BYU STUDIES

Scholarship Informed by the Restored Gospel of Jesus Christ
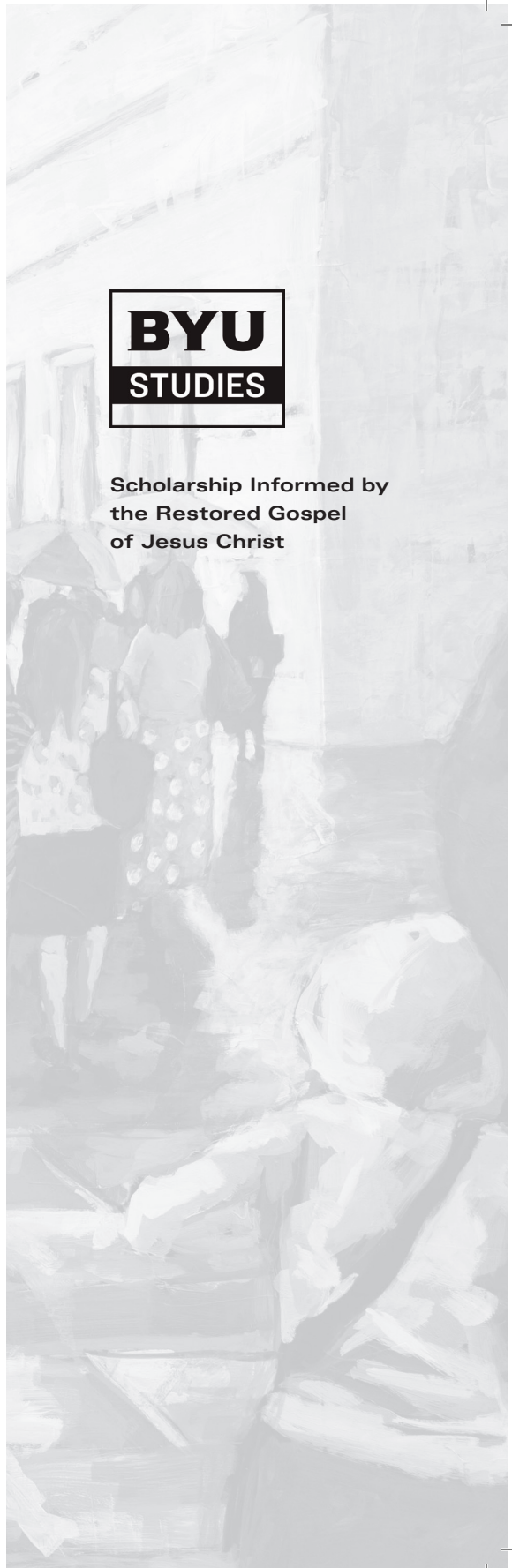
BYU STUDIES

Volume 62 · Number 1 · 2023

Articles

Both a father and a mother are needed to create life, and both are needed to best facilitate the nurturing of that life. Dennis Smith, *First Child,* bronze, 1978, located southwest of the Wilkinson Student Center just east of the Herald R. Clark Building, Brigham Young University campus, Provo, Utah. Photograph by Cooper Douglass.

It Takes Two

What We Learn from Social Science about the Divine Pattern of Gender Complementarity in Parenting

Jenet Jacob Erickson

Introduction

In 2006, Canadian fathering scholar Andrea Doucet shared an illuminating moment from her extensive research with single dads. After a long evening discussing these fathers' experiences, Doucet asked, "In an ideal world, what resources or supports would you like to see for single fathers?" She expected to hear that they wanted greater social support and societal acceptance, more programs and policies directed at single dads. Instead, after a period of awkward silence, one dad stood and said, "An ideal world would be one with a father and a mother. We'd be lying if we pretended that wasn't true."[1] Nods of agreement and expressions of approval followed from the other dads. Although many had had bitter experiences of separation and divorce, they could not ignore the inherent connectedness of mothering and fathering—and the profound deficit experienced when one or the other is not there. They knew because they lived it. Both a father and a mother are needed to create life, and as described by Doucet's fathers and the doctrine of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, both are needed to best facilitate the nurturing of that life.[2]

---

1. Andrea Doucet, *Do Men Mother? Fathering, Care, and Parental Responsibilities* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 215.

2. See also Paul Raeburn, *Do Fathers Matter? What Science Tells Us about the Parent We've Overlooked* (New York: Scientific American and Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014).

Doctrinal Foundation for Gender Complementarity

The biblical account of Creation presents us with a profound insight into Deity regarding the importance of the two genders. "In the beginning," God orders creation through a series of differentiations and separations (Gen. 1:1). We find his holy ordering in the separation and complementarity of heaven and earth, light and dark, day and night, morning and evening, clouds and seas, water and dry land. This essence of creation is captured in the Hebrew designation for God himself, *Kadosh,* meaning differentiated, separated, designated for a special purpose.[3]

At Creation's pinnacle, we are presented with the differentiation of male and female, wholly distinct and complementary, each bearing the image of God, *imago Dei.* "In the beginning," we learn that eternity is composed of a holy ordering of complementary realities, culminating in male and female, in whose union we see the eternal God. In the concept of *Kadosh,* they are separated that ultimately they might become pure, sacred, holy, eternally *one.* Elder Erastus Snow recognized this holy ordering in speaking of one of the most distinctive and profound of Latter-day Saint doctrines: "There can be no God except he is composed of the man and woman united, and there is not in all the eternities that exist, nor ever will be, a God in any other way. I have another description: There never was a God, and there never will be in all eternities, except they are made of these two component parts; a man and a woman; the male and the female."[4]

The eternal reality of male and female, which Elder Bruce D. Porter once described as "woven into the fabric of the universe, a vital, foundational element of eternal life and divine nature,"[5] is a concept also deeply embedded in non-Christian cultural understandings. The ancient Chinese philosophy of yin and yang describes how the contrary, complementary forces of feminine and masculine energy compose all of nature, interacting to create a whole that is greater than the sum of their individual parts.

This concept is not unfamiliar to Latter-day Saints. Elder Boyd K. Packer described the complementing differences between men and women as "the very key to the plan of happiness."[6] This understanding

---

3. Neil Gillman, *Sacred Fragments: Recovering Theology for the Modern Jew* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), 229.

4. Erastus Snow, in *Journal of Discourses,* 26 vols. (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855–86), 19:270 (March 3, 1878).

5. Bruce D. Porter, "Defending the Family in a Troubled World," *Ensign* 41, no. 6 (June 2011): 13.

6. Boyd K. Packer, "For Time and All Eternity," *Ensign* 23, no. 11 (November 1993): 21.

is fundamental to our doctrinal understanding of marriage and has been repeatedly affirmed by apostles and prophets. In the words of Elder Richard G. Scott, "in the Lord's plan, it takes two—a man and a woman—to form a whole. Indeed, a husband and wife are not two identical halves, but a wondrous, divinely determined combination of complementary capacities and characteristics. Marriage allows these different characteristics to come together in oneness—in unity—to bless a husband and wife, their children and grandchildren. . . . Their efforts interlock and are complementary."[7]

Elder David A. Bednar said, "Because of their distinctive temperaments and capacities, males and females each bring to a marriage relationship unique perspectives and experiences. The man and the woman contribute differently but equally to a oneness and a unity that can be achieved in no other way. The man completes and perfects the woman and the woman completes and perfects the man as they learn from and mutually strengthen and bless each other."[8]

Sister Linda K. Burton further clarified this concept using the metaphor of our hands to explain the meaning of the Hebrew phrase for "help meet" (*ezer kenegdo*): "We know from the scriptures that 'it is not good that . . . man should be alone.' That is why our Heavenly Father made 'an help meet for him.' The phrase *help meet* means 'a helper suited to, worthy of, or corresponding to him.' For example, our two hands are similar to each other but not exactly the same. While opposites, they complement each other and are suited to each other. Working together, they are stronger."[9]

Sister Sheri Dew, as a single woman, spoke similarly of this principle: "Our Father knew exactly what He was doing when He created us. He made us enough alike to love each other, but enough different that we would need to unite our strengths and stewardships to create a whole. Neither man nor woman is perfect or complete without the other."[10] Her words echoed instruction by President Spencer W. Kimball decades earlier: "In his wisdom and mercy, our Father made men and women dependent on

7. Richard G. Scott, "The Joy of Living the Great Plan of Happiness," *Ensign* 26, no. 11 (November 1996): 73–74.

8. David A. Bednar, "Marriage Is Essential to His Eternal Plan," *Ensign* 36, no. 6 (June 2006): 83–84.

9. Linda K. Burton, "We'll Ascend Together," *Ensign* 45, no. 5 (May 2015): 30, emphasis original.

10. Sheri L. Dew, "It Is Not Good for Man or Woman to Be Alone," *Ensign* 31, no. 11 (November 2001): 13.

each other for the full flowering of their potential. Because their natures are somewhat different, they can complement each other; because they are in many ways alike, they can understand each other." He then instructed that we "discern what is superficial and what is beautifully basic in those differences, and act accordingly."[11]

Cultural Questions and Social Science Responses

These spiritual statements come at a time when strong cultural messages assert that the differences between men and women are largely artifacts of society's creation. Uncovering society's role in creating and maintaining gender definitions and differences has been important, particularly in exposing problematic assumptions that limit the development, influence, and equality of women in the full range of social spheres.

But the lens of social construction has gone so far as to suggest that in fact there are no differences, that men and women are interchangeable, that there are no distinctions that add value in their coming together. As researcher Judith Stacey said, "The gender of parents only matters in ways that don't matter."[12]

In this cultural debate, Church members may have been led to ask whether there really are differences. And if there are, what are they and why do they matter? How are we to understand statements that men and women "contribute differently but equally" through a "combination of complementary capacities and characteristics"?[13] How are we to understand our Latter-day Saint belief that gender is an essential characteristic of our premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose?

The purpose of this paper is to review what social science research indicates about the distinctive, complementary contributions mothers and fathers make to the development of children. In doing so, it provides a lens into the complementary nature of distinct gender differences between men and women, and how together they create a oneness that is unique to the combination of male and female, mother and father.

---

11. Spencer W. Kimball, "Relief Society—Its Promise and Potential," *Ensign* 6, no. 3 (March 1976): 5.

12. Judith Stacey, quoted in Allison Hope, "Don't Fall into the Nuclear Family 'Parent Trap': What Kids Need Most Is Love," July 14, 2021, CNN Health, accessed March 31, 2023, https://www.cnn.com/2021/07/14/health/kids-parents-love-wellness-opinion/index.html; see also Timothy J. Biblarz and Judith Stacey, "How Does the Gender of Parents Matter?," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 72, no. 1 (February 2010): 3–22.

13. Bednar, "Marriage Is Essential to His Eternal Plan," 84; Scott, "Joy of Living the Great Plan of Happiness," 74.

Limitations of Social Science Research

The research discussed here is largely based on observations of mothers' and fathers' different psychological orientations and behaviors in parenting, as well as analyses that attempt to isolate how maternal and paternal presence and behaviors predict outcomes in children. As with all research, there are limitations to what it can conclude. First, there is no question that there is a tremendous amount of variability within gender. That is, not all mothers and fathers are going to parent in the ways these studies found to be typical. What does appear to be clear is that even if a mother or father does not parent in a way that appears to be "consistent" with typical patterns, in the process of parenting together a mother and a father tend to take complementary approaches, almost with an intuitive sense that children need the difference between them, even if that difference is not typical of others.

More research is needed to understand how biological processes interact with cultural and social influences to shape the distinct ways in which mothers and fathers influence children's development. Parenting behavior is "clearly influenced" by biological processes, including the profound biological changes mothers experience in the process of carrying a fetus, giving birth, and sustaining life and that fathers experience through closeness with their partner and in their paternal involvement.[14] But these biological processes happen within a social and cultural ecology that also appears to profoundly shape the way mothers and fathers relate to their children.[15] More cross-cultural research is needed to tease out the degree to which the observed differences between mothers and fathers are socially constructed differences or consistent across all cultures, indicating something about the inherent natures of fathers and mothers.

As with all statistical approaches, it is difficult to fully isolate a predictor's effect or to determine causality of a result. The studies reviewed herein have used strong methodologies that indicate meaningful correlations and, in some cases, some level of causality between maternal and paternal presence and behaviors and specific outcomes. But those findings do not eliminate the need for caution in suggesting that mothers or fathers *cause* certain outcomes.

---

14. Ross D. Parke, "Gender Differences and Similarities in Parental Behaviors," in *Gender and Parenthood: Biological and Social Scientific Perspectives,* ed. W. Bradford Wilcox and Kathleen Kovner Kline (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 135.

15. Parke, "Gender Differences and Similarities," 121–63.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, though these findings provide insight into the ways in which men and women "contribute differently but equally" through a "combination of complementary capacities and characteristics"[16] to the sacred purposes of marriage and family life, we should not expect mortal experiences captured in social science to define eternal verities. We know from the Proclamation on the Family that "gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose,"[17] but prophetic revelation has not confirmed the specific ways in which the gendered natures of men and women may differ or whether men and women have distinct gender roles or purposes in the eternities. The biological, psychological, and sociological differences experienced in mortality may contain shadows of whatever constitutes the eternal gender that predates our mortal experience.

Evidence for Complementarity in Maternal and Paternal Influences

It is clear that both parents are capable of providing the essential nurturing, feeding, stimulation, teaching, and guidance needed for children to become competent adults. In fact, observational studies indicate that mothers and fathers show striking patterns of similarity in nurturing infants and that infants can form essential emotional attachments with both fathers and mothers. Across development, there is tremendous overlap in how a mother and father influence children's development.[18]

But research also reveals how fathers' and mothers' distinct "genetically, anatomically, [and] hormonally influenced predispositions" contribute to different psychological orientations, strengths, and styles of interaction with children.[19] The patterns of gender differences that emerge are not necessarily fixed, reflecting social, cultural, and historical factors as well as biological ones. As fathering scholar Ross D. Parke summarizes in his review of gender differences and similarities in parenting, this combination of factors shapes what research has found to

---

16. Bednar, "Marriage Is Essential to His Eternal Plan," 84; Scott, "Joy of Living the Great Plan of Happiness," 74.

17. The First Presidency and Council of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign* 25, no. 11 (November 1995): 102.

18. Parke, "Gender Differences and Similarities," 120–63.

19. Marc H. Bornstein, "Parenting x Gender x Culture x Time," in Wilcox and Kline, *Gender and Parenthood,* 92.

be "clear gender differences" in the level of parental involvement, taking on of tasks, and style of interaction parents exhibit as they carry out parenting responsibilities.[20] The resulting effect is that mothers and fathers influence a wide range of children's developmental domains but do so through different processes; when these processes are combined, they present complementary patterns that are valuable for children's development.

These gender differences enable fathers and mothers to influence the same developmental domains through distinct pathways that together benefit children's development. The developmental wholeness facilitated by the careful, consistent caregiving of both a mother and a father emerges as greater than the sum of the individual parts. Neither the father nor the mother is subordinate to each other. Rather, their intertwining differences reveal a complementarity that is measurably significant in facilitating healthy development.

Bonding Patterns

Let's consider what social science research reveals about how mothers and fathers shape children's social and emotional development. Every infant is born dependent on specific social and emotional interactions during a very formative period of brain and body development. In order for those interactions to enable healthy growth, they must occur within a relationship that is predictable, consistent, and emotionally available.[21] In fact, the first essential task for an infant is to establish a bond through which connection and communication can occur. From the moment an infant leaves the womb, she is searching, communicating, interacting—primed to sensitively perceive and seek out a particular caregiver, already demonstrating a preference for her mother, seeking her smell, tone of voice, and touch.[22]

The mother is also physiologically primed to establish such a bond. Face-to-face, body-to-body, sound-to-sound, right brain–to–right brain, mother and infant communicate. In the process, the mother regulates the emotions of the infant—who has little capacity to regulate them—minimizing negative feelings while maximizing positive

---

20. Parke, "Gender Differences and Similarities," 123.

21. Allan N. Schore, *Affect Regulation and the Origin of the Self: The Neurobiology of Emotional Development* (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1994), 3.

22. Schore, *Affect Regulation and the Origin of the Self,* 373–75.

feelings, soothing and calming, and enhancing excitement and happiness.[23] Remarkably, an estimated one million new synapses are forming each second, leading to a literal doubling in brain size during the first year and a half of life.[24] And most of it happens within a very specific section of the brain, the right brain, where personality, self-awareness, empathy, capacity for attention, regulation of stress, ability to experience and read emotions, and capacity for intimacy are developed.[25] In neuropsychologist Allan Schore's words, quite literally through this exquisitely emotional relationship, "mother nature and mother nurture combine to shape human nature."[26]

The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development concluded that the way a mother interacts with her child, her *maternal sensitivity,* is not only the most important factor in attachment security but also the strongest, most consistent predictor of her child's cognitive, social, and emotional development.[27] This finding was the result of extensive research into the potential effects of daycare on children's development. Even when children spent long hours away from their mothers, her maternal sensitivity was the most consistent predictor of all aspects of their development.

Neuropsychological studies of infant brain development have also been important in demonstrating why the effects of maternal interactions are so long-lasting. Mothers appear to be particularly sensitive

23. Allan N. Schore, "Effects of a Secure Attachment Relationship on Right Brain Development, Affect Regulation, and Infant Mental Health," *Infant Mental Health Journal* 22, nos. 1–2 (2001): 7–66; Allan N. Schore, "Modern Attachment Theory: The Enduring Impact of Early Right-brain Development," October 27, 2016, lecture, Roots of Empathy Research Symposium, 49:06, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cosKY86Qmzo.

24. "Brain Architecture," Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University, accessed April 5, 2023, https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/brain-architecture/.

25. Robert Winston and Rebecca Chicot, "The Importance of Early Bonding on the Long-term Mental Health and Resilience of Children," *London Journal of Primary Care* 8, no. 1 (2016): 12; Allan N. Schore, "The First 1000 Days of Life: A Critical Period for Shaping our Emotional Selves and Social Brains," September 29, 2017, university lecture, UCLA David Geffin School of Medicine, Oslo, Norway, 1:51:54, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lY7XOu0yi-E.

26. Allan N. Schore, "The Most Important Years of Life: Our Beginnings," September 18, 2014, university lecture, UCLA David Geffin School of Medicine, Oslo, Norway, 1:36:37, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XnyMD_aARvI.

27. National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Early Child Care Research Network, "Does Amount of Time Spent in Child Care Predict Socialemotional Adjustment during the Transition to Kindergarten?," *Child Development* 74, no. 4 (July–August 2003): 992.

in modifying the stimulation they give to their infants. Through finely tuned perceptions, they match their infants' intellectual and emotional state and provide the optimal level of stimulation needed for the children's developing brains.[28] This process affects changes "in the hypothalamic-pituitary axis" with "positive effects on memory, cognitions, stress tolerance, emotional and behavioral regulation, and cardiovascular, metabolic, and immune function."[29]

It appears that through the emotionally attuned interactions that begin with a mother, a child develops an "internal working model" for understanding and experiencing all other relationships. When the attachment relationship is secure, the infant learns to appropriately interpret and self-reflect about past and future attachment situations and to regulate relationship closeness and conflict resolution.[30] A continued secure attachment across development enables the child to develop the capacity to appreciate, understand, and empathize with the feelings of others.[31] When the attachment is insecure, the infant develops a mistrusting orientation to relationships and is unable to appropriately understand and regulate social behavior. Continued insecurity prevents the child from developing appropriate social regulatory mechanisms.

Early attachment security has been a predictor of children's social interactions, personality development, and behavioral problems, as well as their future attachment behaviors as adults with their own children.[32] And although not inherently pathological, an insecure attachment has been identified as an "initiator of pathways probabilistically associated with later pathology."[33] This explains why early socio-emotional experiences have repeatedly been associated with children exhibiting

---

28. Schore, *Affect Regulation and the Origin of the Self,* 76.

29. Kathleen K. Kline and Brian Stafford, "Essential Elements of the Caretaking Crucible," in Wilcox and Kline, *Gender and Parenthood,* 203.

30. Inge Bretherton and Kristine A. Munholland, "Internal Working Models in Attachment Relationships," in *Handbook of Attachment: Theory, Research, and Clinical Applications,* ed. Jude Cassidy and Phillip R. Shaver, 2nd ed. (New York: The Guilford Press, 2008), 102–27.

31. Ross A. Thompson, "Early Attachment and Later Development," in Cassidy and Shaver, *Handbook of Attachment,* 348–65.

32. L. Alan Sroufe, Elizabeth Carlson, and Shmuel Shulman, "Individuals in Relationships: Development from Infancy through Adolescence," in *Studying Lives through Time: Personality and Development,* ed. David C. Funder and others (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 1993), 315–42.

33. L. Alan Sroufe and others, "Implications of Attachment Theory for Developmental Psychopathology," *Development and Psychopathology* 11, no. 1 (1999): 1.

antisocial behaviors across development. Through the attachment process, and its associated maternal sensitivity, children develop the capacity to appreciate, understand, and empathize with the feelings of others. This in turn enables children to develop the moral awareness and responsibility that form the underpinnings of their moral behavior beyond infancy.

The mother is not the only person who can establish this important bond, but both biological and socialized influences appear to prime mothers for this significant bonding process. For example, considerable evidence suggests that the biological changes in hormonal patterns experienced during pregnancy, childbirth, and nursing are related to maternal responsiveness and sensitivity. In addition, though women express all emotions other than anger stronger than men, they are "better able to regulate emotions than men."[34] This "superior ability to manage emotional expression" likely strengthens their nurturing capacity as mothers. Bjorklund and Jordan explain further, "Caring for infants and young children often requires delaying one's own gratification and the inhibition of aggressive responses, areas in which a female advantage is consistently found."[35]

Across all stages of a child's development, mothers emerge as the preferred "source of comfort in times of stress."[36] Indeed, children's awareness of and capacity to identify their emotions is often the consequence of maternal labeling during the process of caregiving. For many mothers, the work of helping children identify feelings and openly discuss them is integral to mothers' efforts to nurture them,[37] emerging as a hallmark characteristic in mothers' interactions with daughters as well as sons.[38]

But what of fathers? Neuropsychological research on development suggests that mother and father are not equal systems; they both form a unique bond with the baby that facilitates development. Mother-infant bonding has shown a greater influence on the emotion-processing structures, while father-infant bonding has shown a greater influence on mental processing networks. Each bond plays a critical role, beginning with

---

34. David F. Bjorklund and Ashley C. Jordan, "Human Parenting from an Evolutionary Perspective," in Wilcox and Kline, *Gender and Parenthood,* 68.

35. Bjorklund and Jordan, "Human Parenting from an Evolutionary Perspective," 68.

36. Parke, "Gender Differences and Similarities," 123.

37. Rebecca J. Erickson, "Why Emotion Work Matters: Sex, Gender, and the Division of Household Labor," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 67, no. 2 (May 2005): 337–51.

38. Susanne A. Denham and others, "Prediction of Externalizing Behavior Problems from Early to Middle Childhood: The Role of Parental Socialization and Emotion Expression," *Development and Psychopathology* 12, no. 1 (2000): 40.

the mother and infant during the earliest period of development, with the father taking a stronger role in toddlerhood.[39]

While caring for infants, both mothers and fathers experience a flood of the bonding hormone oxytocin,[40] but the same hormone elicits different, even complementary, behaviors. Mothers tend to engage by expressing positive feelings, affectionately touching and gazing at their infants, and engaging in "motherese" vocalizations. For fathers, oxytocin is associated with "stimulatory" and playful behaviors rather than security-inducing behaviors.[41] Thus, while mothers are more likely to be "cooing and cuddling" their infants, fathers are more likely to be "tickling and tossing."[42] These differences foreshadow more complementary parenting patterns exhibited across children's development.

Identity and Social Capacity

Given the profound influence of a mother's distinct psychological orientation, strengths, and style of interaction, it may appear that mothers are more important in the socio-emotional lives of their children than fathers. The reality that mothers develop new life from their own bodies then give birth to infants who continue to be very dependent on them for survival has meant that "in almost all species and regions of the world, across a wide diversity of subsistence activities and social ideologies, observational studies indicate more maternal than paternal investment."[43] In summarizing why, Bjorklund and Jordan explain, "In mammals, conception and gestation occur within the female body, and she must invest the time associated with pregnancy as well as that required by postpartum suckling."[44] This resulting difference in "obligatory investment in offspring" has meant "different psychologies" with respect to how and how much men and women devote themselves to parenting.[45] Mothers tend, for example, to spontaneously engage their

39. Schore, "First 1000 Days of Life."

40. Anne E. Storey and others, "Hormonal Correlates of Paternal Responsiveness in New and Expectant Fathers," *Evolution and Human Behavior* 21, no. 2 (2000): 79–95.

41. Ilanit Gordon and others, "Oxytocin and the Development of Parenting in Humans," *Biological Psychiatry* 68, no. 4 (2010): 377–82.

42. Lisa Belkin, "Why Mothers and Fathers Play Differently," *New York Times,* September 2, 2010, https://archive.nytimes.com/parenting.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/09/02/why-mothers-and-fathers-play-differently/.

43. Bornstein, "Parenting x Gender x Culture x Time," 100.

44. Bjorklund and Jordan, "Human Parenting from an Evolutionary Perspective," 66.

45. Bjorklund and Jordan, "Human Parenting from an Evolutionary Perspective," 67.

children more frequently than their husbands and provide routine care much more frequently.[46] That difference in greater contact time with children for mothers tends to persist in all cultures across all stages of development. Thus, Bjorklund and Jordan conclude, "it goes without saying that mothers have a major influence on their children" regardless of whether they are the primary caregiver.[47]

But this is perhaps where recent research has been most enlightening. Fathering scholar David Eggebeen explains,

> Literally, hundreds of studies over the past two decades have consistently demonstrated that fathers have a measurable impact on children. . . . Good studies have found that the quality of parenting exhibited by the father as well as the resources they bring to their family predict children's behavior problems, depression, self-esteem, and life-satisfaction. The reach of fathers has been shown to extend to adolescents and young adults, as research finds that adolescents function best when their fathers are engaged and involved in their lives. Additional [research] demonstrates that fathers play an important role in helping their children make the transition to adulthood. In short, a fairly extensive body of empirical research has established the importance of fathers throughout the life course of children.[48]

David Popenoe, a noted sociologist and pioneer in fatherhood research, clarifies the distinctive nature of a father's influence: "Fathers are far more than just 'second adults' in the home. Involved fathers . . . bring positive benefits to their children that no other person is as likely to bring."[49] This includes benefits in the area of social-emotional development. A father's closeness to and engagement in the life and activities of his children has predicted positive child outcomes in every area of social-emotional behavior.[50] This influence is exhibited through his affection, responsiveness, encouragement, instruction, and everyday assistance, as well as his involvement in rule formulation, discipline, monitoring, and supervision. In both nurturing- and guidance-oriented

---

46. Jay Belsky, Bonnie Gilstrap, and Michael Rovine, "The Pennsylvania Infant and Family Development Project: I. Stability and Change in Mother-Infant and Father-Infant Interaction in a Family Setting at One, Three, and Nine Months," *Child Development* 55, no. 3 (June 1984): 692–705.

47. Bjorklund and Jordan, "Human Parenting from an Evolutionary Perspective," 71.

48. David J. Eggebeen, "Do Fathers Matter for Adolescent Well-Being?," in Wilcox and Kline, *Gender and Parenthood,* 249.

49. David Popenoe, *Life without Father: Compelling New Evidence That Fatherhood and Marriage Are Indispensable for the Good of Children and Society* (New York: The Free Press, 1996), 163.

50. Parke, "Gender Differences and Similarities," 131–33.

behaviors, fathers influence children's outcomes even when mothers' influence is taken into account.

Mothers' nurturing appears to be oriented toward the development of a secure identity and emotional understanding, while fathers' nurturing appears to be oriented toward the development of social and relational capacity. This complementarity is reflected in the way mothers and fathers hold their infants. While a mother is likely to hold her infant to enable maximum contact with her face and body, a father is most likely to hold the infant in a way that gives the baby the same view of the world as the father has. This "football hold" orients the infant's face outward, toward others.[51]

Interestingly, fathers' involvement with their children is consistently a predictor of how children relate to others. Father closeness during a child's adolescence has been identified as a predictor of empathy and marital relationship quality in adulthood.[52] In contrast, lack of father involvement has repeatedly been associated with delinquent and criminal behaviors that continue into adulthood.[53] For boys, the mere presence of a father in the home predicts less delinquent behavior.[54]

Some of this may be due in part to the discipline style of fathers. Fathers tend to discipline less often than mothers, but when they do, they exhibit more firmness and predictability. Children, in turn, are more likely to comply with their father's requests and demands than with their mother's. Parenting scholars Kyle and Marsha Kline Pruett note, "Fathers tend to be more willing than mothers to confront their children and enforce discipline, leaving their children with the impression that they in fact *have* more authority."[55] In contrast, mothers tend to draw on their emotional connections to their children as the source of their authority, using more reasoning and flexibility in carrying out discipline. While this combination provides children a complementary, balanced approach to discipline, it may also illuminate why fathers' involvement is more strongly related to delinquent behavior.

51. See Kyle Pruett and Marsha Kline Pruett, *Partnership Parenting: How Men and Women Parent Differently—Why It Helps Your Kids and Can Strengthen Your Marriage* (Philadelphia: Da Capo Books, 2009), 23–58.

52. Richard Koestner, Carol Franz, and Joel Weinberger, "The Family Origins of Empathic Concern: A 26-Year Longitudinal Study," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 58, no. 4 (1990): 709–17.

53. Paul R. Amato and Fernando Rivera, "Paternal Involvement and Children's Behavior Problems," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 61, no. 2 (May 1999): 375–84.

54. Deborah A. Cobb-Clark and Erdal Tekin, "Fathers and Youth's Delinquent Behavior," *Review of Economics of the Household* 12, no. 2 (2011): 327–58.

55. Pruett and Pruett, *Partnership Parenting,* 162–63.

Fathers also influence children's social and relational capacity through their unique form of play. Compared to mothers, fathers are much more likely to interact through physical and verbal play.[56] And that play is predictive of the quality of children's peer relationships. In repeated studies, fathers who spent more time in positive play with their children had children with the highest peer ratings. When fathers were more responsive, patient, playful, and less coercive in their play, children showed less aggressiveness and more peer competence, and they were better liked.[57]

As one report noted, "rough-housing with dad" appears to "teach children how to deal with aggressive impulses and physical contact without losing control of their emotions."[58] Through play, fathers help children learn how to temper and channel emotions in a positive, inter-active way and gain confidence in their ability to do so. As children age, fathers focus less on physical play and engage in more peer-like verbal play in the form of sarcasm and humor.[59] Peer-like verbal play allows a father to tease and joke with a child within the safety of the father-child relationship, thus strengthening children's sense of identity and social confidence. In some ways it appears that mothers' nurturing tends to build self-understanding while fathers' nurturing tends to strengthen social-relational capacity.

Learning and Achievement

Complementarity is also exhibited in mothers' and fathers' influence on children's mental development and educational achievement. The emotional sensitivity mothers provide in early infancy emerges as foundational to cognitive capacities. In speaking of this finely tuned process, three psychiatrists from the University of California at Berkeley concluded, "Whether they realize it or not, mothers use the universal signs of emotion to teach their babies about the world. . . . Emotionality gives the two of them a common language years before the infant will acquire speech. . . . It isn't just his mother's beaming countenance but her

---

56. Parke, "Gender Differences and Similarities," 128–29.

57. Craig H. Hart and others, "Overt and Relational Aggression in Russian Nursery-School-Age Children: Parenting Style and Marital Linkages," *Developmental Psychology* 34, no. 4 (1998): 687–97.

58. Jeffrey Rosenberg and W. Bradford Wilcox, *The Importance of Fathers in the Healthy Development of Children* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Heath and Human Services, Children's Bureau, 2006), 13.

59. Parke, "Gender Differences and Similarities," 128.

synchrony that he requires—their mutually responsive interaction."[60] The relatively simple yet profound process of "mutually responsive interaction" shows how mothers influence a whole host of cognitive capacities, including IQ development, shared attention, referential communication, social learning, language, autobiographical memory, and theory of mind, among others.[61]

Recent findings have clarified the intricately bound processes of mother-child emotional connection and intellectual stimulation. After years of research findings showing a correlation between breastfeeding and brain development, more sophisticated research methods revealed that the correlation was due to the fact that mothers who breastfeed are also more likely to engage in behaviors that enhance brain development.[62] The observed behaviors included attention to emotional cues and consistent exposure to language through reading. The benefits of reading to a child were experienced as mothers were attentive to emotional cues from their children in the process of reading to them. This confirmed other research on attachment demonstrating that emotional attentiveness is the critical foundation for cognitive development. And that is most often best facilitated through maternally sensitive interactions between a mother and child.

The interrelationship of emotional attentiveness and cognitive stimulation may also help explain why mothers tend to engage in more teaching-oriented, didactic interactions with children than fathers.[63] For example, while mothers might hold up a ball, describe it, and demonstrate what it does, fathers may take the ball and bounce it somewhere on the child's body, using it in an innovative way. A mother's verbally rich teaching has important implications for cognitive development, including memory, problem-solving, and language advancement.[64] But fathers take the foundational contributions mothers make to children's cognitive development and build upon them.

60. Thomas Lewis, Fari Amini, and Richard Lannon, *A General Theory of Love* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), 61–62, emphasis original.

61. See Bjorklund and Jordan, "Human Parenting from an Evolutionary Perspective," 61–90.

62. Benjamin G. Gibbs and Renata Forste, "Breastfeeding, Parenting, and Early Cognitive Development," *Journal of Pediatrics* 164, no. 3 (2014): 487–93.

63. Parke, "Gender Differences and Similarities," 133.

64. Laura Hubbs-Tait and others, "Relation of Maternal Cognitive Stimulation, Emotional Support, and Intrusive Behavior during Head Start to Children's Kindergarten Cognitive Abilities" *Child Development* 73, no. 1 (January–February 2002): 110–31.

When fathers are "involved, nurturing, and playful," children exhibit higher IQs, language development, and cognitive skills.[65] One explanation for this is that children with involved fathers show a social-emotional readiness for learning, such as being better able to handle the stresses and frustrations associated with schooling. Fathers also tend to uniquely influence children's expressive language development by engaging children in more challenging conversational patterns. Research suggests that mothers provide more linguistic input than fathers, and in some cases more complex input. But fathers' challenging communicative style plays an important role in children's vocabulary development beyond mothers' input.[66]

Fathers also appear to play an important role in academic achievement. An involved father has been identified as the strongest predictor of college graduation.[67] Children with involved fathers were 42 percent more likely to earn "A" grades, 33 percent less likely to repeat a grade, and 98 percent more likely to graduate from college. In part, this is because involved fathers are likely to help with homework and provide financial support for college, but involved fathers also monitor and guide children's actions, helping them avoid behaviors that might negatively impact school achievement. Indeed, they seem to be able to foster a learning environment with just the right mix of "engagement, affection, and supervision."[68]

Most significantly, fathers appear to build children's learning capacities in the way they orient children toward learning. Compared to mothers, fathers' interactions tend to be characterized by arousal, excitement, and unpredictability in a way that stimulates openness to the world and an eagerness to explore and discover.[69]

---

65. Rosenberg and Wilcox, *Importance of Fathers in the Healthy Development of Children,* 12.

66. Kathryn A. Leech and others, "Father Input and Child Vocabulary Development: The Importance of *Wh* Questions and Clarification Requests," *Seminars in Speech and Language* 34, no 4, (November 2013): 249–59.

67. W. Bradford Wilcox, "Dad and the Diploma: The Difference Fathers Make for College Graduation," April 23, 2014, Institute for Family Studies, accessed March 22, 2023, http://family-studies.org/dad-and-the-diploma-the-difference-fathers-make-for -college-graduation/.

68. Wilcox, "Dad and the Diploma."

69. Rob Palkovitz, "Gendered Parenting's Implications for Children's Well-being: Theory and Research in Applied Perspective," in Wilcox and Kline, *Gender and Parenthood,* 226.

Fathers also seem to be more strongly oriented toward developing children's independence. Andrea Doucet's extensive observations of and interviews with fathers revealed how fathers tend to focus on children learning to do things independently and find solutions to their own problems.[70] At lunchtime, for example, stay-at-home dads were more likely to say, "Make your own sandwich," while mothers were more likely to make them. Similarly, fathers were more likely to tell children to "get your own backpack on" or "tie your own shoes," while mothers were more likely to step in and assist them. Initially, Doucet wondered if fathers just weren't as nurturing as mothers. Fathers' behaviors did not seem to fit the traditional definition of "holding close and sensitively responding." But further analysis revealed how this seeming "indifference" was a strategic form of nurturing. A key part of nurturing also includes the capacity to "let go." It was this careful "letting go" that fathers appeared to be particularly good at.

Daniel Paquette found from his research that fathers also "tend to encourage children to take risks, while at the same time ensuring safety and security," which facilitates children's development of independence, confidence, and standing up for themselves in unfamiliar situations.[71] This comprehensive, facilitative approach to independence seems to translate into fathers' influence on educational success.[72]

Fathers also tend to be more "cognitively demanding" of their children by pushing them to demonstrate their skills and knowledge without help, while mothers tend toward a scaffolding approach, by reaching in and helping.[73] For example, sitting behind a child who is trying to solve a problem, mothers tend to intervene and help them when they can't figure it out. Fathers, on the other hand, tend to hold back while encouraging them that they can do it on their own. Acknowledging this complementary pattern, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services report concludes, "Fathers often push achievement while mothers stress nurturing, both of which are important to healthy development. As a

---

70. Doucet, *Do Men Mother?,* 117.

71. Daniel Paquette, "Theorizing the Father-Child Relationship: Mechanisms and Developmental Outcomes," *Human Development* 47, no. 4 (2004), 193–219.

72. W. Bradford Wilcox and Robin Fretwell Wilson, "One Way to End Violence against Women? Married Dads," *Washington Post,* June 10, 2014, http://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2014/06/10/the-best-way-to-end-violence-against-women-stop-taking-lovers-and-get-married/.

73. Palkovitz, "Gendered Parenting's Implications for Children's Well-being," 220.

result, children who grow up with involved fathers are more comfortable exploring the world around them and more likely to exhibit self-control and pro-social behavior."[74]

Gender Identity and Sexual Development

While evidence clearly suggests that fathers and mothers each shape children's social-emotional and mental development in different ways, evidence also suggests that the mere presence of gender differences is itself important to development—particularly in specific psychological capacities and sexual development.

Henry Biller's extensive work on fathering and infant development led him to conclude that differences between the mother and father "can be very stimulating" to children, "even those that . . . appear quite superficial," and even if the father and mother "behave in generally similar ways." Their presence presents contrasting images and experiences—a father is usually larger than a mother, has a deeper voice, wears different clothes, moves and reacts differently, and communicates in a different verbal style to children as well as adults. The infant also learns that mothers and fathers "can be expected to fulfill different needs": findings indicate that infants may prefer the mother "when hungry or tired" and prefer the father "when seeking stimulation of more active play."[75]

Fathering scholar Rob Palkovitz draws on findings from researchers in France (as well as developmental scholar Danielle Paquette) in explaining that even though less differentiated parenting appears to be "more socially desirable" today, there is considerable evidence that "the family structure that is most favorable to the socioaffective development of young children" is one in which parents reflect the "different styles, voices, histories, and connections" of distinct maternal and paternal patterns.[76]

Children benefit from "discrimination learning in the positive sense, the formulation of and analyses of differences," as they experience the psychological and physical differences between their two parents. Thus, Palkovitz concludes, "Experiencing parental differences affords children the opportunity to develop nuanced understandings of individual

---

74. Rosenberg and Wilcox, *Importance of Fathers in the Healthy Development of Children,* 13.

75. Henry B. Biller, *Fathers and Families: Paternal Factors in Child Development* (Boston, Mass.: Auburn House, 1993), 12.

76. Palkovitz, "Gendered Parenting's Implications for Children's Well-being," 223.

differences in personality as well as gender, enhancing social cognition . . . [and] advanced cognitive functioning."[77]

Experiencing parental gender differences is also argued to be core to children's gender identity development. In 2003, a distinguished group of thirty-three neuroscientists, pediatricians, and social scientists comprising the Commission on Children at Risk reviewed research exploring gender development of children. Their report confirmed that typically at about eighteen to twenty-four months a child "begins to show a deep need to understand and make sense of her or his sexual embodiment."[78] An individual's need to "attach social significance and meaning" to his or her own gender "appears to be a human universal." Indeed, the report concludes, "Gender also runs deeper, near to the core of human identity and social meaning—in part because it is biologically primed and connected to differences in brain structure and function and because it is so deeply implicated in the transition to adulthood."[79]

In the need to attach significance to his or her gender, and make sense of his or her own identity, a "child's relationships with mother and father become centrally important," and "both the same-sex-as-me parent and the opposite-sex-from-me-parent play vital roles."[80] Psychologists have long understood that human beings come to understand their identity through experiencing themselves in relation to others. The experience of both a parent who is opposite sex and a parent who is of the same sex thus plays an important role in facilitating a child's ability to understand his or her own gender identity.

This hunger for experience and closeness with both a mother and father also emerges in explorations of how children relate to others sexually. Bruce Ellis's foundational work identifying the consistent link between daughters' sexual development and fathers found that daughters who were close emotionally and physically to their fathers had a reduced risk of early puberty and early initiation of sex.[81] The effect is so consistent that scholars have concluded that an absent father is "the

---

77. Palkovitz, "Gendered Parenting's Implications for Children's Well-being," 223, 229.

78. Commission on Children at Risk, "Hardwired to Connect: The New Scientific Case for Authoritative Communities," in *Authoritative Communities,* The Search Institute Series on Developmentally Attentive Community and Society, vol. 5 (New York: Springer, 2008), 17.

79. Commission on Children at Risk, "Hardwired to Connect," 18.

80. Commission on Children at Risk, "Hardwired to Connect," 17.

81. Bruce J. Ellis and others, "Does Father Absence Place Daughters at Special Risk for Early Sexual Activity and Teenage Pregnancy?," *Child Development* 74, no. 3, (May–June 2003): 801–21.

single greatest risk factor in teen pregnancy for girls."[82] Indeed, the presence and emotional closeness of fathers seems to "'set' the reproductive strategy" girls use throughout their lives.[83] In offering some explanation for these findings, fathering scholar Bradford Wilcox concludes, "Girls raised in homes with their fathers are more likely to receive the attention, affection, and modeling that they need from their own fathers to rebuff teenage boys and young men who do not have their best interests at heart."[84]

But it is not only daughters' sexual relationships that are affected by closeness to their fathers. When boys do not experience the closeness and modeling of their fathers, they appear to be more likely to engage in what David Popenoe calls "protest masculinity," exhibited in rejecting and denigrating anything feminine while seeking to prove masculinity through aggressive and sexual domination.[85] In contrast, "boys who are raised in homes with their fathers are more likely to acquire the sense of self-worth and self-control that allows them to steer clear of delinquent peers and trouble with the law," including in their sexual behaviors.[86]

Self-control and self-worth become defining characteristics of boys' masculine identity, manifesting themselves in behavioral patterns as well as achievements. Given that paternal influence, Bruce Ellis hypothesized that fathers' involvement may enhance a boy's competitive urge, "spurring sons to achieve more when they grow up and leave the family."[87] This hypothesis is underscored by increasing evidence of a gender gap in educational achievement, which appears to be related to boys not growing up with their fathers.[88]

---

82. Palkovitz, "Gendered Parenting's Implications for Children's Well-being," 227.

83. Raeburn, *Do Fathers Matter?,* 162.

84. W. Bradford Wilcox, "Father's Day: Are Dads Really Disposable?," *Deseret News,* June 14, 2012, https://www.deseret.com/2012/6/14/20503429/father-s-day-are-dads-really-disposable.

85. Popenoe, *Life without Father,* 156–57.

86. Wilcox, "Father's Day."

87. Raeburn, *Do Fathers Matter?,* 166.

88. David Autor and others, "Family Disadvantage and the Gender Gap in Behavioral and Educational Outcomes," *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 11, no. 3 (July 2019): 338–81; W. Bradford Wilcox and Wendy Wang, "Life without Fathers: Less College, Less Work, and More Prison for Young Men Growing Up without Their Biological Father," *Institute for Family Studies,* June 17, 2022, https://ifstudies.org/blog/life-without-father-less-college-less-work-and-more-prison-for-young-men-growing-up-without-their-biological-father; Wilcox, "Father's Day."

Safety and Survival

From the moment of her child's birth, a mother faces the realization that a fragile life depends on her.[89] The physical connection inherent in the biological relationship between mother and child seems to make mothers particularly sensitive to responsibility for the child's protection and well-being.[90] Her fear for the baby's survival and growth may also make her vigilant and attentive to finding the best food, care, and medical help, and avoiding possible dangers. These natural attunements serve an important constructive and protective function for a child. Studies consistently indicate that mothers have a significant role in influencing their children's health and well-being throughout their development.

Across cultures mothers are a central influence in providing the nourishment needed for early survival, but in a remarkably complementary way, fathers emerge as important protectors from danger. Noting a substantial body of research, Bradford Wilcox summarized, "Fathers play an important role in ensuring the safety of their children, both by monitoring their children's activities and peers, and by signaling to others, from neighborhood bullies to adults seeking a target for abuse, that they will not tolerate harm to their children. Indeed, by simply sticking around, ordinary dads play an important role in protecting their children from physical, sexual, and emotional abuse."[91]

The Fourth National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect Report to Congress found that children raised by their married mothers and fathers were the least likely to experience abuse.[92] Children living with their single mother and unrelated boyfriend were ten times more likely to be abused when compared to children living with their married mother and father. These findings are consistent with the National Survey of Children's Health reporting on the percentage of children who experience adverse childhood events (ACEs).[93] ACEs have become

---

89. See Daniel N. Stern and Nadia Bruschweiler-Stern with Alison Freeland, *The Birth of a Mother: How the Motherhood Experience Changes You Forever* (New York: Basic Books, 1998).

90. Doucet, *Do Men Mother?,* 109–10.

91. Wilcox, "Father's Day."

92. "National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS-4)," *Administration for Children and Families,* accessed September 24, 2022, http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/research/project/national-incidence-study-of-child-abuse-and-neglect-nis-4-2004-2009.

93. Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, "Children in Nonparental Care: Findings from the 2011–2012 National Survey of Children's Health,"

increasingly important to identify because they represent traumatic experiences that can have negative, lasting effects on health and well-being across development. Children living in families with their married biological parents were overwhelmingly safer than children living with just one biological parent, or with nonparental caregivers. While 70 percent of children living with both biological parents never experienced an adverse childhood event, 78 percent of those living with just one biological parent had experienced at least one of them.[94] It is likely a combination of factors that explains why fathers emerge as such important protectors of their children. As discussed above, fathers are more likely to be involved and attentive to their children than step-fathers or unrelated boyfriends. Their day-to-day presence in the home means that unrelated males are less likely to interact with children for sustained periods. It also means that children are more likely to receive the level of support and connection that makes them less vulnerable to potential predators. Children being raised in a home with their married fathers are also more likely to live in safer areas and spend less time in dangerous areas with potentially dangerous predators. Whatever the combination of factors, research findings repeatedly indicate that a distinct and important contribution of fathers is the safety and protection they provide for their children.

Conclusion

It is clear from the research discussed here that there is much overlap in the capacities, skills, and behaviors of mothers and fathers that enable children to develop and even thrive. But as this article demonstrates, mothers and fathers exhibit different capacities, styles, and psychological orientations that emerge as important, and sometimes critical, contributors in children's social-emotional, mental, and sexual development as well as their safety and protection.

In each of these developmental areas, a surprisingly precise complementarity between mothers' and fathers' parenting strengths tends to emerge. Whereas mothers are biologically prepared to nurture, teach, and provide care that is especially important for foundational development, fathers tend to take a facilitative approach to parenting, fostering

February, 28, 2014, ASPE Research Brief, accessed March 22, 2023, http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/14/ChildrenNonparentalCare/rb_nonparentalcare.pdf.

94. Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, "Children in Non-parental Care."

self-reliance, achievement, and healthy peer relationships in ways that are particularly important especially as children begin to transition to adult life. Indeed, evidence of these distinct contributions confirms a long-assumed proposition—namely, that the direct, continual, loving involvement of both a mother and a father in the home is ideal for the child's development.

While this evidence cannot be assumed to describe eternal verities about the nature of our eternal gender, it does offer a valuable lens through which to understand the restored doctrine that there is something significant about the dual nature of our divinity. In terms of children's development, a substantial body of evidence indicates how mothers and fathers engage with their children using distinctive temperaments and capacities, contributing "differently but equally to a oneness and unity" that appears to be achievable in no other way. In many ways, it appears that her motherhood "completes and perfects" his fatherhood, even as his fatherhood "completes and perfects" her motherhood in ways that "mutually strengthen and bless each other" and their children.[95]

The complementarity that is bound up in their equality is beautifully captured in Elder Bruce C. and Sister Marie K. Hafen's description: "In the . . . family, each spouse freely gives something the other does not have and without which neither can be complete and return to God's presence. Spouses are not a soloist with an accompanist, nor are they two solos. They are the interdependent parts of a duet, singing together in harmony at a level where no solo can go."[96]

Jenet Jacob Erickson is an associate professor in religious education at Brigham Young University, where she teaches the Eternal Family (Rel 200) course and the Introduction to Family Process (SFL 160) course for the School of Family Life. She is a research fellow of both the Wheatley Institute and the Institute for Family Studies and has been a columnist on family issues for the *Deseret News* since 2013. She and her husband, Michael, have been blessed with two children, LaDawn and Peter, who provide them unending opportunities for learning and joy.

