

MORMON SCHOLARSHIP, APOLOGETICS, AND EVANGELICAL NEGLECT: LOSING THE BATTLE AND NOT KNOWING IT?

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Spiritual warfare is a reality. Battle in the spiritual realm is not fought with guns and tanks in the manner of the world. Instead it is a war of ideas that vies for people's minds. The apostle Paul tells us that the weapons we fight with have divine power to demolish such intellectual strongholds. Of Christians he says that, "we demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God" (2 Cor 10:5). However, tearing down arguments entails knowing first what the arguments are. This paper seeks to describe the scholarly and apologetic arguments of one group which we, as evangelicals, believe inhibit true knowledge of God.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Mormonism, has in recent years produced a substantial body of literature defending their beliefs. This paper does not discuss the full range of defensive and offensive scholarship by Latter-day Saints. Instead, we will focus our discussion upon those disciplines that fall under the broad categories of biblical studies and church history.¹ We choose these two categories because of the importance they play in understanding Christian origins and the nature of early Christianity. Both Mormonism and evangelicalism claim to be the church which Christ founded. Both claim to be the heirs of NT Christianity. Both cannot be correct.

We realize that what we say will not be welcomed by all. Some may criticize us for giving the Mormons too much credit and for being too harsh on fellow evangelicals. However, much like testifying against a loved one in court, we cannot hide the facts of the matter. In this battle the Mormons are fighting valiantly. And the evangelicals? It appears that we may be losing the battle and not knowing it. But this is a battle we *cannot* afford to lose. It is our hope that this paper will, in some small way, serve to awaken members of the evangelical community to the important task at hand.

I. EVANGELICAL MYTHS AND FIVE CONCLUSION

Too many evangelicals accept and propagate certain myths about Mormon scholarship. It is a myth that there are few, if any, traditional Mormon scholars with training in fields pertinent to evangelical-Mormon debates. It is a myth that when Mormons receive training in historiography, biblical languages, theology, and philosophy they invariably abandon traditional Latter-day Saints (LDS) beliefs in the historicity of the Book of Mormon and the prophethood of Joseph Smith. It is a myth that liberal Mormons have so shaken the foundations of LDS belief that Mormonism is crumbling apart. It is a myth that neoorthodox Mormons have influenced the

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¹ Under these categories we have included a section demonstrating the application of the tools of biblical scholarship to the Book of Mormon.

theology of their church to such a degree that it will soon abandon traditional emphases and follow a path similar to the RLDS (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) or the World-Wide Church of God.² These are myths based upon ignorance and selective reading. Evangelicals who wish to be responsible must abandon them.

In response to these myths, we assert five conclusions concerning Mormon scholarship. First, there are, contrary to popular evangelical perceptions, legitimate Mormon scholars. We use the term *scholar* in its formal sense of "intellectual, erudite; skilled in intellectual investigation; trained in ancient languages."³ Broadly, Mormon scholarship can be divided into four categories: traditional, neoorthodox, liberal, and cultural. The largest and most influential of the four categories is traditional Mormon scholars. The Latter-day Saints are not an anti-intellectual group like Jehovah's Witnesses. Mormons produce work that has more than the mere appearance of scholarship.

Second, Mormon scholars and apologists (not all apologists are scholars) have, with varying degrees of success, answered most of the usual evangelical criticisms. Often these answers adequately diffuse particular (minor) criticisms. When the criticism has not been diffused the issue has usually been made much more complex.

Third, currently there are (as far as we are aware) no books from an evangelical perspective that responsibly interact with contemporary LDS scholarly and apologetic writings.⁴ A survey of twenty recent evangelical books criticizing Mormonism reveals that *none* interacts with this growing body of literature. Only a handful demonstrate any awareness of pertinent works. Many of the authors promote criticisms that have long been refuted. A number of these books claim to be "the definitive" book on the matter. That they make no attempt to interact with contemporary LDS scholarship is a stain upon the authors' integrity and causes one to wonder about their credibility.

Fourth, at the academic level evangelicals are needlessly losing the debate with the Mormons. In recent years the sophistication and erudition of LDS apologetics has risen considerably while evangelical responses have not.⁵ Those who have the skills necessary for this task rarely demonstrate an interest in the issues.

Finally, most involved in the counter-cult movement lack the skills and training necessary to answer Mormon scholarly apologetic. The need is great for trained evangelical biblical scholars, theologians, philosophers, and historians to examine and answer the growing body of literature produced by traditional LDS scholars and apologists.

² This is not to say that there have been no important shifts in Latter-day Saint theology. Most notably, Latter-day Saints are emphasizing the role of grace in salvation, the person of Christ, and the centrality of the Book of Mormon in formulating doctrine. It is this last emphasis which insures that Mormonism will not completely abandon its historic distinctives.

³ Cf. *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2d ed., s.v. "scholar" and "scholarly." Of course, a scholarly method does not guarantee correct conclusions. Sadly, many involved in the counter-cult movement fail to make this distinction, and thus fail to give Latter-day Saint scholarship proper respect lest they appear to grant legitimacy to its conclusions.

⁴ J. Tanner and S. Tanner, *Answering Mormon Scholars* (2 vols.; Salt Lake City: Utah Light House Ministry, 1994, 1996) might appear to be an exception. However, this work is primarily an answer to several reviews for their books that appeared in the *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon*. The Tanners are keen students of Mormon history, but do not have the skills necessary for a full-scale rebuttal of Mormon scholarship. The one true exception is F. J. Beckwith and S.E. Parrish, *The Mormon Concept of God: A Philosophical Analysis* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1991). Though good, this book is both difficult to obtain and narrow in scope. For LDS reviews see D. L. Paulsen and B. T. Ostler in *Philosophy of Religion* 35 (1994) 118-20; J. E. Faulconer in *BYU Studies* (Fall 1992) 185-95; and especially B. T. Ostler in *FARMS Review of Books* 8/2 (1996) 99-146.

⁵ Again, on their limited topic, Beckwith and Parrish are the lone exception.

II. THE GOALS OF MORMON SCHOLARSHIP

Our five conclusions are controversial. However, the immense amount of scholarly literature by LDS intellectuals published in both LDS and non-LDS venues;⁶ a perusal of apologetic material produced by the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS);⁷ and consideration of evangelical works on Mormonism, justify our conclusions. The scholarship of Mormon writers is at times rigorous; at the least their work warrants examination. What is the focus of this scholarship? We have had a number of opportunities to converse with leading LDS academicians in both scholarly venues (including three days at the FARMS/BYU sponsored 1996 International Conference on the Dead Sea Scrolls) and non-scholarly contexts. The following sketch of LDS academic intentions arises from these contacts.

What are the LDS scholar-apologists trying to prove? In what intellectually plausible ways are they supporting their unique scriptural canon and doctrinal system? The Mormon goals are fairly straightforward. First, they believe the Book of Mormon to be an ancient text written by people of Israelite lineage. A number of studies have been done which attempt to identify in the Book of Mormon Hebraic literary techniques, linguistic features, cultural patterns, and other marker which, it is argued, Joseph Smith would not have been capable of fabricating. Second, Latter-day Saints believe that other ancient texts have been restored through Joseph Smith (e.g., the books of Moses and Abraham in the Pearl of Great Price). As a result, Mormon scholars have taken a great deal of interest in the study of the OT pseudepigrapha, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the Nag Hammadi texts. Their goal is to highlight features these ancient documents share with their own sacred literature. Third, it is a conviction of the LDS church that earliest Christianity suffered substantial apostasy beginning in the latter first century and extending through the end of the second century. This apostasy is usually equated with the process of post-apostolic Hellenization. Under this theory they maintain that the original doctrines of the ancient church were not lost all at once. Later-day Saints have taken a keen interest in the beliefs and practices of the early post-apostolic church. Special attention has been given to the writings of the Patristic Fathers in an effort to demonstrate similarities with Mormon belief and practice. These similarities are not intended to show that the early Christians were proto-Mormons. Rather, they are intended to show that remnants of true pre-Hellenized belief remained for a time after the apostasy. In this regard Mormon academicians (along with many non-LDS scholars) have taken keen interest in the "parting of the ways" between Judaism and Christianity.

III. HUGH NIBLEY:

⁶ Most LDS intellectuals are affiliated with Brigham Young University or one of its daughter campuses. However, this summary statement includes a few LDS scholars at non-LDS institutions. For example, Philip L. Barlow, Th.D. (Harvard) teaches in the department of theology at Hanover College (Presbyterian). Stephen E. Thompson has a Ph.D. in Egyptology (Brown University) and is adjunct Assistant Professor of Archaeology at Boston University. John M. Lundquist, Ph.D. (University of Michigan) is Susan and Douglas Dillar Chief Librarian of the Oriental Division, New York Public Library and is a well-known expert on ancient Near Eastern temples.

⁷ FARMS is the primary producer of academic defenses of Mormonism. According to FARMS editor and board member Daniel C. Peterson, FARMS "represents an attempt to create a body of work that is at once genuinely scholarly and authentically Latter-day Saint. Thus, any serious charge that we have failed to measure up either to the canons of scholarship or to the standards of Christianity merits our closest scrutiny" (*Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 4 [1992] vii). It still remains for qualified evangelicals rigorously to assess the work of FARMS on both counts. It should be noted that FARMS has recently accepted an invitation to become an official part of Brigham Young University.

