latter-day Saints and other modern Christians who may be ambivalent concerning December 25, believing there is no possibility it could be the real birth date of Jesus, or perhaps because of the date's association with a pagan Roman

holiday, may wish to reconsider both the reasoning of fourth-century gentile Christians who chose it as a fixed date for celebrating the Nativity as well as the genuine biblical symbolism that they could have associated with the date.

It is important to remember that Jesus was a Jew. He was born into a Jewish family, in a Jewish town, in a Jewish province, and into a Jewish setting. The date of his birth would have been a Jewish date in the Jewish calendar, a day late in the Jewish month of Kislev. Again, it is entirely possible, indeed essentially probable, as noted previously, that Jesus was born during the eight day Jewish festival of Hanukkah, which began on the twenty-fifth of Kislev. But regardless of what day late in the month of Kislev he was born, the date would not have been thought of in terms of Roman calendar reckoning. No one during Jesus's lifetime would have thought of his birth as occurring in "December." They would have referred to it as occurring in Kislev. And since the Jewish calendar employs lunar months, the run of the days in Kislev did not exactly match the run of days in the Roman month of December. From year to year, the run of days in Kislev would be different when compared to the Roman calendar. That is to say that a Jewish calendar date such as the twenty-fifth of Kislev might fall on the date we know as December 18 one year, but on December 8 the next year. The result is that even if someone at the time of Jesus's birth had noted both the Jewish calendar date and the Roman calendar date, the latter would not have remained constant. If, for example, Jesus had been born on the twenty-seventh of Kislev in 5 BC, and that date happened to be December 16 in 5 BC, it would not have been December 16 in 4 BC or 3 BC or so on. It is not likely that anyone personally associated with Jesus ever expressed his birthday in terms of the Roman calendar.

The early members of the Church of Jesus Christ in the first century AD were overwhelmingly of Jewish origins, and because of the report in Luke the many thousands of his Jewish disciples would have eventually become aware that Jesus had been conceived late in Adar and therefore born late in Kislev. There is no indication that they celebrated Jesus's birthday (although birthday celebration was not improper in Jewish society). During the second century AD, however, the demography of the Church changed dramatically, and in time the vast majority of Christians were gentiles. Jewish and apostolic influences within the Church disappeared. Gentile Christians were largely unfamiliar with the Jewish calendar and how it related to the gospel of Luke. As time passed, they appear to have retained a memory that Jesus had been born early in winter. But no one knew the exact day, and even if they had known the exact Jewish calendar date, it would not have been possible to establish that date precisely in the Roman calendar.

December 25 had been designated in AD 274 by the emperor Aurelian as a Roman holiday called *Sol Invictus*—the Invincible Sun. The winter solstice (shortest day of the year) usually occurred on December 21 or 22, and December 25 was the first day after the solstice that the sun was in the sky for a measurably longer time after the year's shortest day. The *Sol Invictus* festival celebrated the supposed rebirth of the sun, which some Romans, including those who worshiped Mithra, held as a deity. In simple terms, December 25 became the "sun's birthday" in Rome. By the middle of the fourth century, Christianity had become the favored religion of the empire. Roman Christians, recalling the memory that Jesus had been born in early winter, desired to have an early winter date in their calendar on which to celebrate the birth of Jesus, and simply decided to utilize the *Sol Invictus*

holiday on December 25 for this purpose. It appears that Pope Liberius, the bishop of Rome from 352 to 366, gave official Church approval to the December 25 observance, probably in the year 354. There seem to have been at least three legitimate considerations involved in the decision.

First, by the fourth century AD, the New Testament canon was essentially agreed upon as consisting of the same books in our present New Testament, and the implications of Luke's report about the Annunciation to Mary in the "sixth month" resulted in the commemoration of Jesus's conception in late March (early Christian scholars, unlike gentile Christians in general, still retained a knowledge of the Jewish seasons, and knew that March paralleled the Jewish "sixth month"). This, incidentally, is the origin of the Catholic celebration of the Annunciation each March.

Second, the general recollection of an early winter birth date for Jesus pointed toward late December, nine months following the Annunciation to Mary. By coincidence, the already established festival of *Sol Invictus* occurred in this very period. It was essentially a matter of practicality to shift the focus of the festival from a pagan celebration of the "sun's birthday" to a Christian celebration of the birth of the Son of God. Doing this gave the Church a set calendar day on which to celebrate Jesus's birth, something that they had never had before. Since they knew the birth had occurred early in winter, but did not know the exact date, December 25 was as good a day as any on which to celebrate. And it had the advantage of already being recognized as a holiday. The only difference would be that the day now honored the true and living Son of God rather than the notion of a pagan deity.

The third consideration seems to have been Christian recollection of earlier Jewish traditions that identified the coming of Messiah with the symbol of the rising sun. The book of Malachi foretold the coming of Messiah with this phrase: "unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings" (Malachi 4:2). The Hebrew term in this passage of Malachi reads *shemesh tzedakah*, literally "the righteous sun." The symbolic connection of the rising sun to the coming of Messiah was also mentioned by Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, when he prophesied that John would prepare the way for the Anointed One's arrival "to give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace" (Luke 1:77-79). The word "dayspring" in the King James Version of Luke 1 is simply another term for the rising sun—the Greek term is *anatoli*, literally "sunrise." Jews at the time of the New Testament, including Jesus's disciples, identified Messiah's coming with the symbol of the rising sun. And this symbol seems to have been remembered into the fourth century by gentile Christian bishops, who saw no problem in using the *Sol Invictus* festival, which honored the sun, as a day to commemorate the birth of the "Sun of righteousness."

The early gentile Christian designation of the December 25 holiday as a celebration of the nativity of Jesus seems entirely appropriate when viewed in its historical and symbolic context. Though we cannot fix the birth of Jesus to that very day, there are reasons to think it occurred in the weeks of December that we now call the Christmas season.

“Strangers and Pilgrims”

The Challenge of the Real

Robert K. Thomas

A few months ago in a forum address, I spoke concerning the challenge of the ideal. In that speech, I suggested that perfectionism—fretfully striving after ultimates in everything we do—can become an obvious indulgence and, in extreme cases, a disorder of the spirit. “Impossible dreams” and “unreachable stars,” in other words, are more frustrating than helpful as we seek to achieve our highest potential. At the same time, however, the possible and reachable present their own built-in problems. I would like to address those problems now by speaking to the challenge of the real.

When we are young, the real may appear synonymous with restraint. I recall a time when our only daughter, then age four, gave memorable expression to her confrontation with reality. Perhaps I had urged our children once too often to keep their wants and expectations modest—to be, as I said, “realistic.” Her small body stiff with frustration, our little daughter finally exclaimed, “Daddy, *realistic* is my hatiest word!”

Like my daughter, we may conclude in our youth that words like *realistic*, *reality*, or *the real*—seemingly loaded with limitations—head our own list of hatiest words. We practice musical instruments to the beat of the metronome, develop physical coordination before athletic proficiency. As our world expands during years of formal schooling, the real, the actual, occasionally exceeds our expectations. We are less conscious of restraint than we are of possibility. Yet even in our most euphoric moments, we never really escape from what Walter Pater calls “the iron outline of the horizon.”¹

Our sight has limits, and so does our insight. For instance, we rarely understand our so-called failures completely. At best, we learn to avoid that

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which hurts, but a good part of life's lessons involve learning what reality is *not*. The actual is rarely a neat match for the expected. The real world that commencement rhetoric paints as unqualified promise may appear a bit smudged to some of us. Our major may have trained us well for a particular job, but has it prepared us at all for rejection, for no job at all, or for a job that hardly uses our hard-won skills?

Soberingly, the reality that the entire civilized world faces today is not one that will yield to economic manipulation alone. As a scarred survivor of the Great Depression, I recognize elements in our present circumstance that are as different and unsettling as an invasion from outer space. Genetic engineering promises—or threatens—forms of life beyond the imagining. Machines now being developed have reaction times and a range of alternatives matching traditional definitions of human thought. Robots with exquisite sensors exercise quality control in highly subjective areas; these areas are so subjective that they were long thought to be a final bastion of humanity. We need not speculate about the long-range consequences of such achievement. At this point, we need only acknowledge that the real world facing today's graduates may be in process of accelerating—and disconcerting—change.

We need to view the present through untinted glasses. While other ages may have shared our demand for immediate personal gratification, they surely lacked our means for granting it. We are coerced by *now* and apparently committed to its full exploitation. "Quickie courses" and speed reading are surely of a piece with fast foods and fun runs. If we would look toward others rather than ourselves, if we would ponder rather than react, we must repudiate our obsession with the immediate. Our technology must not become a brisker means to a questionable end. The widespread use of computer expertise in video games, which essentially simulate—in dazzling color and stunning iteration—a childish play at cops and robbers, should alert us to how easily we can mistake variety for progress.

Happily, many of us have the perspective of having served a mission or shouldered the responsibilities of marriage and children; these perspectives provide an eternal context to our *now*. A year or so ago at the end of a semester, I noted a young mother and daughter waiting for husband and father during the last hour of the final examination period. The evening was getting dark; the little girl was tired of waiting; and the young man they were awaiting was among the last to finish. Finally he appeared, dazed from his three-hour ordeal, wilting with disappointment. Then his daughter saw him, and in a voice edged with ecstasy she cried, "There's my Daddy!" As the young man, clutching his daughter tightly, glanced over her head to the loving, encouraging look in the face of his wife, I ceased to worry about him. He would recover from what had happened to him in that examination—and quickly—for *his* present was rich with past commitment and future promise.

If the heady fact of commencement is a satisfying *now* for many new graduates, it will quickly become part of their history, part of that past upon which they stand and from which they brace their purchase on the world. New graduates begin to come to terms with that past rather soon. How seriously they have prepared themselves in college, for instance, may be evident in their first full-time job or in the accelerating demands of further study. Many graduates probably know the satisfaction of having worked hard and consistently during their undergraduate years; others may quickly begin reviewing a flawed effort.

In any case, my counsel is to waste little time on remorse, plucking at loose threads that are beyond our easy reweaving. Unlike contrition—which is usually the beginning of a genuine resolve to repent—remorse is a frozen state in which we rehearse our shortcoming in static consternation. Skipped classes, wasted time, the deliberate choice of undemanding courses, all of these form part of what we chose to be. A competitive and usually impersonal world awaits us.

Regardless of past decisions, what we have will probably be enough if we acknowledge our strengths as well as our deficiencies, not only counting the tares but noting the wheat. Growing up in a small, slightly truculent, and generally drab town of Marshfield on the Oregon coast, I was acutely aware of what both I and my hometown were not. I found early that I was not a gifted athlete, and I learned that the town gave obvious recognition only to athletic prowess. Sailors, loggers, and mill workers comprised the bulk of the working population, and their cultural and educational needs seemed to be satisfied early and simply. In recounting what the town and townspeople lacked, I found just as much fault in myself. We were all losers.

On the evening of the day in which Pearl Harbor was attacked, I sat by the radio in growing apprehension, for Marshfield had the only deep-water port between San Francisco and Portland, and it lacked obvious defenses. The town was well-known to hundreds of Japanese sailors who had loaded lumber at its docks over the years. We sat in darkness and heard our local station report that a Japanese cruiser had apparently been sighted off the Golden Gate and was headed north. In a thousand homes there was but one thought—we were liable to be under attack by morning. Suddenly Pearl Harbor seemed very near, and the war was no longer a distant abstraction.

The rather excited and somewhat garbled report concerning the approaching cruiser was followed by something remarkable in the voice of the announcer—who spoke for the town—and in my own attitude. Calmly, firmly, the announcer suggested that we find our hunting rifles by candlelight and gather at the armory, where all the ammunition available at the local sporting goods store would be distributed. I pulled out my 7mm Mauser, reflected that it was hardly a combat weapon, thought briefly about the size of the guns on the Japanese cruisers that had often visited us, and prepared to join my comrades at the armory. We would be only a handful, but our defense of country—and, yes, town—would be implacable. I found in myself a courage I had never known I had, and I sensed an equal fearlessness in the motley but incredibly unified group being summoned to battle. Throughout the night I reflected that I was not disposed to fight, but there was no place in the world I would rather have been that night than with my townsfolk in Marshfield, Oregon. If the effects of our vigil together did not result in massive goodwill or general reform, none of us was ever the same afterwards. We knew something about one another that made a difference and provided the modest base upon which to build a community. Together we were a force because all had found they could rise in a strength they had not known they possessed.

Our college years may not stimulate such dramatic introspection as I have just described, but we must not underestimate what we learn in

college, what we become. Despite easy jokes to the contrary, most new graduates do not overestimate themselves, and every single one can move in the strength of a desire to learn more, to be even better prepared. Consider Alma's immensely insightful comment that a simple desire to believe is the seed from which both faith and knowledge come (see Alma 32). That insight is meaningful in every facet of our lives.

If the real world we encounter in days to come seems willing to substitute policy for principle or the possible for the preferable, or if inequity appears to be taken for granted and crassness accepted without apology, we may choose opposition by placard and demonstration, but I hope we are beyond such gestures. During the height of nationwide campus protests a few years ago, a friend from an eastern university could not believe that BYU was so free of overt dissent. He made several guesses as to why we were so different, and I finally suggested that he talk to a few students to see if they were as apathetic as he believed.

Stopping one student, my friend asked the young man if he could not think of anything to demonstrate about. I will never forget the student's answer. Gently, he explained that he had just returned from a mission to the Far East where, two weeks before, he had been running for his life from a small mob of radical young people who threatened to kill him. He then said firmly that he *did* intend to change the world, but he knew how hard that was to do, and the thought of trying to effect a change by walking around with a poorly lettered placard seemed a bit unreal. This young man understood that to a greater or lesser extent, the world of symbolic gesture almost always floats free of reality. We must not mistake our adversary and end up the pawns of simplistic special interests.

We should all recognize by now that the challenge of the real requires forthright confrontation with our insecurities. Our childish frustrations, our past mistakes, our present retreat to self, all of these speak the primal language of fear and betray our lack of faith. Expectation, a secular attempt to give substance to hope, is simply a substitute for faith. Without faith, we fall into fear. All fear is paralyzing, and only faith can free us from the repressions that generate poor mental and physical health. Those repressions are manifest in varying expressions of hypersensitivity. My internist, for example, recently advised me not to get the gadgetry by which I could check my own blood pressure, lest in a strange manifestation of the Heisenberg principle my overly conscientious checking could, in itself, keep my actual pressure uncertain.

Hebrews 11—which has had a profound influence on my thinking—lists the great men and women of ancient Israel who triumphed through faith. The list is impressive, and their accomplishments are noted in detail.

In verse thirteen, however, we come to the essence of this chapter and to the heart of faith: “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.” I skimmed past that verse many times. One day, however, in a moment of great personal deprivation, I turned to Hebrews 11. Suddenly, I heard verse thirteen’s casual thunder: the greatest men and women, God’s most faithful servants, died without seeing the fulfillment of the promises they received. These faithful people were indeed strangers and pilgrims—not understanding, feeling a bit alien, but faring forward in confidence and courage toward a goal given its hard edge by what George Santayana calls the “soul’s invincible surmise.”²

Informed by the soul’s invincible surmise—genuine faith—we can successfully confront the challenges of the real. Consider the resounding words of Habakkuk: “Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation” (Hab. 3:17–18). In such faith, with such perspective, the so-called real, however bleak it may appear, loses much of its determining power. We can indeed find significant work. We can view apparent limitations so creatively—and with such resolution—that circumstance reflects rather than thwarts our will. We can find and exemplify excellence. Above all, we can become men and women of destiny.

Robert K. Thomas delivered this address as a commencement speech at Brigham Young University on April 21, 1983.

1. Walter Pater, *Marius the Epicurean: His Sensations and Ideas* (London: Macmillan, 1885), 449.

2. George Santayana, “O World, Thou Chooseth Not the Better Part!” in *Poems of Faith*, ed. Bob Blaisdell (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover, 2002), 96.

A Poetics of the Restoration

George B. Handley

Starting first with the proposition that the humanities and the Restoration both share an interest in the preservation of threatened knowledge and in the recovery of lost knowledge, I would like to suggest further how these two forms of restoration can enjoin the same labor. Brigham Young dispensed with the notion of a strict distinction between sacred and secular forms of knowledge when he insisted that all truth belongs to Mormonism, that “every accomplishment, every polished grace, every useful attainment in mathematics, music, and in all sciences and art belong to the saints.”¹ However, this would seem to contradict the notion articulated in the Doctrine and Covenants that the two chief obstacles to our understanding of revealed truth are “disobedience” and “the traditions of [the] fathers” (D&C 93:39). Or, as Paul put it, “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ” (Col. 2:8). If these traditions are nothing but fallen discourses, honest but erroneous attempts to express the truth as reflected in contexts that have not enjoyed the fullest light of revelation, perhaps culture deserves, at best, only our cautious and distant respect. But Brigham Young’s audacious claim is a call for charity, “to lay hold upon every good thing” (Moro. 7:19). Charity is a Christ-centered viewpoint that requires the faith and desire to glean truths from secular sources in all cultures. In this way, secular learning of culture becomes integral to the kingdom’s healthy and ongoing unfolding of the restoration of all things. As the first section of Doctrine and Covenants makes clear, God defines his commandments as divine mandates (they “are of me,” he declares) even though they are also transmitted in the language of local

I first conceptualized this essay after I arrived at BYU in 1998 and participated in a Literature and Belief conference. This was the first of several opportunities the BYU community has provided me to think seriously and formally about the meaning and value of my work as a scholar within the broader context of my LDS faith. This idea lay dormant in me for some time until a group of us in the College of Humanities began to convene and discuss the need for an organization that would facilitate collegiality and collaboration worldwide among LDS scholars in the humanities and to begin exploring the religious basis of our scholarship. The result was the creation of a new organization, Mormon Scholars in the Humanities (MSH), founded in 2006. As its first president, I gave a condensed version of this essay at the inaugural MSH meeting in 2007.



I have found the organization to be a unique opportunity to explore the intersection between my devotion to my profession and to my faith in dialogue with many of the finest minds and most devoted disciples I have had the good fortune to be around. I had pursued all of my schooling in California (Stanford and UC Berkeley), so I had grown accustomed to having my scholarship somewhat independent from my thinking as a believer. This independence is not a bad thing. I believe important benefits come from patient and faithful tolerance of apparent contradictions in ideas. Indeed, it can be unproductive to prematurely force what might turn out to be an unhappy marriage between secular ideas and gospel principles. At the same time, it would be a mistake to shy away from the opportunity and responsibility to articulate the spiritual foundations of a believing scholar's work, and this kind of exploration is precisely the special opportunity afforded by MSH and by *BYU Studies*. I have been consistently inspired by what I have learned from comparative and postcolonial studies, and this essay is, indeed, an *essay*, an experiment or attempt to explore common ground with the Restoration. I never tire of the fascination that comes when ideas reveal their insights unexpectedly after the patient and long process of consecrated scholarship.

understanding: they “were given unto my servants in their weakness, after the manner of their language” (D&C 1:24). So while culture might be the obstacle or weakness that blinds us, it must also become the means or language by which we “might come to understanding” (D&C 1:24). The key to this process is an uncompromised dedication to understanding God’s will that links a lifelong passion for learning both from the word of God—from revelation—and the word of men and women—from the world’s cultures.

The humanities—literature, philosophy, history, and the arts—are born of a striving to bear witness to human experience in all of its varieties, usually under conditions in which the particularities of experience are threatened by oblivion. Whether it is against the grain of a dictatorial political regime or of the dehumanizing forces of a consumption-obsessed economy like ours, expression in the humanities offers itself as a kind of counter-memory, one individual experience at a time, to the oblivious tendencies of power, to the passage of time, and to the persistent patterns of sin. Human expressions are rarely without sin or error, of course, but because they always demand attention to the particulars of individual lives and distinct cultures, they can provide a valuable check against our tendency to rush to quick and glib generalizations about what we deem to be the universals of human experience. If, as it has often been said, it is hard not to love someone whose story you know, it is also easy to hate or ignore someone whose story you can generalize.

The humanities also help us to see how our own particulars of cultural context have shaped our views, including our views of God. Revealed religion, of course, is by definition an expression of truth that transcends human particulars, but, if we are serious in our devotion to revealed truths, it is imperative that we are mindful of how our own culture informs and shapes our understandings. Only by comparative and promiscuous reading about individual lives embedded in other cultures can we become more aware of our embeddedness in our own. Perhaps the “traditions of men” that are most dangerous are those ideologies and discourses that willfully ignore the sanctity of God’s children and impetuously and impatiently bypass the responsibility of having to approach humanity one story at a time. Religious cultures are by no means inoculated against such traditions. When we speak of seeing someone’s true “humanity,” we mean that we can see their identity as it has been shaped by time and circumstance, that we have caught a glimpse of the complexity and mystery of their inner life, and that we feel an elemental compassion for their story. It is equally important, of course, to see our own humanity, lest we fail to understand how we might see the world differently had we lived a different life. When the faithful

disciple engages deeply with the particulars of a culture and emerges with a changed, reoriented, and enlarged vision of human experience, the humanities prove integral to the ongoing restoration of all things. In that the humanities ask us to engage in imagining the world, or in world making, as the word *poetics* implies, consecrated learning becomes a poetics of the Restoration.

Even if the essential ordinances and doctrines of the gospel have already been restored, the extension and application of the saving power of its doctrines depend in part on this expansion of our understanding of the broad varieties of the human condition. Because the passion, or suffering, of Christ is *compassion*—a suffering *with* all of humanity—cultivating the mind of Christ means developing an increasingly profound understanding of how the gospel relates to the diversity, range, and levels of human experience. It means learning Christ's atoning sorrow, which is an expression of understanding or feeling for the particulars of human circumstances. Thus, although "the traditions of men" are always a potential roadblock to understanding gospel truths, passion for the humanities founded on devotion to the Lord helps the believer to use the humanities' portrayal of those very particulars to consecrated ends. It is curious that Alma would describe a process of testing the word of God that echoes how we gain aesthetic experience. In Alma 32, especially verse 27, we find a description of the importance of a suspension of disbelief: "If you will awake and arouse your faculties, even to an experiment upon my words, and exercise a particle of faith, yea, even if ye can no more than desire to believe, let this desire work in you." In verse 28, Alma describes a physical reaction, an enlarging of the "soul" and enlightening of "understanding" and a "delicious" sensation, as long as "ye do not cast it out by your unbelief." Like art, suspension of disbelief toward the word of God yields fruit, a swelling "within your breasts; and when you feel these swelling motions, ye will begin to say within yourselves—it must needs be that this is a good seed."

Both secular and spiritual knowledge require a patient forbearance, a willingness to allow truth to surface only after earnest experimentations upon the word. This kind of patient and deepened vision will not come from a superficial assessment and least of all from a cold dismissal of cultural difference. Preparatory to anyone gaining greater light and understanding is the cultivation of an awareness of others that keeps the soul open to mystery and wonder in the world around us and a humble acceptance of the limits of our understanding. It is no secret to lifelong scholars that such awareness of limits only grows with time and effort. Seeking out the "best books" for anyone is a step in the direction to be able to say, like Nephi,

"I know that [God] loveth his children; nevertheless, I do not know the meaning of all things" (1 Ne. 11:17). Belief in Christ, in other words, requires vigilant awareness of what we do not know and cannot be separated from a vital interest in the world, in the affairs of men and women, and in the many cultural expressions that shed light on the human experience.

Much of what I have said thus far is not exactly news in Mormon belief, even if we don't always live up to Brigham Young's challenge, but I wish to focus on why and how secular learning further enables the Restoration. It is our human condition to inherit culture, so the traditions of men are going to shape and compromise the way we understand the gospel, one way or another. This is one reason why we are wise to overturn the soils of culture from time to time, lest the truths that we think we hold dear become reified, heretical, or false. Mormon explains that the intellectual purpose of charity is to "search diligently in the light of Christ that ye may know good from evil; and if ye will lay hold upon every good thing, and condemn it not, ye certainly will be a child of Christ" (Moro. 7:19). Further, in *Doctrine and Covenants* 98:11, it states: "I give unto you a commandment, that ye shall forsake all evil and cleave unto all good, that ye shall live by every word which proceedeth forth out of the mouth of God." Discipleship, in other words, is incomplete if we are merely content to forsake evil by holding on to what we already have.

The comfort and reassurance of religion sometimes appeals to the fearful, incurious, and the uncharitable mind because religion can provide an excuse to avoid the risks of learning and growing. On the other hand, discipleship is also incomplete if, in our attempt to identify and cleave unto the good in the lives of men and women, we do not maintain, as a keel and rudder on an otherwise perpetually drifting ship, an orthodox devotion to what has already been revealed. This is perhaps the fate of no small number of aspiring scholars who, willing to take notes in lecture halls and to study long hours into the night, remain unwilling to give the scriptures or the teachings of the prophets more than a cursory glance.² As James reminds us, culture blinds all of us when we refuse to allow God's word to penetrate our character or when we prefer the life of ideas or convictions to a life of committed moral action (see James 1:22–23). We must resist, in other words, the temptation of assuming that it matters more to be right or think right than to do good.

This is not to suggest that a disciple should be unconcerned about false ideas; this is an ongoing and real concern for any learner. But it is interesting to note what happens to ideas when they are patiently contextualized and pondered by someone living a consecrated life. Falsehood

is most threatening to the mind that fears falsehood above all, especially more than it loves the good. One might think of a false idea as a common stone that some might dismiss out of hand but in which others who are more patient might find flecks of gold. Moreover, perhaps the pursuit of ideas is less immediately about truth and error and more, at least initially, about an opportunity to contemplate the various forms of life and thus reflect on and even transform the nature of what we believe. Besides, there is something indecent about an uncompromising pursuit of only gold in a world bedecked by stones of infinite form and color! Consecration, in other words, has a tendency to unveil the world itself as the sought-after precious stone. So the effects of consecration will not be reflected so much in the content of study—which authors or artists, which period of history, culture, values, or philosophies to study—but in the amplified vision of possibility one obtains. This sacralization of knowledge means that secular knowledge gradually acquires a character that, like a window, opens the relevance of Mormon belief to wider varieties of human experience and that, like a mirror, allows us to reflect on our latter-day Mormon condition.

I have only occasionally tried to write overtly about Mormon topics, but I have been surprised how my scholarship on topics seemingly unrelated to sacred things has broadened and benefited my understanding of the restored gospel. My first book was an attempt to restore hidden knowledge of the story of slavery's transnational impact in literatures of the Americas. I had been struck by how novelists portrayed the genealogical search into slavery's history as a kind of recovery of lost or hidden knowledge regarding the complex, cross-cultural origins of the Americas and how crucial testimonial language was to this process. Testimony and genealogy. Without intending to, I had written a book with a rather Mormon accent, after all. My discovery, then, was that listening carefully to other voices and other cultures doesn't have to involve sacrificing our values, since ultimately there is no avoiding writing ourselves into what we learn as scholars.

This is not to say that, as readers, we shouldn't worry about the danger of trying to make what we read mean what we want it to mean, of reading ourselves narcissistically into everything we study. There is a different and superior quality to self-understanding when it comes unexpectedly and is not the result of an overzealous search for anticipated confirmation. Presumably we don't attend church merely to receive repeated confirmations of what we already know about our place in the world but to see ourselves anew so that repentance and growth are possible. This happens when we are willing to put ourselves aside and to see the world through the eyes of others. The Spirit seems to reward us with deeper self-understanding in

these efforts. The same principle holds in secular learning. For this reason, as we seek to translate other ideas and other cultures, it is vital to show forbearance and patience, to seek anonymity, to listen, and to discover the “Mormon” or eternal and sacred dimensions of knowledge serendipitously, as revelation and not as self-projection. If we wish to understand our Mormonness, in other words, it is best to do so after we have carefully developed familiarity with the ideas and cultures we encounter.

There is, of course, a great deal of debate in the history of literary criticism about what guides and explains how we read, and what *should* guide how and what we read. There is a tendency, on one hand, to argue that interpretations merely and always reflect the assumptions, prevailing attitudes, and milieu of their time and, on the other, to argue that texts are the primary force in determining meaning.³ Both concerns are valid. The latter emphasis on the text’s authority and priority has been especially emphasized in religious cultures because the very idea of holy writ implies the inherent and primary importance of the text itself as determinant of its meaning and truthfulness. Attitudes that tend to emphasize the radically distinct nature of sacred truth over and against secular understanding tend to want to see the truth of the word of God as self-contained and in no need of any reader’s agency, historicity, or prejudice, since to commingle the contingencies of a reader’s culture and moment in history with the will and the mind of God would appear to contaminate and divert, perhaps even pervert, the ways of God in the minds of men. Peter, who teaches that “no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation” (2 Pet. 1:20), nevertheless acknowledges the challenge scriptures’ sacred nature presents to us. In Paul’s letters, for example, we find, as Peter says, “some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction. Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness” (2 Pet. 3:16–17).

The special status of sacred writ often inspires such strong warnings, but we must also consider Nephi’s rather liberal mandate to “liken” the scriptures to our own circumstances. It is tempting, but ultimately erroneous, to assume that Peter means that human agency, imagination, and experience play no role whatsoever in the generation of divine meaning. This is because such a dismissal of human culture essentially renders reading a completely amoral exercise in its attempt to protect and keep unambiguously clear the boundaries between the human and the divine, the secular and the sacred. From such a position, one cannot explain satisfactorily why two people can read the same text and come away with

separate interpretations, nor, curiously, can one argue from such a position why one reading is correct and another false. Usually the only arguments offered are tautological: the reading is right or wrong because it conforms or diverges from what is preestablished as the truth, even though it is rarely acknowledged that this truth is likely preestablished, of course, by tradition, by human habit.

In effect, overzealous and fundamentalist defenses of the special nature of holy writ lead to a crucial contradiction: in order to preserve the notion of the text's special status above and beyond human stains, defensive readers want to hold to the promise of an absolute and transcendently correct reading, that is, the promise of a perfect human mastery of the text. Alan Jacobs argues that this position, ironically, is more akin to the secularist distrust or suspicion of sacred texts. "Freedom from" and "mastery of," he reminds us, are related concepts, but not identical: "What is vital to note here is the elimination, in each case, of an ongoing dialogical encounter with the text, in which the reader and the text subject each other to scrutiny. . . . In neither case is there anything like real reverence, love, or friendship—in Bakhtin's term, *faithfulness* is lacking—and thus, in neither case is the readerly/critical experience productive of genuine knowledge (of the self or the other)."⁴

Whether one assumes dogmatic protection or dogmatic rejection of claims that sacred writ is unstained by humanity, the reader is never required to take what Jacobs calls the "enormous risks"⁵ of using discernment. In the former case, the assumption of a radical textual determinism means it is merely and always the text that produces meaning, never the reader's agency, choices, or judgment. Ironically, a strictly fundamentalist reader cannot explain how she avoids worshipping a god after her own image. In the case of the secular reader who employs a categorical hermeneutics of suspicion toward the text, the determinism lies with the reader who produces all meaning and ends up answerable to no one. A categorically suspicious reader cannot explain how she avoids the false consciousness she set out to escape.

There is another possibility, one that seeks what the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr calls "mutuality."⁶ Great knowledge comes at great risk—what Ricoeur calls the very "wager" at the heart of all interpretation—and one of the risks is to bet on one's interpretive capacity to discern the will of God; to read faithfully is to believe in the possibility that a mingling of human and divine understanding does not have to lead to contamination on one hand or absolute certainty on the other. Jacobs compares this mutuality to the dialogic imagination of Bakhtin, a kind of hope in a fruitful give and take between the reader and the text. He explains, "This hope involves

neither *demand* nor *expectation*; indeed, if it demanded or expected it would not be hope. An absolute suspicion—one that always and on principle refuses Ricoeur's wager—is the natural outworking of despair.”⁷ What is equally hopeless is a “triumphalist confidence” or presumption that mere contact with the word of God, and no willful interpretation, is sufficient to produce right understanding.⁸ The implication here is that good readings combine submission to the text, most often associated with reading sacred literature, with willfully seeking an understanding of ourselves in the text, most often associated with secular literature. In what follows, I hope to combine what we can learn about reading from Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* with the Book of Mormon in order to then draw some important conclusions about how, as disciples, our relationship to the humanities is vital to our understanding of the gospel and to what I call a poetics of the Restoration.

Reading as Translation, Reading as Revelation

Gabriel García Márquez represents a structure of reading in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* that helps us see how the moment of revelation of lost truths simultaneously becomes a revelation of the self. A novel of almost Book of Mormon-like ambition to recount the lost story of the Americas, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* begins with the founding of a backland village in Colombia called Macondo, a town isolated from the rest of the world; consequently, Macondo's story remains on the margins of the march of modern history, ignored in the larger world and largely unaware of its place in it. A gypsy, Melquiades, brings scientific and philosophical knowledge to José Arcadio Buendía, Macondo's founder, and gives him an alchemist laboratory. The laboratory includes untranslated documents, a philosopher's stone, and other paraphernalia. It becomes a place of secret knowledge, of potential omniscience, but is also a place where time stands still. The narrator tells us that José Arcadio “was the only one who had enough lucidity to sense the truth of the fact that time also stumbled and had accidents and could therefore splinter and leave an eternalized fragment in a room.”⁹ More specifically, this laboratory is a repository of Macondo's own history, unknown to its own people, splintered off from the world but, like the tale of the Nephite migration, restored from oblivion on timeless but as yet untranslated parchments that Melquiades has left behind. The parchments, then, represent for Gabriel García Márquez how literature restores to the imagination the individual sufferings and the family histories that political power seeks to conceal.

Whenever translation of the parchments is undertaken in order to help the family and the town recover knowledge of its own past, each translator finds himself in a race against time since the room becomes “vulnerable to dust, heat, termites, red ants, and moths, who would turn the wisdom of the parchments into sawdust.”¹⁰ García Márquez is making a rich and important point here. He highlights the fact that our understandings of the truth are vulnerable to and always limited by our need to translate them into our particular moment in place and time. This is one way of suggesting the possibility that as long as we are stuck in our particular human condition, we will never be able to gain a perfect and objectively true perspective on it. Human self-understanding, in other words, will always be shaped by the very conditions we are trying to step beyond so as to understand them objectively. García Márquez suggests that human art is defined by an almost impossible desire to take the limitations of our human condition and attempt to imagine on what terms they might become the very means of our transcending those limitations.

The parchments beg for translation and from time to time attract several members of the family, typically in their prepubescent stage, when they do “not show the least desire to know the world that began at the street door of the house.”¹¹ But then the parchments are abandoned once these family members discover sexual and political desire. A dichotomy exists, then, as the critic Josefina Ludmer has demonstrated, between characters who are asexual, imaginative, withdrawn, and mindful of history and transgression and those who are driven by sexual desire, who are political, communal, and interested in future knowledge and change.¹² García Márquez represents these two poles in the competing images of Macondo as a city of houses of glass (where the domestic space is transparent and reflective of the outside world) and of houses of ice (where home is opaque and reflective of the domestic viewer). If retreating to intimate solitude brings self-reflection, insight, imagination, and memories of the past, communion with others brings knowledge of the world, experience, and the chance to affect the future. One form of activity comes at the cost of the other form of knowledge. So unless a character can combine these two poles, translation that would reveal true self-understanding will not occur.

As the novel advances, family lore erodes, memories fade, and genealogy is lost. Finally, the gift of translation comes to Aureliano Babilonia, last in a long line of genealogy. He enters the laboratory and decodes the signs, only to learn his genealogy and discover that he has unwittingly committed

incest with his aunt, Amaranta. The narration explains that at the commencement of the translation, he begins

to decipher the instant that he was living, deciphering it as he lived it, prophesying himself in the act of deciphering the last page of the parchments, as if he were looking into a speaking mirror. Then he skipped again to anticipate the predictions and ascertain the date and circumstances of his death. Before reaching the final line, however, he had already understood that he would never leave that room, for it was foreseen that the city . . . would be wiped out by the wind and exiled from the memory of men at the precise moment when Aureliano Babilonia would finish deciphering the parchments.¹³

His moment of reading himself simultaneously becomes ours since we too discover that the novel we have been reading is the parchment he has just translated.

The brilliance of this scene is that it demonstrates that reading always involves translating ourselves—seeing ourselves in the stories we read, discovering meaning that is produced by our history and our genealogy. It is as if to say that we cannot but liken stories to ourselves. The question is whether or not we do so self-consciously, whether this appropriation reveals new self-understanding or simply produces the same meaning incestuously. The incestuous story here bears an important relationship to the tragedy of Oedipus. Oedipus begins as hero for solving the riddle of the Sphinx and lifting a plague from the city of Thebes. He appears to be a gifted reader, but when as the king he learns that a great crime has brought the city under another plague, he stubbornly refuses to see himself in the story he gathers until he discovers that he is the very criminal he seeks. At this moment, interpretation results tragically in a discovery that his defiant actions have fulfilled the prophecy he tried to prevent from coming true. Reading and interpretation, the Greek myth implies, are never entirely innocent or divorced from self-interest and political power. The symbolic force of Aureliano Babilonia's incest and translation, for García Márquez, is that we are always incestuous readers of our own stories; just at the moment when we discover the secret knowledge of others, of things past or lost, we also discover that that secret history is the story of our own origins and therefore a prophecy of our own moment of reading. We read texts, and when we find meaning in them, it is as if they have awaited us for fulfillment.

Reading becomes a dialectic, then, between translation and revelation, something akin to the dialectic between human imagination and divine will, a structure that we find in the Book of Mormon. The similarity of

structure reminds us that human art and scripture share the same ambition: to gain self-understanding through—not despite—the particularities of the human condition. The New World scripture contains buried truths and performs an act of recovery of crucial genealogical and spiritual knowledge that, similar to the knowledge in Melquiades's parchments, has been ignored in official histories. Only, in this case, it is knowledge marginalized because it is of a spiritual nature and not simply because it emanates from the margins of history. Nephi explains that he writes this record to “preserve unto our children the language of our fathers; and also that we may preserve unto them the words which have been spoken by the mouth of all the holy prophets which have been delivered unto them by the Spirit and power of God, since the world began, even down unto this present time” (1 Ne. 3:19–20). He also makes it clear that “the things which are pleasing unto the world I do not write, but the things which are pleasing unto God and unto those who are not of this world” (1 Ne. 6:5). So the text contains a sacred version of his own secular record and an alternative history to others that might be written by those of this world who despise the revelations of God.

One main reason the Book of Mormon contains knowledge that was ever lost in the first place and was therefore in need of restoration is because of the damaging effects of the scattering of Israel on language and memory and the difficulties this diaspora presented to the preservation of a coherent history that would link up the disparate branches of the family tree. It is for this reason that the lessons of literatures of diaspora and postcolonial struggles can be especially relevant to the Restoration. Like García Márquez's narrative, the Book of Mormon is a story of moments of forgetting and of then recovering the ever-tenuous knowledge of origins. The narrative begins with Nephi's precarious task of obtaining the plates in order to preserve the language of the Jews and the knowledge of the covenants. The recovery of our knowledge of things of God, however, also involves interpretations of dreams and visions, solving the riddles, as it were, of God's language. Nephi tells us, for example, that he becomes a special witness and mouthpiece of God's language when his father first tells him of his dream of the tree of life: “I, Nephi, was desirous also that I might see, and hear, and know of these things, by the power of the Holy Ghost” (1 Ne. 10:17). He is then given a step-by-step interpretation of the vision of his father, translating and preserving each sign of the dream in a language of understanding for his people and for his reader. But the text suggests that if the reader doesn't follow the same process, meaning stops there. Nephi explains: “For [Lehi] truly spake many great things unto [Laman and

Lemuel], which were hard to be understood, save a man should inquire of the Lord; and they being hard in their hearts, therefore they did not look unto the Lord as they ought" (1 Ne. 15:3).

So reading translated scripture correctly requires additional translation, a continuation of the process of likening "all scriptures unto us, that it might be for our profit and learning" (1 Ne. 19:23). For Nephi, this is quite literally a process of adoption into the genealogy of the house of Israel, but what saves this from becoming simply a reaffirmation of a kind of familial or racial exclusivity is that it recurs with each independent reader and that the text, of course, is destined to be read by ever-increasing numbers and varieties of readers. Nephi refers specifically to Isaiah in order to demonstrate that revelations apply equally to the time of Isaiah, to the time of Nephi, *and* to our time. "Our" time, of course, is a loose description of each individual reading moment; whether it happens in early nineteenth-century New England or twenty-first-century New Zealand, the "time" of the reading is as varied as each reader. As in the novel, we see someone translating a prior text; Nephi translates or interprets Isaiah, reading himself in Isaiah's words, and this translation simultaneously becomes prophecy because he and the reader both see themselves in the translation. In other words, we understand Isaiah in the last days because we have a text doubly translated from Isaiah through Nephi and Joseph Smith. In this sense, revelation is always a reading or translation of a divine text, but translation in Mormon experience is not a one-way transference of meaning but a two-way dialectic; that is, some application to our own historical moment, some interpretation, is also involved.

This gives a new understanding to the idea that the "glory of God is intelligence" (D&C 93:36) since *intelligence* from the Latin literally means "to read and to understand" but also to "choose among, to grasp among certain possibilities." That is, reading is seen as an active process of selection of meaning rather than a passive reception. We need only think of the example of Oliver Cowdery who, like the many characters in García Márquez's novel, wanted to translate but failed; and the Lord explained why he failed: "You have supposed that I would give it unto you, when you took no thought save it was to ask me. But, behold, . . . you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you" (D&C 9:7–8). Given the fact that he was trying to translate an unknown alphabet and found himself staring at a blank stone, this is a stunning mandate for Cowdery to use the full force of his imagination. What was it he was supposed to study out in his own mind exactly, except perhaps what he could imagine might be possible?

