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Title Asked and Answered: A Response to Grant H. Palmer

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Abstract Review of *An Insider's View of Mormon Origins* (2002), by Grant H. Palmer.

Asked and Answered: A Response to Grant H. Palmer

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Reviewing Grant Palmer's first published work, *An Insider's View of Mormon Origins,* became an unusual personal challenge to me. It was not that the book had any effect on my beliefs—I have seen nearly all the arguments before and long since dealt with them. It was because it touches on two things I hold dear. One is balanced scholarship and academic integrity, which I have spent a career trying to preach and practice. The other is something especially sacred to me—my personal belief in the reality of Joseph Smith's first vision, the authenticity of the Book of Mormon, and the restoration of priesthood authority. Reviews ordinarily center just on scholarly matters, but somehow I could not approach this particular one without intermixing the two. My commentary, therefore, is in first person and very personal.[1]

A shorter version of this review appears in the book review section of *BYU Studies* 42/2 (2004): 175–89.

1. The reader is also urged to consult the reviews by Davis Bitton, Mark Ashurst-McGee, Steven C. Harper, and Louis Midgley in *FARMS Review* 15/2 (2003). Bitton, in "The Charge of a Man with a Broken Lance (But Look What He Doesn't Tell Us)," 257–71, identifies many sources, scholars, and issues that Palmer all too conveniently ignores. Harper's article, "Trustworthy History?" 273–307, focuses mainly on how Palmer "manipulates

Review of Grant H. Palmer. *An Insider's View of Mormon Origins.* Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002. xiii + 281 pp., with selected bibliography and index. $24.95.

Early in the book, Palmer admonishes historians to have a questioning attitude, honesty and integrity in their dealings with fellow church members, no fear of coercion to secure uniformity of thought, and a willingness to face difficult issues head-on (pp. xi, xiii). This is an ideal shared by historians, even though in their efforts to pursue it they do not always agree. Palmer is persuaded that the evidence does not support the foundational stories of the church, including the literal reality of the first vision, the Moroni visits and other spiritual manifestations, or the historical authenticity of the Book of Mormon. On the other hand, highly respected Latter-day Saint scholars have examined the same evidence and drawn different conclusions. I will not attempt here to answer all the problems raised by Palmer; a few examples will illustrate the kind of faulty speculation, incomplete evidence, and misleading "parallels" that plague his book. My intent is simply to summarize some of his assertions, show that nearly all of them have been dealt with in detail by well-qualified LDS scholars, and point the interested reader to some of their readily available writings. These scholars all have advanced degrees, usually doctoral degrees, with a wide variety of specialties, among them early American history, ancient civilizations, ancient languages, linguistics, anthropology, law, and philosophy. It is clear in their writings, moreover (though they avoid belaboring the point), that they are also believers.[2] I recognize

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evidence" regarding the Book of Mormon witnesses, on his "exaggerated hermeneutic of suspicion" regarding the priesthood restoration accounts, and on his recycling of Wesley Walters's 1969 arguments regarding the first vision, which adds "nothing new." In "A One-Sided View of Mormon Origins," 309–64, Ashurst-McGee addresses the central thesis of each chapter of Palmer's book, responding to virtually each of his arguments and concluding that "an open-minded reader may find that, in most cases, interpretations favorable to the integrity of Joseph Smith and his revelations are as reasonable as or even more reasonable than those presented by Palmer. Midgley's article, "*Pry*ing into Palmer," 365–410, explores some details in the making of *An Insider's View,* the basic facts about Palmer's employment history in the Church Educational System, and the unconvincing parallels between E. T. A. Hoffmann's "The Golden Pot" and the Book of Mormon.

2. See, for example, the simple and inoffensive statement of Richard L. Bushman, winner of the prestigious Bancroft Prize for American History in 1968 and one of the best living authorities on Joseph Smith. In the introduction to his widely heralded *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 3, he announces that his "modest purpose" is to narrate what happened as Mormon-

that simply piling up names of authorities is not sufficient, but I would remind readers that in their search for truth they must read not only the naysayers but also the proven experts. "Asked and answered," we frequently hear lawyers say during trials on television crime shows when their opponents persist in bringing up old questions, and "asked and answered" is a good part of my response to many of the questions Palmer puts forth.

I believe that the evidence favoring the foundational stories is powerful and convincing, but I also believe that the literal reality of the first vision and other sacred experiences can be neither proved nor disproved by secular objectivity. Of course, Latter-day Saint scholars usually look at the evidence through the eyes of faith as well as through the eyes of scholarship, and most will tell you that, ultimately, their testimonies rest on the affirmation of the Spirit. On the other hand, church members who know of Palmer's background will be disappointed to find that he has no confidence in such spiritual confirmation for, he says, the Holy Ghost is an "unreliable means of proving truth" (p. 133). It may be that this lack of confidence in the Spirit helps account for his divergence from what he was presumably teaching when employed by the Church Educational System. Nevertheless, scholars who take it upon themselves to write about these foundational events should be held to common scholarly standards, and it is evident from the writings of those discussed below that their faith has not kept them from applying such standards to their research and

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ism came into being and then says, simply and unobtrusively: "The problem of Joseph Smith's visions complicates even this simplified undertaking. Believing Mormons like myself understand the origins of the Book of Mormon quite differently from others. How can a description of Joseph Smith's revelations accommodate a Mormon's perception of events and still make sense to a general audience? My method has been to relate events as the participants themselves experienced them, using their own words where possible. Insofar as the revelations were a reality to them [and, by his own quiet admission, still a reality to Bushman], I have treated them as real in this narrative." Then, throughout the book, Bushman deals with many of the issues raised by Palmer (including such sensitive questions as the evidence for the restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood, where he takes a somewhat unorthodox stand on the question of when it occurred). He is only one example of the many fine scholars who have studied the same things Palmer has and yet maintain their faith in the integrity of the foundational stories.

writing. Palmer, however, seems to have allowed his desire to debunk traditional faith to blind him to some of those standards.

An Insider's View of Mormon Origins portrays Joseph Smith as a brilliant, though not formally educated, young man who made up the Book of Mormon, as well as other LDS scriptures, by drawing from various threads in his cultural environment. His early religious experiences (the first vision, the visits of Moroni, and priesthood restoration) were not real or physical, but only "spiritual." The stories evolved over time from "relatively simple experiences into more impressive spiritual manifestations, from metaphysical to physical events" and were "rewritten by Joseph and Oliver and other early church officials so that the church could survive and grow" (pp. 260–61). Even the witnesses of the gold plates never really saw them. They had only a spiritual experience. (Why Deity or gold plates seen with "spiritual eyes" could not also be physical realities is never satisfactorily explained.)

Despite such assertions, Palmer does not see himself either as an anti-Mormon or as someone bent on undermining the faith. He presents himself as a faithful Mormon whose "intent is to increase faith, not diminish it" (p. ix). He recently retired after a long career in the Church Educational System, and at the time he wrote the book he was a high priest group instructor in his ward in Sandy, Utah. His announced twofold purpose is (1) simply to introduce church members who have not kept up with the developments in church history over the last thirty years to "issues that are central to the topic of Mormon origins" and (2) to help church members "understand historians and religion teachers like myself" (p. x).

Palmer's readers may well wonder what kind of faith he is trying to increase, for nothing in the book generates confidence in Joseph Smith or modern scripture. He says that he wants church members to understand that the stories of the first vision, the angel Moroni, the Book of Mormon, and priesthood restoration are simply religious allegories (p. 261). Nevertheless, a certain inspiration went into the development of Joseph Smith's teachings, and Palmer says he cherishes many of them. He claims that the focus of his worship, and the object of the faith he wants to promote, is Jesus Christ. Mormon history

gives him "a great commitment to Christ's teachings," and he cites Joseph Smith to the effect that all other things are only appendages to the testimony of Christ. As Latter-day Saints, he says in his concluding paragraph, "our religious faith should be based and evaluated by how our spiritual and moral lives are centered on Jesus Christ, rather than in Joseph Smith's largely rewritten, materialist, idealized, and controversial accounts of the church's founding" (p. 263). As I read that statement, I could not help but wonder whether Palmer really knows the message of the Book of Mormon. Is he actually saying that telling the foundational stories undermines or takes precedence over the worship of Christ in his or other wards of the church? Leaving aside, for a moment, the question of whether those stories are accurate, it seems to me that in his pursuit of the "truth" about them he has seen only part of what really goes on in church—at least in the church I go to. I have attended wards in many parts of the United States, and invariably I find that the major focus in sacrament meetings and Sunday School is Christ. Of course we talk about the church's founding, but in the larger scheme of things, that always takes second place to the Savior and his teachings. Of course we regularly quote from the Book of Mormon, but the all-important, and most prominent, message of that book is Jesus Christ and his atonement. I could not agree more with Palmer's assertion that, as Latter-day Saints, our chief focus should be on Christ and his teachings, but Palmer is wrong if he is implying that we do otherwise.

Palmer says that he wants to help church members "understand historians and religion teachers like [himself]," but the reader may be confused, initially, as to who those historians and religion teachers are. He does not specifically identify them, but in his preface he gives high praise to "the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Church History at Brigham Young University, BYU history and religion professors and scholars from other disciplines and other church schools, and seminary and institute faculty" who have done painstaking work in all the primary sources, gathered data from the environment, studied the language of the revelations and scriptures and compared it with the language of the time, excavated and restored historical sites,

and "published, critiqued, and reevaluated a veritable mountain of evidence." However, he complains, "too much of this escapes the view of the rank-and-file in the church" (p. viii). Such a statement may mislead some into assuming that the Latter-day Saint scholars and teachers alluded to agree with his perceptions—or, at least, that he draws his conclusions from their works. For the record, nothing could be further from the truth.[3]

There seems also to be an implication that, over the years, Palmer has discussed these issues with other Latter-day Saint scholars and that some may agree with his analysis.[4] I have no personal knowledge of any such conversations, but it is important for the reader to understand that when scholars meet together they discuss candidly whatever issues may arise and whatever new information may have come to light. As new sources become available, or divergent insights are presented, scholars seldom write them off as unimportant or insignificant. They consider them straightforwardly and may well say something like "Hmm, that is really interesting, let's look into it," or "Yes, that raises some interesting and important questions." But such

3. See, for example, the "Statement regarding Grant Palmer's Book, *An Insider's View of Mormon Origins*," *FARMS Review* 15/2 (2003): 255; also on the Web site of the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History at smithinstitute.byu.edu. The statement reads:

> In the preface to his book, *An Insider's View of Mormon Origins,* Grant Palmer speaks approvingly of historical work done by the faculty of the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History (pp. vii–viii). To some readers, this has suggested that Smith Institute faculty are among Palmer's category of "historians and religion teachers like myself" who share his views of Latter-day Saint origins (p. x). In subsequent remarks to audiences Palmer has encouraged this view.
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> Smith Institute scholars are unified in rejecting Palmer's argument that Mormon foundational stories are largely inaccurate myths and fictional accounts.
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> Palmer writes of a "near-consensus on many of the details" (p. ix) regarding early church origins, as if most scholars see them in much the same way that he does. We and many other historians take issue with a substantial portion of Palmer's treatment of such details. We encourage and participate in rigorous scholarly investigation and discussion of the historical record, and from our perspective acceptance of Joseph Smith's foundational religious claims remains compatible with such investigation. Our publications, past and present, which are readily available to the public, speak for themselves on these matters.