THE FATHER OF MORMON SCHOLARLY APOLOGETICS

Hugh Nibley is the pioneer of LDS scholarship and apologetics. Since earning his Ph.D. at the University of California at Berkeley in 1939, Nibley has produced a seemingly endless stream of books and articles covering a vast array of subject matter. Whether writing on Patristics, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Apocrypha, the culture of the Ancient Near East, or Mormonism, he demonstrates an impressive command of the original languages, primary texts, and secondary literature. He has set a standard that younger LDS intellectuals are hard pressed to follow. There is no room here for anything approaching an exhaustive examination of Nibley's works.⁸ As Truman Madsen, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy and Religion at Brigham Young University, puts it, "To those who know him best, and least, Hugh W. Nibley is a prodigy, an enigma, and a symbol."⁹

The few evangelicals who are aware of Hugh Nibley often dismiss him as a fraud or pseudo-scholar. Those wanting quickly to dismiss his writing would do well to heed Madsen's warning:

*Ill-wishing critics have suspected over the years that Nibley is wrenching his sources, hiding behind his footnotes, and reading into antique languages what no responsible scholar would ever read out. Unfortunately, few have the tools to do the checking.*¹⁰

The bulk of Nibley's work has gone unchallenged by evangelicals despite the fact that he has been publishing relevant material since 1946. Nibley's attitude toward evangelicals? "We need more anti-Mormon books. They keep us on our toes."¹¹

No doubt there are flaws in Nibley's work, but most counter-cultists do not have the tools to uncover them. Few have tried.¹² It is beyond the scope of this paper to critique Nibley's methodology or to describe the breadth of his apologetic.¹³ Whatever flaws may exist in his methodology, Nibley is a scholar of high caliber. Many of his more important essays first appeared in academic journals such as *Revue de Qumran*, *vigiliae Christianae*, *Church History*, and the *Jewish Quarterly Review*.¹⁴ Nibley has also received praise from non-LDS scholars such as Jacob Neusner, James Charlesworth, Cyrus Gordon, Raphael Patai, and Jacob Milgrom.¹⁵ The former dean of the Harvard Divinity School, George MacRae, once lamented while hearing

⁸ FARMS is currently working on a twenty-volume collection of Nibley's works, thirteen of which are already published.

⁹ T. G. Madsen, foreword to *Nibley on the Timely and the Timeless: Classic Essays of Hugh W. Nibley* (ed. T.G. Madsen; Provo: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1978) ix.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, xiv.

¹¹ Quoted by Madsen, *ibid.*, xi.

¹² J. White's fifty-six page (single spaced) "The Gates of Hell" is the only noteworthy evangelical interaction we have seen recently. It is a disputation of the proper syntax of the pronoun autns in Matt 16:18. (This paper can be acquired from the Alpha & Omega Ministries Internet site). Also worthy of mention is the now somewhat dated article by W. Walters, "Joseph Smith among the Egyptians: An Examination of the Source of Joseph Smith's Book of Abraham," *JETS* 16 (1973) x-xvii.

¹³ For a sharp critique of Nibley's methodology from a LDS perspective see K. P. Jackson in *BYU Studies* 28/4 (Fall 1988) 114-9. Nibley is not the only LDS scholar to whom Jackson's criticisms could apply.

¹⁴ Specific references can be found in *By Study and Also by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley* (ed. J. M. Lundquist and S. D. Ricks; Salt Lake City: Deseret and FARMS, 1990) 1.xviii-1xxxvii.

¹⁵ See the contributions by these men in vol. 1 of Nibley's *Festschrift: By Study and Also by Faith*, as well as a second essay by Neusner in vol. 2

him lecture, "It is obscene for a man to know that much!"¹⁶ Nibley has not worked in a cloister. It is amazing that few evangelical scholars are aware of his work. In light of the respect Nibley has earned in the non-LDS scholarly world it is more amazing that counter-cultists can so glibly dismiss his work.

For many years Nibley may have been conservative Mormonism's only reputable scholar. However, due to Nibley's influence as a motivating professor, today there are many more. During the years Nibley taught at BYU, several LDS students followed his example by going on to earn the degrees necessary to gain a hearing in the academic community. For example, Stephen E. Robinson went on to Duke University to earn a Ph.D. in Biblical Studies under W. D. Davies and James Charlesworth.¹⁷ Others went in different directions. S. Kent Brown took a doctorate from Brown University, focusing his research on the Nag Hammadi texts. C. Wilfred Briggs received a Ph.D. in ancient history from the University of California at Berkeley and is a specialist in early Egyptian Christianity.¹⁸ Under the supervision of David Noel Freedman and Frank Moore Cross, Kent P. Jackson took a doctorate in Near Eastern studies from the University of Michigan after completing a dissertation on the Ammonite language.¹⁹ Avraham Gileadi wrote his Ph.D. dissertation on the literary structure of Isaiah at BYU, with R. K. Harrison serving as the primary reader.²⁰ Daniel C. Peterson was awarded his doctorate in Near Eastern Languages and Cultures from UCLA. Stephen D. Ricks received a doctorate in Near Eastern Religions from the University of California at Berkeley and Graduate Theological Union under Jacob Milgrom.²¹ Donald W. Parry received his Ph.D. in Hebrew jointly from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the University of Utah. John Gee has recently completed a Ph.D. in Egyptology at Yale University. Many more examples of Mormon scholars with equal credentials could be listed. Currently another crop of traditional Mormon intellectuals, in part funded by FARMS's Hugh Nibley Fellowships, are earning advanced degrees from Oxford, Duke, Claremont, UCLA, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, Catholic University of America, and elsewhere. Their fields of study are quite relevant: New Testament, Syriac, Early Christianity, Near Eastern languages and cultures. The significance of these facts is simple: Mormons have the training and skills to produce robust defenses of their faith.

IV. THE BOOK OF MORMON: AN ANCIENT TEXT?

The increased sophistication of LDS scholarly apologetic is clearly seen in their approach to the Book of Mormon. Not only do they use scholarship to defend the Book against common criticisms, they are also attempting to place it squarely into an ancient Near Eastern background.

¹⁶ Quoted in P. L. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) 147, n. 105.

¹⁷ Robinson's dissertation was published as *The Testament of Adam: An Examination of the Syriac and Greek Traditions* (SBLDS; Chico, CA: Scholars, 1982). Other works include: "The Apocryphal Story of Melchizedek," JSJ 18 (June 1987) 26-39; "The Testament of Adam and the Angelic Liturgy [4QSirSabb]," *RevQ* 12 (1985) 105-10; "The Testament of Adam: An Updated Arbeitsbericht," JSP 5 (October, 1989) 95-100. He has also contributed to the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* and the *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*.

¹⁸ See C. W. Griggs, *Early Egyptian Christianity: From Its Origins to 451 C.E.* (Coptic Studies Series no. 2; New York: E. J. Brill, 1990). This book will be discussed below.

¹⁹ K. P. Jackson, *The Ammonite Language of the Iron Age* (HSM; Chico: Scholars, 1983). This is considered by many to be the standard work on the subject.

²⁰ For one example of his work on Isaiah, see A. Gileadi, *The Literary Message of Isaiah* (New York: Hebraeus, 1994). This book received endorsements from professors David Noel Freedman and the late R. K. Harrison.

²¹ For an example of Ricks's expertise with Semitic languages, see his *Lexicon of Inscriptural Qatabanian* (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 1989).

It is their contention that the Book of Mormon reflects the culture, language, and customs of ancient Semitic peoples. This is seen not only in the major story line but also in subtle and important ways which, they argue, Joseph Smith (or anyone else living in the nineteenth century) could not have extrapolated from the Bible.

For example, Paul Y. Hoskisson (Assistant Professor of Ancient Scripture at BYU) wrote an important essay entitled, "Textual Evidences for the Book of Mormon."²² Hoskisson begins his study by pointing out:

In order for material in the Book of Mormon to be sufficient evidence for an ancient Near Eastern *vorlage*, as I am using the term sufficient here, it must be demonstrated that the textual material is ancient Near Eastern and that it was not available to Joseph Smith.²³

His point is that while certain features of the text could be explained as pointing to an ancient Near Eastern origin, not all such evidence would qualify as *sufficient* evidence. Thus we see an LDS scholar attempting to establish some methodological controls for what constitutes "proof" in the Book of Mormon debate.