---

95. Bednar, "Marriage Is Essential to His Eternal Plan," 84.

96. Bruce C. Hafen and Marie K. Hafen, "Crossing Thresholds and Becoming Equal Partners," *Liahona* 31, no. 8 (August 2007): 30.

Salad Days

There used to be smoke standing
on every corner and hovering
just behind each shoulder, sitting
politely at round tables ordering
food from teenaged waiters.
And I used to eat cigarettes,
chocolate wrapped in paper,
inside rooms wrapped in paper
and asbestos. We didn't know
so much and there is so much
we still don't know. My mother,
her curfew was sunset and
her seatbelt was her sister's
arm strapped across her chest.
My father first learned to type
on a sheet of printed paper.
Both have welt marks from
teachers' belts and twigs and
bloodied knees from kneeling.
My father's soles are callouses.
My mother's hands are raw. Once
she lashed a belt across my thighs.
Then she cried. And I still
scour sites for tastes of childhood
treats, buy jelly hamburgers
inside nostalgia stores. I have
at twenty-two enough books
to make a bygone king blush
with jealousy. I hold Plato
in my palm. I stand outside
and cast my eyes to the sky
where there's so much I can't see,
so much gazing down at me.

—Alixa Brobbey

"Show Them unto No Man"

Part 1. Esoteric Teachings and the Problem of Early Latter-day Saint Doctrinal History

Barry R. Bickmore

Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) who attempt to educate themselves about the history of their religion can sometimes be confronted with a bewildering array of interpretations made by historians who range in perspective from traditional believers to atheists and include numerous variations in between. When asked about the origins of such discrepancies, the historians will naturally refer to *biases* exhibited by the others and perhaps even to their own possible sources of bias.[1]

When most people read historical writing, they assume what they are reading is something very close to what actually happened. It is now generally admitted among historians, however, that what ultimately makes it onto the page incorporates a healthy dose of the author's imagination and prejudice. Certainly, historical writing incorporates what we might call "facts" (for example, documentary evidence), but the author connects these widely spaced dots with lines formed from *choices* about which sources are relevant to the subject, their relative trustworthiness, the meaning of the words, and so on. "The problem with historical narrative, . . ." says Georg Iggers, "is that, while it proceeds from empirically validated facts or events, it necessarily requires imaginative steps to place them in a coherent story."[2]

The second part of this two-part article series will appear in volume 62, number 2.

1. For a broad spectrum of perspectives on bias among historians writing about Latter-day Saint history, see the essays in George D. Smith, ed., *Faithful History: Essays on Writing Mormon History* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992).

2. Georg G. Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2005),

The problem of bias becomes especially apparent when dealing with polarizing subjects like religious doctrinal history. For example, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints claims to be a *revealed* religion, whose tenets have been delivered to prophets through divine inspiration and primarily constitute a restoration of the essentials of primitive Christianity (A of F 1:5–7). Obviously, these claims cannot imply that no doctrinal modifications have taken place over time. After all, the Latter-day Saint canon of revealed scripture includes the claim that there are "great and important" truths to be revealed in the future (A of F 1:9), admonishments to give allowance for "the mistakes of men" in the revelations (Book of Mormon, title page), and an instance where a prophet was surprised to learn that he had misinterpreted an earlier revelation (D&C 137:5–10; compare D&C 76:50–113). Nevertheless, believing LDS historians tend to couch doctrinal modifications over time in terms that suggest natural outgrowth from previously revealed knowledge, even though the LDS faith includes no concept of infallibility that would preclude a few surprises along the way.[3] Conversely, historians with a more secular outlook tend to depict doctrinal modifications as abrupt reversals driven by environmental influences, even though ignoring the possibility of supernatural intervention does not require such an interpretation.

It takes little imagination to appreciate that this sort of behavior might stem not only from a divergence of perspective but also from a certain reluctance among historians to give any more ammunition than necessary to intellectual rivals. That is, even though it is not entirely clear from a Latter-day Saint perspective how smoothly doctrinal shifts *should* occur via continuing revelation, the narrative that abrupt, drastic changes have occurred can more easily be used by critics to depict the religion as essentially man-made. Not wanting to give the critics more ammunition than necessary, believing historians might feel at least subconscious pressure to shy away from such narratives. Historians coming from a more secular perspective, even if they feel no personal animosity toward the LDS faith, might feel subconscious pressure to distance themselves from

---

2; compare Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

3. "Revelations, when they have passed from God to man, and from man into his written and printed language, cannot be said to be entirely perfect, though they may be as perfect as possible under the circumstances; they are perfect enough to answer the purposes of Heaven at this time." Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses,* 26 vols. (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855–86), 9:310 (July 13, 1862).

the supernatural claims of the religion, and so they gravitate toward narratives that are less easily accommodated by believers.

The problem of grappling with doctrinal change is, unfortunately, not always as simple as supplying alternative interpretations for *why* and *how* people came to believe different things at different times. Rather, answering even the basic questions of who believed *what, when,* can become ever more difficult as the sources become more sparse and further removed from the interpreter in language, culture, and time. One might think that figuring out who believed what, when, would not be an acute problem for historians of a religion like that of the Latter-day Saints, which was founded as recently as 1830 and has always considered diligent record keeping to be a religious observance (D&C 21:1).[4] However, this is much more difficult than many historians of LDS doctrinal history have realized because of the practice of "esotericism."

Esotericism is the practice of keeping two sets of doctrines—an "exoteric" set meant to be understood by the general public and an "esoteric" (that is, hidden) set meant to be understood only by believers, or even a privileged subset of believers. What is more, the exoteric teachings may be deliberately crafted to make extrapolation to the esoteric doctrines difficult. For example, it is now widely recognized that esotericism was practiced in early Christianity, and when Jesus's disciples asked him why he taught in parables, he replied that "it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given" (Matt. 13:10–11). Christian writers in the first few centuries after Christ often noted that they were in possession of an esoteric tradition handed down from the Apostles, withheld from unbelievers and rarely written down. Such esoteric teachings clearly existed,[5] but although we can find clues about what they involved, their specific content remains largely unknown.[6] Because of this, it is an inescapable fact that historical reconstructions of early Christian doctrinal history must involve a heavy dose of speculation and bias. Regarding the esoteric tradition in early Christianity, Methodist scholar Margaret Barker writes, "It is the unwritten nature of this tradition which proves to be the greatest problem in any investigation which relies entirely on written sources, there

---

4. See also Marlin K. Jensen, "There Shall Be a Record Kept among You," *Ensign* 37, no. 12 (December 2007): 28–33.

5. Guy G. Stroumsa, *Hidden Wisdom: Esoteric Traditions and the Roots of Christian Mysticism,* 2nd ed. (Leiden, Neth.: Brill, 2005), 27–45.

6. Margaret Barker, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven: Temple Symbolism in the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 76.

being nothing else to use. We can proceed only by reading between the lines and arguing from silence, always a dangerous procedure."[7]

The bias involved is not limited to the influence of religious, political, or other points of view. In addition, historians approaching the doctrinal history of a religion that incorporates esotericism often exhibit a bias toward downplaying its importance. That is, they make the practical assumption that even if they know they are missing some information about esoteric teachings, that information probably is not critical for drawing correct conclusions about the belief system. For instance, even several decades after the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls showed that Second Temple Judaism was rife with exactly the sort of esotericism practiced in early Christianity, Guy Stroumsa could write that "the existence of esoteric trends in the earliest strata of Christianity . . . [is] still ignored or played down by some scholars."[8] If its existence is acknowledged, it is too often viewed "almost exclusively within the context of the Hellenistic mystery cults."[9]

Given that the whole point of esotericism is to withhold from public view the clearest and most advanced expositions of doctrine, downplaying the importance of esoteric teachings seems problematic. But how can we assess the seriousness of the problem, when the issue is one of missing information?

In this essay, I argue that the cost of ignoring esotericism when reconstructing doctrinal history is very steep indeed. To demonstrate this point, I present some examples of early Latter-day Saint doctrinal statements that, upon reflection, appear difficult to interpret correctly without referring to Joseph Smith's documented practice of esotericism. In these cases, we actually have both the exoteric and esoteric versions of Smith's early teaching. Among Joseph Smith's earliest writings are the Book of Mormon and the book of Moses, a pair of documents unquestionably produced by Smith near-contemporaneously and respectively claiming to expound exoteric and esoteric teachings.

I also show that a number of historians have nevertheless proposed pathways of early Latter-day Saint doctrinal change that are demonstrably implausible, precisely because they have misunderstood the exoteric-esoteric relationship between these documents, and because

---

7. Margaret Barker, *The Great High Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy* (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 3.

8. Stroumsa, *Hidden Wisdom,* 147.

9. Stroumsa, *Hidden Wisdom,* 149.

they have too often refused to even consider the possibility that Joseph Smith was working from a sophisticated, and perhaps even successful, plan to restore legitimately primitive aspects of early Christianity. No matter what the source of their bias, it is clear that these historians have made very serious mistakes of interpretation, with the result that they present early Church doctrinal history as much more disjointed than it actually was.

The Book of Mormon and Book of Moses as an Exoteric-Esoteric Pair

Essentially contemporaneous exoteric-esoteric pairs of religious documents written by a single author, such as the Book of Mormon and book of Moses, are exceedingly rare. (In this essay, when I refer to Joseph Smith as the "author" or "source" of these documents, I am simply referring to the fact that he is known to have dictated the text. For believers, God was also involved, but this would clearly still indicate a single source.) There are two main reasons for this rarity. First, for many groups the strategy for protecting esoteric teachings has been to transmit them orally rather than in writing. Certain traditions of the Apostles were alluded to in a number of early Christian documents, for example, but the authors uniformly expressed trepidation about writing any of them down.[10] Second, groups that have produced written esoteric teachings have typically paired them with much older documents they claim contain the exoteric teachings, so that the exoteric and esoteric documents were written neither contemporaneously nor by the same author. Early Christian Gnostics, for instance, produced a number of "secret books" attributed to the Apostles (for example, the *Secret Book of James* and the *Secret Book of John*) to go along with the apostolic writings now collected in the New Testament. However, these esoteric texts were clearly not produced by the Apostles and were written decades after their supposedly exoteric counterparts.[11]

I am aware of only one possible exception to this rule in the esoteric literature of antiquity—the *Secret Gospel of Mark*. This document survives only in two excerpts from a letter by Clement of Alexandria (late second century CE), who claimed that it was a second, "more spiritual" version of the Gospel of Mark, written by Mark himself, and which was

---

10. Stroumsa, *Hidden Wisdom,* 27–45.

11. Marvin W. Meyer, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures: The Revised and Updated Translation of Sacred Gnostic Texts, Complete in One Volume* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2010), 19–30, 103–32.

read in the Alexandrian church "only to those who [were] being initiated into the great mysteries."[12] But though the majority of scholars who have written on the subject accept the letter as genuine,[13] so little is preserved of the Secret Gospel that it is impossible to say with any certainty whether it was actually written by Mark.

There can be no doubt, however, that the Book of Mormon and book of Moses form one of these rare exoteric-esoteric pairs produced by the same source near-contemporaneously. Joseph Smith produced the text of the Book of Mormon in roughly sixty to seventy-four working days during multiple sessions over a roughly thirteen-month period in 1828–1829[14] and produced the book of Moses between June 1830 and February 1831 as part of his revision of the Bible.[15] There were witnesses to the production process in both cases.[16] On the one hand, the Book of Mormon explicitly claims to be an exoteric text, with more knowledge to be given later to those who believe it:

> And these things have I written, which are a lesser part of the things which he taught the people; and I have written them to the intent that they may be brought again unto this people, from the Gentiles, according to the words which Jesus hath spoken. And when they shall have received this, which is expedient that they should have first, to try their faith, and if it shall so be that they shall believe these things then shall the greater things be made manifest unto them. And if it so be that they will not believe these things, then shall the greater things be withheld from them, unto their condemnation. Behold, I was about to write them, all which were engraven upon the plates of Nephi, but the Lord forbade it, saying: I will try the faith of my people. (3 Ne. 26:8–11)

The book of Moses, on the other hand, contains two passages admonishing Smith not to share its contents with nonbelievers for the time

---

12. Morton Smith, *The Secret Gospel: The Discovery and Interpretation of the Secret Gospel according to Mark* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 15. I contacted Guy Stroumsa, Martin Buber Professor Emeritus of Comparative Religion at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, about this question, and he could not think of any examples other than *Secret Mark.* Guy G. Stroumsa, personal communication, October 2021.

13. Scott G. Brown, *Mark's Other Gospel: Rethinking Morton Smith's Controversial Discovery* (Waterloo, Ont., Can.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005), 68.

14. John W. Welch, "Timing and Translation of the Book of Mormon: 'Days [and Hours] Never to Be Forgotten,'" *BYU Studies Quarterly* 57, no. 4, (2018): 11–50.

15. Robert J. Matthews, *"A Plainer Translation": Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible, a History and Commentary* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1975), 26–30.

16. For example, see Richard L. Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981); and Matthews, *"Plainer Translation,"* 21–54.

being—that is, at the time it explicitly claimed to be an esoteric text. "These words were spoken unto Moses in the mount, the name of which shall not be known among the children of men. And now they are spoken unto you. Show them not unto any except them that believe. Even so. Amen" (Moses 1:42). "And these are the words which I spake unto my servant Moses, and they are true even as I will; and I have spoken them unto you. See thou show them unto no man, until I command you, except to them that believe. Amen" (Moses 4:32).

Given the *explicitly stated* status of the Book of Mormon and book of Moses as respectively exoteric and esoteric and the timing of their composition within such a short time of one another, one would think that any reconstruction of Joseph Smith's 1830 theology ought necessarily to be based on the expectation that the book of Moses should contain clearer statements than the Book of Mormon. That is, historians should be using Moses to interpret the meaning of the Book of Mormon more than the reverse. And yet just the opposite has too often been the case.

Early Latter-Day Saint Doctrinal History

When historians construct a time line of doctrinal history from available documents, they must supply an interpretive context, and the specific context they choose is sometimes more indicative of their biases than anything else. In his influential book on the development of early Christology, for instance, Larry Hurtado criticizes the scholars of the influential "history of religions" school for assuming that "all characteristics of early Christianity (all beliefs, ethics, practices, and concepts) must have been borrowed from the surrounding religious environment," rather than allowing sufficiently for genuinely distinctive elements within the Christian community to exert influence in the other direction. They were "heavily influenced in their historical work by their own religious preferences," which leaned toward "theological liberalism" and a certain disdain for "religious intensity, preferring what they saw as a more urbane and dignified devotion that emphasized ethical principles over doctrine." Given these predilections and an oversimplified view of first-century Judaism, these historians saw phenomena such as the cultic veneration of Jesus as drastic breaks from Christianity's "parent" religion, which was explained as "merely a particular example of the syncretistic tendencies characteristic of Greco-Roman religion." In their zeal to paint early Christian doctrinal history as a haphazard pastiche drawn from disparate sources, this school "commit[ed] a kind of 'etymological fallacy' by uncritically reading the meaning of a phenomenon from one

religious setting into another setting." Hurtado cautions that "one must always study a particular religious phenomenon in the overall 'pattern' of each religious movement, for the overall pattern may give to the phenomenon very different significance and meaning."[17]

I argue that some historians who address early Latter-day Saint doctrinal history make similar mistakes. Perhaps wishing to curb the apologetic excesses of more traditionalist believers, they portray any changes as the syncretistic adoption of disparate ideas drawn from Joseph Smith's broader environment, resulting in a process characterized by abrupt shifts between contradictory positions. Supporting such a narrative requires pointedly ignoring much of what Joseph Smith said about what he was trying to do (restoring primitive Christianity) and how he was trying to do it (which involved esotericism).

A reasonable test of these historians' approach, therefore, would be to compare how well it explains the historical data with the results of an approach that explicitly takes seriously Smith's stated goals and methods. That is, I will assume that Joseph Smith actually succeeded, on some level, at tapping into the thought forms of some of the most primitive Christian groups (early Jewish Christianity) and engaged in a sophisticated program to roll out a very similar doctrinal framework by employing common methods of esotericism. If this approach explains the data in a clearly superior manner, it will at least show that my assumed interpretive context is probably closer to the truth than some others.

"Early Jewish Christianity" is difficult to precisely define,[18] but in this discussion I will refer mainly to documents that Jean Daniélou, in his classic work *The Theology of Jewish Christianity,* identifies as primarily drawing from Jewish apocalyptic traditions of the period, rather than Hellenistic philosophy and other influences.[19] It is generally agreed that "*there was a first form of Christian theology expressed in Jewish-Semitic terms*"[20] and that "Jewish apocalyptic [was] the dominant conceptual

17. Larry W. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism,* 3rd ed. (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 3, 10.

18. Richard N. Longenecker, *The Christology of Early Jewish Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 1970), 1–24.

19. Jean Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity,* trans. John A. Baker (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1964), 7–54. Compare Barry R. Bickmore, *Restoring the Ancient Church: Joseph Smith and Early Christianity,* 2nd ed. (Redding, Calif.: FairMormon, 2013), 261–84.

20. Daniélou, *Theology of Jewish Christianity*, 10, emphasis in original. Compare Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma,* trans. Neil Buchanan, 7 vols. (New York: Dover, 1961), 1:287.

framework of earliest Christianity."²¹ Only a limited number of early Jewish-Christian documents have survived, but what we have available makes clear that Joseph Smith somehow managed to forge a surprisingly deep connection with the thought forms of the groups that produced them, whether by revelation or naturalistic means.

Modalism and the Book of Mormon

One common criticism of Joseph Smith's later theology has always been that it departs drastically from the monotheistic scruples of traditional Judaism and Christianity. Therefore, it might be surprising that a number of historians allege that Joseph Smith's original theology, recorded in the Book of Mormon, is best described as modalism,²² perhaps the most stringently monotheistic interpretation of the Christian Trinity. Modalism is the belief that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are a single person who is manifested in three different modes. This doctrine first appeared in the late second century CE and was popular in the third.²³ By the fourth century, it was declared heretical and has generally not been officially accepted in Christian churches since, except among a few minor groups like the Oneness Pentecostals. However, the officially accepted doctrine of the Trinity (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three distinct Persons in one eternally unchanging, homogeneous, and indivisible Being) has always been difficult for rank-and-file Christians to understand, so "it is not surprising that a great number of Christians in mainline denominations, including Roman Catholicism, hold a modalistic conception of the Trinity, at least unconsciously."²⁴ Therefore, it is certainly conceivable for Joseph Smith to have absorbed some sort of modalistic view of God from his religious environment and inserted it

---

21. R. G. Hammerton-Kelly, *Pre-existence, Wisdom, and the Son of Man: A Study of the Idea of Pre-existence in the New Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 276.

22. Thomas Alexander, "The Reconstruction of Mormon Doctrine: From Joseph Smith to Progressive Theology," *Sunstone* 5, no. 4 (1980): 24–33; Melodie Moench Charles, "Book of Mormon Christology," in *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology,* ed. Brent Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993), 81–114; Dan Vogel, "The Earliest Mormon Doctrine of God," in *Line upon Line: Essays on Mormon Doctrine,* ed. Gary James Bergera (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), 17–33; Boyd Kirkland, "The Development of the Mormon Doctrine of God," in Bergera, *Line upon Line,* 35–52; Kurt Widmer, *Mormonism and the Nature of God: A Theological Evolution, 1830–1915* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2000).

23. J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines,* rev. ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1978), 115–23.

24. E. Calvin Beisner, *God in Three Persons* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1984), 18.

into the translation of the Book of Mormon. And if so, it would be hard to imagine a wider gulf between the theology taught there and Smith's later teachings.

Supporters of this interpretation typically point to Book of Mormon passages that express generic Trinitarian formulae, for example, "the Father, and . . . the Son, and . . . the Holy Ghost, which is one God" (2 Ne. 31:21), but especially to passages that equate the human body of Jesus as "the Son," and the spirit inhabiting that body as "the Father," such as Mosiah 15:1–5.

> And now Abinadi said unto them: I would that ye should understand that God himself shall come down among the children of men, and shall redeem his people. And because he dwelleth in flesh he shall be called the Son of God, and having subjected the flesh to the will of the Father, being the Father and the Son—the Father, because he was conceived by the power of God; and the Son, because of the flesh; thus becoming the Father and Son—and they are one God, yea, the very Eternal Father of heaven and of earth. And thus the flesh becoming subject to the Spirit, or the Son to the Father, being one God, suffereth temptation, and yieldeth not to the temptation, but suffereth himself to be mocked, and scourged, and cast out, and disowned by his people. (Mosiah 15:1–5; compare 3 Ne. 1:14; Ether 3:14; 4:12)

But is this enough to definitively label the theology of the Book of Mormon "modalist"? Historically, modalists have appealed to similarly worded passages in the New Testament.[25] For instance, in John 10:30 Jesus says that "I and my Father are one," and in John 14:8–11 he says both that "he that hath seen me hath seen the Father" and "the Father . . . dwelleth in me." Before the late second century, there is no record of any modalist Christians, so how did the earlier believers interpret these passages? J. N. D. Kelly notes that premodalist Christians still held to "the ancient view that 'Father' signified the Godhead Itself"[26] and that the first post–New Testament Christological formulations involved variations on a sort of "Spirit Christology," the idea that "in the historical Jesus Christ the pre-existent Son of God, Who is divine spirit, united Himself with human nature."[27] In many of these formulations, the body of Jesus was indwelt by the divine spirit, just as a human soul inhabits the flesh. For instance, Hippolytus of Rome (ca. 170–235 CE) claimed the "*Logos* we

---

25. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines,* 120.
26. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines,* 119.
27. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines,* 143.

know to have received a body from a virgin,"[28] and Ignatius of Antioch (ca. 110 C.E.) wrote that "God the Word did dwell in a human body, being within it as the Word, even as the soul also is in the body."[29] As John phrased it, "The Word was made flesh" (John 1:14). Clearly, equating Jesus's spirit with "the Father" and his body with "the Son" is not sufficient evidence to label a document "modalist."

Indeed, at least since Matthew, Christians have applied the prophecy in Isaiah 9 to Jesus (compare Matt. 4:16 and Isa. 9:2). The Hebrew text has "for unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6). Rather than including several different titles for the messianic figure, the Septuagint[30] has "and his name is called the Angel of Great Counsel." This was seen by the early Christians as a simple summary of the titles in the Hebrew text, as can be seen by the following passage from Clement of Alexandria (late second century CE):

> The Spirit calls the Lord Himself a child, thus prophesying by Esaias: "Lo, to us a child has been born, to us a son has been given, on whose own shoulder the government shall be; and His name has been called the Angel of great Counsel." Who, then, is this infant child? He according to whose image we are made little children. By the same prophet is declared His greatness: "Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace; that He might fulfil His discipline: and of His peace there shall be no end." O the great God! O the perfect child! The Son in the Father, and the Father in the Son.[31]

In other words, Clement considered it proper to call Jesus "Angel," "God," "Prince," "Son," and "Everlasting Father." He could speak of the "Son in the Father, and the Father in the Son," and yet Clement was no modalist.[32]

---

28. Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies* 10:29, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers,* ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, 10 vols. (Buffalo, N.Y.: Christian Literature Publishing, 1885–1896), 5:152, emphasis in original. Compare Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3:9:3, in Roberts and Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers,* 1:423.

29. Ignatius, *Epistle of Ignatius to the Philadelphians* 6, in Roberts and Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers,* 1:83.

30. That is, the second and third century BCE Greek translation of the Old Testament primarily used by the New Testament authors.

31. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor* 1:5, in Roberts and Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers,* 2:215. Compare Margaret Barker, *The Great Angel: A Study of Israel's Second God* (London: SPCK, 1992), 36.

32. See Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata* 4:25, in Roberts and Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers,* 2:438.

Passages about the Father "dwelling in" Jesus are at least consistent with some sort of modalism, but why did it take so long for this interpretation to occur to an appreciable number of early Christians? Two reasons for this lag were that (1) the earliest Christians did not think of the "oneness" of God in the same manner as later Christians and that (2) there are other passages in the New Testament that present serious difficulties for a modalist interpretation.

By the time the earliest modalists came on the scene in the late second century CE, the Christian concept of *what God is,* and consequently *what it means for God to be One,* was in flux. Christopher Stead asserts that the earliest concept of God for both the Jews and Christians was of a person "having a body and mind like our own, though transcending humanity in the splendour of his appearance, in his power, his wisdom, and the constancy of his care for his creatures."[33] By the mid-second century, however, many educated Christians were adopting a description of God's nature identical to that taught by the Greek philosophical schools—"the One" of the Middle Platonists, who was the pure essence of Mind, transcendent, immaterial, eternally existent, unchanging, and homogeneous within itself.[34] It became commonplace for educated Christians to defend their persecuted faith by claiming that their God was essentially the same as that believed in by most educated citizens of the empire.[35] Thus, the early Christian writer Tertullian (ca. 155–220 CE) could bluntly claim, "Whatever attributes therefore you require as worthy of God, must be found in the Father, who is invisible and unapproachable, and placid, and (so to speak) the God of the philosophers."[36] Christians who adapted their theology to the God of the philosophers sometimes contrasted their more sophisticated views to those of the Jews and Jewish Christians. For instance, Justin Martyr (ca. 100–165 CE) chided the Jews for "fancying that the Father of all, the unbegotten God, has hands and feet, and fingers, and a soul, like a composite being."[37] Origen (ca. 184–253 CE) accused the Jews of the same vice but grudgingly

---

33. Christopher Stead, *Philosophy in Christian Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 120.

34. See passages from the Middle Platonist philosophers Numenius and Plutarch, quoted in Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel,* trans. E. H. Gifford (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1903), 525–29.

35. Christopher Stead, *Divine Substance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 187–88.

36. Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 2:27, in Roberts and Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers,* 3:319.

37. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 114, in Roberts and Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers,* 1:256.

admitted that some Christians believed in an anthropomorphic God. He rejected these beliefs, however, as anathema to the philosophers. "The Jews indeed, but also some of our people, supposed that God should be understood as a man, that is, adorned with human members and human appearance. But the philosophers despise these stories as fabulous and formed in the likeness of poetic fictions."[38] Elsewhere, he confessed that the issue of God's corporeality was still an open question in Christian teaching. "For it is also to be a subject of investigation how God himself is to be understood—whether as corporeal, and formed according to some shape, or of a different nature from bodies—a point which is not clearly indicated in our teaching."[39]

Consider how this shift in views about the nature of God would affect perceptions of both the divinity of the Son and the Divine Unity. If God and humans are not wholly disparate types of beings, the old Spirit Christology provides a coherent framework for understanding how the Son can be both truly human and truly God. That is, the Word (a spiritual being not unlike a human soul) could take on a human body and in a real sense be a human. And although the Word would not be the same person as the Father, he could nevertheless be God by virtue of belonging to the same class of being as the Father, although in a subordinate sense and by virtue of unity in will, love, and purpose with the Father. In contrast, how could adding a wrapper of human flesh to the God of the philosophers result in anything that could be called truly human? And if the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are truly God, what is to be done with the philosophers' claim that God must be completely homogeneous and indivisible?

In early Jewish-Christian circles, they appear to have equated Jesus's spirit with the archangel from earlier Jewish beliefs about the principal angelic helper to God who went before the children of Israel in the Exodus and of whom God said, "My name is in him" (Ex. 23:20–21).[40] In the visions of Hermas (late first half of the second century, brother of bishop Pius of Rome), the Holy Spirit is described as "the angel of the prophetic

---

38. Origen, *Homilies on Genesis* 3:1, in *Origen: Homilies on Genesis and Exodus,* The Fathers of the Church, trans. Ronald E. Heine, 142 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1982), 71:89; compare David L. Paulsen, "Early Christian Belief in a Corporeal Deity: Origen and Augustine as Reluctant Witnesses," *Harvard Theological Review* 83, no. 2 (1990): 105–16.

39. Origen, *De Principiis* preface:9, in Roberts and Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers,* 4:241. For a more complete discussion of these and related sources, see Paulsen, "Early Christian Belief in a Corporeal Deity," 105–16.

40. Daniélou, *Theology of Jewish Christianity,* 117–63.

Spirit" and Jesus as the "glorious . . . angel" or "most venerable . . . angel."[41] And although Justin Martyr had adopted an essentially Middle Platonist view of God, Robert Grant[42] considers it likely that he was influenced by the earlier writings of Hermas when he referred to Jesus as "another God and Lord subject to the Maker of all things; who is also called an Angel." He is "distinct from Him who made all things—numerically, I mean, not [distinct] in will."[43] In another passage, Justin seemed to equate the Son and Holy Spirit with the "other" angels. "We reverence and worship [the Father] and the Son who came forth from Him and taught us these things, and the host of other good angels who are about Him and are made quite like Him, and the Prophetic Spirit."[44] The early Jewish-Christian *Ascension of Isaiah* (second century) referred to both Jesus and the Spirit as angels: "And I saw how my Lord worshipped, and the *angel of the Holy Spirit,* and how both together praised God."[45] The early Jewish-Christian[46] Pseudo-Clementine literature both referred to the Son as an angel and specifically claimed that the Father is similar in nature to humans.

> But to the one among the archangels who is greatest, was committed the government of those who, before all others, received the worship and knowledge of the Most High God. . . . Thus the princes of the several nations are called gods. But Christ is God of princes, who is Judge of all.[47]

> Learn this also: The bodies of men have immortal souls, which have been clothed with the breath of God; and having come forth from God, they are of the same substance, but they are not gods. But if they are gods, then in this way the souls of all men, both those who have died, and those who are alive, and those who shall come into being, are gods. But if in a spirit of controversy you maintain that these also are gods, what great matter is it, then, for Christ to be called God? for He has only what all have.[48]

---

41. See Richard N. Longenecker, *The Christology of Early Jewish Christianity* (1970; Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2001), 27.

42. Robert M. Grant, *The Early Christian Doctrine of God* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1966), 81.

43. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 56, in Roberts and Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers,* 1:223, bracketed text in original.

44. Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 6, in William A. Jurgens, *The Faith of the Early Fathers,* 3 vols. (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1970), 1:51.

45. *Ascension of Isaiah,* in *The Other Bible,* ed. Willis Barnstone (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984), 528, emphasis in original.

46. Daniélou, *Theology of Jewish Christianity,* 55–64.

47. Peter, in *Recognitions of Clementine* 2:42, in Roberts and Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers,* 8:109.

48. Peter, in *Clementine Homilies* 16:16, in Roberts and Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers,* 8:316.

Adapting Christian theology to the God of the philosophers was no easy task, and the stage was set for centuries of theological conflict about the ways in which the Persons of the Trinity could be both One and in some sense distinct and the degree to which Jesus could be said to be truly human. Finally, it was decided that there are three distinct Persons within the Being of God, combined in such a way that the distinction is maintained without causing any division of essence,[49] and that Jesus has two natures—one a Person of the Trinity, and the other a complete humanity, including a body and a soul—somehow seamlessly combined.[50]

The point I wish to make with the foregoing discussion of early Christian theology is that interpretation of the modalist-sounding statements in documents like the Book of Mormon and the Bible *has always* been dependent on the underlying concept of *what God is.* On the one hand, if the underlying concept was of a more anthropomorphic sort, it seems more likely that Joseph Smith interpreted such passages more like the early Jewish Christians. In fact, the Book of Mormon does explicitly teach an anthropomorphic concept of God. In vision, the premortal Christ explained, "Behold, this body, which ye now behold, is the body of my spirit; and man have I created after the body of my spirit; and even as I appear unto thee to be in the spirit will I appear unto my people in the flesh" (Ether 3:16). On the other hand, the only reason for adopting a modalist interpretation would be if the underlying concept of God was an eternally unchanging, homogeneous, and indivisible spiritual essence, because otherwise there would be no reason to assume the Oneness of God implies anyone called "God" must be the same Person.

Why else would anyone bother with the mental gymnastics required to accommodate a modalist interpretation to the many *antimodalist* passages in both the Bible and the Book of Mormon?[51] The New Testament, for instance, has Jesus saying that he kept his Father's commandments (John 15:10), that he "came forth from the Father" and would later "go to the Father" (John 16:28) but had "not yet ascended to [his] Father" (John 20:17), that "[his] Father is greater than [he]" (John 14:28), and that he prayed to the Father (John 17). Other passages describe "the Spirit of God" descending upon Jesus and the Father's voice coming from heaven while Jesus was on the earth (Matt. 3:13–17). And of course, there is Stephen's

---

49. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines,* 252–79.

50. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines,* 310–43.

51. For a comprehensive review of evidence for and against a modalist interpretation of the Book of Mormon, see Ari D. Bruening and David L. Paulsen, "The Development of the Mormon Understanding of God: Early Mormon Modalism and Other Myths," *FARMS Review of Books* 13, no. 2 (2001): 109–69.

vision of the risen Jesus "standing on the right hand of God" in heaven (Acts 7:56). Similarly, the Book of Mormon has Jesus claiming to have been "with the Father from the beginning" (3 Ne. 9:15), praying to the Father (3 Ne. 17:15), and going "unto the Father" by ascending to heaven (3 Ne. 26:15; compare 3 Ne. 17:4). It also includes a passage in which the preincarnate Son and the Father speak with different voices (2 Ne. 31:11–15).

In response to the criticism that antimodalistic passages preclude a modalistic interpretation of Book of Mormon theology, Dan Vogel notes that "such passages never dissuaded modalists. In view of the explicit modalistic passages in the Book of Mormon, the presence of apparent contradictions does not necessarily detract from a modalistic interpretation."[52] No doubt it is true that modalists have always had ways of dealing with such texts, but throughout their history they merely inherited the New Testament documents and had to creatively interpret difficult passages as they stood. In Joseph Smith's case, however, Vogel's position requires that Smith was the one actually producing the Book of Mormon. If Vogel were correct about Joseph Smith originally being a modalist, we would have to believe that he was too dim-witted to realize that some of the passages he was dictating contradicted his theology. Vogel might object that Smith was merely parroting similar passages in the New Testament, but there is a compelling reason to believe both that he was paying attention to apparent contradictions and that he would not have felt constrained to parrot antimodalist passages from the Bible. Within months of publishing the Book of Mormon and organizing a church, Joseph Smith began his new "translation" of the Bible, in which he corrected what he saw as errors and omissions and changed wording for clarity.

This brings us to the book of Moses, which comprises the opening chapters of Smith's revision of the Bible. In this document, God describes to Moses a pre-earthly conversation between the Father, the Son, and Satan, the latter two of which appear to be presented as *angels,* both vying to become the Savior of mankind.

> And I, the Lord God, spake unto Moses, saying: That Satan, whom thou hast commanded in the name of mine Only Begotten, is the same which was from the beginning, and he came before me, saying—Behold, here am I, send me, I will be thy son, and I will redeem all mankind, that one soul shall not be lost, and surely I will do it; wherefore give me thine honor. But, behold, my Beloved Son, which was my Beloved and Chosen from the beginning, said unto me—Father, thy will be done, and the glory be thine forever. (Moses 4:1–2)

---

52. Vogel, "The Earliest Mormon Doctrine of God," in Bergera, *Line upon Line,* 24.

The difficulties involved in imposing a modalistic interpretation on Moses 4:1–2 are both obvious and profound, which illustrates a problem I mentioned above. If the Book of Mormon explicitly claims to be an exoteric document, with more information to come for those who believe (3 Ne. 26:8–11), and the near-contemporaneous book of Moses explicitly claims to be an esoteric document meant to give further enlightenment only to believers, why would historians not give priority to Moses for interpreting the Book of Mormon, rather than vice versa? Proponents of the modalist interpretation have sometimes gone to extraordinary lengths to shunt aside such passages from Moses. For instance, Kurt Widmer dismisses a similar passage in Moses as a "minor [reference]," and "a Christian interpolation."[53] Similarly to Vogel, Widmer apparently envisages Joseph Smith clumsily inserting biblical phrases that *flatly contradicted his theology* into a text he was producing as part of *an effort to harmonize the Bible with his theology.*

Monotheism and Subordinationism

Drawing on the work of Vogel, Widmer, and others, Charles Harrell describes the history of Latter-day Saint theology as beginning with "a lay trinitarianism with elements of both orthodox and modal trinitarianism using language that is mixed and sometimes inconsistent" in the Book of Mormon. Harrell explains that in 1830 "the Prophet began differentiating more clearly between the Father and the Son," evidently referring to Moses 4:1–2. However, he assigns to the earlier trinitarian/modalist/inconsistent period a March 1830 revelation identifying Christ as "God, the greatest of all" (D&C 19:18) and an 1831–1832 passage[54] from Joseph Smith's translation of the Bible in which Jesus said, "No man knoweth that the Son is the Father, and the Father is the Son" (JST, Luke 10:22). By 1834–1835, this allegedly morphed into a "binitarian" theology in the *Lectures on Faith,* which explains that "there are two personages who constitute the . . . supreme . . . power over all things. . . . They are the Father and the Son . . . possessing the same mind, . . . which mind is the Holy Spirit, . . . and these three constitute the godhead, and are one." By 1841, Joseph Smith was "leaning toward social trinitarianism, which considers members of the godhead to be distinct individuals who are one only in purpose, and not in substance," with a statement that "the three were separate bod[ies]." But back in 1839, Smith had "hinted that there may be"

---

53. Widmer, *Mormonism and the Nature of God,* 45.
54. Matthews, *"Plainer Translation,"* 30–34.

multiple gods in Doctrine and Covenants 121:28, which says that at some future time it would be revealed "whether there be one God or many gods." Finally, in 1844, the Prophet allegedly "repudiated" trinitarianism by saying that the godhead is "3 distinct personages & 3 Gods," which Harrell calls "tritheistic."[55]

This reconstruction of early Church doctrinal history is difficult to defend. Harrell imposes a series of dubiously applicable technical terms on Joseph Smith's language to manufacture contradiction and fails to take seriously anything Smith explicitly claimed he was about. If the Book of Mormon identifies the Son with the Father but sometimes uses language that is "inconsistent" with a modalist interpretation, then perhaps we should reject the modalist label and adopt another interpretation. If the identification of the Son with the Father must be taken in a strictly literal sense as referring to their "Being," however, why would Smith only a few months later begin "differentiating more clearly between the Father and the Son" by depicting the pre-Incarnate Son as obviously both separate from, and subordinate to, the Father (Moses 4:1–2) but then in 1831–1832 once again identify the Son as the Father? As I explained above, making this connection merely involves taking seriously the explicit claims in the Book of Mormon and book of Moses to be exoteric and esoteric documents, respectively. Moving on, if Moses is accepted as the clearer of the two, what is the difference between its depiction of the Father and Son and their depiction a few years later in the *Lectures on Faith* as "two personages" unified with the Holy Spirit in one godhead? Certainly the 1839–1844 descriptions of the Holy Spirit as a distinct "personage" or "body" express a different understanding than that in the *Lectures on Faith,* but given the data from Moses 4:1–2, why is the earlier expression described as binitarianism instead of "social" binitarianism?[56] Furthermore, if "social trinitarianism" is the idea that the three personages of the Godhead are "distinct individuals who are one only in purpose, and not in substance," how is that anything but superficially different than calling them "3 Gods" if they were always conceived as operating in complete harmony of will and purpose? Some may still resist my

---

55. Charles R. Harrell, *"This Is My Doctrine": The Development of Mormon Theology* (Sandy, Utah: Greg Kofford Books, 2011), 114.

56. Bruening and Paulsen argue that other evidence indicates Joseph Smith did, in fact, consider the Holy Spirit as a distinct entity at that time. See Bruening and Paulsen, "Development of the Mormon Understanding of God," 133–39. Whatever label we put on it, however, it seems likely that the *Lectures on Faith* were describing something different than the later LDS understanding of the Holy Spirit.

insistence that, almost from the beginning, Moses 4:1–2 provided a critical key to harmonizing all this data, but if Joseph Smith was not involved in any sort of planned rollout of gradually clearer doctrinal statements, then what was he doing "hinting" (as Harrell put it) in 1839 that there may be "many gods"?

If we do prioritize the description of the Father and Son in Moses 4:1–2, however, we can summarize the entire progression of Joseph Smith's theology with a single term—"monarchic monotheism." Some might wonder how language like "3 Gods" or "many gods" can possibly be equated with "monotheism." However, a number of scholars have convincingly shown that an overly monistic definition of monotheism (that is, God as a single "being" or "substance") is inconsistent with what is known of ancient Judaism and Israelite religion, in which God was pictured as an absolute monarch, but a variety of heavenly beings (angels) within God's retinue, including "principal agent" figures, shared many of God's attributes and powers and sometimes were even given God's name (YHWH), called "gods," or conflated with the One God. Some scholars, such as Peter Hayman in his article "Monotheism—a Misused Word in Jewish Studies?"[57] and Margaret Barker in her book *The Great Angel: A Study of Israel's Second God,*[58] argue that "monotheism" should not be used to describe such beliefs. Others, such as Larry Hurtado in his article "What Do We Mean by 'First-Century Jewish Monotheism'?," argue that since the Jews claimed they worshipped the "One God," then in some sense they were "monotheists," whether or not this more monarchic type of monotheism (any number of divine beings acting under the direction of one monarch) satisfies later definitions.[59] Clearly, when Joseph Smith wrote in 1839 of the "Council of the Eternal God of all other gods" (D&C 121:32), he had something very similar in mind.

This is not to say that there was perfect agreement about the degree of similarity between God and the angels. Rabbinic Jews of the period argued forcefully against a number of "Two Powers" heresies, including Christianity, which they considered to have elevated one or more

---

57. A. Peter Hayman, "Monotheism—a Misused Word in Jewish Studies?," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 42, no. 1 (1991): 1–5.

58. Barker, *Great Angel,* 70–73.

59. Larry W. Hurtado, "What Do We Mean by 'First-Century Jewish Monotheism'?" in *Society of Biblical Literature 1993 Seminar Papers,* ed. E. H. Lovering Jr. (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 348–68. Compare Larry W. Hurtado, "First-Century Jewish Monotheism," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 71 (1998): 3–26; and Hurtado, *One God, One Lord.*

principal angelic figures too close to the One God.[60] For example, in
3 Enoch, a fifth- or sixth-century CE Jewish apocalypse,[61] the exalted
Enoch[62] and several other angels are given the name "YHWH"[63] and
stand "before Him who is exalted above all gods."[64] Enoch originally
had a great throne before the door to God's throne room, but a visitor
saw him and exclaimed, "There are indeed two powers in heaven!" In
response to this misunderstanding, God sent another angel to publicly
give Enoch sixty lashes with a fiery whip and force him to stand up from
his throne.[65] The early Christian version of God was apparently more
relaxed about such things, however, given that John depicted Jesus as sit-
ting on God's throne (Rev. 7:17) and promised Jesus's followers that they
would be given the divine name (Rev. 3:12) and sit with Jesus on God's
throne (Rev. 3:21).

As I pointed out above, it was common in early Jewish Christianity to
refer to the premortal Christ as the chief archangel, who was given the
name of God (YHWH) and was sometimes even called a "second god."
Although early Christian writers expressed a number of variations on
this theme as they accommodated their theology to the "god of the phi-
losophers," one thing remained constant. That is, aside from the modal-
ists, all of them expressed some form of subordinationism—the idea that
the Son and Holy Spirit are subordinate to the Father in rank and glory.
R. P. C. Hanson writes that "until Athanasius began writing, every single
theologian, East and West, had postulated some form of Subordination-
ism. It could, about the year 300, have been described as a fixed part of
catholic theology."[66] J. N. D. Kelly notes that even at the Council of Nicea,
the largest party present believed "that there are three divine hypostases
[or 'persons'], separate in rank and glory but united in harmony of will."[67]

---

60. Alan F. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity
and Gnosticism* (Leiden, Neth.: E. J. Brill, 1977).

61. P. Alexander, "3 (Hebrew Apocalypse of) Enoch," in *The Old Testament Pseude-
pigrapha,* ed. James H. Charlesworth, 2 vols. (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers,
1983), 1:229.

62. *3 Enoch* 4:1–3, in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha,* 258.

63. *3 Enoch* 10:3–4 and 12:5, in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha,* 264–65.

64. *3 Enoch* 15B:1, in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha,* 303

65. *3 Enoch* 16, in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha,* 268.

66. R. P. C. Hansen, "The Achievement of Orthodoxy in the Fourth Century AD,"
in *The Making of Orthodoxy: Essays in Honour of Henry Chadwick,* ed. Rowan Williams
(New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 153.

67. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines,* 247–48.

To this point, it is clear that, whatever the process involved, Joseph Smith was relatively successful at restoring some points of theology that would have been at home in the most primitive strata of Christianity. Shortly before his death, however, he expressed the belief that God the Father was himself once a man, with his own Father in Heaven, and so on.[68] Such beliefs are not known to have existed in early Christianity, except perhaps among some Christian Gnostic groups,[69] although Smith's revelations claimed God would reveal truths that had been "kept hid from before the foundation of the world" (D&C 124:41). In any case, even this more extreme version of a "many gods" theology is consistent with the "monarchic monotheism" label, if we keep in mind the perfect functional oneness that is supposed to prevail in the heavenly realm. Consider the following comments given by Brigham Young after Smith's death:

> If men are faithful, the time will come when they will possess the power and the knowledge to obtain, organize, bring into existence, and own. "What, of themselves, independent of their Creator?" No. But they and their Creator will always be one, they will always be of one heart and of one mind, working and operating together; for whatsoever the Father doeth so doeth the son, and so they continue throughout all their operations to all eternity.[70]

> When will we become entirely independent? Never, though we are as independent in our spheres as the Gods of eternity are in theirs.[71]

> Then will be given to us that which we now only seem to own, and we will be forever one with the Father and the Son, and not until then.[72]

> Is he one? Yes. Is his trinity one? Yes. Is his organization one? Are the heavens one? Yes.[73]

---

68. See "Discourse, 7 April 1844, as Reported by William Clayton," 13, Joseph Smith Papers, accessed April 7, 2023, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-7-april-1844-as-reported-by-william-clayton/3; see also Harrell, *"This Is My Doctrine,"* 114–15.

69. For instance, Irenaeus of Lyons criticized Gnostic tendency to speculate about what God was doing before he created the earth and warned against "starting the question whether there is another God above God." Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 2:28, in Roberts and Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers,* 1:399–402.

70. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses,* 2:304 (June 3, 1855).

71. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses,* 8:190 (September 30, 1860).

72. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses,* 9:106 (January 5, 1860).

73. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses,* 14:92 (April 8, 1871).

Here, in a practical sense there has never been anything other than "One God," and there will never be any more than "One God," no matter how many "personages" (that is, "gods" or "Gods") are identified with the "One God." This sort of "oneness" is consistent with the *only* passage in the New Testament where the mode of divine unity is given any explanation. Jesus prays to the Father that his followers "all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us" (John 17:21). According to this, the divine unity is qualitatively identical to the kind of "oneness" humans can share with each other, and with God.

Of course, one might object that mainstream Christians have long interpreted this passage in a metaphorical sense—that the Divine Unity is perhaps *analogous* to the ways in which humans can be "one" with each other and God, but it isn't *the same.* However, this clearly illustrates the problem at hand. Human language is full of terms that are used both literally and metaphorically, and it is rare for people to speak so precisely as to always make it clear to cultural outsiders or future historians which they intend. If we take figuratively the passages in the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith's translation of the Bible that identify the Son with the Father and passages stating that God is "One," then we are only applying common idioms—for example, when Rameses tells Moses, "I am Egypt!" in the 1998 animated movie *The Prince of Egypt,* or when Jesus prayed that all his followers would "be one." And once these interpretive choices are made, it is a simple matter to frame Joseph Smith's theology as a progression of ideas that all fit into a single, broad category— monarchic monotheism. In contrast, Harrell, Vogel, and the others must figuratively interpret much more complex passages (for example, Moses 4:1–2, which is clearly a three-way conversation between the Father, the pre-Incarnate Son, and Satan) and implicitly impose a definition of God as some indivisible essence that Joseph Smith explicitly rejected in the Book of Mormon to arrive at an interpretation of early Latter-day Saint theology as a series of contradictions.