4. Palmer does not say this in his book, but such ideas seem to be circulating on the Internet and in various private conversations.

responses hardly imply that they agree with whatever viewpoints they are discussing, though some observers may be misled into thinking so. Of course there are people who agree with Palmer, but those he seemingly alludes to in his preface are not among them.[5]

There is another implication, not stated by Palmer but apparently circulated in much of the discussion that goes on through the Internet and other places, that some people still in the employ of the church dare not come out with their "true" feelings because they are intimidated by fear of loss of employment and even loss of church membership. Palmer himself may have felt such fear, for he did not publish any of this before he left church employment. But "now that I am retired," he says, "I find myself compelled to discuss in public what I pondered mostly in private at that time" (p. x). It amazes me, however, that some people (not Palmer, perhaps, but some of his disciples) can impute such hidden sentiments to scholars whom they do not know but who have continually published their own findings and interpretations for

5. Elsewhere in the book, Palmer enlists B. H. Roberts in his discussion of the Book of Mormon because of the numerous questions Roberts once raised about it. He does not make clear, however, that Roberts never lost faith in the Book of Mormon. Honest scholar that he was, Roberts recognized many of the issues Palmer deals with, wrote about them, and presented his questions to the church's Quorum of the Twelve. But they were questions, not answers, and John W. Welch and Truman G. Madsen have shown that rather than let the unanswered questions destroy his faith in the book, he continued to believe in it and to preach from it. In fact, even after he prepared his manuscript on the questions (which was never intended for publication), he continued to let the Book of Mormon guide much of what he had to say in *The Truth, the Way, the Life,* a work he thought of as his magnum opus. He even concluded his final testimony in the Salt Lake Tabernacle by affirming that God gave to Joseph Smith "power from on high to translate the *Book of Mormon*" and listing its translation as among the many events "and numerous revelations to the Prophet which brought forth a development of the truth, that surpasses all revealed truth of former dispensations." B. H. Roberts, *Discourses of B. H. Roberts of the First Council of the Seventy,* comp. Elsie Cook (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1948), 104, 105. See also John W. Welch, "B. H. Roberts: Seeker after Truth," *Ensign,* March 1986, 56–62; Truman G. Madsen and John W. Welch, "Did B. H. Roberts Lose Faith in the Book of Mormon?" (FARMS paper, 1985); Truman G. Madsen, "B. H. Roberts and the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 19/3 (1979): 427–45; Davis Bitton, "B. H. Roberts and Book of Mormon Scholarship," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8/1 (1999): 60–69. For a brief discussion of the Book of Mormon and its relationship to *The Truth, the Way, the Life,* see the appropriate section in James B. Allen, "The Story of *The Truth, the Way, the Life,*" *BYU Studies* 33/4 (1993): 691–741.

years. Moreover, many who are now retired, or who otherwise are not dependent upon the church for their livelihood (and are therefore "safe" from intimidation), still continue to publish and lecture on Mormon origins with no change at all in their perspectives. Such people include Richard L. Bushman, who serves part time as chairman of the board of the Smith Institute. The reader may be interested in going to the Institute's Web site for a list of the rest of the faculty as well as of the Institute's senior research fellows, including six BYU retirees, all of whom have published widely in LDS history and none of whom supports the conclusions reached by Palmer.[6] Other people who might be included among the "historians like myself" to whom Palmer alludes include the staff of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies,[7] other BYU faculty members, and other Latter-day Saint scholars. Palmer would no doubt say that he did not intend to imply that all these people agree with him, which still leaves us asking who are the "historians and religion teachers like myself" that need to be understood—and who, presumably, share his views? It would be amiss for me to speculate on an answer, but they are not among the groups mentioned above.

Palmer complains about the "Sunday school" type of history, claiming that his "demythologized" versions of the foundational stories "are in many cases more spiritual, less temporal, and more stirring" than what is generally taught (p. ix), though he spends little time trying to demonstrate this curious pronouncement. What we must do, he says, is address and ultimately correct the "disparity between historical narratives and the inspirational stories told in church" (p. xii). This, I think, tends to beg the issue. The leaders of the church are well aware of the various accounts of the first vision and other foundational stories, as well as the sometimes confusing reports by Joseph Smith's contemporaries. Latter-day Saint scholars have been writing about these matters for years. However, in Sunday School there is little time to go into all the details of church history, and especially not the controversies concerning those details. That is not the purpose of Sunday School. Neverthe-

6. See smithinstitute.byu.edu.

7. See farms.byu.edu for a list of this research institute's personnel and publications.

less, the scholars Palmer claims to admire have gone into great detail on nearly all the issues he brings up and have published significant books and articles about their findings. These publications frequently "demythologize" in the sense that they correct false impressions and tend to modify old ideas, bring to light various contextual considerations, and reveal a great deal of new information about Joseph Smith, his contemporaries, and the Book of Mormon. These writings usually do not find their way into "official" church literature—that is, the *Ensign,* the *New Era,* the *Church News,* the *Liahona* (the church's international magazine), and Sunday School, priesthood, and Relief Society manuals—and for good reason. Such publications are not intended to be a forum for academic discussion of controversial issues. Just the opposite, they are designed for the entire population of the church, from the "seasoned" member to the newest convert, so they deal primarily with basic gospel principles and gospel living. Nonetheless, Latter-day Saint scholars who do such cutting-edge research are encouraged by the church to find outlets for their work in church-supported scholarly publications such as *BYU Studies,* the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies,* the *FARMS Review,* several other journals that direct themselves to Latter-day Saint audiences, and various reputable publishing houses, including Deseret Book and various national book publishers. The work of these scholars, who, as Palmer says, have "published, critiqued, and reevaluated a veritable mountain of evidence," is out there to be read and is easily found by anyone who has the interest.

Palmer is right, unfortunately, in saying that not enough LDS historical scholarship has come to the attention of the "rank-and-file" in the church, but this is hardly the fault of either the church or its scholars. It illustrates the sad fact that the vast majority of the reading public seems less interested in history than in lively fiction (largely mysteries, adventure, romance novels, and historical novels) and books on health and diet.[8] History is almost at the bottom of the list,

8. On *USA Today*'s list of the 150 best sellers for the week ending 1 February 2004, for example, the best seller was a book on diet, next was a mystery novel, then came another diet book, another mystery novel, and then another diet book. The first nonfiction or nondiet book, *The Purpose-Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* appeared only in

and, though Latter-day Saints often gain certain historical insights from historical novels, they seldom seek out the scholarly literature that deals with complex issues and problems such as those discussed by Palmer. Again, this is not the fault of the church—it is just human nature. However, the material is out there for those who want to find it.[9] Given Palmer's high praise for all this work in his introduction, it seems ironic that he virtually ignores it in the rest of the book.

The Book of Mormon

In his first chapter, Palmer attempts to demonstrate that Joseph Smith did not have the power to translate anything and that therefore not just the Book of Mormon but also his Bible translations and the Book of Abraham were fabricated (albeit, Palmer seems to feel, in some kind of "inspired" way). The Book of Mormon, he argues, is neither a "translation" nor a direct dictation from God but, instead, "a nineteenth-century encounter with God rather than an ancient epic" (p. 36). In other words, it is inspired fiction. Among his arguments is the fact that there are so many passages in the Book of Mormon that are similar to, or the same as, passages from the King James Version of the Bible. In fact, he says, "scholars have determined that he [Joseph] consulted an open Bible, specifically a printing of the King James translation dating from 1769 or later, including its errors" (p. 10). Later in the book, Palmer suggests that Joseph Smith knew the Bible thoroughly—even, perhaps, having it memorized—thus accounting for his ability to insert Bible passages as he constructed the Book of Mormon (pp. 46–47). One problem here is that the writers he cites really have no way of knowing whether Joseph did or did not have a Bible in front of him, and there

eleventh place, and the next one, number eighteen, was a book on financial planning. Only a handful of books with historical substance appeared on the list, and all of them dealt with current issues. Church members, unfortunately, have similar habits, though they also read books on life and living written by church leaders and other inspirational writers.

9. A guide to the published historical literature on the church, including controversial works, is James B. Allen, Ronald W. Walker, and David J. Whittaker, *Studies in Mormon History, 1830–1997: An Indexed Bibliography* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000). This work is constantly being updated and will soon be available over the Internet. See also the Web sites of *BYU Studies* (byustudies.byu.edu) and FARMS for indexes to their publications.

is no evidence that any of his associates said such a thing. In fact, the statements usually cited are not always contemporary (some were made years after the fact), they do not always agree in detail, and some of those who made them were not actual witnesses to the translation, or dictation, process. LDS scholars have already dealt with the issue of biblical passages in the Book of Mormon many times, but Palmer chooses either to ignore or to brush too lightly over what they have to say. In a review of an earlier work casting doubt on Joseph Smith as the translator, Royal Skousen, who has spent years in painstaking study of the Book of Mormon text, shows from contemporary accounts that the youthful Joseph was not that great a Bible student (for one thing, he did not even know that there were walls around Jerusalem) and that contemporary witnesses affirm that he did not have a Bible with him while translating. Skousen also discusses numerous other points raised by earlier doubters and repeated by Palmer.[10] Another scholar, John W. Welch, explores in depth the section in 3 Nephi that is highly similar to the Sermon on the Mount as recorded in Matthew.[11] In comparing the two sermons he emphasizes not just the similarities but, more importantly, the differences, showing that "the relationship between these texts cannot be attributed to a superficial, thoughtless, blind, or careless plagiarism. On the contrary, the differences are systematic, consistent, methodological, and in several cases quite deft."[12] In his only allusion to Welch, Palmer faults his speculation that God brought the biblical text to Joseph's memory as he was translating, asserting that the Bible edition Joseph used contained mistakes and asking why, if God inspired Joseph, these mistakes were perpetuated in the Book of Mormon (pp. 135–36). Again, however, Welch has already dealt with that issue, in chapter 8 of the same book. Drawing on his own knowledge of Greek texts, he shows that there is no way to know that, in the edition Joseph may have used, the passages in question were, in fact, erroneous translations.

10. See Royal Skousen, "Critical Methodology and the Text of the Book of Mormon," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994): 5–12.

11. John W. Welch, *The Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), esp. chap. 5.

12. Ibid., 93.

Numerous other works by Latter-day Saint scholars deal with the authorship of the Book of Mormon and, as a group, consider nearly every issue raised by Palmer. The point, however, is not just that they present more sophisticated arguments, but that none of the questions raised by Palmer has been hidden by the church or ignored by its scholars and, as ingenious and seemingly overwhelming as the arguments of Palmer and others are, their readers must not presume that they can withstand the scrutiny of well-trained scholars and students of scripture who have spent their careers studying the same issues.

Palmer includes a discussion of the discredited Kinderhook plates, showing that they were a hoax and suggesting that Joseph Smith nevertheless claimed that he could translate them (pp. 1–38). What he does not say, however, is that all this information has been dealt with earlier, in church publications, so it is no secret. In his article on the Kinderhook plates,[13] Stanley B. Kimball tells the story in detail. Joseph may, at first, have thought these plates were authentic, and the *Times and Seasons* even published a statement to the effect that a translation was forthcoming. But the translation did not appear, according to Kimball, simply because Joseph Smith was not fooled for long and soon dropped the matter. The statement in Joseph Smith's *History* saying that "I have translated a portion of them" did not come from Joseph Smith. Rather, this statement stems from the diary of William Clayton, who wrote on 1 May 1843 that "I have seen 6 brass plates. . . . Prest J. [Joseph] has translated a portion of them." Whether Joseph Smith actually tried to translate the plates or was just speculating on their contents in Clayton's presence, or whether Clayton himself was just speculating, is unknown. The statement got into Joseph's history later, when Clayton's diary was used as a source and third-person references were transposed by the editors into first-person statements. The fact that the plates were a hoax was not revealed until many years after Joseph's death, but modern scholars have not been hesitant to discuss the issue and the church has not hidden the facts.

13. Stanley B. Kimball, "Kinderhook Plates Brought to Joseph Smith Appear to be a Nineteenth-Century Hoax," *Ensign,* August 1981, 66–74. See also the short entry by Stanley B. Kimball, "Kinderhook Plates," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism,* 2:789.

Palmer also attacks the authenticity of the Book of Abraham and Joseph Smith's interpretation of the other Egyptian papyri he possessed (pp. 12–30). Without going into detail here, let me simply refer the reader to the voluminous writings of Hugh Nibley, one of the church's most learned scholars of ancient civilizations and languages, who has dealt openly with all the major issues. Even he recognizes that there are various ways to interpret such ancient material and that all the answers are not in, but one would be amiss to doubt his integrity as a scholar.[14] Palmer, relying on the work of another doubter, criticizes Nibley for focusing primarily on Egyptian temple rituals (p. 16), but a careful reading of the *Improvement Era* series as well as *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri* will show that his work is broader than that.