In his essay, Hoskisson provides what he thinks are examples of sufficient evidence for an ancient Near Eastern *Vorlage* for the Book of Mormon. The first item of evidence examined relates to the statement, "their souls did expand" in Alma 5:9. In context the meaning appears to approximate "they became happy," in light of the structural parallelism with the phrase "'they did sing redeeming love' to celebrate their freedom."²⁴ Hoskisson points out that the King James Bible does not use the word "soul" in conjunction with "expand," although the Book of Mormon also speaks of the soul enlarging and swelling in Alma 32:28 and 34 (respectively). He remarks:

This phrase appears to be unusual. Why should the soul expand? If this phrase is unique in English to the Book of Mormon, could the phrase reflect an ancient Near Eastern *vorlage* rather than have its origin in English?²⁵

After pointing out a lack of evidence for this phrase in any extant pre-1830 English source, he goes on to point to instances of this metaphor in Ugaritic and Akkadian sources. However, ultimately this is not found to be an example of *sufficient* evidence, because the phrase "expand the soul" does occur in German, and English belongs to the Germanic language group. Hoskisson admits:

Therefore, though the phrase "expand the soul" does not occur in any readily available pre-1830 English text, and though it is an authentic ancient Near Eastern Semitic phrase, because it is attested in German, we must conclude that the phrase "their souls did expand" is at best necessary evidence for an authentic Near Eastern Semitic Book of Mormon *vorlage*, but not sufficient evidence.²⁶

Following this discussion, Hoskisson provides three examples of "sufficient" evidence: (1) the repeated use of the cognate accusative in the Book of Mormon (e.g., 2 Nephi 5:15; Mos.

²² P.Y. Hoskisson, "Textual Evidences for the Book of Mormon," in *The Book of Mormon: First Nephi, The Doctrinal Foundation* (ed. M. S. Nyman and C. D. Tate Jr.; Provo: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1988) 283-95

²³ *Ibid.*, 283.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 284-5

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 287.

9:8; 11:13; 23:5); (2) the occurrence of the Jewish name "Alma" in a land transaction found at Nahal Hever, dating from the time of the Bar-Kochba revolt;²⁷ and (3) the concept of the oceanic waters being the fountain of rivers, which is typical of ancient Near Eastern thought, and occurs in 1 Nephi 2:9.

A second study worth considering is "The Book of Mormon as an Ancient Book" by C. Wilfred Griggs (Associate Professor of Classics, History, and Ancient Scriptures and Director of Ancient Studies, Brigham Young University).²⁸ He begins his study by throwing out a challenge to critics of the Book of Mormon:

It claims to be an ancient book, and it must be examined and criticized in terms of its claim . . . Since nobody could feasibly invent a work the length of the Book of Mormon which represented ancient Near Eastern society accurately . . . , subjecting the book to the test of historical integrity would be a rather easy task for any specialist to undertake.²⁹

Griggs goes on to complain: "It is precisely this dimension of historical criticism, however, which has been almost totally neglected in attempts to establish the book as a fraud."³⁰ As an example somewhat parallel to the Book of Mormon, Griggs points to the 1958 discovery by Morton Smith of the purported letter of Clement of Alexandria written to a certain Theodore. The contents of this letter were previously unknown to the scholarly world, and there is no mention of Theodore in any of Clement's extant writings. The date of the copy, which was discovered in the Mar Saba monastery near Jerusalem, was fairly easy to establish at around 1750. However, after a detailed study of this document in comparison with other ancient sources, Morton Smith concluded that this was indeed an authentic letter of Clement. Griggs comments:

If a two-and-a-half-page text can elicit 450 pages [the length of Morton Smith's study] of analysis and commentary in an attempt to determine its authenticity, one would not expect less from the world in the case of the Book of Mormon.³¹

Griggs moves on from there to examine the "Tree of Life" dream recorded in 1 Nephi 8-15 against the backdrop of Mediterranean texts which date to approximately Lehi's time (sixth century BC). His discussion mentions numerous examples of religious and magical texts written on gold, silver, and bronze tablets. Of particular interest are the so-called "Orphic gold plates," which date as early as the fifth-century BC and have been found in such scattered areas as Italy, Greece, and Crete.³² Scholars are agreed that these gold plates demonstrate foreign influence,

²⁷ Hoskisson notes: "Since the publication of the Book of Mormon, other West Semitic names ending with aleph have turned up, indicating that the terminal aleph in Alma is not unique to this name" (p. 294, n. 29). In support he cites a study by fellow Latter-day Saint K. P. Jackson published in a *Festschrift* in honor of David Noel Freedman: K. P. Jackson, "Ammonite Personal Names in the Context of the West Semitic Onomasticon," in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Sixtieth Birthday* (ed. C. L. Meyers and M. O'Connor; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983) 507-21. Also, Hoskisson, "An Introduction to the Relevance of and a Methodology for a Study of the Proper Names in the Book of Mormon," in *By Study and Also by Faith* 2.126-35

²⁸ C. W. Griggs, "The Book of Mormon as an Ancient Book," in *Book of Mormon Authorship: New Light on Ancient Origins* (ed. N. B. Reynolds; Provo: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1982) 75-101.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 77.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, 78.

³² *Ibid.*, 81.

but have not come to a consensus as to what that influence was. Griggs notes, however, that, "The influence was certainly from the ancient Near East even if there is no agreement on where the ideas were originally found."³³ The remainder of the examination involves a comparison of the rituals connected with these plates with materials in the Egyptian Book of the Dead and Lehi's dream in the Book of Mormon. Griggs concludes after his detailed study:

Since the Greek gold tablets appear to have an Egyptian origin which agrees in time and content with the Egyptian associations of the Book of Mormon, the most feasible and plausible explanation for the internal characteristics shared by the Book of Mormon is that seventh/sixth-century BC Egypt is the common meeting ground for the two traditions.³⁴

There is no room here for detailed study of further examples of scholarly defenses of the Book of Mormon, but many others merit attention. John Welch has argued for an ancient *Vorlage* based on chiasmic structures in the Book of Mormon.³⁵ Donald W. Parry, professor of Hebrew at BYU and a member of the International Dead Sea Scrolls Editing Team, has published an exhaustive study of Hebrew poetic structures in the Book of Mormon text.³⁶ Roger R. Keller, a former Presbyterian minister armed with a Ph.D. in Biblical Studies from Duke University, has written a monograph arguing, on the basis of distinctive word usages, that the Book of Mormon cannot be the product of a single nineteenth-century author, but rather is the product of several ancient writers.³⁷ John Tvedtnes, senior project manager for FARMS, has written technical studies on Hebraisms and Isaiah variants in the Book of Mormon.³⁸ Several studies involving form-critical analysis also require some attention. Stephen D. Ricks, Professor of Hebrew and Semitic Languages at BYU, has written a detailed article discussing King Benjamin's coronation in Mosiah 1-6 against the backdrop of ancient Near Eastern treaty literature.³⁹ Blake T. Ostler has examined the account of Lehi's vision in 1 Nephi 1 against the backdrop of the "call form" in similar theophanies in the Hebrew Bible and OT pseudepigrapha.⁴⁰ There are many more studies which could be mentioned, but this should suffice to demonstrate that LDS academicians are producing serious research which desperately needs to be critically examined from an informed evangelical perspective.

V. THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS, THE PSEUDEPIGRAPHA,

³³ Ibid., 82.

³⁴ Ibid., 91.

³⁵ See J. W. Welch, "Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon," in *Book of Mormon Authorship*, 33-52; id., *Chiasmus in Antiquity* (ed. J. W. Welch, with a foreword by D. N. Freedman; Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1981); id., "Criteria for Identifying and Evaluating the Presence of Chiasmus," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 4, no. 2 (Fall 1995) 1-14. On the purported ritual context of the Book of Mormon see id., *The Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount* (Salt Lake City: Deseret and FARMS, 1990).

³⁶ D. W. Parry, *The Book of Mormon Text Reformatted according to Parallelistic Patterns* (Provo: FARMS, 1992).

³⁷ R. R. Keller, *Book of Mormon Authors: Their Words and Messages* (Provo: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1996).

³⁸ See J. Tvedtnes, "The Hebrew Background of the Book of Mormon," in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon* (ed. J. L. Sorenson and M. J. Thorne; Salt Lake City: Deseret and FARMS, 1991) 77-91; id., "Isaiah Variants in the Book of Mormon," in *Isaiah and the Prophets* (ed. M. S. Nyman; Provo: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1984) 165-77. A longer version of this paper is available from FARMS.

³⁹ S. D. Ricks, "The Treaty/Covenant Pattern in King Benjamin's Address (Mosiah 1-6)," *BYU Studies* (Spring 1984) 151-62.

⁴⁰ B. T. Ostler, "The Throne-Theophany and Prophetic Commission in 1 Nephi: A Form-Critical Analysis," *BYU Studies* (Fall 1986) 67-87

AND THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

Biblical scholars are well aware of the impact the discoveries at Qumran and adjacent vicinities have had on both Old and New Testament studies.⁴¹ The Dead Sea Scrolls have greatly enhanced our understanding of OT textual criticism, Aramaic backgrounds to the NT, and the complexity of the various Judaisms existing in first-century Palestine. It would be hard to overestimate the importance of the Dead Sea Scrolls research for understanding the Bible.

Recently Mormon scholars have come to the forefront of Dead Sea Scrolls research. FARMS and BYU have sponsored several international conferences on the Scrolls in Israel and the U.S., attended by world-renowned scholars. At least four Latter-day Saints are on the International Dead Sea Scrolls Editing Team headed by Emmanuel Tov.⁴² Latter-day Saint Scrolls research is readily accepted by the larger academic community, and Mormons are increasingly asked to collaborate on, contribute to, or edit books with non-LDS scholars.⁴³ Mormon interest in the Scrolls is not limited to mere curiosity. They use the fruits of their research to promote their faith.⁴⁴ Mormons have taken keen interest in the scrolls for several

⁴¹ See, for example, J. Fitzmyer, "The Qumran Scrolls and the New Testament after Forty Years," *RevQ* 13 (1988) 609-20.

