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Abstract Review of *The Book of Mormon: 3 Nephi 9-30, This Is My Gospel* (1993), edited by Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr.

Monte S. Nyman, and Charles D. Tate, Jr., eds., *The Book of Mormon: 3 Nephi 9–30, This Is My Gospel. Papers from the Eighth Annual Book of Mormon Symposium, 1993.* Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1993. 270 pp., with indexes. \$11.95.

Reviewed by Jennifer Clark Lane

The collection of articles in *The Book of Mormon: 3 Nephi 9–30, This Is My Gospel* serves as another witness of the richness and depth of the Book of Mormon account of the Savior's ministry in the Americas. Like the previous volumes from annual Book of Mormon symposia held at Brigham Young University, this collection contains a variety of faithful interpretations of and insights into the Book of Mormon. Most of the authors explore the complexity of Christ's message, focusing on such topics as missionary training, Exodus typology, the command to be perfect as a command to have charity, repentance, prayer, the Twelve, covenant, ministering, and coming unto Christ.

Of course the power and excitement of scriptural studies is that even while one analysis can provide a new insight to spiritual truths, it cannot begin to encompass or explain the entirety of the text. Each of the arguments in this collection provides an interesting, and sometimes crucial, insight into the message of Christ in the Americas, but none precludes the insights of another. This is why the scriptures are always the source and why writings about the scriptures must always justify themselves by giving us an increased ability to return to the source more able to read and understand.

These articles justify themselves with varying degrees of success. Some of the most powerful manage both a close reading of the text combined with insight as to how this can make a difference in our lives. As Robert L. Millet comments in his article, "This is My Gospel," "some things simply matter more than others. Some topics of discussion, even intellectually

stimulating ones, must take a back seat to more fundamental verities" (p. 11). In his article he does not attempt to break new ground, but by focusing on the doctrine of Christ as taught in 3 Nephi he presents a powerful discussion of what the Book of Mormon is all about. Although many of the articles are more textually oriented and present more original analyses of the text, this is the article that I would send to a friend with whom I wanted to share a vision of what the Book of Mormon is intended to teach.

The gospel is the glad tidings concerning the infinite and eternal atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Atonement is central. It is the hub of the wheel; all other matters are spokes at best. The good news is that we can be changed, be converted, become different people in and through Christ. The good news is that we can come to perceive an entirely new realm of reality, a realm unknown to the world at large. It is a new life, a new life in Christ. (p. 22)

Millet persuasively demonstrates how this good news of Christ's atonement is central to 3 Nephi.

One of the most original and insightful papers in the collection draws its strength from a careful rhetorical analysis. Neal E. Lambert's "The Symbolic Unity of Christ's Ministry in 3 Nephi" examines the symbols and reality of Christ's body and his invitation to come to him in a way that connects the expression of the message to what the message means for us. Lambert's careful literary analysis reveals connections between the Nephites' experience of touching and being healed by the resurrected Christ and his establishment of the sacrament. This analysis and insight make the too-often abstracted invitation to "come unto Christ" take new life. By looking at both what is said and how it is said, Lambert avoids the trap of reducing the events to simple doctrinal or historical statements. He notes Christ's repetition of the words *feel and see* in his invitation to the people. "Clearly the implication of this repetition is that this experience is not exclusive to the first encounter" (p. 204), but instead is an invitation to the whole world. He argues that experience beyond mere intellect is connected to the establishment of the sacrament,

it would seem that the Savior intended in *feel and see* the notion that, at least for those who are prepared, imbedded in the sacramental experience are the means of sensing and knowing, of feeling and seeing almost exactly the same as those physical means of knowing with which the Nephite faithful were first privileged earlier that day. Indeed the central focus and the grand pattern of 3 Nephi is the testament that Christ lives and that we can come unto him. (p. 205)

This analysis extends the same invitation to each of us to participate in a saving and healing relationship with Christ.

Another outstanding article that draws its strength and insights from a thorough textual analysis is S. Kent Brown's "Moses and Jesus: The Old Adorns the New." He carefully demonstrates how Christ repeatedly referred to Moses to explain his own mission. This analysis of Christ's words and actions in light of Moses and the redemption of Israel from Egypt adds meaning to both the Old Testament account and Christ's role as Redeemer. Particularly interesting is his development of the parallels between the Israelites' bondage and redemption and that redemption which Christ provides from sin. Here Brown offers a detailed analysis of the need for the identification of an agent of redemption, applying the ancient Near Eastern elements to both Moses speaking before Pharaoh and Christ speaking to the Nephites. This comparison adds strength and meaning to Christ's message of redemption.