Having satisfied himself that Joseph Smith must have concocted the Book of Mormon by drawing from his biblical knowledge as well as a variety of sources in his environment, Palmer proceeds to amass his evidence in four succeeding chapters. In chapter 2, "Authorship of the Book of Mormon," he comes up with what he considers a "plausible scenario" on how the book came to be. Perhaps, he hypothesizes, the idea began to form in Joseph's mind even before Martin Harris became his scribe in 1828, for he had already experimented with seer stones and thought that maybe God would open his mind to other things. After the loss of the first 116 pages of dictation, "an apprenticeship had been served," and Joseph had nine months before Oliver

14. A list of many of his works appears on the FARMS Web site, but see especially those listed here: Hugh W. Nibley, "A New Look at the Pearl of Great Price," *Improvement Era,* January 1968–May 1970 (a twenty-seven–part series that appeared sometime after the rediscovery of the Joseph Smith Papyri and the resulting academic controversy over their meaning and their relation to the Book of Abraham began); some parts were reprinted in *Abraham in Egypt,* 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 2000). See also *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1975); "The Facsimiles of the Book of Abraham: A Response," *Sunstone,* December 1979, 49–51; and "The Meaning of the Kirtland Egyptian Papers," *BYU Studies* 11/4 (1971): 350–99. One of the church's most gifted scholars, Nibley graduated summa cum laude from the University of California at Los Angeles and completed his PhD as a university fellow at the University of California at Berkeley. He has been associated with BYU since 1946.

Cowdery came to help to "ponder the details" and flesh out the story. Then, before the book was published, he had eight more months to make textual refinements. In LDS-history-according-to-Palmer, Joseph actually had at least three years to "develop, write, and refine the book" (pp. 66–67), or six years, if one counts from when he first told his family about the project. This is conjecture, of course, and is clearly a challenge to what LDS scholars have written on the issue. John W. Welch, for example, has determined that, in fact, it took only about sixty-five to seventy-five days to complete the translation,[15] not several years to make up a story. Of course, Joseph made modifications and corrections during the time the book was in press, but these were not extensive and had no effect on its story line or basic substance. (Incidentally, Palmer makes a mistake when he uses Welch's *Ensign* article for his statement that Joseph Smith dictated the final manuscript in about ninety days [p. 66]. In the article cited, Welch says sixty-five days, though in a later revision of the article he says sixty-five to seventy-five.)

Palmer's estimate is based on his assumption that Joseph Smith somehow began plotting his publication very early, memorized it in detail, and then dictated it from memory over a short period of time. However, as LDS scholars have consistently pointed out, there is a singular internal consistency within the Book of Mormon, including recurring threads and patterns that would be most difficult if not impossible for Joseph Smith to keep in mind as he made up a story and then dictated it, without the use of notes, over a period of sixty-five to seventy-five days, always taking up exactly where he had left off the day before. Moreover, the central material in the Book of Mormon is not the story line but, rather, the powerful, often profound and beautiful, spiritual messages given throughout—most of them centering on Christ and his teachings. They are so abundant, and impress me so deeply, that it seems highly improbable to me that someone trying to perpetrate

15. See John W. Welch, "How Long Did It Take Joseph Smith to Translate the Book of Mormon?" *Ensign,* January 1988, 46; and "How Long Did It Take to Translate the Book of Mormon?" in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon,* ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 1–8.

a fraud could work all that, along with a consistent, highly complex narrative, into a book of fiction dictated in so short a time. With what we know about Joseph Smith's inherent lack of literary prowess, it becomes especially difficult to believe that he was the author.

There are better ways, I think, of looking at this. If one looks at the story through the eyes of faith and assumes that the gold plates were real, an equally or perhaps even more "plausible scenario" emerges. There can be little doubt that young Joseph was thinking about his future task and probably even had some good ideas about what was on the plates before he was actually given them and told to translate them. After all, he was visited and instructed by Moroni several times before he got them. The only authoritative statement on how the Book of Mormon was translated is Joseph Smith's own affirmation that he did it "by the gift and power of God," but we can still imagine several possible scenarios. Royal Skousen and others have argued that Joseph may have received the translation word for word, though not without previous prayerful thought and effort.[16] A similar possibility is that, being already familiar with some of the history of the Nephites and Lamanites (from Moroni's several visits), and also being familiar with the Bible, as Joseph studied prayerfully words came to his mind and he had the experience alluded to in the Doctrine and Covenants: "If it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right" (D&C 9:8). The words may have been his own words, in the language he best understood (though, as scholars have repeatedly shown, they were beyond his own limited linguistic talents, so there was clearly inspiration or revelation as the words came), but he also received spiritual confirmation that they accurately reflected what the Book of Mormon prophets meant to convey. So far as biblical passages are concerned, it is well known that different translators will not translate the same document in exactly the same words, but each of their translations may still be "correct" representations of what the original document said. Joseph used words that he

16. See, for example, Royal Skousen, "How Joseph Smith Translated the Book of Mormon: Evidence from the Original Manuscript," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 7/1 (1998): 22–31.

and the people he knew could best understand as scripture—words as close as he could come to the scriptural style they knew, the King James Version of the Bible. When it came to Isaiah passages and other passages that reflected ideas that were the same as those of the Book of Mormon prophets, it was only natural that he render them in the King James style—even word for word—if they still reflected the same ideas. (It does not bother me to think that, somehow, he had access to and used his Bible during that part of the translation process—hence the word-for-word rendition of Isaiah—but, if the process was inspired, this allows for the significant differences in wording that resulted.) Further, if Christ really did appear to the ancient Nephites, why would he not have delivered his message in almost the same words he employed in Jerusalem? Would this not help account for the similarities between the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon at the Temple? Nephi reminds us that "the Lord God giveth light unto the understanding; for he speaketh unto men according to their language, unto their understanding" (2 Nephi 31:3), and the Lord reminded the Saints with respect to modern revelation that "I am God and have spoken it; these commandments are of me, and were given unto my servants in their weakness, after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding" (D&C 1:24). We don't know what would happen if someone were to translate the same material today, even under inspiration, but it is conceivable that the words would be different, perhaps even in more modern English, such as that in the New International Version of the Bible, but the meaning would be the same and the translation would be "correct." To his credit, even though Palmer discusses some of the parallels between the Book of Mormon and Ethan Smith's *View of the Hebrews,* he does not claim, as some before him have, that *View of the Hebrews* is a direct source for parts of the Book of Mormon. Rather, he uses the parallels to show that in Joseph Smith's cultural setting there was a belief that American Indians were descended from Israelites and that this idea could have provided the inspiration for Joseph Smith to make the same claim in the Book of Mormon (pp. 58–64). Palmer is right about the perception of American antiquities held by many people at the time,

but that is not proof that it provided the idea for the Book of Mormon. Because A is similar to B is not necessarily a reason to assume that A was the source for B, especially, in this case, when Palmer himself recognizes that internally *View of the Hebrews* and the Book of Mormon are not similar. Interestingly enough, information about *View of the Hebrews* has been available through LDS sources for many years, and in 1996 BYU's Religious Studies Center republished, in its entirety, the 1825 edition.[17] Again, nothing about this issue has been hidden by the church or its scholars.

Palmer points to a statement in the introduction to the current edition of the Book of Mormon to the effect that Book of Mormon people are the "principal ancestors of the American Indians" (p. 57) and attempts to use linguistics as well as DNA evidence to show that *no* Native Americans could be of Hebrew descent. The linguistics argument is slippery for Latter-day Saint scholars, since as yet they have not found an abundance of evidence that there are traces of Hebrew in Native American languages, partly—John L. Sorenson and others believe—because there have not been enough interested and competent scholars working on the matter.[18] It is a painstaking and expensive process. There have been a few interesting discoveries, however, as noted by Sorenson. Some names associated with the Mayan calendar, for example, seem to be related to Hebrew. In addition, Sorenson refers to one unpublished study that has noted a degree of similarity in the basic vocabulary of the Hebrews and the language of native groups just north of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec (the area where most LDS scholars believe the Book of Mormon history took place).[19]

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17. See Andrew Hedges, review of *View of the Hebrews,* by Ethan Smith, *FARMS Review of Books* 9/1 (1997): 63–68. The reader may also be interested in looking at "View of the Hebrews: 'An Unparallel,'" in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon,* 83–87. See also Spencer J. Palmer and William L. Knecht, "View of the Hebrews: Substitute for Inspiration?" *BYU Studies* 5/2 (1964): 105–13.

18. See, however, Brian D. Stubbs, "Looking Over vs. Overlooking Native American Languages," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5/1 (1996): 1–49.

19. See John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1985), 79–80. See also John A. Tvedtnes, John Gee, and Matthew Roper, "Book of Mormon Names Attested in Ancient Hebrew Inscriptions," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9/1 (2000): 40–51.

On the DNA issue, knowledgeable LDS scholars have responded quickly and decisively to the argument that DNA studies show no connection between Israelites and Native Americans. DNA investigation is both extremely complex and tentative, but Michael Whiting, Sorenson, and others have shown that the evidence is still so tentative that no firm conclusions can be made, one way or the other. This is partly because we really don't know enough about the colonization patterns of ancient Americans.[20] One hypothesis is what Whiting calls the "local colonization hypothesis," but it presents especially complicated challenges for investigation. This hypothesis, as explained by Whiting,

> suggests that when the three colonizing parties came to the New World, the land was already occupied in whole or in part by people of an unknown genetic heritage. Thus the colonizers were not entirely isolated from genetic input from other individuals who were living there or who would arrive during or after the colonization period. The hypothesis presumes that there was gene flow between the colonizers and the prior inhabitants of the land, mixing the genetic signal that may have been originally present in the colonizers. It recognizes that by the time the Book of Mormon account ends, there had been such a mixing of genetic information that there was likely no clear genetic distinction between Nephites, Lama-

20. See the following articles appearing in *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12/1 (2003): John L. Sorenson and Matthew Roper, "Before DNA," 6–23; Michael F. Whiting, "DNA and the Book of Mormon: A Phylogenetic Perspective," 24–35; John M. Butler, "A Few Thoughts from a Believing DNA Scientist," 36–37; and D. Jeffrey Meldrum and Trent D. Stephens, "Who Are the Children of Lehi?" 38–51. See also "The Problematic Role of DNA Testing in Unraveling Human History," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9/2 (2000): 66–74. Further articles on DNA issues appear in the *FARMS Review* 15/2 (2003): Daniel C. Peterson, "Prolegomena to the DNA Articles," 25–34; David A. McClellan, "Detecting Lehi's Genetic Signature: Possible, Probable, or Not?" 35–90; Matthew Roper, "Nephi's Neighbors: Book of Mormon Peoples and Pre-Columbian Populations," 91–128; Matthew Roper, "Swimming in the Gene Pool: Israelite Kinship Relations, Genes, and Genealogy," 129–64; Brian D. Stubbs, "Elusive Israel and the Numerical Dynamics of Population Mixing," 165–82; and John A. Tvedtnes, "The Charge of 'Racism' in the Book of Mormon," 183–97.

> nites, and other inhabitants of the continent. This distinction was further blurred by the time period from when the Book of Mormon ends until now, during which there was an influx of genes from multiple genetic sources. Moreover, the hypothesis suggests that the Nephite-Lamanite lineage occupied a limited geographic range. This would make the unique Middle Eastern genetic signature, if it existed in the colonizers at all, more susceptible to being swamped out with genetic information from other sources.[21]

Whiting's many observations in this long and fascinating article make clear how tentative DNA investigators must be in trying to determine the relationship between Lamanites and American Indians. Among these observations are the following: "The local colonization hypothesis is hard to test because of complications associated with the Lamanite lineage history, such as founder effect, genetic drift, and extensive introgression." "DNA evidence is not likely to unambiguously refute or corroborate this hypothesis." "This hypothesis has never been specifically tested." "DNA evidence does nothing to speak to the authenticity of the Book of Mormon text." "I would be just as critical of a claim that DNA evidence supports the Book of Mormon as I am of the claim that it does not."[22]

On the matter of the Book of Mormon people being the "principal ancestors" of the American Indians, Palmer (inadvertently?) sets up a kind of straw man. That introductory Book of Mormon statement itself suggests that there *were* other people on the continent. Beyond that, Latter-day Saints (including church leaders) have long recognized that the book is a history of only a relatively small group of people in a very limited region, and that there were other people on the continent when the Jaredites (the earliest group mentioned by the Book of Mormon) arrived. Given that fact, there is no necessity to assume that the Book of Mormon people were the *only* ancestors of the American Indians, or even that the majority of the current inhabitants of North, Central,

21. Whiting, "DNA and the Book of Mormon," 31.
22. Ibid., 33.

and South America are descended from the Nephites and Lamanites. In 1909, Elder B. H. Roberts suggested that the American continent was not empty when the Jaredites came, and a 1927 commentary on the Book of Mormon as well as a 1938 Book of Mormon study guide published by the Church Department of Education held the same view.[23] In 1960 Elder Richard L. Evans of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles clearly recognized the issue when he referred in writing to the Book of Mormon as "a sacred and secular record of prophets and people who were *among* the ancestors of the American 'Indians.'"[24] Sorenson has made the case even stronger, arguing in a noteworthy 1992 article not only that there were "others" on the continent but also that there is evidence within the Book of Mormon itself that the Nephites and Lamanites knew they were there and, to some degree, interacted with them.[25] All these issues, and others, are brought up in the chapter on authorship, and yet most of them have been "asked and answered" earlier by Latter-day Saint scholars whom Palmer, for some reason, generally ignores.[26]

In chapter 3, "The Bible and the Book of Mormon," Palmer fleshes out his previous argument that Joseph Smith drew upon his knowledge of the Bible while constructing the Book of Mormon narrative,

23. See B. H. Roberts, *New Witnesses for God* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1909), 2:356; Roper, "Nephi's Neighbors," 102; and James E. Smith, "Nephi's Descendants? Historical Demography and the Book of Mormon," review of *Multiply Exceedingly: Book of Mormon Population Sizes,* by John C. Kunich, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994): 255–96.