Premortal Existence of Souls

The tug-of-war over which language should be interpreted literally or figuratively continues with respect to the introduction of the Restoration doctrine of the premortal existence of souls. It is generally acknowledged that some version of this doctrine is articulated in the book of Moses, where God says he "created all things . . . spiritually, before they were naturally upon the face of the earth" (Moses 3:5), and God tells Adam that "I made the world, and men before they were in the flesh" (Moses

6:51). The doctrine is not as clearly presented in the Book of Mormon, however, so rather than interpreting relevant Book of Mormon passages in light of the book of Moses, some historians again assume there was a seismic shift in Joseph Smith's beliefs about the origin of souls over the course of a few months in 1830. Charles Harrell, for instance, writes that when the Book of Mormon says that anciently, priests were "called and prepared from the foundation of the world according to the fore-knowledge of God, on account of their exceeding faith and good works" (Alma 13:3), it is simply parroting an "early nineteenth century Free Will Baptist idea" that people are elected to salvation based on God's fore-knowledge of their future faith and good works. In support of his con-clusion that premortal existence of souls is not taught at all in the Book of Mormon, Harrell quotes Latter-day Saint Apostle Orson Pratt saying that, were it not for subsequent revelations, "I do not think that I should have ever discerned" the doctrine of premortal existence in the Book of Mormon.[74] However, Harrell leaves out the passage Pratt used to argue that the doctrine is clearly implied: "Yea, even all men were created in the beginning after mine own image" (Ether 3:15). If God created "all men . . . in the beginning," then how are we to avoid positing some sort of doctrine of premortal existence of souls? Obviously, this is another case where ignoring the *explicitly stated* exoteric-esoteric pairing of the Book of Mormon and book of Moses leads to serious mistakes interpret-ing early Latter-day Saint doctrinal history.

Given the Book of Mormon characterization of Jesus as God, having a premortal spirit with an intrinsically anthropomorphic spirit "body" (Ether 3:16), the account of the premortal spiritual creation in Moses reinforces the view that Joseph Smith's later teachings about God's essen-tial similarity to humans (for example, D&C 93:1, 22) were broadly con-sistent with his earliest theology. Applying this backdrop, including the doctrine of premortal existence in Moses, to Book of Mormon passages like Ether 3:15 can provide greater clarity. For example, consider Nephi's account of Lehi's vision at the very beginning of the Book of Mormon.

> And being thus overcome with the Spirit, he was carried away in a vision, even that he saw the heavens open, and he thought he saw God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels in the attitude of singing and praising their God. And it came to pass that he saw one[75] descending out of the midst of heaven, and

---

74. Harrell, *"This Is My Doctrine,"* 207; compare Blake T. Ostler, "The Idea of Preexis-tence in Mormon Thought," in Bergera, *Line upon Line,* 127–44.

75. "One" was not capitalized in the 1830 edition but is in the current edition.

> he beheld that his luster was above that of the sun at noon-day. And he also saw twelve others following him, and their brightness did exceed that of the stars in the firmament. And they came down and went forth upon the face of the earth. (1 Ne. 1:8–11)

Interpreted in light of the depiction in Moses of Jesus as the principal angelic helper to the Father (Moses 4:1–2) and of the spiritual creation of human souls, passages like this take on greater possible meaning. Was this a vision of the premortal Jesus and his Apostles, or perhaps of the twelve disciples chosen to represent Jesus among the Nephites? The text does not say who the one and the twelve were supposed to represent, but a little later Nephi recounted one of his own visions, in which he saw the mortal Jesus ministering in Palestine and "twelve others following him" (1 Ne. 11:27–29). Nephi was next shown "angels descending upon the children of men" to minister (11:30) and the rest of Jesus's mortal ministry (11:31–33). He then saw "the multitudes of the earth" and "the house of Israel . . . gathered together to fight against the twelve apostles of the Lamb" (11:34–36). Finally, he witnessed Jesus descend from heaven to minister to Nephi's descendants and choose twelve representatives there as well. "And I saw the heavens open, and the Lamb of God descending out of heaven; and he came down and showed himself unto them. And I also saw and bear record that the Holy Ghost fell upon twelve others; and they were ordained of God, and chosen" (12:6–7). This parallel account is at least strongly suggestive of who the one and the twelve in Lehi's vision were supposed to be. In fact, surveying all the other occurrences of the number "twelve" in the Book of Mormon, I found only three incidental mentions of "twelve years" (Mosiah 9:11), "twelve days" (Mosiah 24:25), and twelve sons and daughters (Ether 6:20), whereas all the others refer to the twelve Apostles, the twelve Nephite disciples, or the twelve Apostles judging the twelve tribes of Israel (1 Ne. 11–14; Morm. 3; 3 Ne. 12–13, 15, 19). If there was any purpose at all for mentioning the heavenly descent of the one and the twelve in Lehi's vision, the Book of Mormon provides very limited options for interpretation.

Once again, we find that the doctrine of premortal existence of souls was taught in early Jewish Christianity. In the *Clementine Recognitions,* for instance, Peter told Clement of Rome that "after all these things He made man, on whose account He had prepared all things, whose internal species is older, and for whose sake all things that are were made."[76]

---

76. *Recognitions of Clement* 1:28, in Roberts and Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers,* 8:85.

It turns out that this was part of the esoteric tradition of the Jewish-Christian group that produced the document, just as it was first clearly introduced to Latter-day Saint teachings in the esoteric book of Moses. Elsewhere in the *Recognitions,* when the arch-heretic Simon Magus confronted Peter with the question of the origin of souls, Peter said, "You seem to me not to know what a father and a God is: but I could tell you both whence souls are, and when and how they were made; but it is not permitted to me now to disclose these things to you, who are in such error in respect of the knowledge of God."[77]

Charles Harrell and Blake Ostler[78] separately argue that the New Testament, and even the book of Moses, only supports a doctrine of preexistence involving the corporate or "ideal" existence of mankind in the mind of God. For example, Paul taught that God promised eternal life "before the world began" (Titus 1:2), and the early Jewish Christian *Shepherd of Hermas* (late first half of the second century) claimed the church "was created first of all. . . . And for her sake was the world made."[79] In the case of Moses, this interpretation seems unlikely, given that it describes the Lord telling Cain that he was "also before the world" (Moses 5:24). As for the Book of Mormon, if we accept that 1 Nephi 1:8–11 refers to the descent from heaven of Jesus and his Apostles, a merely corporate preexistence seems out of the question. In any case, the idea of an ideal preexistence of souls is not mutually exclusive of real preexistence as individual entities, so if the *Clementine Recognitions* was correct that a real preexistence was part of the earliest Christian esoteric tradition, it would explain why it seems only weakly attested in the New Testament and why by the early third century Origen could report that there was no clear teaching about the origin of the soul in the church of that time.[80]

In fact, the most striking references to the real premortal existence of human souls come from Jewish and early Jewish Christian apocalyptic literature—accounts of prophets who temporarily ascended to heaven,

77. *Recognitions of Clement* 2:60, in Roberts and Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers,* 8:114.

78. Harrell, *"This Is My Doctrine,"* 207; Ostler, "The Idea of Preexistence in Mormon Thought," 127–44.

79. *The Pastor of Hermas,* Vision 2:4, in Roberts and Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers,* 2:12. Compare "Moreover, the books and the Apostles declare that the Church belongs not to the present, but existed from the beginning." *2 Clement* 14:2, in *The Apostolic Fathers,* ed. Robert M. Grant and Holt H. Graham, 6 vols. (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1965), 2:126.

80. Origen, *De Principiis* preface:5, in Roberts and Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers,* 4:240.

which Daniélou identifies as the locus of the early esoteric traditions.[81] For example, the *Apocalypse of Abraham* (a first-century Jewish document likely modified by a Jewish Christian group and first published in 1863[82]) depicts Abraham's vision of the premortal spirits of humanity standing before God. The scene is joltingly similar to Abraham's vision of premortal humanity in Joseph Smith's book of Abraham (ch. 3).

> And everything I had planned to be came into being: it was already pre-figured in this, for all *the things and all the people* you have seen stood before me before they were created. And I said, Mighty and Eternal Ruler, who then are the people in this picture on this side and on that? And he said to me, Those on the left side are the many peoples which have existed in the past, and after you are appointed, some for judgement *and* restoration, some for vengeance *and* perdition, until the end of the age. And those on the right side of the picture, they are the people set apart for me from the people with Azazil [Satan]. These are the people who are going to spring from you and will be called my people.[83]

2 Enoch (Jewish with probable Christian interpolations, written perhaps as early as the first century CE[84]) states that "all souls are prepared to eternity, before the formation of the world"[85] and specifies that the premortal Adam was an angel. "And I placed him on earth, a second angel, honorable, great and glorious, and I appointed him as ruler to rule on earth and to have my wisdom, and there was none like him of earth of all my existing creatures. . . . I called his name Adam."[86] In support of his own belief in a real premortal existence of souls, the early third-century Christian theologian Origen quoted a Jewish apocryphal document called the *Prayer of Joseph,* which depicts the patriarch Jacob saying, "I am an

---

81. "Jewish apocalyptic was, in other words, a gnosis. It was made up of information about the hidden realities of the heavenly world and the ultimate secrets of the future. These revelations on the fringe of the canonical scripture were put under the patronage of the ancient sages, Noah, Enoch or Abraham. The Christians adopted the same method." Daniélou, *Theology of Jewish Christianity,* 26.

82. H. F. D. Sparks, ed., *The Apocryphal Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 363–67.

83. *The Apocalypse of Abraham* 22, in Sparks, *Apocryphal Old Testament,* 384, emphasis in original.

84. Harry Alan Hahne, *The Corruption and Redemption of Creation: Nature in Romans 8.19–22 and Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 83–86.

85. *Secrets of Enoch* 23:5, in R. H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English,* 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), 2:444.

86. *Secrets of Enoch* 30:11–12, in Charles, *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament,* 2:449.

angel of God, a ruling spirit, and Abraham and Isaac were created before every work of God."[87] In this context, the account of Peter's escape from prison in Acts 12 may be significant. When Peter showed up at the home of Mark's mother, a girl named Rhoda saw him and ran in to tell the other Christians that Peter was standing at the gate. "And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel" (Acts 12:15). The most straightforward interpretation of this passage is that they thought Peter was dead (probably because he had been imprisoned and James had recently been executed) and were referring to his disembodied spirit as "his angel." Joseph Smith, in his later theology (for example, see D&C 129:1–3), classified angels as either pre-mortal or postmortal humans. It appears to me that it was most common in Jewish and Jewish-Christian apocalyptic to treat humans and angels as nonidentical categories, but the examples above clearly show that the categories were thought to overlap, at least. Just as we found with the early Spirit Christology, the early Jewish Christians must have thought of the spirits of humans, angels, and Jesus as in some sense interchangeable.

The "Overall Pattern" of Joseph Smith's Theology

Throughout this essay, I have been arguing that some historians exaggerate discontinuities in Joseph Smith's early theological expansion by imposing an interpretive substrate that was actually foreign to his way of thinking. What was the "overall pattern" (as Hurtado called it) of Smith's theology that is needed to understand the meaning of his writings? I would summarize this pattern as the idea that, while God is far beyond humans in every way, the distance between God and his creations is not the unbridgeable gulf traditional Christianity posits. Christ's divine spirit is human in form (Ether 3:16), and when he became incarnate as a human, this merely involved placing the divine spirit in a human body (Mosiah 15:1–5; Ether 3:14). Although the Son is clearly a separate person subordinate to the Father (2 Ne. 31:11–15; Moses 4:1–2), their relationship is one of such profound unity that it is entirely appropriate to conflate the titles of the two beings (Mosiah 15:1–5; JST Luke 10:22) and refer to them (with the Holy Spirit) as "one God" (2 Ne. 31:21). Just as Christ existed premortally as a spirit, human spirits were also created before the world began (Ether 3:15; Moses 3:5; 5:24; 6:51). *All* of these ideas are found in the Book of Mormon, although some are made clearer by the

---

87. Origen, *Commentary on John* 2:25, in Roberts and Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers,* 9:341.

book of Moses. After 1830, all major additions to Joseph Smith's theology (doctrines about the nature of God) were merely expansions of this theme. For example, by 1832 Smith was teaching that exalted humans would become "gods" (D&C 76:58–59) and later gave more specific information about what that might entail (for example, D&C 132:20, 63). By 1833, Joseph Smith was teaching at least the bare essentials of the idea that both matter and souls are uncreated (D&C 93), further narrowing the gap between Creator and creature.

Once again, analogues of these later additions can be traced back to early Jewish Christianity. For instance, the earliest Christians almost certainly assumed creation *ex materia* (out of preexisting material), because there is no solid evidence that anyone believed in creation *ex nihilo* (out of absolute nothingness) until well into the second century CE. Genesis posits creation from a sort of watery chaos, consistent with the creation myths of other ancient cultures. "In the beginning of creation . . . the earth was without form and void, with darkness over the face of the abyss, and a mighty wind that swept over the surface of the waters" (Gen. 1:1–2, New English Bible). This belief was repeated in the New Testament, where Peter wrote that "there were heavens and earth long ago, created by God's word out of water and with water" (2 Pet. 3:5, New English Bible). There are a few passages in the New Testament that could be consistent with *ex nihilo* creation, such as "God . . . summons things that are not yet in existence as if they already were" (Rom. 4:17, New English Bible). However, Gerhard May and others have pointed out several examples of ancient authors who wrote of creation "out of nothing" or "out of non-being," but they also specifically mentioned creation from unformed matter. In other words, they used terms like "nothing" in a more mundane sense than "absolute nothingness." There are no examples of statements explicitly indicating creation from absolute nothingness until the mid-second century CE, with the Gnostics, Basilides, and the Christian apologist Tatian.[88] Meanwhile, several second-century Christian writers explicitly taught *ex materia* creation.[89] David Winston suggests that Christian

---

88. Gerhard May, *Creatio Ex Nihilo: The Doctrine of 'Creation out of Nothing' in Early Christian Thought,* trans. A. S. Worrall (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 83; compare Hayman, "Monotheism—a Misused Word in Jewish Studies?," 1–5; Jonathan Goldstein, "The Origins of the Doctrine of Creation Ex Nihilo," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 35, no. 2 (1984): 127–35; Jonathan Goldstein, "Creation Ex Nihilo: Recantations and Restatements," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 38, no. 2 (1987): 187–94; David Winston, "Creation Ex Nihilo Revisited: A Reply to Jonathan Goldstein," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 37, no. 1 (1986): 88–91.

89. Frances Young, "'Creatio ex Nihilo': A Context for the Emergence of the Christian Doctrine of Creation," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 44 (1991): 139–51.

thinkers from the late second century onward readily adopted creation *ex nihilo* because it provided a powerful argument against the extreme Gnostic position that matter is not just a lower reality than the world of Mind, as the Platonists taught, but actually *evil.*[90]

Similarly, the deification of the faithful was taught by nearly everyone within early Christianity.[91] For instance, in the late second century, Irenaeus of Lyons wrote that we are "at first merely men, then at length gods"[92] and that Jesus Christ became "what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself."[93] What exactly this meant to different Christian writers varied widely, especially after the widespread adoption of *ex nihilo* creation, which posits an unbridgeable ontological gap between God and everything else. Before anyone is known to have explicitly taught creation *ex nihilo,* however, New Testament writers provided some of the most powerful affirmations of human deification. As discussed above, humans were depicted being given the divine name (Rev. 3:12) and sitting with Jesus on God's throne (Rev. 3:21). The faithful were to become "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet.1:4), "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:17). Human deification was also taught in some strands of Judaism during that period; for example, one fragment in the Dead Sea Scrolls has a clearly human speaker claiming that he had been granted "a mighty throne in the congregation of the gods" and was to be "reckoned with the gods."[94]

Implications

Georg Iggers had the following to say about the problem of "objectivity" in history.

> Peter Novick has in my opinion rightly maintained that objectivity is unattainable in history; the historian can hope for nothing more than plausibility. But plausibility obviously rests not on the arbitrary invention of an historical account but involves rational strategies of determining what in fact is plausible. It assumes that the historical account relates to a historical reality, no matter how complex and indirect the process is by which the historian approximates this reality. Thus, although many

---

90. Winston, "Creation Ex Nihilo Revisited," 89.

91. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 469.

92. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4:38:4, in Roberts and Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers,* 1:522.

93. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5:Preface, in Roberts and Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers,* 1:526.

94. Martha Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 49.

historians have taken contemporary linguistic, semiotic, and literary theory seriously, they have in practice not accepted the idea that the texts with which they work have no reference to reality. To be sure every historical account is a construct, but a construct arising from a dialog between the historian and the past, one that does not occur in a vacuum but within a community of inquiring minds who share criteria of plausibility.[95]

In this essay, I have shown that the problem of objectivity is sometimes exacerbated for historians approaching religious texts to reconstruct doctrinal history. Even if we discard the postmodernist notion that the texts "have no reference to reality," it is evident that religions practicing esotericism may produce texts in which the full reality of the belief system is intentionally obscured. And when this is the case, historians should proceed with caution, or risk serious errors of interpretation.

There can be no doubt that from the beginning Joseph Smith *claimed* he was employing esotericism to gradually roll out a theological framework that emphasizes the relatedness of God and humankind, and I have shown that this claim is well founded. After all, well-informed historians can evidently read the Book of Mormon and come away believing that God creating "all men . . . in the beginning" (Ether 3:15) cannot refer to any sort of premortal existence of souls and that conflating the Father and Son *must* refer to a strange variant of modalism, even if Joseph Smith made such statements both before and after directly contradicting a modalist interpretation. What further proof is needed that Joseph Smith was actually successful at obscuring teachings that were only meant to be encountered head-on *after* reading and believing the Book of Mormon (3 Ne. 26:8–11)?

The problem of objectivity is further exacerbated by the fact that, at least when approaching the doctrinal history of a religion that still has adherents in the community of historians, it is difficult to achieve complete agreement about shared "criteria of plausibility." Even if believing and nonbelieving historians can agree, for practical reasons,[96] to forego explicit appeals to supernatural explanations in their professional writing, their belief or nonbelief in the actual possibility of such things most certainly affects which naturalistic narratives they consider "plausible." For example, I have shown here that Joseph Smith introduced point after

---

95. Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century,* 145.

96. See Barry R. Bickmore and David A. Grandy, "Science as Storytelling," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 53, no. 4 (2014): 37–60.

theological point that can be found in the writings of early Jewish-Christian sects, using a strategy (esotericism) also employed by these ancient groups. Given that he explicitly claimed to be enacting a Restoration of primitive Christianity and to be employing esotericism, this naturally leads to the conclusion that Smith's Restoration proceeded according to a fairly sophisticated strategy, based on a coherent set of ideas. As a believer, I found the idea that Smith could have been largely successful at such a program plausible from the outset, precisely because I accept the possibility of supernatural intervention.

It is not as if supernatural explanations are an absolute requirement to explain the data, however. Smith could not have had access to most of the early Jewish Christian sources I have cited, but there are some more or less plausible sources in Joseph Smith's environment that historians can use to naturalistically explain the origin of many of his ideas. For example, although the vast majority of Christians in early nineteenth-century America believed God creates human souls around the time of birth, Charles Harrell quotes an 1825 Presbyterian magazine article and an 1804 book by a Methodist preacher that taught the premortal existence of souls.[97] Similarly, Harrell finds that there were a number of Christian primitivist groups at the time who believed God the Father is a spirit with a human form[98] and points to Unitarians as examples of those teaching a subordinationist Christology.[99] The scientific consensus in Joseph Smith's day was that matter is indestructible, and some early nineteenth-century Christians had adopted the view that God's creation was *ex materia,* against the orthodox Christian belief in creation *ex nihilo.*[100] For instance, Joseph Priestley wrote in 1777 that there are "two distinct things, or *principles,* [which] had been from eternity, viz. *matter* and *Spirit.*"[101] Joseph Smith could easily have derived his views on human deification from the Bible or, far less likely, some contact with Eastern Orthodoxy. Therefore, there is no compelling reason why the historians I have critiqued in this essay could not have constructed naturalistic narratives of early Latter-day Saint doctrinal development that acknowledge the basic coherence of Smith's thought over

---

97. Harrell, *"This Is My Doctrine,"* 206.
98. Harrell, *"This Is My Doctrine,"* 135.
99. Harrell, *"This Is My Doctrine,"* 137.
100. Harrell, *"This Is My Doctrine,"* 231–33.
101. Joseph Priestley, *Disquisitions Relating to Matter and Spirit* (London: J. Johnson, 1777), 177, emphasis in original.

time and the fact that he developed legitimate insight into primitive forms of Christianity.

I contend that these historians have not considered such narratives precisely because of the opening they might create for believers to point to them as evidence for their supernatural beliefs. That is, the idea that Smith drew in all the ideas discussed from such disparate sources as those just mentioned to form a coherent theology that would have been at home within primitive Jewish-Christian sects seems wildly improbable. And if historians point to someone like Smith as the sort of "genius" who occasionally accomplishes wildly improbable things, it is guaranteed that believers will latch onto this as evidence for divine inspiration.

At this point, I should note that the point of this essay has not been to promote appeals to esotericism as a method to minimize any apparent shifts in doctrine over time. Here I have examined an extremely rare type of case, in which we have near-contemporaneous exoteric and esoteric documents unquestionably dictated by the same religious figure. In this specific case, we have the necessary data to show that some historians have misinterpreted the history of early Church doctrine by ignoring this relationship between the documents. It is very likely that the same dynamic was not in play for other important doctrinal changes, and any claims to the contrary would necessarily be speculative in the absence of documentary evidence. However, the case of early Restoration doctrinal history should serve as a caution to historians who want to assume they can successfully reconstruct the doctrinal history of religious groups that explicitly claimed to employ esotericism. If, even when the esoteric teachings are known, historians can badly misinterpret the content of the doctrines themselves, it is virtually guaranteed that this will happen in cases where the esoteric teachings are incompletely known.

Barry R. Bickmore is Professor of Geological Sciences at Brigham Young University and specializes in mineralogy, geochemistry, and science education. He is married to Keiko Bickmore and has three children.

Recorded in Heaven

The Testimonies of Len and Mary Hope

Scott Hales

Len and Mary Hope were African American Latter-day Saints who joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Alabama (Len in 1919, Mary in 1925) and later raised their children in Cincinnati, Ohio. The Hopes' story was recently featured in *Saints, Volume 3: Boldly, Nobly, and Independent,* introducing the couple's experiences as Black Latter-day Saints in the early twentieth century to Church members around the world.[1]

In *Saints,* the Hopes' story ends in 1949, while the couple still lived in Cincinnati. In February 1952, however, the Hopes moved to Salt Lake City and purchased a home in Millcreek at 893 E 3900 S. The home was a "ramshackle, miserable thing," but with the help of some friends in the city, they were able to "make it habitable" and turn it "into quite a nice home."[2]

---

1. This article benefits from the research of Joseph R. Stuart, whose foundational research on Len and Mary Hope can be found in the biographical entries for the couple in the University of Utah's Century of Black Mormons database (https://exhibits.lib.utah .edu/s/century-of-black-mormons/page/welcome). Additionally, I am grateful for the research and guidance of Jed L. Woodworth, who conducted much of the research on the Hope family for *Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days,* vol. 3, *Boldly, Nobly, and Independent, 1893–1955* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2022). Lisa Christensen, Brooke Jurges, and Jed L. Woodworth also contributed to the transcription of the ca. 1952 recording of Len and Mary's testimonies.

2. Marion D. Hanks, interview by Jessie L. Embry, May 18, 1989, 9–10, MSS OH 1147, Marion D. Hanks Collection, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah; Len Hope, in "Utah Death Certificates, 1904–1965," Salt Lake City, 1952, image 1869, citing series 81448, Utah State Archives Research Center, Salt Lake City. The death certificate provides the Hopes' address and a "length of stay" of "8 mo." at that

Among these friends was future General Authority Marion D. Hanks, who had met the Hopes when he served as a missionary in the Cincinnati Branch in 1942. He had hosted the couple in Salt Lake City once before, in the fall of 1947, when they came to the city to reunite with friends and attend the semiannual general conference of the Church. Hanks remembered the Hopes as "remarkably good and sweet people." He described Len as "a gentle, modest, moderate quiet God-loving, grateful man," adding that "Mary was very like him."[3]

In a 1989 interview with Jessie L. Embry about the couple, Hanks recalled making a "wire tape" of their testimonies in 1947. After Hanks's death in 2011, his family donated his papers to the Church History Library in Salt Lake City. The Marion D. Hanks Collection (MS 31743) does not contain a 1947 wire tape of the Hopes' testimonies among its various "family audio recordings." However, the collection includes a ¼″ × 600′ reel-to-reel audiotape and three audiocassettes of a recording of the Hopes bearing testimony. These tapes are undated, but a note on the back of the reel-to-reel recording identifies it as an "extra copy" of the Hopes' testimonies. In the recording, Len asserts that "President [David] O. McKay is a true prophet of God." Since McKay did not become president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints until April 1951, the recording was likely made by Hanks after the Hopes moved to Utah. While it is possible that Hanks recorded the Hopes in 1947 as well, the absence of an earlier recording in his collection suggests that he simply misremembered the date when he spoke to Embry about the recording nearly forty years later.[4]

In the recording, the Hopes bear simple, powerful testimonies of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. Len Hope also recounts the dramatic

---

place, suggesting the Hopes moved to Utah in February 1952, eight months before Len's September 14 death. Hanks remembers the Hopes' Utah residence being short-lived: "It was a very brief period. I'm not sure how long they were there. He died in 1952. I know it was a year or two or more after their visit in 1947." Embry notes, "They were only in the Polk City directory one year, living at that address. They aren't there in 1951, there in 1952, and then gone by 1953." Hanks, interview, 16.

3. Stanley L. Fish, Bradley J. Kramer, and Wm. Budge Wallis, *History of the Mormon Church in Cincinnati (1830–1985)* (Cincinnati: Cincinnati Ohio and Cincinnati Ohio North Stakes, 1997), 58–59, 68; Hanks, interview, 1–3, 7–8, 15–17; "Cincinnati Pair to Attend Conference for First Time," *Deseret News,* September 26, 1947, 9.

4. The Marion D. Hanks Collection (MS 31743) in the Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (hereafter cited as CHL), catalogues these recordings as MS 31743/14AT0046, MS 31743/ACASS0001, MS 31743/ACASS0028, and MS 31743/ACASS0033 respectively. Hanks, interview, 1–3.

events surrounding his 1919 baptism. The tape is one of the earliest audio recordings of Black Latter-day Saints bearing testimony, making it an invaluable resource for those interested in the history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its Black members.

Len and Mary Hope

Len Hope was born in Magnolia, Alabama, on October 10, 1894 or 1895.[5] His parents, Jim and Annie Buffet Hope, were tenant farmers who had been born—likely enslaved—in the years just prior to the American Civil War.[6] As he recounts in his recorded testimony, Len attended the Baptist Church as a young man, and his desire to "get religion" led him to "seek very hard for it." During a revival, he struggled and prayed for religion, yet despite his arduous efforts, he experienced no religious awakening and concluded that "there was no religion for me." Even so, he accepted baptism at the end of the revival, promising a preacher that he would "live all the laws of the Baptist Church and keep all the commandments of Jesus Christ."

His spiritual quest was not over, however. Not long after his baptism, Len had a dream in which the Lord showed him that he "had to be baptized over again." He began searching the scriptures to "find out who had the right church" and soon became convinced that he needed the gift of the Holy Ghost. But when he sought advice from preachers on how to get it, they could give him no set answer. He then turned to prayer, and once again, his fervent prayers yielded no immediate results. A short time later, Latter-day Saint missionaries left a tract at his home. Len read it and learned "how the elders had the authority to preach the

---

5. Len Hope's record of membership for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints gives his birth date as October 10, 1895. Record of Members, Southern States Mission, CR 375 8, box 34, folder 1, item 53. The 1920 and 1930 United States Censuses also give 1895 as his birth year. His Selective Service draft registration card, however, lists October 10, 1894, as his birth date. "United States World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917–1918," Alabama, Marengo County; A–T, image 2289, Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Registration Administration. Likewise, the 1940 U.S. Census gives 1894 as his birth year. While the 1900 U.S. Census lists no "Len Hope" in the family of Jim and Annie Hope of Marengo County, Alabama, it identifies a "Boots Hope," born 1894, in the family. If "Boots" was Len's childhood nickname, then the 1900 census may be good early evidence of an 1894 birth. Complicating the matter is Len's death certificate, which gives October 11, 1893, as his birth date. "Utah Death Certificates, 1904–1965," Salt Lake City, 1952, image 1869; Utah State Archives Research Center, Salt Lake City.

6. Jim Hope and Annie Hope, in "United States Census, 1900," Alabama, Marengo, ED 73 Precinct 13 Hampden, image 20.

gospel" and confer the gift of the Holy Ghost on "whomsoever . . . they lay their hands." He became an instant convert, but he was drafted into the U.S. Army during World War I, delaying his baptism and confirmation until June 22, 1919.[7]

Eight months later, Len married Mary Pugh in Wilcox, Alabama.[8] Mary was born to Ben and Mahala Ratliff Pugh in Lamison, Alabama, on October 11, 1902.[9] Like Len, she was the child of tenant farmers and had grown up in the Baptist Church, studied the Bible, and turned to the pastor of her church for answers to her questions about religion. The pastor was her uncle and, according to Mary, would never answer her questions. "He made my father whip me a few times and said I was sassing him," Mary later recalled. Without better spiritual guidance, Mary "would pray the best I knew." After Mary became engaged to Len, her uncle predicted that she would become a Latter-day Saint as well. Mary was seventeen years old at the time, and she had not heard "any thing about the Mormon Church worth while." Still, she married Len and began reading the Book of Mormon. After a year, she was convinced that she "could see no better Church" than the one her husband belonged to, but she was not baptized until September 15, 1925.[10]

The Hopes eventually had nine children, six of whom—Rose Anna (b. 1921), Izetta (b. 1923), Maryzell (b. 1925), Len Jr. (b. 1926), William (b. 1930), and Vernon (b. 1934)—lived to adulthood. These six children were likewise baptized into the Church.[11]

---

7. "Len Hope's testimony, undated," audio recording, Marion D. Hanks Collection, CHL; Len Hope, in "Alabama, World War I Service Cards, 1917–1919, Alabama Department of History and Archives, Montgomery; Len Hope, Record of Member, Southern States Mission, CR 375 8, box 34, folder 1, item 53.

8. Len Hope and Mary Pugh, January 1920, "Alabama County Marriages, 1809–1950," database with images, FamilySearch, https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:Q2DQ -RS22 : 19 February 2021, citing Wilcox, Alabama, United States, County Probate Courts, Alabama, Family History Library (FHL) microfilm 1,418,507.

9. Mary Hope, Record of Member, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, CR 375 8, box 34, folder 1, item 264; Ben and Mahala Pugh Family, "United States Census, 1910," Alabama, Wilcox, Clifton, ED 148, image 8 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.). Note that Mary's Record of Member entry identifies her parents as "Bean" and "Mahalie."

10. "Testimony of Len R. Hope and Mary Hope, 1938," [3], CHL; Mary Hope, Record of Member. Mary was baptized by Elder Wm. O. Clouse and confirmed by Elder Sterling W. Sill, future member of the First Council of Seventy.

11. "Testimony of Len R. Hope and Mary Hope, 1938," [3]; Cincinnati Branch, Record of Members and Children, 1930–1942, no. 48–52, 197, 214, 258, LR 1734 23, CHL.

The Hopes in Cincinnati

In the early twentieth century, particularly after World War I, many African Americans in the Southern United States left the region to find better work opportunities and escape the pervasive violence and racial discrimination that existed under Jim Crow laws.[12] The Hopes joined this "Great Migration" in the summer of 1928, when Len and Mary relocated their family to Lockland, Ohio, a suburb just north of Cincinnati, where they remained for the next twenty-four years.[13] Although Len's obituary states that he operated a fiberizing machine at a paper manufacturing company during the entirety of his time in Cincinnati, the 1930 and 1940 U.S. Censuses, respectively, identify him as a laborer at a cotton mill and a car unloader of asbestos shingles.[14] However he was employed, Len apparently experienced no shortage of paying work in Cincinnati, even after the onset of the Great Depression. One person remembered Len picking and selling berries to earn an income.[15] Mary also worked for a time as a maid at Cincinnati's Christ Hospital.[16]

---

12. For more about the Great Migration, see Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (New York: Vintage, 2010); James N. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Beverly A. Bunch-Lyons, *Contested Terrain: African-American Women Migrate from the South to Cincinnati, Ohio, 1900–1950* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Alferdteen Harrison, ed., *Black Exodus: The Great Migration from the American South* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1991).

13. Len Hope Sr. and Mary Hope, Record of Members, South Ohio District, CR 375 8, box 5008, folder 1, item 228, Ohio State, Part 2, CHL; Marion D. Hanks, oral history interview by Jessie L. Embry, May 18, 1989, 12, CHL.

14. Joseph R. Stuart, "Len Hope," *Century of Black Mormons,* J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah, accessed January 10, 2023, https://exhibits.lib.utah.edu/s/century-of-black-mormons/page/hope-len; "Len Hope," *Salt Lake Tribune,* September 15, 1952, 15. A 1940 city directory also identifies Len Hope as a "fctywkr" or factory worker. *Williams' Hamilton County (Hamilton County, Ohio) Directory 1940* (Cincinnati: Williams Directory Co., 1939), 363. Marion D. Hanks remembered Len Hope working "in a fiber glass making factory in the area." Hanks, interview, 1.

15. See Petersen, "Race Problems," 17. According to Petersen, Len once declared, "I paid my tithing and during that whole depression, I didn't lose one day's work. Sometimes I didn't make much money on that day, and I did have to go out into the hills and get berries, but I always had an income."

16. *Williams' Cincinnati (Hamilton County, Ohio) Directory 1939* (Cincinnati: Williams Directory Co., 1938), 551; *Williams' Cincinnati (Hamilton County, Ohio) Directory 1940*; see also Marion Duffin, Journal, October 30, 1936, CHL.

Today, Cincinnati is the home of the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, a nod to the city's long and complex place in the history of race relations in the United States. Before the Civil War, Ohio was a free state, so Cincinnati's location on its southern border with Kentucky made it a home for abolitionists as well as a destination (if not always a haven) for runaway enslaved people seeking freedom.[17] But like many cities throughout the United States, Cincinnati was a racially segregated town well into the mid-twentieth century. Many neighborhoods, schools, hotels, and restaurants routinely barred African Americans from their premises, thus relegating them to "the bottom rung of the city's economic ladder" and greatly limiting their opportunities.[18] Even churches in the city were segregated, with some denominations split between white and Black congregations.[19]

For much of the twentieth century, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints restricted men of African descent from holding the priesthood. Yet, attendance at its wards and branches was technically open to all people, regardless of race.[20] In places like South Africa and the American South, however, where racial segregation was a social norm, predominately white Latter-day Saint congregations often enacted local policies—spoken and unspoken—prohibiting Black people from attending regular Church meetings. In some cases, such policies led to the formation of small "cottage meetings" where Black Saints held worship services in their homes with missionaries, ward or branch leaders, and friendly local Saints.[21]

Such was the case for the Hopes in Cincinnati. When Marion D. Hanks first met the couple, they had been holding monthly cottage meetings in their home for more than a decade. "The Hope family did

17. For more on race relations and the Black community in nineteenth-century Cincinnati, see Nikki Marie Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom: Cincinnati's Black Community, 1802–1868* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005).

18. Robert B. Fairbanks, "Cincinnati Blacks and the Irony of Low-Income Housing Reform, 1900–1950," in *Race and the City: Work, Community, and Protest in Cincinnati, 1820–1970,* ed. Henry Louis Taylor Jr. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 193.

19. Bunch-Lyons, *Contested Terrain,* 90–91; "Go to Church Tomorrow," *Cincinnati Enquirer,* March 15, 1930, 10.

20. "Race and the Priesthood," Church History Essays, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed December 29, 2022, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics-essays/race-and-the-priesthood?lang=eng.

21. "Racial Segregation," Church History Essays, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed December 29, 2022, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/racial-segregation?lang=eng.

not always come to church because they were not always welcome," Hanks remembered. "There was kind of an unwritten rule that they would not come except on special occasions." He described the white members of the branch as "wonderful people but southerners." He recalled that "some of them were not advanced in their sense of the value of other human beings but geared that to their own sense of ethnic purity and color."[22]

Len and Mary Hope with Elder Marion Duff Hanks. Courtesy Richard D. Hanks.

No firsthand account exists of how or why the cottage meetings started at the Hopes' home, but the story must have circulated among missionaries and others who visited the branch because some of them gave abbreviated versions of it in their journals, letters, and later recollections. Writing to his parents in March 1931, a missionary from Arizona explained that branch members did not let the Hopes attend Church because "it would keep all the whites from attending." While the missionary believed the family "should be able to attend once in awhile [*sic*] at least so that they could hear the works of the Church from the pulpit," he believed the Church's priesthood restriction, coupled with erroneous notions about the social benefits of racial segregation, justified the exclusion. "Since the Gospel dispensation hasn't been opened to the blacks," he reasoned, "I guess it is better that they do not come for it would really keep a lot of whites away."[23]

---

22. Hanks, interview, 2. Mildred Catherine Bang Cannon, whose grandparents and parents were some of the earliest members of the Cincinnati Branch, remembered the Hopes coming to Church for district conferences and other important meetings. "People voted not to have them," she recalled. "They could come to conference when a General Authority came." Interview by Jed Woodworth, January 15, 2021, 1, CHL.

23. Henry Layton to Richard Layton and Annie Horn Layton, March 3, 1931, CHL. In his recollection of the Hopes' experience in Cincinnati, Marion D. Hanks noted that some members of the branch had no "trepidation or reticence" about the Hopes attending regular church meetings. However, those who opposed integrated meetings won out. "It was primarily the old guard," Hanks recalled. "Some of them had been in the Church a

Another elder noted that the Hopes were "not allowed to attend Sunday school with the whites because of siver [severe] persecution," resulting in "the Branch Sunday School Superintendent and group of members" holding a monthly "testimonial service" at the Hopes' home.[24] Future Latter-day Saint Apostle Mark E. Petersen, who lived in Cincinnati for three months in 1936, recounted that "some of the members of the Church became extremely prejudiced against this Negro family. They met in a group, decided what to do and went to the Branch President, and said that either the Hope family must leave or they would all leave."[25] Lula Belle Blackham, another mid-century western transplant in Cincinnati, likewise reported that "some members had concerns about black members being in the congregation and it had been decided before we ever got there that the Hopes would not come to meetings each week, but that they would be invited to come to stake conferences, which they always did."[26]

The most detailed account of what happened between the Hopes and the Cincinnati Branch comes from Jonathan Stephenson, a Latter-day Saint who knew Mary Hope later in life, when she was a member of his ward in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. According to Stephenson, after their move to Cincinnati, the Hopes attended branch meetings until "strong objections" from some members led branch president Charles V. Anderson to ask the couple to stop attending. As Stephenson tells the story, Anderson was "red-eyed and crying" when he told the Hopes, "We will do everything we can. We know that it isn't right, but the feelings of the people are something we just have to put up with." Anderson then promised that he and other branch members would "make a special trip out here each month to bring the sacrament to you and have a church service in your home."[27]

---

long time and fought a long battle. They were not about to lose their own esteem or place in the neighbor's eyes by having black people come to Church." Hanks, interview, 17.

24. Duffin, Journal, December 1, 1935.

25. Petersen, "Race Problems," 16.

26. Lula Bell B. Blackham, "Cincinnati Years, 1948–1952," 7, CHL.

27. Jonathan Stephenson, "'I Cries Inside': A Short Biography of Len, Sr. and Mary Hope," [10], CHL. Although Charles V. Anderson attended cottage meetings regularly at the Hopes' home, he made no mention of the meetings in his short memoir or his life in Cincinnati. He does, however, allude to the Hopes and their devotion to the Church: "Cincinnati has a colored population of 50,000. Some of them are quite wealthy. They are members of various churches, but have their own places of worship, fraternal societies, etc. The Latter-day Saints have only one [Black] family belonging to their Church. They are very devout, and live exemplary lives. They own their neat little home, and are very

The branch's decision to bar the Hopes from regular church meetings left the couple heartbroken and deeply disappointed. Len and Mary complied with President Anderson's request, however, and held cottage meetings and other Latter-day Saint worship services in their home for the next two decades.[28]

Cottage Meetings at the Hopes' Home

Diaries and recollections of missionaries and local Saints who knew the Hopes provide a wealth of information about the family's cottage meetings and their effect on those who attended them. Marion D. Hanks remembered the Hopes holding a meeting every first Sunday of the month, the day Latter-day Saints set aside for fasting and bearing testimony. "There would be a testimony meeting and an instruction period followed by a meal which the Hopes would prepare for those who came," he recalled. "When I learned of that, I began to attend immediately. In nearly a year in Cincinnati, I spent my first Sunday afternoons at the Hope home."[29]

After Lula Belle Blackham and her husband, Udell, moved to Cincinnati in 1948, they began attending monthly cottage meetings. By that time, the Hopes had been holding cottage meetings for twenty years, and a routine had been established:

> On the first Sunday of the month, the Branch Presidency would go to their home to conduct a fast and testimony meeting and give the family the opportunity of partaking of the sacrament. The family could then pay their tithes and offerings to the Branch President and bear their testimonies along with others of the branch who came. Always that wonderful, poor family prepared a delicious meal to serve after the meeting to everyone who came, often as many as twenty of us. . . . What a spiritual experience it was to be there. Len and Mary positively glowed as they greeted

industrious. One of their girls is quite gifted musically." Charles V. Anderson, *Twenty-Three Years in Cincinnati: A Six Months' Visit to the Old Mission Field* (Salt Lake City: n.p, n.d.), 17, CHL.

28. Stephenson, "'I Cries Inside'" [10]. Evidence suggests that the Cincinnati Branch had somewhat eased its restriction on the Hopes' Church attendance by 1951. Abner L. Howell, an African American Latter-day Saint from Salt Lake City, visited the Hopes in the summer of 1951. He recalled that the Hopes could "come to church once a month, on fast Sunday," Kate B. Carter, *The Story of the Negro Pioneer* (Salt Lake City: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1965), 59. Marion D. Hanks likewise believed "the branch . . . was treating them more courteously" by the time they moved to Utah in 1952. Hanks, interview, 9. Still, there is no evidence that the branch ever fully rescinded its restriction on the Hopes.

29. Hanks, interview, 6.

each of us. Their home was humble but immaculate, their children and grandchildren polished and in their best clothes. They lined up to pay their tithes and offerings. Brother Hope was always invited to conduct the services in his home. He always, it seemed to me, chose to sing, "We Thank Thee O God For a Prophet." There is a line in the song that reads, "there is hope smiling brightly before us." Always, there was Brother Hope singing that song with fervor and gusto and with a big smile on his face.[30]

Although Hanks and Blackham remembered these meetings happening once a month, missionary letters and diaries suggest that cottage meetings, both planned and unplanned, occurred more frequently at the Hopes' home.[31] Inez Gibson and Essie Holt, two missionaries who served in Cincinnati in the early 1930s, attended various cottage meetings at the Hopes' home, almost all of which took place on a day other than Sunday.[32] Between January and April 1932, Gibson, her companion, and some elders visited the Hopes on a Saturday every month to teach Primary lessons to the children, take part in a cottage meeting (sometimes with a sacrament service), and enjoy a meal prepared by Mary. One missionary, Ronald Gowers, may have been initially reluctant to attend a meeting at the home, but once he arrived there, he had an uplifting experience. "Never felt better in my life," he wrote. "Held a testimony meeting with them. . . . It strengthened my testimony to hear them give theirs. The kids were just little angels. Hope to get back again."[33]

As Lula Belle Blackham's recollection suggests, Mary's cooking always played a key role in these meetings, and missionary journals are rife with descriptions of the food she prepared. Essie Holt and her companion once taught a Primary lesson and then ate a supper of "spare ribs, potato salad, beans, tomatoes, corn bread, hot biscuit," and some fruit, with chocolate ice cream and cake for dessert.[34] Fred Croshaw, a missionary who visited the Hopes in 1932, praised Mary's culinary skills after enjoying "Fried chicken & everything" at their home.[35] "Held Primary and Cottage meeting & Oh boy for the dinner," he wrote in his

---

30. Blackham, "Cincinnati Years," 7.

31. See Hanks, interview, 14.

32. See, for instance, Inez Gibson, Journal, July 12, 1930; August 6, 1930; November 23, 1930; July 27, 1931; November 28, 1931; January 16, 1932; February 20, 1932; March 26, 1932; April 30, 1932; Essie Holt, Journal, July 27, 1931; September 2, 1931; October 5, 1931; CHL.

33. Ronald Gowers, Journal, November 15, 1934, CHL.

34. Holt, Journal, September 2, 1931.

35. Fred Croshaw, Journal, April 30, 1932, CHL.

journal. "Pineapple ice cream too."[36] In another entry, he noted that "we then went out to the Hopes" and fellow missionary Karl R. Lyman "ate half a Turkey I know, but he didn't get sick. Had a lot of fun."[37]

Marion Duffin, who was in Cincinnati in 1936, recorded, "After the meeting [the Hopes] had us all come in the kitchen and have dinner with them. My what a grand dinner! Roast Turkey and dressing. Every thing [*sic*] was just like a Thanksgiving dinner."[38] Lulabelle Blackham recalled that she had "never eaten corn bread dressing to equal Mary's. She was a marvelous cook and cooked for some wealthy families. She never knew how many were coming, but always there were leftovers. I wonder if the Lord had anything to do with that."[39] Inez Gibson twice made the mistake of going to the Hopes' home without an appetite. "They fed us more ice cream," she wrote in her journal. "I was just about sick. Had to gulp it down. Then they gave us plums, peaches, and apples. Thanksgiving dinner never filled me so full."[40]

The hallmark of the cottage meetings, though, was the sharing of testimonies. Like Ronald Gowers, many people remarked on the Hopes' powerful testimonies and the effect they had on those who heard them. Hanks recalled that each family member "would bear testimony in order from Len, Mary, Rose, down to Vernon who could barely talk. He was a little boy."[41] After one meeting, Fred Crowshaw wrote that the "Hopes bore their testimony & was it real. The love & happiness in that home I have never saw it equaled."[42] Opal Litster, another missionary, reported that it "did me good to hear them bear their testimonys [*sic*]."[43] Marion Duffin, likewise, believed "the testimonial meeting we hold there is certainly a strength to my testimony."[44] Catherine Bang Cannon, whose family were early members of the Cincinnati Branch, remembered going to the Hopes' home every month with her uncle Alvin B. Gilliam, who succeeded Charles V. Anderson as president of the branch. Recalling the Hopes and their testimonies, she said, "They believed with all their heart the church was true."[45]

---

36. Crowshaw, Journal, February 4, 1933.

37. Crowshaw, Journal, December 27, 1932.

38. Duffin, Journal, January 5, 1936.

39. Blackham, "Cincinnati Years," 7.

40. Gibson, Journal, July 12 and August 5, 1930.

41. Hanks, interview, 6.

42. Crowshaw, Journal, April 30, 1932.

43. Opal Litster, Journal, September 17, 1932, CHL.

44. Duffin, Journal, January 5, 1936.

45. Cannon, interview, January 15, 2001, 1.

Occasionally, those who attended the cottage meetings recorded details about the contents of Len's testimony. In some cases, these records yield vital insights into Len's feelings about the Church's priesthood restriction. Missionary Karl R. Lyman, for instance, remembered that Len "knew he chould [*sic*] not have the priesthood, but that he felt in the justice of God that some day this would be given to him, and he would be allowed to go on to his eternal reward with the faithful who held it." For Lyman, it was "a real testimony builder to go to [the Hopes'] home and hear the wonderful sweet testimonies they had."[46] Another missionary, Joseph Hancock, recorded a more sobering testimony from Len, which captured Len's anguish over the priesthood restriction as well as his ambivalence about his skin color. "He as you know cannot hold th[e] Priesthood," wrote Hancock to his fiancée in December 1949. "He bears testimony that he would let any man strip him literaly [*sic*] of his black skin if he could only hold the priesthood." According to Hancock, Len's anguish that day became manifest as he and his guests sang the hymn "Do What Is Right." "He cried not aloud but the tears flowed," Hancock recorded. "I can imagine the things that that man has gone thru in order to stay true to the church."[47]

In a subsequent letter to his fiancée, Hancock also retold Len's harrowing conversion experience (see below), which Len often shared at cottage meetings. "It made me ashamed to think how I had taken this church for granted," he wrote. "I also thout [*sic*] how selfish I had been to not want to share the gospel with others. This gospel is the only hope we have!"[48]

The Hopes' Testimonies

In addition to the recording Marion D. Hanks made in 1952, there have been at least two other formal attempts to make a word-for-word record of the Hopes' testimonies. The Church History Library houses the earliest, a three-page typescript dated April 28–29, 1938. Little is known about this document. The typescript is creased and torn in places, but the text itself is largely undamaged. The first two pages contain Len's testimony. The third page contains Mary's. Whoever prepared the typescript included lines for Len and Mary to affix their names, but neither testimony was ultimately signed. It is unclear if the typescript is a transcript of the Hopes'

46. Karl R. Lyman, *As I Saw It* (Orem, Utah, n.p., 1972), 74, CHL.
47. Joseph Hancock to Gloria Gunn, December 2, 1949, CHL.
48. Joseph Hancock to Gloria Gunn, December 31, 1949, CHL.

oral testimonies or simply a written version of them. The testimonies are titled "The Testimony of Bro. Len R. Hope" and "The Testimony of Sr. Mary Hope."[49]

"The Testimony of Bro. Len R. Hope" begins with a descriptive statement: "My reason for being a Mormon and my testimony to the truthfulness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ that has been restored to the earthin [*sic*] the last days Be it known to all the world to all it may concern." It then recounts Len's conversion story and ends with a simple testimony: "I know that Joseph Smith is and was a true Prophet of God and God the Father of our spirits and Jesus Christ is the son of God. My family and I are happy untold so I bear my testimony in the name of Jesus Christ. AMEM [*sic*]."[50]

"The Testimony of Sr. Mary Hope" follows the same basic format, but in addition to recounting her conversion experience, she testifies of a time when Latter-day Saint elders healed her when she "was suffering from 'high blood pressure'" and "nervous breakdowns." Her closing testimony is more protracted than Len's and merits reprinting. It not only captures her voice and faith in the restored gospel, but it also reveals that she too may have harbored ambivalence about her racial identity and the Black community:

> So I am thankful to my heavenly father for this testimony. I do know that this is indeed the true Church of Jesus Christ. I know that God lives and hears and answers prayers, also that Jesus Christ is indeed the son of God also that without a doubt in my mind that Joseph Smith was and is a true prophet of God, and all thoss [*sic*] that have succeeded him are truly prophets of our God. I pray that regardless to how many persecutions may come, I pray, I also hope that we are standing separated from our race, may stand steadfeast [*sic*] and unmoveable [*sic*] before our God. We hope someday we may meet you all again. I bear this testimony, I do it in the name of Jesus Christ. AMEN.[51]

---

49. The typescript was donated to the Church History Library by Judith LaMontagne.

50. "Testimony of Len R. Hope and Mary Hope, 1938," 1–[2].