This suggests that revelation results from a unique balance between our own historicity and the metahistorical position of God, between the place where past and future overlap, where God's time and human time meet, and where memory of the things of God is recovered in a mortal context. Like Aureliano Babilonia's experience, translation is possible only when one begins with a return to oneself, to one's origins, to one's human place. That this is a world-making poetic exercise is evident in the fact that we cannot be passive and inert and introspective alone; we must try to engage our human imagination actively so as to encounter the will and mind of God.

We see this structure at work when Joseph Smith translates himself from these words of Joseph of Egypt's prophecy:

But a seer will I raise up out of the fruit of thy loins; and unto him will I give power to bring forth my word unto the seed of thy loins. . . . And out of weakness he shall be made strong, in that day . . . they that seek to destroy him shall be confounded. . . . And his name shall be called after me . . . yet I will not loose his tongue, that he shall speak much, for I will not make him mighty in speaking . . . and I will make a spokesman for him. (2 Ne. 3:11, 13, 14, 15, 17)

So for Joseph, the translation mirrors Aureliano Babilonia's experience since he prophesies himself in the act of deciphering the plates.

Although the 2 Nephi text is rather direct in its identification of its translator, we are all, its converted readers, implicated as translators, discovering our scripted role in the divinely directed historical drama of the Restoration. Indeed, it is as if we are looking over Joseph's shoulder, as we do over Aureliano's at the conclusion of *One Hundred Years*, reading him reading himself reading ourselves. Aureliano's text becomes ours, just as Joseph's does. The reading moment is saved from becoming a closure of history, as García Márquez's novel rhetorically suggests, because each new reader transforms the endpoint of the genealogical trajectory that extends from the obscure past into the present moment of reading. Restoration, in other words, implies a perpetually open-ended teleology of history, awaiting each and every human story, one at a time, to magnify its genealogical reach by means of adoption, the adoption papers being the reading experience itself. The redundancy of always reading oneself, of reading as genealogical discovery, is saved from a kind of implied incest by the fact that new readers are always adopted into the genealogy of meaning. The family tree of meaning keeps finding reasons for new forms of kinship. Ultimately, when any reader is converted by the Book of Mormon, the act of reading becomes a fulfillment of prophecy about reading itself, a kind of adoption or transformation from Gentile to member of the house of Israel. Nephi tells us, as just one example of many instances when we are invoked,

that “if the Gentiles shall hearken unto the Lamb of God in that day that he shall manifest himself unto them in word, and also in power, in very deed, unto the taking away of their stumbling blocks—and harden not their hearts against the Lamb of God, they shall be numbered among the seed of thy father; yea, they shall be numbered among the house of Israel; and they shall be a blessed people upon the promised land forever” (1 Ne. 14:1–2).

And of course key to the conversion or adoption of the human family into the transcendent covenant of Abraham is the Book of Mormon itself. Isaiah and Nephi both prophesy of the book and the conditions of its coming forth and of its reception. Indeed, one purpose of including Isaiah in the Book of Mormon is to teach us of Christ’s transcendence across the different dispensations of time even as it also shows his perpetual inextricability from the fabric of human history. We also come to recognize our own moment in time in this transcendent plan or pattern. These revelations gather the house of Israel, and all of humanity, back into the umbrella narrative that began with the Abrahamic covenant. Isaiah states, “And again: Hearken, O ye house of Israel, all ye that are broken off and are driven out because of the wickedness of the pastors of my people; yea, all ye that are broken off, that are scattered abroad, who are of my people, O house of Israel” (1 Ne. 21:1). The book contains that secret knowledge, broken off from a larger whole, like the fragments of time found in Melquiades’s laboratory, and hidden from the foundation of the world. This knowledge in fact recounts our adoptive genealogy and recovers our knowledge of our own origins in the narrative of human history that we discover we have written with God. We rescue this secret knowledge of God’s designs from the realm of myth or of mere rhetoric and bring it into actuality and history by the use of our agency; through repentance and conversion, we marry human time to a divine, eternal narrative of salvation.

This encounter with oneself in the act of translating what is revealed, however, can be prodigal rather than oedipal if it is a return to our origins that then opens us perpetually to the next reading and to the next reader. In other words, we must become aware of the contingent nature of our revelation, how it is enabled by our particular moment in culture and in time and how, therefore, it is subject to further understanding. In this way, the moment of prophesying oneself in the act of deciphering latter-day scripture is not a closure of knowledge or a collapse of history itself but the initiation of a *perpetual* process of recovery. In the Book of Mormon, the moment of each individual reading is prophesied as a time when things will *begin* to be restored, when the Abrahamic covenant will *begin* to be fulfilled (1 Ne. 15:13–18). The widening and deepening of the meaning of

the Abrahamic covenant is the responsibility and effect of individual readers from ever wider spheres of human experience who understand that conversion is a choice between searching perpetually for further light and knowledge or losing that which we have already been given (see Alma 12:9–11). For readers merely seeking affirmation of what they already knew, the text is only a mirror, never a window. But readers seeking to move beyond the redundancy of selfhood will be rewarded by a perpetual discovery of larger contexts within which to understand the fragments of truth they possess. What more will the Book of Mormon come to mean, for example, when it is read by millions of Chinese?

If revelation is nothing more than what we have imagined a god might say, then of course Freud was right to criticize religion as a self-deluding dream of our own deepest desires. It is natural, then, that defenders of revealed religion point to what is new and unanticipated about the will of the Lord. But it is important to recognize that to believe in a revealed God does not preclude the possibility that our own inventions and imaginings have been vital to enabling and framing the meaning of such revelations. We are accountable for the truths restored to us, either from revelation or from secular learning, because our active imagination has helped to amplify the meaning of what we discover. This is what I mean by a poetics of restoration: new truth is revealed at the same time that we begin to see the role our imagination has played in projecting a world that anticipates what *might be* revealed. Revelation is not the result of impatient or arrogant expectation, or a waiting for a particular revelation we are sure the leaders of the Church will eventually be smart enough to receive, but instead humble anticipation of new meaning, a rediscovery, redefinition, or realignment of what we thought we knew. Our devotion should be not only to what we know (what we have received), but also to what is yet to come. The Restoration calls for an open orthodoxy, a devotion to what the Lord has revealed *and* to what he will yet reveal, even if it means we must change our thinking about what we thought we knew. To begin the process of restoring truth *in* our weakness is to start with the premise that our cultural and temporal conditions are obstacles. Restoration is not a solipsism in which we invent what God might say and then nod in not-so-surprised affirmation of what we have been told. Rather it is the result of imaginative work that puts us in a position to receive correction. It is the Lord who anticipates the weaknesses and particularities of our imagination and then *broadens* the significance of our questions. The confrontation with the self becomes redemptive, rather than tragic as it is for Oedipus, once we accept our portion of responsibility for the kind of deity who has been revealed to us.

Restoration and the Traditions of Men

Because learning about other cultures helps us to see our own culture in all its contingency and partiality, it is vital to keeping ourselves aware of the role our own culture has played, for better or for worse, in shaping our transcendent understandings of God and of ourselves. Consider the ways in which their place in a particular culture and at a particular moment in history blinded Peter and his fellow disciples from understanding on the eve of the Pentecost just how much more generously they needed to apply the gospel. Despite their ultimate inclusion of the Gentiles, Christ chastised the Old World disciples for their “stiffneckedness and unbelief” because they failed to understand how much more diverse and geographically distant the other sheep might be (3 Ne. 15:18). To have congratulated themselves merely for finally understanding that the Gentiles deserved the gospel fell short of understanding just how many “Gentiles” the world over in far away and even unknown lands qualified for the blessings of the gospel.

If it is “stiffneckedness” to have failed to imagine a people on a land mass previously unknown to the Old World, how much more unfaithful to the Lord is it for us to live in this age of unprecedented access to global information to willfully ignore the particular histories, experiences, languages, and cultures of all of God’s children. We rightly look forward to the prophesied day when Zion will be the envy of the world for its cultural accomplishments and secular knowledge, but we have too often imagined that this would involve an immersion in our own Mormon uniqueness and exceptionality and our claim to have the complete treasure house of knowledge. If the traditions of men are the stumbling block to our proper understanding of the gospel, we cannot hope to sort through the murky diversity of human experience in order to identify dangerous falsehoods if we are not equally committed to finding marvelous truths, that is, those portions of the word that he has told us have been revealed across the world, to men, women, and children, according to the “heed and diligence which they give unto him” (Alma 12:9).¹⁴ No perpetuation of the Restoration is possible if we turn our back on the many rich and varied traditions of men and women, the cultural achievements of the so-called heathen. Zion’s greatness, I believe, will come because we will leave no stone unturned, because we have an insatiable curiosity about how others have generated ideas and lived values unique to their circumstances.

Of course, lest we lose our moorings in the process, individual devotion to the Lord’s oracles is the beginning and returning point for all learning. It is also useful to remember that no one person can obtain sufficient knowledge to fully grasp the extent of the Restoration of all things. In this

quest, there is no room for academic, political, or cultural chauvinism, or for anti-intellectualism or fears of honest and open discussion of opinions. We don't want to be like those in Milton's day who wished to burn or ban books because they preferred an orthodoxy based on hearsay or on authority alone and not on personal witness or investigation. Milton believed that secular learning could aid in "reforming the Reformation" because truth always needed further revision. "Opinion in good men," he wrote, "is but knowledge in the making."¹⁵ For Milton, the earnest Christian's duty was to "hear . . . all manner of reason" and to commit to "books promiscuously read."¹⁶

In other words, Milton understood that truth had been scattered throughout the world and that its broken body must be searched for aggressively and reassembled in a gathering of insights from all books. Mormon suggests similarly that human judgment is flawed by two fundamental errors: judging "that which is evil to be of God, or that which is good and of God to be of the devil" (Moro. 7:14). Mistaking truth for error is as morally dangerous as mistaking error for truth. The countless truths that have been buried by such mistaken judgments historically have been ruinous and arguably the very reason why art and why a dispensation of restoration are necessary. As Milton notes, "Revolutions of ages do not oft recover the loss of a rejected truth, for the want of which whole nations fare the worse."¹⁷ The only way he could imagine that we could fight against these consequences was to adopt a spirit of anticipation: "The light which we have gained was given us, not to be ever staring on, but by it to discover onward things more remote from our knowledge."¹⁸

Our willingness to withhold premature judgment about how ideas fit into the great expanse of God's knowledge requires charity, Christ's power to "bear all things," which, among other benefits, strengthens us with patience to withstand the apparent contradictions of ideas, thus keeping us open to greater understanding. This openness gains direction gradually because it is framed by belief in an eventual restoration of all things, what the novelist Marilynne Robinson refers to as the "law of completion," that moment when "everything must finally be made comprehensible."¹⁹ Without faith in this ultimate moment of circumscription of all truth to act as our compass, the partial knowledge we obtain against the great tide of chaos and forgetting that seems to be the sea we swim in would drain, instead of instill, hope. We can ill afford to be overly confident that we have arrived at a final state of understanding. Indeed, we might say that knowing an idea, feeling its truth, is a brief glimpse into a mind in which all things are known. It is as if we instinctively feel that our newfound comprehension

is evidence that ideas can never be lost, even if they are often lost to our memory or changed by new information. Trust in the Restoration means that we play at secular learning, experimenting on the word long enough to harvest what fruit an idea bears.

In his monumental essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent," T. S. Eliot argues against culture's tendency to fetishize originality and uniqueness, what "least resembles anyone else," in a work of art.²⁰ The newness that we think we admire in a great work of art is really a function of the individual talent's ability to transmit tradition *as if* it were new. The poetics of reimagining and rearranging the past allows the individual talent to render all ages contemporaneous. Eliot notes that "not only the best, but the most individual parts of [an individual's] work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously."²¹ These voices of the dead are displaced and reorganized by the voice of the individual talent so that new understandings emerge that simultaneously feel like things we always or once knew. It is as if to say that creating a new work of art is really only a poetic reading, a restoration of what an earlier work of inspiration sought to express.

So one mistake we might make when we suggest that Mormons can achieve the level of accomplishment of the Bachs and Shakespeares of the world is to assume that there is a kind of radical originality in what must be accomplished. If we really believe in the Restoration, it is well to remember that as unique as we sometimes insist it is, Mormon belief is nothing new; it is the oldest understanding of the cosmos. So we could say that we already have our "Mormon" Bach: the J. S. Bach of the Brandenburg Concertos and the B-minor mass we have come to love. There are as many Mormon writers as there are Mormon readers. That is not to say that we shouldn't aspire to Bach-like or Melville-like accomplishments, but who would want a culture without Bach or Melville? Perhaps it sounds arrogant and egotistical to claim such heroes as our own, but I mean this as an expression of compassion, not proprietary affection. If we are serious about the endeavor of gathering the house of Israel and if all of world culture is up for grabs, Mormon culture stands to become something much more broad and inclusive, much more diverse, and much more sympathetic to the world than any of us has imagined. Indeed, it would seem that it has to if the work of Restoration is to go forward.

Mormon individual talent will achieve greatness when it exhibits what Eliot calls a "continual extinction of personality" because "the poet has, not a 'personality' to express, but a particular medium, . . . in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways."²² The goal of

Mormon art or Mormon learning should not be “a turning loose,” to use a phrase from Eliot, of Mormonness so that the whole world looks at us in envy to say that we have something special, unique, or original.²³ I suspect admiration will come when the culture of Mormonism is invested in the cultures of the world, when we are seen as a people actively engaged in empathetic, disciplined conversations with other traditions, beliefs, and cultures. Eliot is suggesting a paradox; the expression of Mormonism would be an escape from whatever we think “Mormonness” might mean. We need not fear. This is not a denial or denigration of who we think we are, for as Eliot notes, “Only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things.”²⁴ In other words, the individual talent is adopted into the family tree of cultural achievement without compromising originality. In the terms I have been discussing, this talent is a reading of the past that is simultaneously a transmission of the old and a creation, a poetics, of something new. This has important implications for a contemporary LDS religious culture that is still very much invested in our uniqueness, still predominantly shaped by American culture and history, and still emerging from its origins on the Wasatch Front.

Indeed, we seem as a culture to be at a crossroads. We are becoming increasingly international in membership, multilingual as a body and as individual members, and global in our reach. And yet we remain as closely identified as ever with a narrowly defined version of American nationalism, with a specific political party, ethnicity, and geography. This is most evident, perhaps, in the way that U.S. Americans who descend from British Island and Scandinavian stock tend to read their own story into the Book of Mormon to the exclusion of other Americas and other Americans. Indeed, it is not yet clear that in the Mormon emergence out of obscurity we are doing all that we can to demonstrate our commitment to listening to and gathering truth wherever it may be found. We will be like the stiffnecked disciples if we remain content with merely extending now dated and reified understandings of what we thought it meant to be Mormon.

Our Sunday School conversations about the Book of Mormon notwithstanding, the book is *not* exclusively about Anglo-American experience within the geopolitical borders of the United States. Rather, it describes a geography in the Americas of shifting political boundaries with a plurality of cultures of various races. Surely one of its most powerful messages is its warning against geopolitical chauvinism. Nephi asks us, “Know ye not that there are more nations than one?” (2 Ne. 29:7). The Book of Mormon offers a vision of unity for that plurality, to be sure, but like the New World’s greatest novels, it also issues stern warnings about the dangers of entrenched

claims to identity that use force or chauvinism to achieve unity. Most significantly, it points to additional books of equal value to come forth from other lands.

If America was the cradle of the Restoration, perhaps we would do well to consider rethinking what America means; it needn't be an ethnically narrow and geographically restricted America but rather a cross-cultural and transnational location where a dizzying variety of diasporic communities gather, commune, and influence and change each other, and thereby challenge singular ethnic or political claims on the meaning of any one nation. In other words, if it has been suggested that the Restoration took place in the United States because of its particular opportunities of religious and political freedoms, perhaps it is time to consider that American experience has also laid the groundwork for a New Jerusalem, a Zarahemla of sorts, that can become one of the great gathering places of the world's cultures: the Americas of Canada, the U.S., Central America, the Caribbean, and South America; the Americas of Native Americans from Tierra del Fuego to the Arctic; of Asian immigrants from Canada to Argentina; of the vast African diaspora; the Americas of Latin American, Arab, European, and other peoples of international and intranational migration. These have all yet to play their transformative role in the Restoration.

In an important book that outlines a theory of culture for a diasporic and plural America, the Martinican author Édouard Glissant warns against the tendency for cultures to find identity in genealogical roots, especially when those roots are merely conceived as moving back through time to a sacrosanct origin that expels all others.²⁵ He warns, in other words, against totalitarian visions of unity that fail to establish relations with other cultures, other myths, and other lands across time and instead lay exclusive claim to territory. "The root," he insists, "is monolingual" whereas a culture of "errantry" understands itself in motion across land, through time, and as composite.²⁶ Sacred books such as the Bible, he argues, are much more cross-cultural than their readers often realize:

Within the collective books concerning the sacred and the notion of history lies the germ of the exact opposite of what they so loudly proclaim. When the very idea of territory becomes relative, nuances appear in the legitimacy of territorial possession. . . . These books are the beginning of something entirely different from massive, dogmatic, and totalitarian certainty (despite the religious uses to which they will be put).²⁷

Glissant shares Eliot's suspicion that all cultures really are the result of a remaking of fragments of the past into new formulations that work for the present. For this reason, he insists that cultures come to understand

themselves as a contingent unity that is the result of an “aggregation of things that are scattered.”²⁸ This implies, of course, that cultural origins are not merely found in the past but are created in the imagination of the present, that there is a continual poetics of identity in the cultural work of any group. Repeatedly, Glissant takes aim at any conception of time that would place history along a chronological trajectory, what he calls “ancient filiation” and “conquering legitimacy.”²⁹ The reason for this critique is that often such conceptions fail to take interest in and include other peoples, times, and places. What is sacred for Glissant is not the fiction of a singular story of origins but the opportunity to self-consciously and poetically remake culture from the fragments that lie about us in the present; that is, the sacred is the work of imagining relations between competing origins and thereby forging new awareness and new possibilities for more inclusive communities.

In their habits of reading and learning, some Mormons feel hesitant to embrace the educational and scholarly objectives of our politically correct and multicultural times because of today’s increasing balkanization of identity and secularism. And Glissant’s theory might sound too facilely inclusive and indifferent to the transcendent claims of sacred literature regarding our spiritual identity and our relationship to eternal truth. But he is useful to remind us of the dangers of a too narrowly cultural or geographical claim on eternal truth because of the ways that it isolates and excludes. Surely it is not insignificant that the Book of Mormon tells the story of immigrants, portrays the brotherhood between races, and exposes in no uncertain terms the unfinished nature of God’s revelations to humankind. Indeed, the Book of Mormon implies a fundamental redefinition of the traditional Western and Hegelian conceptions of history. The book exposes the story of lost histories that are the result of sin, arrogance, and violence. It calls for greater humility and repentance in light of the ruptures and gaps in our linear understanding of the past that it portrays. Contrary to how virtually every national history is created, the structure of history, in the Restoration at least, does not evolve by means of linear unveilings of time progressively marching from one point of origin to another point of conclusion. The linear structure that culminates in the last days is compromised by a circular returning that is implied in a Restoration, a return again to that which has been hidden since the foundation of the world.

If the Restoration is a chiasmic response to the Apostasy, it would seem that the emerging knowledge of Christ throughout history spins forward but leaves behind in its wake a series of forgettings; history, in other words, results in simultaneous rupture and continuity. The Book of Mormon, for

example, portrays the arrival of the Gentiles in the New World, an event that results simultaneously in the perpetuation of God's covenants *and* a loss of truth. (The Gentiles were presumably not only our British but also our Hispanic forebears. I see no reason why the Book of Mormon's account of the discovery of the Americas is not also telling the story of Hispanic Catholic colonies who, arguably more assiduously than the English Protestants, devoted extraordinary efforts to bringing the word of God to millions of the native inhabitants of the Americas.) We are told that the Gentiles receive "the power of the Lord" to defeat their mother colonies and to exercise power over the Native Americans to establish territory for themselves "out of captivity" (1 Ne. 13:16, 13). They carry with them the word of God, which contains "the covenants of the Lord" but is also missing "many parts which are plain and most precious" (1 Ne. 13:23, 26).

The results are mixed: the Gentiles are simultaneously described as "lifted up by the power of God above all other nations," and yet the fragmented truths they possess "blind and harden the hearts of the children of men" and "an exceedingly great many do stumble, yea, insomuch that Satan hath great power over them," resulting in an "awful state of blindness" (1 Ne. 13:30, 27, 29, 32). It is not always easy to see founders as both great and flawed, but that is certainly the way honest histories tell it. It is often assumed that Nephi's vision sees Columbus in a state of divine inspiration that moves him across the waters. There is little doubt from the historical record that Columbus felt so inspired, but there is also little doubt that he was blinded by a great many false traditions and ideas that caused him to fail to understand accurately where he was geographically during his voyages in the New World. This failure and his arrival had no small consequences. It is hard to see why we should celebrate Columbus's arrival unambiguously or to focus exclusively on the white immigrant story of the Americas, when in the wake of Spanish and other European arrivals, thousands of Indians were enslaved, only to be replaced by millions of Africans; and millions of Indians died of disease, so many that over the course of the next century and a half, the indigenous population of the Americas, estimated to be at 54 million prior to 1492, fell by almost 90 percent by the 1600s.³⁰

Columbus is secondary to my main point here, which is that the Book of Mormon portrays history in the Americas as a series of events through which righteous men and women simultaneously bring the plan of God forward and (either through the failings of those same men and women or the incomplete nature of those events) leave behind pieces of the truth that need to be restored. A restoration implies a perpetual glance back, a recognition of the always incomplete nature of human action and understanding,

and a desire to find the deeper reasons for humanity's secret kinship and belonging in the covenants of Abraham. Traditional Christianity does not always fully confront these forgettings or this constant fragmentation of the gospel's truths. Mormonism posits the need for continual revolutions, that is, for continual returns to the source, to imagine again the lost connections, the repressed relations that make history less determined by evolutionary stages of the past and more determined by our imaginative acts in the present. And, as García Márquez's novel argues, this poetics of restoration is the fundamental impulse of art and is reason therefore that art and culture deserve our serious attention.

Indeed, literary and historical production in the Americas, especially over the last fifty years, has shown profound interest in the early years of colonialism, the breadth and depth of over three centuries of African slavery throughout the Americas, and indigenous life. Moreover, the stories of immigrants and their family memories, the ethnic plurality of cities in the Americas, and the connections between the Americas and the rest of the world have figured more prominently in the literary and scholarly imagination of hundreds of writers and thinkers throughout the Americas than in any previous era of history.³¹ The stories that have emerged remind us that the great meaning of the gathering of the house of Israel is not always blood descent but adoption. They suggest that the profound differences among a plurality of Americans and Americas should challenge us to imagine our kinship. This commitment to hearing scattered stories is a means of testing and potentially expanding the limits of community. It is how a poetics of restoration can avoid the pitfalls of what Glissant criticizes as an unhealthy and even violent obsession with a community's unique and sometimes hardened claims to sacred roots. We see these obsessions whenever there is undue pride about the exceptional nature of a particular culture's origins or unhealthy protectionism about the purity and singularity of those origins. It is not insignificant that such negative protectionism has so often yielded to violence. It certainly enriches our understanding of the past to acknowledge heroism and inspired acts and words, but it does not diminish America to acknowledge the violence, the pride, and the stumbling blocks that have also moved history forward. Such acknowledgement does not preclude the possibility that any nation's affairs have been providentially aided. Indeed, doing so helps us to see providence in human relief. If we were to take the Book of Mormon as our inspiration, we might see a recovery of such plural and sometimes contradictory histories as our sacred duty.

The sacred, for Glissant, is not the imagined origin itself in a state of static perfection but the act itself of imagining the deeper signification

of the root, something that sacred books teach: “The founding books have taught us that the sacred dimension consists always of going deeper into the mystery of the root, shaded with variations of errantry.”³² Specifically, he suggests that something like the intolerant and violent treatment of Native Americans and the enslavement of Africans, which characterize the arrogant trajectories of Western claims to exceptionalism and to territory, is movement that paradoxically “contained the embryo (no matter how deferred its realization might have seemed) that would transcend the duality that started it.”³³ The seeds were sown, in other words, in the crucible of New World experience for a cross-culturation imagination in which humanity could begin to discover the grounds for relation among all family trees. Here we see how the very human conditions that limit, even blind, us might indeed become the means of a redeemed and more penitent self-understanding.

Genealogy has always been effective in teaching diachronic heritage back through time but less effective in mapping the synchronic interrelatedness of communities across time. Family trees are deceptive in this regard because they stress parental links at the expense of the vast and virtually unmappable network of kinship every human being possesses across time with an innumerable family of lost cousins. The genealogical search is a discovery of kinship, but it can also be a discovery of the limits of our understanding of blood, the perpetual mystery of life stories that remain beyond our grasp, and the need to supplement the inevitable lack of sufficient documentation with imagination. If there was a time when those bitten by the bug of Elijah were able to boast of their monarchic ancestors in the Old World as far back as 1066, perhaps it is time we start using genealogy to help us see our responsibilities toward our present-day kin among the far-flung races and religions of the world we inhabit.³⁴ To express ourselves, to know ourselves, and to be truthful to our heritage all imply that we become answerable to and interested in other peoples, other cultures, other times and places.

Who and what we imagine our community to include is often more potent than what our bloodlines indicate about our identity, and this is why culture is so important to understanding ourselves and others. If our ultimate objective is the community of the Abrahamic covenant, a binding of all the families of the earth, it is an understatement to say that there remains a lot of work to do to prepare our hearts to welcome all of God’s children. Every conversion to the gospel, every consecration of one individual life, and every way of seeing the world within the framework of the great plan of happiness represents an adoption and an architectural retrofitting of

the house of Israel. The spirit of Elijah in its broadest sense represents the search for lost knowledges in the world and the attempt to convert transgression and errantry, individuality and particularity, bloodlines and geographies into the new substance of the story of all humankind. This spirit is operative in a disciple's secular learning because even if exposure to the particulars of another culture and identity might challenge the exceptional claims of the Mormon personality, a poetics of restoration that seeks to find the reasons for inclusion of all God's children rewards our leap of faith with a return to, not a dissipation of, the foundations of our Mormon selves, refreshed and restored in profoundly new ways. It is not a Tower of Babel of secular knowledge we need to build but rather the contingent scaffolding of an imagined totality that we hope the Lord will reveal beneath the stories we hear. We can never be sure we properly understand the relationships we imagine among cultures, but charity to bear all things, including, for the time being, what appear to be unassimilable differences, may allow us the opportunity to restore the meaning and shape of the community we hope to establish. In this sense, we are invoked as poetic creators in this ongoing restoration of all things. The aim is to remake our Mormonness, both individually and as a culture, so as to allow more and more of the world's hidden truths to resonate in what we claim to believe, a prospect that I think bodes well for performing the great labor of the gathering of Israel and the restoration of all things.

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1. Brigham Young, quoted in Spencer W. Kimball, "The Gospel Vision of the Arts," *Ensign* 3 (July 1977): 3.

2. There is a rich bibliography on the role of the disciple-scholar in the Mormon tradition. I like what Elder Neal A. Maxwell says: "We constantly need to distinguish between the truths which are useful and those which are crucial, and between truths which are important and those which are eternal. The restored gospel gives us this special sense of proportion." Neal A. Maxwell, "The Disciple-Scholar," in *Learning in the Light of Faith: The Compatibility of Scholarship and Discipleship*, ed. Henry B. Eyring (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1999), 4. Elder Henry B. Eyring elaborates on the priority of our submission to Christ: "Start with the

prophecies about how the gospel of Jesus Christ will change you. From that you will see why faith in Jesus Christ and in the authority of His mortal servants will multiply your scholarly powers. Then, when you have acted on that, you will be able to see how the other predictions and sayings of prophets will expand, not contract, your understanding." Henry B. Eyring, "Faith, Authority, and Scholarship," in Eyring, *Learning in the Light of Faith*, 53.

3. This is a very brief gloss on a long and somewhat complicated history of literary theory, which has featured eras that have emphasized, among other aspects, the importance of the text's formal qualities (formalism), the importance of the reader's identity and/or context (reader response theory, feminist theory, and race theory), the influence of economic and political oppression (Marxism and postcolonial theory), and the inherent gap between signifier and signified (poststructuralism). Often contradictory and often enlightening, these theories enrich our understanding of the complex process of reading, interpreting, and making meaning.

4. Alan Jacobs, *A Theology of Reading: The Hermeneutics of Love* (Boulder, Col.: Westview Press, 2001), 70.

5. Jacobs, *Theology of Reading*, 88.

6. Cited in Jacobs, *Theology of Reading*, 89.

7. See Jacobs, *Theology of Reading*, 89.

8. See Jacobs, *Theology of Reading*, 89.

9. Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2004), 322.

10. Márquez, *One Hundred Years*, 329.

11. Márquez, *One Hundred Years*, 321.

12. Josefina Ludmer, *Cien Años de Soledad: Una Interpretación*, 2d. ed. (Buenos Aires: Editorial Tiempo Contemporáneo, 1974).

13. Márquez, *One Hundred Years*, 383.

14. See also Alma 12:10–11; 32:23.

15. John Milton, "Areopagitica," in Stephen Greenblatt, and others, eds., *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 8th ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), 717.

16. Milton, "Areopagitica," 713.

17. Milton, "Areopagitica," 712.

18. Milton, "Areopagitica," 716.

19. Marilynne Robinson, *Housekeeping* (New York: Picador, 2004), 92.

20. T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1975), 37.

21. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," 38.

22. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," 40, 42.

23. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," 43.

24. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," 43.

25. Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

26. Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 15.

27. Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 15–16.

28. Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 55.

29. Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 56.

30. Shawn William Miller, *An Environmental History of Latin America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 56.

31. My first book, *Postslavery Literatures in the Americas* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2000), explores the theme of genealogy in novels from the Caribbean and from the U.S. and exposes the shared anxieties and histories across various American nations. It is an attempt to understand how the U.S. wrestled with the legacies of its own history of slavery and its striving for democracy in ways that were not entirely unique. My scholarship participates in an active and broad discussion among other scholars on the relationship between and among the various cultures of the Americas.

32. Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 21.

33. Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 56.

34. Between 75 and 90 percent of all African Americans, for example, have white ancestry, which would suggest there are a great number of whites who have yet to acknowledge black ancestors who may have passed as white or who owned slaves. See Shirlee Taylor Haizlip, *The Sweeter the Juice: A Family Memoir in Black and White* (New York: Free Press, 1995), 15.

The Hoarse Whisperer

David Milo Kirkham

Innocence

"Little Lamb, who made thee?"—William Blake¹

"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me."—John 10:27

"Discussing Eastern art and dramas with intellectual llamas"—Dr. Dolittle²

I was thirteen when I first talked to animals in earnest. I don't mean calling to Cuddles, our cat, or sharing a word with Max Goolis, our dog. I mean trying to *communicate* with species nonhuman. Our four acres of fruit trees bumped up against the Ferrins' much larger orchards, fenced in to keep their sheep. On typical summer days, the Ferrin sheep ran together through the apricot and Bing cherry trees, bleating their way from one oasis to the next of low-hanging leaves or green tufts of grass. In harder times, they poked their noses through the fence toward the always greener grass on the other side and became a familiar presence to me in the process.

One afternoon while burning trash in our rusty backyard fifty-gallon-drum incinerator, I found myself in the near company of the Ferrin sheep. A bit bored, I decided to strike up a conversation.

"Baaa," I said in my best ruminant voice.

They stopped their munching and looked at me.

"Baaaa," I repeated, this time in a more elongated tone.

"Baa," came a short reply.

Encouraged, I tried again: "Baaaaaaaaa."

"Baaaa. Baaaa. Baaaa," came at least three responses.

I tried again, this time at a higher pitch. The lambs joined in reply. Each time came a few more voices. We kept up this “baaanter” until we had a veritable chorus of call-and-response going, me the baritone lead bleater with an occasional cracking voice, and twenty-something stuttering counterpoint tenors and altos in reply.

I happily repeated the experiment on other occasions to similar effect. Once during a Boy Scout fishing trip, however, I made the mistake of telling my friends about my communion with the neighbors’ talkative bovinds.

“Hoo, hoo, hoo,” came a much different chorus of taunts and jeers from my peers. “David talks to sheep!”

“Hey, Bruce, d’ya hear that? Kirkham talks to sheep.” Har har.

“What do you say to them? ‘Here, sheepy, sheepy?’”

“Hey, Kirkham, stick your head down in the water and call us some fish!”

I laughed and learned. Some things are better left unshared with even your friends.

Since at least then, however, I have occasionally wondered about the “souls” of animals. Latter-day Saints learn in section 77 of the Doctrine and Covenants that animals, like humans, are spiritual as well as temporal beings. Sacred writings are replete with stories of animals doing unusual things: Balaam’s ass talked. Noah’s animals lined up two by two—and if he had trouble prodding them onto the ark, he spared us those details. Jonah was swallowed by a large fish and lived to tell about it. Daniel’s lions shut their mouths. That Daniel was not food for the lions should provide us food for contemplation.



After the breakthrough with the sheep, I experimented on occasion with other animals. My sister Kathy had a small Appaloosa mare I would ride two or three times a summer. Athena, however, was difficult to catch and bridle. I hated the long ritual we’d go through whenever I approached the corral: she would see me and dash to the other side, I would circle around only to have her run off again, until finally, maybe fifteen minutes later, I would outwit her or she would tire of the game and let me grab her halter—a prelude to a new struggle to put on the bridle.

One day, preparing to ride, I stopped and watched for a moment as Kathy’s beautiful, gray, spotted pony pranced around the corral. My annoyance softened, and I decided on a new approach.

“You really are a pretty little thing,” I said. She watched me warily. I looked back with admiration, saying nothing more. I began to think good thoughts about Athena.

I won’t hurt you girl. You’re beautiful.

She snorted, shook herself, and maintained her vigil from across the way. I stayed where I was.

Can you understand me? I tried to telepath.

She shook herself again.

I held out my hand, still thinking peaceable, admiring thoughts toward the mare; she strutted a bit more, watching me. Finally, after three or four minutes, she sauntered over to me, let me stroke her sleek gray neck, and took the bridle without protest.

Enmity

"They know not the voice of strangers." —John 10:5

*"You got yer dead skunk in the middle of the road
Stinkin' to high heaven!"* —Loudon Wainwright III³

*"And what shoulder, and what art,
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?"* —William Blake⁴

I was fifteen when I first killed animals in earnest. I don't mean tormenting and trampling on fire ants or the one regrettable time when, as a preteen, I shot a robin with my BB gun for no good reason. I mean the first time I set out to kill living mammals.

My target, with malice aforethought, was skunks. Stinking, malevolent, beautiful skunks. One day Mr. Ford, my former scoutmaster, told my friend Doug and me that skunks were wreaking havoc in the neighborhood chicken coops even as they *reeked* havoc in our olfactory nerves most summer nights.

"How would you boys like to be neighborhood heroes and see how many skunks you can get rid of?" he proposed.

We laughed. *Like sure, we're gonna go catch skunks.*

"I've got traps," the scouter explained. "You set them out in the woods over by Charlie's Pond with some raw hamburger on them. Next day you come back, check the traps, find your skunk, and shoot it. It's simple."

"So what d'we do with a dead skunk?" I asked.

"Put it in a stream or irrigation ditch for a day to get rid of the smell, then bring it to me."

"We'll do it." *Sure, something new. How many kids will return to school in the fall and be able to say they trapped skunks over the summer?*

Mr. Ford provided us several iron leg traps "strong enough to break the skunk's leg" and keep it from wandering, even if the trap came loose from its stake. We set them about in thickets of damp brush off the trail in the darker parts of the woods, each a few hundred yards apart.

For the next two weeks, we had a skunk every other day or so. We could usually tell before we reached the trap, as the skunk's instinct was to release its odiferous protective fluids upon the shock of the trap's snap. When we came across our unsuspecting prey, Doug and I took turns shooting our .22 caliber rifles at its head—thud, thud, thud—until it was indisputably dead.

“Way to go, Doug! You got ’im first shot.”

Or

“That little critter doesn’t want to die.” Thud.

We’d then hold our breath, drag the trap to the stream, chain it to the bank, drop the carcass in the water, and watch for a moment as the moving current expiated our acts, cleansing the crimson stains from the fine-looking black-and-white pelt.

Thud, thud, thud. It wasn’t the bang of the rifles that stayed with me. It was the thud of the bullet striking the soft body of a breathing, living creature. Chicken killer. Striking beauty. Stinky beast. Living creation.

Thud, thud, thud. Job well done.

About two years later my mom came to me one night as I relaxed in front of the TV.

“David, Dad’s not home and Mrs. Flynn just ran over Happy’s kittens. Three of them are still alive, but they’re badly hurt.”

“What can I do about that, Mom?” I asked, disturbed.

“I need you to end their suffering.”

I dragged myself to the edge of the driveway to find two dead black kittens; three others writhing, flailing. I raised my .22.

Thud, thud, thud. Job well done.

Tears.



How could the same boy mimic sheep, “telepath” to horses, shed tears for dying kittens, and yet brutally trap and shoot skunks? It’s not a great mystery. It was part of growing up in a semirural environment. Having been raised around hunters and some neighbors who slaughtered animals for food, oversentimentality toward animals was not really part of my upbringing. Sure, we loved our pets, but they were pets, beasts, never to be confused in their value with human beings. My older brother wouldn’t let me kill a snake we found in the wild because it was “one of God’s creatures” doing no harm, and he eventually became a zookeeper at Salt Lake’s Hogle Zoo—yet he was an avid hunter. When it came to skunks, I was simply taught they were a problem, a threat to domesticated animals and, hence, to a comfortable human lifestyle. They could be eliminated without remorse.

And yet I feel remorse.

Interlude

"Take a whiff on me, that ain't no rose."—Loudon Wainwright III⁵

At seventeen years, I was a night watchman at Cherry Hill Campground at the crossroads of Farmington and Kaysville, Utah. It was mostly a dull job, wandering the orchards where the campers stayed, watching for the rare pilferer of picnic coolers or unusual happening. One night about midnight, my good friend Bruce, whose dad owned the campground, was standing watch—horsing around—with me. We caught movement in the grass.

"Hey, a cat!" Bruce noted as we glimpsed a furry little creature enter a sprinkler pipe. "Let's have some fun."

Bruce picked up one end of the pipe; I picked up the other, and we took turns sliding the animal back and forth from one end to the other. But it was fun that quickly lost its charm. Feeling sorry for the cat, I decided not to return the beast to Bruce on the next go-round. I let it slide in my direction, and soon what popped out, at the level of my chest, was a big bushy, black-and-white tail, aiming straight at my solar plexus.

"Skunk!" I yelled, dropping the pipe.

Too late. A stream of poison gas hit me in the chest, making me a casualty in a war I had abandoned long ago. I smelled so bad it hurt. Tears. From the gas. The next morning I laid my shirt in the irrigation ditch. Chalk one up for the polecats. Small vengeance, I know, but a token of what I deserved.

Reconciliation

"Did He who made the lamb make thee?"—William Blake⁶

"The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them."—Isaiah 11:6

I have not for many years killed animals out of malice or mischief. I encourage most insects to leave the house peaceably. I've treated our pets with compassion. Sometimes I yap back at the neighbor's dogs when they harass my wife, Judy, and me on the way to our early morning jog, but mostly I try to befriend them.

This is not to say I have honed my attitudes to Albert Schweitzer-like reverence. I will still usually step on a spider if it's in the house. "They have to stay in their domain," a friend and I once agreed.

We've often had birdfeeders. One day a few years ago, very unexpectedly, a blue-hued hummingbird, a most elusive winged creature, landed on my arm and remained for about two minutes. I was happy it found me a suitable companion while it regained its strength.

“Hey, little fella, are you tired?” I said, recalling words I had once heard quoted by President Kimball in general conference:

Don’t kill the little birds
That sing on bush and tree,
All thro’ the summer days,
Their sweetest melody.⁷

I still am no great friend to mosquitoes or mice—though I have been known to catch the latter alive and release them far from our home. And last summer I destroyed a hornet’s nest on my house and two in my mailbox. For three years running, I have been a reluctant accomplice in my children’s biology projects, which have demanded the capture, murder, and identification of ten species of insects. None of the family takes pleasure in freezing a praying mantis or a dragonfly or chloroforming a butterfly or a beetle.

I still like sheep. When I hear the old Seekers’ song “I Know I’ll Never Find Another You,” I tell my children, “It’s the song of the lonely ram.”

“Huh?” they ask.

“He’ll never find another ewe.”

Each summer we have a snake in our backyard that we leave unmolested. I call him “Sneaky.” On days when I am home, I will often stretch out in the shade on a patio chair with my books while he lazes likewise in a sunny spot four feet away.

Joseph Smith, during the Zion’s Camp experience, once challenged brethren who were killing rattlesnakes, “How will the serpent ever lose his venom, while the servants of God possess the same disposition and continue to make war upon it?”