24. Richard L. Evans, "These Are the 'Mormons,'" *Christian Herald,* November 1960, 80, emphasis added.

25. See John L. Sorenson, "When Lehi's Party Arrived, Did They Find Others in the Land?" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1 (1992): 1–34.

26. In addition to the works by LDS scholars cited above, the reader is urged to consult the variety of approaches to authorship in the Book of Mormon in Noel B. Reynolds, ed., *Book of Mormon Authorship: New Light on Ancient Origins* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1982): C. Wilfred Griggs, "The Book of Mormon as an Ancient Book," 75–101; and Wayne A. Larsen and Alvin C. Rencher, "Who Wrote the Book of Mormon? An Analysis of Wordprints," 157–88. See also Noel B. Reynolds, ed., *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: Evidence for Ancient Origins* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997): Louis Midgley, "Who Really Wrote the Book of Mormon? Critics and Their Theories," 101–39; Daniel C. Peterson, "Is the Book of Mormon True? Notes on the Debate," 141–77; Melvin J. Thorne, "Complexity, Consistency, Ignorance, and Probabilities," 179–97; John L. Hilton, "On Verifying Wordprint Studies: Book of Mormon Authorship," 225–53.

as demonstrated by so many parallels. Among those parallels are the story of Lehi and his family journeying to the promised land in the Book of Mormon and that of the exodus of Moses and the Israelites in the Bible. This phenomenon has already been recognized and dealt with in great detail by S. Kent Brown.[27] Referring to questions raised earlier about the parallels, Brown observes that they are actually recognized by the Book of Mormon prophets and writers themselves and were deliberately used as a teaching tool:

> Such interest is reasonable because Nephite teachers themselves drew comparisons between Lehi's colony and their Israelite forbears. For instance, in an important speech, King Limhi referred to Israel's escape from Egypt and immediately drew a parallel to Lehi's departure from Jerusalem (Mosiah 7:19–20). Alma, in remarks addressed to his son Helaman, also consciously linked the Exodus from Egypt with Lehi's journey (Alma 36:28–29). More than once a prophet or teacher who wanted to prove to others that divine assistance could be relied on appealed to God's acts on behalf of the enslaved Israelites. This replication was the technique used by Nephi, for example, in his attempt to convince his recalcitrant brothers that God was leading their father, Lehi (1 Ne. 17:23–35).[28]

There are thus good reasons for the parallels, and there is no good reason to claim that they represent plagiarism by Joseph Smith.

Palmer points to other parallels. One example is his comparison between the book of Judith in the Apocrypha and the story of Nephi killing Laban in the Book of Mormon (p. 55). This and other apocryphal parallels are dealt with by John Tvedtnes and Matthew Roper in their extensive critique of the same charges originally made by Jerald and Sandra Tanner. They point out that Nephi's story "has much more in common with that of David and Goliath than that of Judith and Holofernes, but to cite from 1 Samuel 17 would have detracted

27. S. Kent Brown, "The Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 30/3 (1990): 111–26.

28. Ibid., 111.

from the Tanners' [and thus Palmer's] thesis that Joseph Smith got the idea from the book of Judith."[29] In reality, the story of Judith and Holofernes is so different from the story of Nephi that the so-called similarities are really superficial. In the Apocrypha, King Nebuchadnezzar sends his general, Holofernes, to conquer the rebellious Jews, but the city of Bethulia refuses to submit. Finally, however, after their water supply has been cut off, the people consider surrendering in five days if God does not rescue them. At that point Judith, a beautiful widow, declares that she will deliver them. Entering the camp of the Assyrians, she captivates Holofernes with her charms and finally, when he is lying on his bed drunk, cuts off his head with his own sword and takes it to her city to show what she has done. The Jews, thus encouraged, sally forth and scatter the invading army and plunder its camp. Palmer's supposed parallels are limited to such incidentals as the fact that an enemy wants to destroy the people of God (a frequent theme throughout the Bible, the Book of Mormon, and Christian history in general, but in this case it is not even a similar story: Nephi goes back to Jerusalem not because he knows Laban wants to kill his people but only to get the records); Judith, like Nephi, enters the city at night (but the purpose is different than that of Nephi: she goes into the city intending to kill the general while Nephi has no such intent and kills Laban only when the opportunity presents itself and then only after considerable soul-searching); Judith cuts off the general's head with his own sword (a kind of parallel, but the description of how she does it is quite different from the description of Nephi killing Laban, and Nephi is certainly not vengeful enough to carry the head away in triumph); then, according to Palmer, Judith takes some of Holofernes's possessions (the Apocrypha says nothing about Judith taking anything out of the general's tent except his head in a food bag, though her people later come in and plunder the enemy camp; in Nephi's case he does not take the head but does take Laban's clothes, sword, and armor as well as the records he initially came for); and both groups celebrate by burnt offerings to the Lord (well, what do you expect of a

29. John A. Tvedtnes and Matthew Roper, "Joseph Smith's Use of the Apocrypha: Shadow or Reality?" *FARMS Review of Books* 8/2 (1996): 338.

group of Israelites: were not burnt offerings the norm, and would not the story of Nephi be suspect if they had *not* offered burnt offerings?). Such strained parallels make Palmer's argument weak indeed—the stories are not at all identical, as he claims, and neither are the phrases and sentences.[30]

Surprisingly, Palmer does not discuss the numerous passages from Isaiah that are included in the Book of Mormon, yet this is one issue that critics of the Book of Mormon often bring up. The reader should know, however, that this issue also has been dealt with exhaustively by respected church scholars, at least as far back as 1939 when Sidney B. Sperry published an extensive two-part article in the church's *Improvement Era*.[31]

Palmer includes a chapter on the parallels between evangelical Protestantism and the Book of Mormon. He finds words and phrases in the Book of Mormon that are similar to words and phrases in the emotionally charged sermons of evangelical ministers and finds teachings that parallel evangelical doctrines. Some of this seems persuasive, though reading through the eyes of faith leads one to ask "why not?" If the same kinds of problems existed in Book of Mormon times, why not scold the people in language that, when translated into the English Joseph knew, sounds evangelical? Moreover, Palmer would be hard-pressed to put Joseph Smith at the camp meetings where Lorenzo Dow, Alfred Bennett, Eleazar Sherman, George Whitefield, or other

30. One nearly "identical" phrase, italicized here, is in the description of the decapitation. Both refer to the hair of the head. The book of Judith says: "She came close to his bed and took hold of *the hair of his head,* and said, 'Give me strength this day, O Lord God of Israel!' And she struck his neck twice with all her might, and severed it from his body" (Judith 13:7–8). Nephi says: "Therefore I did obey the voice of the Spirit, and took Laban by *the hair of the head,* and I smote off his head with his own sword" (1 Nephi 4:18). But not even this small phrase is completely identical—Judith says "his head" and Nephi says "the head."

31. Sidney B. Sperry, "The 'Isaiah Problem' in the Book of Mormon," *Improvement Era,* September 1939, 524–25, 564–69; October 1939, 594, 634, 636–37. This material was republished in Sperry, *The Book of Mormon Testifies* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1952), 348–406, and later in *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 4/1 (1995): 129–52; see H. Clay Gorton, *The Legacy of the Brass Plates of Laban: A Comparison of Biblical and Book of Mormon Isaiah Texts* (Bountiful, UT: Horizon, 1994).

evangelicals spoke or to show that Joseph had read their speeches. There is evidence from Joseph Smith himself, of course, that he did attend some revivals, and must have been acquainted with revivalist language, but even though some of that language appears in scattered places in the Book of Mormon, it is just that—scattered—and not a wholesale incorporation into Book of Mormon sermons.

One of the things Palmer asserts is that the Book of Mormon contains doctrines that are different from doctrines Joseph came up with later. One of these concerns the Godhead, and Palmer cites several passages that seem to make no distinction between the Father and the Son (as opposed to Joseph Smith's later teaching that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are three distinct beings; see Mosiah 15:1–4, for example). What Palmer fails to point out, however, is that there are numerous other passages that clearly distinguish between the persons of the Father and the Son. We read in 3 Nephi, for example:

> And behold, the third time they did understand the voice which they heard; and it said unto them:
>
> Behold my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, in whom I have glorified my name—hear ye him. (3 Nephi 11:6–7)

Then, a few verses later, the Son says:

> Behold, I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world.
>
> And behold I am the light and the life of the world: and I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me in taking upon me the sins of the world, in the which I have suffered the will of the Father in all things from the beginning. (3 Nephi 11:10–11)

There are other such passages in the Book of Mormon (1 Nephi 11:21 and 13:40, for example). Such seemingly contradictory statements exist not only there, however, but also in the Bible and the Doctrine and Covenants. In these books "proof-texters" can find support for any view of the Godhead they want, but to imply that the Book of Mormon portrays *only* one view is misleading. (It may even be that, at

the moment they wrote or spoke, some Book of Mormon prophets themselves did not fully comprehend the Godhead, thus accounting for some differences between them.) For the benefit of church members, however, the apparent contradictions were reconciled by the First Presidency and the Twelve in 1916.[32]

Actually, the only thing Palmer demonstrates effectively in this section is not that Book of Mormon doctrines are fundamentally different from current church teachings but simply that some things, such as temple work, are not there. This may present a dilemma to believers who are reminded in the Doctrine and Covenants that the Book of Mormon contains a "fulness of the gospel." The "fulness of the gospel" as taught consistently throughout the Book of Mormon has been amply documented from the text as a six-point formula that includes faith, repentance, baptism of water, baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost, enduring to the end, and receiving eternal life.[33] This matches exactly the formula presented repeatedly in the Doctrine and Covenants (D&C 10:67–69; 14:7, 10; 18:17–22; 20:25–29; 33:11–12; 39:6; 50:5; 53:3, 7). The answer, of course, is that in its testimony and explanation of the mission of Christ (which, in Palmer's mind, is the most essential thing), the book does contain a "fulness." In addition, part of the "fulness of the gospel" is the concept of continuing revelation, by which Saints in any period of time may receive additional light and knowledge as they are prepared for it.

As part of his effort to show that the Book of Mormon teaches doctrines that were later changed by the church, Palmer includes an interesting quotation from Brigham Young, who said in 1862 that "I will even venture to say that if the Book of Mormon were now to

32. It is true that the seeming inconsistency in scriptural references has sometimes confused Latter-day Saints. To deal with this problem, on 30 June 1916, the First Presidency and the Twelve issued a statement entitled "The Father and the Son: A Doctrinal Exposition by the First Presidency and the Twelve," which explained the various ways the terms *Father* and *Son* are used in the scriptures. See James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1833–1964* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1971), 5:26–34.

33. See Noel B. Reynolds, "The Gospel of Jesus Christ as Taught by the Nephite Prophets," *BYU Studies* 31/3 (1991): 31–50.

be re-written, in many instances it would materially differ from the present translation."[34] However, this quotation is taken out of context. President Young was not talking about doctrinal or other substantive differences. It was simply an aside in a much longer statement in which he was trying to show that God speaks to different people in different ways, "in a manner to suit their circumstances and their capacities." If the Bible were to be rewritten today, he said, it would "in many places be very different from what it is now," meaning that those who wrote the books of the Bible might very well be inspired to say some things differently if they were speaking to the circumstances and concerns of today. The same would be true of the Book of Mormon writers. Such isolated, out-of-context quotations should not be taken so literally, for no one can say that Brigham Young really meant that Joseph Smith would translate things differently in 1862 than he did in 1829. He only meant that if the Book of Mormon writers were writing in 1862 they might well have had a different message, or said things differently, than they did over fifteen hundred years before.