51. "Testimony of Len R. Hope and Mary Hope, 1938," [3]. What Mary meant by "I also hope that we are standing separated from our race, may stand steadfeast [*sic*] and unmoveable [*sic*] before our God" is unclear because the statement seems to be missing at least one word. There is evidence that Len and Mary Hope were criticized by the local Black community for their membership in the Church. Lula Belle Blackham recalled that "I once heard [Len] say that his black friends chided him for belonging to that 'white church' where he couldn't hold the priesthood and where the white members didn't want him to come." Blackham, "Cincinnati Years," 7. With this in mind, one possible rendering could be "I also hope that we [who] are standing separated from our race," a recognition

The other known attempt to record Len Hope's testimony is found in Stanley L. Fish, Bradley J. Kramer, and Wm. Budge Wallis's *History of the Mormon Church in Cincinnati (1830–1985),* a history published by the Cincinnati and Cincinnati North Stakes in 1997. The testimony was not produced with the assistance of Len Hope; rather, it is a later reconstruction (likely from the mid-1990s) of the "words of Len Hope as recalled by Stanley L. Fish." Fish was an Arizona native who came to Cincinnati on a mission, married into a local family, and became the Cincinnati Branch president in 1947. He knew the Hopes well and often heard Len bear his testimony and recount his conversion story.[52] Fish's version of Len's testimony tells the same story and employs some of the same phrases as the typescript testimony and the Hanks recording. However, even though the Fish reconstruction is written in the first person, as if originally spoken by Hope, it should not be construed as an accurate representation of his voice.

Additional research and analysis are needed to understand more fully the relationship between the Hopes' testimonies, their cottage meetings, and the history of race and ad hoc segregationist practices in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. What seems evident, though, is that Len and Mary Hope's home in Cincinnati became a shared sacred space where the family could recover the formal worship practices and faith community otherwise denied to them in the Cincinnati Branch. Not only were their cottage meetings a place where Len, Mary, and their children could, in the words of the Book of Mormon, "meet together oft" with fellow believers "to fast and to pray, and to speak one with another concerning the welfare of their souls," but it also was a place where they could "do good," providing meals and other forms of Christian hospitality to those who refused to break sacramental bread with them elsewhere (Moro. 6:6; see Matt. 5:44).

that the religious path she and Len had taken had removed them from the Black church and the community it fostered. Her hope that her family may be steadfast and immovable is, therefore, an expression of faith that they might remain true to the path they have taken, despite persecution and social repercussions. Another possible rendering, however, is "I also hope that [because] we are standing separated from our race, [we] may stand," which is more in line with Len's apparent willingness to "let any man strip him literally of his black skin if he could only hold the priesthood." Unfortunately, all known sources related to the Hopes reveal little about their relationship to or feelings about the broader Black community. Blackham's recollection, cited above, indicates that they had Black friends, and contemporary sources confirm it. See Gibson, Journal, November 23, 1930; Cincinnati Branch, Minutes, October 5, 1941. Note the Gibson source does not specify the race of the Hopes' friends.

52. Fish, Kramer, and Wallis, *History of the Mormon Church in Cincinnati,* 58–59, 76.

As prominent features of these meetings, Len and Mary's testimonies likewise functioned as much rhetorically as confessions of faith as unequivocal claims to membership in the Latter-day Saint "household of faith." Indeed, in their telling and, in Len's case, frequent retelling of their conversion experiences, the Hopes powerfully affirmed their right to sit at the table alongside fellow believers. As is evident in the transcript that follows, though, Len's testimony was more than a confession or a claim. It seems significant, after all, that all known versions of Len's testimony end with his Latter-day Saint congregation in Alabama welcoming him unreservedly into the fold, offering to protect him from lynch mobs, and assuring him that his name was written not only in the records of the Church, but also in heaven, where it could not be scratched out. During the years Len shared this testimony, Alabama was hardly a bastion of racial tolerance; indeed, in the years immediately following Len's death, cities like Selma and Montgomery became primary battlegrounds in the Civil Rights movement. But in Len's testimony, Alabama was home to "some of the beautifullest smiles that the Latter-day Saints can give," an image that contrasted sharply with the "feelings of the people" who refused to worship with him and his family in Ohio.

Marion D. Hanks characterized Len Hope as "an absolutely pure guileless man," and doubtlessly this was true.[53] Yet while sharing his testimony at a cottage meeting in segregated Cincinnati, Len could bear a wily witness, subtly and lovingly offering his friends and fellow believers a better, more Christian way of being a Latter-day Saint.

Transcript of the Hanks Recording

What follows is a transcript of the Len and Mary Hope recording found in the Marion D. Hanks Collection at the Church History Library.[54] The quality of the recording is good, despite the audiotape being a copy of what was likely the original circa 1952 recording. Every effort has been made to produce an accurate transcription of Mary and Len's words. Len Hope suffered from severe respiratory problems late in life, and his speech is sometimes punctuated by coughing and hoarseness, making some of what he says difficult to decipher.[55] For the sake of clarity,

---

53. Hanks, interview, 15.

54. A partial, imprecise transcription of Len's testimony from this recording can be found in "Early Black Pioneers: Building the Kingdom through Faith," *LDS Living* (July/August 2005): 59–61.

55. According to Hanks, Len Hope's lungs "were destroyed" after years of breathing in particles at the factory where he worked, leaving him with "a form of almost miner's black lung disease." Hanks, interview, 6.

some minor repetitions and filler words have been eliminated from the transcript.

**Len and Mary Hope, Audio recording [1952],
Marion D. Hanks Collection, MS 31743, 14AT0046.**[56]

Mary:

[indecipherable][57] this gospel is true without any shadow of a doubt. I know that Joseph Smith was indeed a true instrument in the hands of God in bringing to pass this wonderful work that we are engaged in. I know that God is our Father. He will hear and answer our prayers. I know that Jesus Christ is indeed the Son of the true and living God. I bear you my testimony in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Len:

Brothers and sisters, I wish to state why I become a Latter-day Saint. I once was belonged to the Baptist Church. Before I become a Baptist, I thought it was wise to ask the old head, some of the old members that had been members of the church for a long time, how do you get religion and what was religion?

Some of them stated to me that when you get religion, you have, they said that you have to pray for it. And they said that you have to see peculiar things and have peculiar dreams. And they said that you have to see yourself crossing hell on a spider web.[58] I thought that was very peculiar, but, however, I was willing to try it.

So I tried to get religion that year. And I used to pray for it and seek very hard for it, for religion. I used to go out in the old cotton fields and corn patches and begging the Lord for religion. So, I couldn't get religion that year. I didn't, couldn't see myself crossing hell on a spider web, nor could I see any of these peculiar things.

---

56. Audio recording can be found at https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/72c48317-499c-4223-9b9d-4df6b6ecc585/0/0.

57. The recording begins midsentence, perhaps suggesting that it was an impromptu rather than a planned recording. But since the recording is a copy, it is also possible that the original recording contained a full testimony from Mary, which was then lost when the copy was made.

58. A reference to Jonathan Edwards's 1741 sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." Edwards said, "All your righteousness, would have no more influence to uphold you and keep you out of hell, than a spider's web would have to stop a falling rock." See Jonathan Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," in *Sermons and Discourses, 1739–1742,* Works of Jonathan Edwards, vol. 22, eds. Harry S. Stout, Nathan O. Hatch, and Kyle P. Farley (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 2003), 410.

The next year, I tried religion again. And as you know, it's customary for those Baptist and Methodist denominations, how they gather their people around on their benches, called mourners' benches,[59] we sit around and we pray and they'll pray for us. And after that for a little period, why, they give us a prayer period, a rest period, to go out and pray for our sins.[60] And they let us go out and spend about an hour or two hours praying for our sins. So, I went out many a night and went out and laid down in the cotton patches and the corn fields, looking up to heaven, begging the Lord for religion, dew falling on me heavily.

Well, [indecipherable][61] it was impossible for me to see any of these peculiar things, and it looked like there was no religion for me. So, I went back to the church and promised to live all the laws of the Baptist Church and keep all the commandments of Jesus Christ as far as I could understand them. I give the preacher my hand with that covenant. So, when the revival was over, they baptized us.

And shortly after that, the Lord showed me in a dream that I had to be baptized over again. I wondered, "Was I in the right church?" or "What had happened?" Finally, that blowed over and I began to search the scriptures night and day, trying to find out who had the right church and which of all the sects were right.

To make a long story short, I read a great much about the gift of the Holy Ghost. But Jesus Christ says that when the Holy Ghost come upon you, it will lead and guide you to all the truth and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever he has said.[62] I figured right then and there, everybody needs the gift of the Holy Ghost. So I begin to ask the preachers then about the gift of the Holy Ghost. I asked them what was the Holy Ghost and how do you get it? One preacher said that you get the Holy Ghost when you get religion. They both go hand and hand. I didn't feel much like I had the gift of the Holy Ghost. I asked another preacher. He said you have to go out and pray for the gift of the Holy Ghost. I wonder how they differ in their opinions, calling themselves God's sent ministers. I think right then—everybody,

---

59. Also called the "anxious seat," the "mourner's bench" was a bench or a series of benches usually placed at the front of some evangelical churches or revivals where penitent Christians and the unconverted would sit or kneel to publicly pray, confess sins or guilt, contemplate their spiritual well-being, and seek communion with God and his Spirit. See Randall Balmer, *Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2004), 29–30.

60. Possibly "ourselves."

61. Possibly "after all that."

62. An allusion to John 14:26: "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you."

I mean, they was wrong—how they would differ and call themselves God's sent ministers.

So, I decided to take the last one's advice. And I thought that by choosing for my praying ground some out of place, that looked like I[63] was deserted or throwed away. In fact, I'd a been able to humble myself so much so until like I was in sackcloth and ashes. So, I choose my praying ground out at an old house where other people had lived long years past. The old house had about rotted down. The floor is rotted out of the old house. And its top had about rotted off. You could look out and see the stars and the moon and so forth.

So, I got into this old house and begin to pray for the gift of the Holy Ghost. I prayed, and I cried all night for the gift of the Holy Ghost. The next morning, no gift of the Holy Ghost. I thought I wasn't praying right. I thought by making a covenant with the Lord, he might give me the gift of the Holy Ghost. I thought then to promise him that I was going to neither eat nor drink until I received the gift of the Holy Ghost or die.

My brothers and sisters, I valued my word. I thought lying was awful crazy, and after I had made that promise, I could picture myself walking up and down the road, passing the death,[64] just wondering what the people were going to say about me. I wasn't going to change unless the Lord had to come down or sent some angel or whatnot to make known to me about the gospel of the Holy Ghost. But the Holy Spirit prevailed with me not to make such a promise, and I thank him from that day for this, that I didn't make the promise.

So, I went back to the house, and after drying the tears off my face, [unintelligible] brother[65] some sort of fairy tale where I had spent the night. That blowed over for a little while.

The elders was all the time down in Alabama preaching the gospel, but they never did come out to preach to us. We lived in the country, way out where one house sits here and one sits way over yonder in the hill. They wasn't close together at all. And this particular house, we had cultivated this particular spot for cotton and corn. Daddy had plowed up every pathway that come up to the house and didn't even leave a pathway

---

63. Possibly "it."

64. "Death" here may allude to his covenant with God "to neither eat nor drink until I receive the gift of the Holy Ghost and die." The idea seems to be that Hope could picture himself walking down the road on the brink of death-by-fasting.

65. Hope apparently lived with his brother at this time (see later reference to "brother's home"). He seems to be saying here that he told his brother "some sort of fairy tale" to account for his absence during the night.

to come up to the house. And it had been raining about forty days in the year of 1913.[66] Can you picture the elders coming across this muddy place with their beautiful shined shoes and nice suits of clothes to bring me a little tract? They brought a little tract[67] up to the house and give it to my sister.[68] I wasn't home, and when I came in, my sister said, "Here's a tract the elders left for you." I wondered why she didn't try to read it or thought the tract was for her.

Well, she give me the little tract, and I begin to read it, and some of the first things I saw how the elders had the authority to preach the gospel in these last days and on whomsoever that they lay their hands might receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.[69] I was convinced right then and there.

They was having a conference down at the little chapel of the branch, so I went down immediately and applied for baptism. And the elders said, "Brother Hope, we'll be glad to baptize you but we'd rather for you be sure of yourself. Get more books and read so you won't be carried about with every wind of doctrine, cunning craft of men whereby they lie in wait to deceive.[70] I felt that was very wise. So, I goes back home, sent way out in Salt Lake City, and get the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, Pearl of Great Price, and many other books.[71] And reading, read them all through. They read so good till I was in a hurry to be baptized.

---

66. In 1913, Hope would have been eighteen or nineteen years old.

67. "I think it was the 'Plan of Salvation.'" "Testimony of Bro. Len R. Hope," [2]. *The Plan of Salvation,* a twenty-four-page Latter-day Saint missionary tract by John Hamilton Morgan (1842–1894), was published in 1887 by the Juvenile Instructor Office, Salt Lake City. The tract was reprinted and circulated many times over the next century.

68. According to the 1900 U.S. Census, Len Hope had three sisters: Eliza (b. 1882), Minnie (b. 1883), and Susie (b. 1890).

69. A possible allusion to Acts 8:18–19: "And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, saying, Give me also this power on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost." See also Doctrine and Covenants 49:14: "And whoso doeth this shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, by the laying on of the hands of the elders of the church."

70. An allusion to Ephesians 4:14: "That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive."

71. "So I went back home and sat down and ordered the Book of Mormon, The Pearl of Great Price, and the Doctrine & Covenants, and other books and read them." "Testimony of Bro. Len R. Hope," [2]. Hanks remembers Len Hope being studious: "He would speak, and he knew the gospel very well. He could quote by the armlength from the standard works. He studied all the time. After he retired, they [that is, Len and Mary] just spent all their time studying the gospel." Hanks, interview, 17.

While I was thus convened, I was called into the war and served my time overseas.[72] I served my time over there, and I felt like the Lord was with me in every move, so that he was in partnership with me. I felt like instead of in the service, I was going to school. I learned many things. Some of the things I brought back, I should have been scared while going through dangerous scenes, but I was very tickled, and surprised, and enjoyed it.

So, those scenes I went through. I really believed that I'd have been killed, but the Lord knew my work wasn't finished on this earth, so he suffered me to get back home without a scratch.[73] So, as soon as I got back home, I applied for baptism immediately. And they take me way up in the woods to an old creek, and they baptized me, and take me out on the bank, confirmed me a member of the Church, laying their hands on my head for the gift of the Holy Ghost.[74]

I had seen the people of other denominations claim that when the Holy Ghost hit them, well, they have to jump and holler. And I've seen elated[75] people sitting in the church and the preacher begin to preach, preaching about their dead relatives and so forth, and get them feeling sorrowful and so forth and they claim that was the Holy Ghost, I guess. But anyway, they start to screaming and throw their little babies across the church, and people who catched the babies, they all begin to walk benches, try to stand on their heads, and cut somersaults. So, the Holy Ghost, kind of like that, I wasn't so much particular about it. But, however, I set out back to my house rejoicing, I could jump a little bit too.

But the elders said, "It[76] don't come like that, Brother Hope." Say, "You begin to live the gospel, and the Holy Ghost will come as you need

---

72. Hope registered for the draft in Marengo County, Alabama, on June 5, 1917. He reported for "special mechanical training for military service" at Tuskegee Institute in Tuskegee, Alabama, on July 15, 1918. He then shipped out from Hoboken, New Jersey, aboard the USS Leviathan with the Camp Jackson Automatic Replacement Draft Battery 11th Field Artillery (Colored) on September 29, 1918. He was honorably discharged from military service on March 19, 1919. Len Hope, in "United States, Veterans Administration Master Index, 1917–1940," image 2079 (St. Louis: National Archives and Records Administration, 1985).

73. "So being protected by the hands of the Lord serving on the firing lines I barely escaped death." "Testimony of Bro. Len R. Hope," [2].

74. According to his Record of Member, Hope was baptized in Magnolia, Alabama, on June 22, 1919, by John M. Tolbert and confirmed by Horace J. Knowlton.

75. Possibly "related."

76. That is, the Holy Ghost.

it more." That's exactly what happened. I begin to live the gospel, and the Holy Ghost when it come, comes as a small still voice calling you to feel as wise as a serpent, harmless as a dove, bold as a lion, and humble as a lamb.[77] The greatest thing of all this world, he'll give you an assurance in your heart to know which of all the sects is right. And from that day to this, I haven't[78] any doubt in all my heart that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was the only true Church on this earth. And I know if you live the gospel, pay your honest tithing, and live the Word of Wisdom, you will be saved back into the presence of our Lord, from which we have come forth.

So I began to live the gospel, and in a few days, the mob crowd came for me, some of the lower class of white people that lives in that vicinity. They had their pistols, rifles, sawed-off shotguns. Come to my brother's home and ask, tell me to come out, say they want to talk with me. They wasn't going to hurt me. [Laughs] Looked like they'd a left their guns at home if they weren't going to turn and hurt me. And I got up enough nerve to go out and talk with them, and they said, "What have you did, now you went overseas, and you learned a few things about the white folks, and now you want to come back and join, is that it?"[79]

I told them, no. I told them I had been investigating this gospel long before I went overseas. Therefore, I found that this was the only true church on the earth, and therefore I came back and joined. That stunned them for a little while, and they said, "Well, go down to the branch and have them scratch your name off or we're gonna hang you to a limb and shoot you full of holes." That's a pretty hard lick, but still I wasn't really scared, seemly.

So, I went down the next morning, down to Church while they were having a conference. Told them my experience and what had happened.

---

77. An allusion to Matthew 10:16: "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves." Hope may also have had Proverbs 28:1 in mind: "The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion." The phrase "humble as a lamb" does not appear in the King James Bible or other Latter-day Saint scriptures.

78. Possibly "haven't had."

79. "So in a few days a band of white men came to my brothers house with rifles and shot guns so they called me saying, 'We just want to talk to you.['] So I went out and they ask me, 'Why did you join the whites.' I said, 'No, I was investigating long before I went to war and I found it was the only true Church on earth that is why I joined it', 'We want you to go and have your name scratched off the record if not we will hang you up to a limb and shoot you full of holes.'" "Testimony of Bro. Len R. Hope," [2].

To my surprise, I thought I was going to see them with their hung-down heads and sad countenances. Fortunately, I saw some of the beautifullest smiles that the Latter-day Saints can give. They said, "Brother Hope, this is just the persecution of the devil." Said, "We all have to endure this."

And I thought to myself, these beautiful people, and when you live the Word of Wisdom, you can see it on the outward appearance the same as inward, the spiritual. If these beautiful people can endure persecution, why couldn't I? I just felt like I could have been hung to this limb and shot full of holes.

They told me then to have my name scratched off, but the elders and so forth, the missionaries, told me my name wasn't[80] down and only it was wrote down in Salt Lake City, and since that time I dreamt[81] that it was wrote in Salt Lake, not only in Salt Lake, but it was wrote down in heaven.[82] And I can't doubt the gospel the least bit.

And I know that Joseph Smith was a true prophet of the living God. And all those that succeeded him, all the way down to President O. McKay,[83] is a true prophet of God. I bear you my testimony in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

───────────

Scott Hales has been a writer and historian for the Church History Department since 2015. He is a general editor and lead writer for *Saints,* the new four-volume history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He has a BA in English from Brigham Young University and an MA and PhD in English from the University of Cincinnati. His writing has appeared in various academic and literary journals, including *Religion and the Arts, BYU Studies Quarterly,* and the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies.* He lives in Eagle Mountain, Utah, with his wife and five children.

───────────

80. Possibly "was."

81. "I had another vision or dream that the Elders work had been recognized in heaven and my sins had been forgotiven and my name was written in heaven." "Testimony of Bro. Len R. Hope," [2].

82. "I rehearsed to the L.D.S. my troubles, so thoes [*sic*] beautiful smiles they gave me not only put sunshine thei into their souls but mine also, so they said 'Brother Hope we could not scratch your name off if we tried to, for your name is in Salt Lake City and also written in Heaven.[']" "Testimony of Bro. Len R. Hope," [2].

83. David O. McKay became President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on April 9, 1951.

Charity as an Exegetical Principle in the Book of Mormon

Matthew Scott Stenson

> *Writing is an act of faith; understanding is an act of charity.*

The eclectic Book of Mormon effectively collapses intellectual and sacred history. Anachronisms have drawn and do currently draw the attention of some Book of Mormon students and researchers. Nicholas J. Frederick, for instance, has written extensively on the presence of New Testament language in the largely pre–Christian Era record.[1] Not all anachronisms are so extensive and involved as those Frederick traces.[2] Some are minor and comparatively unimportant. However, there is a significant and pervasive conceptual anachronism that deserves critical attention. I speak of the primary narrators of the Book of Mormon using faith, hope, and charity (or love) as textual and exegetical principles. Divine love (and love of the divine and the divine within the human), or *charity,* was employed by the ancients, more or less, as a hermeneutic.[3] But Christian charity as a fully articulated principle of exegesis[4] began with Augustine (who was

---

1. See, for example, Nicholas J. Frederick, "If Christ Had Not Come into the World," in *Abinadi: He Came among Them in Disguise,* ed. Shon D. Hopkin (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2018), 117–38.

2. According to one source, anachronisms are "claims that ideas, words, events, persons and objects are historically out of place." The "anachronism" I explore in this project relates to ideas and words. Stephen D. Ricks, "Anachronisms, Alleged," in *Book of Mormon Reference Companion,* ed. Dennis L. Largey (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 55–57.

3. A hermeneutic is a method for interpreting sacred texts.

4. Exegesis is the critical explanation of a sacred text.

inspired by Ambrose[5]) and continued for a thousand years or more until other less theologically oriented methods of interpretive reading emerged during the Renaissance and Reformation.[6] Allegorical reading—historically what reading charitably (or sympathetically) permitted[7]—was replaced slowly by more literal, rhetorical, Protestant, and enlightened approaches to difficult texts.[8] An entire meditative tradition developed around this affective attribute of love.[9] Love was the key to every quest. The diversity of historical approaches to interpreting texts (sacred and legal) is dramatized in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice.* There, Bassanio, the male protagonist, demonstrates what Augustine borrowed from Plato and adapted to Paul when reading the third casket differently than Portia's other two suitors. Bassanio unlocks the riddle because of his true love for Portia.[10] Romantic love and divine love have been the key to

5. Ambrose gave Augustine a vision of how he might reconcile his distaste for the sacred books with his classical learning. Ambrose demonstrated that the scriptures could be read spiritually or allegorically. By this method that allowed for levels of understanding, a "literary scholar and rational critic" like Augustine might endlessly delight in a book (or collection of books) that also appealed to the "devout faithful." Carol Harrison, "Augustine," in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible,* ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2005), 76.

6. In *Confessions,* Augustine explains, in some depth, his methodology and applies the same at length to Genesis 1. St. Augustine, *Confessions,* trans. Henry Chadwick (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 273–305. Francis Petrarch explores reading theory while being guided by his admired predecessor, Augustine, in his *My Secret Book.* According to Peter S. Williamson, "Renaissance humanism paved the way for a renewal of exegesis through its interest in the biblical languages and its advances in textual criticism." Peter S. Williamson, "Catholic Biblical Interpretation," in Vanhoozer, *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation,* 103.

7. Peter S. Williamson explains that "medieval writers and preachers expounded the four senses of Scripture taught by some church fathers": (1) literal, (2) allegorical (revealing Christ in the Old Testament using typology and other strategies), (3) moral (Latter-day Saints call this application to daily living), and (4) anagogical (or eschatological). Williamson, "Catholic Biblical Interpretation," 103. For a complete history of allegory from classical times to early modern times, see Mindele Anne Treip, *Allegorical Poetics and the Epic: The Renaissance Tradition to* Paradise Lost (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1994).

8. Although somewhat dated, Michael Murrin documents in his book on allegory, in a brief and accessible way, the gradual swing from allegory to rhetoric during the Renaissance. Michael Murrin, *The Veil of Allegory: Some Notes toward a Theory of Allegorical Rhetoric in the English Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969).

9. Louis L. Martz, *The Poetry of Meditation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954).

10. Matthew Scott Stenson, "Unlocking Meaning: The Act of Reading in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice,*" *Christianity and Literature* 64, no. 4 (September 2015): 377–99. *The Merchant of Venice* is full of Catholic motifs and Christian exegetical

understanding texts from classical times until more modern times. Similarly, the Book of Mormon, in a day of rigorous rationalistic approaches to interpretation, articulates the exegetical value of faith, hope, and especially charity. Nephi and Moroni both seem to understand that these three Christian virtues are principles of both composition and reception, if not also of comprehension and, ultimately, conversion and salvation (see 1 Ne. 19:6–7; 2 Ne. 26:29–31, 33; Ether 12; Moro. 7, 10).[11]

In this essay, I do three things: (1) describe briefly and very broadly Augustine's exegetical method (a method he creatively adopts and adapts from his reading of authors such as Virgil, Matthew, and Paul); (2) explain how two of the primary narrators of the Book of Mormon (Nephi and Moroni) describe the Nephite record's eventual emergence as a good gift and marvelous miracle, even while paradoxically and anxiously anticipating its mixed Gentile reception due to these two narrators' weaknesses and limitations as writers; and (3) demonstrate that faith, hope, and charity are principles not only of the Nephite record's *production* but also of its Gentile *reception,* not altogether unlike what Augustine (and those he influenced for hundreds of years) advocates in his writings.[12] It is not my purpose to recount the history of medieval or Augustinian exegesis but just to point out that the Nephite record interacts with an exegetical principle connected however tenuously to the once-prominent exegetical tradition.

---

implications. Anne Barton writes, "It is precisely because he [Bassanio] does not fear the ominous inscription on the third casket—'Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath' (2.7.16)—that Bassanio is able to win Portia." His presumably flawed but somehow more perfect love for Portia enables him to not get bogged down in the text itself nor fear its threatening implications. Bassanio decides, a kind of exegetical judgment in Shakespeare's day, to venture and choose the casket not of gold, or silver, but of lowly lead, a bold choice having nothing to do with precious appearances or careful reading of the inscription. Anne Barton, "The Merchant of Venice," in *The Riverside Shakespeare,* ed. G. Blakemore Evans, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 285–86.

11. Scripture has always had something to say about its own reception, whether written or spoken (see Matt. 13:3–9). This is nowhere more true than in the Book of Mormon.

12. For instance, after discussing the many good gifts of his influential mother, Monica, whose eyes Augustine had just closed in death, Augustine reports that "an overwhelming grief welled into my heart." He was worried that those around him would read his gushing tears as grounds for fault finding and mocking him (see footnote 46). His description of this pivotal time in his life encapsulates the principles involved in this exegetical study. Augustine hoped for "a [sympathetic] person of much charity" to consider his case so that he could openly suffer without "some human critic who would put a proud interpretation on [his] weeping." Augustine, *Confessions,* 174–76.

Augustine's General Doctrine of Hermeneutics

Before Augustine arrived on the religious scene to articulate his complex theories of interpretation as found in *On Christian Doctrine* and *Confessions,* others, pagan and patristic, had already developed methods of reading spiritually and allegorically. In other words, he inherited and systematically Christianized an extant classical tradition. For the morally pious among the Greeks, reading allegorically was a way for some of them (and later Christians) to accept the theological problems in Homer's epics: the Greek Bible of the gods and their dealings with men and women.[13] First-century Christians similarly used ingenious methods to demonstrate that Christ was present in the Hebrew Bible. As one scholar put it, "rapidly a battery of proof texts was assembled" by early Christians to demonstrate that Christ was *the* Messiah anticipated by the Old Testament writers.[14] These Christians employed the language of the Septuagint to show that Christ was foreshadowed by the Hebrew records. Matthew, for instance, seeks to persuade the Jews that the prophecies have been fulfilled in Christ. These early Christians attempt to demonstrate a Christological level in the Hebrew Bible by different methods, including that of typology (that is, an allegorical level or reading approach that requires believing in "God's overarching providential plan" and watchfulness over history and its texts[15]). Accordingly, Augustine, himself a Catholic father, develops a more elaborate and distinctive method that reaches for Christ (and other theological truths) in extant scripture using a spiritual approach. His basic reasoning is that if "'Christ is the end of the law' ([Rom.] 10:4) and 'love is the fulfilling of the law' (13:10 NRSV)" and that "all the law and the prophets" (Matt. 22:40) hang on Jesus's twofold great commandment, then love alone can manifest the meanings of scripture.[16] If the greatest commandment is to love God (and secondarily, to love one's neighbor) (Matt. 22:35–40), then according to Augustine, any good-faith attempt at reading by fallen humans that tends to reach for Christ and God (the ultimate

---

13. Alan Jacobs writes that "Basil the Great counsels an 'equitable' way of reading Homer that renders that authoritative text usable for the Christian reader. But Augustine's explicit invocation of love seems to be unique among early theologians." Alan Jacobs, "Love," in Vanhoozer, *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation,* 466.

14. Frances M. Young, "Patristic Biblical Interpretation," in Vanhoozer, *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation,* 566.

15. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Providence," in Vanhoozer, *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation,* 642.

16. Jacobs, "Love," 465–66.

hermeneutic end) through using in love the signs and words of scripture (the ultimate means) to find him who is the embodiment of love and his truths must be admissible, particularly if consistent with doctrinal understandings of the church and its traditions.

Augustine believes that this journey toward a Christocentric understanding is scripture's intention. He finds a unity within scripture by assigning a Christocentric purpose to it, and yet he also allows for a diversity of readings where that intention and the two great commandments are honored.[17] For Augustine, the Holy Spirit has inspired fallen human beings to produce a multivalent collection of sacred texts that is only seemingly fallible. Through the reader's sustained and searching efforts, the sacred books may be understood to contain inerrant doctrinal diversity within Christocentric unity. The initial "discrepancies" and "contradictions" can be negotiated by an appeal to the love for God and an adherence to the purpose of scripture in a way that manifests that the providence of God has allowed the sacred texts to register in a harmonious way, edifying possibilities.[18] In effect, God has prepared the way for a hierarchy of acceptable readings because he is "the true Author of the whole of Scripture."[19] All roads lead to Christ if the meek reader avoids proud idolatry and single-mindedly walks the interpretive path with the lamp of love.[20] As indicated, accessing truth through this "hermeneutical circle" of sorts is not without serious difficulty and considerations.[21] But it is, for Augustine, the challenge of finding the potential within a passage that makes exegesis endlessly rewarding and character refining.

According to Harold Bloom, an important though controversial literary critic, Augustine is the primary progenitor of modern reading theory and practice: "It is from [him] that we learn to read." For Augustine, "to read well (. . . absorbing the *wisdom of Christ*) is the authentic imitation of God and the angels." Further, "for him the purpose of reading," Bloom asserts, "was our conversion to Christ." Nevertheless, in Augustine's theory

---

17. Harrison, "Augustine," 77.

18. Harrison, "Augustine," 76.

19. Jacobs, "Love," 466.

20. For Augustine, interpretation of scripture is generative. The Lord's command to increase and multiply can be read as a command to birth new means into the world. Not unrelatedly, for Augustine the firmament is compared to a text that has been stretched out. To read it, one must therefore carefully attend to the past, present, and future. The past is accessed by means of memory, the present by means of attention, and the future by means of hopeful expectation of Christ. Traces in the text are like breadcrumbs leading one to him. Augustine, *Confessions,* 273–305.

21. Jacobs, "Love," 466.

and practice some have found room for "a type of skepticism." That is, there is a concern in Augustine that centers in and encompasses the reader and his or her limitations as a fallen creature. In this connection, Bloom quotes Brian Stock as saying, "Augustine believes that reading is essential for 'spiritual' development in the individual, but he is pessimistic about the degree of 'enlightenment' that reading itself confers." For Stock, there is a "hopelessness [surrounding] human interpretive efforts."[22] Thus, since we see the divine only darkly, there is a need for patience with each other and for charity toward readings that differ from our own. Although these last ideas may seem discouraging, there is value in them. Readers and writers, though not destitute of all light (the image of God is within them and they can and were guided by the Holy Spirit in Augustine's theories), have inherent flaws and limits that tend to mingle with the divine truth's presentation and reception. Augustine understood that the books composed by God and his well-meaning, human instruments (the prophets) were in many places obscure, ambiguous, and challenging, even if, with effort, rewarding.[23] For Augustine, the balance in proper reading of scripture must be maintained between believing in the providence of God in preparing the scriptural record and acknowledging that readers are often distracted and, in religious terms, proudly idolatrous in their desires.

John Milton, careful student of Augustine's theology of hermeneutics, articulates in poetic terms the Christian father's theory of idolatrous love (cupidity) at a meaningful moment in his epic poem on the Fall of humanity. The passage spoken by the Miltonic narrator suggests that

---

22. Harold Bloom, *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2004), 278–79.

23. For Augustine, a person trained in the schools of Ciceronian elocution and Hellenistic and Neoplatonic philosophy, and a teacher of the same himself, the Bible was vulgar and obscure. It was not until he heard Ambrose's allegorical work with the Bible and its anthropomorphisms that he realized the record, if approached in an open way, might lead to Christological wisdom. (This is how the Greek writers dealt with Homer's theological improprieties and unorthodoxies.) The hermeneutical principles—love chief among them—that enabled Augustine to read allegorically were the solution. Charity was a liberating principle that allowed Augustine to read the text variously without narrowness or dogmatic rigidity. All readings were acceptable to him, even if they were in error, if they promoted faith and charity. Of course, this allegorical method pertained to the most obscure passages. The plain parts of the Bible taught faith and love, and so any reading that established these principles was acceptable and considered harmless. Augustine drew his reading method from scripture. He follows Paul in his mind. I claim that the writers of the Book of Mormon seem to use a similar principle, not in terms of moral impropriety or suspect theology but in terms of disjunctive structure, grammatical errors, and other categories for disorientation or textual imperfections.

one can be near to (or even within) something of great worth and yet not perceive its qualities or its real worth because one does not regard as one should its actual maker. The love of God allows the attentive seeker to properly use what has providentially been placed in their path. Distractions and inordinate desires, if one is not puffed up, will not always lead one away from understanding well the wisdom of truth. Travelers will eventually grasp it even if they should at first stumble on their searching journey:

> Thence up he [Satan] flew, and on the Tree of Life,
> The middle Tree and highest there that grew,
> Sat like a Cormorant; yet not true Life
> Thereby regained, but sat devising Death
> To them who liv'd; nor on the vertue thought
> Of that life-giving Plant, but only us'd
> For prospect, what well us'd had bin the pledge
> Of immortality. So little knows
> Any, but God alone, to value right
> The good before him, but perverts best things
> To worst abuse, or to thir meanest use.[24]

In the foregoing poetic excerpt, the fallen angel, Satan, fails to perceive the obvious use of the tree he sits upon because he is proudly bent on finding and destroying the work of God. He seeks for Adam and Eve that he might in some way retaliate against his Maker. Thus he passes over the spiritual life the tree might provide. Milton's epic embodies Augustinian interpretive theory since it in effect ensnares and distracts readers who want to fault the poet's language or take issue with his apparent theology. The epic, like the lush garden (itself a textual metaphor), must be read in an attentive and single-minded way if one is not to be led astray by the lexical, syntactical, and ideological complexities of it.[25] Cupidity, or the love of anything other than God and presumably his truths, may cause one to wander off instead of reach the divine wisdom or presence within the epic's seeming obscurities and indeterminacies. Reading reveals character and is a process that is educative.

------

24. John Milton, *Paradise Lost,* in *The Riverside Milton,* ed. Roy Flannagan (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), bk. 4, lines 194–204, 447.

25. I explore the reader's journey through Milton's long epic in my dissertation: Matthew Scott Stenson, "Lifting Up the Serpent in the Wilderness: The Reader's Journey through John Milton's *Paradise Lost*" (PhD diss., University of Nebraska–Lincoln, 2009). Reading as a journey is systematically theorized by Augustine but is also implicitly suggested in many earlier sources that influenced Augustine, such as Virgil's *Aeneid.*

For Augustine, one is to honestly approach the difficulties of sacred texts humbly and in the spirit of sincere effort and openness to myriad acceptable possibilities. In our own Latter-day Saint tradition, George Handley has advocated for a balance between what he calls "triumphalist" readings (faithful but static interpretations that are predetermined by one's established belief) and those readings that are ever "idiosyncratic . . . but never transcendent."[26] Given the daunting journey and, for Augustine, ascent of understanding God's obscure word, he allowed, as mentioned, for interpretive variation so long as the proposals complied with what came to be known after him as the rule of *faith* and the exegetical principle of *charity.* If a reading edified and encouraged the love of God and neighbor and, by implication, that which is good and edifying, it was profitable and should not be rejected out of hand, where there is no plain counterexplanation by Deity on record. Exegetes, for Augustine, were to do their best in their weakness to spiritually mature and to thereby interpret divine passages given their native gifts, capacities, and faculties. For Augustine, the command in Genesis to "multiply, and replenish the earth" was more than an injunctive to populate the sky, seas, and lands with creatures (Gen. 1:28); it was, on an allegorical level, to use the Book of Mormon's phrase, a command to "lay hold upon every good thing" by more fully recognizing the treasures of Christ's written wisdom and word (Moro. 7:20).[27] The following is a simplified summary of Augustine's theory of exegesis:

---

26. George Handley, "On the Moral Risks of Reading Scripture," in *Reading Nephi Reading Isaiah: 2 Nephi 26–27,* ed. Joseph M. Spencer and Jenny Webb, 2nd ed. (Provo, Utah: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, Brigham Young University, 2016), 89–104.

27. Augustine's exegetical methods as explained in his works *Confessions* (397–400) and *On Christian Doctrine* (396–427) relied primarily on Matthew 22:35–40 and 1 Corinthians 13, where charity—the love of God and of all people—is expounded. On the principle of love "hang[s]" (depends) an understanding of "all the law and the prophets." *Confessions* is a two-part intellectual autobiography that recounts Augustine's conversion through his mother, Monica (his love for her leads him to accept and love what she loves herself), and provides an extensive discussion on reading and some practical allegorical criticism of Genesis 1. It is common for writers since Augustine's time to bridge the gap between material earth and immaterial heaven by means of an angelic woman. (The woman may also play the part of obstacle or distraction to divine truth and being if she is loved too much, or idolatrously.) Cupidity is the concept that Augustine develops in this regard. God should receive all our love, and all else, in Augustine's view, is only to be *used* to seek out and lay hold of God and his wisdom embodied in Christ. Augustine, *Confessions*; Saint Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine,* trans. D. W. Robertson Jr. (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1997).

1. God's divine wisdom, truth, and word come by means of weak and simple human instruments (though prophetic persons) and are Christocentric.

2. God, through his Holy Spirit, has providentially inspired a challenging but inerrant[28] record that can and should be unified at the level of divine and prophetic intention and purpose where possible.

3. God, according to his foreknowledge, has prepared a way that the seeming imperfections (discrepancies, strangeness, contradictions, and other "problems") of the records can be reconciled or negotiated by taking an increasingly spiritually mature, loving, and sympathetic approach to them that allows for creative variety amid doctrinal unity.

4. God desires to reward with deep understanding of heart the sympathetic reader who uses the words of the text in love to reach for the object of that love—Christ and God—and who uses the words of it to encourage love of his or her fellow travelers.

Among the many Augustinian thoughts that may overlap with current exegetical traditions (including those among Latter-day Saints) are a handful that seem worth underscoring. These concepts appear consistent with Latter-day Saint belief. First, although we do not believe in textual infallibility, we do accept that the reader is fallen (imperfect in his or her perceptions of language and truth) and thus will struggle to appreciate and apprehend divine scriptural meanings. Next, we grant that the general aim of all scripture is to illuminate the character of God and to communicate his salvific truths to his children across time and space. Commensurate with that is our acceptance that the divine being has watched over the process that has ultimately resulted in the availability of these sacred texts in our day. They have been kept and preserved for future generations and are revealed under his directive to accomplish his purposes in this dispensation (1 Ne. 9:5–6; Alma 37).[29] Finally, we acknowledge that a diversity

---

28. In this context, perhaps it should be noted that Latter-day Saints do not believe in scriptural infallibility. That is, we allow for error within sacred texts. This error may have been introduced into the text through transmission, translation, or, in the case of the Bible, tampering.

29. James Faulconer has recently written about these interpretive and reception issues in his work on Mosiah. Faulconer suggests that "theological reflection means thoughtful, imaginative response to scripture." He further explains, "What I mean [by speculative reading] is that it cannot avoid being conceptual and conjectural. A theologian looks at the text carefully. Based on what she observes in the text, the theologian

of approaches, and even arrival at a diversity of conclusions, is acceptable and commendable so long as the one who advocates for any given thesis does his or her best to edify and enlighten and not to destroy and tear down. With these shared intellectual axioms in mind, I now intend to demonstrate that the cardinal virtues of faith, hope, and charity were not far from the minds of even the earliest Nephite writers. Specifically, it is my position that the prophets who produced the Book of Mormon brought it forth in faith and somehow conceived of charity not merely as a divine attribute to be acquired in order to inherit the kingdom of God but as a principle of reception, one that predates much of the exegesis among the pious Homeric interpreters and any associated with the Christian Era.

To be clear, then, I do not intend to demonstrate a strong correspondence between Augustine's specific theories and Nephi's and Moroni's words. Instead I desire in a more general way to suggest that the Nephite prophets had some sense that charity served as a principle of textual reception long before Augustine or his followers ever systematized and baptized the now-outdated exegetical term.

Nephi Leads with Faith, Hope, and Charity

Second Nephi ends with a somewhat-developed passage on faith, hope, and charity (2 Ne. 33).[30] But before jumping into that material, it would be profitable to ask ourselves what kind of reader Nephi was. How did he see the records in his own hands? The sequence of chapters composed of 1 Nephi 19–22 represents Nephi reading to his older brothers chapters that closely resemble Isaiah 48 and 49. But more than that, Nephi tells his reader that he "did read many things to them [his brethren], which were engraven upon the plates of brass," including the five "books of Moses" and "that which was written by the prophet Isaiah" (1 Ne. 19:22–23). It is in 1 Nephi 19 that we first view Nephi as a charitable reader.

---

constructs a set of concepts that reflect what she has seen. So," he concludes, "theological speculation is neither mere guessing nor an exact science like mathematics. It is an interpretive discipline." Accordingly, Faulconer acknowledges that "the unavoidability of our assumptions affecting our interpretations makes difficult the traditional advice that interpreters of scripture should do only exegesis, . . . not eisegesis." Thus, from Faulconer's perspective, reading in the same ways is not all that realistic. Hence, we should allow for the flexibility to find a range of meanings when examining sacred scriptures. James E. Faulconer, "Introduction," in *Mosiah: A Brief Theological Introduction* (Provo, Utah: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2020), 2–10.

    30. The three virtues of faith, hope, and charity are first alluded to together in 2 Nephi 31:19–21.

Before 1 Nephi 19, we learned that Lehi was a voracious reader of the brass plates and that Nephi had been a careful student of his father's writings, revelations, and prophecies, but we had not seen Nephi as a reader. It is true that 1 Nephi 17 suggests that Nephi was a careful student of the brass plates and valued the word of the Lord to his father and others before him. In 1 Nephi 19, we are told that Nephi read to his brothers before expounding on that which he reads from Isaiah.

First Nephi 19 begins with metadiscourse (a term that in this case refers to when the Book of Mormon speaks of itself). Nephi informs his reader that he has "plates of ore" in addition to the brass plates they brought from Jerusalem (1 Ne. 19:1). On his large plates he records items such as the things of his father, some of his own prophecies, his family's genealogy, and his people's wars and contentions. The large plates were produced by commandment. As is well known, Nephi also speaks of another, smaller record that he has been commanded to create, a record he consistently calls "these plates," on which "the more sacred things may be kept" (1 Ne. 19:5). It is in this text-producing setting that Nephi shows his hand as a sympathetic reader of the brass plates in his possession. Notice that Nephi acknowledges that there were errors (of what kind we are not told) on the brass plates made by prophetic men with real weaknesses; nevertheless, Nephi found their writings to be of "great worth," presumably because of his charity and his understanding of the demanding task of writing (bracketed commentary going forward is mine[31]). Nephi confesses to his reader,

> I do not write anything upon plates [large or small] save it be that I think it be sacred. And now, if I do err, even did they err of old; not that I

---

31. My method for guiding the reader through my analysis will require two strategies: (1) I bracket fairly extensively to insert clarifying commentary that would otherwise require many pages to explain, thereby avoiding the necessity of lengthening the project beyond what would be manageable for readers; in other words, generously bracketing inserted commentary is, ironically, a kind of shorthand that I trust is helpful; and (2) I italicize language on occasion when it seems to make following my reasoning easier. I have found that implementing such standard measures, if not excessive, is helpful for readers. I acknowledge that some of the commentary may seem as if I am reading something *into the text*. The glosses, however, are informed by a careful reading of the broad scriptural context and localized details and thus are more *exegetical* than they may seem. In short, I attempt to recover the probable logic of the prophet based on his lexical and syntactic signals. My commentary is not definitive and may change from time to time as I develop a still-better sense for the author involved. My inserted language is in no way an attempt at recreating the text based on some relation to Hebrew or Egyptian. Instead, my comments are often best viewed as peripheral.

would excuse myself because of other men, but because of the weakness which is in me, according to the flesh, I would excuse myself.[32]

For the things [specifically records] which some men esteem to be of great worth, both to the body and soul, others set at naught and trample under their feet. Yea, even the very God of Israel do men trample under their feet; I say, trample under their feet but I would speak in other words—they set him at naught, and hearken not to the voice of his counsels [as they are recorded in sacred texts]. (1 Ne. 19:6–7)[33]

Nephi exemplifies charity as a reader here because he is willing to call that which is fallible "of great worth," presumably due to its Christocentric message and his regard for others before him who produced records as he does. On the heels of this revealing passage, wherein we learn that Nephi understands that there were errors on the brass plates, he gives his reader to understand that even Christ would be misjudged because of "iniquity," though he himself was the embodiment of charity: "Yea [Nephi further explains], they [Christ's own people] spit upon him, and he suffereth it, because of his loving kindness and his long-suffering towards the children of men" (1 Ne. 19:9). Nephi's great enthusiasm for the prophets on record is abundantly apparent: Christ, he points out, "yieldeth himself, . . . into the hands of wicked men, to be lifted up, *according to the words of Zenock,* and to be crucified, *according to the words of Neum,* and to be buried in a sepulchre, *according to the words of Zenos,* which he spake concerning the three days of darkness" (1 Ne. 19:10, emphasis added). In 1 Nephi 19, Nephi places emphasis on proving

---

32. Notice that Nephi acknowledges the errors of the brass plates that he values so much, but he allows for errors (or is not deterred by them) because he understands human nature and, presumably, the process of recordkeeping. Similarly, Augustine, whom we examined earlier, acknowledged distractions and the ever-present variable of human fallibility (or fallenness) in preparing and perceiving texts that represent the transcendent. Nephi implies that people trample certain things under their feet because they cannot bear the thought that something of supposed great worth might be dressed to a degree in the garb of human weakness and evidence of the struggle for expression. The divine must be conveyed by means of the human instrument. Ineffability is yet another Augustinian doctrine. For instance, it is manifest repeatedly in his *Confessions.* He pleads to the Lord, "Have mercy so that I may find words." Augustine, *Confessions,* 5. Augustine's famous first encounter with the Bible while a student of rhetoric at Carthage is telling in this regard: "[Before I learned to read it and properly value the Bible,] it seemed to me unworthy in comparison with the dignity of Cicero. My inflated conceit shunned the Bible's restraint, and my gaze never penetrated to its inwardness. . . . I disdained to be a little beginner." Augustine, *Confessions,* 40.