I’m not a vegetarian and doubt I ever will be, but I do try to put into perspective our reliance on the flesh of other creatures for our sustenance and be moderate in meat consumption.

As a family, we spent four happy years living near Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany, just north of the Austrian border. The sharp, jagged peaks of the Bavarian Alps that surrounded us, engulfed by flowing skirts of rich, ever-verdant countryside, etched a permanent place in my mind for their majesty and grandeur. Wildlife was abundant. We were awakened each morning, beginning in early spring, by a plethora of voices—birds of all varieties singing a wake-up call; squirrels, black and brown, chirping and chattering in accompaniment. No alarm clock was necessary. Indeed, the choir often began before we were ready to rise.

Early morning jogs through the open fields brought sightings of deer, raccoons, rabbits with straight ears, rabbits with floppy ears, badgers and, most of all, foxes. Hardly a morning went by without our seeing a fox or two—my favorites for their striking red coats, plumed tails, and noble demeanor.

Most mornings Judy and I ran together. Sometimes she'd take a day off, however, leaving me to wend my way solo through the open meadows and catch the sunrise, far from the annoyances of civilization. On those mornings, alone and uninhibited, I did what I've pretty much always done when jogging by myself. I talked to God.

One morning at about five thirty, I found myself alone, embraced by the newly rising sun, talking aloud to my Maker, enjoying the beauty of the hills, the green earth, and the chorus of birds. My heart and thoughts were transported. For a time I was scarcely aware of my mortality.

Then I saw it. Poised before me, at some fifty yards distance, stood a large, handsome fox, erect and dignified, watching me jog in its direction. I stopped.

"Now aren't you a beautiful thing?" I said aloud. I watched, enthralled, as it watched me. Then it moved—in my direction. It jogged ten yards closer, stopped, watched me some more.

"That's right," I said. "I won't hurt you."

It came closer. I continued to talk to it gently, calmly as it approached. Another ten yards, another halt, a few more soft words, another ten yards. Soon the fox was within six feet of me.

"I don't recall the last time I was so close to such a majestic animal," I said, partly to the fox, partly to the Heavenly Creator. The fox looked at me with seeming curiosity—head cocked, tender eyed.

We continued to watch each other for a few moments. I was beginning to toy with the idea of stroking it when my reverie ruptured. The absurdity of the situation struck me. Like Peter, who began to sink when he realized he was walking on water, my faith began to shake.

What are you doing, talking to a fox, you silly man? Don't you know foxes are wild animals? They can be dangerous. Why did it approach you? Maybe something's wrong with it? Maybe it's rabid? Leave it alone.

My doubts came tumbling out. I stood for a moment more.

"I've got to be going," I said, not wanting to insult him with the rabies suspicion. "This is nice. I'm glad we shared this moment. But we belong to different worlds."

Someday we may romp these fields together. The leopard may lie with the lamb, the kid with the lion, and you and I can take a morning jog. But for now we should go our separate ways.

With that, I turned and jogged away, and the fox did the same.



Who are the animals? Our relationship to them seems complex. I know some people see it in black and white: kill them, dominate them,

or protect them all at any cost. But to me it is not so simple. They and we share this world. We have powers that *en gros* exceed theirs. So many species have blessed mankind at our beck and call: for food, clothing, warmth, labor, transportation, protection, combat, or companionship. As we find alternatives to animal products for these functions, will our relationships change? Will an end time come when all things achieve their proper place, when predators lose the taste for their prey, when the lion shall eat straw like the ox? Will it be sudden and miraculous and amazing? Or will it happen gradually as human beings grow in wisdom, compassion, and capability and animals grow less wary of us?

I am unsure about it all. Mine is not a clarion call to animal rights, to treating our dogs like children, or to wearing surgical masks like the Jains to avoid swallowing a gnat. Mine is a softer voice, an ambivalent whisper perhaps, suggesting thoughtfulness and respect in how we interact with those other species that share with us this planet.

This essay by David Milo Kirkham (who can be reached via email at byustudies@byu.edu) won third place in the *BYU Studies* 2010 personal essay contest.

1. William Blake, "The Lamb," *Songs of Innocence and Experience with Other Poems* (London: Basil Montagu Pickering, 1866), 8.
2. Leslie Bricusse, "Talk to the Animals," *Doctor Dolittle* (Los Angeles: Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation, 1967).
3. Loudon Wainwright III, "Dead Skunk," *Album III* (New York: Columbia Records, 1972).
4. William Blake, "The Tiger," *Songs*, 53.
5. Wainwright, "Dead Skunk."
6. Blake, "Tiger," 53.
7. "Don't Kill the Little Birds," *Deseret Sunday School Songs* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Sunday School Union, 1909), no. 163, quoted by Spencer W. Kimball, "Strengthening the Family—the Basic Unit of the Church," *Ensign* 8 (May 1978): 45.

“A Question on My Mind”

Robert McCorkle’s 1844 Letter to Joseph Smith

Hal Robert Boyd and Susan Easton Black

Robert Andrew Hope McCorkle (1807–1873)¹ was one of many Americans curious about Joseph Smith and Mormonism. In 1844, he ventured from his western Tennessee home to Nauvoo, Illinois, “with strong desires to familiarize [him]self with what is call’d Mormonism.” In Nauvoo he found “a vast net-full” of Latter-day Saints, but he returned south without having had an opportunity to speak personally with Joseph Smith: “I took with me a series of enquiries with the intention to present them to you, but being debard from becoming familiar with you, my natural timidity forbade my presenting them.” Back in Tennessee, McCorkle took up his pen on May 10, 1844, and put his questions in a letter, transcribed below, and sent it to Joseph.²

After Joseph’s murder, Church leaders and historians kept his official correspondence.³ His letters were carried west with other documents to the Salt Lake Valley and are now housed in the Joseph Smith Collection in

1. Robert Andrew Hope McCorkle was born in Rowan County, North Carolina, in March 1807 and married to Tirzah Scott on December 4, 1828, in Gibson County, Tennessee. Familysearch.org; marriage certificate of Robt. A. H. McCorkle and Tirzah Scott, December 1, 1828, copy in possession of Hal Robert Boyd; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1850, Dyer County, Tennessee; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1860, Gibson County, Tennessee.

2. Robert A. H. McCorkle to Joseph Smith, May 10, 1844, in “Received Letters,” Joseph Smith Collection, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City.

3. Brigham Young and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles kept most of the Prophet’s correspondence as property of the LDS Church. Linda Newell and

May the 10th 1844

To Joseph Smith Nauvoo Ill

Respected Sir—

Having in vain sought an interview with you during your Conference, being repulsed by a throng of business which bore weightily on you at that time— I was under the necessity of returning home without receiving that satisfaction that I desired and which I promised myself before I left for Nauvoo—

As to the teachings exhibited from the stand at the conference in the morn, as far as I understood, I believed— of course the mode of adrep being so far different from any thing with which I had ever be accustomed, I was not a little surprised.

Letter of Robert Andrew Hope McCorkle to Joseph Smith, May 10, 1844, page 1, detail. Courtesy Church History Library.

the Church History Library. McCorkle's letter is a unique part of this collection for both its content and format. It describes his interested but uncommitted involvement with Mormonism, his positive impression of Nauvoo, and his description of Mormon doctrines. Remarkably, after addressing Joseph in prose, McCorkle poses his questions to the Mormon prophet in a poem. While McCorkle's poetry may not appeal aesthetically to all readers, it nonetheless provides an unanticipated vista into Joseph Smith's world and yet another response to his remarkable ministry.

As mentioned, this letter sheds light on McCorkle's ambivalent relationship with Mormonism. That McCorkle had great affinity for Mormonism is evident in the names of his two sons: Joseph Smith McCorkle and Parley Pratt McCorkle.⁴ But there is no known evidence that he joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In 1847, he and others founded the Lemalsamac Church in Wood Scott's schoolhouse near Churchton, Tennessee, for which McCorkle served as a deacon.⁵

Valeen Tipetts, *Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith* (Champaign and Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 204.

4. U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1880, 1910, and 1920 population censuses for Gibson County, Tennessee, entries for Joseph Smith McCorkle (born 1843); familysearch.org, entry for Parley Pratt McCorkle (born 1845).

5. The Lemalsamac Church of Christ credits McCorkle with coining the name Lemalsamac. He did so by using letters from the names of the founding members of the congregation (for example, mac for McCorkle). Lemalsamac Church of Christ, "The History of Lemalsamac Church of Christ," <http://www.lemalsamaccocf.com/Blog/?p=10> (accessed October 20, 2010).

McCorkle's letter suggests reasons why he remained apart. While claiming to believe in the doctrine of the gathering, McCorkle reasons that Mormons have no monopoly on Christian virtue. He also weighs the economic pros and cons of relocating to Nauvoo and decides against it. He enjoyed some security in Tennessee; he eventually died there in Yorkville, Gibson County, Tennessee, on September 26, 1873.⁶

His perspective on Nauvoo and the Saints is historically valuable. Not all visitors to Nauvoo left with positive impressions, but he did: "One thing candor forces me to say, there is more intelligence among the common people there, than ever I met with before; nor have I ever seen as little immorality exhib[it]ed in any city, town, or hamlet in which I ever spent the same length of time." In a doggerel summary, he wrote:

For this I know, That all is not true
That I have heard about Nauvoo.

Though happy with his visit, McCorkle still left with unanswered questions. Thus, in the letter he inquires about prophecy, gifts of the spirit, the Book of Mormon, modern revelation, the gathering of Israel, ministering angels, and the priesthood. He was particularly interested in prophetic authority and asserted that if Joseph were a true prophet, he would be able to provide evidence of accurately predicting events.⁷

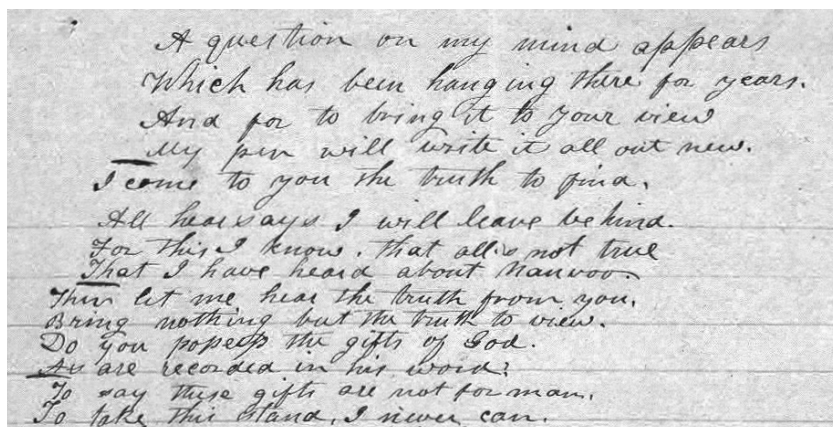
McCorkle's inquiries rendered as verse make his letter curious and distinctive. While since the Church's earliest days Latter-day Saints have used poetry as "a vehicle for preaching the gospel,"⁸ here an enquirer used poetry to ask his questions. He even invited Joseph to respond similarly, but Joseph left no known response. It is not certain that Joseph read the letter, but it seems likely: his clerk, Thomas Bullock, endorsed it.⁹ Either way, Joseph's time was short. He was murdered forty-eight days after McCorkle wrote the correspondence.

6. <http://www.marshahuie.com/>; email from Marsha Huie to Hal Robert Boyd, October 27, 2010. Marsha Huie is a descendent of Robert McCorkle's brother Edwin McCorkle.

7. McCorkle to Smith, May 10, 1844.

8. Richard Cracroft and Neal Lambert explain that the Saints were prolific poets in part because of their use of poetry in preaching. Richard E. Cracroft and Neal A. Lambert, "Poetry," in *Believing People: Literature of the Latter-day Saints* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1974), 251.

9. British-born Thomas Bullock was baptized on November 20, 1841. By 1843, he was residing in Nauvoo and serving as a clerk for Joseph Smith. He later served as a clerk for Brigham Young and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. See Jerald F. Simon, "Thomas Bullock as an Early Church Historian," *BYU Studies* 30, no. 1 (1990) 71–88.



A question on my mind appears
 Which has been hanging there for years.
 And for to bring it to your views
 My pen will write it all out new.
 I come to you the truth to find,
 All that I say I will leave behind.
 For this I know, that all's not true
 That I have heard about Manoo.
 Then let me hear the truth from you,
 Bring nothing but the truth to view.
 Do you possess the gifts of God.
 Are they recorded in his word?
 To say these gifts are not for man,
 To take this stand, I never can.

Letter of Robert Andrew Hope McCorkle to Joseph Smith, May 10, 1844, page 3, detail. Courtesy Church History Library.

In the transcript below, McCorkle's spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and paragraphing have been retained, but line endings and thus words broken at line endings have not. McCorkle's erasures and strike-outs are represented like ~~this~~ or noted in footnotes. McCorkle's insertions are enclosed in angled brackets <like these>. Editorial insertions are enclosed in square brackets [like these]. McCorkle often used a subscript apostrophe that looks like a comma, as in *call,d*. In such cases the apostrophes have been raised, as in *call'd*. McCorkle used a heavy, elongated stroke to end sentences, to set off clauses for emphasis, and to separate the stanzas of his poem. These strokes are rendered below as periods (.) when they end sentences, as em dashes (—) when they set off clauses, and as double spaces between stanzas. McCorkle's commas and periods are hard to distinguish. Thus, identical marks are represented in the transcription below as periods when they end sentences and as commas when they do not.

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Letter of Robert Andrew Hope McCorkle to Joseph Smith

May the 10th 1844
To Joseph Smith Nauvoo Ill

Respected Sir—

Having in vain sought an interview with you during your conference,¹⁰ being repulsed by a throng of business which bore weightily on you at that time¹¹—I was under the necessity of returning home without receiving that satisfaction that I desired, and which I promised myself before I left for Nauvoo.

As to the teachings exhibited from the stand at the conference in the mien, as far as I understood, I believ'd—of course the mode of address being so far different from any thing with which I had ever be accustomed, I was not a little surprised, but considerably amused.¹² Passing these things by, I want to come to a point, & that is your prophetic power, if I rem[em]ber correctly, you stated in your address, (the only public one you made while I was <there>) That you would be able to show, and prove to the satisfaction of the audience, that you had not be come so far a fallen prophet as some would have it you were,¹³—I of course was an entire

10. McCorkle is likely referring to the April 6–9, 1844, conference of the Church in Nauvoo. See Joseph Smith Jr., *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2d ed., rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971), 6:287–330 (hereafter cited as *History of the Church*).

11. Joseph Smith's schedule prior to conference is given as follows: April 2, "at home, somewhat unwell, and kept my house this fine day"; April 3, "presided in a special session of the Municipal Court"; April 4, "in a general council in the assembly room from nine to twelve, a.m. and from one to four, p.m."; April 5, "attended dedication of the Masonic temple." *History of the Church*, 6:285–87. *History of the Church* mistakenly notes April 4 as April 14.

12. The word *amused* likely means "having the mind engaged by something pleasing," rather than laughter-provoking. See Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1846), s.v. "amused."

13. McCorkle is likely referring to Joseph's April 7, 1844, sermon, commonly known as the King Follett discourse. Several hearers took notes. See Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, comps., *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph* (Provo, Utah: Religious

stranger to whome, or what, you alluded. My expectations were raised, thinking to hear you prophecy, but if you made any; I have no recollection of it. I claim to be honest, I believe God never owned any people as <his> people or church, without having prophets among them; when I say prophets, I mean one, who by the power of God, can, and does foresee, & foretell events in the future, which will come to pass literally at the time and place, as by the prophet seen—none other than a literal fulfilment will do me.

I dont want you to think hard of me, when I tell you that I as yet, have not been made acquainted with any prophecy that you have made; which has, or has not been fulfilled, hence I am left without any ground on which to predicate a belief wheather or not, you are a prophet, (true or false) If any you have ever made. I have an honest desire to see¹⁴ them if it be not contrary to wisdom—a private communication on that subject would be of considerable satisfaction, or if a public exhibit would be less objectionable I would just as soon.

I went to Nauvoo with strong desires to familiarize my self with what is call'd Mormonism, but through timidity I was baffled [end of page 1]

Again, I went to Nauvoo with an honest desire to ascertain whether the virtues of the members of the chuch of Jesus Christ of Latter day saints were aparantly greater, than are¹⁵ common amongst the different sectarian churches. In this respect I found them [that is, Latter-day Saints], as might have been expected in such a vast net-full, (a promiscuous¹⁶ squad). One thing candor forces me to say, there is more intelligence among the common people there, than ever I met with before; nor have I ever seen as little immorality exhib[it]ed in <any> city, town, or hamlet in which I ever spent the same length of time.

I took with me a searies of enquiries with the intention to present them to you, but being debard from becoming familiar with you, my natural timidity forbade my presenting them. I however shewed them to several of the elders—some thought them deserving an answer; others ran over them rough shod.

Studies Center Brigham Young University, 1980), 340–55. Thomas Bullock's notes were redacted and published in "Conference Minutes," *Times and Seasons* 5 (August 15, 1844): 612–17. Also see Richard Lyman Bushman with Jed Woodworth, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 533–37.

14. An uppercase S on the word *see* was wiped away and replaced with a lowercase s.

15. Apparently the original word *is* was overwritten by the word *are*.

16. The word *promiscuous* here means "mingled; consisting of individuals united in a body or mass without order." Webster, *American Dictionary* (1846), s.v. "promiscuous."

I have concluded that in as much as I have an opportunity of sending them to you free of cost, I will submit them to your scrutiny; an answer in poetic form¹⁷ would be thankfully rec'd, either privately, or in the "Times & Seasons"¹⁸

I have some inquiries to make with regard to locating in, or near to Nauvoo. I am somewhat of a believer in the gathering¹⁹—but I am desirous to know how as poor a man as I, could make, or secure a comfortable living. I have a comfortable little home here,²⁰ have to use industry, and economy in order to get a long well—but by the by, I am not very able to labor; I am no mechanic, and it looks like if I were to move, unless I could sell for a fair price, it would be rather an imprudent act, & to sell appears out of the question. In your wisdom how would you direct that I should procede? would there be any chance to get a small farm, or piece of land from the church near to Nauvoo having a sufficiency of timber on it, by paying two spans²¹ of mules or horses, and waggons, by advancing two or three hundred dollars in Tennessee currency—if so, what would be the price of the land, and what might I expect for the property say on an average. The scarcity of timber in your country to me, is a great obstacle.²² I will turn over and write down my honest enquiries [end of page 2]

A question on my mind appears
Which has been hanging there for years.
And for to bring it to your view
My pen will write it all out new.

17. McCorkle's request that Joseph Smith respond to his questions in verse follows the form of conversational poetry in which successive poems respond to each other. This type of poetry appears with relative frequency throughout early Mormon literature. Most notably, W. W. Phelps's poem "Vade Mecum, (Translated,) Go With Me," was published along with Joseph Smith's response, titled "A Vision." *Times and Seasons* 4 (February 1, 1843): 81–85.

18. *Times and Seasons* was an LDS newspaper printed (November 1839–February 1846) in Nauvoo, often featuring LDS poetry.

19. "And ye are called to bring to pass the gathering of mine elect; for mine elect hear my voice and harden not their hearts" (D&C 29:7).

20. Robert McCorkle's property in Gibson County, Tennessee, was valued at \$5,000 in 1850 and at \$10,000 in 1860. U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1850 and 1860 population censuses for Gibson County, Tennessee.

21. A "span of horses" is "two [horses] of nearly the same color, and otherwise nearly alike, which are usually harnessed side by side." Webster, *American Dictionary* (1846), s.v. "span."

22. Joseph Smith also recognized the need for wood in Nauvoo and sent Latter-day Saints to the Wisconsin forests to cut and then ship wood down the Mississippi River to Nauvoo. See *History of the Church*, 6:256.

I come to you the truth to find.
 All hearsays I will leave behind.
 For this I know, that all is not true,
 That I have heard about Nauvoo.²³

Then let me hear the truth from you.
 Bring nothing but the truth to view.
 Do you possess the gifts of God,
 As are recorded in his word?

To say these gifts are not for man,
 To take this stand, I never can.
 But this I only want to know,
 Do you possess them at Nauvoo?

If from on high, you have rec'd
 The gifts of God, your not deceiv'd
 Then is it so, that from the Lord
 An angel's brot a true record?²⁴

Does this record come with a grace;
 Does it reveal the Indian's race?
 Your manly honor I invite,
 To give an answer that is right.

My heart within me now doth burn²⁵
 To get an answer in return.
 For if its true, That God has given
 Late revelations right from heaven,

23. By 1844, anti-Mormonism was at a feverish pitch in Warsaw, Illinois. "Joe Smith is not safe out of Nauvoo," trumpeted the *Warsaw Signal*. "We would not be surprised to hear of his death by violent means in a short time. He has deadly enemies. . . . The feeling in this county is now lashed to its utmost pitch, and it will break forth in fury upon the slightest provocation." *Warsaw Signal*, May 29, 1844, 2.

24. This is a reference to the angel Moroni and the Book of Mormon.

25. This may be a reference to Luke 24:32: "And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?"

Its also true, he's set his hands
To gather Israel from all lands.²⁶
And if that's so, we all may know
All kingdoms sure, God will o'er throw,²⁷

Then dont deceive my honest soul,
I want Gods law, me to control,
Then if you are the chosen few
Show it to me, while at Nauvoo,

Your elders say, that you possess
The power of God, thro righteousness,
Th[at] you've rec'd the priesthood new
An angel gave it unto you.²⁸

This priesthood they pretend to say
Unveils the truth in this our day.
That by this power to man is given
An earnest²⁹ of the joys of heaven.

If an angel of the Lord
Has come to man with a record
Such record surely was design'd
To be the blessing to mankind.

26. The gathering of Israel is discussed in Ezekiel 37:21–22: “And say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land: And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all.”

27. The idea of God overthrowing all other kingdoms is found in Daniel 2:44: “And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.”

28. Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery were ordained to the Aaronic Priesthood on May 15, 1829, by John the Baptist (D&C 13). Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery were ordained to the Melchizedek Priesthood by the ancient Apostles Peter, James, and John (D&C 27:12).

29. One definition of *earnest* (noun) is “first fruits; that which is in advance, and gives promise of something to come.” Webster, *American Dictionary* (1846), s.v. “earnest.”

Then if it were by God design'd,
 Sent as a blessing to mankind.
 Then what am I, that I should stand
 And raise objections to the plan?

But if it be a project³⁰ plan
 Invented by a cunning man,
 This truth unveil, and set me free
 An[d] show me who the Mormons be.

If you the special gifts enjoy
 These blessings I would not destroy.
 If with these powers you have been bless'd
 Your joy far triumphs o'er the rest.

Give me some reasons to decide
 That you'r companions of the bride,³¹
 Or else come out, and plainly say
 That you'r deceivers of our day.

If any questions I have form'd
 Are calculated to do harm
 Then to such questions point your hand
 And I will lay them to the land.

These lines convey my mind to you
 Or any other in Nauvoo
 If they deserve a moments time,
 You will an answer form in rhyme

But if they like their author prove
 Unworthy of your time, and love
 In silence they'l remain unheard
 By man! But answerd from the Lord

R. A. H. M'Corkle
 Dyer county Yorkville post offic[e]. Tennessee

30. One definition of *project* (verb) is "to scheme; to contrive," or *project* (noun) "a design not practicable." Webster, *American Dictionary* (1846), s.v. "project."

31. In Revelation 21:2, a holy people and holy city are symbolized as a bride: "And I [John] saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."

The Chicago Experiment

Finding the Voice and Charting the Course of Religious Education in the Church

Casey Paul Griffiths

FIRST PRESENTED AT



BYU STUDIES
SYMPOSIUM

In many professions, Latter-day Saints often struggle to find harmony between their religion and their career. The nature of Mormonism often leads its members into moral dilemmas concerning the standard practices of their chosen field and the teachings of the gospel. This has been especially true in academia, in most of its diverse disciplines. These challenges were particularly fierce when the Church began developing its own corps of professional religious educators to teach and lead in the newly founded seminary and institute programs of the early twentieth century. Elder Boyd K. Packer summarized some of the struggles from this era:

There was encouragement, both for the men in the institute program and for the teachers of religion at Brigham Young University, to go away and get advanced degrees. “Go study under the great religious scholars of the world,” was the encouragement, “for we will set an academic standard in theology.” And a number of them went. Some who went never returned. And some of them who returned never came back. They had followed, they supposed, the scriptural injunction: “Seek learning, even by study and also by faith” (D&C 88:118). But somehow the mix had been wrong. For they had sought learning out of the best books, even by study, but with too little faith. They found themselves in conflict with the simple things of the gospel. One by one they found their way outside of the field of teaching religion, outside of Church activity, and a few of them outside of the Church itself.¹

This is the story of one group of those teachers. In the early 1930s, religious educators in the Church developed a close relationship with the School of Divinity at the University of Chicago. Though eleven young Latter-day Saint scholars attended the school at the Church’s request during that period, this study will focus only on those who left behind extensive

recollections and correspondence. It will seek to tell their stories in their own words, whenever possible. The aim of this paper is not to judge which of the eleven Elder Packer may have been speaking of, but simply to tell their story. In examining what occurred, the dynamic between faith and scholarship in the field of religion may be further explored. Several more questions will also be raised, such as, What is the proper mixture between faith and study in revealed religion? What does the outside scholarship of the world have to offer the religious studies of the Church? and, most importantly, What is the role of the religious educator in the Church? Many of these questions came to a head in the crucible of what could properly be termed “The Chicago Experiment.”²

Viewed from the wider scope of American religious history, this episode also fits into the larger picture of the battles between theological liberals, commonly called “modernists” during this era, and their conservative enemies, termed “fundamentalists.” By sending Church educators to the University of Chicago’s School of Divinity, one of the focal points of the conflict, the Church had inserted itself directly into the modernist-fundamentalist controversy.³ In the battle between the two camps, one that hoisted the banner of science and another that decried the abandonment of traditional biblical views, where would the Latter-day Saints land?

Before these questions may be explored, it is necessary to understand the origins of the unique corps of religious educators created in the early twentieth century by the Church.

A New Kind of Educator in the Church

In the early twentieth century, a radical shift took place in Church education. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, the Common School Movement began to bring state-sponsored schools into every community throughout the Intermountain West. Church leaders, concerned over the secularizing influence that public education might have on the youth of the Church, launched a system of academies to counter the state schools. Church academies lasted roughly thirty years, from 1890 to 1920. However, the geographical limitations of the academies, combined with the exorbitant cost of providing private education while free public schools were opening throughout the region, led to the eventual decline of the system. So a new innovation was introduced: released-time seminary. Under this system, students would attend public schools, being “released” for one period a day to attend religion classes at a nearby seminary building. Beginning at Granite High School in 1912, the seminary program spread rapidly throughout the Church until it had virtually replaced the academy system

by the mid-1920s. As a less expensive alternative to academies, the seminary program allowed the Church to deliver religious education to nearly all of its students throughout the Intermountain West.⁴

The seminary program created a new model for Church education and brought with it a different series of issues that needed to be addressed. Among the most pressing was the recruitment and training of teachers in the new system. In a Church of lay clergymen, was there room for a group of professional theologians? In the early days of the Church, there were no professional religious educators. Rather, leaders in the Church hierarchy acted in this role, interpreting scripture and doctrine with the weight that came from ecclesiastical authority. When the academies began, religion classes were taught on a part-time basis by teachers who specialized in other disciplines.⁵ Even at Brigham Young University, the hub of the Church school system, the only faculty member teaching theology full time was President-Emeritus George H. Brimhall.⁶ As Church education shifted and the need for full-time religion teachers arose, so did the compelling question: Would this new group of religion scholars be defenders of the faith or ambitious Pharisees?

Adam S. Bennion, appointed Church superintendent of education in 1919, took seriously the question of how this new breed of educators in the Church should be trained. In the summer of 1920, Bennion organized a summer school for seminary teachers in the hopes of producing more standardized training and curriculum for the seminaries.⁷ The next year, Bennion added theological training to the summer-school agenda, inviting several General Authorities to lecture, among them Melvin J. Ballard, Joseph Fielding Smith, George F. Richards, Anthony W. Ivins, and David A. Smith. These training sessions were eventually moved to Aspen Grove in Provo Canyon, where the teachers would spend six weeks camping, critiquing one another's teaching, and being instructed. With the entire teaching force consisting of about ninety men, the system had a close-knit, family feel.⁸ Obert C. Tanner, another teacher from the time recalled, "It was a glorious, inspiring summer. We were exploring, adventuring, trying to write the gospel in our own lives in our own way."⁹

At the same time that Bennion was seeking to elevate the scholarship of the teachers in the seminary system, the teachers also searched individually for ways to improve. Sidney B. Sperry, on his own initiative, left in 1925 to attend the Divinity School at the University of Chicago. He received his master's degree in 1926, specializing in Old Testament studies.¹⁰ At the same time, Heber C. Snell, a teacher at Church-owned Snow College, attended the Pacific School of Religion, majoring in biblical studies. In 1928, Snell was invited to lecture at the Aspen Grove summer school, teaching two



Alpine Summer School faculty in the 1920s, including John A. Widtsoe (*front row, far left*) and Adam S. Bennion (*front row, third from the right*). Courtesy L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

courses, “Historical Development of the Religion and Literature of the Hebrews” and “Beginnings of Christianity.”¹¹ The next year, Sperry was invited to teach two classes in Old Testament history and literature.¹²

Snell’s and Sperry’s introductions of outside scholarship deeply impressed the teachers present. Russel B. Swensen wrote of Snell’s class, “I was particularly impressed by his historical approach to the subject and his deep appreciation of the religious message of the Old Testament.”¹³ T. Edgar Lyon, a teacher present at Sperry’s lectures, “felt an exhilaration that he had not previously experienced in any religious education.”¹⁴ Lyon felt he was entering a thrilling new realm of biblical scholarship involving the use of original sources and languages. Swensen noted that Sperry’s “friendly personality and his ability as a teacher were most stimulating to me, as well as to most of the other young teachers who were planning to devote their lives to Church education.”¹⁵

Another person who was deeply impressed, particularly by Sperry, was Joseph F. Merrill, the new Church commissioner of education. As head of the School of Mines at the University of Utah for nearly three

decades, Merrill had a solid background as a scholar and educator. He also brought with him a willingness to embrace higher education. As a young scholar, Merrill had been among the first to leave Utah to obtain higher training in engineering, eventually studying at the University of Michigan, Cornell, and the University of Chicago. In 1899, he received his doctorate from Johns Hopkins University, becoming one of the first native Utahns to obtain a PhD.¹⁶ Influenced by Sperry, Merrill invited Edgar J. Goodspeed, a distinguished New Testament scholar from the University of Chicago, to come and lecture the following year.

If Sperry's teaching had interested many teachers about the University of Chicago, Goodspeed's teaching that summer completely persuaded them. In 1923, he published his own translation of the New Testament, which quickly became a bestseller and elevated him to the front ranks of biblical scholarship. T. Edgar Lyon later described Goodspeed's teaching style: "He was a marvelous lecturer. I was amazed at the way he had these [things] timed. He would never allow any interruption in the classes. . . . He would start lecturing and he'd finish his lectures on the last sentence and the bell would ring. I haven't seen anything so well timed in my life. Then on Fridays we'd just have a free-for-all discussion on what we wanted."¹⁷ Lyon also recalled that after two or three weeks, several General Authorities attended Goodspeed's class. They were so impressed with the lecture that Goodspeed was invited to deliver a Sunday afternoon sermon to a packed crowd in the Salt Lake Tabernacle. To Lyon, Goodspeed's lectures were "the most exciting class I've ever had up to that time." He remarked, "I learned more in Goodspeed's one hour lectures . . . for six weeks than I would have learned in a Sunday School class in a hundred years because the individual had his subject matter and knew how to present it. And he didn't have any people sleeping in his class. He was a scintillating lecturer."¹⁸ Swensen was similarly impressed, remarking in a 1978 interview, "Those summer classes at Aspen Grove really changed my thinking. . . . It really set me on fire to really get more knowledge. I became aware of how little I knew about the scriptures and about history and it was the beginning of a turning point in my life."¹⁹



Heber C. Snell upon graduation from the University of Chicago, 1939. Courtesy Special Collections and Archives, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University.

The Call to Chicago, 1930

Joseph F. Merrill, deeply impressed by Goodspeed's scholarship, decided to further intertwine the Chicago Divinity School and Church education by calling several promising teachers to travel to Chicago and obtain advanced degrees in religion. Besides the impressive performances of Sperry, Snell, and Goodspeed, there were several compelling reasons for making this move.

The late 1920s and early 1930s were among the most critical in defining the future of Church education. The stock market crash in 1929 only added momentum to the movement away from Church schools, in favor of the less expensive system of seminaries and institutes. When Merrill became commissioner of education in 1928, the first directive given to him was to "eliminate Church schools as fast as circumstances would permit."²⁰ In a meeting of the Church General Board of Education held in February 1929, the decision was made to eventually close *all* of the Church schools.²¹ This choice was made in part because of the successful launch of the institute program ("collegiate seminaries," as they were originally called) at Idaho State University that same year. With a way now provided to bring religious education to college students, Church leaders felt they could no longer justify the massive expenses involved in operating Church schools. At the same time, Merrill knew he would need men with suitable academic credentials to staff the institutes, especially since the early arrangements with most universities allowed college credit for biblical studies.²²

Only a few months after the decision was made to either close the Church schools or transfer them to state control, events arose that threatened the existence of the seminary system. The Utah state high school inspector, Isaac L. Williamson, issued a scathing report of the seminary program statewide.²³ The report led to an investigative committee of the Utah State Board, which recommended that Church seminaries and public high schools be completely disassociated, released time eliminated, and credit for biblical studies withdrawn. A major point in Williamson's criticism was the teaching of LDS doctrine in biblical classes offered for credit. Williamson charged that such teachings as "the Garden of Eden was located in Missouri; . . . Noah's ark was built and launched in America; . . . Joseph Smith's version of the Bible is superior to the King James version; and . . . Enoch's city, Zion, with all its inhabitants and buildings, was lifted up and translated bodily from the American continent to the realms of the unknown" were being taught in biblical classes for which the state offered credit.²⁴ In large measure, the crisis that threatened to engulf the seminaries came about because the teachers staffing them were not adequately

trained. Many seminary teachers at the time didn't even have a high school teacher's certificate. Merrill had already seen this as a potential problem. One of his first actions as commissioner was to send a general letter to all seminary teachers, suggesting that they obtain a teaching certificate as soon as possible.²⁵

Merrill's response to these events was twofold. First, he wanted to save BYU from elimination and make it into a training school where seminary teachers could receive proper training that would keep them from getting the system into the kind of hot water it was currently in. Writing in favor of the continued operation of BYU, he argued, "A university is an essential unit in our seminary systems. For our seminary teachers must be specially trained for their work. The Brigham Young University is our training school."²⁶ The training of seminary teachers meant that BYU would need a fully accredited religion department to train in religious studies. Even before Williamson's report, Merrill wrote to President Franklin S. Harris, "May I suggest that serious consideration be given to the problem of making a strong department of religion, or of religious education, whichever you care to call it. . . . It appears to me that there should be good strong courses in Biblical history, providing a strong background for Biblical study."²⁷ A month after the Williamson report was issued, Guy C. Wilson, the former president of LDS College in Salt Lake City and a close associate of Merrill's, was sent to BYU to start a full religion department.²⁸

Merrill wanted the teachers in the institutes to have the very best training available. As a highly trained scholar himself, it seemed natural that a religion teacher should attend divinity school. In a letter to two LDS professors at the University of Idaho, Merrill explained some of his reasoning: "We have felt it very necessary, that at Moscow especially, our Director should have a scholarship in the Biblical and religious field comparable to the scholarship that the University would demand of any one appointed to head one of the departments. For example, if the University is looking for some one to head the department of Physics, it will limit its search to a trained physicist."²⁹ A group of graduate-trained educators seemed to be the best way to accomplish Merrill's goal of raising the bar on scholarship and professionalism in religious education—and the University of Chicago appeared to be the finest place to launch the venture.

With all these factors in play, Merrill extended a call to three seminary teachers—Daryl Chase, Russel Swensen, and George Tanner—to attend the University of Chicago's School of Divinity. Letters were sent in the spring of 1930 with Merrill explaining that "we have certain positions in the higher division of our [education] work for which we must prepare suitable men as soon as possible."³⁰ Arrangements were made so that while they

were in Chicago the men would receive half salary and loans from the Church Education Department to pay for their education.

Why the University of Chicago? Besides Sperry's already existing relationship with the school, there were several compelling reasons to send seminary men there—and several reasons for concern. Chicago was among the most liberal divinity schools in the country. At the time, the divinity school was only thirty-eight years old, founded in 1892 by William Rainey Harper, who emphasized research and academic freedom. The views of the scholars there fell heavily on the modernist end of the spectrum, stressing historical methodology and critical linguistic, sociological, and psychological approaches to the scriptures.³¹ Many of the conclusions reached by the Chicago

scholars ran contrary to orthodox views of the scriptures among Latter-day Saints. Edgar J. Goodspeed, probably the best-known scholar from the school during this time, was a good example of this unorthodoxy. In his writings on the New Testament, he questioned Paul's authorship of nearly half of the epistles, among them Ephesians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, and Hebrews. Goodspeed also ascribed authorship of 1 and 2 Peter to "a Roman Christian, in the name of the apostle."³² Goodspeed favored nontraditional explanations for authorship of many books of the Old Testament as well. In his view, only about half of the book of Isaiah came from the prophet's pen, while the rest was "a combination of several collections," making it "a veritable anthology, or rather a treasury, of the most brilliant and varied Hebrew prophecy."³³

Doubtless there were professors on both sides of the spectrum from Goodspeed, but on the whole, the young school prided itself as being a "hotbed" of radical theology.³⁴ One of the school's scholars noted that "theologically, the Chicago school broke with the older patterns of authoritative Protestantism, its creeds, confessions, and biblical inspiration. They attempted to retain as much as possible whatever was vital and valid in the older Protestant theology, though they believed that the deposit was relatively small."³⁵ The school was very evangelistic in promoting its views, publishing widely and sending its scholars on a variety of speaking engagements everywhere possible. At the same time, the school emphasized nonconfrontational approaches toward those who held more conservative



Daryl Chase upon graduation from the University Chicago, 1931. Courtesy Special Collections and Archives, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University.

views on scripture. Russel Swensen recalled, "In all the time I was there I never heard one criticism by the professors against the fundamentalist or conservative point of view."³⁶

The choice of the Chicago school also thrust Latter-day Saints headlong into the larger modernist-fundamentalist battles taking place in most American denominations. The use of higher biblical criticism—the use of scientific methods in the study of the Bible—was making waves in almost all American religious realms, and the Chicago school was an epicenter of the controversy. The fundamental issues were not doctrinal so much as global—encompassing the whole scope of how religion should be approached. Modernists favored a fusion of scientific and religious thought, while fundamentalists saw this approach as a Faustian bargain that could ultimately rob religion of its mystique and beauty. The Chicago Divinity School was a stronghold of the modernist camp. Its dean, Shailer Mathews, was the author of the book that best encapsulated the modernist mantra, the *Faith of Modernism*, first published in 1924.³⁷ Even the most famous clash of the fundamentalists and the modernists, the 1925 Scopes "Monkey Trial," was heavily influenced by the Chicago scholars. When Clarence Darrow and William Jennings Bryan argued in a Tennessee courtroom over evolution and the inerrancy of the Bible, Darrow, a Chicago attorney, was using ammunition supplied by Chicago scholars.³⁸ Among the scholars, Goodspeed was somewhat of a moderate, but extreme views of the modernist persuasion abounded on the campus.

Sperry, in selecting the school, and Merrill, in following his lead, were probably well aware of the school's liberal leanings. Indeed, one of the ironies of the situation may have been that only a very liberal school would accept Latter-day Saints as students in the religious climate of the time.³⁹ Nor was the "Chicago experiment" the first encounter of Mormonism with higher biblical criticism or with the University of Chicago. William H. Chamberlin, a former mission president and LDS scholar who had studied ancient languages and biblical criticism at Chicago, sparked a controversy at BYU in 1911. The controversy stemmed, in part, from the views Chamberlin and several other professors taught concerning evolution, combined with some questioning of the literal nature of the scriptures. During the controversy, several professors, including Chamberlin's brother, resigned.⁴⁰ Chamberlin stayed at BYU until 1916, but "after years of having his courses dropped from the catalog," he too resigned.⁴¹

With a knowledge of all these things, why take the chance on the Chicago school? When George Tanner was asked in a 1972 interview why Merrill took the risk of sending the men to such a liberal climate, he replied, "Sperry had been back there and apparently this hadn't hurt him at all."