Perhaps the most strained "parallel" in Palmer's book is his appeal to the "Golden Pot," by E. T. A. Hoffmann. In a way, however, I owe Palmer a debt for introducing me to Hoffmann and at least one of his fantastic short stories. Hoffmann (1776–1822) was a brilliant German writer. He at first aspired to be a musician and even changed his middle name, Wilhelm, to Amadeus, in honor of Mozart. Later, he turned also to writing, becoming most famous for his fantasy and horror. His work had wide influence, including an effect on many composers and writers. One collection of his stories inspired Jacques Offenbach to write his opera *The Tales of Hoffmann*. His 1816 story, "The Nutcracker and the Mouse King," inspired Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker* ballet. In the United States, his writings directly affected the work of such luminaries as Washington Irving, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Edgar Allen Poe, and they even influenced Sigmund Freud and the psychia-

34. *Journal of Discourses,* 9:311.

trist Carl Jung's theory of archetypes.[35] It is Palmer's contention that "The Golden Pot" had a direct influence on Joseph Smith's story of how the Book of Mormon came to be.

Palmer believes that Joseph Smith's understanding of, or acquaintance with, the tale "The Golden Pot" "most likely" came through Luman Walters, a magician and necromancer who may have once studied in Europe and there have become acquainted with Hoffmann's work (p. 141). Palmer does not claim that Joseph Smith ever read "The Golden Pot" but only that he got ideas about it from hearing Walters. The problem with this assumption is that the evidence for a direct connection with Walters is tenuous, to say the least. Citing D. Michael Quinn, Palmer says that Brigham Young, Lorenzo Saunders, Abner Cole, and others "confirmed" the fact that the Smith family had contact with Walters in the 1820s. For the most part, however, such "confirmation" is based on secondhand information or on long-term memory, and it seems from reading the writings of Brigham Young that he himself was really not clear on the possible connection. In the 18 February 1855 speech cited by Palmer, for example, Young does not identify Walters by name, though it is evident that this is the man he described as "a fortune-teller, a necromancer, an astrologer, a soothsayer," who, he said, "possesses as much talent as any man that walked on the American soil, and was one of the wickedest men I ever saw."[36] How Brigham knew him is not clear, but the only story he tells is simply that Walters "rode over sixty miles three times the same season they [the gold plates] were obtained by Joseph" in an effort to get the plates for himself, and that he was sent for by some of Joseph's neighbors. Brigham told essentially the same story, with a few variations in detail, a little over two years later, noting that he did not even remember the name of "this fortune-teller."[37] The point Brigham was trying to make was that many people believed there was treasure, or gold, buried in the Hill Cumorah, and

35. See "E(rnst) T(heodor) A(madeus) Wilhelm Hoffmann (1776–1822)," online at www.kirjasto.sci.fi/hoffman.htm (accessed 22 June 2004). This short article provides a supporting bibliography.

36. *Journal of Discourses,* 2:180.

37. *Journal of Discourses,* 5:55.

that three different times they sent for a fortune-teller to help them find it. When he repeated the story to Elizabeth Kane in 1872, he finally remembered Walters's last name. None of this, however, provides evidence that Joseph Smith actually knew Walters, or, even if he did, that he knew him well enough to get the "Golden Pot" story from him, if Walters was at all familiar with Hoffmann's tale. Palmer also cites an obscure 1884 statement by Clark Braden, an anti-Mormon Congregational minister, to the effect that Joseph Smith had "made the acquaintance" of Walters, but it is not clear at all how Braden came to that conclusion.

More important, however, is the fact that Palmer's comparisons between Joseph Smith's story and "The Golden Pot" rely on carefully chosen, widely spaced examples that, when read in context, are not really what Palmer makes them out to be. Not even the general story line is recognizable in Palmer's selected references. "The Golden Pot" is a remarkable, complex fantasy told in twelve "vigils," or chapters. The edition I read covers one hundred pages.[38] Palmer's parallels are highly selective and do not reflect the whole story, either of Anselmus (the hero of "The Golden Pot") or Joseph Smith. What's more, Palmer finds it necessary to pull strands from four different accounts by Joseph Smith in order to make his case.

"The Golden Pot" is the story of the student Anselmus, who is introduced in the first vigil running madly through the city after having a horrifying experience with a witch that discourages him and convinces him he is a born loser. His self-detesting reverie goes on until it is interrupted by a strange rustling in the grass that soon moves up into an elder tree, or bush. He also hears whispering, lisping, and sounds like crystal bells. He then sees three little gold-green snakes and hears more whispering as the snakes glide up and down through the twigs as if the elder bush were "scattering a thousand glittering emeralds" through its leaves. Soon he sees some glorious dark-blue eyes looking at him in longing, hears the elder bush and then the Evening Wind speak to him, and finally watches a mysterious green flame

38. "The Golden Pot," in Thomas Carlyle, trans., *German Romance: Specimens of Its Chief Authors* (Boston: Munroe, 1841), 2:23–122.

vanish in the direction of the city. Does any of this sound like the Joseph Smith story?

Palmer sees a parallel between Anselmus's dwelling on his stupid bumbling as a student (he calls himself a "jolthead" in the translation I read) and Joseph Smith's lament, in 1838, that after his first vision he fell into foolish errors and displayed the foibles of human nature that were "not consistent with that character which ought to be maintained by one who was called of God" (JS—H 1:28). One who reads Hoffmann must immediately ask what makes Palmer think that Joseph Smith would draw on just this one, not necessarily essential, element of Anselmus's story when nothing else in the first vigil fits or parallels anything in Joseph Smith's story? Joseph was writing about sins for which he needed forgiveness (he was led "into divers temptations, offensive in the sight of God" [JS—H 1:28], he said in a passage not quoted by Palmer), not the kind of bumbling that plagued Anselmus. If one wishes to look for parallels, or sources for this kind of statement from Joseph Smith, they are more easily found in the personal and oft-told experiences of the revivalists of the day.

But Palmer goes on, reporting on "a shock, a vision of angels, and a message" (p. 147). Again, the parallel seems more contrived than real. The word *angel,* for example, appears nowhere in this vigil. What Anselmus sees are the three snakes (which Palmer evidently thinks Joseph Smith transformed into angels as he concocted his story) gliding up and down the twigs of an elder bush. He then hears the bells, receives a shock, and sees a blue-eyed snake looking at him. It is then that the elder bush—not a snake, or "being" as Palmer puts it—speaks to him (though it may have been speaking for the snake), and gives him a message of love. Palmer says that Anselmus does not fully understand the "being's" message, but the text of the story says that it is the Evening Wind (not the snake but perhaps speaking for the snake) that glides by, saying "I played round thy temples, but thou understoodst me not,"[39] and continued with a message of love. Then the "Sunbeam" breaks through the clouds and gives a similar message.

39. Ibid., 29.

Palmer also says that these strange "beings" are from the lost civilization of Atlantis—something that is not suggested in this particular vigil but is explained much later on in the story. It is another strain on credulity to figure out how Palmer parlays this into a source for Joseph Smith's 1835 statement that after he had retired to bed he received "a vision of angels in the night season" (p. 148), in which the room was illuminated and an angel sent from God appeared before him. Then, in 1842, he said that the light produced a shock in him, and Palmer further quotes a letter from Oliver Cowdery to the same effect. Anselmus had a vision? Well, if that's what you want to call it, but Hoffmann didn't. Angels? No. Snakes, bells, an elder bush, and the Evening Wind—hardly the kind of "beings" that would give Joseph the idea of reporting the visit of angels. A message? Yes. In Hoffmann, Palmer says, the "being" gave him a message that he did not fully understand, though Hoffmann makes it clear that the message was, in some way, one of love. Joseph Smith, on the other hand, received a very clear message, and even though he speaks of "marveling greatly" at what he was told and being "overwhelmed in astonishment" (JS—H 1:44, 46), he clearly understood what he was supposed to do. Again, the so-called parallels go wanting.

In the second vigil Anselmus is first perceived as mad, but he wakens from his stupor long enough to accept a ride across the river, offered by his friend and professor, Conrector Paulmann. However, partway across he again sees the three snakes and cries out, convincing his companions on the boat that he may, indeed, be mad. But Veronica, the lovely, dark-blue-eyed daughter of Paulmann, defends Anselmus, which immediately changes his demeanor. Later in the day he hears Veronica sing in a voice like a crystal bell (clearly, her blue eyes and the voice are reminiscent of Anselmus's experience with a snake). Still later he is told that Archivarius Lindhorst, who lives by himself in an "old sequestered house," possesses various manuscripts, written in ancient languages and strange characters, that he wishes to have copied—meticulously and with no mistakes—and he is willing to pay for it. Anselmus, who has a flair for both penmanship and calligraphy, is delighted and dreams that night of the fact that, at last, he is going to prosper financially. The next day he goes to apply for

the job but who should meet him at the door but the old witch who had frightened him before. Astonished, he reels back and grabs the bell-rope, which turns into a serpent that attacks and nearly kills him. He quickly loses consciousness and later awakens lying on his bed.

Where are the parallels? Presumably Lindhorst's strange manuscripts became the gold plates in Joseph Smith's reconstruction, and in Palmer's reconstruction of Hoffmann the desire to have them copied becomes a desire to have them also translated (p. 148). This is indeed a stretch, for nothing in the story suggests that Lindhorst hired Anselmus for any purpose but to copy. The only place that translation is even hinted at is much later in the story, in vigil eight, where Anselmus is copying some especially important records in a special gardenlike room. Suddenly, as if in answer to his own concerns, he feels "from his inmost soul" that the only thing the characters on the manuscript could denote are the words "Of the marriage of the Salamander with the green Snake."[40] Immediately Serpentina—the green snake with the blue eyes—comes winding down a palm tree, and Anselmus enjoys the rapture of knowing that his beloved snake loves him. Palmer's transforming this story into the idea that Anselmus was hired to translate the records for Lindhorst is the most far-fetched stretch yet.

Continuing, for a moment, with vigil eight, after Serpentina declares her love, she proceeds to tell Anselmus the wonderful story of her race. When she is finished, Anselmus realizes that during all this time he has not copied anything from the manuscript and yet, mysteriously, the copy is complete. He also realizes, on looking at it, that the writing must contain the story he has just been told. It is this that Palmer says parallels Joseph's claims to have translated by inspiration—a complete misreading of what Hoffmann's story is all about. In a subsequent statement, after being questioned on this matter, Palmer qualifies himself slightly by repeating the story and saying that thus "Anselmus is a kind of 'translator' (as well as a copyist), just as Joseph Smith claimed for himself."[41] But even being a "kind of 'translator'" in this one instance

40. Ibid., 85.

41. Palmer's statement was found online at www.signaturebooks.com/excerpts/insider's3.htm (accessed 19 April 2004).

is hardly the same as being hired, or assigned, to translate—something the wizardly Lindhorst hardly needed anyone to do.

From the second vigil, Palmer draws a parallel between Joseph Smith walking to the Hill Cumorah the day after Moroni's visit and Anselmus walking to Lindhorst's residence—both appointed places. Fine—as if this were the only time anyone walked somewhere he was told to go. But Palmer characteristically distorts the record in his reporting of the Hoffmann story. "As Anselmus walks to Lindhorst's house," he says, he "'saw nothing but clear speziesthalers [dollars], and heard nothing but their lovely clink . . . [F]or here, thought he, slapping his pocket, which was still empty, for here [dollars] will soon be clinking'" (p. 149). A problem here is the fact that Hoffmann wrote the first part of this passage as a description of what Anselmus was thinking about during the night, not while he was walking to the house the next morning, though the last part is chronologically correct. It is also true that Joseph reported in 1832 that at first he sought the plates to get riches. But is Anselmus's thought of getting paid to copy old manuscripts really a parallel with Joseph Smith's youthful temptation to somehow use the gold plates to get wealthy? Perhaps, but hardly enough of a parallel to be a source.

Such comparisons continue throughout Palmer's chapter, but there is no space here to deal with all of them. Suffice it to say that nearly all the parallels are equally forced, merely "proof-text" in nature—that is, they are presented in such a way that the context in "The Golden Pot" is distorted and the comparison with Joseph Smith's story is contrived, often depending not on what Joseph Smith himself said but on what someone else (Abner Cole, Oliver Cowdery, Lucy Mack Smith, Orson Pratt, and others) said he said. This is neither good history nor convincing evidence that "The Golden Pot" was the source for anything that Joseph Smith reported. There may be a few similarities between "The Golden Pot" and Joseph Smith, if the text is strained, but they are ripped out of a hundred-page story line that has no similarity at all to that of Joseph Smith. However, let me encourage the interested reader to go to Hoffmann's work itself and make his or her own comparisons. You will find the story so different in thrust from what is presented in

Palmer that you will wonder how and why he ferreted out such obscure parallels at all, when the whole story itself is one massive unparallel. But if you like Old World fantasy, you will have a delightful read.