⁴² Donald W. Parry, Andrew Skinner, Dana M. Pike, and David Rolph Seely.

⁴³ See *A Bibliography of the Finds in the Desert of Judah, 1970-1995* (ed. F. G. Martinez and D. W. Parry [LDS]; New York: E. J. Brill, 1996); D. W. Parry [LDS], "Retelling Samuel: Echoes of the Books of Samuel in the Dead Sea Scrolls," *RevQ* 17 (1996) 293-306; D. R. Seely [LDS], "The 'Circumcised Heart' in 4Q434 Barki Nafshi," *revQ* 17 (1996) 527-36; D. M. Pike [LDS], "The 'Congregation of YHWH' in the Bible and at Qumran," *RevQ* 17 (1996) 233-40; *Discoveries in the Judean Desert XXXIII* (ed. A. Skinner [LDS] and D. M. Pike [LDS]; Oxford: Clarendon, forthcoming); *Current Research and Technological Developments on the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. D. W. Parry [LDS] and S. D. Ricks [LDS]; New York: E. J. Brill, 1996). From this volume see: D. W. Parry [LDS], "4Qsam^a and the Tetragrammaton," 106-25; D. M. Pike [LDS], "The Book of Numbers at Qumran: Texts and Context," 166-94; D. R. Seely [LDS], "The Barki Nafshi Texts (4Q434-439)," 194-214; S. R. Woodward [LDS], and others, "Analysis of Parchment Fragments from the Judean Desert Using DNA Techniques," 215-38; D. W. Parry [LDS] and S. W. Booras [LDS], "The Dead Sea Scrolls CD-ROM Database Project," 239-50. This last essay describes the groundbreaking computer database *Dead Sea Scrolls Electronic Reference Library Vol. II* produced by FARMS and BYU. Additional collaborators to the project include the Oxford University Press, E????rill, Israel Antiquities Authority, and the Ancient Biblical Manuscript Center. See also F. M. Cross and D. W. Parry [LDS], "A Preliminary Edition of a Fragment of 4Qsam^b(4!52)," *BASOR* 306 (May 1997) 63-74; and D. W. Parry [LDS], D. V. Arnold, D. G. Long, and S. R. Woodward [LDS], "New Technological Advances: DNA, Databases, Imaging Radar," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls After Fifty Years*, vol. 1 (ed. P. W. Flint and J. C. Vanderkam; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1998) 496-515.

⁴⁴ LDS interest in the Scrolls can be seen in research projects such as R. A. Cloward, *The Old Testament Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha and the Dead Sea Scrolls: A Selected Bibliography of Text Additions and English Translations* (R. A. Cloward, 1988, available from FARMS); and *LDS Perspectives on the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. D. W. Parry and D. M. Pike; Provo: FARMS, 1997). Mormon scholars have described the following as rather poor examples of LDS usage of the Scrolls (a judgment with which we concur): V. W. Mattson, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and other Important Discoveries* (2d ed.; Salt Lake City: Buried Record Productions, 1979); E. Seaich, *Mormonism, The Dead Sea Scrolls and The Nag Hammadi Texts* (Midvale, UT: Sounds of Zion, 1980); K. Terry and S. Biddulph, *Dead Sea Scrolls and the Mormon Connection* (n.p.: Maasai, 1996). Only slightly better popular level LDS use of the Scrolls is D. Gibbons, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Aaronic Priesthood* (Salt Lake City: Origen, 1997). A Mormon scholar, S. K. Brown, observes, that their "quality is at the very best uneven," their "authors possess few means or skills to study the ancient texts themselves," and they "exhibit serious misunderstandings because of their dependence on the vast but uneven secondary literature on the scrolls" (S. K. Brown, "The Dead Sea Scrolls: A Mormon Perspective" *BYU Studies* 23/1 [Winter 1983] 52). These are weaknesses not found in the works listed in the above note. However, these last examples do illustrate the fact that Mormon interest in the Scrolls is growing at a popular level. Editions of the DSS are available in most LDS bookstores.

reasons. Foremost among these is their desire to portray early Christianity as a movement firmly rooted in apocalyptic Judaism. Nibley writes that,

This common tradition was not that of conventional Judaism, let alone Hellenistic philosophy; it was the ancient tradition of the righteous few who flee to the desert with their wives and children to prepare for the coming of the Lord and escape persecution at the hands of the official religion.⁴⁵

Nibley posits a line of continuity between the desert sectarians represented by Lehi and his family (cf. 1 Nephi 2), the community at Qumran, earliest Christianity, and second-century Gnosticism. The argument is not that the Qumran Essenes were proto-Mormons, but simply that Mormonism has more in common with the apocalyptic belief system represented at Qumran than with that of Hellenized Christianity. Nibley continues:

Now with the discovery and admission of the existence of typical New Testament expressions, doctrines, and ordinances well before the time of Christ, the one effective argument against the Book of Mormon collapses.⁴⁶

Elsewhere he points to ten parallels between the Qumran literature and the Book of Mormon. One example is given as follows:

For the first time we now learn of the ancient Jewish background of (1) the theological language of the New Testament and Christian apocrypha, (2) their eschatological doctrines, and (3) their organizational and liturgical institutions. All three receive their fullest exposition in 3 Nephi, where the Messiah himself comes and organizes his church on the foundations already laid for it.⁴⁷

Nibley is not alone in pointing out parallels between the Qumran texts and Mormon scripture. William J. Hamblin complains that "the critics [of Mormonism] have never explained why we find close linguistic and literary parallels between the figure *Mahijah* in Dead Sea Scrolls Aramaic fragments of the *Book of Enoch* and *Mahijah* questioning Enoch in the book of Moses (Moses 6:40)."⁴⁸ Gaye Strathearn suggests several points of contact between the Genesis Apocryphon (1QapGen) discovered at Qumran and the LDS Book of Abraham.⁴⁹ Stephen E. Robinson points to numerous similarities between the Qumran community and the Latter-day Saints. He notes that the Qumranites wrote important information on metal, they believed in baptisms(s) by immersion,⁵⁰ their community was led by a council of twelve men with three

⁴⁵ H. W. Nibley, "More Voices from the Dust," in *Old Testament and Related Studies* (Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, vol. 1; Salt Lake City: Deseret and FARMS, 1986) 243.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 242.

⁴⁷ Nibley, "The Dead Sea Scrolls: Some Questions and Answers," in *Old Testament and Related Studies*, 250.

⁴⁸ W. J. Hamblin, "An Apologist for the Critics: Brent Lee Metcalfe's Assumptions and Methodologies," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994) 484-5. Hamblin is referring to the Book of Giants fragments 4Q203, 4Q530 and 6Q8. For an extended discussion of this and other parallels see H. W. Nibley, "Churches in the Wilderness," in *Nibley on the Timely*, 155-86.

⁴⁹ G. Strathearn, "The Wife/Sister Experience: Pharaoh's Introduction to Jehovah," in *Thy People Shall be My People and Thy God My God* (ed. P. Y. Hoskisson; Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1994). The article contains an extended discussion of these and other texts.

⁵⁰ This is thought to be significant because it is an example of Jews baptizing by immersion before the NT, thus showing the practice in the Book of Mormon not to be anachronistic.

governing priests, they had sacred meals of bread and wine administered by priests,⁵¹ and they believed in continuing revelation through a prophetic leader. He writes, "All of this leads to the conclusion that in many ways the Essenes may have been closer to the [Mormon] gospel than other Jewish sects."⁵² As with defenses of the Book of Mormon, more examples could be listed. In light of the growing participation of LDS scholars in Scrolls research we can be sure that many more parallels will be brought to our attention.

Mormon scholars have related interest in the OT pseudepigrapha. Their involvement in pseudepigraphal studies can be seen in the two volume *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, edited by James H. Charlesworth.⁵³ The dust jacket of the work states:

Scholars, Bible students, professionals of all religious groups and denominations, and lay people--indeed, all those who can be signified as "People of the Book," Christians, Jews, *Mormons*, Muslims--will be interested in these translations.⁵⁴

The editor's preface contains thanks to Brigham Young University's Religious Studies Center for their partial funding of the project. Stephen E. Robinson, a student of Charlesworth's, was responsible for the translation and commentary of the *Apocryphon of Ezekiel*, the *Testament of Adam*, and *4 Baruch*.⁵⁵

Whereas LDS interest in the Dead Sea Scrolls is primarily related to the desire to root earliest Christianity in the soil of apocalyptic Judaism, the pseudepigrapha offer more specific points of contact between LDS scriptures and various ancient sources. The Mormons are *not* generally trying to say that genetic literary relationships exist between these texts, but rather that there are significant conceptual parallels which point to an ancient milieu for the Book of Mormon and the Pearl of Great Price.