33. Notice that for Nephi the point of scripture is to persuade people of the God of Israel and to make known his counsels to the children of men.

all things with the heart.[34] Using Zenos's writings, Nephi indicates that Jesus would be rejected when "those who are at Jerusalem . . . turn their hearts aside" from him (1 Ne. 19:13), but that he would be received by them "when that day cometh, saith the prophet, that they no more turn aside their hearts against the Holy One of Israel" (1 Ne. 19:15). Nephi ends this chapter by citing Zenos and Isaiah, then inviting his reader to receive with "hope" what Isaiah has written, "for after this manner has the prophet written" (1 Ne. 19:24).[35]

Nephi's early embrace, though not explicit, of the principle of sympathy or charity, a principle having more to do with the heart than the head when it comes to receiving messengers and truth, is evident in the latter part of 2 Nephi, where readers see the concept alluded to alongside the reception of oral and written teachings. The context is the Book of Mormon's sudden emergence in "the days when the Lord God shall bring these things forth" (2 Ne. 26:14). In 2 Nephi 26:12–30, Nephi prophesies of his record's destined role among the proud and learned Gentiles. In the midst of that lengthy, explanatory prophecy, Nephi gives his reader another glimpse at how he understands charity to be a principle of openness and receptivity. The Gentiles, he predicts, will "preach up unto themselves their own wisdom and their own learning . . . and grind upon the face of the poor," but the Lord will work a work in plainness among them because "he loveth the world" (2 Ne. 26:20–24). Among the sins Nephi identifies in the arrogant and heady Gentiles is priestcraft (2 Ne. 26:29). In contrast to Gentile priestcraft, which for its proliferation relies on the learning and charismatic talents of its ambitious adherents, Nephi juxtaposes the humble teachers of God, the "laborer[s] in Zion," associated with the people of God (2 Ne. 26:30–31). Notice Nephi's emphasis on charity in receiving the humble efforts of the unsophisticated laborer in Zion:

> Behold, the Lord hath forbidden this thing [practice of priestcraft for "gain and praise of the world" (2 Ne. 26:29)]; wherefore, the Lord God hath given a commandment that all men should have charity, which charity is love [for Christ and his servants]. And except they should

---

34. Augustine calls this equivalent "way of discovering" the "road of the affections." Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine, 7, 16.*

35. Nephi's great passion for the words of those who labored to record prophecy before him is manifest in his psalm: "And upon these I write the things of my soul, and many of the scriptures which are engraven upon the plates of brass. For my soul delighteth in the scriptures, and my heart pondereth them, and writeth them for the learning and the profit of my children" (2 Ne. 4:15). Clearly Nephi has covered a multitude of errors by concentrating on and rejoicing in the truth.

have charity they were nothing [they should receive nothing of true value from those servants, and therefore become nothing like their Lord (see Moro. 7:45)]. Wherefore, if they should have charity they would not suffer the laborer in Zion to perish [because of his poverty; but they, by implication, would assist him in his efforts to minister and teach].

But the laborer[s] in Zion [they who have worked with their own hands for their support and yet were also called to teach the people of God] shall labor for Zion; for if they labor for money [instead of for love] they shall [also] perish. (2 Ne. 26:30–31)

Reading this passage, one gets the sense that whereas the proud and contentious teachers among the Gentiles would be received according to their native gifts and talents, the ministers and teachers among the people of God who would labor with their own hands for their support would necessarily rely for their sustenance and success on God's grace and the goodwill of the people whom they served and taught. They would be received not because they were learned and polished but because, though humble in circumstance, they were sent by God. The talented Gentile would teach "for money" that which the people itched to hear. In contrast, the humble Nephite teacher, if he labored "for Zion" and not for himself, would teach the truth in love, trusting that his diligent labors and his Christocentric message would be supported temporally, and at least tolerated spiritually, if the people had charity in their hearts (2 Ne. 26:31). He did not ask for money. Significantly, the commandment was "that all men should have charity" and not just that the people of God should have charity (2 Ne. 26:30).[36]

---

36. Second Nephi 27 also has much to say about reading. Nephi adapts and repurposes Isaiah 29 in this chapter. The Lord through the prophet seems to make two distinctions: The first is that the record spoken of would be both sealed and made available. The sealed portion would come later; the opened portion would come forth to a wicked world in apostasy. Its coming forth would be the "turning of things upside down" (v. 27). The other distinction drawn by the Lord in the chapter has to do with readers. Readers are of two dichotomous sorts: (1) the "learned" with impure motives (of which Professor Anthon is the representative [vv. 15–20]) and (2) the "not learned" with ostensibly purer motives (of which Joseph Smith is the representative [vv. 19–20, 25–26]). Within this second categorization of readers are the "deaf," "blind," "meek," and "poor" who love the Lord's name and rejoice in him (vv. 29–30, 34). These readers have a pure love of Christ, "their joy shall be in the Lord," and they are the antithesis of those who have long since "removed their hearts far from [him]" (vv. 25, 30). Interestingly, in that day that the unsealed record comes to light, it will be "read by the power of Christ," which sounds like the "spirit of prophecy" or the testimony of Jesus Christ that Nephi had already spoken of in the prologue to the longer prophecy (v. 11; 2 Ne. 25:4).

In 2 Nephi 33, Nephi's prophecies (2 Ne. 25–30) and doctrinal teachings (see 2 Ne. 31–32) now concluded, he writes directly about the reception of the record he has referenced since at least 1 Nephi 6. He suggests a concern about its latter-day reception due to his "weakness" in writing and explicitly conveys to his readers that the "words which [he has] written in weakness" are motivated by his faith, hope, and charity (2 Ne. 33:3–9) and, he predicts, "will be made strong [or spiritually powerful] unto them" (2 Ne. 33:4). Nephi believes in what he has been commanded to do and places unqualified trust in God that much good will come of it in future generations (2 Ne. 33:7). Let us examine here Nephi's palpable concern about his record's reception in some detail. Nephi reveals in the first two and half verses of 2 Nephi 33 that his concern centers on the fact that his words will be received as a *written record* and not as words *from his own mouth.* Here Nephi's anxieties are articulated with his latter-day audience in mind:

> And now I, Nephi, cannot write all the things which were taught among my people; neither am I mighty in writing, like unto speaking; for when a man speaketh by the power of the Holy Ghost the power of the Holy Ghost carrieth it unto the hearts of the children of men [the heart can be opened and penetrated by the powerfully spoken word almost against a person's will].
>
> But behold [here is the contrasting logic], there are many that harden their hearts against the Holy Spirit, that it hath no place in them; wherefore, they cast many things away which are written and esteem them as things of naught. [This language reminds us of Nephi's concerns in 1 Nephi 19:6–7 and anticipates Moroni's final promise. The logic is that the act of reading his words will require more than listening to him would require. It will require demanding effort and a measure of charity to choose to concentrate on his content and not on his weakness in writing.][37]

---

37. In the passage I cited earlier about Augustine's first encounter with the Bible, we learn how the theologian and theorist of hermeneutics understood scripture from the vantage point of later in his life. From that vantage point, he understood (and Milton also has much to say about this) that to value a text does not mean that the text is plain, but that rigorous effort exercised in love is how we honor and demonstrate respect for a sacred text. Augustine compares the reading of the Bible to climbing a mountain: "I . . . decided to give attention to the holy scriptures and to find out what they were like. And this is what met me: something neither open to the proud nor laid bare to mere children; a text lowly to the beginner but, on further reading, of mountainous difficulty and enveloped in mysteries." He continues, "I was not in any state to be able to enter into that, or to bow my head to climb its steps." Augustine, *Confessions,* 40. Milton, following in Augustine's shadow to a degree, describes his ideal reader as necessarily of good character and

But I, Nephi, have written what I have written [characteristically, Nephi doubles down on what he has been commanded to do], and I esteem it [my record] as of great worth, and especially unto my people. (2 Ne. 33:1–3)

I am aware that this passage has been used by Elder David A. Bednar to teach about the role of the learner's agency in the reception of truth;[38] however, I cannot shake free from the idea that there is yet another profitable reading to be discovered in it. Nephi, as I understand him, suggests that if he could speak face-to-face with his modern reader, his message would readily be embraced because of his gift for speaking in power and authority. However, as indicated, the above passage contains a binary logic, as did the former passage from 2 Nephi 26:29–31. What Nephi compares is the reception of the spoken word to the reception of the written word.[39] Nephi concerns himself with the reception of his record because its reading will be made difficult by his weakness for writing (a weakness he does not have as speaker), and thus valuing it will require more effort and generosity of spirit for his audience than if he could convey his message in direct speech.[40] Nephi, like Moroni, has this concern

---

judgment and possessed of a "charity of open dialogue needed in the long work of" finding truth and understanding. His ideal reader is variously "strenuous" and "charitable." Nicholas von Maltzahn, "Milton's Readers," in *The Cambridge Companion to Milton,* ed. Dennis Danielson, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 237–38.

38. In Elder David A. Bednar's reading, he explains that what Nephi is saying is that the truth can be carried "unto" the heart of a learner, but whether or not it eventually has any place "in them" (or in the learner's heart) depends on the learner's faith and agency. David A. Bednar, "Seek Learning by Faith," *Ensign* 37, no. 9 (September 2007): 61. Learning is invited into the heart through preparation. This is an edifying point and one that has great pedagogical significance and obvious application to gospel living, but because the passage can be read that way does not suggest that it cannot also be understood alternatively, if both readings are edifying and profitable to the reader. As the scriptures themselves demonstrate, one passage can contain many possible meanings and applications, all of which can have some value. This is one of Augustine's central points and a necessary idea. Does it lessen God's or his servants' authority that the scriptures can mean many things? Is not more truth better than only some truth?

39. Many scholars have explored the oral and written traditions among the Nephites, such as Hugh Nibley, Brant Gardner, and Samuel Brown. I have also published an article through *BYU Studies Quarterly* that speaks to the subject. Matthew Scott Stenson, "Answering for His Order: Alma's Clash with the Nehors," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 55, no. 2 (2016): 127–53. In another article not yet in print, I explore in detail early expressive prophetic rhetoric that may bear on King Benjamin's powerful speech.

40. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine,* 42–43. Augustine suggests that the key to reading difficult passages is made possible through the faculty of memory. In Augustine's

in part because, he confesses, "neither am I mighty in writing, like unto speaking," and "there are many [who will] harden their hearts against the Holy Spirit," so much so that they will (if they are not downright angry at what he writes) "cast many things away which are written" for their eternal benefit (2 Ne. 33:1–2).

In 2 Nephi 33, Nephi identifies his target audiences: (1) "my people," (2) the "Jew," (3) "the Gentiles," and (4) "all ye ends of the earth" (2 Ne. 33:7–10). Nephi's concern about his record's reception is subdued because of his faith in Christ and his firm expectation (hope) that it will be well received by many (see 2 Ne. 30:3). Nephi believes that they will be convinced by it, "for it [the record] persuadeth them to do *good,* . . . and it speaketh of *Jesus,* and persuadeth them to believe in him" (2 Ne. 33:3–12, emphasis added). Nephi explains that the record will be received by many of his people, "for," he says, "I pray continually for them by day, and mine eyes water my pillow by night [intercessory acts of love for his intended audiences], because of them; and I cry unto my God in faith, and I know that he will hear my cry" (2 Ne. 33:3). Nephi knows that his prayers of faith will assure that his written words are received by many souls. He knows that "the words which [he has] written in weakness will be made strong unto them," "notwithstanding [his] weakness" in writing (2 Ne. 33:4, 11).

As here, the language of the three virtues typically associated with Paul's eloquent words to the high-minded and contentious Greeks of Corinth prefigures much of what we encounter in Ether 12 and in Moroni 7 and 10, where Moroni considers the day of the Gentiles and the record's destined, miraculous appearance among them. We now turn our attention from Nephi's beginnings focused on his record's production and reception to Moroni's attempted endings (of which there are several) as representative of a Nephite hermeneutics of production and reception.

---

formulation, for the reader to understand, he must acquaint himself with the text thoroughly. He must come to possess it. Then, once possessed, the more open and plain passages can be used to illuminate the more obscure ones by means of the reader's memory of the familiar text. Mastering plain places in scriptures for Augustine is fundamental to interpretive work. Memory is best explored when the reader can read in silence so that she can ponder and make connections. What may be of interest to Latter-day Saints is that thinking is the process by which truths are gathered from their scattered condition among the lands of the memory.

Moroni Ends with Faith, Hope, and Charity

Now that we have seen that faith, hope, and charity are referenced by Nephi in passages that generally discuss oral reception and textual production, we need to examine how the principle of charity more directly applies to the Book of Mormon's reception according to Moroni. Nephi only suggests that the principle of charity has various useful applications to reception; Moroni explains that this application more fully and deliberately connects the principle to the receipt of the Book of Mormon. Since Ether 12 is an obvious example of what I claim, I spend less time with it than with Moroni 7 and 10, less well-known examples. In what follows, I provide a relatively new reading of Ether 12[41] and Moroni 7 and 10, a reading that focuses on these three virtues, especially charity, as exegetical principles not unlike those developed and used by Augustine and others who claimed that sacred texts should be received with an eye single to God as well as with an open mind and generous allowance for faithful interpretive possibilities and even faithful misreadings.

Ether 12–13:12 constitutes one of Moroni's first attempts to conclude his own writings (Moro. 1:1).[42] In each (or nearly all) of his attempted

---

41. Rosalynde Welch portrays Moroni's concept of the receipt of scripture as an event or process that depends on the reader's charity. This process she calls "scripturalization." It describes "how . . . an imperfect text . . . [like the Book of Mormon] speak[s] to readers with the power of scripture." Welch explains Moroni's "*reader-centered theology*" this way: "a text becomes scripture in the hands of humble, receptive readers who are moved upon by the Lord or his Spirit." For the promise is that "weak things [will] become strong *unto them*." Moroni's imperfect text requires, according to one scholar Welch cites, "a new type of reading characterized by faith and charity." She terms the process of receiving a human-produced text in a fully realized scriptural way the reader's "transformation [of the text]." This transformation occurs "in the moment of sincere encounter." Rosalynde Frandsen Welch, *Ether: A Brief Theological Introduction* (Provo, Utah: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2020), 40, 72–77. Both Welch and I argue that Moroni in Ether 12 represents charity as an exegetical principle. Our projects overlap as far as that detail goes. Again, my own emphasis in this part of my analysis is how we might understand Moroni 7 and 10 as a continuation of the exegetical logic of Ether 12.

42. Grant Hardy suggests that Moroni attempts a conclusion at least three times: Mormon 8–9, Ether 12, and Moroni 10. Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 249. This seems hard to disagree with. I would add that we might consider including Moroni 7 on the list, since it and Moroni 10 go together. So what do these chapters treat? Interestingly, three of these four chapters deal with faith, hope, and charity. Moroni, who uses his father's words, apparently believes that these principles will have the greatest impact on the record's ultimate positive reception. He wishes to give his readers the principles for understanding the record.

endings, he touches on faith, hope, and charity.[43] What follows Ether 12 is a description of the fall of the Jaredites. Ether 12 represents a reflective sermon on the three virtues woven together with Ether's "great and marvelous" predictions concerning the "house of Joseph," "they who are numbered among the seed of Joseph," and the "inhabitants" of the "Jerusalem of old" (Ether 13:1–13). This reference to the house of Joseph is not out of place because, as Grant Hardy indicates, Moroni consciously interacts with Joseph of Egypt's prophecies recorded in 2 Nephi 3 as he first concludes the Nephite record in Mormon 8 and 9.[44] In Ether 12's sermon, one that in part resembles the pattern of Hebrews 11, Moroni, the final narrator and editor of the record, radically adapts Ether's comprehensive teachings, applying them to the record for which he has charge. Ether's writings were comprehensive, "for he truly told them [his people] of all things, from the beginning of man" to the end of man, but Moroni was "forbidden" by the Lord to write them all (Ether 13:2, 13). Accordingly, Moroni anticipates the Nephite record's miraculous emergence and cold Gentile reception when he writes:

> And now, I, Moroni, would speak somewhat [unto the Gentiles] concerning these things [concerning the record I prepare and the tendency among you to disbelieve what cannot be empirically verified]; I would show unto the world that faith is [exercised in] things which are hoped for and not seen; wherefore, dispute not [this record's veracity when it comes forth] because ye see not [how it possibly could have been revealed], for ye [Gentiles] receive no witness [of its truthfulness] until after the trial of your faith [see also 2 Ne. 27:7–8, 10–11, 21–22; 3 Ne. 26:8–11; and Ether 4:8–19].
>
> For it was by faith that Christ showed himself unto our fathers, after he had risen from the dead; . . . wherefore, it must needs be that some [before his coming to them] had faith in him. . . .

---

43. What is remarkable—given the disparity between Augustine, Milton, Nephi, and Moroni—is that all of them end their major written works this way. Augustine writes near the end of his intellectual autobiography, "The able reader can grasp your apostle's meaning when he is saying that 'love is diffused in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given to us' (Rom. 5:5). Teaching us concerning the things of the Spirit, he demonstrates that the way of charity [notice that love as a gift of the Spirit is a means to apprehending what the apostle says about love] is 'supereminent' (1 Cor. 12:1)." Augustine further says that while love lifts us up to divine understanding and intellectual or spiritual encounters, "the weight of cupidity pull[s] us downwards." Cupidity is defined at this point in Augustine's work as the "love of [worldly] anxieties." Augustine, *Confessions,* 276–77; see also Milton, *Paradise Lost,* 12.574–605, 707–8. The Nephites also speak of anxiety as a hindrance but also as a result of love (Jacob 1:5; 4:18). Their anxiety was primarily born out of a love for God and their people.

44. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon,* 249–52.

> But because of the faith of men [faith of the covenant fathers] he has shown himself unto the world [in time's meridian], and glorified the name of the Father [performing the Atonement], and prepared a way that thereby others [besides those who lived where and when he ministered] might be partakers of the heavenly gift [of eternal life], that they [those who came before him and those who would come after him] might [also] hope for those things [redemption through Christ] which they have not seen [for themselves].
>
> Wherefore, ye [Gentiles] may also have hope, and be partakers of the gift [of eternal life], if ye will but have faith [in Christ when you receive these things in this Nephite record]. . . .
>
> For if there be no faith among the children of men God can do no miracle [he cannot bring forth this record] among them; wherefore [similarly, or for that reason], he showed not himself [to the Lehites in Bountiful] until after their faith. (Ether 12:6–9, 12)

That Moroni is selectively cataloging all those things that are fulfilled by faith—for "by faith all things are fulfilled" (Ether 12:3)—to primarily make plausible the predicted emergence of the record that he and his fathers have faithfully labored and prayed to bring forth is made clear later in the same chapter when he begins to lean into his concerns about making the record for the learned and empirically minded Gentiles: "And it is by faith [Moroni continues] that my fathers have obtained the promise that these things [the record I prepare according to the prophecies] should come unto their brethren [the Lehites] through the Gentiles; therefore the Lord hath commanded me [to write these things], yea, even Jesus Christ" (Ether 12:22).

At this point, Moroni sounds like Nephi,[45] who was commanded to write the Lord's words for future generations, "notwithstanding [his] weakness" (2 Ne. 33:11).[46] The rest of Ether 12 famously recounts

---

45. Jacob was also commanded to write the Lord's words, and he was the one who hoped that their writings would not be "contempt[uous]" to their children (Jacob 4:3).

46. One can see an interesting application of Augustinian reading theory upon the death of Monica, Augustine's pious mother. He describes his weeping for her in textual terms. He says that God might interpret his weeping one way, while a "human critic" might put a more "proud interpretation" upon the inordinate event. The reception of the weeping of this man for him had to do with the charity of the viewer or receiver. One person might "find . . . fault" or "mock," but another, more godly in nature, might weep with him as if in sympathy with him (see note 13). Augustine, *Confessions,* 176. This is the sense in which God receives him who is in error. The open heart is fundamental to understanding others when they are not at their best as communicators. (Job's friends may have understood him better if they had loved him enough to hear his words and not make assumptions about his worthiness based on the externals of the

Moroni's dialogue with the Lord about the Nephite record's anticipated reception (Ether 12:23–37). Moroni expresses his serious reservations (Ether 12:23–25). The Lord comforts and instructs him as to the record's destiny (Ether 12:26–28). One can hear Nephi's voice in this familiar verse that is best understood as a verse treating the general reception of the Book of Mormon: "And if men come unto me [through these writings which have been prepared] I will show unto them their weakness.[47] I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me [on receipt of this record]; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me [when they receive this record], then will I make weak things [in them and in the imperfect record] become strong [powerful and persuasive] unto them" (Ether 12:27; see also 2 Ne. 3:20–21).

Ether 12 concludes with the Lord explaining that these three virtues, the same that Augustine had co-opted for interpretive purposes, will bring the Gentiles unto Christ, who is the "fountain of all righteousness" (Ether 12:28). They are the principles by which one receives all that the Lord has in store. Moroni emphasizes charity (or being slow to condemn or judge) almost every time he writes a conclusion to the record (Morm. 8:22, 26; Morm. 9:30–31; Ether 4:8–12; Ether 12:28–37; and Moro. 10:20–21). He goes as far as to pray for the Gentile portion of his audience that they might have charity enough to receive his record (Ether 12:36). Moroni understands that unless they have these virtues, "they cannot inherit" the kingdom of God (Ether 12:34). Moroni's farewell testimony precedes his exhortation: "And now I would commend you to seek this Jesus of whom the prophets and apostles have written [or, in other words, I would commend you, Gentiles (and all ye ends of the earth), to seek this Jesus who speaks in and through this record. For the same Jesus was spoken of in Old Testament prophecy and by the Apostles of the Lamb]" (Ether 12:41). Thus, like Nephi (2 Ne. 33:14), Moroni ends his second attempted conclusion by directing his reader to the *prophets* and *apostles* and the other words that confirm his and his fathers' epic project. From

---

lamentable situation he in his own suffering faced.) Moroni in Ether 12 is concerned that the Gentiles will in a similar way render a "proud interpretation" of his best efforts to write since his crooked words will not be all they might be because of his weakness in writing.

47. The Book of Mormon identifies many of the Gentiles' sins. Their weaknesses are fully cataloged. Their spiritual weaknesses include pride, envy, blindness, unbelief, immorality, contention, and many other problems. See 3 Nephi 30:2 for an example of one of these catalogs.

Moroni's perspective, the springing forth of the Book of Mormon is unto the fulfillment of the prophets from the beginning. He will return to this theme in the last chapter of the Book of Mormon (Moro. 10:28).

After several years, Moroni yet again attempts to conclude his record (see Moro. 7). However, this time, instead of adapting Ether's writings, he creatively deploys a sermon from his father's ministry (many years before) to ground his written remarks sometime before his death. I infer that Moroni 7 acts as another potential conclusion to the Nephite record because of its location near the end of the record (between Ether 12 and Moroni 10) and the nature of its content. Moroni 7 seems to be yet another attempt to end the record for the following reasons. It initially has much to say about how to judge so that one does not unwittingly condemn that which is "good" and of "Christ" (7:12–19). Indeed, the reader of Moroni 7 is warned in this manner: "Take heed . . . that ye do not judge . . . that which is good and of God to be of the devil" (7:14). Again, Moroni, channeling his father's earlier words, commands his reader: "See that ye do not judge wrongfully" (7:18). These exhortations, as Moroni employs them, appear to refer to receiving the Nephite record, something that Moroni has worried about since at least Mormon 8:17–20. This lesson understandably appears late in the overall record so as to assist the reader in laying hold of the goodness of the Book of Mormon. What follows in the same chapter treats how God has historically revealed his "every word" using "divers ways" (7:24–25). In this broadening context, the reader is invited to consider certain questions. (Here it is hard to know whether Moroni channels his father still or if he temporally steps out from behind his father's original words to ask his own audience many pointed questions that amount to really one question: If Christ revealed himself before his coming to earth by sending "angels to . . . the children of men (and by other means), why would such miracles cease after Christ (7:22, 29–32)? Moroni 7 characteristically concludes with a reference to the Lord's intention to fulfill his covenants (7:32) and an exhortation to repent and believe (7:34). It is here that Moroni (it seems unlikely that Mormon would have spoken these words) concludes the record in the stock way (7:35) before more obviously borrowing from his father to again underscore the principle of charity.

Additionally, in Moroni 7, Moroni appropriates his father's discourse. It is a discourse on faith, hope, and charity that Mormon gave much earlier when his people were more peaceful (see Moro. 7). Significantly, Moroni adapts Mormon's sermon to his own rhetorical purpose, which, as indicated, is to provide doctrines, warnings, and teachings with

exegetical implications.[48] Going forward, I wish to make it clear that the standard approach to Moroni 7 is to assume that all of it is directly borrowed and that none of it is attributable to Moroni, its abridger/editor. However, I wish to suggest that parts of it may in fact allow Moroni to speak to his latter-day audience more directly than supposed. In what follows, I assume that the material referring to faith, hope, and charity may all be attributed to Mormon (7:1) but that the plying of those virtues to the reception of the Nephite record (and other details not so specified in 7:1) may reasonably be associated with Moroni himself. What is clear is that in Moroni 7, Moroni borrows heavily from his father, except insofar as it might enable him to point his readers to the reception of the record that he and his father have such a stake in bringing to light.

Moroni had referred to the restoration of the Nephite record (and to its latter-day translator) as early as Mormon 8 and 9, where he first ventured to construct a conclusion to the overall record. (Mormon 9 is recognizably reminiscent of Moroni 10, the record's actual ending.) Ether 4 (which corresponds to Mormon 8 and 9), however, concisely gets at similar concepts to those found in Moroni 10's other clear companion, Moroni 7:

> And at my [the Lord's] command the heavens are opened and are shut; . . .
>
> And he that believeth not my words [in this record] believeth not my disciples [the record of the twelve Apostles]; and if it so be that I do not speak [through this record], judge ye; for ye shall know that it is I that speaketh, at the last day [see Isa. 52:6].
>
> But he that believeth these things which I have spoken [in this record], him will I visit with the manifestations of my Spirit [power of the Holy Ghost (see Moro. 10:4–5; D&C 5:16)], and he shall know and bear record. For because of my Spirit he shall know that these things are true; for it [this record] persuadeth men to do good [see 2 Ne. 33:4, 10].
>
> And whatsoever thing persuadeth men to do good is of me; for good cometh of none save it be of me. I am the same that leadeth men to all good. (Ether 4:9–12)

This early attempt by Moroni (who records the Lord's words while abridging Ether's writings) to work out these reception ideas, some of which are also intimated in 2 Nephi 33 by Nephi, is more developed in Moroni 7 than anywhere else: "Wherefore, [Moroni says, borrowing from

---

48. Welch argues that "Moroni's mind is always present in the text" when he abridges Ether, and that is equally true when he writes the book of Moroni. Welch, *Ether,* 20.

Mormon,] all things which are good cometh of God; and that which is evil cometh of the devil; for the devil is an enemy unto God, and fighteth against him continually, and inviteth and enticeth to sin, and to do that which is evil continually. But behold, that which is of God inviteth and enticeth to do good continually; wherefore, every thing which inviteth and enticeth to do good, and to love God, and to serve him, is inspired of God" (Moro. 7:12–13).

Much as Nephi does, in this first part of Moroni 7 the last Nephite record keeper, as mentioned, admonishes his sophisticated modern reader to not "judge wrongfully" the record in the spirit of self-righteousness, contempt, or hostility (Moro. 7:18; see also Morm. 8:17–20; Moro. 7:14). And how can one know if this record—itself a good thing—is from God? Moroni, drawing on his father, explains, "The Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil [see Ether 4:11]; wherefore, I show unto you the way to judge [and, by implication, read for understanding]; for every thing which inviteth to do good, and to persuade to believe in Christ, is sent forth by the power and gift of Christ. . . . But whatsoever thing persuadeth men to do evil, and believe not in Christ, and deny him, and serve not God . . . is of the devil" (Moro. 7:16–17; see also 2 Ne. 33:4). It is unclear under what circumstance Mormon originally taught these principles of evaluation. However, Moroni appears to use them as a way to guide his reader toward receiving the Nephite record he will hide up for future generations.

Mormon's Christocentric exegetical formula, given how it intersects with the previous material, is also Moroni's explanation (an explanation he works out again and again) of how his reader is to confirm the veracity of the record he seals up. The most telling detail in the foregoing is that whatsoever convinces or persuades men to "believe in Christ, is sent forth by the power and gift of Christ" (Moro. 7:16). This hermeneutic is also Augustine's. For him, the end of discovery was, as indicated, the wisdom and truth of Christ. Moreover, from Nephi on, the Book of Mormon's central invitation is to "believe in Christ" (2 Ne. 26:12–13; 30:2, 7; 33:10–11). Nephi underscores this theme as he concludes. Further, Moroni, using Mormon, admonishes his reader 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," he promises, "ye certainly will be a child of Christ" (Moro. 7:19). Thus, the full introduction to Moroni 7 (Moro. 7:1–19) ends where the chapter ends: focusing on the "true followers of Christ," who may in time, if they practice charity, "become the sons [and daughters] of God" (Moro.

7:48). Charity, therefore, is not only an *end* but a *means* to an end and an exegetical principle.

The second half of Moroni 7 (vv. 20–48) is framed by an important question probably first posed by Mormon (although in what follows I will place it in Moroni's mouth): "And now, my brethren, how is it possible that ye can lay hold upon [understand and internalize] every good thing?" (Moro. 7:20). The lesson for the remainder of the chapter is that faith, hope, and charity are the principles whereby disciples may lay hold of every good thing, not just some good things, but *all good things* offered by Christ, howsoever they come (Moro. 7:24–25). After acknowledging the good that would come in and through Christ by angels appearing to prophets before Christ, Moroni reminds his readers that "there were [before Christ] divers ways that he did manifest things unto the children of men, which were good; and all things which are good [howsoever manifest] cometh of Christ" (Moro. 7:24).[49] Moroni then adds this intermediate, inclusive, and summative conclusion: "Wherefore, by the ministering of angels, and by every word which proceeded forth out of the mouth of God, men began to exercise faith in Christ; and thus by faith, they did lay hold upon every good thing; and thus it was until the coming of Christ" (Moro. 7:25). At this point, the logic advances with chronological time. Having spoken of faith as a principle of acquisition *before* Christ, Moroni now asserts that even *after* Christ people were "saved by faith" and were thereby enabled to "become the [children] of God" (Moro. 7:26). It becomes clear in the second half of Moroni 7 that Moroni's larger point is that if God worked in "divers ways" before Christ, operating by angels and prophets and other diverse means, it is reasonable to believe that he has not ceased to be a God of miracles (and spiritual conversion) unto those who believe in Christ through this miraculous record (2 Ne. 27:23; Morm. 8:16, 24–26; 9). In fact, Moroni says, "they who have faith in him will [yet] cleave unto every good thing" (Moro. 7:28). But what exactly is Moroni talking about?

To get at what is specifically involved, I cite the second half of Moroni 7 at some length. Recall that Moroni is nearing the end of his record. As mentioned above, he has attempted to end it on possibly three or four

---

49. Here Moroni appears to reason with his audience that if God in ancient times used a diversity of means to make known his truths to his children on earth, why is it so strange that he would use a record from the earth again in a latter day to reveal his mind and will? The prophetic logic is hard to refute. God is the same yesterday, today, and forever, after all.

other occasions. Each time he has made the attempt, he has commented on the record and its reception in a restoration context. Further, Moroni has just set his discussion in a particular Nephite context: "And as surely as Christ liveth he spake these words unto our fathers, saying: Whatsoever thing ye shall ask the Father in my name, which is good, in faith believing that ye shall receive, behold, it shall be done unto you" (Moro. 7:26). And what good and miraculous thing is it that his fathers from the earliest of times desired? To a person, they desired the coming forth of their record unto a later generation (see Enos 1:15–18). Here are the most relevant verses to suggest what the prophet Moroni is apparently saying when he adapts his father's much earlier sermon:

> Wherefore, my beloved brethren, have miracles ceased [like the miracle of a record suddenly springing forth from the earth] because Christ hath ascended into heaven? . . .
>
> For he hath answered the ends of the law [Christ performed the infinite Atonement in fulfillment of the law of Moses and ascended into heaven]. . . .
>
> And because he hath done this, . . . have miracles ceased? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; neither have angels ceased to minister unto the children of men [this seems to generally foreshadow the latter-day Restoration through angelic ministration].
>
> For behold, they are subject unto him [Christ (Moro. 7:24)], to minister according to the word of his command, showing themselves unto them of strong faith and a firm mind in every form of godliness [this is suggestive of the prophet of the Restoration and his associates].
>
> And the office of their [angels'] ministry is to call [certain] men unto repentance, and to fulfill and to do the work of the covenants of the Father, . . . to prepare the way among the children of men, by declaring the word of Christ unto the chosen vessels of the Lord, that they may bear testimony of him [again, this is suggestive of the experience of the prophet of the Restoration and his associates, particularly as it relates to bringing forth the record Moroni concludes].
>
> And by so doing [by making available the word of God and by bearing witness of it], the Lord God prepareth a way that the residue of men [all the remainder of God's children] may have faith in Christ, that the Holy Ghost may have place in their hearts, according to the power thereof [spiritual conversion]; and after this manner bringeth to pass the Father [in the last days], the covenants which he hath made unto the children of men. (Moro. 7:27–32; see also Ether 12:8–9, 22)

This passage is focused on the miracle of the "word of Christ" coming to the "chosen vessels of the Lord" for the world's benefit in a day

subsequent to the fulfillment of the law of Moses, and what follows is especially characteristic of the emergence of the Book of Mormon and the promise of spiritual "power" to those who would honestly consider it (Moro. 7:31–32). Indeed, we are told in Moroni 10:24 that Moroni, like Nephi (2 Ne. 33:10), prophesies of these things going "unto all the ends of the earth." "God will show unto you [ye nations of the earth who receive this Nephite record], with power and great glory at the last day, that they [our words in this record] are true, and if they are true, has the day of miracles ceased?" (Moro. 7:35). Anyone acquainted with the closing speeches of the record's writers knows that this penultimate word from Moroni is typical of the farewell testimony each prophetic narrator bears as he finishes his portion of the record.[50] That is why I suggest that Moroni's own words may interfuse his use of his father's original sermon.

However, Moroni appears to resume using his father's words around Moroni 7:39 ("I judge better things of you" is Mormon's assessment of his original audience), yet they are no longer meant for his contemporaries but for those he addresses. Moroni 7 closes with an explanation of hope (briefly) and charity. Charity by this point has taken on an exegetical patina in connection with receiving the promised sacred record. In Moroni 7:44, 47, the writer appears to refer to Moroni 7:31–32 (and Ether 12:34–35) when he suggests that anyone who has partaken of the "power of the Holy Ghost" while reading the miraculous record must needs have enjoyed already the gift of charity, which is the "pure love of Christ." Although the record may be variously understood and taught in many ways for faithful purposes, it has no greater purpose and meaning than convincing its reader to believe in Christ, love him, and "come unto [him]," thereby entering the covenant he makes anew with the inhabitants of the earth (Moro. 7:32–34). If readers have not charity, Moroni intimates, they will be in danger of thinking nothing of the record, though it is of "great worth" unto the children of men. They will, in effect, "trample

---

50. For example, at the end of his record, Nephi writes, "And if they [Nephi's words on the small plates] are not the words of Christ, judge ye—for Christ will show unto you, with power and great glory, that they are his words, at the last day; and you and I shall stand face to face before his bar; and ye shall know that I have been commanded of him to write these things, notwithstanding my weakness" (2 Ne. 33:11). Jacob's words are similar: "Know ye not that if ye will do these things [reject these words that have come forth according to the written and spoken prophecies], that the power of the redemption and the resurrection, which is in Christ, will bring you to stand with shame and awful guilt before the bar of God? . . . Finally, I bid you farewell, until I shall meet you before the pleasing bar of God" (Jacob 6:9, 13).

[it] under their feet" or "set [it] at naught," as Nephi said (1 Ne. 19:6–7). If so, they, whether hostile or just neglectful and light-minded, will sadly have missed the mark for one of two reasons: (1) the record's nearly unbelievable, miraculous story of origin (an authentic *miracle* out of the ground in a day of emerging science and rationalism) or (2) the record's contradictions, borrowings, grammatical imperfections, anachronisms, and redundant oddness among other objectionable characteristics.

According to Moroni's cumulative logic, to best access the record's covenant-centered, Christological message, one must believe in Christ, hope in Christ's Atonement and the power of his Resurrection (major themes of the record), and be "meek, and lowly of heart" (Moro. 7:43).[51] These virtues, virtues not far from Augustine's own spiritual priorities, will unleash the power of the record if one also has charity for its pre-parers. Think of these familiar words normally associated with Paul's, Augustine's, and Moroni's descriptions of charity in exegetical terms as they may relate to receiving the strange, imperfect, and seemingly anach-ronistic text of the Book of Mormon in a day that Nephi and Moroni generally describe as brimming with rationalistic high-mindedness and Gentile pride, opposition, disbelief, contemptuous scorn, and wicked-ness. In the following passage, directed in love to the modern reader, Moroni describes charity (these certainly were Mormon's words before his son quoted them in their new rhetorical context). This charity may be understood as descriptive of the book's ideal reader:

> And charity . . . is not puffed up [it is meek and lowly of heart], . . . is not easily provoked [to rage and anger (2 Ne. 28:20, 28)], thinketh no evil [is not rash in judgment and does not condemn], and . . . rejoiceth in the truth [of God], beareth all things [including imperfections, anachro-nisms, oddities, simplicity, and signs of human weaknesses, willingly],

---

51. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine,* 38–40. Since in Augustine's theory of herme-neutics, pride is that which hinders one from understanding wisdom, he naturally emphasizes "meekness of piety" as a means to comprehension. As does Moroni in Moroni 7, Augustine mingles his discussion of love and seeing God clearly with other principles such as hope and meekness. Indeed, Augustine's theory of interpretation and understanding combines three familiar passages of scripture that contain Christian attributes and qualities. He weaves together into a hermeneutics of intellectual ascension the writer of Proverbs ("fear" culminates in "knowledge," Prov. 1:7), Peter ("faith" cul-minates in "charity" and "knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ," 2 Pet. 1:5–8), Paul ("faith" culminates in "charity," 1 Cor. 13), and Matthew's Jesus ("meek[ness]" and "hunger and thirst" culminate in the cleansing of the eye of the "heart" that we might see, Matt. 5:5–8). See Moroni 7:48.

believeth all things [every good thing, wheresoever it comes from and howsoever it manifests], hopeth all things, endureth all things.

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, if ye have not charity, ye are nothing [this Christocentric record will profit you nothing (Moro. 7:6, 9)], for charity [as a way or means to Christ] never faileth. Wherefore, cleave unto charity [earlier, in Moroni 7:28, the formulation was "they who have faith in him will cleave unto every good thing"]. . . .

Wherefore, my beloved brethren [as I have said repeatedly so far in attempting to close this record], pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love [and thereby come to know that this record is true], which [love] he hath bestowed [and will yet bestow] upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ [not just Church members]; that ye [also] may become [through charity and the receipt of saving ordinances such as baptism (Moro. 7:33–34)] the sons [and daughters] of God; . . . that we [you and I and as many as will come unto Christ and believe in him through this record] may be purified even as he is pure. Amen. (Moro. 7:45–48)

Augustine had Paul's version of this same passage in mind as he contemplated reading the Bible in profitable ways. For him, reading for the wisdom of Christ meant that one was maturing from child to man or woman in Christ. All profitable readings were to point his fellow believers to Christ and his law of love. They were to edify believers in faith and truth. As indicated, I do not wish to push the comparisons too far, since Augustine reads allegorically and Latter-day Saints tend to read the scriptures more literally. In contrast to Latter-day Saints, Augustine and those before and after him sought the mystical meanings inside scripture (and secular literature) to find Christ in less-than-obvious places. All scripture points us to Christ. Latter-day Saint exegetical practices are more literal than Augustine's creative negotiations of scripture. We delight in plainness, but plainness is relative. Where there is no plainness, we defer to the passage of time and the will of the Lord to make the text more fully understood. However, like Augustine, and many before and after him, we are also seekers. We are also taught to ask, seek, and knock.[52] For Augustine, praying, reading, and contemplating carefully and intensely was, in essence, to ask, seek, and knock. The promise was sure that all those who sought knowledge would come to an understanding that would magnify Christ and his laws. To that degree, Nephi and Moroni are in some agreement with Augustine, but not much further than that.

---

52. Augustine, *Confessions,* 305.

Conclusion

As does Augustine's *Confessions* (304–5), 2 Nephi 32:4 and Mormon 9:21–28 end with an exhortation to the reader to ask, seek, and knock. Moroni picks up there too (Moro. 10:3–4). His exhortation is famous and can be summarized by Latter-day Saints familiar with the Book of Mormon. He provides an exhortation and promise; a passage on the power and good gifts of God, especially the gifts of faith, hope, and charity (Moro. 10:6–23); and a complex closing that homes in on the record's role in fulfilling the prophets and covenant by inviting all to "come unto Christ" and "love God with all your might, mind, and strength" (Moro. 10:28–32). Along with 2 Nephi 33 and Moroni 7, Moroni 10 falls into the category of metacommentary (as discussed at the beginning of this article). Moroni, in the closing chapter of the Book of Mormon, focuses his readers' attention squarely on the record itself: "And wo unto them who shall do these things away [reject these things] and die," and again, "I declare these things [the coming forth of this record] unto the fulfilling of the prophecies" as the voice of Christ to this generation: for he (Moroni) affirms, "[these things] shall proceed forth out of the mouth of the everlasting God" (Moro. 10:26–28). Anticipating the objections to the record's sudden emergence in a future rationalistic generation, Moroni confirms again that "nothing that is good denieth the Christ," and that "every good gift cometh of Christ," including this one (Moro. 10:6, 18). I believe Moroni alludes again to Joseph Smith and his associates in a Restoration context (Moro. 10:24–26). His final exhortations include this familiar invitation: "And again [and yet again] I would exhort you that ye would come unto Christ, and lay hold upon every good gift," especially this miraculous record (Moro. 10:30; see also 2 Ne. 27:20–26; Ether 12:7–22; Moro. 7:27–38).[53]

In Moroni's final promise, God's mercy is to be pondered as much as or more than the record itself. The Nephite record is yet another

---

53. In their writings, as indicated, both Nephi and Moroni refer to the Nephite record's emergence as a miracle brought forth by the power of God. However, that does not mean that the Nephite text is not also described elsewhere in scripture as weak and simple (see 2 Ne. 3:18–21). Both descriptions of the sacred text are true. Thus the record's words can be made strong unto the humble (see 2 Ne. 33:4; Ether 12:27). The Nephite record comes forth as an imperfect document, but it is also a divine miracle that comes as a result of the faith, prayers, and efforts of many righteous and loving people. The power of the record descends upon the reader of it when the faith and love of the producers of the record encounter the faith and love of the recipients of it.

merciful manifestation of God's providence, a manifestation that, if pondered in context with all sacred history, will prepare a person to pray to the Father for an answer to the question, "Is this record yet another true manifestation of the mercy that God has shown in all ages of the world?" If God is the same and has been a merciful God in all ages, then even this miracle—this marvelous work and wonder—is just another gift of grace in the march of history, a final stretching out of his hand as before, but this time in the closing moments of salvation history. Finally, becoming a charitable reader of sacred texts does not mean sweeping a multitude of seeming errors and potential problems under the rug. It means seeing multiplicity in supposed errors or issues, a multiplicity anticipated by Providence. It means that, though readers are to judge the text—"judge ye" (2 Ne. 33:11; Ether 4:10; 5:6; Moro. 7:18; see also Morm. 8:17–22 and 3 Ne. 14:2)—they are to do so with a generous and sympathetic spirit and with intellectual meekness and charity or love of God and of all men, including those who have labored to bring it forth. This empathetic love will allow serious readers to entertain more than one honest interpretation, so long as they edify and more or less conform to doctrine that is known and accepted, or at least plausible. Some readings will be stronger; others weaker; but all will need adjustment or further revision due to our propensity to err or misread. As I have noted, the Book of Mormon itself cautions its interlockers about rushing to judgment, lest they, like Portia's inadequate suitors in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice,* lose their soul's reward. The stakes are high.

What are the consequences of fussing too much about the imperfections, tangential issues, awkwardness, or anachronisms of the Nephite text, or of just honestly misreading it? Though encyclopedic like other epics, the Nephite record is not primarily a montage of intellectual and cultural inroads. It is not primarily a way to understand geography or military history, though those readings are profitable to a degree if one has a specific question or interest. The text is primarily a convincing witness of its central figure, Jesus Christ, and constitutes the renewal of the everlasting covenant according to the prophets and promises. This witness of Christ and the new covenant is what the Book of Mormon fundamentally is. Any commendable reading of the record—and there are as many of those as there are fish in the waters—will inspire faith, hope, and charity, all of which center in Christ and his gospel. Reading with charity will enable what is weak in the record's style, delivery, and manner to become strong and life changing unto the loving reader. The most charitable will perhaps provide the strongest readings. Approaching the

text with a pure love of Christ and his gospel covenants will shed, I suppose, the most light on it. It will assure that the faith, effort, and love that went into the composing of the text have an equally ready listener and receiver of its abrupt turns, logical nuances, and less-than-plain passages. To read with charity is to search the text so sincerely, so generously, and so regularly that one comprehends its possibilities and, understanding them, is "converted to the Lord" (Alma 23:6). Such a reading attunes the reader's heart to the wisdom of Christ, the very voice of Christ, which, I take it, is the ultimate goal of faithful exegesis.

Matthew Scott Stenson, a graduate of the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, currently functions as an English lecturer at Tennessee Technological University. At Tech, he teaches rhetoric and composition and, on occasion, British literature. In addition to his other callings, Scott serves along with his wife as a stake institute instructor in his area. Others of his articles have been published with the *Religious Educator, Christianity and Literature,* and *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship.*

After Anger

Where are the angels?
In the kitchen's brittle light hard words are fallen
and the angels have retreated,

but not far. We rest our fingers on a tabletop,
touch the knob of a half-closed door;
preoccupied, we fail to feel how each strains
strangely, subtly, like a child rolling in a mother's belly.

The fluorescent lights hover in their electric arcs;
The microwave blinks a thousand inner eyes and hums or sings a hymn.
Beneath the floor, unpinioned wings lift the curled linoleum veil,
flex tessellated feathers, and resettle
to cover bright faces and bright feet.

The kitchen entryway sways imperceptibly
in time to an unheard song in an unknown tongue.
The house fills with an impending holiness,
making the joists and window frames shift and sigh.

All—all—watch, ageless, restless, from their places.

And behind the oven the most patient angels sanctify their spaces—
waiting their dancing hearts and weighing each incensed breath—
steadying an ember taken from the altar of forgiveness and apology,
ready at any moment to offer it to the lips of either one of us—
holding it solemnly in a soup spoon we thought we'd lost.

<div align="right">—Daniel Teichert</div>

Figure 1. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Descent from the Cross* (center panel of triptych), 1612–14, oil on panel, 420.5 × 320 cm, Our Lady Cathedral Antwerp, www.artinflanders.be, photo by Hugo Maertens.
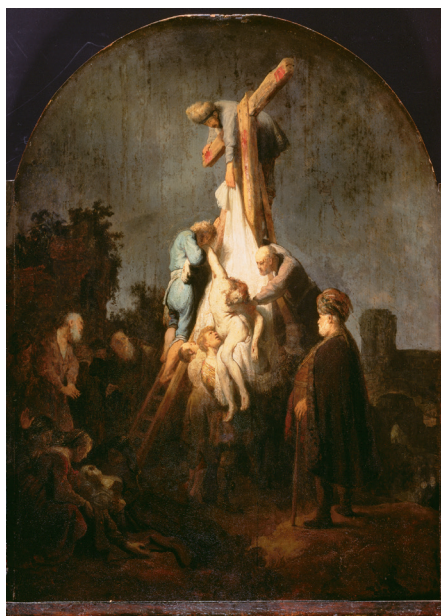

Figure 2. Rembrandt van Rijn, *The Deposition from the Cross*, 1633, cedar wood, 89.4 × 65.2 cm, München, Alte Pinakothek. Courtesy of Blauel/Gnamm - ARTOTHEK.

The Book of Mormon Art Catalog

A New Digital Database and Research Tool

Jennifer Champoux

You can learn much about a society from its religious art. Compare, for example, two images of Christ's descent from the cross—one a Counter-Reformation Flemish painting and the other from just twenty years later in nearby Protestant Amsterdam. In the earlier piece, Peter Paul Rubens (fig. 1) creates a scene of movement, drama, vivid color, and swirling drapery and depicts the body of Christ as muscular and heroic. In the second, by Rembrandt (fig. 2), we see a somber, quiet, darkly monochromatic scene and Christ's frail, sagging body. How might we account for such different visual interpretations of this pivotal biblical moment by two nearly contemporary artists? And what might these differences tell us about the religion, the people, and their values?

Rubens, working in Catholic Flanders and responding to the Reformation, created monumental, engaging art that sought to draw people back to the Catholic church. Christ's body has the pallor of death yet is still heroic in its pose. Looking to ancient classical statues, Renaissance masters such as Michelangelo, and Italian Baroque innovators like Caravaggio, Rubens created a scene of dramatic courage.[1] The placement of figures creates a strong pyramidal shape that draws the viewer's eye upward.