He said Daryl Chase had concluded that “Joseph F. Merrill had so much faith in the gospel that he thought if we went there we’d be able to find the material so that we could just positively lay out the proof for all of our claims.” Chase believed that “Joseph F. Merrill was naïve enough to believe that that would lead us into proof positive of the various positions we had taken.”⁴² While the men may have believed Merrill was being naïve, there is ample evidence to believe he also knew the risk he was taking. Each of the men was informed that if they changed their views, they might not have a position when they returned.⁴³ Overall, Merrill’s attitude indicated a cautious optimism about the venture. Shortly after the men’s arrival at the school, Merrill wrote to Swensen, “We are glad to find that the religious atmosphere there is full of sympathy and is not wholly critical and scholastic. . . . After all, religion is based upon faith. And religious faith, of course, does not rest wholly on demonstrable facts.”⁴⁴

Life at the University

The university was an environment completely different than anything the men had experienced before. The student body was diverse, running the gamut from middle-aged ministers to former missionaries in the Far East, army chaplains, and, despite the segregationist attitudes of the time, several black students. One of the black students, Benjamin Mays, later became Martin Luther King Jr.’s teacher and delivered the eulogy at King’s funeral.⁴⁵ Most of the men roomed together in student housing, enduring the barest of conditions. Tanner recalled taking his wife and three children with him and living on a budget of less than a hundred dollars a month.⁴⁶ The close quarters, however, prompted many positive religious exchanges. Swensen wrote home that a young minister in the hall had invited him to speak at his church to correct some hurtful comments about Mormonism made during a sermon there.⁴⁷ When an evangelical minister cornered Swensen in a student lounge and began attacking the Church, Swensen was surprised when several young Baptist and Presbyterian ministers rose up in defending Mormonism.⁴⁸ The men also invited some of the prominent Chicago professors to speak in the local LDS branch.⁴⁹ The environment was not entirely welcoming, however. Sperry, who returned to Chicago to complete his PhD during this time, warned the men that “as a ‘Mormon’ in Gates Hall I either made enthusiastic friends or enthusiastic enemies.”⁵⁰

Relationships with the professors were, for the most part, warm and cordial. The men studied under some of the most prominent biblical scholars of the time, including William C. Graham, an Old Testament specialist; John T. McNeill, a medieval church historian; and William C. Bower, whose

focus was religious education.⁵¹ The LDS students partly felt an obligation to act as missionaries to influence the faculty toward more positive views on Mormonism, and in large measure they were successful. William Warren Sweet, a Chicago professor of American history, had written a book highly critical of Mormonism. He later remarked to Tanner that after meeting the young Mormons, he would rewrite the book if given the chance.⁵² Graham remarked privately to Chase and Swensen “that he believed Joseph Smith was inspired of God.”⁵³ In a gathering where it was jokingly noted that Goodspeed had gone to Utah to try to “convert the Mormons,” Goodspeed rose and offered praise for the Mormon religion, its vitality, and its system of lay leadership.⁵⁴

Writing home from Chicago, Swensen in particular was full of praise for his professors. He wrote to assuage the concerns of his father, saying, “Before you condemn the scholars and thinkers it would pay the price to investigate their way of thinking. They have no diabolical scheme to undermine the truth, but the reverse, to discover it.”⁵⁵ Swensen gushed over the “stimulus in study when sitting at the feet of brilliant professors” and wrote that “the past year will be a bright spot in my life.” George Tanner, too, found himself quite enamored with the school: “I learned more about Bible and things there in a semester than you learn in a lot of our Church institutions in five times that length of time.”⁵⁶ At the same time, the students perceived some tension among the Chicago faculty. In another letter, Swensen noted, “The school has a strong group of sceptical [*sic*], agnostic professors but our dean is a courageous defender as well as an expounder of the faith. He is often the butt of sharp attacks from conservative Christians but there is no abler teacher of religion in the light of modern science.”⁵⁷ Swensen came to nearly idolize Goodspeed, writing home of “the most delightful intimacy with this great scholar” and that Goodspeed was “as charming as a man as he is famous for his learning.”⁵⁸

In contrast, when T. Edgar Lyon arrived at the school in 1932, he was less enamored of the environment. He wrote a scathing assessment of the Chicago scholars’ methodology to his father:

Down in their [the professors’] hearts they are all either infidels or agnostics. . . . I fail to see how a young man can come here to school, then go out after graduation, and still preach what we call Christianity. The U. of Chicago is noted as being the most liberal (and that means Modernism) school in America. All religion is taught as product of social growth and development, and anything supernatural is looked upon as merely a betrayal of one’s own ignorance and primitive mind. They make no attempt to harmonize Science and the Bible—they merely throw the Bible away, and teach scientific “truths” as the only thing to follow. I have taken a course called “Systematic Theology” this summer.

It consisted of a brief discussion of the God of the Old Testament, who was merely a sign of the fear of the Hebrews, how He grew into the Gods of the New Testament, and then Dean Matthews [*sic*] informed us that he only existed in the minds of the believers.⁵⁹

Lyon felt that though the professors feigned enlightenment, they could be just as dogmatic in their views as the most ardent fundamentalist. He continued:

Their God, here at this University, is “the cosmic force of the Universe,” “the personality producing force of the cosmos,” the “in all and all” and a few more phrases just as unintelligible and meaningless. I readily see why the modern preachers talk about psychology, sociology, astronomy, prison reform, etc., in their churches on Sunday—that is all there is left to talk about after they have finished robbing Jesus of His Divinity, and miracles, and resurrection. In fact, around the Divinity School, the professors are always talking of “the Social Gospel.” I am glad that I do not have to accept such rot, and that I do not have to study [it]. . . . The more I see and hear of it, the more it makes me appreciate the simple truths and teachings of . . . “Mormonism,” even though we are called primitive. I am able to see so many places in the lectures each day that seem to me to be so obviously clear and simple for us to accept, yet these “learned men” pass right over them and can not see anything but their own view. I think they are just as narrow minded in their interpretations as they claim we are in ours.⁶⁰

Was Lyon exaggerating in his descriptions of the teachings given at the Divinity School? Contemporary writings from the Chicago school indicate that Lyon was fairly accurate in describing what must have been taught at the school. Shailer Mathews, the school’s dean, was most famous for his writings on the evolution of the concept of God in human thought. In contrast to the anthropomorphic God of Mormon theology, Mathews taught that “the word God in its religious usage does not stand for Being or a principle of concretion. It is a concept evoked by an attempted relationship with a cosmic activity which is other than the human subject.”⁶¹ Lyon comes close in the letter to an almost verbatim quoting of Mathews, who defined God as the “personality-evolving and personally responsive activities of the universe upon which human beings depend.”⁶²

While Lyon felt that his emphasis in religious history, rather than theology, spared him the brunt of the modernist teachings, he was also deeply concerned about the attitude of his fellow LDS students who he felt might be abandoning their beliefs to fit into the new environment. In the same letter to his father, he wrote:

We have several of them [LDS students] here on campus who think that they are outgrowing our little narrow-mindedness about our doctrines, and try to go with the world by attempting to take all of the

supernatural elements out of our religion. . . . I suppose that I am too old fashioned to accept their way of thinking, but I fail to see how we can ever discard these views that have been the building force of the Church. Brother Sperry, who receives his Doctor of Philosophy degree here next Friday, and I are the two "Orthodox Mormons" around here, and many of the others laugh at us, for our simple trusting faith. . . .

I am really worried what the outcome of the next thirty years will mean to the church. Even many of the BYU professors are going over to this view, and teaching things that are far more radical than those taught by Peterson and Chamberlain [*sic*] at the time they were dismissed from that institution.⁶³

Along with Lyon's concerns, there is additional evidence that some of the Chicago students were beginning to stray from their theological foundations. Later, George Tanner recalled "a regular transformation, a liberation in clear thinking."⁶⁴ There are also some indications that tension began to grow between the more orthodox LDS students and their free-wheeling counterparts. After Tanner completed his master's degree and returned to the Moscow Idaho Institute of Religion, Swensen noted some tension between T. Edgar Lyon and the original LDS students. "It seems quite a while since we were indulging in some hilarious theological observations. We haven't had any with Lyon. . . . Last night Daryl [Chase] and I were down to his place for dinner. His wife asked us to explain some of the 'new theology.' . . . Like good priests we changed the subject."⁶⁵ Other new students were drawn to the school's teachings as they arrived. When Carl Furr, another LDS student, arrived, Swensen noted, "Furr is taking the 'cure' quite easily and nicely. His background in literature leaves him more open minded to [a] historical scientific way of viewing things."⁶⁶

During a trip Swensen and Chase took back to Utah, it began to become clear that there was some evidence of skepticism among Church leaders as well toward the venture. While in Utah after their first year, Swensen and Chase had the opportunity to visit with B. H. Roberts in his office at Church headquarters. When Swensen informed Roberts that his professors were urging him to write a thesis on a Mormon topic, Roberts wryly replied with a puckish smile and mock hyperbole, "Young man, don't ever write a thesis on a Mormon subject; if you do, you'll be cut off from the Church. Half the people in the Church would apostatize if they knew the true history of the Church."⁶⁷ After hearing this from Roberts, Chase chose instead to write his master's thesis on "The Early Shakers," while Swensen chose "The Rise of the Sects as an Aspect of Religious Experience."⁶⁸ For Tanner, however, Roberts's prediction proved prophetic. Writing his thesis, "The Religious Environment in which Mormonism Arose," he ran afoul of some controversy. He reflected, "I was a little amazed when I got in to find

some things. For instance, I'd always been taught that the Word of Wisdom, the section of the Doctrine and Covenants on the Word of Wisdom, was just like lightning out of a clear sky. I got there and started digging in and found the genesis of that thing and the roots."⁶⁹ When Tanner arrived home after securing his master's degree, Merrill asked him to publish some of his findings in the Church section of the *Deseret News*. In 1972, Tanner recalled, "I got nasty letters from all over but I had the evidence."⁷⁰

The End of the Chicago Experiment

Latter-day Saint teachers continued to attend the Chicago Divinity School in increasing numbers during the early part of the 1930s. In total, eleven men earned advanced degrees at Chicago during this period.⁷¹ As the 1930s continued, however, fewer and fewer students attended the school, and the relationship between the Chicago scholars and the Church withered. There were several reasons why this may have occurred. Swensen felt that when Joseph F. Merrill was called as an Apostle in 1931 and then sent to preside over the European Mission in 1933, the program lost its main proponent. At the same time, Church leaders began to be skeptical of the liberal spirit of the Chicago school and worried that its approach to the scriptures could undermine the faith of the students. The Church Education Department had brought more Chicago scholars to BYU to teach at the summer school the three years following Goodspeed's impressive debut in 1930, but after 1934 there were no additional efforts made to bring Chicago scholars to teach and train Church educators. Lack of funding as the Depression wore on was certainly also a factor in the decision to end this tie. In addition, when Sidney Sperry and Russel Swensen arrived home and began teaching in the BYU Religion Department, the increasing pool of LDS scholars with advanced training may have no longer necessitated the hiring of outside scholars.⁷²

There are also indications that Merrill's replacement as Church commissioner of education, John A. Widtsoe, was uncomfortable with the close association with the Chicago school. While Widtsoe did arrange to send at least one scholar to Chicago, namely, T. Edgar Lyon,⁷³ Lyon described Widtsoe's attitude toward the school as "non-committal." When Lyon was called as president of the Netherlands mission soon after his return from Chicago, Widtsoe urged him to forget everything he had learned at divinity school before he went into the mission field.⁷⁴ Despite these changes, some students still chose to go to the divinity school on their own accord. Heber C. Snell, who, along with Sperry, had first sparked the interest in divinity studies, came to Chicago and earned his PhD in biblical studies,



Russel B. Swensen (*left*) and Sidney B. Sperry (*right*) as religion faculty members at Brigham Young University, 1943. Courtesy L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

writing a thesis on “The Historical Background of the Teachings of Jesus.”⁷⁵ Vernon F. Larsen was the last Church teacher in this era to attend the school, graduating in 1941.⁷⁶

Chicago Influence in the Church Educational System

How did the Chicago students react when they returned as full-time Church educators? The most comfortable, it appears, were Sperry and Swensen, who landed in the Religion Department at BYU. The least happy with his assignment upon his return appears to be Daryl Chase, who was assigned to teach at a high school. He wrote to Swensen, “It is next to impossible to keep from slipping backwards intellectually in such an environment. . . . It is not that I am over-worked, but the monotony is killing.— Six classes of the O.T. daily to little children who have to be told the meaning of half of the words in their text.”⁷⁷ In a similar vein, Chase wrote to T. Edgar Lyon, “I used to think that I knew how to teach Old Testament to high school students but after my work at the University of Chicago,

I discovered what an impossible task it was to teach the Old Testament as it actually is, and at the same time feed the religious life of young boys and girls. For that reason I persuaded my associate teachers to relieve me of all Old Testament duties.”⁷⁸

Other teachers experienced difficulty as well. Carl Furr, assigned to the seminary in Richmond, Utah, wrote to Swensen that local members charged that he “lacked spirituality and did not have a testimony of the gospel, and that I never paid enough to hold my job (tithing).”⁷⁹ In a scathing letter, Furr remarked, “I know my goose is cooked. I don’t want to come back unless a new principal comes in and they get a stake president who has some back-bone and is not a jelly-fished chicken raiser.”⁸⁰ At least from Furr’s letter, it appears that his teachings were popular among the local populace. He remarked that his mutual class “had to meet in the main auditorium to accommodate the people who come to hear the spiritualess, non-mormon teach.”⁸¹ Furr felt that his prayers were “answered just as much as a willy-nilly stake president or jealous seminary principal.”⁸² The letter seems to indicate that Furr felt his training and popularity as a lecturer put him in a superior position to his ecclesiastical and occupational overseers.

Criticism was not limited to local Church authorities either. Chase, in particular, had little patience with the higher leadership of the Church. He wrote to Swensen, “Am I completely nuts, or do the facts show that we are facing intellectual ban[k]ruptcy in the leadership of our people? . . . The mass of the people have stopped playing the old game of follow the leader. In the words of ‘my good teachers and friends, and masters,’ S. J. Case, S. Matthews, et al., authoritarianism has played its chief role in the Mormon Church.” Referring to the recent election that repealed prohibition, Chase continued, “Yea verily authoritarianism has played its chief role unless it can be backed up with a more vigorous intellectualism.”⁸³

Public controversies accompanied these private expressions as well. Heber C. Snell, for example, created an uproar at a January 1937 meeting of LDS institute directors. In an address entitled “Criteria for Interpreting the Old Testament to College Youth,” Snell publicly questioned the historicity of the book of Jonah and traditional authorship of the later chapters of the book of Isaiah. Snell, a former student of William Chamberlin’s during the 1911 controversy,⁸⁴ admonished, “We ought to be governed in our judgments in internal evidence of the books themselves, and by such external evidence as may exist, rather than by mere tradition.” Snell continued, stating that evolution proved to be “not a blind arrangement for continuing species in the world, but a method used by and worthy of a God whose chief glory is Intelligence.”⁸⁵ Elder Joseph Fielding Smith was so alarmed by Snell’s declarations that he wrote to Church Commissioner of Education

Franklin L. West, saying, “If the views of these men become dominant in the Church, then we may just as well close up shop and say to the world that Mormonism is a failure.”⁸⁶

Response of the Brethren

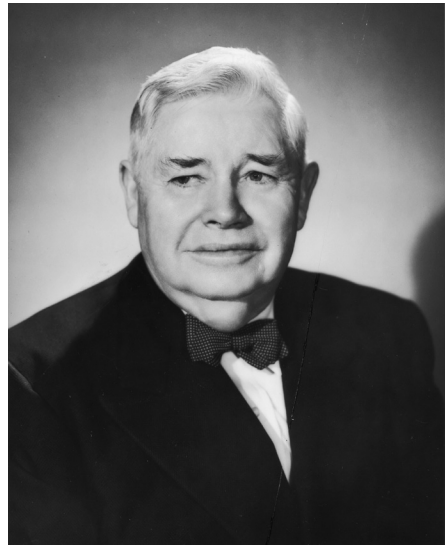
General Authorities soon began to publicly respond to some of the more heretical attitudes appearing among religion teachers in the Church. President J. Reuben Clark’s address “The Charted Course of the Church in Education” can be read as a sharp response to the rising current of intellectualism in Church education. Some passages of this address, given at Aspen Grove in 1938, read almost as if they were being delivered to those who had received advanced degrees:

On more than one occasion our Church members have gone to other places for special training in particular lines; they have had the training which was supposedly the last word, the most modern view, the plus ultra of up-to-dateness; then they have brought it back and dosed it upon us without any thought as to whether we needed it or not. I refrain from mentioning well-known and, I believe, well-recognized instances of this sort of thing. I do not wish to wound any feelings.

But before trying on the newest fangled ideas in any line of thought, education, activity, or what not, experts should just stop and consider that however backward they think we are, and however backward we may actually be in some things, in other things we are far out in the lead, and therefore these new methods may be old, if not worn out, with us.⁸⁷

Clark warned that if unorthodox teaching continued, “we shall face the abandonment of the seminaries and institutes and the return of Church colleges and academies.” He added, “We are not now sure, in the light of developments, that these should ever have been given up.”⁸⁸

President Clark’s address provoked strong reactions among educators present. Sterling McMurrin, a young teacher present, remarked, “We divided ourselves up . . . into liberal and conservative camps. . . . Clark laid it out very firmly, and there was considerable discussion



J. Reuben Clark. © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

about it around our campfires.”⁸⁹ One teacher, Newell K. Young, offered his resignation that night, but it was refused.⁹⁰ Another Church educator reported a discussion among his peers where the talk was called “an expression of medieval theology.”⁹¹ President Clark noted the criticism himself in a letter to mission president William E. Tew, noting, “There has been not a little rather severe fault-finding on the part of certain groups because of the things which I said at Aspen Grove. We expect to follow through on this matter and to try to bring our Church education institutions in line therewith.”⁹²

In the weeks following the address, Clark made it clear that the talk was not a reflection of his personal views, but a message directly from the First Presidency. Responding to a complimentary letter on the address, Clark wrote back, “We of the Presidency have felt that something should be said about matters that were discussed in my talk at Aspen Grove, and it was decided that I should be the mouthpiece to say them.”⁹³ The address won praise from other General Authorities as well. Joseph Fielding Smith wrote to Clark, “I have been hoping and praying for a long time for something of this kind to happen. I have talked to many of these teachers, including the Commissioner of Education himself, and realize thoroughly the need of such counsel and wisdom which I hope will bear fruit.”⁹⁴ In some respects, the address opened a floodgate of concerns over the direction that Church education had been taking, with Clark acting as the main outlet for criticism. Some of the criticisms were directed pointedly at the outside scholarship that had inundated the system. One member wrote, “I cannot see how a modernist teacher can keep his job and ignore your instructions.”⁹⁵ Samuel O. Bennion, the general manager of the Deseret News Publishing Company, wrote, “It was so timely, so necessary, and seemed to me to be a real revelation. . . . I have often wondered why our Church people do not preach the true Gospel of Jesus Christ as given to the Prophet Joseph Smith and told in the Standard Works of the Church, instead of quoting so many needless authorities.”⁹⁶ Clark wrote back, “I said a good many things then that I had been thinking for a long while, and wishing to say. I think that most of the parents of the Church will agree with all that I said.”⁹⁷

In the months following the address, Clark continued to emphasize his concerns over religious education. His office journal records the following conversation with Commissioner West on January 23, 1939:

In the course of his observations he [West] spoke of the fact that as a body the institute and seminary teachers had real testimonies of the truthfulness of the Gospel. I told Brother West that I had never had a serious doubt but that the bulk of those teachers did have a testimony. I said that my own view was that their real difficulty was that they could not bring themselves to teach the doctrines of the Church because of

what their non-Church member colleagues would say about them. I said in my judgment the real difficulty was lack of courage. I emphasized this several times in my conversation.⁹⁸

The end of this conversation pointed toward where Clark's next move would take place. When West made the comment that the teachers at BYU specifically were "almost apologetic about the Gospel," Clark replied that such an observation was "evidence to my thesis, namely, that what they lacked was not testimonies, but courage." Both ended the meeting agreeing that "no person should be employed to teach in the college [BYU] who is not in a position spiritually to teach any subject in religion."⁹⁹

With the BYU Religion Department as ostensibly the intellectual locus of religious education in the Church, the first efforts at change were made there. At the end of the 1938–39 school year, when Guy C. Wilson retired as head of the Religion Department at BYU, J. Wyley Sessions, who did not hold a PhD, was appointed as his replacement, which was perceived as a signal that faithfulness was more important than scholarship in Church education. Though Sessions had spent several summers at Chicago working toward a PhD, he was more likely appointed because of the close relationship he had gained with most of the General Authorities, as he served as president of the mission home in Salt Lake City previous to his assignment at BYU. Sperry wrote on September 2, 1939, to John A. Widtsoe, expressing his dismay that "another man is to come in as the head of the department of Religious Education who has had little or no real rigorous training as a number of us have. He is a fine fellow and we will give him our support despite our personal feelings, but it hurts the morale of a department in a University to have men hoisted over our heads when we have gone through the heat and labor of the day."¹⁰⁰ Chase wrote to Sperry, offering his diagnosis: "The brethren who make the decisions in such matters still distrust the scholarship of the specialists in the field of religion."¹⁰¹

A few months later the First Presidency, led in this effort by President Clark, made an even more forceful move to give direction to religious education. A memorandum sent to Commissioner West from President Clark stated, "Institutes and Seminaries will hereafter confine themselves exclusively to the following work: a) Fostering and promoting the work of the auxiliary organizations of the Church . . . b) Teaching the principles of the Gospel, as set out in the doctrines of the Church." Teachers were specifically directed to use the Bible, Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price as the "ultimate authority on all matters of doctrine, save where the Lord shall have given or shall give further revelation through the prescribed source for such—the President of the Church." The letter contained even more pointed references to the influence of the

Chicago school, stating, “Teachers will do well to give up indoctrinating themselves in the sectarianism of the modern ‘Divinity School Theology.’ If they do not, they will probably bring themselves to a frame of mind where they will be no longer useful in our system.” The letter asked teachers to teach “the Gospel and that only, and the Gospel as revealed in these last days.” They were also warned not to use the term “ideology,” which the First Presidency felt placed “the Gospel in the same category with any and every pagan religion or theology.” The letter continued, “This concept, reduced to its lowest terms, may be expressed as conceiving that religion is man-made, that man makes his God, not God his man—a concept which is coming to be basic to the whole ‘Divinity School Theology,’ but which is contrary to all the teachings of the Church and to God’s revealed word.”¹⁰²

Such a direct challenge to the divinity school philosophies indicates that serious concerns were arising in relation to the Chicago men. Even their old ally, Joseph F. Merrill, felt corrections needed to be made. “I am in full harmony with the efforts that are now being made,” he wrote to Christen Jensen. Merrill was wary of “teachers who have seemed to be unwilling to accept wholeheartedly the essential teachings of Mormonism. . . . Of course, if the faith is genuine, all of us feel more or less lenient for conduct of the past, if there shall be a wholehearted desire to make amends for failures as indicated by conduct from now on. Enough said.”¹⁰³

During this time, Clark held multiple conversations with John A. Widtsoe and Merrill, the two Apostles most involved in religious education, to express his concerns. Following a prayer meeting in the Salt Lake Temple held on March 21, 1940, he took Widtsoe and Merrill aside to speak privately. Clark’s notes from the meetings record, “Told them all the Presidency want is the gospel.”¹⁰⁴ This led to two meetings in Clark’s office a few days later. Clark’s notes from one of the meeting with the two Apostles records the terse entry, “Schools—seminaries and institutes—must be brought into line.”¹⁰⁵ Clark’s concern over religious education may have been exacerbated by the fact that his son, J. Reuben Clark III, had recently been hired as a seminary teacher.¹⁰⁶ He expressed his concerns in a letter to a seminary principal in 1941, writing, “I express to you the hope that all the seminaries of the Church will abandon their generalities based on sectarian concepts, frequently, in fact, almost always contrary to the principles and doctrines of the Church, and get back to the great fundamentals of the restored Gospel and Priesthood.”¹⁰⁷

Impact on the System

How serious was the concern over the Chicago men in the system? It may be impossible to gauge. The existing documents indicate that the First Presidency was not overreacting to charges of heresy within the system. While it is difficult, if not impossible, to measure a person's belief, there are indications that the Chicago men could be located on the spectrum from full orthodoxy to near heterodoxy, with most landing somewhere in between. On the orthodox end of the spectrum was Sidney Sperry, who used his scholarly training to write scores of books defending the traditional beliefs of the Church. While many at the Chicago school questioned the authorship of Isaiah, Sperry wrote his master's thesis on "The text of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon." Sperry left his divinity school training with a keen desire to use its methodologies to focus on not only the Bible, but also on the other standard works. When the first men after him arrived in Chicago, Sperry wrote enthusiastically to Swensen that "the two of us are going to have a lot of pleasure doing Book of Mormon and Pearl of Great Price problems." In the same letter, he indicated that he had already found linguistic evidence tying the Book of Abraham to the Book of Genesis.¹⁰⁸ Sperry wrote several important books on Latter-day scripture that raised the profile of the Book of Mormon in the Church.¹⁰⁹

Along with Sperry, T. Edgar Lyon remained a staunch advocate of the Restoration throughout his career. Even while in Chicago, Lyon showed a strong devotion to the unique scriptures of Mormonism. While discussing his thesis with several of the professors, William W. Sweet insisted that Lyon refer to the Doctrine and Covenants as "purported" revelations. Lyon refused, insisting that they were revelations. After further discussion, Shirley Jackson Case, another professor, intervened, much to Sweet's consternation. Lyon was allowed to retain his statements since Joseph Smith referred to the writings as revelations and his followers believed them to be such.¹¹⁰ Lyon enjoyed a long career teaching at the Salt Lake Institute and authoring several key Church texts, focusing on Church history and the Doctrine and Covenants.

Russel Swensen had a long and distinguished career at BYU teaching in both the religion and history departments. He stayed close to his Chicago roots, but seems to have also followed the Chicago school's admonition on nonconfrontation. Reflecting later on his career, he offered his own assessment of his teaching: "I was aware of our Church traditions. I made it a purpose in teaching to be honest in what I taught, to believe everything that I said. Things that I knew might be too disturbing to an unprepared mind, I would not even try to bring up. I'd teach them the principles of

research, of historical method.”¹¹¹ In his writings on scripture, particularly the New Testament, Swensen quoted from Goodspeed extensively, even giving support to some of Goodspeed’s more controversial explanations of authorship. But where Goodspeed’s writings often made absolute statements about his theories, Swensen was always careful to include a lengthy discussion of all the sides involved, then offer his opinion.¹¹² Swensen left the Religion Department at BYU to join the History Department in 1947, where he served as chairman from 1949 to 1954. He eventually wrote three manuals for the Sunday School on the New Testament and over thirty Church magazine articles.¹¹³

Daryl Chase’s writings seem to indicate that he relished his role as a gadfly in Church education. He had a sometimes outrageous sense of humor toward his assignments and the contradictions that his views sometimes represented. As indicated earlier, he was full of criticism toward the General Authorities but seemed to genuinely love and relish the doctrines and history of the Church. In a letter to Sterling McMurrin, he wrote, “It is my sincere belief that the only way LDS educators can possibly go forward is to steer by Joseph Smith. He is still greater and stronger than any living man in Mormondom. Then why not tie to him and have him battle for us and tell the historians and Philistines to go to h--- with their criticisms?” Perhaps recognizing the paradoxes in his own thoughts, he wrote, “I am on the verge of going nuts—before committing academic suicide.”¹¹⁴ Chase flirted with orthodoxy but valued his independence. After being placed on a committee to review Church publications, he joked that his friends were calling him “Chase, the heresy-hunter.”¹¹⁵ In another letter, Chase wrote that though he felt as if a “big sharp sword” was always hanging over his head, he was committed to his profession. “I’m in for the duration so far as I can look into the future, partly because of my educational background and partly just for the d---d ‘fun’ of it. I do not remain in with my eyes shut; I know that ‘the duration’ for me may not extend beyond tomorrow.”¹¹⁶ Ironically, shortly after Chase penned those words he left Church education to serve as the Dean of Students at Utah State University (USU). Though Chase later stated he was not seeking to leave the system, he served with distinction in Church education.¹¹⁷ Later, he served as the president of USU from 1954 to 1968.

George Tanner served as the director of the Moscow Idaho Institute for nearly three decades. According to Tanner in a 1989 interview, his “liberal views” caused some alarm among Church leaders, but he was left alone because of his work with the students.¹¹⁸ Tanner wore the badge of “Mormon liberal” with honor. In 1972, he defined a liberal as “a person who is not afraid of change” and decried his ideological opposites, saying,

“Conservative people don’t give up on old ideas easily. *Religious* conservatives hardest of all!”¹¹⁹ Tanner felt that fundamentalist Latter-day Saints had “practically apotheosized the Bible and the other scriptures” and felt that “we should take the Bible for what it is.”¹²⁰ He felt Christian service was more important than a claim to absolute truth. He once remarked, “Instead of my saying, ‘I know this is the true Church,’ I’ll say, ‘for my money this is the best Church.’ For many folks the divinity of the Mormon Church is the important thing. To me how well it is doing its job is the important thing.”¹²¹ Tanner did not hesitate to share his views with his students. Leonard Arrington, the famous Mormon historian, was also influenced by Tanner. He wrote, “I most appreciated his introducing me to the latest biblical and historical scholarship. . . . I was happy to be introduced to the Moffat, Goodspeed, and J. Powis Smith translations—versions that I enjoyed reading, not just for proof-text on doctrine, but for exciting narrative and discourse.”¹²² Arrington’s Smith-Goodspeed Bible went with him through his collegiate experiences and his service in World War II, remaining on his desk for many years—battered, annotated, and underlined.¹²³

As mentioned earlier, among the Chicago men, the one with the most controversial career was Heber C. Snell. After returning from his divinity training, Snell taught at the Pocatello Institute, then later at the Logan Institute. His correspondence indicates he held little patience with or regard for those he characterized as fundamentalists. His letters to Sterling S. McMurrin, also a close correspondent of Chase, provide a window into the thought of some of the more liberal teachers of the period. He wrote to McMurrin, somewhat jokingly, “What would you think of forming a combination—and getting the power from somewhere—either to make the fundamentalists in the Church repent or put them out? You observe that I have a great zeal for the truth, and knowing how sadly they come short of this precious thing I think something should be done about it—something drastic, like calling down fire on them or having them eaten up by bears.”¹²⁴ McMurrin wrote back in reply, “Your ‘combination’ is a good idea. I’m for anything that will encourage freedom of speech in the Church. I told Dr. West that all we ask is to be considered as orthodox as those who believe that the ten tribes are on the north star.”¹²⁵ Snell held serious misgivings about the nature of the institute program and the emphasis given by Church leaders in the early 1940s to social activities within the institutes. He wrote to McMurrin, “We naively substitute socials for salvation, we must ‘draw our students’ by catering to their pagan desires all the way instead of teaching them Christian truth. I am beginning to be ‘fed up.’”¹²⁶

Along with disapproving of the social side of institute, Snell appears to have been unhappy with the Bible being granted a place alongside, or as he saw it, subordinate to, other LDS scriptures. In another letter he wrote, "This is our registration week and, as usual, students are flocking here to enrol [*sic*] in Lambda Delta Sigma. Classes are incidental prerequisites; I wonder if in LDS circles knowledge will ever come into its own. I find too that Book of Mormon is in much greater demand than 'Bible.' We do succeed admirably in displacing real volumes—yet we are a 'good people,' I imagine. Some paradox!"¹²⁷ Both appeared to have been aware of the problems Restoration scriptures held for certain views that were grounded in higher criticism, and they were frank in their discussions about them.

McMurrin wrote to Snell shortly after McMurrin left Church education to accept a university position, "As I recall, you made a statement something like this in your last letter, 'What are we going to do with the Pearl of Great Price?'" McMurrin's first impression was to do nothing at all, but his second impulse was to throw it away, because "those who take it seriously in the orthodox manner constantly employ it as a rather effective weapon to combat an intelligent approach to the bible."¹²⁸ While such ideas may not have been widespread among Church educators, the Snell-McMurrin correspondence does provide a view into why Church leaders took the steps they did to ensure orthodoxy among Church teachers of the period.

Snell and Sperry: The *Ancient Israel* Controversy

Snell was embroiled in controversy again when he published his book *Ancient Israel: Its Story and Meaning* in 1948. Snell worked on the book for several years prior, intending originally to publish it through the Department of Education. He wrote to Franklin L. West, "You will like the book if you will read it carefully and without too much attention to an occasional line or paragraph which may not be in keeping with theology as usually understood." Snell overconfidently assured West, "In no case have I intentionally gone against our interpretations," and "there is very little in the book that need ruffle anyone."¹²⁹ Snell stated in the preface that the book was "not written as sectarian theology but as history."¹³⁰ However, Snell's position as an institute teacher immediately brought him into conflict with Church members and leaders over the work.¹³¹ The book showed no overt trace of atheism, but it did take several positions that could be controversial in consideration of LDS doctrine. No part of the work quoted from LDS scriptures beyond the Bible, and Snell again took up his controversial position that the latter parts of the book of Isaiah were written by an unknown prophet of the Exile.¹³² Snell defended his

work, saying it was intended for a “wider public” outside the Church.¹³³ At the same time, the words “Institute of Religion, Logan, Utah” appeared immediately following his name on the title page of the book.

While the book received positive reviews from sources outside the Church, it soon drew attacks from Church members. A few months after its publication, Earl Harmer, a Church member from Salt Lake City, published an open letter directed against the book, criticizing the modernist tone of the work. He wrote, “Your position reminds me of a somewhat crude but truthful observation made by a young man in our ward recently. He said, ‘There is a growing group of LDS mugwamps. A mugwamp, you know, is that bird that sits on the line of truth with his face on one side and his wamp on the other and tries to make himself and the world believe that he has succeeded in doing the impossible.’” Harmer concluded the letter by calling modernism “sugar coated atheism.”¹³⁴ Snell responded to Harmer with his own letter, stating, “It seems evident to me from your criticisms of my book that you have missed its great themes and the heavy support it gives to fundamental LDS theology.”¹³⁵ He also asked McMurrin and another friend, Ezra M. Hawkes, to write letters in his defense. This in turn led to a letter sent to Snell and Hawkes from Joseph Fielding Smith, which asked several direct questions about their beliefs concerning the Fall of Adam, the Atonement of Jesus Christ, the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, and his views on Isaiah. An added question to Hawkes’s letter asked pointedly, “Do you believe that the great scholars in the Chicago University or elsewhere, who have studied the Bible, know more about it and its interpretation [than] do the modern prophets of the Lord?”¹³⁶

Snell’s conflicts with Church leaders over his book eventually brought him into open conflict with Sidney B. Sperry. Their exchanges throw light on their positions and how wide the spectrum of thought was among the men who attended the Chicago school. Sperry wrote to Snell:

I am not trying to be antagonistic toward you or your text. You know very well what my point of view is and I shall consistently stick to that point of view. I cannot see how a Church School teacher could write a text purely from the outsider’s point of view and expect the Church to accept it. It is quite obvious that you accept the orthodox scholarly point of view with respect to the first five books of the Old Testament. Your constant references to the . . . “Prophet of the Exile” show that you take the same point of view with respect to the authorship of Isaiah. How you can do this in the light of the “Restoration” is beyond me. It is perfectly apparent to anyone who has read the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price that your point of view is out of step with these books. I quite expected to find that point of view in your text, because you have always kept away from mentioning these texts, especially the Book of Mormon. [Do] you really believe in this book? I doubt it.

I justify my attitude on the grounds that I am converted to the Standard Church Works, and also that I am honest in my point of view. Inasmuch as the Book of Mormon is one of the foundation stones of the Church, I cannot [see] how a man who professes to be a Latter-day Saint can fail to use it as a source, when it has so many valuable points to give us with respect to the Old Testament.¹³⁷

Sperry's response and his refusal to use the book at BYU infuriated Snell. Snell wrote to McMurrin, "Is Sperry just 'an innocent' who has not outgrown his childhood theology or is he an opportunist who just doesn't know how to be smart?"¹³⁸ Unfortunately, Snell answered in a bitter letter, accusing Sperry of hypocrisy, and charging him with subverting his scholarship to gain popularity. He wrote, "I am interested to learn, in this connection, just why, in your writings on the Bible, you refer to specifically Mormon writings. Do you use them because you honestly believe they throw light on the Bible or because you think such use will give them a certain status and dignity? Or, do you use them because they are your certificate of orthodoxy?"¹³⁹ In a postscript to the letter, Snell appealed to Sperry's training in Chicago while highlighting the wide gap in the philosophies of the two men: "You might contrast your own present attitude toward the book with that of a reviewer of some distinction in the July number of the 'Journal of Religion.' On second thought I am constrained to remark, knowing your bias against University of Chicago scholars, that you would not be in the least influenced by the review."¹⁴⁰

Snell and Joseph Fielding Smith continued to exchange letters over the book for several years. Snell also went before the Church Board of Publications to defend the work. Roughly a year after the controversy sprang up, Snell received a notice from Franklin L. West that his contract would not be renewed for the next year.¹⁴¹ Though he was of retirement age, Snell saw the letter as a direct result of the controversy. McMurrin called the action a "sacrifice of one of the Church's few great teachers and scholars upon the altar of ignorance, fear, and authoritative dogma."¹⁴² Snell spent the next few years promoting his book, writing letters to General Authorities in the hopes of winning an endorsement. Joseph F. Merrill and John A. Widtsoe both responded with letters of encouragement, if not outright endorsement. Levi Edgar Young, a member of the presidency of the Seventy, offered an enthusiastic endorsement. Snell even wrote to BYU president Ernest Wilkinson seeking for the book to be used as a text and attempting to counter Joseph Fielding Smith's firm opposition.¹⁴³

Snell and Sperry dueled one more time on the issue in the late 1960s, offering a kind of circular symmetry to the Chicago movement. Fittingly, the two teachers who first sparked interest in divinity school training at

Aspen Grove would, near the end of their lives, pick up the discussion once more. An epitaph to the Chicago influence on LDS education, the two old partisans wrote opposing essays in the spring 1967 volume of *Dialogue*. Snell was frank in his disapproval of the Bible's status in the Church. "From occupying the status of the first of two books of scripture in the Church the Bible became, in the course of about two decades, one of four."¹⁴⁴ Snell even felt the Bible was subordinate to the other books in the minds of some Latter-day Saints. He continued, "My work, as a teacher of the Bible in LDS collegiate institutions over a period of a quarter of a century, has failed to convince me that our people have made much advancement in biblical knowledge."¹⁴⁵ The main thrust of Snell's argument was against "proof-texting," or quoting selected passages without context in order to prove a doctrinal point. To prove his point, Snell quoted the several different passages that he saw as examples of this, including Moroni's message to Joseph Smith and Doctrine and Covenants 77 (which Snell called "a bold venture in biblical interpretation"). Joseph Smith only tolerated these methods, in Snell's self-serving opinion, because "he never came in sight of the better methods of biblical study which we know today."¹⁴⁶

When Sperry was given a turn to respond, he wrote, "Here is a scholar 'telling off' the Prophet, who really understood the scriptures. . . . Professor Snell is more in sympathy with the views of modern scholarship than he is with those expressed by the Prophet. . . . I cannot agree that Joseph Smith would now concur with the scholarship of modern higher criticism, which, for example, denies the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch and which disavows Isaiah's authorship of much of the book that goes under his name."¹⁴⁷ Sperry agreed with Snell that context was necessary in understanding scripture but strongly disagreed where the ultimate authority on interpreting scripture rested. "Here is the rub—the Mormon people, including your reviewer, don't happen to believe that either Snell or his 'interpreters' have proved their point. There is too much supposition and guesswork in their exegesis, not enough real proof. If one has to depend upon authority, we would rather depend upon the authority of a great prophet like Joseph Smith, than upon commentators who, sincere and useful in their way, can make no great claims to heavenly wisdom."¹⁴⁸

Dialogue produced no clear winner, but the conversation is perhaps the best distillation of these two men's views coming out of the Chicago experiment. In a follow-up article, another scholar diplomatically offered his hope that scholars like Snell and Sperry "will assist us in advancing beyond the superficial to a deeper understanding of the scriptures."¹⁴⁹ This comment stung Snell, who insisted that major changes in the attitudes of Church members and leaders regarding scriptural interpretation

were essential to accomplishing the Church's true mission. The differences between the two men were not superficial, but fundamental.¹⁵⁰ The gulf between the two men also encapsulated well the seeds planted in their experiences at the Chicago divinity school. In many ways, the debate was over the nature of modern biblical interpretation and modern scripture. Sperry used the methods of biblical interpretation to bolster the claims of distinctive LDS scripture; Snell seemed to have lost faith in modern scripture through those methods. Nowhere were the differences between the two men thrown into sharper contrast than in their views concerning the Book of Mormon. When Sperry directly challenged Snell's belief in the Book of Mormon, Snell chose not to respond. During the *Ancient Israel* episode in 1948, when Joseph Fielding Smith asked Snell about his belief in the book directly, Snell replied, "The Book of Mormon contains the word of God just as does the Bible."¹⁵¹ Later, near the end of his life, Snell was more candid. In an oral history, he remarked, "I have never been able to enjoy Book of Mormon. . . . There are some beautiful passages in it. I have wondered how they could be because I am coming, more and more, as I think about it, to question the veracity of this story of the origin of The Book of Mormon."¹⁵²

Sperry, at the other end of the spectrum, wrote a wide range of books dealing with LDS scriptures, particularly the Book of Mormon, including *Our Book of Mormon*, *Book of Mormon Testifies*, *Themes of the Restored Gospel*, and compendiums for both the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants.¹⁵³ Because of his divinity school training, some assumed Sperry would be a skeptic. David Yarn, one of Sperry's students, recalled, "I remember being in Dr. Sperry's office when one who was considered a religious skeptic came in to visit with him; upon learning that Dr. Sperry was writing about the Book of Mormon, the visitor said cynically, 'Oh Sid, you don't believe that stuff about the Book of Mormon, do you?' Dr. Sperry, in a courteous and respectful manner, but in firm and unmistakable terms, bore a resolute testimony concerning the Book of Mormon."¹⁵⁴

Epilogue—Finding a Voice

What was the outcome of the Chicago experiment? The full impact of those brief years in the 1930s may be immeasurable, except to say they made Church leaders acutely aware of problems that needed to be avoided in religious education in the Church. The resulting concern over potentially poor outcomes certainly had an impact on the relationship Latter-day Saints had with divinity schools in general. No Latter-day Saint educator attended a divinity school for nearly thirty years after the Chicago experience. When

several did begin attending again, they went of their own volition, without Church sanction.¹⁵⁵ Russel Swensen, writing a reminiscence of the Chicago experience, noted that all except Sperry, Tanner, Lyon, and Snell eventually left religious education for other pursuits. When Swensen collected statements for his article, he contacted all of the remaining men who traveled to Chicago. Most held positive feelings about their experience. These reflections, written nearly forty years after their experience at the divinity school, also highlight the importance of the experiment in the minds of its participants. George S. Tanner wrote that the Chicago experiment “resulted in mutual benefit, that is, benefit to the scholars who came and the students they met. The net gain to the LDS Department was considerable; we learned that non-Mormon scholars were honest, sincere, and interested in our welfare. We got acquainted with a number of their scholarly books and liked them.”¹⁵⁶

T. Edgar Lyon, the most critical of the Chicago movement at the time, called it “a landmark in an educational outreach which the Church had never known before, and which has profoundly influenced the teaching in the seminaries and institutes since that day.” He wrote, “It was a time of an intellectual and spiritual awakening which was the entering wedge that put the Church educational system in contact with the ongoing mainstream of Christian scriptural and historical research. This outlook has aided in the metamorphosis of the LDS Church from a sectionally oriented to a worldwide Church in less than forty years.”¹⁵⁷ Heber C. Snell was more negative in his assessment of the overall effect of the Chicago venture. “Regrettable as it may be, the effect of the visiting scholars on the Church as an institution appears to have been negative. Their work at the Church University seems not to have been appreciated by our Church leaders.”¹⁵⁸

Joseph F. Merrill seems to have never harbored any regrets in having launched the venture. Russel Swensen recorded a poignant moment with Merrill, years after the episode: “I saw Brother Merrill just before he died and thanked him for what he’d done for me in opening my eyes. I think the Chicago experience really was one of the greatest things of my life. At that time he said, ‘I still believe I was right. Unfortunately I’m the only one of the authorities who could see that way.’”¹⁵⁹ If Merrill had stumbled in his actions, his mistakes were fully understandable. If a miscalculation was made, it may have been to assume that divinity training was the best background for the Church’s religious scholars. This was a natural misconception, though, given Merrill’s application of the logic that a physicist should head the department of physics and so forth. Today the religion faculty at BYU is an eclectic mixture of scholars with degrees in varying fields. Higher education, though, has proved a key asset to the department’s

success, just as Merrill believed. Though the religion department has had numerous struggles and course corrections over the years, it has long been an integral part of the university.¹⁶⁰ In time it became a remarkable center for the type of studies Merrill had sent the group to Chicago to produce in the first place.