In a panel discussion, a question was asked concerning connections between Mormon scriptures and ancient sources such as the Dead Sea Scrolls, the pseudepigrapha, and the Nag Hammadi texts. In answer, S. Kent Brown pointed to two main areas. First, there are points of contact with regard to interest in key personalities: Adam (Moses 6:45-68; cf. *Life of Adam and Eve* and the Coptic *Apocalypse of Adam*), Enoch (Moses 6:25-8:1; cf. the Book of Giants fragments, and the Ethiopic, Slavonic, and Hebrew books of Enoch), Melchizedek (Alma 13:14-19; cf. 11Q Melchizedek and the Nag Hammadi Melchizedek work), Abraham (Book of Abraham; cf. the *Testament of Abraham* and *Apocalypse of Abraham*), and Joseph (2 Nephi 3:5-21; cf. *Testament of Joseph*). Second, there are parallels in terms of key themes, such as the Creation account (Moses 3:21-5:21; cf. 4 Ezra 6:38-54 and the Gnostic *On the Origin of the*

⁵¹ The point here is to illustrate a distinctively Christian ordinance with roots in pre-Christian Judaism.

⁵² S. E. Robinson, "Background for the Testaments," *The Ensign* (December 1982). In "The Dead Sea Scrolls: A Mormon Perspective," S. K. Brown discusses many of the same parallels as Robinson but seeks to curb LDS over-enthusiasm about such coincidences by noting significant differences. Other similarities between the Qumranites and the Latter-day Saints include the rejection of orthodox religion (believing it to be corrupt and apostate), communalism, and the Exodus-type motif lived out in the community's history wherein the group flees to the desert (including the obvious similarity between the Dead Sea and the Great Salt Lake). There is also the general emphasis on purity demonstrated in the wearing of white linen garments and certain dietary restrictions (cf. the Word of Wisdom, D&C 89). Furthermore, and most significant, both have had a flexible notion of Scripture exemplified in an expanded canon, liberty to modify and expand biblical texts (e.g., the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible), and a belief in degrees of inspiration.

⁵³ *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (2 vols.; ed. J. H. Charlesworth; New York: Doubleday, 1985).

⁵⁴ Emphasis added. Notice how Mormonism is listed with three of the great world-religions. See n. 109 below.

⁵⁵ See OTP ???-95; 1. 989-95; 2.413-7.

World and the Hypostasis of the Archons), the notion of a pre-mortal existence of souls (Abraham 3:18-28; cf. the *Apocryphon of James* and the *Gospel of Thomas*, saying 4), and the idea of an eschatological restoration following a period of apostasy (cf. *The Apocalypse of Peter* in the Nag Hammadi library).⁵⁶

Space does not permit an extended discussion of LDS use of the OT pseudepigrapha, the NT Apocrypha, and the Nag Hammadi texts.⁵⁷ However, several studies deserve mention. Hugh Nibley wrote a book-length work on the extant Enoch literature.⁵⁸ Stephen E. Robinson makes several interesting points: Paul apparently used the *Wisdom of Solomon*, which teaches the premortal existence of souls (8:19ff.) and the creation of the world out of unformed matter (11:17) (both of which are distinctive tenets of LDS theology). The Narrative of Zosimus (also known as History of the Rechabites) contains an interesting tradition about Jews leaving Jerusalem in Jeremiah's time and traveling across the ocean to a land of promise.⁵⁹ The *Testament of Adam* (3:1-5) contains an account similar to what is found in Doctrine and Covenants 107:53-56. And, the *Gospel of Philip* describes a three-stage initiation rite corresponding to the three chambers of the Jerusalem temple.⁶⁰ In another interesting study, S. Kent Brown compares the titles "Man of Holiness" and "Man of Counsel" in Moses 6:57 and 7:35 with material in the Hebrew Bible and two later documents, *Eugnostos the Blessed* and *The Sophia of Jesus Christ*.⁶¹

LDS writers are not alone in noting various parallels between these ancient texts and Mormon literature. James H. Charlesworth, in a lecture delivered at Brigham Young University entitled "Messianism in the Pseudepigrapha and the Book of Mormon," points to what he describes as "important parallels . . . that deserve careful examination." He cites examples from 2 *Baruch*, 4 *Ezra*, *Psalms of Solomon*, and the *Testament of Adam*.⁶² If world's leading authority on ancient pseudepigraphal writings thinks such examples deserve "careful examination," it might be wise for evangelicals to pay attention. George Nickelsburg has also note a rather interesting parallel between the Qumranic Book of Giants and the LDS Book of Moses in the Pearl of Great Price.⁶³ Yale's Harold Bloom is perplexed as to how to explain the many parallels between Joseph Smith's writings and ancient apocalyptic, pseudepigraphal, and kabbalistic literature. He writes,

⁵⁶ See S. K. Brown and others, "The Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible: A Panel," in *Scriptures for the Modern World* (ed. P. R. Cheesman and C. W. Griggs; Provo: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1984) 81-3.

⁵⁷ For a good example of how Mormon scholars utilize such sources, especially note the cautious essays by S. E. Robinson and S. K. Brown in *Apocryphal Writings and the Latter-day Saints* (ed. C. W. Griggs; Provo: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1986). Also see more recently, S. E. Robinson, "The Noncanonical Sayings of Jesus," *BYU Studies* 36/2 (1996-97) 75-91.

⁵⁸ H. Nibley, *Enoch the Prophet* (Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, vol. 2; Salt Lake City: Deseret and FARMS, 1986).

⁵⁹ On this especially see J. W. Welch, "The Narrative of Zosimus and the Book of Mormon" *BYU Studies* 22 (Summer, 1982) 311-32.

⁶⁰ See S. E. Robinson, "Background for the Testaments."

⁶¹ S. K. Brown, "Man and Son of Man: Issues of Theology and Christology," in *The Pearl of Great Price: Revelations from God* (ed. H. D. Peterson and C. D. Tate; Provo: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1989) 57-72

⁶² J. H. Charlesworth, "Messianism in the Pseudepigrapha and the Book of Mormon," in *Reflections on Mormonism: Judeo-Christian Parallels* (ed. T. G. Madsen; Provo: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1978) 99-137. Non-LDS biblical scholars J. Milgrom, D. N. Freedman, W. D. Davies, and K. Stendahl also contributed to this volume.

⁶³ W. D. Davies writes: "As a parallel in the Enochic corpus, George Nickelsburg has called my attention in correspondence to 4QEnGiants . . . 8.3: *prsgn lwh' tny[n]* ('the copy of the sec[on]d tablet')" (W. D. Davies, "Reflections on the Mormon 'Canon,'" *HTR* 79 [1986] 51, n. 18). The parallel here is with Moses 6:46: "For a book of remembrance we have written among us, according to *the pattern given us by the finger of God.*"

Smith's religious genius always manifested itself through what might be termed his *charismatic accuracy*, his sure sense of relevance that governed biblical and Mormon parallels. I can only attribute to his genius or daemon his uncanny recovery of elements in Jewish theurgy that had ceased to be available either to normative Judaism or to Christianity, and that had survived only in esoteric traditions *unlikely to have touched Smith directly*.⁶⁴

VI. MORMONISM AND EARLIEST CHRISTIANITY: EVIDENCE OF AN APOSTACY?

It is a central tenant of Mormonism that the original church established by Christ apostatized. This is an absolutely fundamental belief of Mormonism because if there had not been an apostasy there would have been no need for Joseph Smith's "restoration."⁶⁵ Latter-day Saint scholars (among others) contend that the church of the post-apostolic period differed substantially from earliest Christianity. In this, Mormon scholars have, in large part, adopted the views of Adolph Harnack and Walter Brauer.⁶⁶ The spirit of apostasy and the increasing influence of Hellenization contributed to a spiritual and doctrinal decline in the second and third centuries. According to this thesis, the result was that early Christianity, rooted in apocalyptic Judaism, was transformed into a synthetic blend of "Christianity" and pagan Platonic and (later) Neoplatonic philosophy. The process of Hellenization was so severe that it literally killed the religion Christ founded and replaced it with something else. Stephen E. Robinson summarizes this view when he writes:

Essentially, what happened is that we have good sources for New Testament Christianity (the New Testament documents themselves); then the lights go out (that is, we have very few historical sources), and in the dark we hear the muffled sounds of a great struggle. When the lights come on again a hundred or so years later, we find that someone has rearranged all the furniture and that Christianity is something very different from what it was in the beginning. The different entity can be accurately described by the term hellenized Christianity.⁶⁷

Mormons have written several studies in this area.⁶⁸ As usual, Hugh Nibley led the way.⁶⁹ He began with a book published under the title, *The World and the Prophets*. This Book

⁶⁴ H. Bloom, *The American Religion* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992) 101 (emphasis added).

⁶⁵ Cf. K. P. Jackson, *From Apostasy to Restoration* (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1996)8. Chaps. 1-5 are a convenient popular exposition of Jackson's take on the presumed apostasy. A slightly more technical version of chap. 2, in which Jackson attempts to root the beginnings of the apostasy in the NT itself, is "Watch and Remember: The New Testament and the Great Apostasy," in *By Study and Also by Faith* 1. 81-95.

⁶⁶ See A. von Harnack, *History of Dogma* (7 vols.; New York: Dover, 1961) and W. Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971).

