



FIGURE P-1. *Go with Me to Cumorah*, 1997. Liz Lemon Swindle, 1953-

PREFACE

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I took my stand halfway
 between awe and love;
 a yearning for Paradise
 invited me to explore it,
 but awe at its majesty
 restrained me from my search...
 I revered what lay hidden
 and meditated on what was revealed...

Joyfully did I embark
 on the tale of Paradise—
 a tale that is short to read
 but rich to explore.
 My tongue read the story's
 outward narrative,
 while my intellect took wing
 and soared upward in awe
 as it perceived the splendor of Paradise—
 not indeed as it really is,
 but insofar as humanity
 is granted to comprehend it.¹

This book was made possible by the unexpected blessing of a yearlong “sabbatical” in France. Though the book of Genesis has long been a favorite of mine, the project became possible only because our family’s move to a new time zone afforded extra early morning study time before the day’s e-mail messages began to arrive from across the Atlantic.

My original thought had been to focus on the poignant Jacob-Joseph story cycle, which has long attracted me. However, as I began the project in earnest, my thoughts were continually—and at first, I admit, reluctantly—led back to the book of Moses, a revelatory expansion of the first chapters of Genesis. My reluctance stemmed from a cognizance of my ignorance. Though the sobering demeanor of this marvelous book had become beautiful to me through long acquaintance,² I felt I had neither the time nor the expertise required to assimilate—let alone credibly contribute to—the mountain of prophetic writings and scholarship that had already addressed the many enigmas woven deeply into the fabric of this foundational work of scripture. In short, it seemed a story far too old for a green author.³

Despite my early misgivings, I found tangible reassurance and ongoing direction in the intimate dialogue of prayer, and friendly encouragement in the splendid scaffolding previously assembled by the patient labors of prior exegetes, to whom I acknowledge my

1 Ephrem the Syrian, *Paradise*, 1:2-3, p. 78.

2 See *Endnote P-1*, p. xxvii.

3 W. Shakespeare, *Venus*, 806, p. 1714. See *Endnote P-2*, p. xxvii.

deep indebtedness.⁴ Looking back, I acknowledge with grateful surprise that the major ideas came together much more quickly than I had thought possible. A few months after our return from France, I had a reasonably complete draft of the commentary in hand. The bibliography and excursus sections followed.

While fellow Latter-day Saints will have little problem comprehending my still-growing attachment to Joseph Smith's translation of the early narratives of Genesis, many of my friends and colleagues will find it mystifying that I have devoted so much time and attention to a study of what may understandably seem to be no more than a fanciful collection of worn-out fables—one more shard among the dusty discards of the almost bygone religious passage of Western culture. In that regard, it must also be admitted that the central historical claims of Mormonism—and Christianity⁵ itself, for that matter—hardly appear any less fantastic to the modern mind than the stories of Adam and Eve.⁶ Even in the nineteenth century, Charles Dickens⁷ approved as Hannay charged the Mormons with “the absurdity of seeing visions in the age of railways”—simultaneously commending our “immense practical industry” while decrying our “pitiable superstitious delusion.” His conclusion at that time is one that would be met with understanding nods by many perplexed observers of Mormonism in our day: “What the Mormons do, seems to be excellent; what they say is mostly nonsense.”⁸

In contrast to the predominantly polemical bent of apologetic and scholarly literature that appeared during the first century of Mormonism, recent decades have happily witnessed hundreds of broad studies of the founding stories and scriptures of the Latter-day Saints that can be appreciated by both members and non-members of the Church alike.⁹ It is regrettable that serious studies of the Joseph Smith Translation (JST) of the Bible have been relatively late in coming, explorations of its textual foundations having begun in earnest only in the last forty years with the pioneering work of Richard P. Howard and Robert J. Matthews.¹⁰

Now, at last, as the book of Moses—and the related book of Abraham—are beginning to receive their due in the spotlight of scholarly scrutiny, they may well prove to be among the strongest witnesses of the prophetic mission of Joseph Smith.¹¹ For example, noted Yale critic of secular and sacred literature Harold Bloom, who classes these two books among the “more surprising” and “neglected” works of LDS scripture,¹² is intrigued by the fact that many of their themes are “strikingly akin to ancient suggestions”¹³ that essentially restate “the archaic or original Jewish religion, a Judaism that preceded even the Yahwist.” While expressing “no judgment, one way or the other, upon the authenticity” of LDS scripture, he finds “enormous validity” in the way these writings “recapture... crucial elements in the archaic Jewish religion... that had ceased to be available either to normative Judaism or to