Rembrandt's painting employs many of the same elements, but in a rather different way. Here, everything appears to sink into a pool of dark despair in the lower part of the canvas. The figures each retreat into their own grief, as opposed to the unified heroism in Rubens's grouping. The white body of Christ looks small and weak. Compared with Rubens,

---

1. See Kristin Lohse Belkin, *Rubens* (London: Phaidon Press, 1998), 109–19.

Rembrandt presented a scene that is less dramatic, more earth-bound, and more pitifully human. This is in part due to the impact of Reformation theology, with its emphasis on the miracle of God's grace through faith, even in a fallen world.[2]

This quick comparison provides only the briefest interrogation of these paintings, but it gives an idea of the enormous influence religion and culture can have on artistic expression. Moreover, it indicates the power of art to shape a certain response in the viewer and to affect belief. Similarly, what might art based on the Book of Mormon tell us about the beliefs and cultures of those connected to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints? It has been difficult to get a clear view of how Latter-day Saints have been engaging artistically with the Book of Mormon because the sources were so widespread and many artworks were inaccessible to the public. This lack of access was problematic for not just scholars but also artists. In many cases, patterns established in the most-viewed Book of Mormon art influenced later artists. Meanwhile, alternative approaches or styles from outside our specific religious visual world are largely forgotten or unexplored. This trend influences not just artists but members of the Church too, who tend to turn to known, easily accessible artworks in their scripture study and teaching.

For centuries, religious leaders have understood art's ability to bring religious text and doctrine to life in the viewer's mind, as well as the unique emotional effect of visual art. Likewise, leaders of the Church have long encouraged members to be active in the arts. Even in the nineteenth century, the Church commissioned artists to illustrate Book of Mormon scenes,[3] appointed artists to paint murals in temples,[4] and called artists on missions to Europe specifically to further their art training.[5] Somewhat more recently, in his "Gospel Vision of the Arts" message, President Spencer W. Kimball famously said, "We are proud of the artistic heritage that the Church has brought to us from its earliest beginnings, but the full story of [The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints] has

---

2. See Mariët Westermann, *Rembrandt* (New York: Phaidon Press, 2000), 101–7.

3. George Q. Cannon, "To the Artists of Utah," *Deseret Weekly,* March 8, 1890, 367.

4. Doris R. Dant, "Minerva Teichert's Manti Temple Murals," *BYU Studies* 38, no. 3 (1999): 6–32; Paul L. Anderson, "A Jewel in the Gardens of Paradise: The Art and Architecture of the Hawai'i Temple," *BYU Studies* 39, no. 4 (2000): 164–82.

5. See Linda J. Gibbs and Doris R. Dant, "Harwood and Haag Paint Paris," *BYU Studies* 33, no. 4 (1993): 754–56; Dawn Pheysey, "Testimony in Art: John Hafen's Illustrations for 'O My Father,'" *BYU Studies* 36, no. 1 (1996–97): 58–82; Travis T. Anderson, "Seeking after the Good in Art, Drama, Film, and Literature," *BYU Studies* 46, no. 2 (2007): 243; and Rachel Cope, "'With God's Assistance I Will Someday Be an Artist': John B. Fairbanks's Account of the Paris Art Mission," *BYU Studies* 50, no. 3 (2011): 133–59.

never yet been written nor painted nor sculpted nor spoken. It remains for inspired hearts and talented fingers *yet* to reveal themselves."[6]

Religious art has the potential to teach and inspire in powerful ways. However, to some degree, religious art is inherently problematic, since artists are often guessing at details, there may be multiple competing yet valid interpretations of a scripture passage, and visual art is simply a different medium than scriptural text and therefore communicates differently. Access to a broader variety of art helps address these issues because it creates more space for diverse interpretations and personal responses.

The Book of Mormon Art Catalog

The Book of Mormon Art Catalog aims not only to recover the full history of art based on this book of scripture but also to inspire new and varied artistic production to further illuminate the scriptures and bring viewers closer to Christ (fig. 3).[7] The catalog is a comprehensive, open-access, searchable, and growing digital database of more than three thousand images, providing unprecedented access to visual imagery inspired by the Book of Mormon. It brings together for the first time Book of Mormon art from a range of public and private collections, museums, galleries, studios, exhibitions, and publications. In this role, the Book of Mormon Art Catalog supports research and education, promotes greater knowledge of artists worldwide, highlights the diversity of Latter-day Saint art and artists, and provides a study and devotional resource for members of the Church and other interested individuals. The project is funded by a grant from the Laura F. Willes Center for Book of Mormon Studies, part of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship at Brigham Young University.

In addition to familiar images, the catalog includes many artworks that are difficult to locate. Artist Kathleen Peterson, for example, allowed the inclusion of her Book of Mormon art series, which can't be found anywhere else online. Peterson's work often highlights the experience of women in the scriptures, making her series a welcome addition to the catalog. For instance, although there are numerous depictions of Helaman's stripling warriors, Peterson's depiction is one of only a handful to consider the role of their mothers.[8] Her *Mothers of the Stripling*

---

6. Spencer W. Kimball, "The Gospel Vision of the Arts," *Ensign* 7, no. 7 (July 1977): 5, emphasis original.

7. The catalog can be found at https://bookofmormonartcatalog.org/.

8. Helaman recounts of his two thousand sons, "Yea, they had been taught by their mothers, that if they did not doubt, God would deliver them. And they rehearsed unto

Figure 3. The Book of Mormon Art Catalog homepage, at https://bookofmor monartcatalog.org/. The homepage features Minerva Teichert's *House of the World,* 1949–1951, oil on Masonite, 36 × 38 in. Courtesy of Brigham Young University Museum of Art, 1969.

Warriors exudes a tender fortitude as a mother prepares to send her son into battle (fig. 4).[9]

Private collections of art are also represented in the catalog. Anthony's Fine Art and Antiques allowed us to include its vast collection of drawings by Arnold Friberg.[10] Rarely seen publicly, these sketches give greater context for Friberg's famous series of twelve paintings done in the 1950s. Friberg sketched a number of scenes and figures that were never realized as finished paintings, including a representation of Lehi's dream and a group portrait of Nephi's family (fig. 5).[11]

---

me the words of their mothers, saying: We do not doubt our mothers knew it" (Alma 56:47–48).

9. Kathleen Peterson, "Mothers of the Stripling Warriors," Book of Mormon Art Catalog, https://bookofmormonartcatalog.org/catalog/mothers-of-the-stripling-warriors/.

10. With thanks to Micah Christensen.

11. Arnold Friberg, "Nephi's Family," Book of Mormon Art Catalog, https://bookof mormonartcatalog.org/catalog/nephis-family/.

Figure 4. Kathleen Peterson, *Mothers of the Stripling Warriors,* 2015, oil, 24 × 24 in. Courtesy of Kathleen Peterson. Peterson's series of Book of Mormon paintings highlight female characters and experiences in the scripture.

The collection of the Church History Museum of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints includes hundreds of Book of Mormon artworks, many of which have never been publicly documented before. The Book of Mormon Art Catalog team identified these artworks in the Church History Museum, requested permission from the Church to include them, and then worked to secure image files, giving the public access to many of these images for the first time.[12] One example is a rug weaving by Diné

12. I am grateful to Laura Paulsen Howe, art curator at the Church History Museum, for helping me locate and research Book of Mormon art in their collection, and to Carrie Snow, manager of collections care at the Church History Museum, who arranged for photography and image files of items.

Figure 5. Arnold Friberg, *Nephi's Family,* 1950–1954, graphite on paper, 18½ × 23½ in. Courtesy of Anthony's Fine Art and Antiques. One of many Friberg sketches that have not been readily available to the public before now.

Figure 6. Leta Keith, *Tree of Life,* 1999, 46.5 × 67 in. © Intellectual Reserve, Inc. Courtesy of Church History Museum. This rarely seen piece from the Church History Museum uses traditional Navajo techniques and style to depict a scene from 1 Nephi 8.

artist Leta Keith depicting 1 Nephi 8 (fig. 6).[13] Keith lived in Arizona on a Navajo reservation. She began weaving when only seven years old and continued to create rugs throughout her life, while serving for many years as the Relief Society president of the Chilchinbito Branch. In this weaving, Leta portrayed a traditional Navajo village combined with elements of Lehi's dream, such as the tree of life and the great and spacious building.

Figure 7. David Hyrum Smith, *Lehi's Dream of the Tree of Life,* circa 1875, oil on canvas, 24⅛ × 19¹⁵⁄₁₆ in. Courtesy of Community of Christ Archives. This is the first known depiction of Lehi's dream and one of the very earliest examples of Book of Mormon art.

Book of Mormon art can also be found in various Restoration branches, and this project brings them all together. For example, the Community of Christ owns one of the very earliest visual depictions of a Book of Mormon scene. It was painted by David Hyrum Smith, the youngest son of Joseph and Emma Smith. As the earliest known image of Lehi's dream, it draws on the tradition of European history painting to depict Lehi and his heavenly guide in classical poses within the landscape (fig. 7).[14]

Research Possibilities

More than just a list of artworks, the Book of Mormon Art Catalog also includes extensive research. Each artwork entry includes primary information such as artist, title, date, medium, dimensions, copyright information, and scripture reference (fig. 8). Several tabs below the entry organize additional data about the artist, use of the image in Church media, references in publications, exhibition history, awards, style and technique, the inclusion of figures and symbols in the work, and the physical location of the piece. Each category utilizes a structured vocabulary for indexing to facilitate search retrieval. The site includes as much information as possible about copyright, location, links to the artists' websites, and links to commercial galleries to protect the artists and to help users know where to secure image permissions for their own projects or where to purchase artworks or prints.

---

13. Leta Keith, "Tree of Life," Book of Mormon Art Catalog, https://bookofmormon artcatalog.org/catalog/tree-of-life-34/.

14. David Hyrum Smith, "Lehi's Dream of the Tree of Life," Book of Mormon Art Catalog, https://bookofmormonartcatalog.org/catalog/lehis-dream-of-the-tree-of-life-2/.
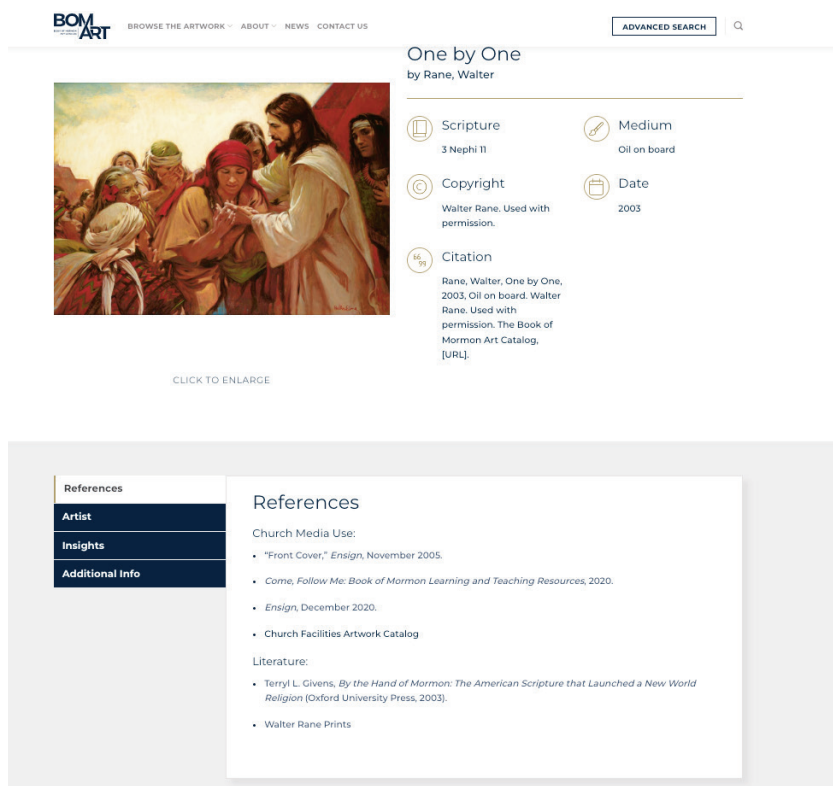
Figure 8. Each entry in the Book of Mormon Art Catalog contains information about the artist, artwork, scripture reference, Church media use, exhibition history, and published references. This screenshot shows the entry for Walter Rane's 2003 *One by One,* depicting Christ's visit to the Nephites as recounted in 3 Nephi 11 (Walter Rane, "One by One," Book of Mormon Art Catalog, https://bookofmormonart catalog.org/catalog/one-by-one/).

With this data now attached to the artwork, users can browse the site in two main ways. First, they can use six broad browsing categories organized into lists: artist, date, scripture reference, nationality of the artist, topic, and style and technique (fig. 9). Second, they can conduct specific, advanced, multivariable searches of the database (fig. 10). This powerful research tool makes possible a more thorough analysis and understanding of Book of Mormon art than has ever been available before. For instance, a scholar can compare how female and male artists have portrayed Nephi. Or an artist can review scenes of King Benjamin that are included in official Church media versus those that are not. Or a Sunday School teacher can find art about the Savior's visit to America that was done by a South American artist.
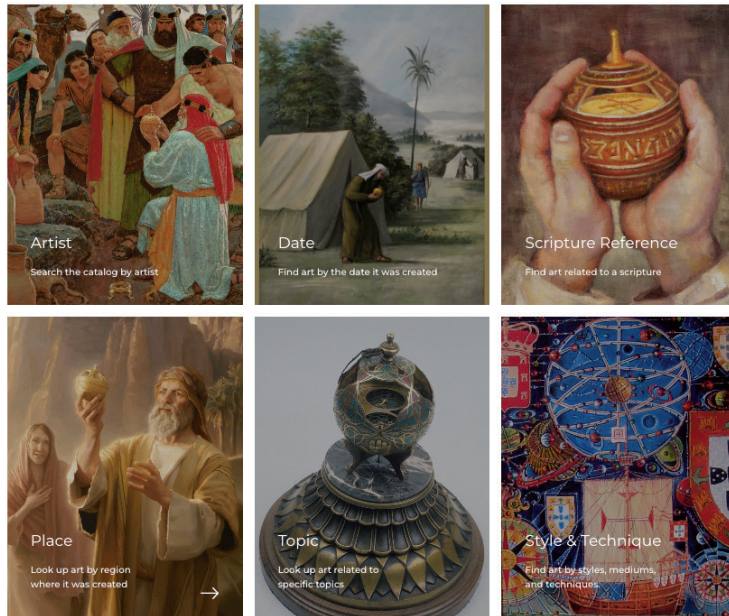
FIGURE 9. The Book of Mormon Art Catalog offers users a variety of ways to conduct specific searches and browse the artworks by category. The Liahona images (left to right and top to bottom) are by artists Arnold Friberg, C. C. A. Christensen, Karen Foster, Joseph Brickey, David A. Baird, and José de Faria.

To provide a sense of the types of analysis available through the Book of Mormon Art Catalog, this short study will briefly review two broad trends that have begun to emerge from the data. First, the production of Book of Mormon art has increased substantially over time, not as a steady growth but rather in fits and starts. And second, the bulk of Book of Mormon imagery concentrates on just a handful of topics or figures.

Production Patterns over Time

First, a consideration of production trends (chart 1). After a flurry of initial artistic activity in the late 1880s, resulting in seventy known images from 1870 to 1903, only forty-four known Book of Mormon images originated from 1904 to 1948.[15] Activity picked up again in the early 1950s

---

15. It should be noted that there may have been additional artworks during this period that are no longer extant. But it's interesting to consider why there was a relative

FIGURE 10. Advanced Search allows users to conduct targeted, multivariable searches.

with the work of Minerva Teichert and Arnold Friberg, although they appear to be the only two artists working in earnest on the Book of Mormon during this time.[16] The 1970s saw an increase in Book of Mormon images, as the Church was commissioning Book of Mormon art for its correlated manuals and materials. Much of this was in the style of straightforward, comic strip–style illustrations that appeared in the Church's *Book of Mormon Stories,* first published in 1978.[17] Then Book of Mormon artwork production doubled in the 1980s and almost doubled again in the 1990s, largely due to the interest of Church History Museum

---

decline in artistic interest in the Book of Mormon during that time. While there are probably many explanations, it's notable that the Church in that period encouraged Latter-day Saint artists to train and work in contemporary European approaches, particularly landscape painting, rather than narrative religious art.

16. The exceptions are one painting of Lehi's dream by Avon Smith Oakeson and one of Christ with the Nephites by Mabel Pearl Frazer. Also, a series of comics based on the Book of Mormon by John Philip Dalby was published in the *Deseret News* from 1947 to about 1953. The Dalby series is currently being researched and added to the catalog. For more information on Dalby, see Ardis E. Parshall, "Dalby's 'Stories of the Book of Mormon,' Table of Contents," *The Keepapitchinin* (blog), April 9, 2020, https://keepapitchinin .org/dalbys-stories-of-the-book-of-mormon-table-of-contents/.

17. *Book of Mormon Stories,* 3rd ed. (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1997), https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/book-of-mormon-stories?lang=eng. For purposes of this study, out of these hundreds of illustrations, only the thirty that are also used in the *Come, Follow Me* manuals are included in the numbers.
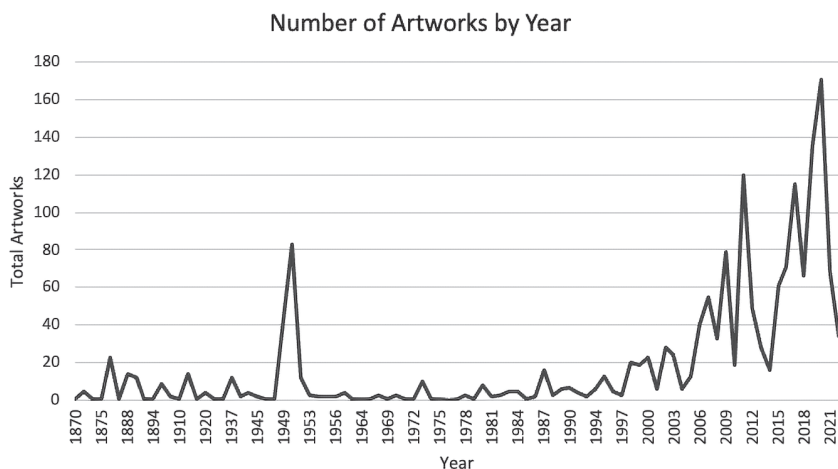
CHART 1. Number of Book of Mormon artworks by year, from 1870 to 2022. Production has increased over time but in fits and starts rather than steady growth.
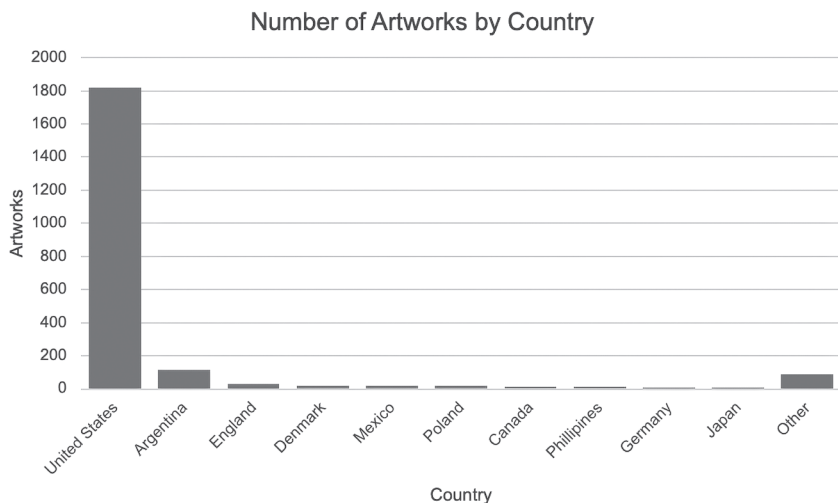

CHART 2. Percentage of total Book of Mormon artworks by country, showing the ten countries with the highest percentages. The "Other" category comprises forty-one countries. Artworks from the United States account for 85 percent of all Book of Mormon art.

(formerly known as the Museum of Church History and Art) curators like Richard Oman in commissioning art on Lehi's dream and soliciting art from a broader international pool of artists. After 2010, there was an explosion of Book of Mormon art. The upward trend appears to continue, with more than 270 Book of Mormon–inspired artworks produced in the three years from 2020 to 2022, which is a greater volume of art than was produced (or at least that we know of) in the first 120 years combined after the publication of the Book of Mormon.

Artworks in the catalog originated from fifty-one different countries, but 85 percent of Book of Mormon art has been created by artists from the United States (chart 2). Except for nineteenth-century pieces made by pioneer immigrants from England and Denmark, Book of Mormon art from outside the United States is unknown until 1979, with two pieces from northern European countries produced that year. It was not until the later 1980s and 1990s that there began to be documented Book of Mormon art from Asian, Latin American, Middle Eastern, and African countries. This data confirms that competitions like the Church's International Art Competition and Scripture Central's annual art contest (formerly known as Book of Mormon Central), as well as recent initiatives at the Center for Latter-day Saint Arts, have done much to increase the production and visibility of artists and artworks outside of the United States. The data also demonstrates, however, that there is still room for growth for art originating internationally.

Concentration of Topics

One way to browse the Book of Mormon Art Catalog is with a list of one hundred topics that grew organically from the documented artworks. Yet not all topics have received the same attention in art. In fact, the sixteen most popular topics account for about half of all Book of Mormon imagery (chart 3). Lehi's dream is far and away the most frequently depicted topic or scene from the Book of Mormon and is depicted almost twice as often as the next most popular topic, which is Christ in ancient America.

More study is needed to understand why these are the most frequently depicted scenes. Could it be that they are scenes that best lend themselves to narrative art? Is it important that many of them were among the earliest to be illustrated? Some scenes, such as Lehi's dream, Nephi preaching, Nephi's ship, Nephi with his brothers, and the Liahona appear earliest in the Book of Mormon, so perhaps that has an effect. It would be interesting to examine which of these topics have been discussed the most by Church leaders. It is also worth noting that all of these most popular

Topics	Number of Artworks
Lehi's dream	236
Jesus Christ in ancient America	124
Abinadi and King Noah	75
Stripling warriors	69
Nephi and brothers	55
Moroni (Captain) and title of liberty	54
Brother of Jared	54
Nephi obtains the plates	52
Ammon and King Lamoni	51
Nephi preaches	49
Alma (son of Alma) preaches	48
Liahona	47
Nephi's ship	47
Jesus Christ blesses Nephite children	46
Alma (father of Alma) baptizes	45
Samuel the Lamanite	44
Total	*1,096*
All other topics	*1,115*

CHART 3. The sixteen most frequently depicted topics account for almost half of all Book of Mormon art. Lehi's dream is the most popular topic to be visualized in art.

scenes are focused on male figures. Many depictions of women from the Book of Mormon did not appear until recently. The first image of Abish, for example, appeared in the year 2000. And except for a 1950 sketch by Arnold Friberg, the wife of King Lamoni was not visualized until 2003.

Similarly, certain individuals from the Book of Mormon get much more attention in the art than others (chart 4). The most frequently depicted figures are Nephi, Christ, and Lehi. Laman and Lemuel are depicted about half as frequently as Nephi but still more than the next most popular figures, which are Sariah, Moroni (the Captain), Moroni (the son of Mormon), Alma (the son of Alma), Sam, the stripling warriors, Mormon, Ammon, Abinadi, and Alma (the father of Alma). On the other hand, there are some topics and figures that have been depicted very few times, including Morianton's maidservant, Hagoth, Corianton, the daughters of Ishmael, Giddianhi, Mosiah, Pahoran, and Helaman (although there are many artworks
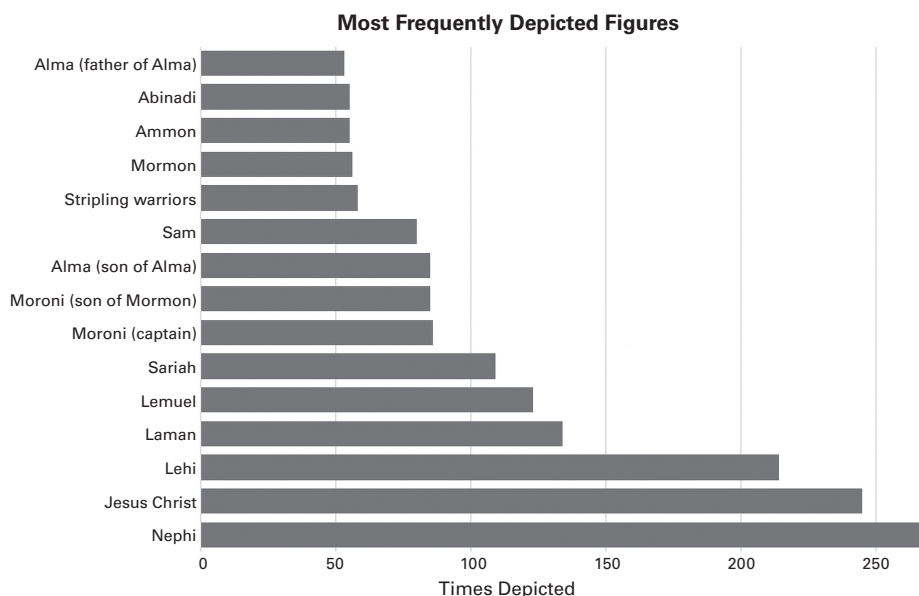
Most Frequently Depicted Figures

CHART 4. The fifteen most frequently depicted figures in Book of Mormon art. Nephi, Jesus Christ, and Lehi are the figures who appear most often.

of his stripling warriors, there are only a handful of Helaman). And there are certainly others that do not show up in the art at all. Having this data will help artists and scholars consider why certain topics have received artistic attention while others have not and may even lead to the development of art based on less-common topics, figures, and interpretations.

Conclusions

This data from the Book of Mormon Art Catalog unlocks many potential research topics, and the data observations presented here are just the tip of the iceberg. Moreover, the data will likely shift as the catalog expands. This is an ongoing, collaborative repository for Book of Mormon art— one that will continue to grow over time. There is a contact form on the website where users can suggest new artwork or additional information. Already, since the site launched in October 2022, many new artworks have been submitted and added. One example is the innovative drawing shown here by Robert Sonntag of Christ ministering to the Nephite children in 3 Nephi 17 (fig. 11).[18]

---

18. Robert Sonntag, "Behold Your Little Ones," Book of Mormon Art Catalog, https://bookofmormonartcatalog.org/catalog/behold-your-little-ones-6/.

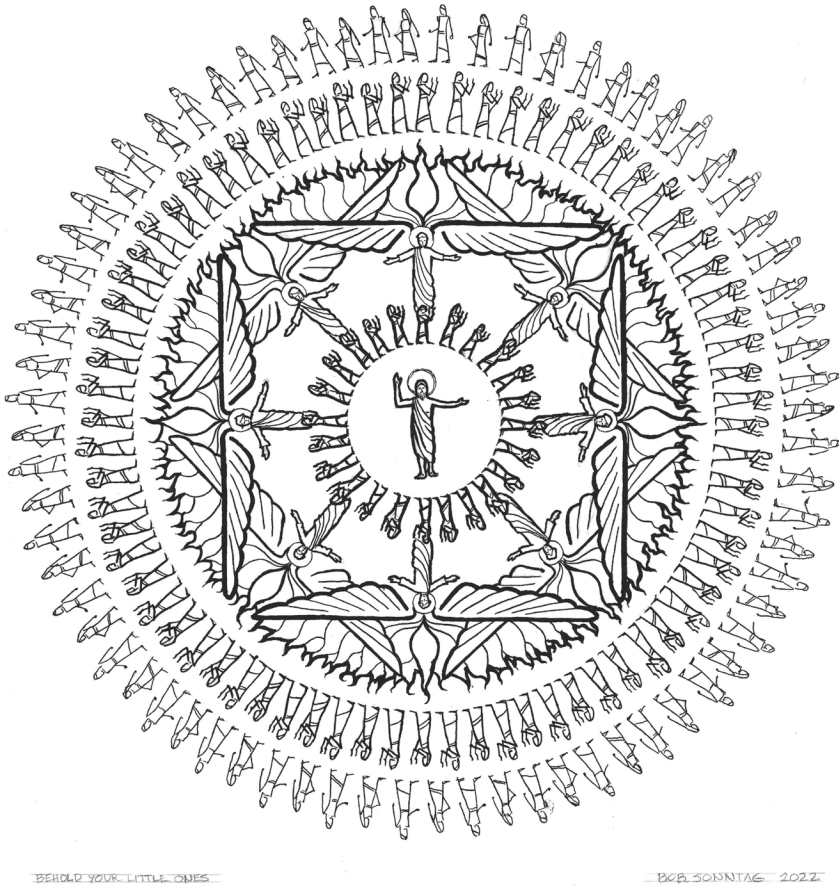BEHOLD YOUR LITTLE ONES   BOB SONNTAG 2022

FIGURE 11. Robert Sonntag, *Behold Your Little Ones,* 2022, India ink on Bristol vellum, 11 × 14 in. Courtesy of Robert Sonntag. This drawing depicts Christ ministering to Nephite children, encircled by angels and fire. The children's parents form the outer rings.

Apart from the catalog's scholarly uses, it is a groundbreaking devotional tool for members of the Church to engage with the Book of Mormon and be inspired by it. The catalog's website and social media pages include weekly posts with artwork and messages to supplement the *Come, Follow Me* curriculum. Users can even browse the artwork through these *Come, Follow Me* posts.[19] Additionally, we are creating and sharing short video interviews with artists and scholars that help

19. "Come, Follow Me," Book of Mormon Art Catalog, https://bookofmormonartcat
alog.org/category/come-follow-me/.

Figure 12. Jorge Cocco Santángelo, *His Marks*. Courtesy of Jorge Cocco Santángelo. In this painting by an Argentinian artist, the resurrected Savior shows the wounds in his hands and feet to Nephites in ancient America.

contextualize the artworks in the catalog and make them even more accessible to the public.[20]

On a personal note, building this database has allowed me to immerse myself in the Book of Mormon and the artwork based on it. As I looked at each image to catalog the various figures, symbols, and scripture references, I often had the scriptures open at the same time, and the process helped me explore the Book of Mormon in a new and fruitful way. In 3 Nephi 11, when Christ appeared in ancient America, the Nephites "heard a voice as if it came out of heaven; . . . and notwithstanding it being a small voice it did pierce them that did hear to the center" (3 Ne. 11:3). And with this piercing, still voice, God commanded, "Behold my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, in whom I have glorified my name—hear ye him" (3 Ne. 11:7). For me, the painting *His Marks* by Jorge Cocco Santángelo,

---

20. Book of Mormon Art Catalog, Home [YouTube Channel], https://www.youtube.com/channel/UClTBj7npnhS8KWyg6KqiYoQ.

with its fractured space and flat planes of color, captures this feeling of sacred stillness (fig. 12).[21] As the Savior reveals the wounds in his hands and feet, the crowd responds with awe and reverence. I imagine a kind of deafening silence as the people take in the moment. Looking at this painting makes me wonder, in my own busy life, if I can find ways to make time for quiet and awe. Like these Nephites, do I sit still and pay attention and listen to the promptings of the Spirit? Or in what ways could I better allow space for God to reveal himself in my life?

Work on this project has also facilitated rewarding inter-actions with generous scholars, artists, curators, and collec-tors. I am inspired by the ways in which artists are engaging with the Book of Mormon to

Figure 13. Annie Poon, *Whispers,* 2017, aquatint etching on copper, 6 × 10 in. Cour-tesy of Annie Poon. Part of a series of Book of Mormon prints, this etching visualizes Nephi "crying from the dust."

illuminate its message and meaning. One goal of the catalog website is to help artists reach a broader audience. In the early stages of the project, artist Annie Poon provided feedback on how the site could best meet the needs of artists, and she continued to support the endeavor in a variety of ways. She also allowed us to publish her recent series of fifty Book of Mormon prints, making them available to the public for the first time.

One of these etchings is *Whispers,* which visualizes Nephi's declara-tion that through his written record he speaks "unto you as the voice of one crying from the dust" (2 Ne. 33:13, fig. 13).[22] Poon's light-heartedly

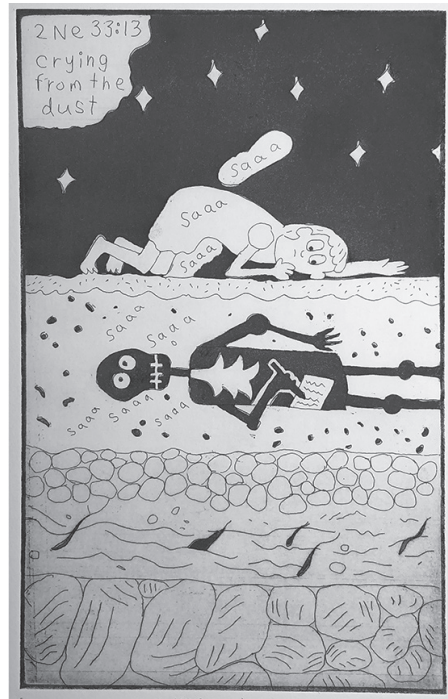21. Jorge Cocco Santángelo, "His Marks," Book of Mormon Art Catalog, https://book ofmormonartcatalog.org/catalog/his-marks/.

22. Annie Poon, "Whispers," *Book of Mormon Art Catalog,* https://bookofmormon artcatalog.org/catalog/whispers-book-of-mormon-series-12/.

macabre image shows Nephi—now a skeleton long since dead and buried underground—still clutching a stylus and writing away. Nephi's whispers of "saaa, saaa, saaa" float up from him to reach the listening ear of a living girl. With one ear pressed to the ground, the girl strains to hear this voice from the dust. In some ways, this image is emblematic of the Book of Mormon Art Catalog's mission to recover the past, index the present, and pave the way for the future. The work of translation is typically understood as dealing strictly with text. Yet in the thousands of images in the catalog, I see works of translation too. I see people wrestling with scripture, making decisions about how to understand a scene or idea, and finding novel and creative ways to express their beliefs.

Visual art has a powerful impact on how we think about scripture stories, doctrine, and history. As Richard Oman has remarked, "The visual image helps reinforce gospel teachings, helps sink the message into the mind and the heart."[23] Art can be a wonderful method of communication and a medium for revelation and understanding. There are two sides to this coin, though, since art has the potential to constrain interpretation and connection when only one kind of art, one kind of figural depiction, or one kind of reading is viewed. Access to a greater variety and volume of art through the Book of Mormon Art Catalog provides an opportunity for scholars, artists, and members of the Church to be enriched both aesthetically and spiritually, to consider familiar scenes with fresh eyes, and to find inspiration in the scriptures.

23. "Mormon Art Portrays History, Doctrine and Beliefs of Church," Newsroom, March 27, 2009, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, https://newsroom .churchofjesuschrist.org/article/mormon-art-portrays-history--doctrine-and-beliefs -of-church.

"He Is God; and He Is with Them"

Helaman 8:21–23 and Isaiah's Immanuel Prophecy as a Thematic Scriptural Concept

Matthew L. Bowen

The prophet Isaiah foretold to Ahaz and the house of David: "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isa. 7:14). Latter-day Saints often interpret and teach the "Immanuel" prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 as a simple, straightforward messianic prophecy with a single fulfillment in the birth of Jesus Christ.[1] Most pay little attention to the historical circumstances in which Isaiah gave the prophecy—namely, the Syro-Ephraimite crisis prior to the Assyrian invasion in the eighth century BCE. The idea of a more immediate, contemporary fulfillment is sometimes (wrongly) regarded as undermining the veracity of Matthew's statement of its fulfillment in Jesus (Matt. 1:22–23).

On the contrary, this earlier fulfillment should be acknowledged and understood by Christians in general and Latter-day Saints in particular rather than swept aside or ignored. Understanding the more immediate eighth-century-BCE fulfillment of the Immanuel prophecy is key to understanding *why* Matthew used it as part of his portrayal of Jesus's birth and the idea of "God with us" as a broader theme in his gospel. It is also key to understanding why the Immanuel prophecy remained important to the Nephites, especially after they united with

---

1. This tendency has been addressed at length recently by Jason R. Combs, "From King Ahaz's Sign to Christ Jesus: The 'Fulfillment' of Isaiah 7:14," in *Prophets and Prophecies of the Old Testament (The 46th Annual Brigham Young University Sidney B. Sperry Symposium),* ed. Aaron P. Schade, Brian M. Hauglid, and Kerry Muhlestein (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2017), 95–122.

the Mulochites (Mulekites).[2] Together, the historical-critical and messianic readings of the Immanuel theme in Isaiah 7:14; 8:8, 10 help us appreciate the strength of Isaiah's message in its immediate context and why that prophecy, as a doctrinal source, remained meaningful to later generations of Israelites.

Accordingly, I will discuss the Immanuel prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 as a prophetic promise rooted in the Davidic covenant and its language (see 2 Sam. 7:4–17, especially vv. 12–13). Isaiah's prophecy speaks to the preservation and continuance of the Davidic royal line in spite of existential threats to the house of David and in spite of the recalcitrance of Judah's Davidic king, Ahaz. I will explore later adaptations of the Immanuel prophecy, including Matthew's inclusion of Emmanuel (God with us) as a doctrinal and theological theme in his gospel. I will further endeavor to show how the Immanuel prophecy—with its doctrine of divine protection, preservation, and presence—had implications for the Nephites, not only at the time of the establishment of their society but also later, after the providential merging of the Nephite and Mulochite societies. Among the Mulochites lived many descendants of King David through Zedekiah, the last regnant king of Judah.

Two statements from Nephi$_2$, the son of Helaman, have direct reference to Isaiah's Immanuel theme in Isaiah 7:14; 8:8, 10 and the meaning of Immanuel, "God with us." The first statement comes after Nephi's citation of the testimonies regarding Christ's coming by Abraham, Zenos, Zenoch (Zenock),[3] Ezaias (Ezias),[4] Isaiah, and Jeremiah, who, Nephi notes, had also correctly predicted the destruction of Jerusalem. Nephi punctuates this witness list with the question, "O then why not the Son of God come according to his [Jeremiah's] prophecy?" (Hel. 8:20).[5] Nephi then

---

2. On Muloch versus Mulek as the preferred reading in the Book of Mormon, see Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part Three: Mosiah 17–Alma 20* (Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2006), 1464–70. Throughout this article, I will use Muloch, Mulochite, or Mulochites rather than Mulek, Mulekite, or Mulekites.

3. On Zenoch versus Zenock as the preferred reading in the Book of Mormon, see Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part One: Title Page, Witness Statements, 1 Nephi 1–2 Nephi 10* (Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2004), 408–10; Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part Five: Alma 56–3 Nephi 18* (Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2008), 3022–23.

4. Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants, Part Five,* 3022–23.

5. Citations of the Book of Mormon will generally follow Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2009).

asks, "And now will you dispute that Jerusalem was not destroyed? Will ye say that the sons of Zedekiah were not slain, **all except it were Muloch?** Yea, and do ye not behold that **the seed of Zedekiah are *with us*** [Heb. ʿ*immānû*] and they were driven out of the land of Jerusalem?" (Hel. 8:21; emphasis in all scriptural citations is mine). Nephi thus cites the miraculous preservation of the Davidic seed through Zedekiah among the population of Zarahemla—"with us"—as proof of the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem. That fulfillment, on analogy, had implications for the imminent fulfillment of Jeremiah's "prophecy" and those of earlier prophets (for example, Isaiah) concerning the coming of the Son of God. Moreover, Nephi invokes Isaiah's onomastic sign concerning a royal Davidic son prophetically named Immanuel ("with us is God") as proof of the Lord's power—not just to preserve the Davidic seed of Zedekiah but to fulfill the promise regarding the coming of the Son of God through the Davidic line ("the seed of David").[6]

The second statement, two verses later, even more clearly invokes the meaning of the name Immanuel: "And behold, **he is *God*** [in Hebrew, *hûʾ (hā) ʾĕlōhîm*]; **and he is *with them*** [*wĕhûʾ ʿimmām*],[7] and he did manifest himself unto them, that they were redeemed by him. And they gave unto him glory because of that which is to come" (Hel. 8:23). Nephi here characterizes the Son of God as "God"—that is, Jehovah—who "is with" their ancestors—that is, "almost all their fathers" who "testified of the coming of Christ," just as he was with the house of David anciently. This article will further explore how both statements reveal some of the nuances of how the Nephites understood the Immanuel prophecy. Lastly, I will show how Jesus's physical presence "with" the Lamanites, Nephites, and Mulochites in 3 Nephi 11–26 stands as the ultimate earthly expression of the "Immanuel" concept. That supreme Christophany included his institution of the sacrament as a reminder of his resurrected physical presence among them at the temple in Bountiful and his continuing spiritual presence "with" them afterward (see 3 Ne. 18). Jesus instituted these symbols among a people who had a familiarity with and a lengthy interpretive history of the prophecies of Isaiah, as had Jesus's Jewish Galilean disciples.

---

6. On the covenant dimension of the collocation "seed of David," see, for example, 1 Kings 11:39 (and JST 1 Kgs. 11:39) and Jeremiah 33:22. On "seed of David" as pertaining particularly to Jesus, see John 7:42; Romans 1:3; and 2 Timothy 2:8.

7. ʿ*immām*: see, for example, Genesis 18:16; 29:9; Leviticus 26:41; Deuteronomy 29:25; Joshua 4:8; 20:4; Judges 1:22; 1 Samuel 10:6; 14:21; 17:13; 25:16; 2 Samuel 3:22; 15:36; 1 Kings 11:18; 2 Kings 6:33; Isaiah 34:7; Joel 3:2; Zechariah 10:5; Psalm 83:8; and Job 21:8.

"Immanuel"

In terms of discernible meaning, Immanuel easily constitutes one of the most transparent names in the entire Hebrew Bible and ancient Israelite onomasticon. Immanuel, literally "with us is El/God," consists of the preposition ʿ*imm*- ("with"), followed by the possessive suffix -*ānû* ("us") and the divine title/descriptor ʾ*ēl* (El, "God," or "god"). As Bruce Waltke and Michael P. O'Connor note, ʿ*im(m)* "expresses a variety of comitative relations ('with'). The most common sense involves accompaniment (fellowship and companionship, person + person; 'with')."[8]

Even more than "with," the preposition ʿ*im(m)*—derived from the Semitic root ʿ*m(m)*—denotes "in company with, together with."[9] It "expresses communal action or action in company."[10] Thus, "Immanuel" more precisely conveys the sense "God in company with us" or "God together with us." Waltke and O'Connor further note, "The locus of psychological interest can be marked with ʿ*m* ('with, in')."[11] As an example of the latter, they cite Numbers 14:24,[12] which has relevance for the present discussion: "But my servant Caleb, because he had **another spirit with** [ʿ*immô*] him, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land whereinto he went; and his seed [*wĕzarʿô*] shall possess it."

The extrabiblical name Immanujah ("Yahweh is with us") is attested with both the plene[13] spelling ʿ*mnwyhw* on a seal[14] and the defective spelling[15] ʿ*mnyhw* in the Elephantine Papyri ("Jehoeli the daughter of Immanujah") and on a seal.[16] The name Immanujah confirms that

---

8. Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 219.

9. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament,* 2 vols. (Leiden, Neth.: Brill, 2001), 1:839.

10. Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon,* 839.

11. Waltke and O'Connor, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax,* 219.

12. Waltke and O'Connor, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax,* 219.

13. "Plene" denotes a "fuller" spelling with the use of vowels to aid pronunciation.

14. G. I. Davies, *Ancient Hebrew Inscriptions: Corpus and Concordance,* 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 1:462. On ʿ*mnwyhw,* see Nahman Avigad, "Two Seals of Women and Other Hebrew Seals," *Eretz-Israel: Archaeological, Historical, and Geographical Studies* 20 (1989): 90.

15. "Defective" denotes a spelling without additional vowels to aid pronunciation.

16. See, for example, M. Sprengling, "The Aramaic Papyri of Elephantine in English—Continued," *American Journal of Theology* 22, no. 3 (1918): 357. On the ʿ*mnyhw* seal, see Nahman Avigad, "Hebrew Seals and Sealings and Their Significance for Biblical Research," in *Supplements to Vetus Testamentum,* vol. 40, ed. J. A. Emerton (1988), 14. Avigad transliterates ʿ*mnwyhw* ʾ*Immanuyahu.* In contrast to John A. Tvedtnes, John Gee, and Matthew Roper, "Book of Mormon Names Attested in Ancient Hebrew

Immanuel does not exist in an onomastic vacuum. In other words, it confirms that Immanuel did not constitute an onomastic anomaly employed simply as prophetic rhetoric. Immanuel conforms to basic principles of Hebrew nomenclature.

"God Is with Us": A Sign of Preservation to Ahaz and the House of David

Isaiah 7 immediately describes the geopolitical threat that faced Ahaz and the kingdom of Judah during Ahaz's reign: "And it came to pass in the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, that Rezin the king of Syria, and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, went up toward Jerusalem to war against it, but could not prevail against it. And it was told the house of David, saying, Syria is confederate with Ephraim. And his heart [that is, Ahaz's heart] was moved, and the heart of his people, as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind" (vv. 1–2). Rezin of Syria/Aram and Pekah of the Northern Kingdom of Israel had suddenly, but unsuccessfully, attacked Jerusalem. Although this invasion did not achieve its ultimate objective, Ahaz, the house of David (royal family), and the kingdom of Judah were understandably terrified by this sudden, dramatic turn of events.

The Deuteronomistic historian who wrote 2 Kings states that Ahaz was relatively young and inexperienced when he inherited the throne from his father, Jotham: "Twenty years old was Ahaz when he began to reign, and reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem, and did not that which was right in the sight of the Lord his God, like David his father" (2 Kgs. 16:2; see also 2 Chr. 28:1). This writer also characterizes Ahaz as an idolater: "But he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, yea, and made his son to pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the heathen, whom the Lord cast out from before the children of Israel. And he sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places, and on the hills, and under every green tree" (2 Kgs. 16:3–4).

The Lord tasked Isaiah with persuading Ahaz to have faith and to put his trust in the Lord in the face of the combined Syrian-Ephraimite threat:

Inscriptions," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9, no. 1 (2000): 40–51, 78–79, I do not see ʿ*mnyhw* as the Book of Mormon name Ammonihah. The plene spelling ʿ*mnyhw* confirms this. And I concur with Paul Y. Hoskisson, "It Is OK Not to Have Every Answer: The Book of Mormon Onomastic Ending *-(i)hah*," *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 18, no. 1 (2009): 48–55, that the significance of the *-ihah* ending remains unclear.

> Then said the Lord unto Isaiah, Go forth now to meet Ahaz, thou, and Shear-jashub ["A-remnant-shall-return"] thy son, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool in the highway of the fuller's field; and say unto him, Take heed [*hiššāmēr*], and be quiet [*wĕhašqēṭ*]; fear not, neither be fainthearted for the two tails of these smoking firebrands, for the fierce anger of Rezin with Syria, and of the son of Remaliah [that is, Pekah]. Because Syria, Ephraim, and the son of Remaliah, have taken evil counsel against thee, saying, Let us go up against Judah, and vex it, and let us make a breach therein for us, and set a king in the midst of it, even the son of Tabeal: thus saith the Lord God, It shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass. (Isa. 7:3–7)

Here Isaiah discloses the intent of the Syrian and Ephraimite attack on Jerusalem: to depose Ahaz as king of Judah and to install a man contemptuously named only as "the son of Tabeal." Rezin and Pekah intended to install the son of Tabeal as a puppet-king who would join them in their rebellion against the Assyrians, the dominant regional superpower. This "evil counsel" amounted to an existential threat against the Davidic dynasty.

Rather than remain faithful to Yahweh and his covenant in the face of the combined Syrian-Ephraimite threat (hence the Lord's declaration "If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established" (Isa. 7:9), or alternatively, "If you do not have faith, it is because you have not been faithful" [translation mine]), Ahaz desired a covenant or treaty with Assyria. Deuteronomy 7:2 forbade Israel to make covenants with the Canaanite nations ("thou shalt make [cut] no covenant with them"). Isaiah seems to have had a similar prohibition in mind in Isaiah 28 when he excoriated Judah's covenant with "death" and "hell" (quasi-deities Mot and Sheol, probably symbolic of Ahaz's covenant with Assyria[17]): "We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement"; and when he prophesied that "your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand" (Isa. 28:15, 18).

To dissuade Ahaz from this course, the Lord spoke to Ahaz through Isaiah again and took the unusual step of offering Ahaz a sign—any sign that Ahaz could possibly hope to see—as demonstrative proof that the Lord would protect Ahaz and the Davidic dynasty without Assyrian help: "Ask thee a sign of the Lord thy God; ask it either in the depth, or in the height above" (Isa. 7:11). Ahaz responded with faux humility and piety: "I will not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord" (Isa. 7:12; compare

---

17. See, for example, Nathan Mastnjak, "Judah's Covenant with Assyria in Isaiah 28," *Vetus Testamentum* 64, no. 3 (2014): 465–83.

Deut. 6:16). Ahaz did not ask for a sign because he knew it would obligate him to pursue a different path than the one he had already chosen: a vassal covenant/treaty with Assyria.

It is significant that the Lord's response to Ahaz's refusal was not simply addressed to Ahaz himself but to the "house of David": "And he said, Hear ye now [*šimʿû-nāʾ*], O house of David; is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also?" (Isa. 7:13). The plural grammatical forms further suggest *the sign that followed was also directed more broadly to the "house of David"* and not just Ahaz himself.