The significance of all these parallels, many of them superficial, pales in comparison with things about the Book of Mormon that Palmer does *not* consider but that LDS scholars have studied and written about for years, and that provide powerful evidence of the book's authenticity. In addition to numerous noteworthy articles, for example, John L. Sorenson has published two particularly important books. In the first, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon,* he studies the geography and ancient life and culture of Mesoamerica and makes comparisons with the geography and culture described in the Book of Mormon. He does not set out to "prove" that the Book of Mormon is true. As a highly qualified anthropologist, he recognizes the limitations of his study, but he nevertheless provides what I find convincing evidence for Book of Mormon locations. "The geographical setting identified meets the criteria set out unintentionally by the Book of Mormon," according to Sorenson. "Dimensions, climate, topography, configuration of land and water, and cultural levels exhibited in scriptural statements were found to agree with characteristics of central and southern Mesoamerica. . . . The Book of Mormon shows so many striking similarities to the Mesoamerican setting that it seems to me impossible for rational people willing to examine the data to maintain any longer that the book is a mere romance or speculative history written in the third decade of the nineteenth century in New York State."[42] Those bothered by Palmer's much less well-founded conjectures should take note. Further, noting the complexity of the Book of Mormon, Sorenson deals with war, dissent, agriculture, secret societies, kinship, tribes, trade, conquest, migration, and missions, showing in every case a remarkable correlation with the culture of the region under study. In *Images of Ancient America: Visualizing Book of Mormon Life,* he deals with similar issues, though in a more "popular" format. This volume, a handsome, coffee-table book, is filled

42. Sorenson, *Ancient American Setting,* 354.

with photographs that help elucidate the culture of both the Book of Mormon and ancient America. Again, Sorenson is careful not to say that he has "proven" the authenticity of the Book of Mormon, but the evidence, taken as a whole, is powerful and persuasive.[43]

Some of Sorenson's findings are summarized in a more recent essay, "How Could Joseph Smith Write So Accurately about Ancient American Civilization?"[44] Martin Raish, in a summary of various recent works on the Book of Mormon, calls attention to the impossibility of creating a fictional society that in some way parallels a real society that the author knows nothing about. He refers to a discussion of this point by the widely read LDS novelist, Orson Scott Card:

> My final recommendation is a short essay by Orson Scott Card, "The Book of Mormon: Artifact or Artifice?" in *A Storyteller in Zion*. Card examines whether the Book of Mormon could be a 19th-century hoax rather than an authentic ancient record. He approaches the question from the experience of an author who has tried to do similar things (that is, to create epic works of fiction) and who knows that "writing something that purports to be an artifact of another culture is the most complicated, difficult kind of science fiction" and that such "is almost never attempted under circumstances where the author actually tries to pass it off as a genuine document."
>
> If the book is fiction, Card writes, "we should find Joseph Smith's or someone else's influence there as *author*. In that case *all* of the ideas and events in the book should come out of the mind of an 1820s American." But this is not the case. Card searched for flaws and oversights but could not find them. Instead, he found examples of language, culture, and literature that demonstrate the improbability, if not the downright im-

43. John L. Sorenson, *Images of Ancient America: Visualizing Book of Mormon Life* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998). See also Sorenson's "The Book of Mormon as a Mesoamerican Record," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited,* 391–521.

44. John L. Sorenson, "How Could Joseph Smith Write So Accurately about Ancient American Civilization?" in *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon,* ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002), 261–306.

> possibility, that Joseph Smith was the author rather than the translator of the Book of Mormon. These conclusions are not startling, but the way Card approached and presented them from the viewpoint of a writer rather than a scholar has left an indelible impression on me.[45]

Other areas of investigation not approached by Palmer, but which readers must consider, include the mounting evidence of Hebraisms and other literary forms in the Book of Mormon. John Welch has made a marked contribution to Book of Mormon studies with his work on a distinctive literary form known as chiasmus, which appears regularly in the Book of Mormon. According to Welch, chiasmus has appeared in Greek, Latin, English, and other languages, but it was more highly developed in Hebrew. It is prevalent in biblical texts but did not become well known among students of literature until long after the Book of Mormon was published.[46] John A. Tvedtnes shows that the Book of Mormon has many other characteristics of the Hebrew language and that "in many places the words that have been used and the ways in which the words have been put together are more typical of Hebrew than of English."[47] Since the Nephites seem to have been familiar with Hebrew, this is to be expected. Donald W. Parry also finds many ancient literary forms in the Book of Mormon, including simile curses, names, poetic forms, and the expression *and it came to pass.*[48] Most recently, James T. Duke brings together and discusses

45. Martin Raish, "A Reader's Library," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 10/1 (2001): 74. The reader should consult Card's full essay, "The Book of Mormon—Artifact or Artifice?" in *A Storyteller in Zion* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1993), 13–45.

46. See John W. Welch, "Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon," in *Book of Mormon Authorship,* 33–52; Welch, "What Does Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon Prove?" in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited,* 199–224; and Welch, "How Much Was Known about Chiasmus in 1829 When the Book of Mormon Was Translated?" *FARMS Review* 15/1 (2003): 47–80.

47. See John A. Tvedtnes, "The Hebrew Background of the Book of Mormon," in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon,* ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 77.

48. See Donald W. Parry, "Hebraisms and Other Ancient Peculiarities in the Book of Mormon," in *Echoes and Evidences,* 155–89; and Parry, *The Book of Mormon Reformatted According to Parallelistic Patterns* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1992).

in depth the numerous literary forms and devices found in the Book of Mormon—some biblical in nature, others unique but not found in the language of Joseph Smith's culture.[49] Such things could hardly be the creation of a young man with the limited literary talent of Joseph Smith, nor could they have come about by happenstance.

The interested reader may also want to consult the various Book of Mormon wordprint studies that seem to demonstrate a significant difference in authorship between various authors in the Book of Mormon, suggesting that even in translation the distinctive style of different writers shines through.[50] I could go on and on, especially with the variety of studies carried out and published under the auspices of FARMS, but enough has been said to establish the fact that an abundance of scholarly work is available for the benefit of anyone who wishes to find it. Four recent compilations provide valuable examples of studies relating to the authenticity of the Book of Mormon as well as new insights into the complexity and richness of the book itself.[51]

Palmer next attacks the testimonies of the witnesses to the gold plates, claiming, in part, that they were all visionaries who believed that it was possible, with something he calls "second sight," to see all kinds of hidden treasures. They saw the gold plates, he claims, through "spiritual eyes," but the plates were not real. He also asserts, however, that Joseph Smith may have manufactured "a plate-like object" in order to engender belief in some who later said they felt the plates through a cloth (p. 207)—which is not only pure speculation but also somewhat inconsistent with the idea that the witnesses actually saw or handled nothing. But again—asked and answered. Nearly everything he raises in this chapter has already been dealt with by Latter-day Saint scholars, a few of whom are referred to briefly, almost in passing, but none taken seriously.

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49. See James T. Duke, *The Literary Masterpiece Called the Book of Mormon* (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2004). See, for example, his chapter on idiomatic expressions.

50. See, for example, Larsen and Rencher, "Who Wrote the Book of Mormon?" 157–88; and Hilton, "On Verifying Wordprint Studies," 225–53.

51. Sorenson and Thorne, eds., *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon;* Welch, ed., *Reexploring the Book of Mormon;* Reynolds, ed., *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited;* and Parry, Peterson, and Welch, eds., *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon.*

As part of his argument Palmer uses some questionable sources to establish the idea that Joseph Smith had a rather unsavory reputation, particularly with respect to his early money-digging. These include statements made many years after the fact, statements made by avowed enemies or apostates, and numerous statements collected by Philastus Hurlbut and published in 1834 by E. D. Howe in *Mormonism Unvailed.* (Curiously, Palmer cites Howe extensively in his footnotes but does not include this controversial book in his bibliography.) Richard Lloyd Anderson has shown, however, that the affidavits published by Howe are unreliable, not only because both Hurlbut and Howe were bitter anti-Mormons (and Howe, even, at one time called Hurlbut unreliable) but that internal evidence reveals that they were probably doctored by Howe. Anderson focuses on statements accusing Joseph and his family of lack of industriousness, but his observations apply equally as well to the rest of Joseph's reputation.[52]

Palmer's chief focus is on the testimonies of the witnesses to the gold plates, and here he takes a slightly different tack from that of most earlier naysayers. Though he implicitly raises questions about their character (an old approach that has been dealt with extensively by LDS scholars),[53] his main argument is that the witnesses were deeply immersed in the magical worldview of the times, believed in hidden treasures guarded by strange creatures, and were so susceptible to suggestions that they received "visions" with their "spiritual eyes" and that "such visions of the mind erased the boundaries that separate the spiritual and the physical worlds, a perspective consistent

52. See Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 142–44; Anderson, "The Mature Joseph Smith and Treasure Searching," *BYU Studies* 24/4 (1984): 489–560; Anderson, "Joseph Smith's New York Reputation Reappraised," *BYU Studies* 10/3 (1970): 283–314; Anderson, review of *Joseph Smith's New York Reputation Reexamined,* by Rodger I. Anderson, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 3/1 (1991): 52–80; and Hugh Nibley, "Digging in the Dark," in *The Myth Makers* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1961), 91–190; republished in *Tinkling Cymbals and Sounding Brass* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 193–303.

53. See Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses;* Larry E. Morris, "'The Private Character of the Man Who Bore That Testimony': Oliver Cowdery and His Critics," *FARMS Review* 15/1 (2003): 311–51.

with how a number of people of that day perceived reality" (p. 202). Their very cultural orientation, then, made them gullible enough to "see" whatever Joseph Smith wanted them to see. Interspersed in this line of reasoning is also the old argument that the witnesses were inconsistent and, at times, denied actually *seeing* the plates.

The question of the integrity of the witnesses' testimony is dealt with effectively by Richard Lloyd Anderson. In one instance, Palmer claims that Martin Harris testified publicly in 1838 that "none of the signatories to the Book of Mormon saw or handled the physical records" (p. 204). His source is a letter from Stephen Burnett to Lyman E. Johnson. However, Anderson shows that Burnett's statement is a highly interpretive "first-hand report of a half-truth" and that Burnett probably "bends words" to support his own theory that Mormonism was a "lying deception." The incident Burnett was reporting concerned Martin Harris standing up in a meeting in the Kirtland Temple to challenge charges made by Burnett and other apostates. Anderson's analysis of Burnett's statement shows that he was trying to ridicule Harris and therefore may not have been quoting him correctly but, rather, in derision, saying that he had seen the plates "only" in vision, and that he had seen them "only" four times. The term *only* seems to be Burnett's caustic addition to what Harris really said.[54] Anderson goes into much more detail, demonstrating the long-term integrity of all the witnesses, and the reader would do well to read Anderson's work before accepting uncritically what Palmer has to say.

The magical worldview of the time has also been recognized by LDS scholars, who have described it in detail and have cautioned their readers not to be surprised at such revelations.[55] For a more detailed

54. See Anderson's full explanation in *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses,* 155–59.

55. See, for example, the entire issue of *BYU Studies* 24/4 (1984), which is devoted exclusively to this issue and contains essays by Dean C. Jessee, Ronald W. Walker, Marvin S. Hill, and Richard Lloyd Anderson. These articles were prepared as part of a concerted effort by LDS scholars to evaluate the implications of two letters that came into the church's hands through Mark Hofmann. Even before Hofmann's duplicity was revealed, these scholars had questions about the authenticity of the letters, but their writings, coming in part from new research stimulated by the letters, explored openly and honesty the implications of this magical worldview for Mormon history. Also relevant to this discussion are various reviews of D. Michael Quinn's *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View.*

discussion of the problems inherent in this part of Palmer's work, however, the reader is urged to consult Mark Ashurst-McGee's essay in the previous issue of the *FARMS Review.*[56]

Priesthood Restoration

Palmer also devotes a chapter to the restoration of the Aaronic and Mechizedek Priesthoods, calling the early accounts "more nuanced and fascinating than the simple, unified story that is told today" (p. 215). This is a bit misleading, for even though in Sunday School we may hear an abbreviated version, the complex and fascinating story examined by LDS scholars is readily available to church members. Years ago Anderson dealt with Oliver Cowdery and his various accounts of priesthood restoration in his "The Second Witness of Priesthood Restoration."[57] Bushman has looked at the complexities of the issue, raised questions about the date of the restoration of the apostleship, and opined in print that it came only after the organization of the church—a nontraditional view.[58] Larry C. Porter, on the other hand, supports the traditional view.[59] But Palmer's main thrust in this chapter seems not to be whether or when the priesthood was restored but, rather, whether it was done by the physical process of the laying on of hands by heavenly beings. At this point he does not seem to be arguing with the idea that Joseph Smith had priesthood authority, but simply with the current concept that it was given through a physical ordination rather than just some kind of spiritual manifestation. The earliest accounts, he claims, made no such references, and not until about 1835 did the story "evolve" to become one of a hands-on

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See, in particular, intensive review essays by Stephen E. Robinson and William A. Wilson in *BYU Studies* 27/4 (1987): 88–104; and by John Gee, William J. Hamblin, and Rhett S. James in *FARMS Review of Books* 12/2 (2000): 185–414.