Conclusions—the Right Mix

This study began with three questions. First, What is the proper mixture between faith and study in revealed religion? Next, What does the outside scholarship of the world have to offer the religious studies of the Church? And most importantly, What is the role of the religious educator in the Church? Answering the final question first, we must be reminded of the experimental nature of the Church's ventures into religious education in the early twentieth century. As noted, a whole new kind of religious educator was being created, and determining the operational guidelines was often a painful process. The Chicago men raised important questions surrounding the role of a religion scholar in a Church with a lay clergy. After all, their peers at the divinity school would return to their congregations to become the priesthood in their respective churches. Would their scholarly degrees entitle them to similar positions? For better or worse, the battles fought over the introduction of outside biblical scholarship prompted a response from Church leaders that defined the role of a religious educator. J. Reuben Clark's speech at Aspen Grove authoritatively settled the question of the respective values of faith and scholarship in Church education. After stating several basic doctrines, Clark declared, "The first requisite for teaching these principles is a testimony of their truth. No amount of learning, no amount of study, and no number of scholastic degrees, can take the place of this testimony, which is the *sine qua non* of the teacher in our Church school system."¹⁶¹ For the Church-employed religion teachers, at least, faith was the crucial element. In that realm, testimony was more important than inquiry. These ideas remained a common theme in Clark's dealings with the religion teachers of the Church throughout the rest of his life. Notes in Clark's papers from a 1954 address to seminary teachers contained two lines that captured his philosophy. Appearing first was, "Sow faith—not doubt," and just below, "No academic freedom in religion."¹⁶²

The actions taken to bring Church education into line were important in defining not only the role of religious educators in the Church, but the role of priesthood leaders as well. In giving the "Chartered Course," the First Presidency was asserting its primacy over Church educators, even if

educators held advanced degrees. Put in scriptural terms, the scribes and Pharisees would serve *under* the priesthood, not over it. On a wider level, the actions taken to bring religious education into line during the 1930s and 1940s were extended to *all* Church organizations. In March 1940, during the height of his concerns about Church education, President Clark gave a major address that was designed to bring all auxiliary organizations of the Church under priesthood direction. Closely echoing the language he used with the Church religion teachers, Clark reminded these organizations of the fundamentals, saying that “the sole . . . aim and purpose of the Auxiliary organization of the Church is to plant and make grow in every member of the Church a testimony of the Christ and of the Gospel, of the divinity of the mission of Joseph Smith and of the Church, and to bring the people to order their lives in accordance with the laws and principles of the restored Gospel and Priesthood.”¹⁶³ These early efforts laid the foundation for the Correlation movement of the 1960s, which has immeasurably shaped the modern Church. The problems caused by a few of these teachers who had attended the Chicago Divinity School eventually played a role in prompting some major innovations in Church policies and practices.

Answering the second question, What does the outside scholarship of the world have to offer the religious studies of the Church? it should be noted that the outcomes of the Chicago experiment were by no means completely negative. Nearly all of the Chicago men noted that their time at the divinity school opened ecumenical doors for the Church and helped bring Mormonism further into the mainstream of American religious discourse. At the same time, the scholarly methods learned in Chicago, applied toward modern scripture, led to huge leaps in the quality of Mormon apologetics. Sidney Sperry, T. Edgar Lyon, Russel Swensen, and other Chicago scholars wrote the majority of Sunday School and priesthood manuals used in the Church for decades after they returned from Chicago, and they inspired a new generation of scholars who helped reach out to other religious groups, defending the faith when necessary. While the Church was drawn into the wider controversies other American churches were embroiled in, fighting these battles helped reaffirm the identity of Mormonism in the modern world.

Could these tensions between fundamentalism and modernism in the mid-twentieth century have been resolved in a more harmonious way? The answer to that question can only be answered with speculation. Nearly every major Christian denomination fought a battle over these issues in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and Mormonism’s conflict, Philip Barlow points out, was relatively mild.¹⁶⁴ As Leonard Arrington and Davis

Bitton observed, no books were banned, no excommunications occurred, and no schisms took place.¹⁶⁵

The final question, What is the proper mixture between faith and study in revealed religion? may be the most difficult of all to answer. Ultimately, every student of religion has to answer it. This struggle has defined the religious scholarship of the Church in the past and will continue to do so in the future. Each new generation will wrestle with this question. But the crucible of the Chicago experiment, in its own way, moved the Church significantly toward finding its own voice in the world of religious scholarship. While some outcomes were negative, it ultimately proved that faith and scholarship were not mutually exclusive, and the mixture of the two could be a powerful force for good. In the words of Elder Packer, “Happily, though, some of those who went away to study returned magnified by their experience and armed with advanced degrees. They returned firm in their knowledge that a man can be in the world but not of the world.”¹⁶⁶

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1. Boyd K. Packer, *That All May Edified* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982), 43.

2. Major sources for this study were the papers of Church teachers who attended the University of Chicago’s School of Divinity in the 1930s. Valuable collections include the papers of Russel B. Swensen, Sidney B. Sperry, and J. Reuben Clark, all located in the L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. The extensive collection of T. Edgar Lyon, which also provides a valuable window into this period, are located in Perry Special Collections and in the Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah. The massive collection of Sterling McMurrin, located at Special Collections in the J. Willard Marriott Library at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City, also provided a wealth of correspondence and documentation. In addition, the Everett L. Cooley oral history project, Special Collections, J. Willard Marriott Library, contains several interviews with Church teachers from this period, most notably Heber C. Snell. The papers of George S. Tanner, housed in Special Collections, J. Willard Marriott Library, were also helpful. The massive papers of Heber C. Snell, located in the Special Collections of the Merrill-Cazier Library at Utah State University in Logan, Utah, contain a copious documentation of the battles fought over orthodoxy in the Church Educational System during this time. Also contained in Special Collections, Merrill-Cazier Library, are the papers of Daryl Chase, which provided valuable context. My deepest gratitude goes to the staff of all of these great institutions

who were tremendously helpful in this project. In addition, several colleagues, most notably Perry Montoya and Paul Murphy, reviewed early manuscripts and made invaluable suggestions.

3. The modernist-fundamentalist controversy raged throughout the early twentieth century, probably reaching its apex with the famous 1925 Scopes "Monkey Trial" in Dayton, Tennessee, where William Jennings Bryan and Clarence Darrow battled over whether the teaching of evolution in schools undermined traditional faith in the Bible. The famous event was later commemorated in the play and film *Inherit the Wind*. For a good summary of the conflict, see *Controversy in the Twenties: Fundamentalism, Modernism, and Evolution*, ed. William B. Gatewood Jr. (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1969), and to a lesser extent, Norman F. Furniss, *The Fundamentalist Controversy, 1918–1931* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954).

4. See Milton Lynn Bennion, *Mormonism and Education* (Salt Lake City: The Department of Education of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1939), 175–202.

5. Gary James Bergera and Ronald Priddis, *Brigham Young University: A House of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1985), 53.

6. *Brigham Young University: The First Hundred Years*, ed. Ernest L. Wilkinson, 4 vols. (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1975), 2:286; see also Mary Jane Woodger and Joseph H. Groberg, *From the Muddy River to the Ivory Tower: The Journey of George H. Brimhall* (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, 2010), 131–33.

7. Kenneth G. Bell, "Adam Samuel Bennion: Superintendent of LDS Education: 1919–1928" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1969), 75–81.

8. See William E. Berrett, "My Story," unpublished manuscript, 1974, Perry Special Collections, 37–38.

9. Bell, "Adam S. Bennion," 80.

10. David H. Yarn, "Sidney Sperry Reminiscence," in *They Gladly Taught: Ten BYU Professors*, ed. Jean Anne Waterstradt, 3 vols. (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University and the Emeritus Club, 1986–88), 1:160.

11. "Summer School Announcement," *Brigham Young University Quarterly* 24, no. 3 (1928): 43.

12. "Summer School Announcement," *Brigham Young University Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (1929): 43.

13. Russel B. Swensen, "Mormons at the University of Chicago Divinity School," *Dialogue* 7, no. 2 (Summer 1972): 40.

14. T. Edgar Lyon Jr., *T. Edgar Lyon: A Teacher in Zion* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press), 2002, 115.

15. Swensen, "Mormons at the Chicago Divinity School," 40.

16. *Dedication of the Joseph F. Merrill Engineering Building*, program, University of Utah, February 26, 1960, 1, Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City. See also Alan K. Parrish, *John A. Widtsoe* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 117. John A. Widtsoe was studying in Germany at the same time, completing his work a few months after Merrill. The author has been unable to verify if Merrill was the first Utahn to earn a PhD, though in the program cited, which was produced by the University of Utah in conjunction with the dedication of the Joseph F. Merrill Engineering Building, he was recognized as such. For other information on Merrill's

education background, see Richard R. Lyman, "Dr. Joseph F. Merrill of the Council of the Twelve," *Improvement Era* 35 (November 1931): 9–10; Bryant S. Hinckley, "Greatness in Men: Joseph F. Merrill," *Improvement Era* 36 (December 1932): 74–77, 121; and Gordon B. Hinckley, "Passing of Elder Joseph F. Merrill," *Improvement Era* 55 (March 1952): 144–47, 203–4.

17. T. Edgar Lyon, oral history, interview by Davis Bitton, November 18 and 15, December 2, 9, 16, and 30, 1974; and January 6, 13, 20, 1975, Salt Lake City, Lyon Collection, 93, Perry Special Collections.

18. T. Edgar Lyon, interview by Frederick S. Buchanan and Marshal B. Poulson, February 7, 1973, 13–14, 28, Perry Special Collections.

19. Russel B. Swensen, The Joint Oral History Project of Brigham Young University Archives, BYU Alumni Association Emeritus Club, and Charles Redd Center for Western Studies, interview by Mark K. Allen, September 13, 1978, 9, Perry Special Collections.

20. James R. Clark, "Church and State Relationships in Education in Utah" (PhD diss., Utah State University, 1958), 441.

21. Minutes, February 20, 1929, Minutes of the General Church Board of Education, found in William E. Berrett, CES History Resource Files, 1899–1985, Church History Library.

22. See Dennis A. Wright, "The Beginnings of the First LDS Institute of Religion at Moscow, Idaho," *Mormon Historical Studies* 10 (Spring 2009): 65–84. See also Joseph F. Merrill, "LDS Institutes and Why," *Improvement Era* 32 (December 1929): 135–37; and J. Wyley Sessions, "The Latter-day Saint Institutes," *Improvement Era* 38 (July 1935): 412–15.

23. "Seminaries of LDS Church Put under Study," *Salt Lake Tribune*, January 9, 1930, 14–15.

24. "Seminaries of LDS Church Put under Study," 14–15.

25. Joseph F. Merrill to all seminary teachers, October 1, 1928, Salt Lake City, George A. Brimhall papers, Perry Special Collections.

26. William E. Berrett and Alma P. Burton, *Readings in LDS Church History from Original Manuscripts*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1958), 3:341–42.

27. Wilkinson, *First Hundred Years*, 2:219.

28. Church General Board of Education, Minutes, February 5 and March 5, 1930, Church History Library; copies in possession of the author.

29. Joseph F. Merrill to E. J. Call, G. L. Luke, and W. V. Halverson, April 18, 1931, Sydney B. Sperry Collection, Perry Special Collections.

30. Joseph F. Merrill to Russel B. Swensen, March 10, 1930, Russel B. Swensen Collection, Perry Special Collections.

31. Swenson, oral history, 11.

32. Edgar J. Goodspeed, *The Goodspeed Parallel New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1943), 534.

33. Edgar J. Goodspeed, *The Story of the Bible* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1936), 24.

34. Charles Harvey Arnold, *Near the Edge of Battle: A Short History of the Divinity School and the "Chicago School of Theology," 1866–1966*, (Chicago: The Divinity School Association, 1966), 34.

35. Arnold, *Near the Edge of Battle*, 59.
36. Swensen, oral history, 11.
37. See Shailer Mathews, *The Faith of Modernism* (New York: AMS Press, 1924, 1969).
38. William J. Hynes, *Shirley Jackson Case and the Chicago School: The Socio-Historical Method* (Chico, Calif.: Society of Biblical Literature Centennial Press, 1980), ix.
39. Lyon, *Teacher in Zion*, 132.
40. Philip L. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible: The Place of the Latter-day Saints in American Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 129–34.
41. James M. McLachlan, “W. H. Chamberlin and the Quest for a Mormon Theology,” *Dialogue* 29, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 154–55. McLachlan also notes that in 1921, while on his deathbed, W. H. Chamberlin “received word . . . that he had been chosen to teach religion in the summer school at BYU. . . . Five years after Chamberlin’s death, attitudes in the church had changed. Apostle David O. McKay wrote to Ralph V. Chamberlin [William’s brother] in a letter dated 17 February 1926: ‘That a lofty, sincere soul like W. H. Chamberlin’s should have been compelled to struggle in our community and to have been misunderstood by those who should have known him best, seems to me to be nothing short of a tragedy.’”
42. George Shepherd Tanner, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Oral History Program, interview by Davis Bitton, Salt Lake City, August 24, 1972, 11, Church History Library.
43. Swensen, oral history, 10, Swensen, “Mormons at the Chicago Divinity School,” 40.
44. Joseph F. Merrill to Russel B. Swensen, July 21, 1930, Swensen Collection.
45. Swensen, “Mormons at the Chicago Divinity School,” 41.
46. Tanner, oral history, 10.
47. Russel B. Swensen to Swen L. Swensen, December 19, 1932, Swensen Collection.
48. Swensen, “Mormons at the Chicago Divinity School,” 42.
49. Russel B. Swensen to Swen L. Swensen, March 2, 1931, Swensen Collection.
50. Sidney B. Sperry to Russel B. Swensen, November 20, 1930, Swensen Collection.
51. Swensen, “Mormons at the Chicago Divinity School,” 40.
52. Tanner, oral history, 12–13.
53. Swensen, “Mormons at the Chicago Divinity School,” 40.
54. Swensen, “Mormons at the Chicago Divinity School,” 42.
55. Russel B. Swensen to Swen L. Swensen, September 21, no year (circa 1931), Swensen Collection.
56. Tanner, oral history, 11–12.
57. Russel B. Swensen to Swen L. Swensen, December 10, 1931, Swensen Collection. The “dean” Swensen is most likely referring to is Shailer Mathews, the dean of the Chicago Divinity School.
58. Russel B. Swensen to Swen L. Swensen, January 28, 1933, Swensen Collection.
59. T. Edgar Lyon to parents, August 21, 1931, T. Edgar Lyon Collection, Church History Library, cited in Lyon, *Teacher in Zion*, 131.

60. T. Edgar Lyon to parents, August 21, 1931, cited in Lyon, *Teacher in Zion*, 131, punctuation modernized.
61. Shailer Mathews, *The Growth of the Idea of God* (New York: MacMillan, 1931), 219.
62. Mathews, *Growth of the Idea of God*, 219.
63. T. Edgar Lyon to parents, August 21, 1931, cited in Lyon, *Teacher in Zion*, 132. Lyon probably has reference here to Ralph Chamberlin, Joseph Peterson, and Henry Peterson, three BYU professors dismissed by the Church in 1911 after publicly teaching controversial concepts at BYU. William H. Chamberlin, also censured during this time had received training in ancient languages and biblical studies at the University of Chicago. See Wilkinson, *First Hundred Years*, 1:412–32; see also Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 129–34.
64. Tanner, oral history, 12.
65. Russel B. Swensen to George S. Tanner, December 31, 1931, Swensen Collection.
66. Russel B. Swensen to George S. Tanner, December 31, 1931.
67. Swensen, oral history, 12; Swensen, “Mormons at the Chicago Divinity School,” 44.
68. Swensen, “Mormons at the Chicago Divinity School,” 44.
69. Tanner, oral history, 13.
70. Tanner, oral history, 13.
71. Lyon, *Teacher in Zion*, 136. Those who earned degrees included Anthony S. Cannon, Daryl Chase, Carl J. Furr, Therald N. Jensen, Vernon Larsen, Wesley P. Lloyd, T. Edgar Lyon, Heber C. Snell, Sidney B. Sperry, Russel B. Swensen, and George S. Tanner. See Lyon Jr., *Teacher in Zion*, 143.
72. Wilkinson, *First Hundred Years*, 2:288.
73. Vernon F. Larsen, “The Life and Times of Vernon F. Larsen,” unpublished document, 5:42, Church History Library.
74. Lyon, oral history, 101.
75. Swensen, “Mormons at the Chicago Divinity School,” 44.
76. Larsen, “Life and Times,” 52.
77. Daryl Chase to Russel B. Swensen, undated letter (ca. 1933), Swensen Collection.
78. Daryl Chase to T. Edgar Lyon, February 18, 1933, Lyon Collection.
79. Carl Furr to Russel B. Swensen, April 3, 1934, Swensen Collection.
80. Carl Furr to Russel B. Swensen, April 3, 1934.
81. Carl Furr to Russel B. Swensen, April 3, 1934.
82. Carl Furr to Russel B. Swensen, April 3, 1934.
83. Daryl Chase to Russel B. Swensen, ca. 1933.
84. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 140.
85. Heber C. Snell, “Criteria for Interpreting the Old Testament to College Youth,” *Through the Years: Occasional Writings of Heber C. Snell* (Logan, Utah: Merrill Library, 1969), 95–97.
86. Joseph Fielding Smith to Franklin L. West, March 11, 1937, cited in Richard Sherlock, “Faith and History: The Snell Controversy,” *Dialogue* 12, no. 1 (Spring 1979): 27, 38.

87. J. Reuben Clark, "The Charted Course of the Church in Education," in *J. Reuben Clark: Selected Papers*, ed. David H. Yard Jr. (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1984), 251–52.
88. Clark, "Charted Course," 254.
89. Sterling M. McMurrin and L. Jackson Newell, *Matters of Conscience: Conversations with Sterling M. McMurrin on Philosophy, Education, and Religion* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996), 115.
90. McMurrin and Newell, *Matters of Conscience*, 115.
91. N. L. Nelson to J. Reuben Clark Jr., September 2, 1938, Clark Papers, cited in Scott C. Esplin, "Charting the Course: President Clark's Charge to Religious Educators," *Religious Educator* 7, no. 1 (2006): 107, 117.
92. J. Reuben Clark to William T. Tew Jr., September 22, 1938, Clark Papers.
93. J. Reuben Clark to R. K. Bischoff, September 8, 1938, Clark Papers.
94. Joseph Fielding Smith to J. Reuben Clark, August 15, 1938, Clark Papers.
95. Joseph S. Peery to J. Reuben Clark, August 16, 1938, Clark Papers. At the time this letter was written, Peery was serving as the manager of the Temple Square Bureau of Information.
96. S. O. Bennion to J. Reuben Clark, August 15, 1938, Clark Papers.
97. J. Reuben Clark to S. O. Bennion, August 20, 1938, Clark Papers.
98. J. Reuben Clark, Diary, January 23, 1939, 62, Clark Papers.
99. Clark, Office Journal, January 23, 1939, 63.
100. Sidney B. Sperry to John A. Widtsoe, September 2, 1939, Sperry Collection.
101. Daryl Chase to Sidney B. Sperry, November 27, 1939, Sperry Collection.
102. J. Reuben Clark to Franklin L. West, February 17, 1940, First Presidency Papers, Church History Library, cited in Wilkinson, *First Hundred Years*, 2:381–82.
103. Joseph F. Merrill to Christen Jensen, May 28, 1940, cited in Wilkinson, *First Hundred Years*, 2:384–85.
104. Clark, Office Journal, March 21, 1940, emphasis in original.
105. Clark, Office Journal, March 29, 1940. During this time, Clark was disturbed by articles that had been appearing in *Week-day Religious Education*, a periodical published by the Department of Education. During March 1940, Clark discussed an article written by Alma King in the periodical. See Clark, Office Journal, March 28–29, 1940.
106. Milton Lynn Bennion, *Recollections of a School Man: The Autobiography of M. Lynn Bennion* (n.p.: Western Epics, 1987), 108. Existing correspondence indicates that President Clark's son was a teacher at least as early as 1940 and was teaching during the height of Clark's concerns over the orthodoxy of the system. See Vernon A. Cooley and J. Reuben Clark III to J. Reuben Clark, December 10, 1940, Clark Papers.
107. J. Reuben Clark to J. Karl Wood, May 27, 1941, Clark Papers.
108. Sidney B. Sperry to Russel B. Swensen, November 20, 1930, Swensen Papers.
109. See Noel B. Reynolds, "The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon in the Twentieth Century," *BYU Studies* 38, no. 2 (1999): 18, 25.
110. Dale C. LeCheminant, "T. Edgar Lyon: I Have Never Been Bored!" in *Teachers Who Touch Lives*, ed. Philip L. Barlow (Bountiful, Utah: Horizon Publishers, 1988), 178.

111. Swensen, oral history, 19.
112. See Russel B. Swensen, *The New Testament: The Acts and the Epistles* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Sunday School Union Board, 1955). Swensen states in his acknowledgments that he had obtained permission to quote two of Goodspeed's works in his text, *An Introduction to the New Testament* and *New Testament, an American Translation*. In many places he agrees with Goodspeed's theories of authorship (Hebrews, 1 and 2 Peter, Jude) and in many places he doesn't (Ephesians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus) remaining neutral on the traditional authorship of others (Revelation). See pages 220, 226, 255, 263–65, 279–81, 292. When Swensen does agree with Goodspeed, he closely follows the latter's logic. Compare with Edgar J. Goodspeed, *The Goodspeed Parallel New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1943), 502, 534, 562.
113. Swensen, "Mormons at the Chicago Divinity School," 46.
114. Daryl C. Chase to Sterling S. McMurrin, July 26, 1944, McMurrin Papers.
115. Daryl C. Chase to Sterling S. McMurrin, August 31, 1944, McMurrin Papers.
116. Daryl C. Chase to Sterling S. McMurrin, undated letter (ca. July–August 1944), McMurrin Papers.
117. Daryl C. Chase, oral history, interview by Marie Fuhrman Olsen, February 19, 1980, Special Collections and Archives, Merrill-Cazier Library.
118. George S. Tanner, interview by John Fowles, June 5, 1989, cited in John Lessing Fowles, "A Study Concerning the Mission of the Week-day Religious Educational Program of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from 1890–1990: A Response to Secular Education" (PhD diss., University of Missouri–Columbia, 1990), 106–7.
119. Tanner, oral history, 40; emphasis in original.
120. Tanner, oral history, 43–44.
121. Tanner, oral history, 37.
122. Leonard J. Arrington, "George S. Tanner: A Teaching Pioneer," in Barlow, *Teachers Who Touch Lives*, 89. See also Leonard J. Arrington, "Why I Am a Believer," in *A Thoughtful Faith: Essays on Belief by Mormon Scholars*, ed. and comp. Philip L. Barlow (Centerville, Utah: Canon Press, 1986), 228–29.
123. Arrington, *Adventures of a Church Historian*, 23.
124. Heber C. Snell to Sterling S. McMurrin, January 5, 1941, McMurrin Papers.
125. Sterling S. McMurrin to Heber C. Snell, January 19, 1941, Snell Papers.
126. Heber C. Snell to Sterling S. McMurrin, May 16, 1943, McMurrin Papers.
127. Heber C. Snell to Sterling S. McMurrin, September 14, 1947, McMurrin Papers.
128. Sterling S. McMurrin to Heber C. Snell, August 30, 1945, Snell Papers.
129. Heber C. Snell to Franklin L. West, August 11, 1947, Snell Papers.
130. Heber C. Snell, *Ancient Israel: Its Story and Meaning* (Salt Lake City: Steven and Wallis, 1948), xiv.
131. For a lengthy discussion of this episode, see Sherlock, "Faith and History," 27–41.
132. See Snell, *Ancient Israel*, 187–88.
133. Heber C. Snell to David O. McKay, May 28, 1951, Snell Papers.

134. Earl W. Harmer, open letter to Heber C. Snell, December 23, 1948, copy in McMurrin Papers.
135. Heber C. Snell, open letter to Earl W. Harmer, January 7, 1949, cited in Sherlock, "Faith and History," 29, 39.
136. Joseph Fielding Smith to Ezra M. Hawkes, May 25, 1949, Snell Papers. Joseph Fielding Smith's letter to Snell with the questionnaire, but minus the final question on the Chicago scholars, is referenced in Sterling S. McMurrin to Heber C. Snell, June 2, 1949, Snell Papers.
137. Sidney B. Sperry to Heber C. Snell, August 31, 1949, McMurrin Papers.
138. Heber C. Snell to Sterling S. McMurrin, November 5, 1949, McMurrin Papers.
139. Heber C. Snell to Sidney C. Sperry, September 20, 1949, copy in Snell Papers.
140. Heber C. Snell to Sidney C. Sperry, September 20, 1949.
141. Franklin L. West to Heber C. Snell, January 5, 1950, Snell Papers.
142. Sterling S. McMurrin to Heber C. Snell, January 16, 1950, Snell Papers.
143. Heber C. Snell to Ernest L. Wilkinson, August 3, 1953, Snell Papers.
144. Heber C. Snell, "The Bible in the Church," *Dialogue* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1967): 56.
145. Snell, "Bible in the Church," 57.
146. Snell, "Bible in the Church," 60–61.
147. Sidney B. Sperry, "Scholars and Prophets," *Dialogue* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1967): 74–75.
148. Sperry, "Scholars and Prophets," 83.
149. Kent Robson, "The Bible, the Church, and Its Scholars," *Dialogue* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1967): 90.
150. Register to the papers of Heber C. Snell, Merrill-Cazier Library.
151. Heber C. Snell to Joseph Fielding Smith, April 23, 1948, Snell Papers.
152. Heber C. Snell, oral history, interview by Frederick Buchanan, Hay Rogers, and Dale LeCheminant, 49–51, Everett L. Cooley Oral History Collection, Marriott Library.
153. Waterstradt, *They Gladly Taught*, 1:161. Sperry also wrote an impressive number of books on biblical topics as well, including *The Spirit of the Old Testament*, *Biblical Aramaic*, *The Voice of Israel's Prophets*, and *Paul's Life and Letters*.
154. David H. Yarn Jr., "Sidney B. Sperry: A Reminiscence," in Waterstradt, *They Gladly Taught*, 1:169.
155. Scott Kenney, "Saints in Divinity Schools," *Sunstone* 3, no. 4 (May–June 1978): 22–24.
156. *Collected Statements of Former Students at the University of Chicago*, 1971, collected by Russel B. Swensen, Church History Library; emphasis in original.
157. Swensen, *Collected Statements*.
158. Swensen, *Collected Statements*.
159. Swensen, oral history, 10.
160. For a brief history of the Religion Department at BYU, see Packer, "Seek Learning Even by Study and Also by Faith," 41–55.
161. Clark, "Charted Course," 249–50.
162. J. Reuben Clark, speech notes from BYU Seminary Teachers Banquet, July 15, 1954, Clark Papers.

163. Memorandum of Suggestions made by President J. Reuben Clark, courtesy Max Mulgard of the Church Correlation Department. Clark made these remarks at a meeting with the Presidencies and Superintendencies of the Church Auxiliary organizations on March 29, 1940, in the Church General Office Building.

164. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 137.

165. Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), 260. Several attempts were made to excommunicate Snell, but the action never took place. Snell remained active in the Church until his death. See Register to the Papers of Heber C. Snell, Mss. 32, USU Special Collections, accessed October 27, 2010 at <http://library.usu.edu/Specol/manuscript/collms32.html>. Snell referenced the possible excommunication in a letter, never sent, to the high council of the Cache Stake, Heber C. Snell to Cache Stake High Council, Oct. 6, 1962, Snell Papers, Special Collections.

166. Packer, "Seek Learning Even by Study and Also by Faith," 44.

When Are Chiasms Admissible as Evidence?

Boyd F. Edwards and W. Farrell Edwards

*They seek him here, they seek him there,
Those Frenchies seek him everywhere.¹*

—Sir Percy Blakeney in *The Scarlet Pimpernel*

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BYU STUDIES
SYMPOSIUM

Many regard John W. Welch's 1967 discovery of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon as evidence of the ancient origins of the book, arguing that chiasmus was used by Isaiah and other Old Testament writers in Jerusalem, that Lehi grew up in Jerusalem at about this time, that he learned there about the chiastic form, and that he carried this knowledge to America, where he passed it on to Book of Mormon writers.² Chiasmus is an ancient literary form in which a list of elemental words, phrases, or ideas is stated in a particular order and is then repeated in reverse order.³

1. Baroness Emmuska Orczy, *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1905), 117.

2. John W. Welch, "Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 10, no. 1 (Fall 1969): 69–84; John W. Welch, "A Masterpiece: Alma 36," in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon: Insights You May Have Missed Before*, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1991), 114–15; John W. Welch, "Chiasmus in Helaman 6:7–13," in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1992), 230–32, available online at <http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/publications/books/?bookid=71&chapid=832> (accessed November 10, 2010); John W. Welch, "A Steady Stream of Significant Recognitions," in *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2002), 340; Jeffrey R. Lindsay, "Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon," *LDS FAQ: Mormon Answers*, <http://jefflindsay.com/chiasmus.shtml> (accessed November 10, 2010).

3. John W. Welch and Gerstenberg Verlag, eds., *Chiasmus in Antiquity* (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1981; repr., Provo, Utah: Research Press, 1999); John W. Welch, "Chiasmus in Biblical Law," in *Jewish Law Association Studies IV: The Boston Conference Volume*, ed. B. S. Jackson (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 8; John

I was thirteen years old in 1969, when John Welch published his discovery of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon.² I remember the excitement of my father, Farrell Edwards, co-author of the present article, when he told me that an ancient Hebrew literary form had been discovered in the Book of Mormon. I was impressed by the symmetry and beauty of these chiasms and regarded their presence in the Book of Mormon as evidence of its authenticity.

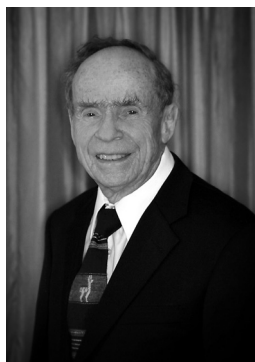
In 2002 or thereabouts, I happened upon an essay by Curt Van Den Heuvel arguing that Book of Mormon chiasms are “a result of the incredible amount of repetition contained therein, and are well within the bounds of probability.”⁸ The essay supplied no statistical calculations to justify this statement, so I dismissed it as unfounded. But the statement wouldn’t leave me alone, because I knew I had the training, as a theoretical physicist, to confirm or refute it, and because I felt that the LDS community had the right to know whether it was true.

I did a few preliminary calculations and discussed them with my father, also a physicist. He suggested that our study account for the likelihood that a chiasm could result from rearranging *all* of the elements in the Book of Mormon, not just the elements of a chiasm that appear in a passage, such as Alma 36. Though his suggestion meant weeks of additional calculations, I concurred because the study would be incomplete without them. We agreed to do the study together and to publish our results whether or not they confirmed the intentionality of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon. We contacted John Welch and published our results in *BYU Studies* in 2004.²²

Since then, we have learned about Strangite and other chiasms that have been used to argue various points of view in chiasmus debates. Some of these chiasms seem quite convincing at first glance. In the present article, we summarize our studies of these chiasms and their implications for the authenticity of the Book of Mormon.



Boyd F. Edwards



W. Farrell Edwards

An application of this form is called a chiasm. Evidence of ancient origins rests on the assumption that Book of Mormon chiasms are deliberate constructions by ancient authors, constructions that Joseph Smith Jr. translated without knowing about the form.⁴

Welch's discovery opened a Pandora's box of chiasms that have been identified in various works—it seems that in some Mormon circles chiasms are sought “everywhere.” Some chiasms are used in an attempt to uncover hidden meanings, while others are treated as evidence of particular points of view in debates about Book of Mormon origins.⁵ Some people use chiasms in the Doctrine and Covenants and in letters by Joseph Smith Jr. as evidence that he knew about chiasmus.⁶ Others see such chiasms as evidence that God revealed chiasmus to Joseph without his knowledge.⁷

W. Welch and Daniel B. McKinlay, eds., *Chiasmus Bibliography* (Provo, Utah: Research Press, 1999).

4. John W. Welch, “How Much Was Known about Chiasmus in 1829 When the Book of Mormon Was Translated?” *The FARMS Review* 15, no. 1 (2003): 47–80, available online at <http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/publications/review/?vol=15&num=1&id=465> (accessed November 10, 2010).

5. A Google search on “Chiasmus Mormon” yields over 80,000 websites; Donald W. Parry, *The Book of Mormon Text Reformatted according to Paralelistic Patterns* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1992), 278–81; Benjamin N. Judkins, “Recent Trends in Book of Mormon Apologetics: A Critical Assessment of Methodological Diversity and Academic Viability,” *The FARMS Review* 16, no. 1 (2004): 75–97, available online at <http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/publications/review/?vol=16&num=1&id=526> (accessed November 10, 2010).

6. Brent Lee Metcalfe, “Apologetic and Critical Assumptions about Book of Mormon Historicity,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 26, no. 3 (Fall 1993): 163–77; Blake Ostler, review of *Book of Mormon Authorship: New Light on Ancient Origins*, by Noel B. Reynolds, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 16, no. 4 (Winter 1983): 140–44; CAM and Kerry, “Chiasmus: Deception or Ancient Evidence?” *Zion's Lighthouse Message Board (ZLMB) Archives: One on One*, <http://pacumenispages.yuku.com/topic/1441/t/Chiasmus-Deception-or-Ancient-Evidence-CAM-KERRY.html> (accessed November 10, 2010); Sandra Tanner, “Chiasmus and the Book of Mormon,” *Utah Lighthouse Ministry*, <http://www.utlm.org/onlineresources/chiasmusandthebom.htm> (accessed November 10, 2010); Daniel A. Vogel, “The Use and Abuse of Chiasmus in Book of Mormon Studies,” SLO1374, presented at Sunstone Theological Symposium, Salt Lake City, 2001; Michael White, “Ancient Scriptures: Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon,” *Zarahemla City Limits*, http://zarahemlacitylimits.com/essays/BookOfMormon/No_Longer_Believe_15.html (accessed November 10, 2010).

7. H. Clay Gorton, *Language of the Lord: New Discoveries of Chiasma in the Doctrine and Covenants* (Bountiful, Utah: Horizon, 1993), 9–10; Charles Francis King, *Doctrine and Covenants Completely Structured (including Chiasmus)* (Provo, Utah: Private Printing, 2000), 1–6; Richard C. Shipp, “Conceptual

An inadvertent chiasm in *INFORMIX—Online Database Administrator's Guide* was applied to argue that chiasms in the Book of Mormon merely demonstrate the human ability to discover patterns where none were intended.⁸ A chiasm in *Green Eggs and Ham*, by Dr. Seuss, was used satirically as evidence that this book is the translation of an ancient record, the real intent, of course, being to disparage chiasmus in Book of Mormon debates.⁹ A chiasm in *Hickory Dickory Dock*, a nursery rhyme originally published in 1744 in *Tommy Thumb's Pretty Song Book*, was employed for the same purpose.¹⁰ A chiasm in *Mediation and Atonement*, by John Taylor, has been used to argue that chiasmus appears in enough places that its appearance in the Book of Mormon is not particularly noteworthy.¹¹ A chiasm in an online inquiry has been highlighted to show that chiasmus can appear naturally, unknown to the author.¹² A chiasm in the *Popol Vuh*, a Mayan text written in the 1550s, has been used to argue that knowledge of chiasmus was passed from Book of Mormon peoples to Mayan peoples.¹³ Chiasms in texts that James Strang purportedly translated from ancient

Patterns of Repetition in the Doctrine and Covenants and Their Implications” (master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 1975), 32–34, 158–59.

8. Curt Van Den Heuvel, <http://www.lds-mormon.com/chiasm.shtml> (accessed November 10, 2010).

9. Robert Patterson, “Hebraicisms, Chiasmus, and Other Internal Evidence for Ancient Authorship in ‘Green Eggs and Ham,’” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 33, no. 4 (Winter 2000): 163–68.

10. Tanner, “Chiasmus and the Book of Mormon”; MormonThink, “Book of Mormon Difficulties,” <http://www.mormonthink.com/book-of-mormon-problems.htm#responses> (accessed November 10, 2010). The appeal of such inversions in proverbs and nursery rhymes was already mentioned in Welch, “Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon,” 71.

11. See responses to Sharon Lindbloom, “The Book of Mormon: True or False?” *Mormon Coffee*, October 29, 2008, <http://blog.mrm.org/2008/10/the-book-of-mormon-true-or-false/> (accessed November 10, 2010).

12. MormonInformation.com, “Does Chiasmus Prove the Authenticity of the Book of Mormon?” <http://www.mormoninformation.com/chiasmus.htm> (accessed November 10, 2010).

13. Will Anderson, ed., *All Things Common: The Communal Way of Tribal Life That Jesus Taught* (Cabool, Mo.: Will Anderson, 2001–2004), 78, available online at <http://www.prophecykeepers.com/ebooks/3/prophecythreepeek.pdf> (accessed November 10, 2010); Allen J. Christenson, *Popol Vuh: Sacred Book of the Quiché Maya People* (n. p.: Mesoweb Publications, 2007), available online at <http://www.mesoweb.com/publications/Christenson/PopolVuh.pdf> (accessed November 10, 2010); Allen J. Christenson, “Chiasmus in Mayan Texts,” *Ensign* 18 (October 1988): 30–31; Allen J. Christenson, *The Use of Chiasmus by the Ancient Maya-K’iche’* (forthcoming); Allen J. Christenson, “Chiasmus in Mesoamerican Texts,” in Welch, *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 233–35, available online at

records after Joseph's martyrdom in 1844 are regarded by some as evidence of Strang's prophetic calling and by others as a reason to question the value of chiasmus as evidence of any kind.¹⁴ Kaimi Wenger said, "Maybe Strangites are seeing chiasm in Strang's works, while we see chiasm in Joseph Smith's, *precisely because apparent chiasms have no probative value at all.*"¹⁵

Outside Mormon circles, numerous scholarly books, articles, and dissertations, as well as popular essays and websites, show a considerable level of wide-ranging interests in all forms of chiasmus, whether symmetrical or inverted structures. Indeed, in the recent decade alone, a number of sophisticated and imaginative studies have appeared (see chiasmus studies sidebar on page 136).