⁶⁷ S. E. Robinson, "Early Christianity and 1 Nephi 13-14," in *The Book of Mormon: First Nephi, The Doctrinal Foundation*, 188. The influence of Greek philosophy on "orthodox" Christianity is a repeated theme in Robinson's recent dialogue with evangelical scholar Craig Blomberg (C. L. Blomberg and S. E. Robinson, *How Wide the Divide? A Mormon and an Evangelical in Conversation* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997]). On this issue Robinson and other Latter-day Saints are fond of E. Hatch, *The Influence of Greek Ideas and Usage upon the Christian Church* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1895; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995). For an extensive evangelical review of *How Wide the Divide?* with responses by LDS scholars, see our review in the *FARMS Review of Books* (forthcoming). We devote a lengthy appendix to Robinson's claims about the Hellenization of Christianity.

⁶⁸ We are not referring here to the popular level use of the Fathers exemplified in Van Hale's debates, nor to the poor handling of sources in M. T. Griffith, *One Lord, One Faith: Writings of the Early Christian Fathers as Evidences of*

is the edited transcript from a series of talks originally delivered to an LDS radio audience between March 7 and October 17, 1954 entitled "Time Vindicates the Prophets."⁷⁰ In this book, according to the foreword by R. Douglas Phillips, Nibley

describes with great clarity the process by which the Church changed from an organization with inspired prophets into a thoroughly different and alien institution built upon the learning of men. He shows how prophets were replaced by scholars, revelation by philosophy, inspired preaching by rhetoric.⁷¹

Whatever one may think about Nibley's conclusions, the breadth of learning displayed in these lectures is intimidating. In them he discusses hundreds of texts from Papias, Clement, Ignatius, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Athanasius, Augustine, and Chrysostom (among others). In classic Nibley style, all references are personally translated from Greek and Latin originals; rarely are translations listed for modern German, French, or Italian works.

Mormon intellectuals do not confine their reconstruction of early Christian history to Latter-day Saint audiences. In an attempt to reach a wider academic audience C. Wilfred Griggs has published a book-length history of early Egyptian Christianity.⁷² By its frequent bibliographic listing in standard church history reference books, it appears that Griggs's work has been received favorably.⁷³ Though in no way an explicit apologetic for Mormonism, this book lends much support to the LDS thesis. In it he argues that earliest Christianity, as it was introduced to Egypt in the first century, was not the same species that was later identified as "orthodox." Griggs declares that "a radical bifurcation of Christianity into orthodoxy and heresy cannot be shown to have existed in Egypt during the first two centuries."⁷⁴ His study of many early Christian and Gnostic papyri found in Egypt during the last hundred and fifty years leads Griggs to agree with Bauer's main thesis.⁷⁵ That is, certain manifestations of Christianity which

the Restoration (Bountiful, UT: Horizon, 1996). These examples do not represent the strength of the LDS apologetic from church history.

⁶⁹ Nibley's most important works in this area are: *The World and the Prophets* (Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, vol. 3; Salt Lake City: Deseret and FARMS, 1987) and *Mormonism and Early Christianity* (Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, vol. 4; Salt Lake City: Deseret and FARMS, 1987).

⁷⁰ These lectures were recorded and are available under their original title in most LDS bookstores and from FARMS [P. O Box 7113, University Station, Provo, UT 84602]. We recommend the purchase of this series as an excellent introduction to Nibley. The book contains a few additional essays and citations for all references but fails to convey the full vigor of the original lectures.

⁷¹ Phillips, "Foreword," *The World and the Prophets*, x, xi.

⁷² C. W. Griggs, *Early Egyptian Christianity: From Its Origins to 451 C.E.* (Coptic Studies Series no. 2; New York: E. J. Brill, 1990). Griggs is not the only Latter-day Saint with an interest in early Egyptian Christianity. Also see S. K. Brown, "Coptic and Greek Inscriptions from Christian Egypt: A brief Review" in *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity* (ed. B. A. Pearson and J. E. Goehring; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986) 26-41. Several LDS scholars were also contributors to *The Coptic Encyclopedia* (ed. A. S. Atiya; New York: Macmillan, 1991).

⁷³ For example, Griggs's book is listed in several of the bibliographies in the *Encyclopedia of the Early Church* (ed. A. Di Berardino; New York: Oxford University Press, 1992). However, reviews have been mixed. For example, P. Widdicombe concludes that Griggs "cannot be considered a reliable guide either to the issues involved or to the most recent literature on the subject" (JTS 43 [April 1992] 231). On the other end of the spectrum, S. Elm has called Griggs's book "one of the best examples of a perfect 'textbook,' in the best sense of the word: comprehensive, precise, challenging and immensely informative" (JAOS 112 [1992] 491). Interestingly, the bulk of reviewers' criticisms bear upon some of the issues raised in the book most pertinent to Mormonism.

⁷⁴ Griggs, *Early Egyptian Christianity*, 45.

⁷⁵ It should be mentioned that Griggs has excavated some of the more important sites for the study of early Christianity in Egypt, especially in the Fayum, and has himself discovered some of the papyri. Most recently see, C.

the church later renounced as heresies "originally had not been such at all, but at least here and there, were the only form of the new religion--that is, for those regions they were simply 'Christianity.'" ⁷⁶ What later heresiologists like Irenaeus identified as "Gnosticism" in Egypt was simply "Christianity" to the Egyptians. ⁷⁷

Griggs portrays a version of early Christianity quite different from the nascent Catholicism which later developed into "orthodoxy." This version had a more extensive literary tradition, broader theological tendencies, and more esoteric ritual practice. ⁷⁸ He maintains that the archaeological evidence points to a version of Christianity

based on a literary tradition encompassing both canonical and non-canonical works (both categories being named as such here in light of their *later* status as defined by the Catholic tradition). . . . Egyptian Christians did accept the Apocalyptic literary tradition so notably rejected by the Western Church, especially as reflected in the Resurrection Ministry texts, but not at the expense of the gospel or epistolary tradition of the emerging Catholic Church. ⁷⁹

This version of Christianity thrived in the Nile Valley for quite some time. ⁸⁰ Its demise began at the end of the second century with the Bishop of Alexandria being influenced by Irenaeus's *Against Heresies*. The Bishop and his successors, in a vie for prestige, increasingly aligned themselves with the powerful "orthodox" episcopates. As the power of the Alexandrian episcopate extended over greater geographical area, the original apocalyptic form of Christianity was increasingly condemned as heretical. When the Alexandrian bishops finally held ecclesiastical power for all Egypt, rival versions of Christianity were systematically wiped out. ⁸¹ The correspondence with the LDS doctrine of apostasy should be obvious. ⁸²

As well as arguing for a radical Hellenization of Christianity, LDS scholars find many parallels between early Christianity and particular LDS practices and doctrines. ⁸³ For example, William J. Hamblin has written a detailed study comparing Latter-day Saint temple endowment ceremonies with materials known from certain Gnostic sources and the so-called Secret Gospel

W. Griggs, "Identities Revealed: Archaeological and Biological Evidence for a Christian Population in the Egyptian Fayum." in *Ancient History in a Modern University*, vol. 1 (ed. T. W. Hillard and others; Grand rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 82-7.

⁷⁶ Griggs, *Early Egyptian Christianity*, citing Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy*, xxii.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 32-3.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 80, 82.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 45-116, passim.

⁸² Griggs all but states the LDS view when he writes, "As was the situation elsewhere in early Christianity, the real threat to believers was considered to be from within the organization. Church members who had turned from the true faith and were in rebellion (the meaning of the Greek word *apostasia*) were a much greater threat to the Church than were external forces." He follows this statement with an early quotation that "identifies the real apostates with those who have ecclesiastical authority" (Griggs, *Early Egyptian Christianity*, 85).

⁸³ Because appeals to the early church for the doctrine of "theosis" (deification) are well known, we have chosen not to include them in this study. Instead we describe two lesser-known examples. It should be noted, however, that LDS research on the topic is more extensive than merely reading the Fathers through. The most in-depth study of theosis by a Latter-day Saint is K. E. Norman, "Foundation: The Content of Athanasian Soteriology" (Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1980). This dissertation does not mention Mormonism or any Mormon authors. However, some of Norman's LDS presuppositions and biases can be detected throughout and especially protrude in the abstract (iii-vi). In evangelical rebuttals to the Mormon doctrine of deification we have yet to see any significant interaction with this important piece. (However, see J. R. White, *Is the Mormon my Brother?* [Mineapolis: Bethany House, 1997] 253-4.)

of Mark. Hamblin argues, in agreement with Morton Smith, John Dominic Crossan, and Hans-Martin Schenke, that the Secret Gospel of Mark preserves material predating canonical Mark. Hamblin notes:

Before the recent discovery of Clement's letter it had usually been maintained by modern scholars that the theologians of Alexandrian Christianity were influenced by Gnostic and Hellenistic concepts. The new letter of Clement shows that the Great Mysteries and Hierophantic Teaching were not copied by the Alexandrians from the Gnostics or Greek Pagans, but, as maintained by Schenke, were part of the earliest ideas and practices of Alexandrian Christianity.⁸⁴

He moves from there to a discussion of esoteric rites which we know of from the Nag Hammadi library and the writing of Ireneaus, noting twelve parallels with the LDS temple endowment which he feels are significant.⁸⁵

Another example comes from David L. Paulsen's article in the *Harvard Theological Review* entitled, "Early Christian Belief in a Corporeal Deity: Origen and Augustine as Reluctant Witnesses." Paulsen's study begins by appealing to Harnack for support of the view that the second-century church replaced the personal God of the Bible with an incorporeal deity due to the influence of Platonism. Paulsen writes,

Harnack identifies several sources of early Christian belief in an embodied deity, including popular religious ideas, Stoic metaphysics, and Old Testament sayings, literally understood. . . . But no doubt the biblical writings contributed most significantly to early Christian corporealism; for therein God is described in decidedly anthropomorphic terms.