Isaiah declares that the Lord is going to give the "house of David" a sign anyway—a sign indicative of the Lord's intent to preserve the house of David, but also with negative consequences for Judah (see below): "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you [*lākem*] a sign; behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel [*ʿimmānû ʾēl*]" (Isa. 7:14; 2 Ne. 17:14). Note Isaiah's additional use of the preposition + second-person masculine plural suffix pronoun "(to) you" here to address the house of David. The child "Immanuel" would constitute a sign to the house of David that "God" would be "with" them to protect the Davidic line in spite of Ahaz's own recalcitrance and determination to pursue a covenant/treaty with Tiglath-pileser and the Assyrians in the face of the Syro-Ephraimite threat (2 Kgs. 16:5–7) and later in the face of an armed invasion from the Assyrians themselves.

Notwithstanding Isaiah's prophetic pronouncement, Ahaz continued to pursue his own will rather than Yahweh's will and the prophet's counsel. He became a vassal to the king of Assyria by a vassal covenant/treaty: "So Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, saying, **I am thy servant and thy son**: come up, and save me out of the hand of the king of Syria, and out of the hand of the king of Israel, which rise up against me. And Ahaz took the silver and gold that was found in the house of the Lord, and in the treasures of the king's house, and sent it for a present to the king of Assyria" (2 Kgs. 16:7–8; compare 2 Chron. 28:16).

The verses that immediately follow the giving of the sign in Isaiah 7:14 confirm an immediate eighth-century-BCE historical fulfillment of this prophecy in connection with the Syro-Ephraimite crisis and subsequent Assyrian imperial aggression: "Butter and honey shall he [Immanuel] eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good. For before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings" (Isa. 7:15–16). In other words, this prophecy would find fulfillment while Immanuel was still young.

Historical questions about Isaiah 7:14 tend to revolve around identities: Who was *hāʿalmâ,* "the virgin"? And who was the child "Immanuel"? Robert Alter suggests that *hāʿalmâ* "might be the prophet's wife because there is precedent for prophets begetting symbolic sons, or she might be a woman in the house of David."[18] Joseph Jensen recommends that the *ʿalmâ* "referred to is a wife of Ahaz, and the son to be born would be a child of Ahaz; as such he would be a guarantee of the continuation of the Davidic dynasty, to which perpetuity has been promised (2 Sam. 7) and from which great things have been expected."[19] The identity of the eighth-century-BCE "Immanuel" is even more problematic. Some scholars see Hezekiah as the subject of the divine son/royal figure prophecies of Isaiah 7–12. However, if the Deuteronomistic chronology of 2 Kings 16:2; 18:1–2 is correct, we can categorically rule out Hezekiah.[20] J. F. A. Sawyer writes, "The chronological problems are virtually insuperable, as Hezekiah must have been already in his twenties."[21]

If Jensen is correct in his identification, "Immanuel" would have been a royal Davidic son, his name constituting a "sign" that "God" was "with" the house of David and the kingdom of Judah in fulfillment of divine promises (see, for example, 2 Sam. 7:13, 15–16 and Ps. 89:4 [Masoretic Text v. 5]). In fact, the name amounts to an expression of faith such as Ahaz, the house of David, and the kingdom of Judah *should have had* in the Lord: "God is with us!" We note the similarity of the name Immanuel and its meaning to Nathan's statement to David, "The Lord is with thee [*yhwh immāk*]" (2 Sam. 7:3), and the Lord's statement to David, "And I was with thee [*wāʾehyeh ʿimmĕkā*]" (2 Sam. 7:9; compare also Ps. 89:24 [Masoretic Text v. 25]). It is reasonable within the given evidence to see the eighth-century-BCE "Immanuel" as a probable son of Ahaz and thus a "son of David," as Jesus Christ would be later. In any case, Immanuel as an omen ultimately "means that the dynasty of the Davidic kings still has a future."[22]

18. Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible, Volume 2: Prophets* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2019), 645.

19. Joseph Jensen, "Immanuel," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary,* ed. David Noel Freedman, 5 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 3:393.

20. See, for example, John Gee, "How Not to Read Isaiah," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 37 (2020): 34–35.

21. J. F. A. Sawyer, "Immanuel," in *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible,* 5 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 3:24.

22. Hans Wildberger, *Isaiah 1–12: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 313.

Ahaz's and Judah's refusing to have faith in the Lord during the Syro-Ephraimite crisis and putting their trust in the Assyrians had negative long-term consequences. Jensen writes, "Nevertheless, because Ahaz had refused to believe and to repose his faith in the Lord alone, the trust he had placed in Assyria would occasion terrible devastation for Judah."[23] Isaiah further predicted,

> Forasmuch as this people refuseth the waters of Shiloah that go softly, and rejoice in Rezin and Remaliah's son; now therefore, behold, the Lord bringeth up upon them the waters of the river, strong and many, even the king of Assyria, and all his glory: and he shall come up over all his channels, and go over all his banks: and he shall pass through Judah; he shall overflow and go over, he shall reach even to the neck; and the stretching out of his wings shall fill the breadth of thy land, **O Immanuel** [ʿimmānû ʾēl]. (Isa. 8:6–8; 2 Ne. 18:6–8)

In addition to cultic/religious compromises, vassalage to Assyria would mean submission and payment to Assyria in perpetuity. When payment stopped, as it did under Hezekiah, the Assyrians came calling.

"Take counsel together, and it shall come to nought; speak the word, and it shall not stand: for **God is with us** [ʿimmānû ʾēl]" (Isa. 8:10; 2 Ne. 18:10). Isaiah foretold not only the failure of the Syro-Ephraimite confederation but also Ahaz's ill-advised alliance with the Assyrians. Isaiah also foresaw that the Davidic dynasty would survive in spite of Ahaz and future unworthy representatives (for example, Manasseh, Amon, and others).

That this doctrine had perhaps (then) present appeal and staying power is evident from Psalms 46, one of the hymns of the Jerusalem temple,[24] which twice invokes the Immanuel doctrine: "The Lord of hosts is with us [ʿimmānû]; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah" (Ps. 46:7, 11 [Masoretic Text vv. 8, 12]. As expressed in this psalm, the Immanuel doctrine conveys the notion of divine protection and preservation for the Lord's covenant people.

Even after the catastrophe of the Babylonian exile, the return of some Jews to Jerusalem, and the rebuilding of the temple, the prophet Zechariah declared, "Thus saith the Lord of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go

---

23. Jensen, "Immanuel," 393.

24. Margaret Barker, *The Gate of Heaven: The History and Symbolism of the Temple in Jerusalem* (Sheffield, U.K.: Sheffield Phoenix, 2008), 45.

with you: for we have heard that **God is with you** [*ʾĕlōhîm ʿimmākem*]"
(Zech. 8:23; compare Zech. 10:5). Matthew may have viewed Zechariah's
prophecy as an extension of the Immanuel prophecy, just as he viewed
Zechariah 9:9, "Behold, thy King cometh unto thee" (Matt. 21:5), as a
fulfillment of the Immanuel prophecy (see especially Matt. 1:23; 28:20).

"Emmanuel, Which Being Interpreted Is, God with Us": Matthew's Interpretation and Application of the Immanuel Prophecy

It would be difficult to overstate the importance of Isaiah 7:14 and the
name "Immanuel" for Matthew's depiction of Jesus. The traditional
Christian interpretation of Isaiah 7:14, of course, originates with Mat-
thew's incorporation of the Immanuel prophecy into his narrative of
Jesus's birth and his declaration of its fulfillment:

> But while he [Joseph] thought on these things, behold, the angel of the
> Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David,
> fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in
> her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt
> call his name **JESUS** [*Iēsoun* < Hebrew/Aramaic *yēšûaʿ*]: for he shall save
> [*sōsei* < Heb. *yôšîaʿ*] his people from their sins. Now all this was done,
> that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet,
> saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son,
> and they shall call his name **Emmanuel**, which being interpreted is, **God
> with us** [*meth' hēmōn ho theos*]. (Matt. 1:20–23)

The Greek text of Matthew follows the spelling of the name as
Emmanouēl from the LXX (Septuagint) version of Isaiah 7:14 and the
precise wording of LXX Isaiah 8:8, where the name is rendered by its
meaning *meth' hēmōn ho theos* ("with us [is] God"). Also notable is the
wording of LXX Isaiah 8:10, where the meaning of the name Immanuel
finds expression in slogan form: *hoti meth' hēmōn kyrios ho theos* ("for
with us [is] Lord-the-God"). One implication of Matthew's use of the
LXX text is that he sees Jesus as the *kyrios ho theos* from Isaiah 8:10.

Much recent historical-critical analysis has tended to focus on Mat-
thew's apparent severance of Isaiah 7:14 from its immediate historical
setting within the Syro-Ephraimite crisis without any further attempt
to fathom how the gospel writer *understood its historical implications for
the house of David and its divine preservation* up to the time of Jesus. The
text of Isaiah 7 twice emphasizes the importance of the events described
therein as they pertained to "the house of David" (Isa. 7:2, 13). Besides
the title "Christ" (*christos*), the first title that Matthew uses to describe

Jesus is "son of David." Famously, Matthew's entire genealogy for Jesus with its three engineered[25] sets of fourteen generations constitutes a gematria[26] (14 = ד [daleth = 4] + ו [waw = 6] + ד [daleth = 4] = דוד [DVD]) that emphasizes the strength of Jesus's connection to David and the Davidic dynasty.

With the phrase *touto de holon gegonen* ("now all this was done" or "all this happened"), Matthew cites every foregoing detail mentioned in Matthew 1, including the genealogy and Jesus's naming in terms of *yšʿ/sōsei,* as contributing to the ultimate, overarching fulfillment of Isaiah's Immanuel prophecy. A detail that exegetes often overlook is that Matthew would have understood the historical implications of the Immanuel prophecy for the divine preservation of the house of David: that the Davidic royal line was destined to continue according to divine covenant. He includes Ahaz in, rather than omits him from, his genealogy for Jesus (see Matt. 1:9). Matthew also understood that the royal line continued despite its political disenthronement when Nebuchadnezzar II ended Zedekiah's reign at the time of the Babylonian captivity. Matthew's expansive view of Isaiah 7:14 thus reflects the outlook of Jeremiah 33:17–21.

Matthew expands the theological symbol of the name Immanuel from "God with us"—a sign that Yahweh was "with" Jerusalem and the house of David to preserve them from annihilation—into the more powerful idea of "God with us" in the flesh. As New Testament exegetes have noted, Emmanuel or "God with us" becomes an important theme for Matthew's depiction of Jesus,[27] surfacing in several additional key texts in his gospel.

Matthew first recalls the "Emmanuel" birth fulfillment when Jesus responds to his disciples who have failed to heal a boy described as

---

25. Aaron M. Gale observes, "To keep the generational pattern intact at fourteen, Matthew is forced to omit five kings: Ahaziah, Joash, Amaziah, Jehoahaz, and Jehoiakim. In addition, the third and final set contains thirteen names, which may suggest that the fourteenth and final generation is that of the church." "The Gospel According to Matthew," in *The Jewish Annotated New Testament,* 2nd ed., ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 11.

26. Gematria is an ancient Jewish hermeneutical technique (or method of interpretation) that exploits the numerical value of words and names, since letters were used as numerals in ancient Hebrew (as in ancient Greek and Latin). The name David in Hebrew numerals—D + W [or V] +D (4 + 6 + 4)—adds up to fourteen. Matthew's genealogy for Jesus is widely recognized as a New Testament example of this practice.

27. See, for example, David D. Kupp, *Matthew's Emmanuel: Divine Presence and God's People in the First Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 138–219.

selēniazetai (usually understood today as "to experience epileptic sei-
zures, [to] *be an epileptic*"[28] rather than "to act like a lunatic"): "Then
Jesus answered and said, O faithless and perverse generation, **how long
shall I be with you** [*eōs pote met' hymōn esomai*]? how long shall I suf-
fer you? bring him hither to me" (Matt. 17:17). Regarding this incident,
David Kupp writes, "This attempt by the disciples to heal the epileptic
boy constitutes the first independent step of ministry, in line with their
Matthew 10 commissioning. Their failure again points out their inability
yet to undertake the larger mission task."[29] Although Jesus is physically
present "with" them, that is not yet sufficient in itself to generate the faith
required to perform what their mission will later require.

Kupp further observes, "Jesus' exasperated 'How much longer must
I be with you?' underlies his dilemma as their leader and teacher: when
would they learn the correlation between his mission, Emmanuel per-
sona, and their faith? When would they understand that his being
μεθ' ὑμῶν [*meth' hymon*[30]] with divine, messianic power is more truly
empowering than their requirement for his physical intervention?"[31]
We should note here that the inclusion of Jesus's statement reemphasizes
the point made explicit at the beginning of Matthew's Gospel: that Jesus
fulfilled Isaiah's Immanuel prophecy in an even more precise way as God
"with" his people—especially his disciples—in the flesh.

At the same time, Jesus hinted that his physical presence with them
would soon come to an end. Nevertheless, Jesus promised his continued
presence with his disciples as they would gather and meet together in his
name: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I
in the midst of them [*ekei eimi en mesō autōn*]" (Matt. 18:20). This prom-
ise can also be viewed as an ecclesiastical[32] expression of the Immanuel/
Emmanuel idea, especially since it anticipates its ritual expression in his
institution of the sacrament.

---

28. Walter Bauer and others, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and
Other Early Christian Literature,* rev. and ed. by Fredrick William Danker, 3rd ed. (Chi-
cago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. "σεληνιάζομαι," emphasis original, bolding
removed. Originally it meant "to be moonstruck." They further note, "In the ancient
world epileptic seizure was associated with [the] transcendent powers of the moon."

29. Kupp, *Matthew's Emmanuel,* 84.

30. *meth' hymon* = "with you" (plural).

31. Kupp, *Matthew's Emmanuel,* 84.

32. Jesus's promise in Matthew 18:20 is made in the immediate narratological context
of the only two mentions of "church" (*ekklēsia*) in any of the Synoptic Gospels: Matthew
16:18 and 18:17.

In fact, the next manifestation of Matthew's Emmanuel theme occurs in his account of Jesus's institution of the ordinance of the sacrament as an appropriation of elements of the Passover commemoration:

> And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new testament [*touto gar estin to haima mou tēs diathēkēs*], which is shed for many for the remission of sins. . . . I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new **with you** [*meth' hymōn*] in my Father's kingdom. (Matt. 26:26–29)

Matthew here incorporates Jesus's institution of the sacrament, including the wine as representing "my blood of the new testament," into his Emmanuel theme by mentioning the Savior's promise to partake of sacramental wine "new with [them] in [the] Father's kingdom." The sacrament offers us the most sublime ritual expression of the Immanuel idea (see further below).

The ordinance of the sacrament introduced on this sacred occasion, on at least one level, represents "the earnest [*arrabōn,* i.e., 'a "pledge or deposit guaranteeing what is to come"'[33]] of the Spirit" (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; see also Eph. 1:14, "is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession"). In other words, it constitutes access to the gift of the Holy Ghost, which the Savior promised his disciples that very same night in lieu of his physical presence (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13–14; compare John 14:16–18), but it also points "us" forward to the future reality in which he will always be physically present "with them" (compare 1 Thes. 4:17).

The final instance of Matthew's Emmanuel theme—and the closing bracket of Gospel-length *inclusio* that stretches back to Matthew 1:23—occurs as part of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:16–20). At the conclusion of the commission, Jesus declared: "Lo, I am with you [*egō meth' hymōn eimi*] alway[s], even unto the end of the world. Amen." Kupp writes, "If there is anything retrospective about the christology of

---

33. William D. Mounce, ed., *Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2006), 520. *Arrabōn* represents a Semitic loanword into Greek. Compare Hebrew ʿ*ērābôn* in Bauer and others, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament,* s.v. "ἀρραβν." Bauer and coauthors gloss *arrabōn* as "payment of part of a purchase price in advance, *first installment, deposit, down payment, pledge*" (emphasis original, bolding removed).

[Matthew 1:23] it begins with and stems from the promise of [Matthew 28:20], as part of the author's internal design of inclusio."[34]

The syntax of Matthew's Greek paints a verbal picture: I-with-you-am. Jesus will not only be "with" the disciples, but he will be *around* them. This "departure from ordinary word order," including a "separation of words usually belonging together," constitutes a rhetorical figure known as *hyperbaton*.[35] And it should pass without notice that the separated words, *egō . . . eimi,* comprise the divine identification "I am" from Exodus 3:14 used so abundantly throughout the Gospel of John to identify Jesus as Jehovah.

When considering Jesus's promise "I am with you alway[s]" (Matt. 28:20) in connection with the institution of the sacrament (Matt. 26:26–29) and the future promise of partaking thereof "with" his disciples, Latter-day Saints can better comprehend the power of the covenantal promise in the sacrament prayers "that they may always have his Spirit to be with them" (D&C 20:77; see below). For Matthew, the name *Emmanouēl* was not just a sign that "God" was "with" the house of David in guaranteeing the temporal surety of David's political dynasty in the face of the Ephraimite and Syrian "confederacy" against Ahaz. Neither was it simply a sign that "God" was "with" the kingdom of Judah in the face of the Assyrian threat. For Matthew and his depiction of Jesus, *Emmanouēl* was the sign that literally "God is with us" in the flesh as David's rightful descendant ("Son of David"), a title used in Matthew's Gospel far more than any of the other Gospel accounts.[36]

Early Nephite Interpretations of the Immanuel Prophecy

Nephi₁ incorporated substantial portions of Isaiah's writings into his personal record on his "small" plates (for example, Isaiah 48–49 = 1 Nephi 20–21; Isaiah 49:22–52:2 in Jacob's sermon as preserved in 2 Nephi 6–10; Isaiah 2–14 = 2 Nephi 12–24; Nephi's midrash of Isaiah 29 in 2 Nephi 27; and so forth). In an insightful study, John Gee and Matthew Roper explored how Nephi and the earliest Nephites would have, in Nephi's own words, "liken[ed] all scriptures unto us, that it might be for our

---

34. Kupp, *Matthew's Emmanuel,* 175.

35. Richard A. Lanham, *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms,* 2nd ed. (Berkley: University of California Press, 1991), 86.

36. Matthew 1:1; 1:20 (in reference to Joseph); 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30–31; 21:9, 15; 22:42. See Jack Dean Kingsbury, "The Title 'Son of David' in Matthew's Gospel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 95, no. 4 (1976): 591–602.

profit and learning" (1 Ne. 19:23). As a major part of their study, they answer the question of how Nephi and his people might have "likened" the political situation in the Syro-Ephraimite crisis laid out in Isaiah 7 to their own circumstances. They write:

> Apply [Isaiah 7] now to Nephi's day. Within forty years of Lehi's departure from Jerusalem (see 2 Nephi 5:34), perhaps after thirty years in the promised land (see 1 Nephi 17:4), Nephi notes that "we had already had wars [i.e., large-scale conflicts] and contentions with our brethren" (2 Nephi 5:34). In his ambition to gain power and assert his claims to rulership, Laman, leader of "the people who [are] now called Lamanites" (2 Nephi 5:14), has made war on another ruler of Israelite descent, Nephi and his people (see 2 Nephi 5:1–3, 14, 19, 34). Perhaps frightened by the superior numbers of their enemies, the people are counseled to trust in the Lord, since those who fight against Zion will end up licking the dust of the feet of the covenant people of the Lord (see 2 Nephi 6:13; 10:16). If there were others in the land, it would also help explain why many of Nephi's people had difficulty understanding Isaiah, although not all of them did (see 2 Nephi 25:1–6). Nephi's emphasis on the universal nature of God's love is even more meaningful if written and taught to a people grappling with issues of ethnic and social diversity. "And he inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile" (2 Nephi 26:33). Nephites would understand Jews to be those who came out from Jerusalem, yet the additional reference to Gentiles and heathens would make sense to a Nephite only if there were others in the land.[37]

In other words, the Nephites may have "likened" Pekah, the king of Israel, to Laman, and others in the land (who allied themselves with Laman) to Rezin, while likening Nephi to the Davidic king. If Gee and Roper are correct, Nephi—though not of Davidic descent (as far as we know)—adopted it as a promise of protection for himself, as an Israelite ruler, and the kings that reigned after him (see Jacob 1:10–11). Nephi's adopted Immanuel doctrine would have found easy correlation with the "dynastic" promise to Lehi and Nephi (or "Lehitic Covenant")[38] that

---

37. John Gee and Matthew Roper, "'I Did Liken All Scriptures unto Us': Early Nephite Understandings of Isaiah and Implications for 'Others' in the Land," in *The Fulness of the Gospel: Foundational Teachings from the Book of Mormon,* ed. Camille Fronk Olson and others (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2003), 59–60.

38. On the designation "Lehitic Covenant," see Joseph M. Spencer, *An Other Testament: On Typology,* 2nd ed. (Provo, Utah: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious

finds thematic expression in Nephi's writings and later throughout the Book of Mormon: "Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper in the land. But inasmuch as ye will not keep his commandments, ye shall be cut off from his presence" (for example, 2 Ne. 1:20).[39] Nephi's statement in 2 Nephi 5:11, "And **the Lord was with us** and **we did prosper** exceedingly," constitutes superb evidence that such was the case (compare further 2 Ne. 5:13).

That Nephi and his successors saw a messianic dimension in the Immanuel prophecy seems clear from the language in Nephi's report of his vision of the tree of life and Alma$_2$'s later allusion to Isaiah 7:14. In describing the tree of life and the birth of the Son of God that he saw in vision, Nephi employs the language of Isaiah 7:14: "I beheld a virgin [(*hā*)*ʿalmâ*], and she was exceeding fair and white" (1 Ne. 11:13). When Nephi's angelic guide asks what he sees, he responds: "**A virgin** [compare Heb. (*hā*)*ʿalmâ*] most beautiful and fair above all other virgins" (1 Ne. 11:15). Nephi reports that his angelic guide subsequently identified the virgin thus: "And he said unto me: Behold, **the virgin** [Heb. *hāʿalmâ*] which thou seest is **the mother of *God*** [compare Heb. *ʾel*] **after the manner of the flesh**" (1 Ne. 11:18).

When Nephi sees the virgin's divine son, he reports it in the language of Isaiah 7:14 and Isaiah 9:6: "And I looked and beheld the virgin [Heb. *hāʿalmâ*] again, bearing **a child** [Heb. *yeled*] in her arms. And the angel said unto me: Behold the Lamb of God, yea, even **the Eternal Father**" (1 Ne. 11:20–21). The angel's characterization of the Messiah as a "child" bearing the divine name-title "the Eternal Father" appears to come straight from Isaiah 9:6: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, The mighty God [*ʾēl gibbôr*], **The everlasting Father** [*ʾăbi-ʿad*], The Prince of Peace."[40]

Scholarship, 2016), 84–90; Kimberly M. Berkey, "'Retain All Their Oaths': Lehitic Covenant and Secret Combinations in Alma 37," in *Give Ear to My Words: Text and Context of Alma 36–42 (The 48th Annual Brigham Young University Sidney B. Sperry Symposium),* ed. Kerry M. Hull, Nicholas J. Frederick, and Hank R. Smith (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2019), 411–32.

39. See 1 Nephi 2:20; 2 Nephi 4:4; 5:11, 13; Jarom 1:9; Omni 1:6; Mosiah 1:7; 2:22, 31; 9:9; 10:5; 12:15; 21:16; 23:20; 27:7; Alma 1:31; 9:13; 36:1, 30; 37:13; 38:1; 48:15, 25; 50:18, 20; 62:48, 51; Helaman 3:20; 4:13, 15; 12:1–2; 3 Nephi 6:4; and 4 Nephi 1:17. Compare 1 Nephi 13:15, 20; Ether 6:28; 7:26; 9:16; and 10:16.

40. I have removed the comma from the KJV translation "Wonderful, Counsellor," which is not required by the Hebrew text.

Alma similarly relies on the language of Isaiah 7:14 when he describes Mary giving birth to Jesus in his speech to the people in the land/city of Gideon: "And behold, he shall be born of Mary at Jerusalem, which is the land of our forefathers, **she being a virgin** [Heb. ʾalmâ], a precious and chosen vessel, who shall be overshadowed and **conceive** by the power of the Holy Ghost **and bring forth a son,** yea, even **the Son of God**" (Alma 7:10). Alma immediately juxtaposes his paraphrase of Isaiah 7:14 with a reference to[41] and exegesis of Isaiah 53:3–5 in Alma 7:11–13. Alma's use of Isaiah 7:14 and 53:3–5 together illustrates just how thoroughly enmeshed the prophecies of Isaiah were with Nephite Christology.

Moroni₁ cites to Lamanite leader Zerahemnah the Nephites' covenant faithfulness in connection with the Immanuel doctrine as the reason for their preservation in the face of overwhelming opposition:

> But now ye behold that **the Lord is with us** [compare Heb. ʾimmānû yhwh; compare Isaiah 7:14; 8:8; 8:10]. And ye behold that he hath delivered you into our hands. And now I would that ye should understand that this is done unto us because of our religion and **our faith** [compare Heb. ʾĕmûnâ] in Christ. And now ye see that ye cannot destroy this **our faith.** Now ye see that **this is** *the true faith* of God. Yea, ye see that God will support and keep and preserve us **so long as we are faithful unto him and unto our faith** and our religion. And **never will the Lord suffer that we shall be destroyed except we should fall into transgression and deny our faith.** (Alma 44:3–4)

We here recall Isaiah's words to Ahaz and the house of David in Isaiah 7:9: "If ye will not believe [ʾim lōʾ taʾămînû], surely ye shall not be established [kî lōʾ tēʾāmēnû]." Moroni asserts that the Lord had been "with" the Nephites and had established or confirmed them because of their "faith" and "faithfulness" (Heb. ʾĕmûnâ) vis-à-vis the Lamanites and apostate Nephites like (possibly) Zerahemnah. Moroni's statement is particularly appropriate and ironic if he understood that the name Zerahemnah denoted "seed of faithfulness" (zeraʿ, "seed" + a contracted form of hāʾĕmûnâ[42] [compare shortened form, ʾĕmunâ],[43]

---

41. See Thomas A. Wayment, "The Hebrew Text of Alma 7:11," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14, no. 1 (2005): 98–103.

42. For ʾĕmûnâ with definite article—hāʾĕmûnâ—see Isaiah 11:5; Jeremiah 7:28 (KJV renders it "truth").

43. For the shortened form ʾĕmunâ, see 1 Samuel 26:23; 2 Kings 12:15; and Psalms 143:1. Compare the cognate noun ʾēmun (as in lōʾ-ʾēmun, "no faith," "no faithfulness") and Helaman's statement at the outset of his letter: "Behold, two thousand of the sons of those men which Ammon brought down out of the land of Nephi—now ye have known

"faithfulness") or "[the] faithful descendant." It is even more poignant and ironic if Zerahemnah himself was a descendant of Zarahemla and Muloch (see below). Mormon's inclusion of this episode, including the repetition and wordplay involving ʾĕmûnâ and Zerahemnah, helps modern readers appreciate what Nephi's adoption of the Immanuel doctrine in connection with the Lord's covenant with Lehi meant over time in Lamanite-Nephite history.

The stripling sons of the converted Lamanites also seem to have drawn on early Nephite interpretations of Isaiah's Immanuel doctrine, "likening" its promises of protection and preservation to themselves when they said to Helaman: "Father, behold, *our God is with us,* and **he will not suffer that we shall fall**" (Alma 56:46). This doctrine had been taught to them by their mothers: "Yea, they had been taught by their mothers that **if they did not doubt** that **God would deliver them.** And they rehearsed unto me the words of their mothers, saying: **We do not doubt**; our mothers knew" (Alma 56:47–48; compare Alma 57:21). Unlike Ahaz and the house of David, these young men did "believe" or "have faith" in the Lord and his promises and were "established," escaping without a single loss. Helaman reports the results of their faith in the Lord thus: "And now their preservation was astonishing to our whole army, yea, that they should be spared, while there was a thousand of our brethren which were slain. And we do justly ascribe it to the miraculous power of God because of their exceeding faith in that which they had been taught to believe, that there was a just God, and whosoever did not doubt, that they should be preserved by his marvelous power" (Alma 57:26). It has been argued elsewhere that words translated "faith" and "believe" constitute wordplay on the name Laman in terms of traditional Nephite rhetoric regarding Laman and the Lamanites.[44] Helaman's use of the verb "spare" also coincides with another important Book of Mormon theme: Zarahemla and the "seed of sparing."

---

that these were a descendant of Laman, which was the eldest son of our father Lehi—now I need not rehearse unto you concerning their traditions or their unbelief, for thou knowest concerning all these things." See Matthew L. Bowen, "Laman and Nephi as Key-Words: An Etymological, Narratological, and Rhetorical Approach to Understanding Lamanites and Nephites as Religious, Political, and Cultural Descriptors," FairMormon Conference, Provo, Utah, August 2019, https://www.fairlatterdaysaints.org/conference/august-2019/laman-and-nephi-as-key-words.

44. Bowen, "Laman and Nephi as Key-Words."

"Seed of Compassion" or "Seed of Sparing": Zarahemla and the Davidic Descendants of Zedekiah in the Land/City of Zarahemla

A small but not insignificant thread running through the Book of Mormon is the divine preservation of the Davidic seed in the New World and the merging of these descendants of David through Zedekiah and his son Muloch with the righteous Nephites who resettled in Zarahemla. That thread begins in Omni 1:12–19, where Amaleki recounts the exodus of Mosiah₁ and the righteous Nephites out of the land of Nephi and their discovery of the land, city, and people of Zarahemla, whose ruler's name was also Zarahemla.

The meaning of the name Zarahemla—"seed of compassion"[45] (Hebrew *zeraʿ*, "seed" + *ḥemlâ*, "compassion," "pity," "sparing")—fits hand in glove with the circumstances of the miraculous preservation of the Mulochites and the preservation of Zedekiah's posterity: "Behold, it came to pass that Mosiah discovered that the people of Zarahemla came out from Jerusalem at the time that Zedekiah, king of Judah, was carried away captive into Babylon; and they journeyed in the wilderness and was brought by the hand of the Lord across the great waters into the land where Mosiah discovered them" (Omni 1:15–16). The Deuteronomistic author of 2 Kings records:

> And the city [Jerusalem] was broken up, and all the men of war fled by night by the way of the gate between two walls, which is by the king's garden: (now the Chaldees were against the city round about:) and the king went the way toward the plain. And the army of the Chaldees pursued after the king, and overtook him in the plains of Jericho: and all his army were scattered from him. So they took the king, and brought him

---

45. John A. Tvedtnes, "I Have a Question: Since the Book of Mormon is largely the record of a Hebrew people, is the writing characteristic of the Hebrew language?," *Ensign* 16, no. 10 (October 1986): 65; John A. Tvedtnes, "What's in a Name? A Look at the Book of Mormon Onomasticon," review of *I Know Thee by Name: Hebrew Roots of Lehi-ite Non-biblical Names in the Book of Mormon,* by Joseph R. Salonimer and Norrene V. Salonimer, *FARMS Review of Books* 8, no. 2 (1996): 41; see also Stephen D. Ricks and John A. Tvedtnes, "The Hebrew Origin of Some Book of Mormon Place Names," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 6, no. 2 (1997): 259; and Joseph R. Salonimer and Norrene V. Salonimer, *I Know Thee by Name: Hebrew Roots of Lehi-ite Non-Biblical Names in the Book of Mormon* (Independence, Mo.: Salonimer, 1995), cited by Ricks and Tvedtnes, "Hebrew Origin of Some Book of Mormon Names," 259. The Salonimers, two Community of Christ scholars, arrived at the same conclusion, positing the meaning "child of grace, pity, or compassion." Tvedtnes, for his part, seems to have arrived at this etymology at least as early as 1983. Paul Hoskisson, personal communication with author, August 31, 2015.

up to the king of Babylon to Riblah; and they gave judgment upon him. And they slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him with fetters of brass, and carried him to Babylon. (2 Kgs. 25:4–7)

Mormon makes it clear that Zarahemla—Hebrew "seed of compassion"—was a direct descendant of Muloch, although he does not here disclose his precise identity: "Now there were not so many of the children of Nephi, or so many of those which were descendants of Nephi, as there were of the people of **Zarahemla, which was a descendant** [compare Heb. *zeraʿ*] **of Muloch** and those which came with him into the wilderness" (Mosiah 25:2; compare also the similar possible wordplay on "Zarahemla" in Mosiah 7:3).[46]

Mormon's mention of Muloch in Mosiah 25:2 comes on the heels of several narratives that emphasize Zarahemla as a refuge for the descendants of those who had gone up to reinherit[47] the land of Nephi generations earlier (on the return of Limhi's and Alma$_1$'s peoples to Zarahemla, see Mosiah 22–24). Mormon states that Mosiah$_2$ "received" both the survivors of the people of Limhi and Alma's people "with joy" in Zarahemla (Mosiah 22:14; 24:25) after their miraculous deliverances.

Later, Mormon revisits this theme when, following Ammon$_2$ and his brothers' successful mission among the Lamanites, he states that "Ammon and his brethren" were "moved with compassion" for the converted Lamanites in the face of a determined effort to exterminate them and proposed to relocate their converts to Zarahemla (Alma 27:4–5). A generation later, the people of Ammon in Zarahemla reciprocally were "moved with compassion" for the Nephites (Alma 53:11–13).[48]

In Helaman 6:10, we learn for the first time that Muloch was the immediate son of Zedekiah. Mormon makes the connection explicit in a chiastic text explaining the general geography in which Lehite history transpires:

---

46. On the possible wordplay on Zarahemla in Mosiah 7:3, see Pedro Olavarria and David E. Bokovoy, "Zarahemla: Revisiting the 'Seed of Compassion,'" *Insights: The Newsletter of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship* 30, no. 5 (2010): 2.

47. On the expedition to re-inherit the land of Nephi, see Amaleki's comments in Omni 1:27–30 and Zeniff's autobiography in Mosiah 9–10.

48. On the wordplay on Zarahemla evident in these narratologically bound episodes, see Matthew L. Bowen, "'They Were Moved with Compassion' (Alma 27:4; 53:13): Toponymic Wordplay on *Zarahemla* and *Jershon*," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 18 (2016): 233–53.

> A Now the land south
> > B was called Lehi;
> > > C and the **land north**
> > > > D **was called Muloch,**
> > > > > E **which was after the son of Zedekiah.**
> > > > > E′ For **the Lord** [yhwh]
> > > > D′ **did bring Muloch**
> > > C′ **into the land north**
> > B′ and Lehi
> A′ into the land south. (Helaman 6:10)[49]

Commenting on the structure of this text, John W. Welch notes: "The center of this chiasm involves two individual words. At the very apex, the words 'Zedekiah' and 'Lord' stand parallel to each other, which is intriguing since the Hebrew word for 'Lord' constitutes the theophoric suffix –yah at the end of the name 'Zedekiah.'"[50] Welch's point is that Mormon creates something of an onomastic wordplay involving the *-yāhû* element in Zedekiah (*ṣidqiyyāhû*) and *yhwh*—the divine name Yahweh or Jehovah.

Conceivably, Mormon's mention of "Muloch . . . the son of Zedekiah" and the "the Lord . . . bring[ing] Muloch into the land north" was motivated by, preparing for, and ultimately drawn from the account of Nephi₂'s speech from his garden tower (Hel. 7:13–29), which he later includes. This mention especially anticipates the data of Helaman 8:21: "And now will you dispute that Jerusalem was not destroyed? Will ye say that the sons of Zedekiah were not slain, all except it were Muloch? Yea, and do ye not behold that the seed of Zedekiah are with us and they were driven out of the land of Jerusalem?" The Mulochite identity as the "seed of Zedekiah" and thus the "seed royal" (*zeraʿ hammamlākâ* or *zeraʿ hammĕlûkâ,*[51]

---

49. The chiastic text is only part of a much larger chiastic structure spanning Helaman 6:7–13. I have adapted it from the structure suggested by John W. Welch, "Chiasmus in Helaman 6:7–13," in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon,* F.A.R.M.S. Updates (Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 230–32. See also John W. Welch and J. Gregory Welch, *Charting the Book of Mormon: Visual Aids for Personal Study and Teaching* (Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1999), chart 133.

50. Welch, "Chiasmus in Helaman 6:7–13," 232.

51. Compare editor Paul Y. Hoskisson's suggestion in *The Book of Mormon Onomasticon of the Laura F. Willes Center for Book of Mormon Studies,* s.v. "Zarahemla," https://onoma.lib.byu.edu/index.php/ZARAHEMLA.

2 Kgs. 11:1; 25:25; Jer. 41:1; compare 2 Chron. 22:10)[52] that had been divinely preserved according to the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants remained an important aspect of Nephite polity and identity.

"False Christs": Trouble in Zarahemla and Benjamin's (Re)establishment of His Father's Dynasty

From the beginning of Lehite history, the right to rule among Lehi's descendants was a complicated matter. As Noel Reynolds pointed out long ago, $Nephi_1$'s brass plates—including their quotations of Isaiah and the "Immanuel" prophecy—constituted something of a legitimating political document for Nephi's right to rule,[53] among other things.

The Book of Mormon, as we have it, reveals very little about the kingship situation in the land of Nephi at the time of the exodus of $Mosiah_1$ and his followers from that land. Amaron, the son of Omni, reports that around 320 years after Lehi left Jerusalem "the more wicked part of the Nephites were destroyed" (Omni 1:5) and that "the Lord did visit them in great judgment" (Omni 1:7), but also that the Lord "did **spare** the righteous, that they should not perish, but did deliver them out of the hands of their enemies" (Omni 1:7). Writing sometime later in the city of Zarahemla, Amaleki, Amaron's nephew, reports that $Mosiah_1$ had been "warned of the Lord that he should flee out of the land of Nephi—and as many as would hearken unto the voice of the Lord should also depart out of the land with him into the wilderness" (Omni 1:12). Amaleki never specifies whether $Mosiah_1$ was the regnant king in the land of Nephi at that time, though he may have been. It is also possible that Mosiah led the exodus in opposition to someone else who had ascended the throne. The fact that $Mosiah_1$ "was made king over the land of Zarahemla" (Omni 1:12) perhaps indicates that he had previously reigned as king in the land of Nephi. In any case, Mormon, describing circumstances near the end of the reign of $Mosiah_2$, tells us that "the kingdom had been conferred upon none but those which were descendants of Nephi" (Mosiah 25:13), which suggests that $Mosiah_1$ was a royal descendant of Nephi.

---

52. The preservation of the Davidic line, at times as a seemingly endangered remnant, constitutes an important theme of the Deuteronomistic History from 2 Samuel 12 until the last verses of the very last chapter of 2 Kings (2 Kgs. 25:25–30).

53. See Noel B. Reynolds, "The Political Dimension in Nephi's Small Plates," *BYU Studies* 27, no. 4 (1987): 15–37.

The Book of Mormon contains a single mention[54] of "false Christs" (W of M 1:15), which Mormon makes when he describes the stabilizing of King Benjamin's reign (W of M 1:12–Mosiah 1:1) sometime following the reign of Mosiah$_1$, King Benjamin's father, who Amaleki tells us "was made king over the land of Zarahemla" at the time the Nephites and the Mulochites first united (Omni 1:12–19). It is hard to imagine that Mosiah$_1$'s kingship was universally accepted by the people in Zarahemla. And ironically, the biblical texts that Mosiah$_1$ brought with him on the plates of brass would have potentially legitimated the kingship of Zarahemla and his descendants as descendants of David. Although Mormon never specifies precisely what he means by "false Christs," it is important to note that in the Hebrew Bible the kings of Israel and Judah were designated as the Lord's "anointed" (Hebrew *māšîaḥ* = Greek *christos*).[55] Even after Saul had been rejected from dynastic rule (1 Sam. 13:13–14) and later from his kingship (1 Sam. 15), he still retained this title (see 1 Sam. 24:6; 26:9, 11, 16, 23).

"The Seed of Zedekiah Are with Us"

For the first time, at least in what we still have of Mormon's abridgment of the large plates, Mormon mentions that Zarahemla and the people of Zarahemla descended from a man named Muloch, though he does not mention Muloch's importance: "Now there were not so many of the children of Nephi, or so many of those which were descendants of Nephi, as there were of the people of Zarahemla, which was a descendant of Muloch and those which came with him into the wilderness" (Mosiah 25:2). Although Muloch's identity is not yet made clear, the name itself—a formation from the Semitic/Hebrew root *m-l-k* ("reign," "to be king")[56]— hints at his royal, Davidic identity. We also learn here that the descendants of Muloch constituted the majority of the new "Nephite" population after the time of Mosiah$_1$'s exodus to Zarahemla.

---

54. In 2 Nephi 25:18, Nephi states, "For there should not any [messiah] come save it should be a false Messiah which should deceive the people. For there is save one Messiah spoken of by the prophets"—that is, Jesus Christ.

55. See, for example, 1 Samuel 12:3, 5; 24:6; 26:9, 11, 16, 23; 2 Samuel 22:51; Psalms 2:2; 18:50; 20:6; 28:8; 84:9; 89:38, 51; 132:10; and Habakkuk 3:13; compare 1 Samuel 2:10 and Lamentations 4:20.

56. See Hoskisson, *Book of Mormon Onomasticon,* s.v. "Mulek," https://onoma.lib .byu.edu/index.php/MULEK.

The next mention of Muloch, as noted earlier, definitively establishes the Davidic identity of Muloch as a son of Zedekiah: "Now the land south was called Lehi; and the land north was called Muloch, which was after the son of Zedekiah. For the Lord did bring Muloch into the land north and Lehi into the land south" (Hel. 6:10). By the time of Mosiah$_1$, the Davidic descendants of Zedekiah in Zarahemla were "exceeding numerous" (Omni 1:17). By the time of Nephi$_2$, intermarrying with the Nephites would have made these descendants even more numerous.

Mormon's statement in Helaman 6:10 appreciably aids the reader's grasp of the demographic dynamics of Nephi$_2$'s speech. Mormon reports that Nephi gave the speech "upon a tower which was in the garden of Nephi, which was by the highway which led to the chief market which was in the city of Zarahemla" (Hel. 7:10). Nephi's audience in Zarahemla included an increasingly mixed, if not a wholly integrated, group of Nephites and Mulochites.

As a lead-in to his prediction of the murder of the Nephites' chief judge Seezoram and a first demonstration of his own ability to receive specific knowledge through divine revelation about the murder of the Nephites' chief judge (see Hel. 8:11–28), Nephi$_2$ cites a lengthy list of prophetic witnesses of Jesus Christ beginning at Moses (vv. 11–13) and the evidence of the brazen serpent (vv. 14–15), then harking back to Abraham (vv. 17–19), then forward again to Zenos (v. 19). He then states, "And behold, also Zenoch and also Ezaias and also Isaiah and Jeremiah, Jeremiah being that same prophet which testified of the destruction of Jerusalem—and now we know that Jerusalem was destroyed according to the words of Jeremiah—**O then why not the Son of God come according to his prophecy?**" (Hel. 8:20).

Verifying the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecies (Jer. 6:1–30; 26:7–9) regarding the destruction of Jerusalem, Nephi says, "And now will you dispute that Jerusalem was not destroyed? Will ye say that **the sons of Zedekiah were not slain, all except it were Muloch**? Yea, and do ye not behold that **the seed of** [*zeraʿ*] **Zedekiah are *with us*** [Heb. ʿ*immānû*] and they were driven out of the land of Jerusalem?" (Hel. 8:21).

The phrase "the seed [*zeraʿ*] of Zedekiah are with us [ʿ*immānû*]" constitutes double wordplay involving both the names Zarahemla ("seed of compassion," "seed of sparing")[57] and Immanuel ("with us [is]

57. Bowen, "They Were Moved with Compassion," 234–35, 250. Nephi$_2$ had used a similar wordplay on "seed" and (implicitly) Zarahemla in Helaman 7:24.

God"). If the Nephites' language still consisted largely of Hebrew,[58] the Nephite and Mulochite inhabitants of Zarahemla would have appreciated the rhetorical force of both of these apparent onomastic allusions. Like the Syro-Ephraimite crisis of the eighth century BCE, the destruction of Jerusalem in 586/587 BCE constituted an existential threat to the house of David. The Davidic dynasty came to an end as a political institution with the capture of Zedekiah and the slaughter of his known sons (except for Muloch). For his part, Zedekiah's nephew and predecessor Jehoiachin (or Jeconiah) and the latter's Davidic offspring survived in Babylon in initially precarious, but eventually improving, circumstances (see 2 Kgs. 25:27–30).

Like the survival of Jehoiachin and his offspring in Babylon and the survival of Zedekiah's daughters elsewhere (see Jer. 41:10), the survival of Zedekiah's royal Davidic son Muloch among those who "were brought by the hand of the Lord across the great waters, into the land where Mosiah discovered them" (Omni 1:16), represents a continuation of the promised protection of the house of David according to Isaiah's Immanuel prophecy and is consistent with the articulation of the Davidic covenant as an extension of the Abrahamic covenant in Jeremiah 33:22: "As the host of heaven cannot be numbered, neither the sand of the sea measured: so will I multiply the seed of David my servant."

Nephi₂ further uses the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy regarding the destruction of Jerusalem (see, for example, Jer. 6:1–30; 26:7–9) as an analogy to argue the fulfillability of Jeremiah's and earlier prophets' prophecies concerning the coming of the Son of God. If the Lord had destroyed Jerusalem according to prophecy, which the presence of the "seed of Zedekiah . . . with us" more than proved, then the Son of God would come and eventually be "with" them.

Conceivably, Jeremiah's statement regarding "the Son of God com[ing], according to his prophecy," has reference to Jeremiah's prophecies in Jeremiah 23:5–6 and 33:15–17 that foretold the raising up of a "Branch" (ṣemaḥ)—that is, a Davidic scion or descendant who would "execute" the "judgment" and "justice"/"righteousness" (ṣĕdāqâ) that previous Davidic kings had never fully established or had utterly failed to uphold. The symbolic name given to the Branch was "the Lord our

---

58. In Mormon 9:33, Moroni indicates that the Nephite everyday language still largely consisted of Hebrew, albeit in altered form.

Righteousness" (*yhwh ṣidqēnû*)—a wordplay on the name Zedekiah (*ṣidqiyyāhû*). Jeremiah gave the branch prophecy (or prophecies) at a time when the Davidic monarchy ceased to exist as a political institution with Zedekiah's capture and deportation to Babylon, the same time when Muloch and those with him escaped and came to the New World. For the scripturally literate in Nephi's audience who could appreciate its significance,[59] Nephi's reminder that the "seed of Zedekiah are with us" would have effectively recalled both the Immanuel prophecy of Isaiah 7:14; 8:8, 10 and the "Branch" prophecy of Jeremiah 23:5–6; 33:15–17 and would have reminded those Nephite-Mulochites who heard the prophecy that the "Son of God" would in due course also be "with" them.

"He Is God; and He Is with Them" (Hel. 8:21b–23)

After noting the "seed (*zeraʿ*) of Zedekiah" who had been "driven out of Jerusalem" and miraculously spared and who dwelt, by then, in comparatively substantial numbers[60] in Zarahemla, Nephi$_2$ turns to earliest Lehite history and the events that Nephi$_1$ chronicles in 1 Nephi 1:1–2:4 of Lehi being driven out of Jerusalem: "But behold, this is not all. Our father Lehi was driven out of Jerusalem because he testified of these things. Nephi also testified of these things, and also almost all of our fathers, even down to this time. Yea, **they have testified of the coming of Christ and have looked forward and have rejoiced in his day, which is to come**" (Hel. 8:21b–22).

---

59. There remain open and irresolvable questions about the degree to which Nephi's audience would have had access to the scriptures. It is plausible and even likely that the religious and judicial elite and other well-to-do individuals—and maybe more—would have had access to copies of scriptural texts. For example, Mormon mentions that "many" people at Ammonihah had copies of scriptural texts (see especially Alma 14:1, 8). If such was the case at Ammonihah, it would have been even more the case at Zarahemla, the Nephite religious capital during that time. There is also the question of language: were the writings on the brass plates written in Egyptian script using Egyptian language, in a type of Egyptian shorthand using Hebrew language, or in some combination of these? In any case, the meaning of the name Immanuel from Isaiah 7–8, like the name Zarahemla, would have been transparent to a Hebrew-speaking audience. The Nephites used Hebrew as a written—and probably spoken—language until the end of their existence, as Moroni indicates (see Morm. 9:33), albeit in altered form. All languages change over time. Amaleki mentions that the Nephite and Mulochite spoken languages had diverged considerably by the time of Mosiah$_2$ (see Omni 1:17–18). To exactly what degree Nephite Hebrew had changed from the Israelite and Judahite Hebrew of the eighth–seventh centuries BCE is presently unknowable. Nevertheless, it remains an important question to consider. I proceed here on that acknowledgment.