Inasmuch as chiasms are found almost everywhere, which, if any, are admissible as evidence in debates?

Judges help to resolve disputes by deciding which evidence is admissible in court. Their decisions are based on strict rules designed to promote an impartial hearing. In a similar vein, we have developed a statistical admissibility test that can help to resolve chiasmus debates by determining, in a manner grounded in standard statistical analysis, which chiasms are admissible in these debates. The purpose of this paper is to introduce this test, to apply it to chiasms in various works, and to discuss implications for Book of Mormon origins.

Others have developed nonstatistical admissibility criteria. John Welch said, "The degree to which chiasmus serves as evidence of anything specific also depends directly upon the degree to which the passage satisfies objective criteria."¹⁶ He published a list of fifteen criteria to aid the analyst, especially

<http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/publications/books/?bookid=51&chapid=833> (accessed November 10, 2010).

14. <http://www.strangite.org/Chiasmus.htm>; Kaimi Wenger, "Further Musings of a Chiasm Doubter or 'Doubting Chiasm, Musing Further,'" *Times and Seasons*, April 12, 2005, <http://timesandseasons.org/index.php/2005/04/further-musings-from-a-chiasm-doubter-or-doubting-chiasm-musing-further/> (accessed November 10, 2010), with 170 responses; Michael De Groote, "How Missionary Found Book of Mormon Secret," *Mormon Times*, June 9, 2008, <http://www.mormontimes.com/article/12439/How-missionary-found-Book-of-Mormon-secret> (accessed November 10, 2010), with 179 responses at <http://www.deseretnews.com/user/comments/700233127/MormonTimescom-How-missionary-found-Book-of-Mormon-secret.html?pg=1>. See also Lindbloom, "Book of Mormon: True or False," with 307 responses.

15. Wenger, "Further Musings of a Chiasm Doubter," emphasis in original.

16. John W. Welch, "What Does Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon Prove?" in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1997), 203; posted on *Faith and*

Chiasmus Studies by Biblical Scholars in the Recent Decade

- Auffret, Pierre. "Voyez les œuvres de Dieu. Étude structurelle du Psaume 66." *Vetus Testamentum* 53 (2003): 431–44; "YHWH, qui sejournera en ta tente? Etude structurelle du Psaume 15." *Vetus Testamentum* 50 (2000): 143–51.
- Bauer, Uwe F. W. "Eine literarische Analyse von Psalm 114." *Vetus Testamentum* 51 (2001): 289–311.
- Brouwer, Wayne. *The Literary Development of John 13–17: A Chiastic Reading*. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000.
- Busch, Austin. "Questioning and Conviction: Double-voiced Discourse in Mark 3:22–30." *JBL* 125 (2006): 477–505.
- DeSilva, David A. "X Marks the Spot? A Critique of the Use of Chiasmus in Macro-Structural Analyses of Revelation." *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 30 (2008): 343–71.
- Douglas, Mary. *Thinking in Circles*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2007.
- Gelardini, Gabriella. "From 'Linguistic Turn' and Hebrews Scholarship to 'Anadiplosis Iterata': The Enigma of a Structure." *Harvard Theological Review* 102 (Jan. 2009): 51–73.
- Hess, Richard S. "Review: A Reassessment of the Priestly Cultic and Legal Texts." Review of *Leviticus 1–16, Leviticus 17–22, and Leviticus 23–27*, by Jacob Milgrom. *Journal of Law and Religion* 17 (2002): 375–91.
- Jackson, Bernard S. "Models in Legal History: The Case of Biblical Law." *Journal of Law and Religion* 18, no. 1 (2002–2003): 1–30.
- Jacobs, Jonathan. "The Role of the Secondary Characters in the Story of the Anointing of Saul (I Samuel ix–x)." *Vetus Testamentum* 58 (2008): 495–509.
- Lee, Dorothy. "In the Spirit of Truth: Worship and Prayer in the Gospel of John and the Early Fathers." *Vigiliae Christianae* 58 (2004): 277–97.
- Levinson, Bernard M. "The Birth of the Lemma: The Restrictive Reinterpretation of the Covenant Code's Manumission Law by the Holiness Code (Leviticus 25:44–46)." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 124 (2005): 617–39.
- Reymond, Eric D. "The Poetry of the Wisdom of Solomon Reconsidered." *Vetus Testamentum* 52 (2002): 385–99.
- VanderWeele, Tyler J. "Some Observations Concerning the Chiastic Structure of the Gospel of Matthew." *Journal of Theological Studies* 59 (2008): 669–73.
- Wenham, David. "The Sevenfold Form of the Lord's Prayer in Matthew's Gospel." *Expository Times* 121 (May 2010): 377–82.
- Yudkowsky, Rachel. "Chaos or Chiasm? The Structure of Abraham's Life." *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 35 (2007): 109–14.

in assessing the likelihood that a chiasm was created intentionally by an author.¹⁷ Several other scholars have proposed other sets of criteria for defining and describing the appearance of chiasmus, especially in biblical texts.

David Wright argues that some chiasms are “artifacts of modern analysis, not the product of ancient authorial or editorial intent,”¹⁸ and urges scholars to be more circumspect in the analysis of chiastic structures. He lists several fallacies of chiastic analysis that include errors in symmetry, subjectivity, probability, quality, scope, purpose, and meaning, but concludes that, when strict criteria are employed, chiastic structures can provide very “solid proofs of the intentional formation of chiasmus in antiquity.”¹⁹

We generally agree with Welch’s and Wright’s concerns. The admissibility of a chiasm as evidence in debates rests on evidence of its intentionality. If applied objectively and uniformly, Welch’s criteria or Wright’s fallacies could reduce the number of spurious chiastic proposals, but nevertheless allow room for considerable difference of opinion as to intentionality. Some consider Alma 36 to be a masterpiece of deliberate chiastic composition, while others who are familiar with Welch’s criteria dismiss it as a product of random repetition that happens to fall into chiastic order.²⁰

Welch also suggested an uncoached reader test: “A good test might be to give an unmarked text to ten different uncoached but knowledgeable

Teachings, September 8, 2009, <http://faithandteachings.com/?p=126> (accessed November 10, 2010); see also John W. Welch, “The Power of Evidence in the Nurturing of Faith,” in *Nurturing Faith through the Book of Mormon: The 24th Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1995), 149–86, and in Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch, eds., *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2002), 17–53, <http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/publications/bookschapter.php?bookid=8&chapid=60> (accessed November 10, 2010).

17. John W. Welch, “Criteria for Identifying the Presence of Chiasmus” (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1989), expanded and updated as “Criteria for Identifying and Evaluating the Presence of Chiasmus,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 4, no. 2 (1995): 1–14; Welch and McKinlay, *Chiasmus Bibliography*.

18. David P. Wright, “The Fallacies of Chiasmus: A Critique of Structures Proposed for the Covenant Collection (Exodus 20:23–23:19),” *Zeitschrift für altorientalische und biblische Rechtsgeschichte* 10 (2004): 143.

19. David P. Wright, *Inventing God’s Law: How the Covenant Code of the Bible Used and Revised the Laws of Hammurabi* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 378.

20. Welch, “Masterpiece: Alma 36”; Earl Wunderli, “Critique of Alma 36 as an Extended Chiasm,” *Dialogue* 38 (Winter 2005): 97–112; Earl Wunderli, “Earl Wunderli Responds,” E-paper no. 2, *Dialogue Paperless* (April 30, 2006), available online at <http://www.dialoguejournal.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/WunderliRespondsPaperless.pdf> (accessed November 10, 2010).

people to see whether most of them discover the same structure as the one that has been proposed. The more divergence that results, the less objective the suggested pattern would be.”²¹ A simple two-element chiasm might pass Welch’s reader test, but two-element chiasms do not supply strong statistical evidence of intentionality because they can easily emerge unintentionally during composition.

Statistical analysis can supply evidence of intentionality. Earlier, we developed tools to calculate the likelihood P that a particular chiasm could have appeared in a work through random arrangements of literary elements.²² If this likelihood is sufficiently small, then the chiasm is likely to be intentional. But when is *small* small enough to be statistically significant?

In this paper, we discuss a cutoff value of P considered by statisticians as strong evidence of intentionality and adopt this value as the basis of an admissibility test for chiasms, a litmus test that labels each chiasm as either admissible as evidence in debates or not. We then apply this admissibility test to the strongest known chiasms in various works and discuss implications for debates over Book of Mormon origins. Appendix A introduces an admissibility test that relies on tables of values. Appendix B gives details of calculations for the eleven chiasms below. Appendix C evaluates the admissibility of additional chiasms found in the Doctrine and Covenants. These three statistically technical appendices are available at byustudies.byu.edu.

Admissibility Test

To calculate the likelihood P that a chiasm could have appeared in a work by chance, we employ procedures that we developed previously.²³ These procedures include six rules for identifying and accounting for chiasmic elements and ensure valid, consistent comparisons between chiasms by (a) insisting that element pairs share the same significant word or words, (b) accounting for all appearances of all repeated elements, including elements that do not fit the chiasmic form, and (c) accounting for the length of the parent work from which the chiasm is taken. The validity of the

21. Welch, “What Does Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon Prove?” 217.

22. B. F. Edwards and W. F. Edwards, “Does Chiasmus Appear in the Book of Mormon by Chance?” *BYU Studies* 43, no. 2 (2004): 103–30; B. F. Edwards and W. F. Edwards, “Does Joseph’s Letter to Emma of 4 November 1838 Show That He Knew about Chiasmus?” E-paper no. 4, *Dialogue Paperless* (2006), <http://www.dialoguejournal.com>. B. F. Edwards and W. F. Edwards, “Response to Earl Wunderli’s Critique of Alma 36 as an Extended Chiasm,” *Dialogue* 39, no. 3 (2006): 164, available online at https://dialoguejournal.com/wp-content/uploads/sbi/articles/Dialogue_V39No3_178.pdf (accessed November 10, 2010).

23. Edwards and Edwards, “Does Chiasmus Appear,” 111–14.

analysis hinges on the care taken in this process. These six rules circumvent major pitfalls in chiasmic analysis and promote statistical legitimacy in the sometimes permissive world of chiasmic analysis. Because of the inevitable ambiguities of language, these rules sometimes permit more than one chiasmic rendering of a passage. In such cases, it is permissible to choose the rendering with the smallest P value.

Let n represent the number of repeated elements that fit the chiasmic form, R the number of appearances of repeated elements that do not fit the chiasmic form, and L the likelihood that such chiasmic structure could have emerged by chance in random arrangements of elements in the chiasmic passage itself. As one might expect, chiasms with few chiasmic elements and/or considerable extra repetition have large L , and chiasms with many elements and little extra repetition have small L .

The overall likelihood P that a chiasm could emerge by chance depends upon the length of the parent work from which the chiasm was taken. The longer a monkey uses a typewriter, the greater the likelihood that a sonnet will emerge. Similarly, the longer the parent work in which a chiasm is found, the greater the number of words that could potentially form chiasms and the greater the likelihood that a chiasm could have appeared by chance somewhere in the work. Accordingly, we use the likelihood P that a chiasm could have emerged in random arrangements of *all* literary elements in the parent work. For example, the entire Book of Mormon serves as the larger work in the case of Alma 36. The longer the parent work, the greater the number N of opportunities for chiasmus to emerge by chance and the larger the value of P . The number of opportunities N can be estimated as the ratio of the length of the work to the length of the chiasm, as illustrated below in Examples 1, 3, 6, 7, and 11. The number N of opportunities can also be estimated by reading through the work and counting the number of opportunities, as illustrated below in Example 9.

In summary, five quantities are important in characterizing the chiasmic likelihood:

- n Number of repeated elements in the chiasm that fit the chiasmic form
- R Number of appearances of repeated elements that do not fit the chiasmic form
- L Likelihood that the chiasm could have appeared by chance in a particular passage
- N Number of opportunities for the chiasm to appear by chance in the parent work
- P Likelihood that the chiasm could have appeared by chance in

the parent work

Using elementary statistical analysis, we derived a mathematical equation for L that pertains to “simple” chiasms with no extra repetition ($R = 0$).²⁴

Equation 1. Individual Likelihood of Appearing by Chance for Simple Chiasms

$$\begin{aligned} L &= 1/(1) = 1 && \text{for } n = 1, \\ L &= 1/(1 \cdot 3) = 1/3 && \text{for } n = 2, \\ L &= 1/(1 \cdot 3 \cdot 5) = 1/15 && \text{for } n = 3, \\ L &= 1/(1 \cdot 3 \cdot 5 \cdot 7) = 1/105 && \text{for } n = 4, \\ L &= 1/(1 \cdot 3 \cdot 5 \cdot 7 \dots (2n-1)) && \text{for general } n \end{aligned}$$

Here, the numerator is always 1 and the denominator is the product of the first n odd integers starting with 1. Clearly, L decreases rapidly as n increases.

We developed a computer program called CHIASMUS to calculate L for “complex” chiasms with extra repetition ($R > 0$), for which Equation 1 does not apply. This program, which is available for free download, randomly arranges literary elements as if drawn from a hat and counts the fraction of arrangements that are chiastic.²⁵ When applied to simple chiasms, CHIASMUS gives L values that agree with exact values from Equation 1. CHIASMUS also agrees with exact values of L that can be calculated in special cases for complex chiasms. This agreement validates both Equation 1 and CHIASMUS, and confirms the reliability of both methods for calculating likelihoods.

We also used elementary statistical analysis to derive an equation to calculate P for the chiasm with the smallest value of L in a parent work, assuming there are no other chiasms in the work with comparable values of L .²⁶

Equation 2. Overall Likelihood of Appearing by Chance

$$P = 1 - (1 - L)^N$$

Values of P range between zero and one. The smaller the P -value of a chiasm, the stronger the evidence of its intentionality.

24. Edwards and Edwards, “Does Chiasmus Appear,” 115.

25. Edwards and Edwards, “Does Chiasmus Appear,” 115, 116; The computer program CHIASMUS that calculates likelihoods is available for free download at <http://byustudies.byu.edu/chiasmus/> (accessed November 10, 2010).

26. Edwards and Edwards, “Does Chiasmus Appear,” 114, and appendix A of this paper available at byustudies.byu.edu.

When is the evidence strong enough to justify admission of a chiasm as evidence in debates? The standard answer in statistical analysis is to compare the P -value with a fixed cutoff, called the level of significance. For example, Ditlev Monrad and others state: “If the P -value is less than the level of significance, then the decision is to reject the null hypothesis; otherwise, the decision is not to reject the null hypothesis. The standard choice for the level of significance that is considered strong evidence is 0.05.”²⁷

The expression “null hypothesis” means, in our case, the hypothesis that a chiasm appeared by chance. We adopt the standard choice for level of significance and therefore consider chiasms with $P < 0.05$ to have strong evidence of intentionality and to be admissible as evidence in debates. Like a limbo dancer, a chiasm that passes *under* the bar passes the test.

Some chiasms with $P > 0.05$ have literary value and might well have appeared by design. However, such chiasms lack strong statistical evidence that they did appear by design and have little defense against claims to the contrary. These chiasms are deemed statistically inadmissible as evidence in debates. Such chiasms may have merits that compensate for the lack of strong statistical evidence of intentionality, merits that suggest intentionality and that justify further study. For example, Matthew 10:39 is a simple two-element chiasm that fails our admissibility test but whose contrasting elements suggest intentionality: “He that **findeth his life** shall **lose it**: and he that **loseth his life** for my sake shall **find it**.” Such compensating merit can be subjective, though—and the literature certainly contains many subjective disagreements about the merits of various chiasms. Chiasms whose intentionality cannot be established objectively, either statistically or otherwise, serve little use because they tend to polarize debates rather than resolve them.

Chiasms with $P < 0.05$ (5 percent) have likelihoods smaller than 1 in 20 of appearing by chance and are therefore considered to have strong evidence of intentionality. Although unlikely, it is possible that a chiasm with $P < 0.05$ could appear by chance and could therefore yield a false positive result for the admissibility test. One might lower the level of significance to 0.01, say, to reduce the likelihood of such a false positive. But one can never fully eliminate this possibility, and lowering the level of significance increases the risk of rejecting chiasms that have strong evidence of intentionality. The standard choice for the level of significance, 0.05, is a time-honored

27. Ditlev Monrad and others, *Statistics: The Craft of Data Collection, Description, and Inference*, 3d ed. (Champaign, Ill.: Mobius Communications, 2002), sec. 9.2, p. 404.

compromise, and represents the cutoff value below which results are deemed statistically significant.²⁸

Chiasms with values of P that are much smaller than 0.05 present much stronger evidence of intentionality than those with P values that are just barely smaller than 0.05. Of the fourteen chiasms that are considered below, two pass the admissibility test with P values that are smaller than 0.01, giving very strong evidence of intentionality, and eleven fail the test with P values that are larger than 0.10, giving little or no evidence of intentionality.²⁹

Applications to Chiasms in Various Works

Results of admissibility tests for chiasms in various works are shown in Table 1 and Figure 1. The chiasms on lines 1, 2, and 3 of the table pass the test and those on lines 4–14 fail it. Each line represents the strongest chiasm (or chiasms, for line 3) of which we are aware in a parent work.

Analyses of lines 1–7 in Table 1 were published previously, together with the generalization of Equation 2 for Line 3 of the table.³⁰ Lines 1 and 2 give very strong evidence of intentionality for Alma 36 and Leviticus 24. Line 3 gives strong evidence of intentionality of the four strongest chiasms in the Book of Mormon, Mosiah 3:18–20, Mosiah 5:10–12, Alma 36:1–30, and Helaman 9:6–11, each of which qualifies, at minimum, as a simple five-element chiasm. As a group, these four pass the admissibility test, while the strongest chiasm in the Doctrine and Covenants (line 4), also a simple five-element chiasm, fails it. The reason is that the likelihood of a simple five-element structure appearing *four times* in the Book of Mormon is much smaller than the likelihood that such a structure could appear *once* in the Doctrine and Covenants. Lines 6 and 7 are inadmissible chiasms found in the introduction of a computer manual and in a letter of November 4, 1838 from Joseph Smith Jr. to his wife Emma.³¹ Lines 8–14 in Table 1 are analyzed below.

28. Stephen Stigler, “Fisher and the 5% Level,” *Chance* 21, no. 4 (2008): 12, available online at <http://www.springerlink.com/content/p546581236kw3g67/full-text.pdf> (accessed November 10, 2010).

29. Watter J. Burdette and Edmund A. Gehan, “Planning and Analysis of Clinical Studies” (Springfield, Ill.: Charles C. Thomas Publishing, 1970), 9.

30. Lines 1–6 of table 1 are analyzed in Edwards and Edwards, “Does Chiasmus Appear,” 117–23. Line 7 is analyzed in Edwards and Edwards, “Does Joseph’s Letter.”

31. Van Den Heuvel, <http://www.lds-mormon.com/chiasm.shtml>; Jared R. Demke and Scott L. Vanatter, “Letter to Emma: I Do Not Know Where It Will End,” *Davidic Chiasmus and Parallelisms*, <http://davidicchiasmus.com/> (accessed Nov. 11, 2010), forthcoming; Dean C. Jessee, ed. *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002), 399–401.

Table 1. Tabulated Overall Likelihoods *P* that Chiasms Could Have Appeared by Chance

Work	Chiasm	n	R	N	L	P
1. Book of Mormon	Alma 36:1-30	8	0	359	0.00000049	0.00018
2. Pentateuch	Lev. 24:13-23	7	0	342	0.0000074	0.025
3. Book of Mormon	Four Strongest	5	0	956	0.0011	0.020
<i>significance level</i>						0.05
4. Doctrine and Covenants	88:34-39	5	0	686	0.0011	0.52
5. Book of Abraham	Abr. 3:26-28	3	0	54	0.067	0.98
6. <i>INFORMIX Guide</i>	Introduction	9	39	1	0.66	0.66
7. Joseph's 1838 Letter	entire letter	7	36	1	0.68	0.68
8. <i>Green Eggs and Ham</i>	example 1	3	0	16	0.067	0.67
9. <i>Mediation and Atonement</i>	example 3	5	6	286	0.044	1.00
10. Online Inquiry	example 5	3	4	1	0.19	0.19
11. <i>Pretty Song Book</i>	example 6	3	0	40	0.067	0.94
12. <i>Popol Vuh</i>	example 7	5	3	436	0.015	1.00
13. Voree text (Strangite)	example 9	3	0	2	0.067	0.13
14. Laban text (Strangite)	example 11	5	5	124	0.030	0.98

Figure 1. Graph of Overall Likelihoods *P* That Chiasms Could Have Appeared by Chance



Line 8. *Green Eggs and Ham*. Robert Patterson contends against chiasmus as evidence of ancient origins in a satirical argument that chiasmus supplies evidence of the ancient origins of *Green Eggs and Ham*, by Dr. Seuss. Example 1 shows the chiasm with the largest L value that Patterson identifies in the work.³²

Example 1. Chiasm in *Green Eggs and Ham*

- (A) I do not like them, Sam-I-am.
- (B) I do not like green eggs and ham.
- (C) Would you like them here or there?
- (C') I would not like them here or there.
- I would not like them anywhere.
- (B') I do not like green eggs and ham.
- (A') I do not like them, Sam-I-am.³³

This is a simple three-element chiasm with $n = 3$ and $R = 0$. Accordingly, $L = 1/15 = 0.067$ from Equation 1. Dividing the total number of words in the book *Green Eggs and Ham* by the number of words in the chiasm gives $N = 783/49 = 16$ as the number of chiastic opportunities in the book. Accordingly, Equation 2 gives $P = 0.67$, indicating a 67 percent chance that similar chiastic structure could appear in a random ordering of ideas in *Green Eggs and Ham*.

Line 9. *Mediation and Atonement*. A chiasm in *Mediation and Atonement: An Examination into and an Elucidation of the Great Principle of the Mediation and Atonement of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*, by John Taylor, has been used to argue that chiasmus appears in enough places that its appearance in the Book of Mormon is not particularly special:

Example 2. Chiasm in *Mediation and Atonement*

- (A) And as He IN HIS OWN PERSON
- (B) BORE THE SINS OF ALL,
- (C) and ATONED for them
- (D) by the SACRIFICE of Himself,
- (E) so there came upon Him the weight and AGONY
- (F) of AGES
- (F') and GENERATIONS,
- (E') the indescribable AGONY consequent upon this great

32. Patterson, "Hebraicisms," 166.

33. Dr. Seuss, *Green Eggs and Ham* (New York: Random House, 1960), 12–16.

(D') SACRIFICIAL
 (C') ATONEMENT wherein He
 (B') BORE THE SINS OF THE WORLD, and
 (A') suffered IN HIS OWN PERSON the consequences of an eternal law
 of God broken by man.³⁴

This rendering displays only those repeated elements that fit the chiasmic form, ignores all other repeated elements, and includes a pairing (F, F') that is invalid because "ages" and "generations" are not forms of the same word.³⁵ Omitting this invalid pairing and accounting for all repeated elements leaves a five-element chiasm:

Example 3. Chiasm in *Mediation and Atonement*, Alternate Rendering

(A) And as *He in his own person*
 (B) **bore the sins** of all,
 (C) and **atoned** for them
 (D) by the **sacrifice** of *Himself*,
 (E) so there came upon *Him* the weight and **agony** of
 ages and generations,
 (E') the indescribable **agony** *consequent* upon this great
 (D') **sacrificial**
 (C') **atonement** wherein *He*
 (B') **bore the sins** of the world, and
 (A') suffered **in his own person** the *consequences* of an eternal law
 of God broken by man.

Appearances of the five chiasmic elements ($n = 5$) are shown in bold face, while two other repeated elements that do not fit the chiasmic form are shown in italics. One of these, *he/himself/him*, appears four times, and the other, *consequent/consequences*, appears twice, giving $R = 6$ appearances of repeated elements that do not fit the chiasmic form. *Mediation and Atonement* contains many direct scriptural quotes that were not penned by John Taylor. We estimate the number $N = 19460/68 = 286$ to be the ratio of the estimated number of words that he penned to the number of words

34. Lindbloom, "Book of Mormon: True or False"; John Taylor, *Mediation and Atonement: An Examination into and an Elucidation of the Great Principle of the Mediation and Atonement of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Publishing Company, 1892), 149–50.

35. Edwards and Edwards, "Does Chiasmus Appear," 111–14.

in the chiasm.³⁶ Entering these data into CHIASMUS yields $L = 0.044$ and $P = 1.00$ (Appendix B).

Line 10. Online Inquiry. On March 13, 2005, a person going by “auteur55” inquired in an online discussion board about the critical response to chiasmus in the Book of Mormon. A chiastic rendering of this inquiry was posted the next day as evidence that chiasmus can appear naturally, unknown to the author:

Example 4. Online Inquiry

- (A) **Hello** friends,
- (B) **I am** sure **this**
- (C) topic has **been debated**
- (D) before but **I am** really **curious**
- (E) as to how antis **have explained**
the discovery of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon.
- (E') I don't see how they **could rationally explain** it away
- (D') and **I was wondering** what excuses they give.
- (C') This may have all **been debated**
- (B') but **I am** new to **this** board and don't see how this doesn't authenticate
the Book of Mormon very strongly.
- (A') **Cheers.**³⁷

Modifications that are needed to ensure reliable statistical results include omitting pairing A, A', modifying other pairings, and accounting for all repeated elements:

Example 5. Online Inquiry, Alternate Rendering

- (A) Hello friends, **I am** sure
- (B) **this** topic **has been debated**
- (C) before but **I am** really curious
- (D) as to how antis have **explained**
the discovery of chiasmus in the *Book of Mormon*.
- (D') I *don't see how* they could rationally **explain** it away

36. In determining N , we made use of an electronic copy of *Mediation and Atonement* at <http://www.fldstruth.org/systemenu.php?MParent=ARTICLES&MIndex=60> (accessed November 10, 2010).

37. MormonInformation.com, “Does Chiasmus Prove the Authenticity”; SalamanderSociety.com, “Chiasmus, Limericks and Haiku—Proofs and Spoofs of Holy Scripture,” <http://www.salamandersociety.com/limericks/> (accessed November 10, 2010).

- (C') and **I was** wondering what excuses they give.
 (B') **This** may **have all been debated**
 (A') but **I am** new to this board and *don't see how* this doesn't authenticate the
Book of Mormon very strongly. Cheers.

This three-element, four-level rendering includes one duplicate level (levels A and C both involve the element *I am/was*, which appears four times), two appearances of *Book of Mormon* that do not fit the chiastic form, and two appearances of *don't see how* that do not fit the chiastic form. Using CHIASMUS to account for these various appearances, including the duplicate level, we obtain $L = 0.19$ (Appendix B). Since this chiasm apparently constitutes the entire text of the inquiry, $N = 1$ and $P = 0.19$ from Equation 2.

Line 11. *Tommy Thumb's Pretty Song Book*. Chiasms in nursery rhymes have been used as evidence that chiasmus appears in documents without ancient Semitic origins and as evidence that chiasmus in the Book of Mormon fails to prove its ancient origin.³⁸ The best example is *Hickory Dickory Dock*, a simple three-element chiasm with $L = 1/15 = 0.067$ from Equation 1:

Example 6. *Hickory Dickory Dock* Chiasm

- (A) **Hickory, dickory, dock,**
 (B) **The mouse ran**
 (C) up **the clock.**
 (C') **The clock** struck one,
 (B') **The mouse ran** down,
 (A') **Hickory, dickory, dock.**

This nursery rhyme was originally published in 1744 in *Tommy Thumb's Pretty Song Book*, which contains forty nursery rhymes.³⁹ Treating each of these rhymes as one chiastic opportunity gives $N = 40$, and $P = 0.94$ follows from Equation 2.

Line 12. *Popol Vuh*. Chiasmus in Mayan texts written in the sixteenth century have been used to argue that knowledge of chiasmus was

38. Tanner, "Chiasmus and the Book of Mormon"; MormonThink, "Book of Mormon Difficulties."

39. Wikipedia, "Tommy Thumb's Pretty Song Book," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tommy_Thumb%27s_Pretty_Song_Book (accessed November 10, 2010).

passed from Book of Mormon peoples to Mayan peoples.⁴⁰ A literal translation of the strongest example in the *Popol Vuh* follows:

Example 7. *Popol Vuh* Chiasm

- (A) Thus rejoiced the Quetzal Serpent: “Good you arrived,
 you its **Heart Sky**: you Huracan, you as well youngest thunderbolt,
 sudden thunderbolt. It shall be successful our framing, our shaping,”
 they said therefore. First therefore
- (B) **was created**
- (C) **earth**,
- (D) **Mountains**, valleys,
- (E) **Divided** were its paths **water**,
 made their way were their branches among *mountains*.
- (E') Merely **divided** then existed **water**,
- (D') Then were revealed great **mountains**.
- (C') Thus its *creation* **earth** this,
- (B') then it **was created** by them
- (A') The its **Heart Sky**, its Heart *Earth*, they are called.⁴¹

This chiasm has five chiastic elements, with *mountains*, *created/creation*, and *earth* mentioned once each outside of the chiastic structure. There are no nonchiastic elements. The chiasm occupies 20 lines of the 8,716-line literal translation, giving $N = 8716/20 = 436$. Accordingly, CHIASMUS yields $L = 0.015$ and $P = 1.00$ (Appendix B).⁴²

Line 11. Voree Plates. James J. Strang claimed he was the designated successor to Joseph Smith. He formed the “Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints” and took his flock, including several former prominent followers of Joseph Smith, to Voree, Wisconsin, and later to Beaver Island in Lake Michigan.⁴³ In 1845, Strang published a text that he claimed to be

40. Anderson, *All Things Common*, 78.

41. Allen J. Christenson, *Popol Vuh: Literal Translation*, lines 245–64, available at <http://www.mesoweb.com/publications/Christenson/PV-Literal.pdf> (accessed November 10, 2010); Christenson, “Chiasmus in Mesoamerican Texts”; A literal translation is valuable for chiastic analysis because it preserves the word orders of the original K’iche’ language.

42. In Christenson, *Popol Vuh, Literal*, 39, a 178-line version of this chiasm is given that has five valid chiastic elements, two invalid chiastic elements, nine nonchiastic elements, and $R = 47$, $N = 49$, $L = P = 1$.

43. Wikipedia, “James Strang,” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Strang (accessed November 10, 2010); “City of Voree” and “Opinions of the Smith Family,” *Voree Herald*, June 1846, [1]; Dale R. Broadhurst, “Newspapers of James J. Strang,

his inspired translation of the Voree Plates, a record of an ancient American ruler.⁴⁴ Strangite adherents have recently identified a four-element chiasm in the Voree text as evidence of Strang's prophetic calling:

Example 8. Chiasm in the Strangite Voree Text

- (A) My people ARE NO MORE.
- (B) THE MIGHTY ARE FALLEN, and the young slain in battle.
- (C) Their BONES bleached on the plain by the noonday SHADOW.
- (D) The houses are leveled to the dust, and IN THE MOAT
are the walls. They shall be inhabited.
- (D') I have IN THE BURIAL served them,
- (C') and their BONES in the Death-SHADE,
towards the sun's rising, are covered.
- (B') They sleep with THE MIGHTY dead, and they rest with their fathers.
They have FALLEN in transgression
- (A') AND ARE NOT, but the elect and faithful there shall dwell.⁴⁵

The pairing (D, D') is invalid for statistical analysis because "moat" and "burial" are not forms of the same word, and because insignificant words such as "in" and "the" do not qualify, in themselves, as chiastic elements. We therefore omit this pairing, leaving a simple chiasm with three elements ($n=3$), no extra repetition ($R=0$), and $L=1/15=0.067$ from Equation 1.

In order to evaluate the likelihood that this structure appeared by chance in the Voree text, we divide this text into three sections, each section having three chiastic elements:

Example 9. Complete Strangite Voree Text, Divided into Three Sections

1. My people **are no** (A) more. The **mighty are fallen** (B) and the young slain in battle. Their **bones** bleached on the plain by the noonday **shadow** (C). The houses are leveled to the dust, and in the moat are the walls. They shall be inhabited. I have in the burial served them, and their **bones** in the Death-**shade**, (C') towards the sun's rising, are covered. They sleep with the **mighty** dead, and they rest with their fathers. They

1846–1847 Articles," *Uncle Dale's Readings in Early Mormon History (Newspapers of Iowa, Wisconsin & Minnesota)*, <http://sidneyrigdon.com/dbroadhu/IA/JStrang1.htm> (accessed November 10, 2010).

44. Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, "Voree Plates," <http://www.strangite.org/Plates.htm> (accessed November 10, 2010).

45. Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, "Chiasmus on the Brass Plates," <http://www.strangite.org/Chiasmus.htm> (accessed November 10, 2010).

have **fallen** (B') in transgression and **are not**, (A') but the elect and faithful there shall dwell.

2. The **word** hath revealed it. **God** (E) hath sworn to give an inheritance to his people where transgressors perished. The **word of God** (E') came to me while I mourned in the Death-shade, saying, I will avenge me on the destroyer. He shall be driven out. Other strangers shall inhabit thy land. I an ensign there will set up. The escaped of my people **there shall dwell** (D) when the flock disown the Shepherd and build not on the Rock. The forerunner men shall kill, but a mighty prophet **there shall dwell** (D'). I will be his strength, and he shall bring forth thy **record** (F). **Record** (F') my words, and bury it in the Hill of Promise.

3. It shall come to pass **in the latter days** (H), that **my people shall hear** (I) my voice, and the truth shall speak from the earth, and **my people shall hear** (I'), and shall come and build the Temple of the Lord. My prophet, unto whom I send **my word** (J) shall lead them, and guide them in the ways of peace and salvation. In Voree the name of the Mighty One shall be heard, and the nations shall obey my law, and hear the **words of my** (J') servant, whom I shall raise up unto them **in the latter days** (H').

The first section involves the three elements A, B, and C in chiastic order, ABCC'B'A'. The second involves three new elements D, E, and F in nonchiastic order, EE'DD'FF'. The third involves elements H, I, and J in nonchiastic order, HII'JJ'H'. The third section was not included in Strang's published text, which he said was only part of the record, and was published in 1873 by H. V. Reed as a possible addition to the record.⁴⁶ The first section has three-element chiastic structure while the last two sections do not. Counting all three opportunities for chiastic structure gives $N = 3$ and $P = 0.19$ by Equation 2. Omitting the third section gives $N = 2$ and a smaller likelihood $P = 0.13$. For either $N = 3$ or $N = 2$, the chiasm fails the admissibility test.

Line 12. Brass Plates of Laban. In 1851, James Strang published the *Book of the Law of the Lord*, claiming it to contain both his translation of the brass plates of Laban, which we call the Laban text, and his own modern-day revelations.⁴⁷ Strangite adherents have recently proposed two chiasms from the Laban text, one with two elements and the other with six:

46. Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, "Voree Plates."

47. Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, "Book of the Law of the Lord," <http://www.strangite.org/Law.htm> (accessed November 10, 2010); 1 Nephi 3–5.

Example 10. Chiasm in the Strangite Laban Text

- (A) Thou shalt not TAKE the NAME of the Lord thy God in VAIN:
 (B) thou shalt not USURP dominion
 (C) as a RULER; for the NAME of the Lord thy God
 (D) is great and glorious ABOVE ALL OTHER NAMES:
 (E) he is ABOVE ALL,
 (F) and is the ONLY TRUE God;
 (F') the ONLY JUST and upright King
 (E') OVER ALL:
 (D') he ALONE hath the RIGHT
 (C') to RULE; and in his NAME, only he to whom he granteth it:
 (B') whosoever is not chosen of him, the same is a USURPER, and unholy:
 (A') the Lord will not hold him guiltless, for he TAKETH his NAME in VAIN.⁴⁸

This rendering displays only those repeated elements that fit the chiasmic form, ignores all other repeated elements, and includes an invalid element pairing (D, D'). Any of these deficiencies would invalidate statistical analysis. We omit the invalid pairing and include all appearances of all repeated elements in a five-element rendering:

Example 11. Chiasm in the Strangite Laban Text, Alternate Rendering

- (A) *Thou shalt not* **take the name of the Lord thy God in vain**:
 (B) *thou shalt not* **usurp** dominion
 (C) as a **ruler**; for the **name** of the Lord thy *God*
 (D) is great and glorious above **all** other names: he is above **all**,
 (E) and is the **only** true *God*;
 (E') the **only** just and upright King
 (D') over **all**:
 (C') he alone hath the right to **rule**; and in his **name**,
only he to whom he granteth it:
 (B') whosoever is not chosen of him, the same is a **usurper**, and unholy:
 (A') the **Lord** will not hold him guiltless, for he **taketh his name in vain**.

This rendering has five chiasmic elements ($n = 5$), each of which appears twice (bold face) to constitute the basic chiasmic form. One of these elements (E, *only*) makes one extra appearance (italicized). Two other nonchiasmic elements (*thou shalt not* and *God*, in italics) appear twice each but do not fit the chiasmic form. The total number of extra repeats is $R = 5$ (one for the

48. Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, "Chiasmus on the Brass Plates."

extra appearance of *only*, two for the two appearances of *thou shalt not*, and two for the two appearances of *God*). For this rendering, CHIASMUS yields $L = 0.030$ (Appendix B).

The 1851 edition of the *Book of the Law of the Lord* contains 16,895 words, including 12,264 words in the Laban text.⁴⁹ We estimate the number of opportunities for such five-element chiastic structure to be the ratio of this number to the number of words in the chiasm, $N = 12264/99 = 124$. Only one such opportunity is known to have structure with L comparable to, or smaller than, 0.030. Equation 2 accordingly yields $P = 0.98$. Compared with the Voree text, the extra repetition in and the extra length of the Laban text indicate a larger P value, despite the larger number of elements.

Conclusions

Because inadvertent chiasms can be found in almost any text, we consider a chiasm to have no probative value unless it is accompanied by strong evidence of intentionality. In this paper, we propose a quantitative test that can supply such evidence. This test compares the likelihood P that a chiasm could have appeared by chance with the standard level of significance $P = 0.05$ (5 percent) that is considered strong evidence in statistical analysis; chiasms with $P < 0.05$ pass the test. We consider only those chiasms that pass this objective test to be admissible as evidence in debates over Book of Mormon origins.

Reliable calculations of P require: (a) unquestionably strong associations between element pairs, (b) inclusion of all appearances of all repeated elements, and (c) consideration of the length of the work from which the chiasm is taken. Careful application of our procedures, which include six rules for selecting chiastic elements, produces reliable results.⁵⁰ Ignoring these procedures can yield misleadingly small P -values and erroneous conclusions.

Herein, we report the results of admissibility tests on the strongest examples of chiasmus of which we are aware in various works. Chiasms in Leviticus 24 and Alma 36 have seven and eight elements, respectively, with the two appearances of each element sharing the same essential words and expressing the same complete ideas. These chiasms have no extra repetition

49. Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, "Book of the Law of the Lord." The 1851 edition of the *Book of the Law of the Lord* contains 42 chapters that are purported to be the translation of the brass plates of Laban and 5 chapters listed as modern revelations. An 1856 edition contains 10 new chapters and a series of explanatory notes.

50. Edwards and Edwards, "Does Chiasmus Appear," 111–14.

of these or other ideas and have very small likelihoods of appearing by chance ($P = 0.0025$ and 0.00018 , respectively). These values give very strong evidence that the authors of these chiasms knew about the chiastic form and applied it deliberately in composing them.

This evidence narrows the Book of Mormon chiasmus debate to a single question: How did *deliberate* chiasmus come to appear in the Book of Mormon?

To explain chiasmus in the Book of Mormon, some argue that Joseph Smith knew about chiasmus and applied it deliberately in writing, rather than translating, the Book of Mormon.⁵¹ These people cite chiasms in the Doctrine and Covenants, the Book of Abraham, and Joseph Smith's correspondence as evidence of this view, but these chiasms are inadmissible because their P values are too large.⁵² These chiasms supply no statistical evidence either that Joseph knew about chiasmus or that God revealed chiasmus to Joseph without his knowledge.

Also inadmissible are chiasms in *INFORMIX Guide*, *Green Eggs and Ham*, *Mediation and Atonement*, the online inquiry, *Hickory Dickory Dock*, the *Popol Vuh*, and Strangite texts. Compared with chiasms in Leviticus 24 and Alma 36, such inadmissible chiasms have fewer chiastic elements or considerable extra repetition, or both. The number and variety of these inadmissible chiasms illustrates the prevalence of chiasmus of dubious intentionality. The *Popol Vuh* chiasm supplies no evidence that Book of Mormon peoples passed knowledge of chiasmus to Mayans. Our admissibility test cuts both ways, disqualifying this argument for the ancient origin of the Book of Mormon along with disqualifying the many arguments against it. Strangite chiasms supply no evidence of Strang's prophetic calling and are invalid as a reason to question the probative value of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon.

Chiastic evidence that is supported and interpreted appropriately holds an important place in debates about Book of Mormon origins. Our admissibility tests establish the intentionality of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon and refute the claim that Joseph's modern writings demonstrate his awareness of chiasmus. If Joseph Smith was indeed unaware of chiasmus, then its presence in the Book of Mormon stands as evidence of its authenticity.