4 See *Endnote P-3*, p. xxvii.

5 See *Endnote P-4*, p. xxvii.

6 See *Endnote P-5*, p. xxvii.

7 See *Endnote P-6*, p. xxviii.

8 J. Hannay, *Smith*, p. 385, cited in R. J. Dunn, *Dickens*, p. 4. A non-LDS observer similarly wrote of the Mormons in 2009: “What would do you do if you met people you admired greatly, who reminded you of the best examples of your fellow believers, yet whose faith rested on what you saw as patent absurdities” (W. Lobdell, *Losing*, pp. 121-122). He goes on to concede, however: “Yet what’s so strange about Mormonism compared to traditional Christianity... The details of Mormonism are fresher, but not much more strange and mythical” (*ibid.*, pp. 126, 127). See *Endnote P-7*, p. xxix.

9 For broad perspectives from LDS and non-LDS scholars on the wide influence of Joseph Smith's life and work, see J. W. Welch, *Worlds* and R. L. Neilson et al., *Reappraisals*.

10 R. P. Howard, *Restoration 1969*; R. J. Matthews, *Plainer*.

11 See *Endnote P-8*, p. xxx.

12 H. Bloom, *Names Divine*, p. 25.

13 See *Endnote 2-28*, p. 130.

Christianity, and that survived only in esoteric traditions unlikely to have touched [Joseph] Smith directly.”¹⁴

Having spent more than three years in focused study of the book of Moses, I have also been astonished with the extent to which its words reverberate with the echoes of antiquity—and, no less significantly, with the deepest truths of my personal experience. Indeed, I would not merely assert that the book of Moses holds up well under close examination, but rather that, like a fractal whose self-similar patterns become more wondrous upon ever closer inspection, the brilliance of its inspiration shines most impressively under bright light and high magnification: there is glory in the details.¹⁵

I owe my awakening to the literary beauty of scripture to a Brigham Young University (BYU) “Reading the Scriptures” course taught by Professor Arthur Henry King, or “Brother King” as he preferred to be called in class.¹⁶ Converted to Mormonism in Britain during his later years, Brother King was a Shakespearian scholar and professional “stylistician”—in other words, an expert in how the nuances of linguistic expression reveal to their readers, both intentionally and unintentionally, not only the literary characters but also the authors themselves. Indeed, Brother King often mentioned how it was the very style of the First Vision account that convinced him that Joseph Smith was telling the truth.¹⁷

Brother King believed strongly in the virtues of reading the scriptures aloud.¹⁸ He taught the members of our class how to experiment with different approaches to reading the same verse, how to listen to the wisdom of the spoken voice, and how the varying of emphasis and pauses for breath could highlight different shades of meaning in the text. Under his direction, we sang the scriptures as if they were music.

The Prophet Joseph Smith said that scripture should be “understood precisely as it reads.”¹⁹ Likewise, Brother King taught us to read slowly, and to persist in reading until the plain sense of the words became clear to us.²⁰ This approach differs from the facile skimming for rapid information ingestion that is the stuff of our daily business—the great Jewish scholar Martin Buber went so far as to term the application to scripture study of the modern unreflective method “the leprosy of fluency.”²¹

Once having gained confidence in our grasp of the plain sense of the words of scripture, we must still decode its pervasive imagery. Our problem in that respect is that we live on the near side of a great divide that separates us from the religious, cultural, and philosophical perspectives of the ancients.²² The Prophet Joseph Smith was far closer to this lost world than we are—not only because of his personal involvement with the recovery and revelatory expansion of ancient religion, but also because in his time many archaic traditions were still embedded in the language and daily experience of the surrounding culture.²³ Barker describes the challenges this situation presents to contemporary students of scripture:

14 H. Bloom, *American Religion*, pp. 98, 99, 101. See *Endnote P-9*, p. xxx.

15 See *Endnote P-10*, p. xxx.

16 See *Endnote P-11*, p. xxxi.

17 A. H. King, *Account*, pp. 42-43, 45; A. H. King, *Joseph*. See *Endnote P-12*, p. xxxi.

18 A. H. King, *Afterword*, pp. 233-236; A. H. King, *Rhetoric*, pp. 201-204; A. H. King, *Child*, pp. 101-102; A. H. King, *Education*, pp. 240-242; cf. D. Packard et al., *Feasting*, pp. 18-20, 199-203, 209-213.