56. Ashurst-McGee, "A One-Sided View of Mormon Origins."

57. See Richard Lloyd Anderson, "The Second Witness of Priesthood Restoration," *Improvement Era,* September 1968, 15–24. See also Brian Q. Cannon and BYU Studies staff, "Priesthood Restoration Documents," *BYU Studies* 35/4 (1995–96): 162–207.

58. See Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism,* 162–63, 241n.

59. See Larry C. Porter, "The Restoration of the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods," *Ensign,* December 1996, 30–47.

bestowal of authority, or the receiving of authority through the ministering of angels. As in the rest of the book, the sources Palmer quotes can be interpreted variously, but even though they do not always say "ministering of angels" or "laying on of hands," they are not inconsistent with that perception. Further, Palmer fails to cite Joseph Smith's earliest attempt, in 1832, to write his own history. He began this early account by referring specifically to "the reception of the holy Priesthood by the ministring of Aangels."[60] This and other problems with this chapter are also discussed in detail in Ashurst-McGee's review.[61]

The First Vision

Palmer also takes up Joseph Smith's first vision in his final chapter. As he does with other foundational stories, Palmer takes the position that current LDS interpretations "simplify and retrofit later accounts to provide a seemingly authoritative, unambiguous recital" (p. 235). He focuses on Joseph Smith's various accounts of the vision in an attempt to show not only that they are inconsistent but also that in 1838 he rewrote the story in order to meet certain institutional needs. Like other foundational stories, Palmer insists, it was transformed from a "spiritual," or metaphysical, experience into one depicting a physical reality. Exactly why this new kind of story was so essential is never satisfactorily explained, though Palmer theorizes that, as a result of troubling apostasies, Joseph found it necessary to embellish his story to reassert his authority. Accordingly, he "then told a revised and more impressive version of his epiphany" and announced for the first time that "his initial calling had not come from an angel in 1823, as he had said for over a decade, but from God the Father and Jesus Christ in 1820" (pp. 248, 251). This is pure speculation and also distorts the various accounts themselves.

In a way, however, Palmer's emphasis on the "spiritual" nature of Joseph Smith's first vision is not inconsistent with LDS thought. Latter-

60. As reproduced in Dean C. Jesse, ed., *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith,* rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and BYU Press, 2002), 10.

61. Ashurst-McGee, "A One-Sided View of Mormon Origins."

day Saints have no trouble accepting the proposition that Joseph saw the Father and the Son with something other than his "natural eyes." He reported in 1838 that after the vision closed "I came to myself again, I found myself lying on my back, looking up into heaven" (JS—H 1:20). This suggests that he was having an experience something like that of Moses: "But now mine own eyes have beheld God; but not my natural, but my spiritual eyes, for my natural eyes could not have beheld" (Moses 1:11). But seeing through "spiritual eyes" does not preclude the possibility that what Joseph saw was real and physical. Palmer's reasoning to the contrary is not persuasive.

There are several contemporary accounts of Joseph Smith's first vision (i.e., accounts prepared by or under the direction of Joseph himself or accounts of someone who heard him recite his experience). Recorded at different times and places, under different circumstances, and in connection with different audiences, they naturally differ in some details. Four of these accounts were recorded directly by Joseph Smith or under his direction. The 1832 account represents his first effort to write the history of the church. Recorded partly in his own handwriting and partly in the handwriting of his scribe, Frederick G. Williams, it is grammatically unpolished but deeply moving, written in a style similar to that of the evangelical spirit of the times. The 1835 account was recorded by Joseph's scribe Warren Cowdery as Joseph was telling a visitor of the rise of the church. The 1838 account was prepared under Joseph Smith's direction and is now published in the Pearl of Great Price. It has become the "official" version of the story. The 1842 account is part of a letter written by Joseph Smith to John Wentworth and published in the church's *Times and Seasons* on 1 March. All of these accounts are readily available.[62] No one should expect Joseph Smith, or anyone else, to repeat a verbatim account each time he tells it.

Palmer goes to great lengths to try to show that the revival Joseph Smith discusses in his 1838 account did not occur in 1820, as that

62. The most convenient source is Milton V. Backman Jr., *Joseph Smith's First Vision: Confirming Evidence and Contemporary Accounts,* 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980).

account declares, but rather in 1824 (pp. 240–44), thus casting doubt on the accuracy of that account. This discussion is hardly new, for Mormon historians and anti-Mormon writers began arguing over that and related issues as early as the late 1960s, after Wesley P. Walters challenged the traditional account.[63] Walters averred that there was no revival in Palmyra in 1820, as supposedly claimed by Joseph Smith, and that if Joseph Smith's description of what went on that year cannot be trusted neither can his description of the first vision itself. I call his article "pseudoscholarly" because, as Marvin S. Hill observed in his thoughtful analysis of the scholarly debates over the first vision, "Walters' scholarship is one of sectarian advantage, not objectivity." Then, referring to Walters as well as to other anti-Mormon writers, he said that the sources they employ, "the conclusions they reach, the places where they publish, and their strong anti-Mormon missionary activities suggest that they have other than scholarly concerns." The real point, according to Hill, is not whether a revival occurred in 1820—some agree that it did not—but the fact that all the textual evidence shows that Joseph Smith had a vision between the ages of fourteen and fifteen.[64]

It would hardly be a blot on Joseph Smith's veracity to say that, when preparing his "official" history in 1838, he confused the date of the revival and somehow superimposed what he experienced in 1824 over his memory of what led to his great 1820 epiphany. Most LDS scholars have not done that, however, thanks, in part, to the work of Milton V. Backman Jr. Even before Walters produced his article, Backman was at work scouring the religious records of Palmyra and its vicinity, including records Walters neglected. Drawing first on a highly regarded study of religious fervor in western New York, Backman observed that between 1816 and 1821 "revivals were reported in more towns and a

63. Wesley P. Walters, "New Light on Mormon Origins from Palmyra (N.Y.) Revival," *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society* 10/4 (1967): 227–44, also published as a tract by the Utah Christian Tract Society, La Mesa, CA; reprinted in *Dialogue* 4/1 (1969): 60–81, in "Roundtable" as "The Question of the Palmyra Revival." See also the critique by Bushman, 82–93, with a response by Walters, 94–100, in the same roundtable.

64. Marvin S. Hill, "The First Vision Controversy: A Critique and Reconciliation," *Dialogue* 15/2 (1982): 43.

greater number of settlers joined churches than in any previous period of New York history."[65] But he went further than that, demonstrating that in the great revival of 1819–20 there were numerous reports of "unusual religious excitement" within such reasonable distance of Joseph Smith's home (up to about 15 miles) that young Joseph and his family could easily have known of, and even attended, some of them.[66] An interesting controversy followed, focusing at one point on a debate between Walters and Bushman over Joseph Smith's meaning when he described the revival. Interpreting narrowly Joseph Smith's words that there was "unusual excitement on the subject of religion" in "the place where we lived," Walters insisted that the revival had to have taken place in the village of Palmyra, in 1820, for it to fit Joseph Smith's story. Bushman looked more broadly at Joseph's complete statement, wherein he said that the religious excitement "soon became general among all sects in that region of country. Indeed, the whole district of country seemed affected by it," suggesting that Joseph was remembering revival activity that occurred over a broad, though accessible, area.[67] Two things should be obvious to those who read all that has been written on these issues: (1) that Walters and others like him clearly have an anti-Mormon ax to grind and are not always the careful scholars they claim to be and (2) that Backman, Bushman, and others are careful scholars who look at the documents not only with the benefit of their scholarly skills but also through the eyes of faith; they have a prochurch bias, of course, but it is well balanced by their careful scholarship and open recognition of the problems and issues involved.

Palmer seems overly concerned with two issues relating to the first vision: (1) was Joseph Smith called of God and Christ at that time to restore the fulness of the gospel or was he called only later by the angel? and (2) what was his purpose in praying in the first place?

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65. Milton V. Backman Jr., "Awakenings in the Burned-over District: New Light on the Historical Setting of the First Vision," *BYU Studies* 9/3 (1969): 302, citing Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-Over District* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1950), 13.

66. See, for example, the maps in Backman, "Awakenings in the Burned-over District," 312–13.

67. See Richard L. Bushman, "The First Vision Revisited," *Dialogue* 4/1 (1969): 82–93. This is followed by a rejoinder by Walters.

On the first question, Palmer concludes that Joseph Smith did not announce that it was in the first vision that he was "called of God" to restore the ancient gospel until he wrote the 1838 account, and then it was only to bolster "his authority during a time of crisis" (p. 251). One problem with this interpretation is that it does not take into account the natural development of Joseph Smith himself as his own understanding of the significance of the vision unfolded. Palmer's supposition that the differences between the accounts reflect Joseph Smith's deceptive effort to bolster his own authority is not the only possibility. Latter-day Saint scholars have already spent considerable time on this issue of multiple accounts and what they mean. The first such article was my own, which appeared in 1970 in the church's *Improvement Era*. It discussed eight contemporary accounts, observing that the differences may be explained by such factors as (1) Joseph Smith's age and experience at the time a particular account was prepared; (2) the particular circumstances surrounding each account, including the special purposes Joseph Smith may have had in mind at the time; (3) the possible literary influence of those who helped him write (or, in the case of the 1835 account, the one who recorded it as Joseph related his story to the visitor); and (4) in the case of versions recorded by others, the fact that "different points would impress different people, and therefore they would record the story somewhat differently. One would hardly expect to find every account to be precisely alike."[68] In a more direct response to the Palmer-type argument, Bushman has explained the differences between the 1832 and 1838 accounts in terms of a broadening of Joseph Smith's own understanding of what the vision really meant. As explained by Bushman:

> But to understand how Joseph Smith's life unfolded, it must be kept in mind that in 1820 he did not know this was the First Vision, nor could he be expected to grasp fully everything that was said to him. Like anyone else, he first understood a new experience in terms of his own needs and his own background.

68. James B. Allen, "Eight Contemporary Accounts of Joseph Smith's First Vision: What Do We Learn from Them?" *Improvement Era,* April 1970, 6.

By 1832, when he first wrote it down, Joseph knew that his vision in 1820 was one of the steps in "the rise of the church of Christ in the eve of time," along with Moroni's visit, the restoration of the Aaronic Priesthood, and the reception of the "high Priesthood." But even twelve years after the event the First Vision's personal significance for him still overshadowed its place in the divine plan for restoring the church. In 1832 he explained the vision as he must have first understood it in 1820—as a personal conversion. What he felt important to say in 1832 was that a "pillar of light" came down and rested on him, and he "was filld [*sic*] with the spirit of God." "The Lord opened the heavens upon me and I Saw the Lord and he Spake unto me Saying Joseph my Son thy Sins are forgiven thee, go thy way walk in my statutes and keep my commandments." It was the message of forgiveness and redemption he had longed to hear. . . .

That was half of it. He had also mourned the sins of the world. . . .

Like countless other revival subjects who had come under conviction, Joseph received assurance of forgiveness from the Lord, and, in the usual sequence, following the vision his "soul was filled with love and for many days I could rejoice with great joy and the Lord was with me. . . ." In actuality there was more in the vision than he first understood. Three years later in 1835, and again in another account recorded in 1838, experience had enlarged his perspective. The event's vast historical importance came to overshadow its strictly personal significance. He still remembered the anguish of the preceding years when the confusion of the churches puzzled and thwarted him, but in 1838 he saw the vision was more significant as the opening event in a new dispensation of the Gospel. In that light certain aspects took on an importance they did not possess at first.[69]

69. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism,* 56–57.