While it is true that there is no single meritorious approach to the study of intentionality of chiasms, the main challenge of any approach to the study of intentionality is devising a list of criteria used to identify acceptable

51. Metcalfe, 163–77; Ostler, 140–44; CAM and Kerry, “Chiasmus: Deception or Ancient Evidence?”; Tanner, “Chiasmus and the Book of Mormon.”

52. See Appendix C at byustudies.byu.edu.

elements. Our statistical approach is quantitative, restrictive, and is based on well-established statistical methodology and strict element-selection criteria. Such strict criteria give confidence of intentionality for chiasms passing the test, even though these criteria likely exclude other intentional chiasms. More flexible criteria, such as permitting synonymous element pairs, would lead to a higher proportion of admissible chiasms, would increase the risk of admitting chiasms that were not intentional, and would introduce subjectivity into the analysis—one person's synonymous pair is another's unrelated pair. Our criteria are consistent with our statistical approach, which is capable of a higher level of quantitative rigor than other approaches. Thus, for a chiasm that passes our statistical test, the debate about its intentionality could be considered over—for it passes what might be considered the most restrictive and the least subjective test.

Failing our statistical admissibility test does not mean that a chiasm was not intentional. For such chiasms, other compensating merits and other analytical approaches, such as Welch's fifteen criteria, can be considered in reaching a judgment about intentionality. But these approaches are less restrictive and more subjective. They might be used to build a case for intentionality of a chiasm that fails our test, but such a chiasm has less probative value in resolving debates than one that passes our test, simply because it fails the strictest test of intentionality.

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Aftergrove

Had you known, would you've stayed there,

Light still beading on your skin?

Your Grove now templed, a nave, your forever green April sanctus—
to leave is to begin.

Barely a boy, bruises yet to form, how slow you must have stepped, dew still
clotted to your shoes.

They were so Beautiful, so . . .

. . . yet first there was the dark,

it too spoke your name.

Your tongue to stone, petrified.

Only your mind could cry "Father."

Beyond these trees, child, past the fence there, through town and to the west:
Untold fires, hours and years of hard . . .

. . . your heart of glass to sliver and crack and shatter,

somehow still to shimmer.

'til June of Forty-four, when again, at last, a pillar . . .

—Scott Livingston

This poem won second place in the 2009 BYU Studies poetry contest.

City Dog

The day I die I hope this old yellow dog
will slip from my fist like string through a bead

and jog west, tongue out, dim eyes leaping
to the distant green and granite face

of the mountain that presided over my youth.
This final errand: to shed over seven states,

through days of unslacking hardwoods
and humid miles of corn, the great weight

of living within the blackened brick walls
of this restless city, and to grow unworn again,

to return as the last bright spark of my prodigal heart
to the bowing lupine and flickering aspen forest

where my broad father, and his before him,
gave his bones back to the everlasting earth.

—David J. Passey

This poem won first place in the 2010 BYU Studies poetry contest.

St. Louis Luminary: The Latter-day Saint Experience at the Mississippi River, 1854–1855

Susan Easton Black

The *St. Louis Luminary*, an LDS newspaper printed in St. Louis, was short lived but is a key to chronicling the status of the Church on the American frontier in 1854 and 1855. Although it was only one volume, the newspaper contained fifty-two issues, each spanning four pages in length with each page divided into five columns. This translates into approximately twenty-six hundred single-spaced pages on 8½" x 11" paper. From the first issue on Wednesday, November 22, 1854, to the last issue on Saturday, December 15, 1855, its masthead proclaimed the paper a “light [shining] in darkness and the darkness comprehendeth it not,” a reference to the gospel being published in the *Luminary* in the “gentile” city of St. Louis. A new book, *The Best of the St. Louis Luminary*, gives an in-depth history of the newspaper and its contents, and includes a DVD of scans of the entire volume of the newspaper in a searchable format. This article is excerpted from that book.

Because of the years in which this newspaper was printed, it played a significant role in the national discussion of polygamy, which had not been publicly announced until 1852.¹ The paper printed an unrelenting defense of polygamy against a backdrop of exaggerated reports and sensational claims that stemmed from the halls of Congress and from eastern newspapers. Editor Erastus Snow did not hesitate to confront politicians, newspaper columnists, or even the president of the United States on the issue.

St. Louis: A Gathering Place for the Saints

By 1854, thousands of Mormons heeded President Brigham Young’s advice to come to Zion. Pushed westward by “black clouds of war” that had



Brigham Young. As president of the Church, Brigham Young announced in April 1854 that St. Louis, Missouri, was to become a gathering place for Saints who were preparing to make the trek west. Courtesy of the Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

“burst with fearful violence over the Old World” and promises of greener pastures in Zion, great numbers of Mormon emigrants boarded ships in Liverpool and sailed to the United States, landing in New Orleans. From there they traveled up the Mississippi River to St. Louis, a trailhead of the West. Once in St. Louis, some emigrants lacked funds to continue their journey toward Zion. These paused to earn needed funds; others simply remained in the city and did not travel farther. Many looked to Young for counsel on a temporary gathering place but found precious little until he made the decision to open “gathering places in the States.”²

It was announced at the April 8, 1854, general conference “that St. Louis was to be organized into a Stake of Zion.” Erastus Snow reported that upon hearing this “some smiled and some laughed outright, and some as guileless as Phillip, said, can any good come out of Saint

Louis?”³ Many Latter-day Saints at the time believed St. Louis to be “a sink-hole of corruption and iniquity.”⁴ They saw troubles ahead for Latter-day Saints who remained in that city. In contrast, Church leaders saw great value in St. Louis as a gathering place for the Saints. After appointing John Taylor to New York City and Orson Spencer to Cincinnati, the First Presidency appointed Erastus Snow to St. Louis to “receive and take care of all Saints who shall arrive under his Presidency; counseling them as to their locations and pursuits as he shall be led by the Holy Ghost, and take the oversight and superintend the further gathering of all such as are able, and who may be deemed worthy to swell the numbers in Deseret.” Snow was given authority “to receive donations and collect tithing for and on behalf of said church, and he is hereby appointed agent for said church, to make such a disposition of said funds, and to transact all such business as may be required of him.”⁵

At the time of Snow’s appointment, neither he nor President Young had any firm idea of the multitude of foreign-born Latter-day Saints working in the greater St. Louis area, let alone those members who had gathered to the

city from nearly every state in the Union. Nevertheless, Young urged Snow to accept the assignment. He did so without deliberation and in October 1854 arrived in St. Louis with a letter of introduction from the First Presidency.⁶

Snow found St. Louis to be a haven, a respite for Latter-day Saints. He wrote:

St. Louis is a fine, large, and flourishing city, and has furnished employment to many hundreds and thousands of our brethren, who have here in a short time made a good outfit for the gathering places of the Saints. This city has been an asylum for our people from fifteen to twenty years. There are few public buildings of any consideration in this city that our brethren have not taken an active and prominent part in erecting and ornamenting. There are few factories, foundries, or mercantile establishments, but they have taken, or are taking an active part in establishing or sustaining, either as employers, as artisans, or as customers. . . . There is probably no city in the world where the Latter-day Saints are more respected, and where they may sooner obtain an outfit for Utah than in this city.⁷

Snow acknowledged that “St. Louis [was] in many respects a desirable place of residence” for Mormons who ultimately wished to gather in the Rocky Mountains.⁸

Erastus Snow

Snow was remarkably suited to the task of leading the Saints in St. Louis. He had joined the Church in Vermont in 1832 at age thirteen, and by age sixteen he was a missionary. He brought converts to Kirtland, Ohio, but soon left to preach in the East, writing a pamphlet and newspaper articles along the way. He was in the vanguard company of pioneers, and he and Orson Pratt were the first Latter-day Saints to enter the Salt Lake Valley. He was called to return to the East to gather money and clothing for those traveling across the plains, and in this assignment he journeyed to St. Louis. There he found nearly a thousand Mormons, several of whom donated funds and clothing.



Erastus Snow. A member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, Snow was called to preside over Church members in St. Louis in 1854. As part of his duties there, he edited and published the *St. Louis Luminary*. Courtesy of the Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

In February 1849, he was called to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. He advocated the Perpetual Emigrating Fund, a fund organized to help poor Saints reach Zion. He collected money for the fund until October 1849, when he was called to preside over the Scandinavian Mission. While he was there the Lord's work in Scandinavia rolled forward due to native missionaries and the printing of a number of Church pamphlets, a hymnal, and a Book of Mormon translated into Danish—the first time it was printed in a foreign language. In addition, in October 1851 the newspaper *Skandina-viens Stejerne* (Scandinavian Star) was launched.

Returning to Utah in 1852, he was asked to organize the Deseret Iron Company in Cedar City. Soon his leadership was needed more in St. Louis, so in April 1854 he was called to preside over the Church in the “Western states,” or what we now call the Midwest. In that capacity, he was to direct European migration from St. Louis to the Salt Lake Valley and to organize a stake in St. Louis.⁹

Historical Importance of the *St. Louis Luminary*

When Snow arrived in St. Louis, he was disappointed to find discouragement and backsliding among the Saints. Hoping to revive a spirit of commitment and reformation, he instituted the doctrine of rebaptism. His letters to Brigham Young speak of the effects of that reformation upon the St. Louis Saints: “Last Sabbath I visited the Gavois Branch, 6 miles out of town, where there are 175 members in rather a Lukewarm state, and dedicated a new place of worship and endeavored to stir them up and they agreed to renew their covenants and commence a reformation.”¹⁰ Yet time and means prevented Snow from visiting all the branches in the area.

Believing more and better communication among the Saints in St. Louis was needed, and in fulfillment of the assignment given him by Brigham Young,¹¹ Snow began to search for a facility to house a newspaper and to serve as the Church's headquarters in the city. After looking throughout the downtown area, he leased a brick church on the corner of Washington Avenue and Fourth Street. The building had a large assembly room with a gallery on the main floor and basement rooms “suited to councils, schools, storage, rendezvous for emigrants &c.” It also had a newspaper office.¹² He purchased equipment and then assumed his position as editor of the *St. Louis Luminary*.

Although Snow was outwardly enthusiastic about his new position, in a private letter to his wife Elizabeth, he wrote, “The church overhead and the other two rooms of the Basement are full of men, women & children, Boxes, Barrels, Sacks, Beds, & filthiness. and they keep up a dreadful meele

that nearly confuses my brain, and the Printing Office & my editorial office is only separated from them by a board partition.”¹³ Conditions aside, Snow wrote in the first issue of the *Luminary*, “We feel assured that the ‘Saints’ and lovers of truth and justice will hail with pleasure the appearance of the LUMINARY,” a paper “devoted to the exposition of the favorable side of Mormonism,” something the “honest inquirer” had longed to read.¹⁴ To him, it was the *Luminary* that would keep the St. Louis Saints focused on their membership and future trek to Zion.

The *Luminary* made its appearance on Wednesday, November 22, 1854.¹⁵ The *Missouri Cumberland Presbyterian* noted the first issue by printing, “This paper [the *Luminary*] will undertake to show that Mormonism is not so bad after all; that men may have a dozen wives and all be right.” The editor sarcastically added, “We may expect the clouds and fogs of error and superstition which have so long hung over our unfortunate country, to be all dispelled by the effulgent light of this ‘*Luminary*.’”¹⁶ The editor of the *Missouri Cascade* printed, “[The *Luminary*] will doubtless be read with interest by those who wish to be informed as to the peculiar doctrines and practices of this Church,” before admitting, “To us Gentiles, some of the ideas advanced seem rather odd, but perhaps it is because we are behind the times.”¹⁷

To Snow, the initial response of non-Mormon editors was of little importance. He focused on uniting the westward Saints and addressing their concerns. On the issue of whether to pay tithes before reaching the Salt Lake Valley, Snow said, “If they are not willing to do it, they are not worthy to go there and receive an inheritance among the saints.” When considering “to whom shall they pay it,” Snow advised, “Elder Taylor in New York, Elder O. Spencer in Cincinnati, and myself in St. Louis.” As to whether the Saints should go directly to the Salt Lake Valley or remain in the greater St. Louis area, Snow suggested, “Gather into the region of St. Louis and Cincinnati.” As to helping poor Saints reach the Salt Lake Valley, Snow declared, “As a general thing, those whom the Lord has favored with this world’s goods, would do better to donate liberally of their substance to the Perpetual Emigrating Fund, which is . . . designed to assist those who try to help themselves.” He explained, “This method of assisting the poor teaches them to be grateful for the aid afforded them, and to manifest their gratitude by their works.”¹⁸

Snow used the *Luminary* foremost as a religious newspaper, publishing epistles from the First Presidency, doctrinal treatises in defense of Latter-day Saint practices (especially plural marriage), and news and letters from the Salt Lake Valley before printing local news, poetry, and wise sayings. The paper also contains valuable information that reflects the problems the

Church was facing in the national press during these years, specifically on the topics of plural marriage and Utah Territory's battle for statehood.

From the beginning, Snow sought ways to circulate the *Luminary* among Latter-day Saints. Early on, he called forty-two men to be missionary-agents, meaning missionaries for the Church and agents for the *Luminary*. Church leaders such as John Taylor in New York, Franklin D. Richards in England, Orson Spencer in Cincinnati, Charles C. Rich in San Bernardino, and James McGaw (the emigration agent in New Orleans) were a few of his missionary-agents. Local leaders like Milo Andrus, president of the St. Louis Stake, and Andrew Lafayette Siler, president of the Atchison Kansas Branch, were traveling agents throughout the west.

Most of the missionary-agents were called and assigned to the Midwest by leaders of the St. Louis Stake. Such assignments suggest that these men were expected to strengthen the St. Louis Stake as proselyting missionaries and to sign up subscribers for the paper. Missionary-agent William Marsdon used the paper to further his proselyting efforts: "Since I have been in receipt of the *Luminary*, I have endeavoured to let its light shine upon the benighted people of this neighborhood, hoping thereby some might inform themselves of the true principles of our church."¹⁹ Missionary-agent William Cazier focused on subscriptions: "I did not receive your prospectus until the 7th of this month. I immediately went from house to house canvassing for subscribers, and I have obtained over sixty."²⁰

Although Snow had hoped to devote his paper to "Science, Religion, General Intelligence and News of the Day,"²¹ he often used the *Luminary* to vent his monetary frustrations—unpaid notes contracted by previous directors of Mormon emigration and expenses associated with printing the newspaper. He believed these financial problems would be solved by getting more subscribers. By January 1855, the newspaper had about nine hundred subscribers, but most failed to pay the full subscription rate of two dollars per annum.²² Hoping to attract full-paying subscribers, Snow wrote enthusiastically of the publication:

From all quarters our correspondents hail the *Luminary* with joy. We wish them to use their utmost exertions to increase its circulation, and forward us all the means possible; (bills of any sound bank;) urging every friend of the cause to subscribe for as many papers as possible, that we may be enabled to meet the heavy expenses incurred by the *Luminary* in its infancy.²³

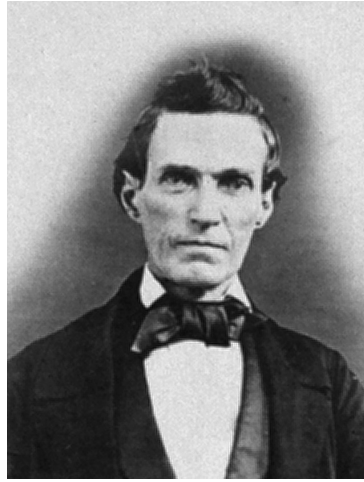
Perhaps due to his encouraging words or to the paper itself, the number of subscribers did increase, but so did Snow's financial burden. Indebtedness and longings for family led him to write to Brigham Young on February 3, 1855, asking whether he should remain in St. Louis or travel back to

Utah to attend to personal and “business affairs a few months and return again [to St. Louis] in the fall.”²⁴

By the time Snow discovered that Young wished him to remain in St. Louis, it was too late. Snow had already bid farewell to the St. Louis Saints. In an article titled “Friends and Patrons,” he said, “We’re about to leave you! ’Tis eight months since we first made our bow and entered upon our editorial career.” Of this departure Snow explained, “Our multipl[i]ed duties during emigration season has prevented our devoting that care and attention to the Luminary which its position and importance demands.”²⁵ Snow appointed Orson Spencer of Cincinnati as the new editor in chief. James H. Hart, president of the St. Louis High Council and a man who had contributed much to the *Luminary*, was appointed interim editor until Spencer arrived in St. Louis. With his responsibilities passed to others, on May 23, 1855, Snow left St. Louis aboard the *Polar Star* bound for Atchison, Kansas, a staging area for emigrating Mormons. From Kansas, he journeyed homeward to Zion.²⁶

On July 7, 1855, Spencer arrived in St. Louis. He remained in the city only two weeks before leaving to visit missionaries laboring in the Cherokee Nation. While on this visit, Spencer contracted a “fever accompanied with chills.” He returned to St. Louis “fatigued, debilitated and afflicted”²⁷ and unable to resume his labors in the editorial department.²⁸ Yet he was sustained as “President of the Church in this part of the United States.” Unfortunately, he did not live to act in that capacity. Spencer died on October 15, 1855, following a forty-day illness.²⁹

Upon learning of Erastus Snow’s departure, Elder George A. Smith of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles wrote to James Hart, “I do not feel altogether disposed to stop my monthly correspondence, but take pen again to note some of the principal events which are transpiring in this corner of Zion.”³⁰ John Taylor wrote to Hart expressing leadership concerns: “[It is] necessary for me to address you a few words, as the charge of this, as well as

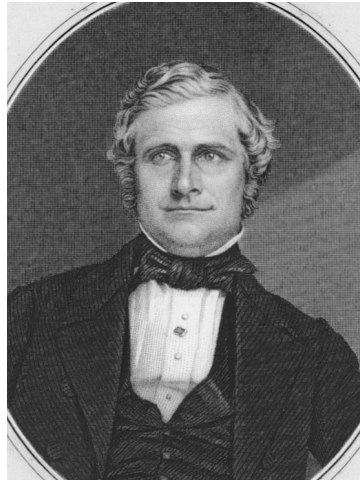


Orson Spencer. In 1854, Spencer was appointed to preside over the Church in Cincinnati. When Erastus Snow left St. Louis in May 1855, Spencer was selected as the new editor of the *St. Louis Luminary*. However, he passed away in October 1855. Courtesy of the Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

the eastern country, necessarily devolves upon me.” Taylor left New York City to confer with brethren in St. Louis about the best course to adopt for the *Luminary* and the St. Louis Stake of Zion. Taylor found that James Hart had “acted promptly, wisely and judiciously” as had “the High Council, the Bishops and other authorities of the Church.” Yet he was “in hopes of the Presidency sending out some one from the Valley, to assist in managing affairs” in St. Louis.³¹ During the interim, he asked the St. Louis leadership to be shepherds to the Saints and keep printing the *Luminary*. After promising that he would return in a month or two, Taylor journeyed back to New York City.³²

The *Luminary* continued to meet publishing deadlines for an ever-increasing readership. “The demand for the *Luminary* has exceeded our most sanguine expectations,” wrote Hart on October 13, 1855. “We have increased the issue twice, and from the present demand, we presume it will be necessary to publish an additional number at the commencement of the second volume.”³³ Subscribers were promised that a “second volume should be commenced on the first day of the new year . . . untrammelled by arrearages.”³⁴

Unfortunately, this promise was not fulfilled. At the very time subscriptions for the second volume were being solicited, John Taylor was making plans to stop printing the *Luminary*. His reason for stopping the press was “the absence of President Erastus Snow to the valley, and the decease of our beloved and lamented brother—Professor Orson Spencer.” For subscribers who had prepaid for the second volume, Taylor advised, “As there may be some who have recently subscribed [to the *Luminary*], we shall make arrangements to supply them with the *Mormon*,” the Latter-day Saint newspaper in New York City. For those who had prepaid for advertisements, Taylor assured, “We shall also insert the *Luminary*’s unexpired advertisement” in the *Mormon*.³⁵ The *Luminary* staff “forwarded to ‘The Mormon’ all those names, subscriptions and advertisements which have been sent us for



John Taylor. Taylor presided over the Church in New York City, where he also edited the *Mormon*, a Latter-day Saint paper that eventually replaced the *St. Louis Luminary* when that paper was canceled in 1855. Courtesy of the Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

the second volume.”³⁶ The fifty-second and final issue terminated the modest career of the *Luminary*.

The *Luminary*'s Content

From the selection of newspaper agents, who were set apart as Latter-day Saint missionaries, to the lead article, a doctrinal treatise, the *Luminary* was a Mormon newspaper. Yet the paper also printed local news—day-to-day events, weather forecasts, election results, and business opportunities. And, like other papers of the day, it was a composite of exchanges, or clippings, and telegraph dispatches. Most of the national and international news and pithy sayings found in the *Luminary* were reprints from other papers.

Articles about Plural Marriage. In most issues, lengthy doctrinal treatises covered all five columns of page one. A general epistle of the First Presidency or counsel from Brigham Young were typical. Of this, one subscriber, William M. White, wrote, “Through the good instruction contained [in the *Luminary*], many may obtain a knowledge of the truth.”³⁷ When such treatises were not forthcoming, Snow reprinted writings of Orson Pratt originally published in the *Millennial Star*. The treatise that received the most notice contained Pratt’s views on the Latter-day Saint doctrine of plurality of wives. “It is not as many have supposed,” penned Pratt, “a doctrine embraced by [Mormon men] to gratify the carnal lusts and feelings of man; that is not the object of the doctrine.”³⁸ He explained the doctrine with references to Father Abraham: “How did Abraham manage to get a foundation laid for this mighty kingdom? Was he to accomplish it all through one wife? No. Sarah gave a certain woman to him. . . . It would have been rather a slow process if Abraham had been confined to one wife, like some of those narrow, contracted nations of modern Christianity.” Pratt concluded that plurality of wives existed so that participants could “inherit the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and receive a continuation of [their] posterity, that they may become as numerous as the sands upon the sea-shore.”³⁹

Few outside of Mormonism shared his views, but not all were hostile. The *Luminary* printed the following report from the *New York City Nichol's Journal*.

The House of Representatives spent two whole days not long since, in debating that most amusing of modern bugaboos, the Polygamy of Utah. . . .

We cannot help thinking that a Mormon, who in good faith takes two or three wives, and maintains them, may be a better man than a good many other sort of Christians we know of, in Congress and out.

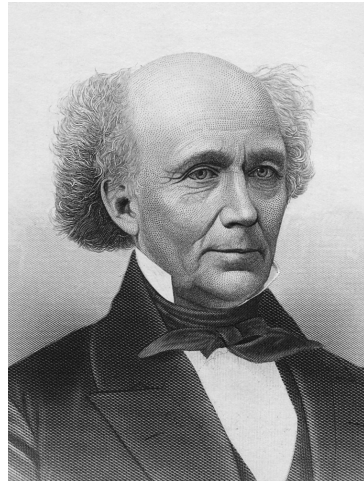
Everybody thinks Abraham, and Jacob, and the Patriarchs were good men. Why not the Mormons, who believe as they did? Would Congress punish Abraham? . . .

People are predicting that we shall have trouble about Utah. So we shall, and shall deserve to have it, if we meddle with what don't concern us. What possible business is it to any citizen of New York, how many wives some man has in the City of the Salt Lake?⁴⁰

When the *Morning Herald* suggested that a young man loved by two girls “join the Mormons, and marry both of these spunky girls,”⁴¹ the editor of the *Luminary* retorted, “In all cases the preliminary requisition . . . is baptism for the remission of sins; and about twelve months probation, to see if the candidate is worthy of one wife; and if he should have a Laban to deal with, he might be required to serve fourteen years for the second.” The national sentiment toward polygamy led Snow to print such notices as “Christian Europe sustaining plurality of wives in Turkey. Uncle Sam please take notice.”⁴² He also printed John Milton’s views on polygamy: “Either, therefore, polygamy is true marriage, or all the children born in that state are spurious; which would include the whole race of Jacob, the twelve holy tribes chosen by God.”⁴³ More than one subscriber thanked editors of the *Luminary* for their strong defense of plural marriage. One subscriber penned, “I cannot help thanking you for coming down from the hill of Zion to defend the truth, and let the world know there are two sides of the question to read.”⁴⁴

News from the Salt Lake Valley.

The 1850s was a difficult decade for Utah Territory. Federal officials appointed numerous territorial officers, many of whom became known as runaway officials because they went to Utah, stayed only a short time, and then left—sometimes with the federal money that had been earmarked for the territory.⁴⁵ Some of this drama was reported in the *Luminary*. “I perceive by the tone of the press, that politicians, moralists and religionists are in trouble about Utah and Polygamy. ‘War!’ ‘war!’ ‘blood’ and ‘destruction,’ to the poor heathen



John M. Bernhisel. A physician by trade, Bernhisel served as Utah Territory’s first delegate to Congress and often supplied the *St. Louis Luminary* with political news and documents. Courtesy of the Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Mormons!” wrote Parley Pratt.⁴⁶ Orson Pratt reached the same conclusion, but added, “We look calmly at the approaching storms, knowing that each in succession will precede a more glorious day to all who remain faithful in the cause of truth.”⁴⁷

Editors of the *Luminary* were “indebted to Hon. John M. Bernhisel, Delegate from Utah, for papers and public documents”⁴⁸ and to Brigham Young for opinions about important matters before the U.S. government. The most interesting, of course, were Young’s opinions. For example, on the subject of the U.S. president’s salary, Young exclaimed he “should not have \$25,000 a year pledged to him, for if he knew enough to rule the nation, he would know enough to take care of himself.”⁴⁹ As to how the government should treat Mormonism, Young advised, federal officials “ought to treat the religion of the Latter-day Saints as they do Methodism, Presbyterianism, Quakerism, Shakerism, and many other isms and say; ‘Here, I wish you to hold your tongues about the Mormons, for they have just as good a right to their religion as you have to yours.’”⁵⁰ As for the persecution the Mormons suffered because of their religious practices, Young said, “Let us alone and we will send Elders to the uttermost parts of the earth, and gather out Israel wherever they are; and if you persecute us we will do it the quicker, because we are naturally dull when let alone.” As to the prospects of a new governor presiding in Utah, Young said, “Let them send whom they will, and it does not diminish my influence one particle.”⁵¹

Epistles from the First Presidency, letters from various ecclesiastical leaders and traveling missionaries, and clippings from the *Deseret News* took precedence over local Latter-day Saint news in St. Louis. Letters from the Salt Lake Valley contained news of celebrations, the Twenty-fourth of July being the most elaborate, and reports of the advantages of living in the westward Zion. *Deseret News* clippings provided “home news that may be of interest”⁵² to readers, such as “discriptions of Utah—its climate, soil, productions, geography and aboriginal tribes.”⁵³

Minutes of Church Conferences in St. Louis. Minutes of the annual and semiannual St. Louis conferences (held November 1854, April 1855, and October 1855) were printed in the *Luminary*. At the first conference, held on November 4, 1854, few Latter-day Saints attended. “There are many men and women professing to be Saints, in this city and vicinity,” remarked Snow, “who cannot realise, and do not appreciate the importance of this occasion, or their seats would not have been vacant this morning.” Attendance aside, Snow proceeded with the conference. He reported on “the vote of the General Conference, appointing [him] to come to this place to take charge of the churches in this vicinity, to organize a gathering place and Stake of Zion.”⁵⁴ Snow then organized the St. Louis Stake of Zion with “a

Presidency and a High Council, a Bishop and his Counsellors, with such other quorums as the circumstances and conditions of this people may require.”⁵⁵ He addressed the question, “Why is it that Stakes of Zion are located in this place?” His answer—

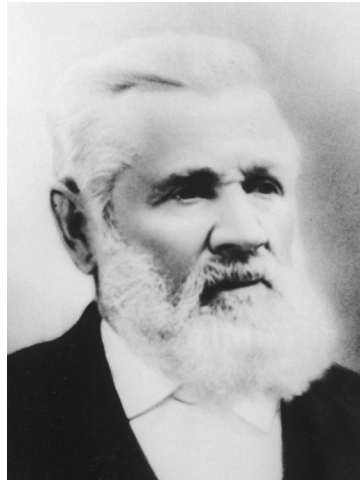
It is just as proper to organize a stake of Zion in Cincinnati, St. Louis, San Jose, California, or any other place which the Lord may designate, as in Salt Lake City. . . .

Relative to the Saints gathering from other parts of the world to this place, to Cincinnati, to California, to Salt Lake, or other parts of Utah; every Latter-day Saint throughout the world is at liberty to gather to either of these places, according to their choice.⁵⁶

Snow then spoke of tithing, acknowledging “a large portion of the Saints congregated in St. Louis and the region round about are poor.” He advised, “The law of tithing is a part of the celestial law, and obligatory upon all who expect to enjoy Zion[']s blessings.”⁵⁷

Three weeks before the April 6, 1855, semiannual conference was held, advance notice of the date and place of the conference was printed in the *Luminary*. Also printed was the request for “all our brethren who are interested therein to favor us with their presence on that occasion.”⁵⁸

Better attendance at the second conference was reported. “Erastus Snow was sustained as President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the Western States,” and Milo Andrus was sustained as president of the St. Louis Stake of Zion, along with other local leaders.⁵⁹ After the sustaining vote, Snow spoke on the topic of sustainings, concluding that “the Lord will think better of you if you refuse to vote, than he will if you vote to sustain them and then fail to do so in your actions.”⁶⁰ Conference proceedings included statistical reports on the number of high priests (17), seventies (27), elders (208), priests (126), children blessed (41), English deaths (16), and Danish deaths (17) in the St. Louis Stake since the last conference. The most interesting report was the number of



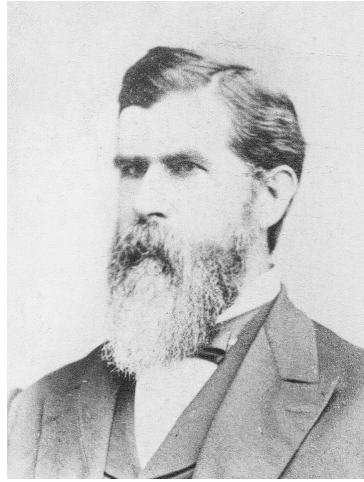
Milo Andrus. As with many local leaders, St. Louis Stake President Milo Andrus was also an agent for the *St. Louis Luminary*. Several sermons he gave to local congregations were reprinted in the newspaper. Courtesy of the Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

rebaptisms (1,010) and the total number of members, including officers of the stake (1,661), an increase of 341 since the November 1854 conference.⁶¹ Snow expressed displeasure with the increase: "God has not given [St. Louis] to his saints for an inheritance, but as a place to rest their feet." He wanted all in attendance to make plans to immigrate to Zion before the next conference.⁶²

The October 6 to 8, 1855, conference was held after Snow had departed for his home in the Rockies. James H. Hart, president of the St. Louis High Council, presided at the conference, explaining, "We have not the company of Elder Orson Spencer. He is now sick, but he is in the hands of the Lord."⁶³ Hart transacted business at the conference and remarked "on the improved condition of the Stake, and the augmentation of the branches to nearly double to what they were in November, 1854." He announced "the 'Luminary,' was increasing in its circulation, and gave notice of the publication of the second volume."⁶⁴ After "a few closing remarks," Hart invited the congregation to sing "Go Ye Messengers of Glory."⁶⁵

Local Church News and Advice. Knowing when and where meetings and conferences were to be held was important to the Church organization in the greater St. Louis area.⁶⁶ Knowing what languages would be spoken at these gatherings was just as important. The *Luminary* reported, "On Sunday last religious worship was conducted at our Church on Washington avenue in four different Languages, English, French, German and Danish," and "three services were held at the same time in separate departments."⁶⁷ But to Snow, payment of tithes and fast offerings to benefit the poor was of greater importance. He advised local leaders "to have an open ear all the time to the voice of the poor."⁶⁸

Presidents Milo Andrus and James Hart saw the need for counsel on family relationships. Husbands were to "love [their] wives [and] treat them kindly and tenderly, as Christ does his church"; wives should "honor and



James H. Hart. Hart served as president of the St. Louis High Council and was a frequent contributor to the *St. Louis Luminary*. When Erastus Snow left St. Louis in 1855, he appointed Hart to stand as interim editor until the arrival of Snow's replacement, Orson Spencer. Courtesy of the Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

obey [their] husbands as your future presidents on earth"; and parents should remember that "children are an heritage and gift of God. . . . Be careful that you set a proper example before them."⁶⁹

Missionary News. The *Luminary* printed names of Latter-day Saint missionaries released from European missions who were returning to the United States.⁷⁰ It also printed letters from missionaries still serving in distant regions of the world. To editors of the *Luminary*, missionary work was of great importance—none more so than the work within the St. Louis Stake. Stake missionaries or missionary-agents were admonished to search out "those who have been in the Church some twelve, fifteen, or eighteen years, but have never gathered with the Saints. We wish to hear of such, that they are disposing of their houses, lands, &c., and are preparing to gather home to Zion. It is time that all such were in the vallies of Utah."⁷¹ Missionary letters that told of success among early Church members who had fallen away but who were now coming back were received with joy. One such letter from James Case, laboring in Keokuk, Iowa, told of "gathering unto the fold some of the lost sheep of the house of Israel. . . . The whole number that I have re-baptised since last April Conference is 108."⁷²

Mormon Immigration to the Salt Lake Valley. The *Luminary* reported that "in every seaport of any consequence in this country and in Europe, emigration agents are located to give information to the inquiring, and to aid those who desire to go to Utah, and arrange for their safe and speedy transportation."⁷³ Emigrants receiving assistance from the Perpetual Emigrating Fund were advised to "go directly through to Utah."⁷⁴ All others were to concentrate at St. Louis and report themselves at the *Luminary* office.⁷⁵

As emigrants arrived at the office, they were schooled on commodities needed for the next leg of their journey: "Every person will need to have . . . one hundred pounds breadstuffs, and a few pounds bacon or dried beef, and as much sugar, tea, coffee, and dried fruit as they calculate to eat during a three month's journey over the plains."⁷⁶ Once outfitted with the necessary provisions, emigrants were notified of dates and places of expected departures for Atchison, Kansas, the next destination on their westward trail.

Marriages and Deaths. It was customary to announce upcoming marriages of Church members in the *Luminary*. The name of the bride and groom, the date, and the place of the wedding made up a typical entry. A poetic phrase promising future happiness for the couple appeared next to the marriage entry when a gift had been presented to the *Luminary* staff by the couple.

Death notices were written in a brief, matter-of-fact manner.⁷⁷ For those whose death caused personal sorrow to the *Luminary* staff, a short statement followed the obituary, such as “Elder Wm. W. Major, formerly well known to many of the Saints in St. Louis, a man of exemplary piety and untiring zeal for the cause of God, has finished his earthly mission and passed within the veil.”⁷⁸ Several obituaries also mentioned the cause of death.⁷⁹

Poetry. Most poetic verses in the *Luminary* were written by Latter-day Saints like Joel Hills Johnson of Salt Lake City.⁸⁰ One telling poem was “Plurality of Wives” by Alexander Robbins Jr.

“Plurality of Wives”

Ye theologians, pray tell me why,
(If such sage counsel in your craniums lie,)
 Those ancient men of God took many wives,
In sacred union, for eternal lives?

* * * *

The time the Prophet saw is on the wing,
“When seven women to one man shall cling,
(Not for the lack of clothing, or of bread,
But for a husband—for a man—a head)”⁸¹

Wise Sayings. Short pithy sayings were popular in nineteenth-century newspapers. The following are examples of wise sayings printed in the *Luminary*:

“When we record our angry feelings, let it be on the snow, that the first beam of sunshine may obliterate them forever.”⁸²

“The softest pillow is a good clean conscience.”⁸³

“Every good scholar is not a good schoolmaster.”⁸⁴

Humor. Jokes were another common element in newspapers of the era. The following examples appeared in the *Luminary*:

“A man came into a printing office to beg a paper. ‘Because,’ said he, ‘we like to read the newspaper very much, but our neighbors are all too stingy to take one.’”⁸⁵

“There is a shop kept by an old maid in New York, in the windows of which appear these words: ‘No reasonable offer refused.’”⁸⁶

Newspaper Exchanges and Telegraph Dispatches. As with other papers of the day, the *Luminary* was a composite of exchanges and telegraph dispatches. National news and wise sayings printed in the *Luminary* lacked originality but proved the newspaper staff had access to the *New York Post*, *San Francisco Herald*, *Detroit Advertiser*, *Washington Star*, *Cincinnati Gazette*,

Boston Post, *New York Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, and the *National Intelligencer*, which were credited for certain articles reprinted in the *Luminary*.

As to foreign papers, the *Luminary* was dependent upon exchanges carried aboard transatlantic steamers and telegraphers that sent summaries via dispatches to the *St. Louis Republican* office. Once dispatches or summaries were printed in the *Republican*, editors felt at liberty to reprint these in the *Luminary*. "Most people think the selection of suitable matter for a newspaper the easiest part of the business," Snow recalled. He concluded:

How great an error. It is by all means the most difficult. To look over and over hundreds of exchange papers every week from which to select enough for one, especially when the question is not what shall, but what shall not be selected, is no easy task. If every person who read a newspaper could have edited it, we should hear less complaints. Not infrequently is it the case that an editor looks over all his exchange papers for something interesting, and can absolutely find nothing. Every paper is drier than a contribution box.⁸⁷

Advertisements. Reasonable rates were extended to merchants who advertised in the newspaper. Discounted rates were given to merchants like J. W. Marrion, a blacksmith in Kansas City, Missouri, for favorable reporting of Mormonism.⁸⁸ Editors encouraged readers needing a buggy, a cookstove, ready-made clothing, cheese, or a ferry ride to look no further than St. Louis. Whether readers needed a watchmaker, jeweler, tailor, dentist, doctor, sign painter, gunsmith, tin maker, music teacher, or attorney, editors assured them services were available in the city.

Conclusion

In 1856, Brigham Young instructed Erastus Snow to return to St. Louis and resume publishing the *Luminary*.⁸⁹ Snow began his return to St. Louis with the intention of complying with Young's wishes. By the time he arrived in St. Louis, however, he had made other plans. To Snow, emigration took precedence over resurrecting the *Luminary*. On September 25, 1856, he wrote to Brigham Young, "I find on the adjustment of the *Luminary* a/c that I sunk about \$1,300 in its publication last year. And as the business swallowed it including advertising & subscription list, during my absence, despite its struggles and *remonstrances* I should hardly have faith to call it again to life."⁹⁰ On October 31, 1856, Young replied, "We hardly expect that you will be able to start the *Luminary*. This is all right. If however you are able to do so, you are at liberty to do as you please about it."⁹¹

Although there are only fifty-two issues of the *Luminary*, the content of the paper, especially that concerning polygamy and its effect on Latter-day Saints in the Midwest, is most interesting and informative. Latter-day Saints

at the Mississippi were encouraged to muster their strength and become a buffer between national concerns over polygamy and practicing Mormons in a westward Zion—this is what makes the newspaper different from its many predecessors. The Saints needed to be armed with reason, rationale, and logic as well as the Spirit to combat a nation determined to end plural marriage. The *Luminary* did much to prepare the Midwest Saints to defend their faith and, if necessary, to leave their homes to fight territorial injustice in the West. The paper is as defensive in its approach to plural marriage as it is militaristic in its stance toward government intervention in religious matters. For a people on the front lines of verbal assault, the *Luminary* was an outlet for sharpening skills of debate and reason. The wide distribution of the paper did much to inform an outraged public of Mormon persecutions and frustrations in defending their religious practices.

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1. See Danel Bachman and Ronald K. Esplin, “Plural Marriage,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 3:1091–95.

2. “Movements of the Church,” *St. Louis Luminary*, March 3, 1855, 4, cols. 2–3. For more information on emigration, see *Deseret News 1997–98 Church Almanac* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1996), 161; Leonard J. Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830–1900* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1993), esp. chaps. 4–5.

3. “St. Louis under a New Regime,” *St. Louis Luminary*, August 18, 1855, 2, col. 2; and Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, and J. M. Grant, “To All to Whom This Letter Shall Come,” *St. Louis Luminary*, December 23, 1854, 2, col. 1. For more information on the Church in St. Louis, see Fred E. Woods and Thomas L. Farmer, *When the Saints Came Marching In: A History of the Latter-day Saints in St. Louis* (Orem, Utah: Millennial Press, 2009); Stanley B. Kimball, “The Saints and St. Louis, 1831–1857: An Oasis of Tolerance and Security,” *BYU Studies* 13, no. 4 (1973): 489–519. See also St. Louis Records, 1852–56, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City.

4. “The City of St. Louis,” *St. Louis Luminary*, February 3, 1855, 2, col. 1.

5. Young, Kimball, and Grant, “To All to Whom This Letter Shall Come,” *St. Louis Luminary*, December 23, 1854, 2, col. 1.

6. Young, Kimball, and Grant, “To All to Whom This Letter Shall Come,” *St. Louis Luminary*, December 23, 1854, 2, col. 1.

7. “The City of St. Louis,” *St. Louis Luminary*, February 3, 1855, 2, col. 1.

8. “The City of St. Louis,” *St. Louis Luminary*, February 3, 1855, 2, col. 2.

9. Andrew Karl Larson, *Erastus Snow: The Life of a Missionary and Pioneer for the Early Mormon Church* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1971), 253.