The remainder of Paulsen's article contains a discussion of certain polemical writing of Origen and passages from Augustine which indicate that it was common for Christians in their day to view God as an embodied deity (though Origen and Augustine did not).⁸⁶

VII. WHERE IS THE BIBLE?

One might assert in response that the topics discussed above are simply irrelevant to the issue at hand. After all, if Mormons cannot ground their beliefs in the Bible it does not matter whether or not they find support for them among the Dead Sea Scrolls, the pseudepigrapha, or church history. Without the Bible it does not matter whether they are using their expertise in Near Eastern history, cultures, and languages to defend a possible Near Eastern background for the Book of Mormon. We agree that there is truth in this objection. But, the issues cannot be simply dismissed in this way.

One of the fundamental issues debated by evangelicals and Mormons is the interpretation of the Bible itself. Both parties claim that the Bible is the Word of God. Both claim to believe

⁸⁴ W. J. Hamblin, "Aspects of an Early Christian Initiation Ritual," in *By Study And Also By Faith* 1.211.

⁸⁵ On the significance of the Secret Gospel of Mark for Latter-day Saints, cf. S. E. Robinson, *Are Mormons Christians?* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1991) 99-101.

⁸⁶ See D. L. Paulsen, "Early Christian Belief in a Corporeal Deity: Origen and Augustine as Reluctant Witnesses," *HTR* 83 (1990) 106; K. Paffenroth's reply ("Paulsen on Augustine: An Incorporeal or Nonanthropomorphic God?") and Paulsen's rejoinder ("Reply to Kim Paffenroth's Comment") in *HTR* 86 (1993) 233-9. For a philosophical argument see Paulsen, "Must God Be Incorporeal?" *Faith and Philosophy* 6 (1989) 76-87. Most recently Paulsen has written on the same themes with a distinctive LDS application of his conclusions in, "The Doctrine of Divine Embodiment: Restoration, Judeo-Christian, and Philosophical Perspectives," *BYU Studies* 35 (1995-96) 7-94.

every verse of the Bible.⁸⁷ Both parties claim biblical support for *their* religion. So, theoretically, much of the debate could be solved by an appeal to the Bible. But before this can be done there must be agreement on the hermeneutical ground rules.

It seems that in large part evangelicals and Mormons are agreed that the bible should be interpreted according to its grammatical-historical sense. Writing about the similarity of evangelical and LDS views on the nature of Scripture, Stephen E. Robinson says,

We [LDS] take the Scriptures to be literally true, we hold symbolic, figurative or allegorical interpretation to a minimum, accepting the miraculous events as historical and the moral and ethical teaching as binding and valid.⁸⁸

This statement is very close to the Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics.⁸⁹ The question then is not one of methodology.

Logically then, what must be established in Mormon-evangelical dialogues is the historical-cultural context in which the biblical texts were written. This is exactly what the Mormons are doing in their studies of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the pseudepigrapha, and Christian origins. They are building the contextual infrastructure necessary for a proper interpretation of the bible, particularly the NT. They are arranging the evidence in a manner that will, if flaws are not demonstrated, warrant an interpretation of the NT that is both historically-culturally based and at odds with evangelical theology.

Though most energy is being spent in the study of these areas, Mormons have not neglected biblical studies proper. An example that should have made evangelical OT scholars aware of their LDS counterparts was the *Festschrift* written in honor of R. K. Harrison. Produced in 1988 by an evangelical publishing house, *Israel's Apostasy and Restoration* contained essays by several leading evangelical scholars as well as three essays written by Mormons (among others). The volume was edited by the previously mentioned Avraham Gileadi.⁹⁰ The scholarship of the LDS authors in no way stands out as inferior.⁹¹ In fact, at least one evangelical theologian has quoted from these essays in his own writing.⁹² It is striking that no evangelical scholar thought it was odd for Mormons to edit and contribute to this book. It would seem that someone would have investigated to see if these Mormons were using their skills in defense of their faith. As it turns out this book itself does, in a very subtle way, support Mormonism. First, all three of the LDS essays lend support to some aspect of LDS theology.⁹³

⁸⁷ Recently S. E. Robinson has written, "Often Evangelical assume that we LDS accept the Book of Mormon *in place of the Bible*, this is incorrect. There isn't a single verse of the Bible that I do not personally accept and believe, although I do reject the interpretive straitjacket imposed on the Bible by the Hellenized church after the apostles passed from the scene" (*How Wide the Divide?* 59).

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 55. Cf. Robinson's related statements on pp. 10, 55, 56, 75.

⁸⁹ The International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics* (1982), esp. articles VIII, XIII, XIV, XV.

⁹⁰ *Israel's Apostasy and Restoration: Essays in Honor of Roland K. Harrison* (ed. A. Gileadi; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988).

⁹¹ The LDS essays are A. Gileadi, "The Davidic Covenant: A Theological Basis for Corporate Protection"; S. D. Ricks, "The Prophetic Literality of Tribal Reconstruction"; and J. M. Lundquist, "Temple, Covenant, and Law in the Ancient Near East and in the Hebrew Bible."

⁹² The quotation of Stephen D. Ricks's essay "The Prophetic Literality of Tribal Reconstruction" appears in R. L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993) 226, n. 11.

⁹³ Ricks's article is significant because a literal re-gathering of Israel was predicted by Joseph Smith (See *The Teachings of Joseph Smith* [ed. L. E. Dahl and D. Q. Cannon; Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1997] 329). The title of Ricks's essay is a clear verbal allusion to the tenth LDS Article of Faith which states, in part, "We believe in the

Second, the theme of the book and its title reflect the Mormon belief that human history is a series of apostasies from and restorations of true faith (the last being Joseph Smith's Restoration of the Church).

It seems that there exists an unfounded presupposition among evangelicals that there are no respectable LDS biblical scholars. This often blinds people from noticing the work LDS scholars have done. Yet evangelicals quote Mormon scholars for support more than they know. This is not to say that the practice is wrong per se (it's not), or that Mormon scholars might not sometimes make valid observations. (There is an analogy here with evangelical quotation of liberal, Catholic, or Jewish scholars.) The point is this: It is inconsistent for evangelicals to insist that heterodox groups like the LDS have no legitimate biblical scholars, and then utilize the very scholars whose existence they deny.⁹⁴

As with the Book of Mormon, DSS, and pseudepigrapha, we could describe several examples of LDS biblical scholarship, but space does not permit. In a fuller treatment of the subject we might describe, in addition to the above, the work LDS scholars have done on the biblical Temple,⁹⁵ biblical law,⁹⁶ chiasmic structures,⁹⁷ the role of magic in the OT,⁹⁸ the unity of Isaiah,⁹⁹ NT backgrounds,¹⁰⁰ Pauline theology,¹⁰¹ textual criticism,¹⁰² as well as others.¹⁰³

literal gathering of Israel and in the restoration of the Ten Tribes; that Zion will be built upon this [the American] continent." In light of the importance temples, covenants, and gospel laws play in Mormon religious life, it should be apparent why Lundquist would focus his study on these topics. Gileadi's essay also ties in with his LDS theology with respect to proxy salvation.

⁹⁴ Three recent example of unwitting quotation can be seen in M. F. Rooker, "Dating Isaiah 40-66: What Does the Linguistic Evidence Say?" WTJ58 (Fall 1996) 307, n. 15 (referencing a study on language drift in biblical Hebrew by W. J. Adams and L. L. Adams); A. B. Luter and M. V. Lee, "Philippians as Chiasmus: Key to the Structure, Unity and Theme Questions," NTS 41 (1995) 99, n. 34 (citing J. W. Welch's book on chiasmus, which, incidentally, has an entire chapter on chiasmus in the Book of Mormon); and, R. Price, *Secrets of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1996) 115 (citing A. Gileadi's work on Isaiah).

⁹⁵ A concise example is J. M. Lundquist, "Biblical Temple" in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East* (ed. E. M. Meyers; New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). Lundquist's lengthier works are cited in the article's bibliography. An interesting anthology on ancient temples generally is *The Temple in Antiquity* (ed. T. G. Madsen; Provo: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1984). In addition to LDS contributions this volume also contains essays by well-known non-Mormon scholars Frank Moore Cross, Jacob Milgrom, Mitchell Dahood, Shaye Cohen, Carol Meyers, and George MacRae. The value of each essay for Mormons is explained by editor's prefaces. Also see *Temples of the Ancient World: Ritual and Symbolism* (ed. D. W. Parry; Salt Lake City: Deseret and FARMS, 1994).

⁹⁶ As the author of several studies in this area, his knowledge of the literature is demonstrated in *A Biblical Law Bibliography* (ed. J. W. Welch; Toronto Studies in Theology, no. 51; Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1990).