Bushman continues with this same tight reasoning in his lengthy discussion of the first vision, but enough is quoted here to illustrate that there are more reasonable explanations than Palmer's of the differences between the accounts. Other LDS scholars have also dealt with these differences in detail.

Though Palmer plays on the differences between the accounts, they are actually remarkably consistent—much more so than Palmer seems willing to admit. All four of Joseph Smith's personal accounts rehearse his disillusionment over the differences in the religions of the day, though the 1832 account also goes into great detail concerning his quest for forgiveness of personal sin. All four accounts refer to his anguished prayer. Though worded slightly differently, three of them (1835, 1838, and 1842) make it clear that trying to find out who was right or wrong was the reason he went into the grove to pray. This is not specific in the 1832 account, which focuses on Joseph's quest for forgiveness, but it may be implied in his comment that the churches of his day were in a state of apostasy and did not build on the gospel of Jesus Christ as recorded in the New Testament. It is certainly logical to assume that he had both concerns in mind—his own sins as well as his concerns for which church, if any, was right. All four accounts are consistent in their timing of Joseph's religious concerns. The 1832 account says that his concerns began at the age of twelve, and that he pondered them in his heart until the age of fifteen; in 1835 he said that he was "about 14 years old," the 1838 version says he was in his "fifteenth year," and in 1842 he said he was "about fourteen." A revival, or religious excitement, is mentioned specifically only in the 1838 account, but there are strong suggestions of it in all of the others—else why was Joseph's young mind so wrought up on the subject of religion and why, in the 1832 narration, did he write in language so reminiscent of the revivalists? It is significant, too, that after having discussed the revival explicitly in 1838 Joseph did not do so in 1842—the same year the 1838 account was actually published for the first time. Evidently that specific issue was not of as much concern to him as it is to some today whose time is devoted to ferreting out problems.

The major discrepancy between the various accounts is that in 1832 Joseph mentioned only the appearance of "the Lord," who forgave him of his sins. This may well be explained by the perspective presented by Bushman, that what Joseph Smith wrote later represented a more mature understanding of the importance of everything he saw. None of the accounts use the words "the Father and the Son," but three tell of two personages appearing to him and one of them delivering the important message(s). Palmer says that Joseph does not mention the appearance of God the Father in his 1835 account (p. 240), but this is certainly stretching the point—the fact that he tells of two personages appearing and that the "second was like unto the first" is certainly as direct a reference to the Father and the Son as the statements in the 1838 and 1842 accounts. The fact that Joseph was forgiven of his sins is stated in both the 1832 and 1835 accounts, and even though it is not stated in the 1838 account it was duly reported in the first account actually to be published. This was prepared by Orson Pratt (who obviously received his information from Joseph Smith) and published in Scotland in 1840. Even though Joseph did not repeat that part of the story in 1838, it is clear that it was in no way hidden from the Saints. The Book of Commandments, printed in 1833, contained an 1830 revelation that stated: "For after that it truly was manifested unto this first elder [Joseph Smith], that he had received a remission of his sins, he was entangled again in the vanities of the world; but after truly repenting, God ministered unto him by an holy angel."[70] That same statement continued in the Doctrine and Covenants after it was published (D&C 20:5–6). Just because Joseph Smith did not say in 1838 that he had been forgiven of his sins during the first vision is no evidence that he changed what he wanted the Saints to understand.

Palmer says that Joseph Smith did not say that he was "called of God" to restore the gospel until 1838, but the fact is that not even in that account is there a statement to that effect. What Joseph does say is that after his first vision he succumbed to various temptations and his actions were "not consistent with that character which ought to

70. *A Book of Commandments for the Governance of the Church of Christ* (Zion [Independence, MO]: Phelps, 1833), 24:6–7.

be maintained by one who was called of God as I had been" (JS—H 1:28). But called of God to do what? The account simply does not say. In 1840 Orson Pratt reported that during the vision Joseph Smith "received a promise that the true doctrine the fulness of the gospel, should, at some future time, be made known to him," and in 1842, in the Wentworth letter, Joseph said the same thing. Not even these statements, however, specifically said that he was "called" to do the restoring—only that he would eventually receive a full knowledge of the gospel. This could be a hint, of course, at the idea that he would be instrumental in restoring that gospel. But this is hardly inconsistent with earlier accounts—only another added detail.

Palmer's second "important question" concerns the reason Joseph Smith sought the Lord in 1820. The motive, says Palmer, differed between 1832 and 1838—the first being a quest for forgiveness of sins and the second being a desire to know which church was right. In view of the probability, already discussed above, that Joseph's accounts of the vision differed simply because of the differing circumstances under which each was given, as well as his maturing understanding of what the vision really meant, why should it be surprising that he should emphasize one motive at one time and another at a different time, especially when he probably had *both* motives in mind? Palmer avers that in 1832 Joseph "does not mention concern for doctrinal corruption" (p. 252). What in the world, then, does the following statement from that account mean? "And by searching the scriptures I found that mand <mankind> did not come unto the Lord but that they had apostatised from the true and liveing faith and there was no society or denomination that built upon the gospel of Jesus Christ as recorded in the new testament."[71] The statement differs from 1838, but certainly suggests that the question of doctrinal variance was on Joseph Smith's mind. In 1835 (not waiting until 1838, as Palmer suggests), Joseph Smith made his religious confusion abundantly clear when he said: "Being wrought up in my mind, respecting the subject of religion and looking at the different systems taught the children of men, I knew not who was right or who was wrong and I considered it

71. From the 1832 history as reproduced in Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith,* 11.

of the first importance that I should be right, in matters that involve eternal consequ[e]nces."[72] This is certainly the same concern as that expressed in 1838: "My object in going to enquire of the Lord was to know which of all the sects was right."

The reader who wants to ferret out for himself the facts about the first vision accounts, and to see what the LDS scholars have said about them, must go to the works of those scholars themselves. Some have already been discussed here, but a few more seem appropriate at this point. My own work includes the *Improvement Era* article cited above as well as two articles dealing with the growth of knowledge and understanding of the first vision within the church.[73] Anderson has dealt in detail with various circumstantial evidences from Joseph Smith's times, including comments on the setting for the vision as described by Lucy Mack Smith, Oliver Cowdery, and William Smith as well as by non-Mormons Orsamus Turner and Pomeroy Tucker.[74] In addition to his very important book on the first vision, which brings together much of his earlier research, and his article on "Awakenings in the Burned-Over District" referred to above, Backman has published various articles that explain and reconcile the first vision accounts.[75] Bushman, in a fine article on the visionary world in which Joseph Smith lived, looks at many of Joseph's contemporaries who had

72. From Joseph Smith's 1835 journal, as reproduced in ibid., 104.

73. See James B. Allen, "The Significance of Joseph Smith's First Vision in Mormon Thought," *Dialogue* 1/3 (1966): 29–45; and Allen, "Emergence of a Fundamental: The Expanding Role of Joseph Smith's First Vision in Mormon Religious Thought," *Journal of Mormon History* 7 (1980): 43–61.

74. See Richard Lloyd Anderson, "Circumstantial Confirmation of the First Vision through Reminiscences," *BYU Studies* 9/3 (1969): 373–404.

75. See Milton V. Backman Jr., "Joseph Smith's Recitals of the First Vision," *Ensign,* January 1985, 8–17; Backman, "Confirming Witnesses of the First Vision," *Ensign,* January 1986, 32–37 (a discussion of Orson Pratt and the first vision); Backman, "Joseph Smith's First Vision: Cornerstone of a Latter-day Faith," in "*To Be Learned Is Good If . . .*," ed. Robert L. Millet (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987), 21–41; Backman, "Lo, Here! Lo, There! Early in the Spring of 1820," in *The Prophet Joseph: Essays on the Life and Mission of Joseph Smith,* ed. Larry C. Porter and Susan Easton Black (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 19–35; and Backman, "Verification of the 1838 Account of the First Vision," in *The Pearl of Great Price: Revelations from God,* ed. H. Donl Peterson and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1989), 237–48.

similar religious conversion experiences, showing, in part, that the language of Joseph Smith's 1832 account not only is reminiscent of the visionary language of the time but ought to be expected in the kind of account Joseph was trying to prepare that early in his career.[76] Neal E. Lambert and Richard H. Cracroft have also dealt effectively with the revivalistic language found in the 1832 account.[77] Peter Crawley, Marvin S. Hill, Dean C. Jessee, and Stanley B. Kimball have also made distinctive contributions.[78]

I do not say that Palmer is dishonest or deliberately deceptive. I believe, however, that in his enthusiasm to rationalize his own lack of faith in the foundational stories he misleads his readers by imputing motives to Joseph Smith that are not there and by emphasizing changes and inconsistencies that are either insignificant or nonexistent. In doing this he largely ignores the findings of the very LDS scholars he praises in his preface who have "published, critiqued, and reevaluated a veritable mountain of evidence," too much of which "escapes the view of the rank-and-file in the church." It still escapes their view, for Palmer does little to lead the "rank-and-file" to it—not even by using footnotes to show what the "other side" of his arguments might be. He lists some of these scholars in his bibliography, but cites them in his

76. See Richard L. Bushman, "The Visionary World of Joseph Smith," *BYU Studies* 37/1 (1997): 183–204.

77. See Neal E. Lambert and Richard H. Cracroft, "Literary Form and Historical Understanding: Joseph Smith's First Vision," *Journal of Mormon History* 7 (1980): 31–42; Richard H. Cracroft "The Ineffable Made Effable: Rendering Joseph Smith's First Vision as Literature," *Annual of the Association for Mormon Letters* (1995): 38–57; revised version published as "Rendering the Ineffable Effable: Treating Joseph Smith's First Vision in Imaginative Literature," *BYU Studies* 36/2 (1996–97): 93–116.

78. See Peter Crawley, "A Comment on Joseph Smith's Account of His First Vision and the 1820 Revival," *Dialogue* 6/1 (1971): 106–7; Marvin S. Hill, "The First Vision Controversy: A Critique and Reconciliation," *Dialogue* 15/2 (1982): 31–46, which goes into much greater depth on the debates over the vision than indicated previously in this article; Hill, "A Note on the First Vision and Its Import in the Shaping of Early Mormonism," *Dialogue* 12/1 (1979): 90–99; Dean C. Jessee, "The Early Accounts of Joseph Smith's First Vision," *BYU Studies* 9/3 (1969): 275–94; Jessee, "The Early Accounts of Joseph Smith's First Vision," in *The Pearl of Great Price,* Studies in Scripture, vol. 2, ed. Robert L. Millet and Kent P. Jackson (Salt Lake City: Randall Book, 1985), 303–14; Stanley B. Kimball, "A Footnote to the Problem of Dating the First Vision," *Dialogue* 5/4 (1970): 121–23.

text only sparsely and then only when they happen to have said something that he can use to support one of his arguments.

It is easy to find all kinds of anti-Mormon literature, both in print and on the Internet. It is also becoming disturbingly easy to find people, like Palmer, who claim to be faithful church members but who nevertheless take aim at our foundational stories, hoping that we will see them as inspiring myths but not true history. Some arguments, like those presented by Palmer, seem more sophisticated than others because they do not carry the bitter, polemic tone of anti-Mormon diatribe. Some attack the historicity of things discussed here while others attack doctrine, some even claiming that Mormons are not Christians (something also "asked and answered" not just by Latter-day Saint writers but by other scholars as well).[79] But believing Latter-day Saint scholars have also been busy and have answered their arguments—sometimes, as in the case of most of Palmer's book, long before they were made. Those who genuinely seek the truth will read not only the works of naysayers, who obviously look at the evidence through the eyes of disbelief, but also the works of LDS scholars who look at it through the eyes of faith and whose works are readily available to those who want to find them.[80]

79. For an interesting commentary of the techniques of anti-Mormons, see Daniel C. Peterson and Stephen D. Ricks, *Offenders for a Word: How Anti-Mormons Play Word Games to Attack the Latter-day Saints* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998).

80. Let me remind the reader that one good source for Book of Mormon studies is FARMS. For the price of one book such as Palmer's, you can purchase a one-year subscription to FARMS, which will give you not only the current journals and newsletters but also Internet access to the FARMS Web site; there you can read all the back issues of the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* and the *FARMS Review,* as well as many other FARMS publications.