If, then, Jesus was the envoy or representative who came in his own name and in that of the Father and if his purpose was to rescue his people from both Satan and their own sinful state what, we might ask, did he bring as his credentials? We need not look far. He bore the proofs of his rescue mission in his own body. (p. 97)

He further discusses Christ's use of the phrase "I AM" in light of Moses at the burning bush and the Gospel of John's "I am" sayings, providing further insight into the role and importance of Christ's self-identification.

Two other articles that offer distinctive new interpretations are Robert A. Cloward's "The Savior's Missionary Training Sermon in 3 Nephi" and Joseph Fielding McConkie's "The Doctrine of a Covenant People." They both provide fresh insights, but sometimes in the attempt to establish their own reading over familiar interpretations they risk offering an exclusive interpretation. Readers will be interested to read and consider the claims for themselves.

Cloward argues that the teachings in the Sermon in Bountiful "stand apart in their missionary training purpose from the remainder of Jesus' personal ministry among the Nephites and Lamanites" (p. 134). This is an impressive effort to defend the unity and practicality of the Beatitudes, but the attempt to find a single explanation sometimes seems too single-minded. It may very well be that this message was directed at the Twelve and others preparing to be missionaries, but does this mean that the message applied *only* to missionaries, as Cloward argues?

"Seek ye first the kingdom of God" (v 33), though often quoted out of context to apply to everyone, is actually counsel directed only to those involved in full-time ministry. Jesus promised his Twelve that their needs would be met if they would build his kingdom as their first priority. For the rest of us, whose ministry is only part-time, we must indeed take thought for our physical upkeep and not expect that God or others will take care of all our needs. (p. 133)

Of course the responsibility to support oneself is not applicable to full-time missionaries and the Twelve, but does that mean that the rest of us do *not* need to seek first the kingdom of God, trusting that God will add unto us what we need? President Benson has recently renewed this promise, saying, "When we put God first, all other things fall into their proper place or drop out of our lives."¹ Efforts to narrow scriptural meanings in order to defend against misinterpretation often cause the loss of less concrete dimensions of the commandments.

¹Ezra Taft Benson, "The Great Commandment—Love the Lord," *Ensign* 18 (May 1988): 4.

Another challenging interpretation is provided by Joseph Fielding McConkie in "The Doctrine of a Covenant People." This article stresses the vitality of the principle of covenants to both 3 Nephi and the gospel. Covenant is very important to Christ's appearance and teachings, and McConkie offers important insights. In addition, he offers an interpretation that is both intriguing and possibly problematic. McConkie suggests that "what we have traditionally supposed to be the ordinance of sacrament" (p. 172) in 3 Nephi 18 and 20 is instead a covenant meal like that which the elders of Israel ate with the Lord on Mt. Sinai (Exodus 24:11). This is a rich and important suggestion. Clearly "something more is taking place" (p.172), but to suggest that Christ was not also establishing the sacrament at this point is to ignore his explanation that this was a model for further use: "And this shall ye always observe to do, even as I have done, even as I have broken bread and blessed it and given it unto you" (3 Nephi 18:6).

Indeed, to all of the authors' credit, the articles in this volume are primarily centered on what Christ did and taught. Even with a collection of sixteen papers, there are, of course, several sections of 3 Nephi 9–30 that receive less attention. The two last chapters, Mormon's prophecies and warnings, were basically ignored; had they been connected with the preceding text, they could give an interesting insight into the message of the section as a whole. Another section that may seem less vital, but that could have been profitably discussed in more depth, is the citation of Malachi and Isaiah. While these are not new texts, their inclusion in this section is significant and promising for further study.

These cursory evaluations only touch on the rich variety of insights found in *The Book of Mormon: 3 Nephi 9–30, This Is My Gospel*. The sixteen authors offer a wide assortment of observations, reflecting different backgrounds and perspectives. Although they may not all agree with each other, or we might not agree with them all, it is encouraging to know that Christ's teachings in the Americas are receiving a thoughtful evaluation.