⁹⁷ Especially see J. W. Welch, "Chiasmus in the New Testament," in *Chiasmus in Antiquity*, 211-49

⁹⁸ S. D. Ricks, "The Magician as Outsider: The Evidence of the Hebrew Bible," in *New Perspectives on Ancient Judaism* (ed. P. V. M. Flesher; Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1990) 125-34. This study is significant because Ricks's conclusions could be used in a cumulative argument seeking to vindicate Joseph Smith's use of magic.

⁹⁹ See n. 20.

¹⁰⁰ *Masada and the World of the New Testament* (ed. J. F. Hall and J. W. Welch; Provo: BYU Studies, 1997).

¹⁰¹ For one example see, R. L. Anderson, *Understanding Paul* (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1983).

¹⁰² In 1997, as an outgrowth of its work on the *Dead Sea Scrolls Electronic Reference Library*, FARMS founded the Center for the Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts (CPART). One of the projects CPART is undertaking is a Greek NT text project designed to facilitate text critical studies by placing high-quality photographs of the most important manuscripts on a single CD-ROM. Also of interest to text critics will be CPART's Syriac manuscript project. CPART is also planning to produce databases of early Coptic and Armenian Christian texts. To what degree the work of CPART will have apologetic value remains to be seen.

¹⁰³ See the following LDS authored entries in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*: Egypt, History of (Greco-Roman); Egyptian, the (person); Saying of Jesus, Oxyrhynchus; Souls, Preexistence of; Truth, Gospel of [S. K. Brown];

Suffice it to say that responsible LDS scholars tend not to participate in the naive proof texting that characterizes the average Mormon missionary or lay person.¹⁰⁴

VIII. WHERE ARE THE EVANGELICALS?

We hope by this point to have convinced some of our readers that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is currently producing a robust apologetic for their beliefs. Their scholars are qualified, ambitious, and prolific. What are we doing in response? The silence has become deafening. And it is getting louder. The only two significant attempts (apart from the Tanners) are an article by James White and a recent book by John Ankerberg and John Weldon.

The article by James White, "Of Cities and Swords: The impossible Task of Mormon Apologetics," was an attempt to introduce evangelicals to LDS apologetics, to the work of FARMS, and, in the process, critique the group.¹⁰⁵ This article failed on all three points. White's article does not mention a single example of the literature we have presented in this paper. He does not accurately describe the work of FARMS, or of LDS scholarship in general. He gives his readers the impression that their research is not respected in the broader academic community. We believe that we have demonstrated that this is simply not the case. His attempted critique picks out two of the weakest examples. Not only does he pick weak examples, he does not give even these an adequate critique. This is nothing more than "straw man" argumentation.

The book by John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Behind the Mask of Mormonism: From Its Early Schemes to Its Modern Deceptions*, is far worse.¹⁰⁶ Having read a great deal of evangelical literature on the subject, we consider this to be among the ugliest, most unchristian, and misleading polemics in print. The authors constantly belittle their opponents--always questioning either their intelligence or integrity. Particularly frustrating is the appendix which was added to the updated edition. They accuse Mormons of being unwilling "to consider the established theological, textual, historical, and archeological facts surrounding Mormonism and Christianity."¹⁰⁷ The fact of the matter is that it is our evangelical brothers who in this book display their own unwillingness to give any consideration to such issues. Nor do they intend to. They write:

It's not that evangelicals have an objection to evaluating all the arguments and scholarship cited by Mormon critics. Some Mormon apologists think that all Christian critics of Mormonism should spend thousands of dollars and man-hours [like the Mormons are doing?] in order to stay abreast of the latest in Mormon defensive scholarship in its numerous forms and offshoots. . . . Anyone familiar with the Bible and Christian history knows that biblical orthodox, Christian

Jaakobah; Jaareshia; Jaasu; Jaaziah; Jaaziel; Names, Hypocoristic; Names, Theophoric [D. M. Pike]; Abortion in Antiquity; Sheba (Person); Sheba (Queen of) [S. D. Ricks]; Adam, The Testament of; Baruch, Book of 4; Joseph, Prayer of [S. E. Robinson]; Arabah; Shur, Wilderness of; Sin, Wilderness of; Zin, Wilderness of [D. R. Seely]; Rephidim; Succoth [J. H. Seely].

¹⁰⁴ We use the term "lay person" loosely when referring to Mormons who are not scholars. Technically all Mormon are laity.

¹⁰⁵ J. White, "Of Cities and Swords: The Impossible Task of Mormon Apologetics," *Christian Research Journal* (Summer, 1996) 28-35.

¹⁰⁶ J. Ankerberg and J. Weldon, *Behind the Mask of Mormonism: From Its Early Schemes to Its Modern Deceptions* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1992).

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 452.

doctrine is established and documented. For Mormonism to claim Christian doctrine is false, it must first provide at least *some* evidence to support its charges.¹⁰⁸

It is amazing, in light of the massive amount of purported evidence that has been published by the LDS, that Ankerberg and Weldon could make such a statement. Not only do they appear to assume that Mormon scholars must not really be "familiar with the Bible and Christian history," but they seem to say that there is no need to spend any significant amount of time or resources to respond. In our opinion the views expressed here simply amount to a refusal to do serious scholarly investigation. It is either the result of apathy or inability. The most they are able to do is offer an enthusiastic endorsement of Brent Lee Metcalfe's anthology, *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon*, and pronounce the battle over.¹⁰⁹

IX. WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE: SOME PROPOSALS

The evangelical world needs to wake up and respond to contemporary Mormon scholarship. If not, we will needlessly lose the battle without ever knowing it. Our suggestions are as follows: First, evangelicals need to overcome inaccurate presuppositions about Mormonism. Second, evangelical counter-cultists need to refer to qualified persons LDS scholarship that is beyond their ability to rebut. Third, evangelical academicians need to make Mormonism, or some aspects of it, an area of professional interest. Fourth, evangelical publishers need to cease publishing works that are uninformed, misleading, or otherwise inadequate. Fifth, scholars in the evangelical community ought to collaborate in several books addressing the issues raised in this paper. Related to this, professional journals should encourage articles on these same topics. Finally, might we suggest that evangelical scholarly societies form study groups to assess the claims made by LDS scholars. Members of the Evangelical Theological Society have made a move in this direction with the recent formation of the Society for the Study of Alternative Religions (SSAR). The fact is that the growth of Mormonism is outpacing even the highest predictions of professional sociologists of religion, and is on its way, within eighty years, to becoming the first world-religion since Islam in the seventh century.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 453. Not only is there no serious interaction with Mormon scholarship in this book, what little there is, is frequently cited second hand from Jerald and Sandra Tanner. A cursory reading of the endnotes makes this abundantly clear.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. See *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon* (ed. B. L. Metcalfe; Salt Lake City: Signature, 1993). It has become common for evangelicals to defer to this book. This is quite disturbing. Many of the authors of this volume (though not all) are thorough-going naturalists. The methodology they sometimes employ to dismantle traditional views of the Book of Mormon could equally be used to attack the Bible. D. P. Wright, one of the contributors to the work, writes, "This, by the way, shows that the conclusions made here about the Book of Mormon cannot be used to funnel Mormons into fundamentalist Christianity. *It is the height of methodological inconsistency to think that critical method of study can be applied to the Book of Mormon and that its results can be accepted while leaving the Bible exempted from critical study*"

¹¹⁰ See R. Stark, "The Rise of a New World Faith," *Review of Religious Research* 26 (1984) 18-27. Stark originally estimated 265 million Mormons by 2080. Currently actual growth is nearly a million members above Stark's initial projections (id., "So Far, So Good: A Brief Assessment of Mormon Membership Projections," *Review of Religious Research* 38 [1996] 175-8. It is interesting and significant that Stark uses Mormonism as the paradigm example against which he compares and contrasts the growth of early Christianity in his recent book, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in The Western World in a Few Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996). It appears that Stark is convinced Mormonism will be a serious rival to Christianity as the predominant Western religion in years to come (barring a world-wide

With such growth, the needs expressed in this paper will become ever more pressing as the twenty-first century approaches.

X. CONCLUSION

The sentiments we have tried to express in this paper are fittingly stated in the words of one prominent evangelical theologian:

This spiritual warfare can be considered under the aegis of a contest of the gods, a neglected biblical theme I want to retrieve. . . . The various religions and their gods appear to be vying for people's allegiance. Competition in religion is not only biblical, it is empirically evident. Vital religions always compete with other's claims. If you can find a religion that is not competitive, you will have found a religion on its last legs. A dynamic religion always wants to tell its story, which adherents think is the best story ever told, and the one most worthy of commitment.

According to the Bible, history is the theater of a contest of the gods. Gods are in conflict with one another. There operates a kind of survival of the fittest among them. Some go down to defeat, while others move into ascendancy. . . . History is a graveyard of the gods. The living God will outlive them all, proving himself to be the true God. Since this moment of revelation comes at the end of history, and will not be clear to everyone until then, our missionary task in the meantime is testing the proposition concerning God's identity and conducting the contest. *We say: let the claims be made, let the information be shared, let the issues be weighed, and let the dialogue take place.*^{111*}

catastrophe). Even the mere projections of such portentous Latter-day Saint growth by a well respected sociologist like Stark should cause evangelical scholars considerable pause.

¹¹¹ C. H. Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in the World of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992) 122-3 (emphasis added). We agree wholeheartedly with the above quotation, but have serious reservations about Pinnock's general approach to religious pluralism.

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