10. Letter from Erastus Snow to Brigham Young, September 21, 1854, as cited in Larson, *Erastus Snow*, 258–59. Original found in Official Correspondence file, Church History Library. The collection consists of over two hundred letters and telegrams written by Erastus Snow to Church leaders and associates and received by him from them. There are fifty-one letters in the collection from Erastus Snow to Brigham Young.

11. See “Twelfth General Epistle,” *St. Louis Luminary*, July 21, 1855, 1, col. 1, to 2, col. 1.

12. Letter from Erastus Snow to Brigham Young, September 21, 1854, as cited in Larson, *Erastus Snow*, 259. Original found in Official Correspondence file. The Church headquarters in St. Louis had previously been located at No. 12 St. Charles Street in St. Louis. See “Notice,” *St. Louis Luminary*, May 26, 1855, 3, col. 4. Emigrants arriving up the river from New Orleans, not having a place to stay, often used the church basement.

13. Erastus Snow to Elizabeth Rebecca Ashby Snow, January 24, 1855, as cited in Larson, *Erastus Snow*, 263. Original in Family Correspondence file.

14. Snow believed his paper would not be enjoyed by those “who delight in the filth and slander of the age.” “Our Paper,” *St. Louis Luminary*, November 22, 1854, 2, col. 1.

15. By the third issue of the *Luminary*, the publication day was Saturday.

16. “New Paper.—The World Advancing,” *St. Louis Luminary*, December 2, 1854, 2, col. 3.

17. “St. Louis Luminary,” *St. Louis Luminary*, January 13, 1855, 3, col. 5.

18. “Questions Answered—Tithing and Emigration,” *St. Louis Luminary*, January 13, 1855, 2, col. 1. Later Snow printed, “Stakes of Zion are to be built up at St. Louis and Cincinnati. . . . The Saints have their choice of locating in either of the above Stakes, but if circumstances prevent, they can locate at Philadelphia.” “Movements of the Church,” 4, col. 2. The First Presidency lamented “those who are in debt to the Fund neglecting to pay for their emigration.” “Twelfth General Epistle,” *St. Louis Luminary*, July 21, 1855, 1, col. 5.

19. William Marsdon, “Inquiries after Truth—Intended Emigration, &c.,” *St. Louis Luminary*, January 27, 1855, 2, col. 3.

20. “Letter from Wm. Cazier, Patriarch,” *St. Louis Luminary*, April 28, 1855, 2, col. 4.

21. “St. Louis Luminary,” *St. Louis Luminary*, January 13, 1855, 1, col. 1.

22. See “Terms,” *St. Louis Luminary*, November 22, 1854, 1, col. 1. If the paper was “delivered to City Subscribers,” the cost was sixty cents per quarter.

23. “Summary of Local Correspondence,” *St. Louis Luminary*, December 2, 1854, 2, col. 3.

24. Letter from Erastus Snow to Brigham Young, February 3, 1855, as cited in Larson, *Erastus Snow*, 264–65. Original in Official Correspondence file.

25. “Friends and Patrons,” *St. Louis Luminary*, July 21, 1855, 2 col. 2.

26. “President Erastus Snow,” *St. Louis Luminary*, July 21, 1855, 2, col. 3; Larson, *Erastus Snow*, 265–66. The gathering place was actually Mormon Grove, which was three to four miles from Atchison. For more information, see Fred E. Woods and Melvin L. Bashore, “On the Outskirts of Atchison: The Imprint of

Latter-day Saint Transmigration at Mormon Grove,” *Kansas History* 25, no. 1 (Summer 2002): 38–51.

27. “Obituary of Orson Spencer,” *St. Louis Luminary*, October 20, 1855, 2, col. 4.

28. Dr. Jethro Clinton attended Orson Spencer. See “President Spencer’s health is slightly . . .,” *St. Louis Luminary*, October 13, 1855, 2, col. 3.

29. “Minutes of the Conference,” *St. Louis Luminary*, October 13, 1855, 3, col. 1; and “Obituary of Orson Spencer,” *St. Louis Luminary*, October 20, 1855, 2, col. 4.

30. George A. Smith, “To the Editor of the Luminary,” *St. Louis Luminary*, November 10, 1855, 3, col. 2.

31. John Taylor, “To the Saints in the United S[t]ates and Canada,” *St. Louis Luminary*, November 24, 1855, 2, col. 4.

32. “President John Taylor,” *St. Louis Luminary*, November 24, 1855, 2, col. 3.

33. “The Luminary—Notice to Subscribers,” *St. Louis Luminary*, October 13, 1855, 2, col. 1.

34. “To Our Subscribers,” *St. Louis Luminary*, November 10, 1855, 2, col. 1.

35. “To the Subscribers of the Luminary,” *St. Louis Luminary*, December 15, 1855, 2, col. 1.

36. “The Last Number,” *St. Louis Luminary*, December 15, 1855, 2, col. 1.

37. William M. White, “Correspondence,” *St. Louis Luminary*, October 20, 1855, 2, col. 5.

38. Elder Orson Pratt, “Celestial Marriage,” *St. Louis Luminary*, February 17, 1855, 1, col. 1.

39. Orson Pratt, “Celestial Marriage (*continued*),” *St. Louis Luminary*, February 24, 1855, 1, cols. 1–2.

40. “Polygamy in Utah,” *St. Louis Luminary*, December 2, 1854, 1, col. 5.

41. “Two young ladies have fallen in love with one young man . . .,” *St. Louis Luminary*, April 21, 1855, 2, col. 3.

42. “Remarks of Governor Young, at the Celebration of the Fourth of July, in Great Salt Lake City, 1854,” *St. Louis Luminary*, December 16, 1854, 1, col. 5.

43. “Milton on Polygamy,” *St. Louis Luminary*, February 3, 1855, 1, col. 1.

44. Absalom M. Young, “President Erastus Snow,” *St. Louis Luminary*, September 29, 1855, 2, col. 5.

45. See Thomas G. Alexander, “Thomas L. Kane and the Mormon Problem in National Politics,” in *Colonel Thomas L. Kane and the Mormons, 1846–1883*, ed. David J. Whittaker (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies; Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2010), 57–88.

46. Parley P. Pratt, “A Challenge!” *St. Louis Luminary*, April 28, 1855, 3, col. 3. Orson Spencer asked, “Now will the American public suffer the long-abused, expatiated Mormon community to be chafed and goaded into another scene of dire suffering and dispersion?” See Orson Spencer, “Prospect of Mormon War,” *St. Louis Luminary*, November 22, 1854, 2, col. 4.

47. Orson Pratt, “Can They Let Us Alone?” *St. Louis Luminary*, January 20, 1855, 2, col. 3.

48. “We are indebted to Hon. John M. Bernhisel . . .,” *St. Louis Luminary*, January 13, 1855, 2, col. 2. For more information on John M. Bernhisel, see Gwynn W. Barrett, “Dr. John M. Bernhisel: Mormon Elder in Congress,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 36 (Spring 1968): 143–67.

49. "St. Louis Luminary," *St. Louis Luminary*, January 13, 1855, 3, col. 5.
50. "Extracts of a Di[s]course by President Brigham Young, February 18, 1855," *St. Louis Luminary*, May 19, 1855, 1, col. 2.
51. Brigham Young, "Remarks," *St. Louis Luminary*, September 29, 1855, 1, cols. 2 and 4.
52. "To the Missionaries from Utah," *St. Louis Luminary*, December 16, 1854, 2, col. 4.
53. "Utah—Its Geography, Climate, Soil, Productions, Aboriginal Tribes, &c.," *St. Louis Luminary*, March 10, 1855, 4, col. 1.
54. "Conference Minutes," *St. Louis Luminary*, November 22, 1854, 4, col. 1.
55. "Conference Minutes," *St. Louis Luminary*, November 22, 1854, 4, cols. 3 and 5. It should be noted that six wards were organized in St. Louis and nine branches in Missouri, Iowa, and Illinois. At the time, there were 788 members residing in the six St. Louis wards, the largest number being in the St. Louis Sixth Ward. There were 532 members residing in the nine branches.
56. "Conference Minutes," *St. Louis Luminary*, November 22, 1854, 4, cols. 1–2. Reacting to the news, missionary-agent Charles Bassett penned, "This new movement—the establishment of Stakes of Zion in the different States—will be an important epoch in the history of Mormonism." Charles H. Bassett, "Correspondence of the Luminary," *St. Louis Luminary*, December 30, 1854, 2, col. 2.
57. At the conference, "it was unanimously voted to adopt the law of tithing throughout this Stake." "Conference Minutes," *St. Louis Luminary*, November 22, 1854, 4, col. 3.
58. "Saint Louis Conference," *St. Louis Luminary*, March 17, 1855, 2, col. 2. About the conference, Snow also said, "We hope to see many of our elders face to face, and to hear from their lips an account of their labors." "Summary of News from Our Elders," *St. Louis Luminary*, March 17, 1855, 2, col. 2.
59. "Minutes of the St. Louis Semi-annual Conference, Held in the Church Cor. Fou[r]th St., and Washington Avenue, April, 1855," *St. Louis Luminary*, April 14, 1855, 2, col. 5.
60. "Remarks of President E. Snow, Saturday Afternoon, April 7th 1855," *St. Louis Luminary*, May 5, 1855, 2, col. 2.
61. "The following is the report . . .," *St. Louis Luminary*, April 21, 1855, 3, col. 4; see "Conference Minutes," *St. Louis Luminary*, November 22, 1854, 4, cols. 1–4.
62. "Remarks of Pres. E. Snow at the Opening of the Conference, April 6, 1855," *St. Louis Luminary*, April 15, 1855, 2, col. 2.
63. "Minutes of the Conference," *St. Louis Luminary*, October 13, 1855, 2, col. 5.
64. "Minutes of the Conference," *St. Louis Luminary*, October 13, 1855, 3, cols. 1–2.
65. "Minutes of a Meeting," *St. Louis Luminary*, October 27, 1855, 2, col. 3.
66. See "Notice," *St. Louis Luminary*, May 19, 1855, 3, col. 3.
67. "On Sunday last religious . . .," *St. Louis Luminary*, May 26, 1855, 2, col. 2.
68. Erastus Snow, "To the Saints in St. Louis, Extract of Elder Snow's Remarks, on Sunday, 12th November," *St. Louis Luminary*, December 2, 1854, 2, col. 2. In a show of support for Snow's stance, the high council issued the following statement: "Observe the law of tithing, it is henceforth the duty of all Latter-day Saints in this stake of Zion, to pay the tenth of all they possess." J. G. Hart and

J. S. Cantwell, "The High Council to All the Saints in St. Louis, and throughout This Stake of Zion—Greeting," *St. Louis Luminary*, December 16, 1854, 2, col. 2.

69. Milo Andrus, "The High Council to All the Saints throughout This Stake of Zion—Greeting," *St. Louis Luminary*, December 23, 1854, 2, col. 4.

70. For the names, the *Luminary* staff relied on information printed in the *Millennial Star*. See "Return of Missionaries," *St. Louis Luminary*, January 6, 1855, 2, col. 3.

71. "We are pleased at all times, to hear . . .," *St. Louis Luminary*, July 14, 1855, 2, col. 1.

72. James Case, "To the Editor of the Luminary," *St. Louis Luminary*, October 13, 1855, 2, col. 3.

73. The *Luminary* added, "All along the line of travel, too, other agents are in waiting with the necessary supplies for the journey, and under the auspices of Mormonism the great land voyage across the plains is now almost as safe as a journey from New York to Albany." "The Mormon Immigration," *St. Louis Luminary*, June 9, 1855, 4, col. 1. "It is estimated that there are at this time en route between Liverpool and St. Louis not fewer than two thousand Latter-day Saints, who are mostly from the British Isles, there are some from France and the Channel Islands, some from Italy, Switzerland, Malta, and Gibraltar and other nations, and Islands of the sea." "The Emigration," *St. Louis Luminary*, May 5, 1855, 2, col. 2. "Between November 24, 1854, and April 26, '55, I shipped about 3,650 souls of Saints from the European missions, of whom 1,126 were emigrated wholly, or in part, by the perpetual emigrating fund, about 600 intended to go through to the Valley on their own means, the remainder purposed to stay at New York, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, St. Louis." "Interesting Correspondence from F. D. Richards," *St. Louis Luminary*, May 26, 1855, 2, col. 3.

74. "Emigration," *St. Louis Luminary*, December 15, 1855, 3, col. 3. The reason for the directive was stated by Brigham Young: "The operation of the Company thus far, have been very successful, although comparatively little remuneration has as yet been received from those benefitted. . . . Thousands are anxiously awaiting for the time when the Company will be able to bring them." "Governor's Message," *St. Louis Luminary*, March 24, 1855, 1, col. 4.

75. Snow believed that within "two or three years" those who had reported to the *Luminary* office could "gather up to Zion by adopting the plan of saving weekly some portion of their earnings." "Save Your Dimes," *St. Louis Luminary*, June 2, 1855, 2, col. 3.

76. "Notice to Our Emigrants," *St. Louis Luminary*, April 14, 1855, 2, col. 1.

77. For a more complete listing of Latter-day Saint deaths in St. Louis, see "Lists of Deaths in the St. Louis Branch Records of Members, 1849–1862," film CR 375/8, reel 4267, Church History Library.

78. "Another Good Man Departed," *St. Louis Luminary*, November 22, 1854, 2, col. 2.

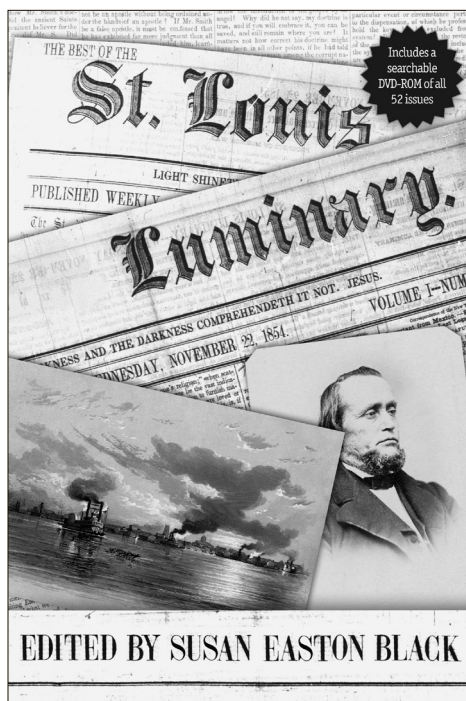
79. The index of nineteenth-century terms on the DVD-ROM accompanying *The Best of the St. Louis Luminary* defines these causes in modern medical terms.

80. See "Joel H. Johnson . . .," *St. Louis Luminary*, October 13, 1855, 2, col. 3.

81. Alexander Robbins Jr., "Plurality of Wives," *St. Louis Luminary*, September 8, 1855, 4, col. 1.

82. "When we record our angry feelings . . .," *St. Louis Luminary*, December 30, 1854, 4, col. 4.
83. "The softest pillow is a good . . .," *St. Louis Luminary*, February 3, 1855, 3, col. 5.
84. "Every good scholar is not . . .," *St. Louis Luminary*, July 21, 1855, 4, col. 2.
85. "A man came into a printing . . .," *St. Louis Luminary*, January 6, 1855, 3, col. 5.
86. "There is a shop . . .," *St. Louis Luminary*, March 17, 1855, 4, col. 2.
87. "Selections for a Newspaper," *St. Louis Luminary*, January 27, 1855, 3, col. 5.
88. J. W. Marrion, "Blacksmithing and Grazing," *St. Louis Luminary*, March 3, 1855, 3, col. 5.
89. Brigham Young, "Instructions to Erastus Snow," April 10, 1856, as cited in Larson, *Erastus Snow*, 279. Original in Official Correspondence file.
90. Erastus Snow to Brigham Young, September 25, 1856, as cited in Larson, *Erastus Snow*, 284. Original in Official Correspondence file.
91. Brigham Young to Erastus Snow, October 31, 1856, as cited in Larson, *Erastus Snow*, 284. Original in Official Correspondence file.

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Lance Larsen. *Backyard Alchemy*.
Tampa, Fla.: University of Tampa Press, 2009

Reviewed by Casualene Meyer

Fatherhood is an immediate, fruitful theme in Lance Larsen's *Backyard Alchemy*, from the title with its combination of hominess and intellectual magic to the dedication page honoring his wife, Jacqui, and his recently deceased father, Veryl Larsen. Several poems in Larsen's book feature fathers, inviting readers to ponder the subject.

When Larsen's poems introduce characters as "my son" or "my daughter," it is more than mere identification. It is unlikely that the role played by a son or daughter in a poem could have just as well been written for an arbitrary character. The relationship of fathers to children is the essence of or at least a key to appreciating the poems. I leave to readers to draw their own conclusions about the functions of and insights into fatherhood in *Backyard Alchemy*, but here, through a few poems, are some initial observations and answers to the question posed by Larsen: "What is a father?" (31).

A father is a human being who serves his children despite his failings. "Self-portrait, with Fly Rod and Falling Snow" tells the story of a father who in an angry moment hurls his daughter's doll from the window because, as he describes it, "my daughter / wanted to break both my arms / and never again make her bed in this world." After the angry display of human frailty provoked by a child, the speaker-father finds himself in the duty-driven absurdist position of standing on the "icy roof" in "cob-webbed galoshes" using his own father's fishing pole in an attempt to hook the doll out of the tree she landed in. The poem is at once pathos, humor, and cosmic insight as it concludes, "Dolls copy the fears we feed them. / Snow copies what swirls in our heads. / Fathers on roofs copy stern gods hoping to be loved" (8-9).

A father is a male who gives away part of his vitality so that his children might flourish. In Elizabethan thought, a male lost a fraction of his vitality whenever he procreated. This concept informs a reading of “Bestiary for Half-lost Humans,” in which the speaker begins by comparing himself to an amaryllis: “To keep your amaryllis blooming, pluck the stamens / out, the almanac suggests. So much for lily ardor, / so much for making a natural *navidad* of every hour.” This poem suggests that a responsible father sacrifices his strength by giving life, empowers his child to blossom, and remains to nurture her as she grows. But with his loss of vitality comes a subtle compensation:

If I wander here below, and if I climb
the stairs into a simpler dark, and if my sleeping
daughter, oracle of chuff and sigh, turns to the moon
why not sway in her exhalations on my one good stem? (21)

A father is a rough character who frightens and compels. “Elegy, with Dental Bridge” is a portrait of an ornery and ominous father removing and brushing his dental bridge in the early morning. The poem is by no means lyric as it begins “Make it an ungodly hour of bruised blue, house / still creaky with nightmares” and introduces the father as groggy “like the bear he resembled, a shaggy calypso / bubbling from his mouth, a cheerful rage / against aging, mortgages, and Tricky Dick Nixon.” The speaker further recounts watching his father remove and clean the bridge: “With a ratty toothbrush he attacked / those hairline cracks, scrubbing like a zephyr” and completes the scene with the father reinserting the bridge: “Taking a step back and tilting his head for focus, / he’d bite bite bite the air, three glorious times / like Cerberus tasting the breeze for his next meal.” This forbidding father also compels; the speaker recalls: “I couldn’t look, / couldn’t look away. He held his tragic flaw / in his palm” (41). Fathers can be alarmingly human and even grotesque, but they remain the fathers of their children who, knowing no other parental reality, look to them. These images of fathers remain with their sons and daughters forever as the images have with the speaker of “Elegy.”

A father is an observer who learns from—or at least questions—brief moments with his children as to where he stands in the universe. Various poems in *Backyard Alchemy* illuminate seemingly quotidian father-child moments to reveal their larger significance. In “Apprentice” (with its possible allusions to the *Star Wars* epic), a father plays rock-paper-scissors with a daughter who “shrugs off / each win, but losing, offers up her hand for punishment” and at the critical moment of the poem pulls a surprise

move that turns a simple game into a serious, seismic moment of self-questioning for the father:

I choose paper. She chooses—no,
she lifts her hands, as if channeling electricity, fingers
writhing, fingers kissing the space between her eyes
and mine. *Fire*, she says with five dirty flames at the end
of each wrist. What is a father? At what temperature
do rules melt? Even the rain at the window burns. (31)

“Sit-ups with Mr. Johnny Keats” is a travel experience in which a father, staying in Hampstead, England, with his daughter, anchors her feet and compares Keats’s epic life and people’s romancing of it to helping his daughter through her mundane but arduous exercises, “willing her success / in the unwinnable race—forehead to knees, elbows / to cosmos, cradled head chasing the glorious banging heart” (61). This event shows a father putting his daughter’s life and interests—and his hand in them—in a context that reverences them.

Finally, the prose-poem “On Kissing Sleeping Children” extends the wonders and angst of fatherhood to anyone who has kissed a sleeping child: “You are kissing what you have already lost, a country offering no visa. . . . When you kiss children you taste again their sage nonsense—*hiccups make your birthday come faster*—long enough to believe in your own” (43). With Larsen’s poetic insight, even the small, common interaction of an adult kissing a child multiplies meanings.

As the title suggests, *Backyard Alchemy* is not only a collection of poems about fatherhood, but is a collection of eclectic curiosities. Poems explore electricity, ashes, snakes, hermit crabs, bats, and pigs, relating these subjects not only to the whimsy of nature but to deep reflections on faith and doubt, hope and love, and what it means to be human. Notably, Larsen also presumes to write outright about religious matters ranging from God to the sons of perdition. I appreciate him taking this aesthetic and philosophical risk and for doing it so satisfyingly, even as I appreciate the intellectual, poetic exploration of fatherhood with its angst and power. Larsen has sired some fine poetry and leaves readers desiring more of the same.

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Nicholas Wade. *The Faith Instinct:
How Religion Evolved and Why It Endures.*

New York: Penguin, 2009

Reviewed by Brian Jackson

People of faith may not warm to the view that the mind's receptivity to religion has been shaped by evolution," writes Nicholas Wade, science writer for the *New York Times*, in his new book *The Faith Instinct* (5). If religion evolves with cultural circumstances, then it loses some of its immutable, supernatural qualities. On the other hand, atheists "may not embrace the idea that religious behavior evolved because it conferred essential benefits on ancient societies and their successors" (5). If we accept the proposition that faith endures because cultures select it (perhaps unconsciously) as a necessary attribute of their survival, then we have to accept the proposition that religion is good—even necessary—for the survival of the species. Though Wade's book will not delight the deeply religious or the defiantly irreligious, it provides an eloquent tour of evolutionary biology's adventure with faith. Like Robert Wright's popular book *The Evolution of God*, published in 2009, *The Faith Instinct* is a journalist's attempt to articulate, in accessible prose for the nonexpert, the salutary nature of religion as a natural phenomenon of group selection. This explanation works well if religions are considered merely cultural or social institutions. However, Wade ultimately cannot account for the essence of religion as we experience it—as a vital, orienting, and motivating force for personal growth.

With *The Faith Instinct*, Wade wades into troubled waters. Evolution continues to divide the public, even though it has long been accepted as fact by the scientific community. It has been nearly a century since the Scopes Trial, and we are still debating evolution, especially when it comes to the science curriculum in public schools. In the last decade, a handful of atheist scholars like Richard Dawkins and Daniel Dennett—the "neo-atheists"—have written popular books in the Enlightenment tradition that criticize religion's influence on science. Within this milieu, the thinking believer searches faithfully for works that take religion seriously without

running away from the mountainous evidence that science presents for natural selection. Wade's book will be best appreciated by readers who believe that religion and science are "nonoverlapping magesteria," as science historian Stephen Jay Gould put it so memorably, rather than incompatible propositions.

Wade defines religion as "a system of emotionally binding beliefs and practices in which a society implicitly negotiates through prayer and sacrifice with supernatural agents, securing from them commands that compel members, through fear of divine punishment, to subordinate their interests to the common good" (15). From the standpoint of evolutionary biology, religion has "survival value" because it strengthens community and thereby protects and fosters reproduction, which is "natural selection's only yardstick of success" (12–13). Religious societies outlast others because the sense of group purpose creates stronger armies, larger families, and more cooperative members. According to this thesis, the genetic imperative to pass along our genes led primitive man to establish religion as a binding social system to reinforce the already hardwired moral instinct. Though religious practices evolved as human civilization evolved, the instinct to rely on supernatural imperatives to reinforce community and family morals remains constant because the need to pass along genes remains constant. Early on in *The Faith Instinct*, we find a fundamental tension between the unconscious genetic imperative that ostensibly governs religious life and the "personal aspects of religion"—like comfort, faith, repentance, transcendence, and closeness with God—that theoretically have no biological function beyond making us feel good enough about religion to participate in it, thereby increasing the likelihood that we will pass along our genes (12).

In his chapter on the evolution of religious behavior, Wade describes how a swiftly modernizing brain could collude with others to create "an emotional commitment to the group so fierce and transcendent that men would quite readily sacrifice their lives in its defense" (39). That need for commitment was found in religious rites of passage, music, dance, and supernatural commandments. What better way to reinforce "society's moral authority" (55) than to imagine an omniscient deity who promises to smite you, your family, and your crops and herds if you do not abide by the group's moral code? And these rituals created the emotional connections necessary to keep the group together. For example, we are told that the all-night ritual healing dance of the !Kung people of the Kalahari "clearly enhances the viability of the !Kung group" through a deep, emotionally resonant communal ecstasy (107). However, the ecstasy—the drums, the chanting, the dancing, the singing, the trancelike state, the communion

with the gods—is not the true essence of religion in this narrative; surviving and reproducing is.

Despite Nicholas Wade's capable storytelling, he can provide only scant direct evidence that this is how and why religion evolved and endures, a point that Wade himself admirably concedes. His thesis rests on three controversial assumptions. First, he claims "the fact that religious behavior is universal strongly suggests that it is an adaptation, meaning a trait shaped by natural selection" (43). Second, he argues, along with cultural anthropologists, that we can look at existing hunter-gatherer communities (like the !Kung or the Andaman Islanders) to see what religious life was like fifty thousand years ago when ancestral man stepped out of the African deserts and started settling the world. Though they certainly are suggestive, both of these perspectives provide indirect evidence at best.

Finally, Wade accepts the principle of group selection, or "the idea that genes can become more common if they confer a benefit on groups of people rather than just individuals" (29). Darwin explored the group selection thesis in his autobiographical writings; however, in the late twentieth century, with scientists focusing on genes as the site where natural selection takes place, group selection was not popular in the biological sciences.

In 1975, E. O. Wilson wrote his controversial *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*, the final chapter of which explores the biological evolutionary basis of human behaviors. Since then, scientists have debated whether religion or any social morality is adaptive rather than accidental. Wade sides with the adaptation group, which includes popular moral psychologists like Jonathan Haidt, author of the delightful book *The Happiness Hypothesis*. In the nonadaptive group, Steven Pinker and Richard Dawkins, for example, argue that religion is an accidental evolutionary misfiring on par with a moth's navigational weakness for the flames (66). For the time being, according to Wade, group selection is the most convenient and reliable way to describe religious behavior as it evolves through the ages. For all its weaknesses, the group selection theory is a useful way to combine culture and genetics, since "evolution is the bedrock theory of biology and people belong inseparably to the biological world" (123).

While the Kalahari !Kung may have remained unchanged over the millennia, other religious societies have shown themselves to be a "superbly flexible genetic framework" for new and changing cultural needs (189). Wade posits that modern societies moved from ritual to belief and sacred text, from egalitarian communities to complex ecclesiastical hierarchies, from personal interfaces with the divine to priestly mediation, from a focus on practical day-to-day needs to salvation in the afterlife. At each step of the way, "the neural circuitry" that predisposes us to faith was

channeled into new religious outlets that ensured survival. The transition was not always smooth: as with the Great Awakenings in U.S. history, there is often “tension between the ecclesiastical and the ecstatic” (133), a point illustrated by the early Latter-day Saints’ struggle with spiritual exuberance in Kirtland.

Wade tries to plot as much of this evolution as possible onto a “tree of religion” in much the same way as linguists may plot the world’s languages on a single tree. Most religions, writes Wade, are “composite cultural creations,” springing from other branches, much as Christianity and Islam sprang from Judaism (147). The tree for the most part keeps its shape, with the occasional new growth like “the exotic flower of Mormonism” (191). It is not clear to me—admittedly, I’m no expert—what biological imperative is served through such rich variation. In the end, it is not clear exactly how biology and culture interact to create new strains of religious practice. Human agency, it seems, makes a mess of evolution when it comes to culture.

In *The Faith Instinct*, the “exotic flower of Mormonism” makes several appearances as the quintessence of group selection. The Latter-day Saints have high barriers of entry into the community, which “raises the level of trust among its members” (59). The early Church permitted individual access to deity through spiritual experience—even ecstasy through speaking in tongues and prophesying—while maintaining a strong hierarchy to control such experiences (138). Like the hellenized Jews in the first century, Mormonism spreads most efficiently through social networks, thereby demonstrating “the evolutionary assumption that religious behavior evolve[s] as a means of group cohesion” (159). For all his insight, Wade misses what I think would be the most conspicuous example of Mormonism’s group fitness: the doctrine of family and the importance of procreation. Though we may not hear much from the pulpit anymore about impatient spirits waiting to come down to righteous families, the doctrines of premortal life and the eternal nature of family have resulted in a prolific people, with procreative practices reinforced by divine decrees. Wade misses this essential perspective.

Wade spends three chapters demonstrating how religion takes a vital part in societies old and new by shaping relationships of trust and commerce, regulating reproduction and population, and influencing war. In one of the more incisive passages, Wade defends religious morality against those atheists who argue that religion is not necessary for creating moral people:

Adam Smith described the marketplace as an invisible hand that induced each individual, by following his self-interest, to serve the

common interest. But hands come in pairs. An efficient marketplace can operate only on the basis of trust. The counterpart of the invisible hand that works on self-interest is the one that induces moral self-restraint. In most, if not all, societies moral standards have been secured by religion and the fear of divine retribution. (210)

Yet as Wade closes his remarkable book, he notes that the three-hundred-year march of modernity has made secularism a viable and attractive alternative to religion, particularly in the West, a point Charles Taylor so richly made in *A Secular Age*. Could it be that in a post-Enlightenment world religion has lost its power to create commonality within a people, which would, by some inexplicable process, make them less likely to perpetuate themselves? If Wade's narrative carries water, then nations retain their potential for survival insofar as they retain religion. Wade uses the United States as an example of a modern, constitutionally secular state that has somehow preserved, among its abundant religious plurality, a common civil religion, an "overarching faith" (263) or "meta-creed" (265) that binds a people together and, Wade argues yet again, makes more likely the survival of their genes.

And what if the United States declines in religious fidelity? How does its citizenry sustain a moral universe without the divine? Wade's answer is sure to spark controversy. In the last chapter, he argues that because of human agency, religion can be "reworked" to meet the needs of a secular society (280). Just as the military has learned to harness the power of ritual and group movement for secular purposes, so too can future religious leaders in secular societies work creatively to transform religion into something more palatable to people who embrace science and eschew supernaturalism. To Wade, the very fact that humans have agency to change the way we worship constitutes a more-than-human *something* that is very much like "the hand of the deity in action" (283).

Of course, this theory is an unsatisfactory conclusion to those who believe that religion is revealed rather than made. For believers who experience God's direction in religious matters, it may be a salve to think that religion, contra Dawkins and the sour neoatheists, is considered beneficial to societies, but it is nonsensical to believe that we can at will change the way we practice it. And there is an additional troubling aspect of Wade's book, one that I believe has been challenged so eloquently by Marilynne Robinson in her recent book *Absence of Mind*. Religion is not something we practice like automatons, dancing out the rituals while our genes call the tune. We do not experience love, art, and belief as aspects of some buried pulsation urging us to leave surviving offspring. Rather, they are necessities of the abundant life. The evolutionary hypothesis of religion,

no matter how usefully informed by science, is not, as William James might say, a *live* hypothesis to us. In other words, we may nod in agreement as intellectuals interested in science, but we do not *feel* or *experience* this explanation as the essence of our belief. Nor, I imagine, do the tribal cultures. The aborigines, I assume, never stop their healing dance mid-stomp and turn to each other and say, “So glad we’re practicing this arduous ritual so that our strong social ties will enforce moral codes necessary for the survival of our offspring!” For all the enlightenment we receive from the group selection thesis of religion, there is something missing here—and that something might be everything vital about living our religion.

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Benjamin C. Pykles. *Excavating Nauvoo: The Mormons and the Rise of Historical Archaeology in America*.
Lincoln, Nebr.: University of Nebraska Press, 2010

Reviewed by Richard K. Talbot

During a recent coordination meeting, an archaeologist employed by the state of Utah tried to explain how the science of archaeology can help Native Americans to know their history. In response, one of the Native American participants exclaimed, "We already know our history!"¹ This statement sheds light on tensions that arise when reconstructing the past. To those living in a postmodern world, history can serve many purposes and many masters; for this particular Native American, the oral history that had been passed down generationally to her presented her past in a context and form with which she was accustomed and comfortable. Her past was a fact, not a story to be interpreted or reinterpreted.

In a general way, this story reflects the paradox Ben Pykles faced in producing a most enlightening volume on the behind-the-scenes story of the restoration of Nauvoo. As a historical archaeologist and a Latter-day Saint, Pykles is keenly aware that history and story often pull in different directions. Modern archaeology strives to be objective, using artifacts, site types, and patterns to document the record of what actually happened (at least as far as the remains that are preserved can reveal), free from emotion and agenda.² Archaeologists then use those patterns not only to describe the past, but to explain it. But it is an ever-changing history, as more pieces of the puzzle are filled in. To help complete the final picture, historical preservation efforts strive to protect and encourage the study of as many of those pieces as possible.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, like most large religious, political, or social organizations, has always been deeply interested in its own history. And like other institutions, it has a vested interest in telling the story in its own way. A primary goal of the restoration of

Nauvoo, like other Church history sites in New York, Ohio, Missouri, Utah, and elsewhere, is to tell that story. But restoration for preservation's sake or for filling in the pieces of the Church history puzzle is not the end goal. Pykles quotes Steven L. Olsen from the Church History Department: "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is not in the business of historical preservation per se. It is in the business of saving souls" (301).³

Students of Church history will find Pykles's research instructive, but perhaps not in the way they might expect, because his intended primary audience is other archaeologists. However, *Excavating Nauvoo* is not so much the story of the archaeological work carried out at Nauvoo as it is the story of the influences, attitudes, and agendas that shaped that work. The book's subtitle, *The Mormons and the Rise of Historical Archaeology in America*, refers to the unusual convergence of the Nauvoo restoration efforts at a time when historical archaeology was on the threshold of becoming a true scientific discipline, growing out of a long period in which restoration and interpretation were the primary objectives. Noted archaeologist Robert L. Schuyler writes in the foreword that Pykles's book is "the second serious, extended study of the origins and early development of the historic archaeology discipline" (x). In this sense, the first four chapters lead into the final chapter, which focuses on the role of Nauvoo in that development.

Pykles's thorough research is evident from beginning to end, which makes it difficult to find substantive fault with the volume, as he traces the many threads that define Nauvoo today. Central to this account is the formation and evolution of Nauvoo Restoration, Inc. (NRI) and the personalities involved throughout the process of reclaiming the city. Pykles gives very detailed treatment of LDS President David O. McKay's deep interest and involvement in restoring Nauvoo. Additional supporters recognizable to many included Hugh B. Brown, Henry D. Moyle, David M. Kennedy, and J. Willard Marriott. However, Dr. J. LeRoy Kimball, a Salt Lake City cardiologist and great-grandson of Heber C. Kimball, was in many respects the visionary behind NRI. Over many years, Kimball had purchased properties in Nauvoo with the goal of restoration, and his early involvement and contacts were instrumental in keeping the project going.

Those familiar with the foundations of historical archaeology in the United States will particularly appreciate Pykles's discussion of J. C. Harrington's role in the formative years of the Nauvoo work. An old-school archaeologist and considered one of the fathers of historical archeology, Harrington had been deeply involved in the excavation and restoration work at Colonial Williamsburg. To elicit his involvement was a real coup for NRI and helped legitimize the project. Harrington and his

wife, Virginia, spent the transitional years of their retirement organizing and supervising the restoration and interpretive efforts at Nauvoo, including the excavation of the original Nauvoo Temple foundation. Overall, the initial restoration efforts reflected the mutual interests of both the Church and of the archaeologists. Yet, as Pykles has demonstrated, the interests of the two eventually diverged as a new generation of archaeologists came onto the scene—more particularly Dr. Dale Berge (now retired after four decades at BYU)—whose goals went beyond just digging and restoring buildings to reconstructing history through professional archaeological methods.

Pykles's research digs deep into the roots of the early interest in restoring Nauvoo and the friction between competing interpretive positions of the Latter-day Saints, the Community of Christ (then RLDS Church), as well as government entities. Latter-day Saints saw Nauvoo as a commemoration of the faith, suffering, and perseverance of the pioneers who later went west, while for the RLDS, Nauvoo was a way to honor Joseph Smith and lend credibility to their beliefs. Concurrently, state and federal government interest in preserving and restoring Nauvoo leaned more toward a secular memorializing of the westward expansion of the United States and the ideals of that period. Pykles's discussions of these various competing interests puts the entire Nauvoo project in a different perspective from what most readers and visitors to Nauvoo might imagine.

The volume is weakened slightly by issues of connectivity and tone. Most glaring is the lack of maps and other figures to contextualize the various buildings and other features that have or have not been restored, including a generalized plat map of historic and modern Nauvoo. Archaeologists in particular, even in a volume examining the roots of historical archaeology, would expect more detailed feature maps and comparison of those maps with final restoration plans, although these may not have been available to Pykles.⁴

While Pykles tries to present a fair and balanced narrative of NRI and the restoration effort, he is not always entirely successful. This is particularly evident when he addresses what may be the most dramatic events in the book, those which revolve around the “changing of the guard” in early 1970 with the death of President David O. McKay and the subsequent tenures of Presidents Joseph Fielding Smith and Harold B. Lee. The latter two clearly had different leadership styles from those of President McKay and different visions as to what Nauvoo should become. The casual Church member may find Pykles's treatment of this emotional issue a little uncomfortable, since it deals with personality differences and disagreements within the Church hierarchy. In fact, of all the sections in the book, this

particular discussion seems the most one-sided, with many of the most emotional quotes originating from participants heavily invested in NRI. The perspectives and feelings of Presidents Smith and Lee are for the most part only inferred, giving them little opportunity to speak for themselves.

Many archaeologists (who are mostly non-LDS with little or no knowledge of the Church or sympathy for its proselytizing goals) may come away from this book feeling that the treatment of the archaeological remains at Nauvoo was a national travesty. Pykles tries to circumvent this feeling with a rational discussion in the final chapter on the temporal context of the Nauvoo work. That is, by the time historical archaeology began a full-scale shift toward becoming an explanatory science, the path of Nauvoo restoration was already politically set in stone. Further, Pykles correctly notes that Mormon identity is in part built upon a shared interpretation of the past, and Church members not only “touch” the past by visiting Nauvoo, but they become active participants in it. This process is something that anthropologically trained archaeologists can understand and accept.⁵ Archaeologists also understand the importance of telling a story and of making their work “mean something” to the public.⁶ Pykles is mostly successful in this effort to contextualize the restoration work, although the tone of the preceding chapters may be hard for some to overcome.

The final pages of Pykles’s book describe the connection between historical archaeology and the Mormon identity. Here Pykles diverts from his primary audience in order to make the case within the Church for a more sympathetic approach to archaeology and to allow archaeology to contribute to the Mormon identity beyond just finding foundations so that buildings can be restored or replicated. This discussion in many respects is the most masterful in the book and deserves thoughtful consideration by everyone concerned with or even remotely interested in Church history, particularly those who think that “we already know our history.”⁷

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1. May 2010 meeting between officials from the Utah State Antiquities Section and various Native American representatives relative to a large archaeological excavation project being carried out at the time.

2. This is not to say that postmodern interpretations have not slipped into archaeological dialogue, but that the majority of archaeologists try not to take sides in interpretive battles outside the realm of science. As a colleague of mine likes to say when excavating: “I don’t write the record; I just read it.”

3. Quoting Steven L. Olsen, "A History of Restoring Historic Kirtland," *Journal of Mormon History* 30, no. 1 (2004): 120.

4. Selectivity in restoration and the construction of missionary housing and other buildings in the city that were not part of the original city assure that the Nauvoo seen by thousands of visitors yearly is not the same Nauvoo that existed in the time of Joseph Smith.

5. For example, most anthropologists would respect and properly contextualize the very theme expressed on the official website for Nauvoo, at <http://www.historicnauvoo.net>: "Historic Nauvoo is a place for making connections. To the past. To those you love. To yourself. . . . Nauvoo offers its guests a chance to understand a people of faith, to make a connection to the values of a simpler time, and to share some real fun with family or friends."

6. Richard K. Talbot, "Archaeology's Bottom Line: Making It Mean Something," *Utah Archaeology* 21, no. 1 (2008): 137.

7. The research goals of historical archaeology and the proselytizing goals of the LDS Church are not mutually exclusive, and there is always reason to hope that they might unite once again. Museum displays, pageants, costumes, narratives, and rebuilt/refurnished structures are only secondary means of making connections to the past. Written texts are the script of history, and historical archaeology provides the actual set and physical context in which that history is most appropriately viewed. Archaeology allows people to touch the dirt and grind of the past, and it can refresh and refine the interpretation of pioneer life. By filling in these missing pieces of history, archaeology can deepen the appreciation of the pioneer experience and enrich the story being told.