60. Compare Mosiah 25:2.

In 1 Nephi 1:19, Nephi makes it clear that Lehi "testified that the things which he saw and heard [in his vision], and also the things which he read in the book [that is, in the heavenly book that he was given to read], manifested plainly of the coming of a Messiah and also the redemption of the world." Nephi further notes that it was specifically testimony regarding the coming of the Messiah that put his father's life in danger. Lehi's audience in Jerusalem had been content to mock him when he had "truly testified of their wickedness and their abominations" (1 Ne. 1:19). However, when he began to testify of the coming of a Messiah, "they also sought his life that they might take it away" (1 Ne. 1:20). Lehi's subsequent divine deliverance and preservation from his enemies at Jerusalem—and Nephi's own deliverance and preservation from his brothers—shapes the great thesis statement of Nephi's record: "I Nephi will shew unto you that the tender mercies of the Lord are over all them whom he hath chosen **because of their faith** to make them mighty, even unto the power of deliverance" (1 Ne. 1:20). He may also have intended this thesis statement as an expression of his own adaptation of the Immanuel doctrine.

It is in the context of his own citation of the many earlier prophetic witnesses of Jesus Christ and the testimonies of Lehi, Nephi$_1$, and their successor witnesses, including Moroni$_1$ and the 2,060 stripling warriors, that Nephi$_2$ testified to the people, "And behold, **he is God** [Heb. *hûʾ (hā)ʾĕlōhîm*]; **and he is with them** [*wĕhûʾ ʿimmām*], and he did manifest himself unto them, that they were redeemed by him. And they gave unto him glory **because of that which is to come**" (Hel. 8:23).

Nephi$_2$'s declaration "he is God; and he is with them" represents a Christological statement consistent with Nephi's vision of the tree of life and its meaning: "**The virgin** [*hāʿalmâ*] which thou seest is **the mother of God** after the manner of the flesh" (1 Ne. 11:18; compare 11:22–23). It is also consistent with a Christology expressed throughout the Book of Mormon that presents Christ as "the very Eternal Father" (Mosiah 16:15; see also Mosiah 15:4 and Alma 11:38–39). Jesus Christ would, in only a few years, be "with" his people in the flesh, as described in Matthew's gospel, but also with the Lamanites, Nephites, and Mulochites as the resurrected Lord (see 3 Ne. 11–26).

In Hebrew, the idea "he is God" is expressed with a verbless clause: *hûʾ hāʾĕlōhîm* (for example, Deut. 4:35, 39; 7:9) or *hûʾ ʾĕlōhîm* (for example, Josh. 2:11; Ps. 100:3).[61] On one level, the "us" expressed in *ʿimmānû* from

---

61. Compare 1 Nephi 11:6 and Mosiah 27:31.

Isaiah 7:14 refers to the "house of David" to whom the Immanuel proph-
ecy originally came. However, if "us" in Isaiah 7:14 can also be connected
with the "us" of the divine council in Isaiah 6:8 ("Whom shall I send,
and who will go **for us** [*lānû*]?") and the "us" of Isaiah 9:6 ("For unto us
[*lānû*] a child is born, unto us [*lānû*] a son is given"), then it is a broad
enough "us" to include the prophets (compare the "noble and great ones"
of Abr. 3:22–23). Nephi's declaration firmly expands the application of
the Immanuel prophecy far beyond its original, historical application to
Ahaz, the house of David, and Judah and even beyond Nephi's adaptive
likening of its doctrine to himself and his successors or to the Mulochites
later. Jesus Christ is the "God with" all of those who truly believe in him
and demonstrate covenant faithfulness to his name. Nephi's words also
suggest an extension of the blessings of the Davidic covenant along the
lines of Isaiah 55:3: "Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your
soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even
the sure mercies of David." The Nephites, Lamanites, and Mulochites
would all experience the extension of these "sure mercies" in the most
sacred sense at the temple in Bountiful just a few years later.

"Ye Shall Have My Spirit to Be with You": The Sacrament Prayers as an Expression of the Immanuel Doctrine

When Jesus appeared to the Lamanites and Nephites—including Mulo-
chites—at the temple in Bountiful (3 Ne. 11–26), he appeared to a people
familiar with the Immanuel prophecy and doctrine. For this audience,
"he is God; and he is with them" was a well-established Israelite, Davidic,
and Lehite covenant concept. This favored group of Israelites would
experience "God with us" beyond what many of Jesus's disciples in Gali-
lee and Judea experienced—even "God with" them in the flesh (we will
return to the scenes in 3 Ne. 11–17 below).

The resurrected Jesus's institution of the sacrament in 3 Nephi 18 with
its accompanying promises of his continued divine presence "always . . .
to be with them" stands as one of the most important earthly expressions
of the Immanuel doctrine. The sacrament prayers as found today in
D&C 20:77, 79 have been taken nearly verbatim from Moroni 4:3 and 5:2,
respectively. In view of the foregoing discussion, it seems important to
consider these prayers—two of the very few fixed prayers in Latter-day
Saint liturgy—as expressions of the Immanuel doctrine. Here we will
consider what they mean in terms of "God with us" in spirit and the
more expansive Matthean notion of "God with us" in the flesh:

Moroni 4:3

O God the Eternal Father, we ask thee in the name of thy Son Jesus Christ to bless and sanctify this bread to the souls of all those who partake of it, that they may eat in remembrance of the body of thy Son, and witness unto thee, O God the Eternal Father, that they are willing to take upon them the name of thy Son and always remember him and keep his commandments which he hath given them, **that they may always have his Spirit to be with them.** Amen.

Moroni 5:2

O God the Eternal Father, we ask thee in the name of thy Son Jesus Christ to bless and sanctify this wine to the souls of all those who drink of it, that they may do it in remembrance of the blood of thy Son, which was shed for them, that they may witness unto thee, O God the Eternal Father, that they do always remember him, **that they may have his Spirit to be with them.** Amen.

The sacrament prayers as translated in Moroni 4–5 originate in the words that the resurrected Jesus spoke to the Lamanites and Nephites at the temple in Bountiful, as recorded in 3 Nephi 18. As John W. Welch has noted, "The words in our sacrament prayers are a transformed version of Jesus's first- and second-person language recast as a third-person text."[62] The dependence of the prayer preserved in Moroni 4:3 on Jesus's words in 3 Nephi 18:6–7 could not be clearer: "And this shall ye always observe to do, even as I have done, even as I have broken bread and blessed it and gave it unto you. And this shall ye do in remembrance of **my body, which I have shewn unto you.** And it shall be a testimony unto the Father, that ye do always remember me. And if ye do always remember me, **ye shall have my Spirit to be with you.**" The resurrected Jesus was "with them" in the flesh, promising them the presence of his Spirit to be "with them" until he would be with them again (see also Matt. 28:20).

As Welch has observed, "When we partake of the bread, we should remember that we eat not only in remembrance of the body that has been broken for us . . . [but] in remembrance of the physical, tangible body"[63]—that is, Christ had just "shewn" unto the people the marks that stood as irrefutable tokens, proofs, and memorials of his atoning sacrifice. Thus, we should not decouple the prayer on the bread in Moroni 4:3 and its source in Jesus's words in 3 Nephi 18:6–7 from the tangible

62. John W. Welch, in "3 Nephi Conference Panel Discussion," in *Third Nephi: An Incomparable Scripture,* ed. Andrew C. Skinner and Gaye Strathearn (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2012), 381.

63. Welch, "3 Nephi Conference Panel Discussion," 381–82.

experience detailed in 3 Nephi 11:15: "And it came to pass that the multitude went forth and thrust their hands into his side and did feel the prints of the nails in his hands and in his feet. And this they did do, going forth one by one until they had all gone forth and did see with their eyes and did feel with their hands **and did know of a surety** and did bear record that it was he—of whom it was written by the prophets—that should come." Paul connects the "sure mercies of David" mentioned by Isaiah (Isa. 55:3) with the resurrection and specifically the Resurrection of Jesus (Acts 13:34). When the Lamanites and Nephites partook of the sacramental bread, they recalled the experience that gave them the "sure" knowledge that Jesus is the resurrected Messiah. With the resurrected Savior present with them, they had experienced "God with us" (Immanuel) to a degree that few mortals will ever experience. When we partake of the sacrament today, we are invited to "remember" Christ in the actualizing way that Oliver Cowdery was invited to envision him: "Behold the wounds which pierced my side, and also the prints of the nails in my hands and feet" (D&C 6:37).

The prayer preserved in Moroni 5:2, in a similar way, originates in Jesus's words to the Lamanites and Nephites (including those of Mulochite descent) in 3 Nephi 18:10–11:

> And when the disciples had done this, Jesus saith unto them: Blessed are ye for this thing which ye have done, for this is fulfilling my commandments. And this doth witness unto the Father that ye are willing to do that which I have commanded you. And this shall ye always do unto those who repent and are baptized in my name. And ye shall do it **in remembrance of my blood, which I have shed for you,** that ye may witness unto the Father that ye do always remember me. **And if ye do always remember me, ye shall have my Spirit to be with you.**

As Welch notes, "We celebrate the sacrament, not only of the Lord's supper, but also of the Lord's appearance in 3 Nephi."[64] But partaking of the emblems of the sacrament, including the wine (or water) in remembrance of his blood also looks forward to an eschatological reality—"that day when I shall come and drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom" (JST Matt. 26:26 [in Matt. 26:29, footnote b]). The sacrament constitutes an oath (compare Latin *sacramentum*) that we acknowledge Jesus Christ as God the Eternal Father's divine Son, and as we remember him, we receive the promise that we shall "always have his spirit to be

---

64. Welch, "3 Nephi Conference Panel Discussion," 381.

with [us]" (Moro. 4:3)—"He is God; and he is with [us]" (Hel. 8:23). Or, as Jesus said to the disciples in Galilee after his Resurrection, "I am with you alway[s]" (Matt. 28:20).

"They Pray unto Me Because I Am with Them" (3 Ne. 19:18–22)

The day that followed Jesus's institution of the sacrament among the Lamanites and Nephites saw a much larger gathering to "the place [compare Hebrew *māqôm*] where Jesus should shew himself unto the multitude" (3 Ne. 19:3). "The place"—a Deuteronomic term for the temple[65]—was likely the temple in Bountiful or near thereto.

The ritual events of that day, which included baptism, also included a form of temple prayer, unique in scripture, in which the disciples prayed *directly to* Jesus: "And behold, they began to pray; and they did pray unto Jesus, calling him their Lord and their God" (3 Ne. 19:18). After this prayer commenced, Jesus in turn prayed to the Father:

> And it came to pass that Jesus departed out of the midst of them and went a little way off from them and bowed himself to the earth, and he saith: Father, I thank thee that thou hast given the Holy Ghost unto these whom I have chosen. And it is because of their belief in me that I have chosen them out of the world. Father, I pray thee that thou wilt give the Holy Ghost unto all them that shall believe in their words. Father, thou hast given them the Holy Ghost because they believe in me. And thou seest that they believe in me because thou hearest them, and they pray unto me; and **they pray unto me because *I am with them.*** (3 Ne. 19:19–22)

Like Jesus's institution of the sacrament in person the day before, this unique form of prayer to Jesus himself and his accompanying high-priestly intercessory prayer gave full earthly expression to the Isaianic Immanuel concept—God with us—introduced to "two thousand and

---

65. See, for example, Deuteronomy 12:5: "the place which the Lord your God shall choose out of all your tribes to put his name"; Deuteronomy 12:11: "a place which the Lord your God shall choose to cause his name to dwell there"; Deuteronomy 12:14: "in the place which the Lord shall choose in one of thy tribes, there thou shalt offer thy burnt offerings, and there thou shalt do all that I command thee"; Deuteronomy 12:21: "the place which the Lord thy God hath chosen to put his name there"; and Deuteronomy 12:26–27: "the place which the Lord shall choose: and thou shalt offer thy burnt offerings." In the Deuteronomic cult-centralization legislation, "the place" (*māqôm*) had direct reference to the central sanctuary—that is, the temple. When the tabernacle resided at Shiloh, it served as the central sanctuary. Later when the tabernacle came to Jerusalem and still later when Solomon's temple was built, these served as the central sanctuary.

five hundred souls" (3 Ne. 17:25) the previous day. As noted before, they had "g[one] forth one by one . . . and did see with their eyes and did feel with their hands and did know of a surety . . . that it was he" (3 Ne. 11:15). Subsequently, they had been healed "every one," and "they did all—both they which had been healed and they which were whole—bow down at his feet and did worship him. And as many as could come for the multitude did kiss his feet, insomuch that they did bathe his feet with their tears" (3 Ne. 17:9–10). Mormon records that those present later testified, "No tongue cannot speak, neither can there be written by any man, neither can the hearts of men conceive so great and marvelous things as we both saw and heard Jesus speak. And no one can conceive of the joy which filled our souls at the time we heard him pray for us unto the Father" (3 Ne. 17:17). They had been overcome with joy such that they could not even stand (3 Ne. 17:18). They saw Jesus weep in their presence with a fullness of joy, even as "he took their little children, one by one, and blessed them" (3 Ne. 17:20–22), before the children were encircled by theophanic fire and angels ministering to them (3 Ne. 17:24). He had instituted the sacrament and the attendant promise of his Spirit to "always" be with them (3 Ne. 18:1–13; Moro. 4:3). He had gone away and had come again.

Thus, in the immediate aftermath of the disciples' praying to Jesus "because I am with them" (3 Ne. 19:22) and his accompanying high-priestly prayer, Jesus's second blessing and distribution of the sacrament that day, wherein he miraculously provided the bread and the wine (3 Ne. 20:2–9), must have been supremely meaningful to that much larger audience, and perhaps even more so to those who had experienced these events both days. In hindsight, we can better appreciate the beauty in Nephi$_2$'s proleptic statement that past prophets and saints "**gave unto** [the Lord] **glory** because of that which is to come" (Hel. 8:23). Mormon understood that one of the most important things "to come" was the resurrected Jesus being "with" the sheep of his other fold. He records, "Now when the multitude had all eat and drank, behold, **they were filled with the Spirit.** And they did cry out with one voice and **gave glory to Jesus, whom they both saw and heard**" (3 Ne. 20:9).

We note that Mormon, the editor of this account, had witnessed the supreme divine withdrawal from his people: "And there were no gifts from the Lord. And the Holy Ghost did not come upon any because of their wickedness and unbelief" (Morm. 1:14; compare Alma 44:3–4); "the strength of the Lord was not with us. Yea, we were left to ourselves, that the Spirit of the Lord did not abide in us" (Morm. 2:26). But he also had "tasted and knew of the goodness of Jesus" through the Lord's

personal visitation to him (Morm. 1:15). Mormon was thus well situated to give his Latter-day audience a foretaste of "God with us," since the Lamanites and Nephites had experienced Christ, and to warn against falling from the high enlightenment from which his people had fallen.

If the scenes portrayed in 3 Nephi 11–26 offer a type and foreshadowing of events as they will transpire at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, Latter-day Saints should cherish these scenes, the ordinance of the sacrament, and the gift of the Holy Ghost as our first received payment of an eternal inheritance (see again 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5 and Eph. 1:14). In a day to come, Jesus's disciples from all ages who have believed that "he is God; and he is with them" will appreciate the Immanuel concept on the highest and most expansive level in the celestial kingdom, "where God, even the Father, reigns upon his throne forever and ever" (D&C 76:92), when even the earth (and the saints) "shall be crowned with glory, even with the presence of God the Father" (D&C 88:19).

Conclusion

The "son" given the name Immanuel ("God with us") as a sign to Ahaz and the house of David as an immediate fulfillment of Isaiah's eighth-century-BCE prophecy is best understood as a child conceived and born within the royal household not long after Isaiah gave the prophecy. Biblical chronologies preclude Hezekiah as the fulfillment of the prophecy. Nevertheless, as a "son of David," the child "Immanuel" constituted a divine message that the house of David would not be exterminated, in spite of the sins and unfaithfulness of Ahaz and its later royal representatives. Later generations of Israelites found hope in the Immanuel prophecy as a promise of divine protection, preservation, and presence.

Matthew recognized the expansive theological possibilities of the "Immanuel" prophecy as applied to Jesus Christ—"God with us" in the flesh. This idea constitutes a sustained part of Matthew's Christology, which he connects with the church that Jesus sought to establish, with the sacrament, and with the Lord's promise to be "always . . . with" his disciples (Matt. 1:23; 17:17; 18:20; 26:29; 28:20; Moro. 4:3).

Nephi$_1$, who described seeing Jesus's birth in language drawn from Isaiah 7:14 (1 Ne. 11:13, 15, 18, 20–21; compare Alma 7:10), also likened the Immanuel prophecy to himself and his fledgling people in the face of the immediate Lamanite threat. Later, Moroni$_1$ and the stripling sons of Ammon$_2$'s Lamanite converts drew on and took hope in the Immanuel doctrine (see Alma 44:3–4; 56:46–48). The Immanuel prophecy took on increasing significance among the Nephites and Mulochites after the Nephite exodus to

Zarahemla and their unification with the Mulochites, among whom lived many descendants of a divinely protected and preserved son of Zedekiah, the last regnant king of Judah. The full power of Nephi₂'s speech to the Nephites and Mulochites in the city of Zarahemla, including his statements "the seed of Zedekiah are with us" and "he is God; and he is with them" (Hel. 8:21, 23), cannot be fully appreciated without recognizing intertextual relationship with Isaiah 7:14 and 8:8, 10. In fact, Nephi's words in Helaman 8:13–26 offer a lens for viewing the Immanuel prophecy as it relates to the house of David, the Davidic Covenant, the house of Judah, and more broadly to the whole house of Israel.

Nephi₂'s use of the Immanuel prophecy and his testimony of Jesus Christ to a Davidic audience came only decades before the Savior's advent as God in the flesh and his subsequent appearance as a resurrected being among the Lamanites and Nephites (including Mulochites) at the temple in Bountiful. Beyond his healings and teachings throughout his ministry at the temple in Bountiful (3 Ne. 11–26), Jesus's institution of the emblems of the sacrament among them in person, their prayers to him in person ("because I am with them," 3 Ne. 19:22), and his high-priestly prayers stand as the ultimate expression of the Immanuel doctrine, as Israelite-Lehite religious and cultural heritage. We appreciate anew the promise in the sacrament prayers that his disciples might "always have his spirit to be with" us (3 Ne. 18:7, 11; Moro. 4:3; 5:2; D&C 20:77, 79; compare Matt. 28:20) until his physical presence is eternally "with us."

To his disciples today, the sacrament should constitute an abiding reminder that the Lord wishes us to have his Spirit "always . . . to be with [us]" until that day. As the Lord stated to Joseph Smith, Orson Hyde, Luke S. Johnson, Lyman E. Johnson, William E. McLellin, and the early members of the restored Church: "Wherefore, be of good cheer, and do not fear, for **I the Lord am with you, and will stand by you**; and ye shall bear record of me, even Jesus Christ, that I am the Son of the living God, that I was, that I am, and that I am to come" (D&C 68:6).

Matthew L. Bowen is currently an associate professor of religious education at Brigham Young University–Hawaii. He earned MA and PhD degrees in Biblical studies from the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. He is husband to Suzanne Blattberg Bowen and father to Zachariah, Nathan, and Adele. They live in beautiful Lāʻie, Hawaii. He serves as a bishop in a married student ward. The author would like to thank Steve Harper, Roger Terry, Matt Christensen, and Taylor Crofts.

Fired from Carpool

Cristie Cowles Charles

I don't think this is working out."

"What do you mean? What part isn't working out?"

"I just feel like we have different styles. I mean, I miss my kids so much while they're at school that I want to see them as soon as possible afterward. And you seem to have . . . different priorities." My neighbor Julie's[1] blown-out blonde hair shakes at that last word, and she shifts in her doorway.

"So wait, what are you saying? Are you . . . firing me?" Besides the extreme embarrassment burning my cheeks and hot tears that I'm trying to hide behind my shaggy bangs, a small panic erupts in my gut. *How will I possibly make it on time across town twice a day?* Oh. I start to see her point.

"I just think we should take a break and see how it goes." She moves to close her front door but pauses and opens it again, revealing a stunning photo wall of her three kids behind her. "I don't understand how you can't be there waiting at 3:20 to pick them up. Don't you teach a class every day at BYU? You have to be on time for that, right?"

"Well, that's Tuesday and Thursday in the middle of the day," I answer. What I don't mention is that I have a series of five alarms in increasing decibels and frequency to get me out of my office door. And I'm still often behind, running down the hallway to collect my colored-paper copies, springing down steps to forgo elevators' sluggish apathy, and rushing through far-off basement classroom doors out of breath. I've started buying shoes based on how well they stay on my feet in a sprint, which is

---

1. All names have been changed.

hard to test in a store, so now I order online and run laps in my basement. Sometimes I forget to mail back the rejects. I'm starting to sense a pattern.

"It's true that I should do better—*will* do better" I try, in an attempt to appeal to Julie's sense of mercy, but this time her statuesque features match her immoveable will. I surrender and turn to walk down her porch steps as a familiar mom-guilt bubbles up inside me. It's not that I don't love my kids—when we're together, we have more fun and get along better than anyone I know—I'm just really bad at the daily stuff: the waking, the cooking, the cleaning, the driving. I have to admit that in an attempt to send one last email or meet with one more student, I sometimes snoozed my leave-to-pick-up-the-kids alarm a little too long. Somehow, I'd subconsciously thought that children would be more forgiving. I hadn't counted on their mothers.

What I also didn't mention to Julie is that earlier today one of my best friends from Boston, Abigail, confided in me that she was diagnosed with adult ADHD, and I'd been mulling that over ever since. Abigail is no ordinary woman. She's highly accomplished, was top of her class at Wellesley, worked as a corporate lawyer before quitting to advocate full time for her autistic child, and was the most intimidating Gospel Doctrine teacher the Cambridge (Massachusetts) 1st Ward had ever seen. However, I would often notice her sneaking into the back of the chapel during sacrament meeting, consistently ten to fifteen minutes late. I noticed this because I was often the one opening the door for her as we snuck in at the same time.

Abigail's ADHD diagnosis felt inconceivable. "But you're so accomplished," I'd said. "That doesn't make sense."

"I think I was in denial for years," she'd replied. "It turns out many 'high-functioning' adults, especially women, don't realize they have ADHD—they just think they're bad at everyday tasks."

Whoa. That phrase "everyday tasks" echoed in my head until I'd had to get off the phone as fast as possible, trying to throw a little empathy Abigail's way before I'd said goodbye. Now, as I return home from being carpool-fired, all I can think about is how much Abigail's troubles feel like my own.

I sit at my bedroom desk, move piles of papers, unstick half a dozen Post-it notes from the keyboard, and google *adult ADHD* to find the Mayo Clinic list of symptoms.[2] I check off the first three in rapid succession:

---

2. Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research, "Adult Attention-Deficit/ Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)," *Mayo Clinic,* June 22, 2019, https://www.mayoclinic .org/diseases-conditions/adult-adhd/symptoms-causes/syc-20350878.

- poor planning. Check.
- trouble multitasking. Check.
- problems following through and completing tasks. Check.

I think of my friend Carrie, who used to call herself "The Closer" because she was so driven to finish tasks. Me, she called "The Opener."

- excessive activity or restlessness. Check.

Does "trying to do too much" count as excessive activity? Is that really *excessive*? Isn't that just being *ambitious*?

- trouble coping with stress. Check.
- disorganization and problems prioritizing. Check.

Prioritizing. There's that word again. I silently curse Julie for pinpointing my failings better than I did. But now I'm getting distracted.

- problems focusing on a task. Check.

Great. And now the fact that I'm crying about this is a marker, too:

- frequent mood swings. Check.

Oh. And the kicker:

- poor time management skills. Double check.

As I scroll, I learn that another name for poor time management skills is time blindness. It sounds like a disease, but it describes me perfectly: the inability to estimate how much time has gone by, how long a task will take, or how much more time you'll need for extra things such as walking to your parking spot or making lunch before you leave.[3] Me to a T. I add my own item to the list:

- extreme optimism that "just driving faster and smarter" will make up for minutes lost elsewhere. Check.

I realize Abigail also prides herself in her fast Boston-style driving. It occurs to me that this ADHD thing might not necessarily be a joke.

The website says symptoms can usually be traced back to childhood, and I wonder how long I've been like this without putting the pieces together. Memories from my past start bubbling up like the gnocchi I should be starting for dinner. I pull out my box of old journals and start

---

3. Bridget Read, "What Is 'Time Blindness' and Do You Have It?" *The Cut,* April 10, 2020, https://www.thecut.com/2020/04/coronavirus-self-isolation-time-blindness.html.

rifling through them. If I'm being honest, I've always had trouble with follow-through. As an eight-year-old, I may have been able to do perfect cartwheels between the grocery store shelves filled with glass pickle jars, but balancing the rest of life hadn't been nearly as effortless. I remember returning piles upon piles of only half-read library books with a side of guilt. And most of my sporadic journal entries stopped *in medias res.*

Then there was the time I spent weeks writing a fabulous patriotic speech for a local Fourth of July contest but didn't leave enough time to memorize more than the first thirty seconds. I got as far as the check-in desk before realizing that there was no mercy on the memorization bit. I turned around in my dress and church shoes and simply walked out to the hum of other kids in line rehearsing their memorized pages. The theme song of my childhood could have been sung by Elvis: "So Close Yet So Far."

Sighing and glancing back up to the computer, I see another familiar symptom:

- Hot temper. Check.

I'm reminded that my high school friends nicknamed me "Crusty" because of all the angry, crusty glares I gave. Ouch.

I realize even my carpool troubles have an origin story: I can't believe I was never tipped off by the fact that every day in high school I made the mom across the street wait with everyone squished into the back of their running sedan—including my little sister—while I still hurried to finish throwing on my grunge-flannel shirt and ripped jeans ten minutes late. They would leave the front seat open so I could jump in as fast as possible, then the mom peeled down the road and wrote us all "late passes" to give to the still-beehived-in-the-'90s Attendance Lady. I'm honestly surprised I didn't get fired from carpool back then.

Although now that I think about it, the first time I *was* fired was in high school. This time it was my piano teacher. One would think as the consumer, I—or at least my mom—would get to do the firing. But instead I received a formal, typed-out letter in the mail claiming a desire to "slim down my piano studio and focus on teaching younger students." She didn't mention the frequent tears at my lessons that I always tried to hide with my bangs or my rhythmically inconsistent scales—impossible to pull off correctly without steady, daily practice. She also didn't mention that mine was the only letter she sent out.

I've since noticed that the people who end up majoring in piano performance are the ones who have a penchant for obedience and consistency. My neighbor Julie's a great pianist; she plays with measured certainty. I, on the other hand, play with passion, "dripping with emotion"

as my mom used to say. However, I'm embarrassed by my lack of accu-racy. I crave the technical perfection that can only be won through daily diligence, but I've never been able to sit long enough for the extra hours necessary. In fact, on the days in high school when I did practice, I spent most of my time sampling from the dozens of piano books on my mom's bookshelf because sight-reading felt more fun than playing what was assigned. There *was* one good side to my distracted piano ways, though: now I'm an excellent sight reader. Consistency can get you good tech-nique, but distraction makes you good-in-a-pinch and flexible.

I'm surprised to see in my journal that once at a summer music camp I actually won an award: a masterclass with the university's best professor. They told me to bring a "working piece," something I was still learning so he could give me feedback on it. But I was intimidated at the thought of my imperfections being laid out that obviously, so I decided to play my best piece, the one I'd just played in the piano competition, to impress him by not making any mistakes. The other students in the masterclass played half-finished songs and received many expert tips for achieving rhythmic precision or practicing tricky passages, but when this teacher got to my piece, he had little to say. I remember he helped me think through some of my interpretations of the song, playing a little more *giocoso,* but after a few minutes he moved on to the next student. Instead of being proud, I realized I had missed an opportunity to actually improve.

I leaf through my journals and wonder how many other times I'd missed opportunities to learn because I wanted to hide my flaws. I come across an entry about one particular winter Sunday during our time in graduate school when I was just setting out to walk down the icy, sky-scrapered wind tunnel that was our walk to church. Even though I'd woken up plenty early, I hadn't been able to find anything to wear that wasn't totally out of style or didn't make me look fat, and I was having a seriously bad hair day. By the time I saw the rented former boiler build-ing where the rest of my family was already sitting in sacrament meeting, church had been going for thirty minutes.

As I walked, I thought about how we'd been living in expensive Boston for six years and had no immediate hope for an end to my husband's PhD, let alone job prospects, and I'd recently given birth to our third child, whom we had to somehow fit into our already-bursting-at-the-seams twenty-fourth-floor apartment. Plus, the idea of opening the back door to the chapel yet again with all the heads turning to look at me felt like just another reminder of my utter weakness. I was tired and grumpy and not in the mood to see a bunch of perfect people at church having good hair days and who had yet again managed to get themselves there on time. Particularly irksome

were all those gorgeously coiffed, rich business school students who parked their bright red sports cars next to our rusty, dented non-power-locks-or-windows beater in the dorm parking garage. Oh, how I envied their key fobs, their talk of "stock portfolios," and their high-end fashion!

I thought hard that day about turning around and just going home; it seemed pretty justifiable in my mind. Then no one would notice I wasn't there—they'd probably assume I was home sick or out of town, and I could still pretend I wasn't just a work in progress. I finally said a prayer, "Heavenly Father, I'm going to show up, but that's all I can give today. I don't have it in me to make thoughtful comments or go out of my way to make friends with a new sister in Relief Society or volunteer to have the missionaries over. Today all I can do is show up." And with that, something kept me moving.

As I turned into the walled church courtyard and opened the old industrial door, the scripture story of the poor widow came into my mind—the one where she walks through all the rich worshippers to put in her two mites. That day I felt very much like that widow walking in her obvious weakness with little to give. I liked to think that the widow was a young mom like me, far from perfect, that she'd left a less-than-tidy house that day, that maybe she'd carried a child on her hip to the temple, hurrying because she was late, and that she might have even had some unkind thoughts about the rich people she'd had to walk through to get to the treasury box. But there was at least something that kept her moving.

Maybe she recognized that what she needed more than those two mites was proximity to God. And that the way to find him was to be in holy places giving what she could despite her obvious shortcomings. It's easy to give when you have abundance, on days when you have energy and excitement and good hair, but the test comes on those days when you're embarrassingly late, your shoes are wet from tromping through the snow, and your well-coiffed ward is glaring at your interruption.

I'd like to say that after I got to church that day something profound happened, but that's not always how lessons work. I don't remember the rest of that particular day. What I do remember is that I kept going, and soon after, I was called as the Primary pianist—a calling that was easy for me because, you know, I'm flexible and a good sight reader. And I ended up having a great time Doing as They Were Doing, Following the Prophet around the room, and racing the kids as they Head, Shouldered, Kneed, and Toed.

One Sunday as I was kneeling to put my songbook in my bag, I felt a triple tap on my shoulder. I turned and stood to see the tiniest three-year-old Sunbeam, Sara Lopez. She grabbed my hand and put a red folded-and-glued construction paper card in it.

"Teacher, teacher. I made this for you in my class."

I opened it to find a picture of a stick-figure woman with long brown hair holding hands with a girl with short black hair and a pink triangle skirt standing next to a big brown box.

"That's you and that's me and that's a piano."

Arched over the figures it said "tHAnk yOu tEAcHEr i LoVE u." She gave my legs a quick hug and ran off to her family. And as I stood there next to the brick wall of the Primary room, something inside me healed.

That little girl didn't care if I'd been late to church for the umpteenth time or that I felt self-conscious about my leftover baby weight. She'd accepted my meager offering as is, and for a brief moment her view of me felt like a window into God's.

Now, staring at the ADHD symptom list on my dusty monitor, I wonder if God can help me with these tendencies that have apparently always accompanied me along my way.

I think of Enoch and Moses, who were "slow of speech," and the overlooked servant Abish and an uneducated fourteen-year-old boy prophet. I wonder if God can make something of me too. I know we focus a lot on the scripture Ether 12:27 that God "will make weak things become strong," but I like verse 37 better: "because thou hast seen thy weakness, thou shalt be made strong." I'm realizing that in facing my whole self—warts and all—I can begin to give an offering that could open the windows of heaven. So I decide to try, like the widow, to give God "all my living."

Yes, I think, *but where do I begin when I'm already failing? I haven't even earned a D− in carpool.* Yet at that thought, my mind is drawn to the family of my newly called bishop, whose kids also attend the same across-town French-immersion school as mine. It occurs to me that by offering to start a carpool with them—with full disclosure of my past failings—*I* could be a blessing to *them* and take some of their daily burden. And I get along well with Andrea, the bishop's wife, who's much more chill about timing than my neighbor Julie, so there's a real chance for carpool redemption. Maybe this day of embarrassment and failure is the beginning of a miracle: the carpool relationship I was meant to have all along. And that feels like enough to keep me moving.

I fight the urge to put this off and pick up the phone.

"Hi, Andrea, I was just thinking about how our kids go to the same school and was wondering if you want to try a carpool. I need to tell you that I have a tendency to show up a little late sometimes, but it's something I'm working on . . ."

That They May Be Light

Stephanie Hock

When covenant women are together, they become each other's shelter. The storms might be raging around them, but they don't feel the rain or hear the thunder because they're so busy laughing and loving each other. They carry burdens collectively as they walk forward toward the light. They encourage each other to keep going and lean on each other when it's hard. I have found that walking through the storms of life with these women at my side has brought more relief than I could ever imagine. Physically, they've helped me with house moves, babies, sicknesses, work, laundry, and so much more. Emotionally, they have cried with me, laughed with me, listened to my feelings, and provided wisdom and strength so I haven't felt so alone. Spiritually, they've succored me and pointed me toward the one Redeemer who is the source of all true relief. I believe the work of Relief Society speaks to the very heart of our covenant to "bear one another's burdens, that they may be light" (Mosiah 18:8). And I believe the promise of light isn't just relief from heaviness but a promise of being a light to each other as we are filled with the light of Christ.

Joseph Smith and the Mormons
by Noah Van Sciver

New York: Abrams ComicArts, 2022

Reviewed by Scott Hales

Readers have been anticipating Noah Van Sciver's graphic novel *Joseph Smith and the Mormons* since 2011, when the cartoonist first published a story about Joseph Smith and Latter-day Saint origins in his indie comics anthology *Blammo.* In the story, Van Sciver offset a rather straightforward account of the First Vision and translation of the Book of Mormon with his signature visual style, an arresting combination of the primitive and the grotesque.[1] The result was an artistically intriguing retelling of early Church history, and readers wanted more. When Van Sciver subsequently published graphic novels about Abraham Lincoln (*The Hypo: The Melancholic Young Lincoln,* 2012) and Johnny Appleseed (*Johnny Appleseed: Green Spirit of the Frontier,* 2017), fans wondered if his next biographical work would tackle the life of the Latter-day Saint prophet.

In many ways, *Joseph Smith and the Mormons* does not disappoint. At 456 pages, it is an epic visual narrative covering the entirety of the Prophet's life, from his days as a young New York seer to his violent death at the Carthage jail. The book itself is as beautiful as it is ambitious. The golden color and gilt lettering of the cover evoke the gold plates, a detail accentuated by gilt-edged pages and front endpaper decorated with symbols from John Whitmer's "caractors" document. Inside, the book is richly colored with greens and other earth tones, and it contains a bibliography and extensive notes in back that reveal the depth of the author's research into and reflection on the life and ministry of Joseph Smith.

---

1. The story was later reprinted in the June 2011 issue of *Sunstone.* See Noah Van Sciver, "Van Sciver's Book of Mormon Origins," *Sunstone* 163 (June 2011): 23–27, https://sunstone.org/wp-content/uploads/sbi/articles/163-23-27.pdf.

Among other things, these notes reveal Van Sciver's motivation for telling Joseph Smith's story and for making certain artistic and interpretive decisions in the narrative. In his "Author's Note," Van Sciver explains that he was a practicing Latter-day Saint until the age of twelve, when his parents divorced and his mother "set to work separating her children from the faith as best she could," which included telling him "all about Joseph Smith and everything my Sunday School lessons never mentioned." Eventually, Van Sciver's faith "evaporated," and his childhood religion became a "curiosity" that his brain "couldn't quit picking at." Making *Joseph Smith and the Mormons,* he notes, became "a way of reconnecting with that part of my childhood." For him, Joseph Smith became something of a lynchpin in his relationship to his former faith: "I needed to know who Joseph Smith was. . . . I needed to *be* him, to inhabit the man through my art and act out the events of his life with my pen. I wanted to know how that would feel, and whether, after learning all about him, I would gain some special insight into and understanding of where the faith I grew up in came from. Then I would know if some divine heritage had been stripped from my life after my parents divorced" (440).

The book opens with Joseph's face buried in a hat, his father and Josiah Stowell looking on. Stowell is eager for Joseph, a barely literate young "scryer," to help him find buried treasure, and he is willing to pay. Joseph and his father take the job, but their efforts prove unsuccessful when Joseph, via a brown seer stone, sees the money slip away. While some readers may find this portrayal of the young prophet unflattering, Van Sciver treats Joseph with sensitivity and sympathy. The Smiths' poverty is evident throughout the early pages of the book, and Joseph hires out his services not to gain treasure or renown for himself, but to help support his close and loving family. In fact, there's a guilelessness—bordering on naiveté—to Joseph throughout the book, even when some of what he says or does seems, to some observers, questionable or problematic. Van Sciver's Joseph Smith is too earnest to be a con artist. He is a man of obvious faith and immense passion. Often, the story is less about him than the effect he has on people.

In her preface to *No Man Knows My History,* Fawn M. Brodie quipped that there are "few men" like Joseph Smith, "who have written so much and told so little about themselves." For her, the documentary record is "fiercely contradictory" about the Prophet, making it difficult for historians to sift fact from fiction and get a clear picture of the man. Ultimately, she found his "six-volume autobiography"—the first six books of

the *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*—to be "the antithesis of a confession."[2] In making *Joseph Smith and the Mormons,* though, Van Sciver had no need of a confession. The graphic novel is a work of historical fiction, so it has no fixed obligation to the documentary record. As Van Sciver explains in his "Selected Bibliography" at the end of the book, he has given readers his "*interpretation* of the story of Joseph Smith," and he freely admits to taking "a certain amount of artistic license" (452, emphasis original) with the historical record in order to make the narrative work. Yet, elsewhere in the back matter, he assures readers that "my approach with this graphic novel is to tell the story of Joseph Smith as straightforwardly as I can and to let readers draw their own conclusions" (440).

In this aim, he largely succeeds. Richard L. Bushman once argued that as a "practicing Mormon," he had an "advantage" as a biographer of the Prophet because he "believe[d] enough to take Joseph Smith seriously"—something Fawn Brodie was never able to do.[3] Although Noah Van Sciver is not a believer, one senses that he has enough respect for Joseph Smith and his followers, past and present, to give him and the church he founded a fair treatment. His thorough notes and glossary, which reveal a broad knowledge of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, are evidence of this. So too is his bibliography, which contains a wide range of Joseph Smith biographies, exposés, and church histories (including, to my delight, *Saints, Volume 1: The Standard of Truth*). While the book is not without its criticisms of Joseph Smith—particularly in his relationship with Emma and various Church dissenters—it never reduces the Prophet to a caricature. Latter-day Saints who are familiar with the Prophet's life—through the Joseph Smith Papers or *Saints*—will generally recognize Joseph in this book.

They will also be pleasantly surprised by how complete and nuanced it is, especially considering how difficult it can be to tell such an epic story in the graphic novel form. A traditional novel, after all, has a virtually unlimited capacity for exposition, description, and character development, which makes the form ideal for storytelling on a grand scale. A graphic novel, on the other hand, generally requires more simplicity, at least if the graphic novelist wants to keep the book at a manageable

---

2. Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), vii–viii.

3. Richard Lyman Bushman, *On the Road with Joseph Smith: An Author's Diary* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 125.

length. The form is more like theater or film in its dependence on imagery and dialogue to carry the story. Sometimes graphic novelists use captions to enhance the form's expository power, as Van Sciver and his coauthor Paul Buhle do in *Johnny Appleseed: Green Spirit of the Frontier,* but this can tax the reader's patience if done to the extreme. What's impressive about *Joseph Smith and the Mormons* is that it uses almost no expository captions to move the narrative along, fill in gaps, or provide additional context to the story. Instead, what we see throughout the book are "silent" panels, often depicting landscapes, that give readers time to pause and reflect on the story and its meaning. One of the most visually moving of these panels shows the Smith's house in Harmony, Pennsylvania, during the translation of the Book of Mormon. The sky above the house is rosy and streaked with clouds while manuscript pages float between the heavens and a window in the house. It is unclear what direction the pages are moving—are they descending or ascending?—but an old graveyard in the panel's foreground and a lush forest behind the house remind readers of the Book of Mormon's lasting relevance to both the quick and the dead (96).

Historians and readers with any kind of investment in Joseph Smith's story are bound to take issue with aspects of the graphic novel. The narrative hits most major milestones in the life of the Prophet and the history of the Church, but its limited canvas rarely allows the story to dwell on any single episode or secondary character for very long. Consequently, readers who are unfamiliar with early Church history may experience some disorientation as they try to understand the significance of the Kirtland Temple or the Missouri conflicts. Some readers may also question Van Sciver's choice to present the First Vision and other miraculous visitations as memories—stylized as blue line drawings—rather than in the story's present action. As he explains in his author's note, he does this to give readers more freedom to "draw their own conclusions" about "the more extraordinary events" of Church history (440).

The book also contains some glaring absences. For instance, there are no panels devoted specifically to the eight witnesses, the publication of the Book of Mormon, the organization of the Church, the Word of Wisdom, the office of patriarch, the calling of the twelve Apostles, the start of the British Mission, the siege of Far West, Joseph Smith's legal troubles in Nauvoo, the founding of the Relief Society, or the Kirtland and Nauvoo endowments. Likely because of space constraints, the book also does little to help readers understand the events of 1837–38, reducing the

Missouri War to a montage of violent images showing the suffering of the Saints. Characters like Martin Harris and Sidney Rigdon, moreover, sometimes come across as caricatures or composites (or both) instead of well-rounded characters. Aside from Emma and the Partridge sisters, the book also has a shortage of developed female characters, and readers familiar with the stories of early Latter-day Saint women—women like Lucy Mack Smith, Eliza R. Snow, Mercy and Mary Fielding, Vilate Kimball, and Jane Manning—may ask why they don't play a more visible role in the book.

Unsurprisingly, the most controversial aspect of *Joseph Smith and the Mormons* is its treatment of plural marriage. For the most part, Van Sciver maintains his objective, straightforward approach to storytelling as he narrates Joseph's involvement in the practice. Indeed, readers will find many parallels between his treatment of plural marriage and the depiction of the practice in the first volume of *Saints.* For instance, like *Saints,* Van Sciver balances the pain and heartache of the practice, particularly for Emma Smith, with the stories of Lucy Walker and others who received powerful spiritual confirmations to become plural wives. He also makes a good-faith effort to present the historical origins of and theological justifications for the practice. But the book never really shows the elite community plural marriage created in Nauvoo nor the way Joseph recruited the help of friends and family members when making marriage proposals. Instead, Joseph often appears to act alone with something of a wandering eye when young women like Fanny Alger and Nancy Rigdon enter the room.

Sensitive readers should be advised, moreover, that Van Sciver makes use of William McLellin's account of Emma Smith coming upon Joseph and Fanny Alger "transacting" in a barn. A blanket and well-placed limbs obscure any nudity, and the situation is not depicted as necessarily adulterous. But the episode is potentially explosive for those who are unfamiliar with the story or uncomfortable with the possibility of sexuality in Joseph's plural marriages (227–30). Some readers may also object to the book's attention to the more troubling aspects of Joseph's revelation on marriage, now canonized as Doctrine and Covenants 132. In one panel, Hyrum Smith reads to Emma from the revelation, saying, "For I am the Lord and will destroy her if she abide not in my law" (see D&C 132:54). There is then a silent panel showing Emma, sitting alone, a dead expression on her face. It is then followed by an almost identical image, but now, cracks have formed all over Emma's body, literally splitting her

apart. The panel is a clear criticism of the revelation and its language, yet it is also a powerful visual representation of Emma's struggle to reconcile herself to her husband's plural marriages (365).

While no reader may be wholly satisfied with *Joseph Smith and the Mormons,* the book is unquestionably a landmark text in Latter-day Saint literature—it is, perhaps, the best Mormon graphic novel to date—and an important touchstone in artistic representations of Joseph Smith. Van Sciver readily acknowledges that he has not written "a perfect graphic novel about the events surrounding the early years of the Latter-day Saints" (452). But when is perfection ever a requirement for excellence? *Joseph Smith and the Mormons* is far more than the sum of its flaws, and its determination to treat its subject with seriousness and sensitivity is a high compliment to those who honor Joseph Smith and have faith in the message he restored.

Scott Hales is a writer and historian for the Church History Department. He is a general editor and lead writer for *Saints,* the new four-volume narrative history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. His two-part graphic novel *The Garden of Enid: Adventures of a Weird Mormon Girl* was published by Greg Kofford Books in 2016 and 2017. He is also the author of *Hemingway in Paradise and Other Mormon Poems.* His scholarship and creative writing have been published in *The Edgar Allan Poe Review, Religion and the Arts, BYU Studies Quarterly, Irreantum,* and the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies.* He and his family live in Eagle Mountain, Utah.

Every Needful Thing: Essays on the Life of the Mind and the Heart, edited by Melissa Wei-Tsing Inouye and Kate Holbrook (Provo, Utah: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2022)

This important collection of essays is the result of the inspiration and insight of two generous and faithful scholars, Melissa Wei-Tsing Inouye and Kate Holbrook. Melissa has an appointment as a senior lecturer at the University of Auckland and is a historian for the Church History Department. Kate, who passed away in 2022, was also a historian, who worked on such important books as *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society: Key Documents in Latter-day Saint Women's History* and *At the Pulpit: 185 Years of Discourses by Latter-day Saint Women.* Together, Melissa and Kate have sought out essays "on the life of the mind and the heart" from Latter-day Saint women scholars throughout the world: the Philippines, Samoa, New Zealand, Peru, Argentina, Nigeria, the People's Republic of China, and the Seneca and Navajo Nations, as well as the United States.

The book's title is taken from a verse in the Doctrine and Covenants: "Organize yourselves; prepare every needful thing; and establish a house, even a house of prayer, a house of fasting, a house of faith, a house of learning, a house of glory, a house of order, a house of God" (D&C 88:119). Latter-day Saint women scholars were invited to write about how they negotiate the complexities of faith, scholarship, family, and community suggested by this scripture.

The twenty-three writers represent the disciplines of medicine, history, university administration, music, theology, science, law, international relations, education, business, literature, and mathematics. One of the strengths of the collection is that the reader can learn so much about so many topics, as each writer considers how her faith in the gospel increased her understanding of her discipline, and how her discipline increased her understanding of the gospel. Learning by both study and faith has helped these scholars to better negotiate our imperfect and sometimes judgmental world.

Many of the writers describe their early lives and explain how they were led to their professions. They discuss influential mentors who helped them make choices that determined the direction of their lives. Almost all of them faced some kind of adversity they were able to overcome with faith and by focusing on principles of the gospel. In explaining the work they do, they also discuss how they depend on spiritual help. For example, many were led to change the direction of their research or to find answers to research questions through prayer and by trusting the inspiration they received.

It is difficult to summarize the contributions of such a diverse collection because each essay offers much food for thought. Each reader will have personal favorites. The major gift Melissa and Kate have given the Latter-day Saint community in compiling and editing this fine collection is to show the growing contributions of LDS women throughout the world and to provide examples of how these women combine faith and scholarship in their personal and professional lives.

—Susan Elizabeth Howe

Perspectives on Latter-day Saint Names and Naming: Names, Identity, and Belief, edited by Dallin D. Oaks, Paul Baltes, and Kent Minson (New York City: Routledge, 2023)

Perspectives on Latter-day Saint Names and Naming: Names, Identity, and Belief, edited by Dallin D. Oaks, Paul Baltes,

and Kent Minson, is an exploration of the significance and practices surrounding names within the context of the faith and culture of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

With recognizable contributors such as Eric A. Eliason, Don E. Norton, John A. Tvedtnes, Joseph Fielding McConkie, John Gee, Stephen D. Ricks, and Brad Wilcox, as well as the editors, this thought-provoking anthology examines the intricate ways in which names shape and reflect an individual's sense of self, familial connections, and place within the broader community.

The book delves into the historical, cultural, theological, and covenantal dimensions of naming within the Church, exploring its impact on personal and communal identity. The editors have curated articles that examine the scriptural and theological foundations, the historical development, and the contemporary practices of naming children and places in the Latter-day Saint faith. Readers will find how names carry a sacred and transformative power, both in personal spiritual experiences and in important religious rituals, such as baptism and temple ordinances.

The articles tackle contemporary issues and challenges related to names in LDS culture. For instance, there are discussions surrounding the use of middle names, surnames, and the adoption of nontraditional or diverse names within the faith. This includes culturally significant names associated with Latter-day Saints, such as names derived from the Book of Mormon or Church history and parents choosing the last names of General Authorities as first names for their children. The editors aim to foster a broader understanding and appreciation of the complexity and diversity in naming practices of Church members. Overall, the book presents various viewpoints and research findings, providing a comprehensive overview of the subject.

Perspectives on Latter-day Saint Names and Naming is a valuable resource for both scholars and members of the Church interested in the intersection of religion, culture, and personal identity. This anthology invites readers to reflect on the power and significance of names and their integral role in shaping individual and communal identities of Latter-day Saints.

—Matthew B. Christensen