19 J. Smith, Jr., *Words*, 29 January 1843, p. 161. See *Endnote P-13*, p. xxxi.

20 A. H. King, *Afterword*, pp. 233-234; D. Packard et al., *Feasting*, pp. 8-10.

21 See *Endnote P-14*, p. xxxi.

22 C. S. Lewis, *Descriptione*; G. d. Santillana et al., *Hamlet's Mill*, p. 10. See *Endnote P-21*, p. xxxv.

23 A. H. King, *Joseph*, pp. 287-288.

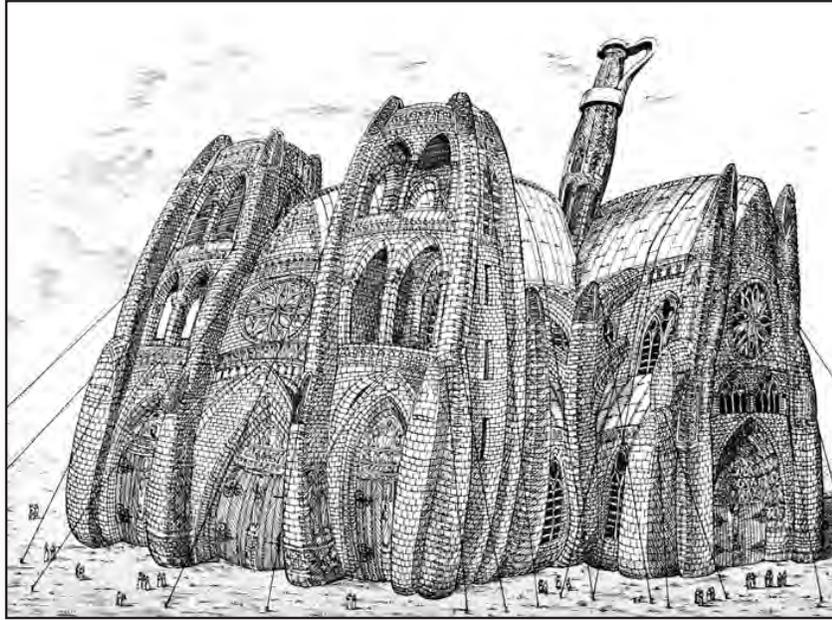


FIGURE P-2. *Inflatable Cathedral*, 1978
David Macaulay, 1946-

*The things of God are of deep import; and time, and experience, and careful and ponderous and solemn thoughts can only find them out.*¹ In vivid contrast to Joseph Smith's statement, David Macaulay's tongue-in-cheek simulation is "intended to create a distinguished setting at a moment's notice."² While the concept was just a gleam in Macaulay's eye when he created this drawing, inflatable churches are now available for rent or purchase. A Web site proudly proclaims: "The attention to detail is heavenly, complete with plastic 'stained glass' windows and airbrush artwork which replicates the traditional church. Inside it has an inflatable organ, altar, pulpit, pews, candles and a gold cross. Even the doors are flanked by air-filled angels. The church can be built in two hours and disassembled in less than one... It can be set up anywhere, from your garden to Malibu Beach, it's up to you. No problem with 'high heels.'"³

1 J. Smith, Jr., *Teachings*, 25 March 1839, p. 137.

2 D. Macaulay, *Moments*, caption for plate xxvi.

3 *Inflatable Church*.

Like the first Christians, we still pray "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven,"²⁴ but many of the complex system of symbols and stories that describe the Kingdom are not longer recognized for what they are.²⁵

It used to be thought that putting the code into modern English would overcome the problem, and make everything clear to people who had no roots in a Christian community. This attempt has proved misguided, since so much of the code simply will not translate into modern English... The task, then, has had to alter. The need now is not just for modern English, or modern thought forms, but for an explanation of the images and pictures in which the ideas of the Bible are expressed.²⁶ These are specific to one culture, that of Israel and Judaism, and until they are fully understood in their original setting, little of what is done with the writings and ideas that came from that particular setting can be understood. Once we lose touch with the meaning of biblical imagery, we lose any way into the real meaning of the Bible. This has already begun to happen and a diluted "instant" Christianity has been offered as junk food for the mass market. The resultant malnutrition, even in churches, is all too obvious.²⁷

24 Matthew 6:10.

25 M. Barker, *Hidden*, p. 128.

26 See *Endnote P-15*, p. xxxii.

27 M. Barker, *Earth*, pp. 1-2.

Consistent with Barker's observations, many observers have documented a worldwide trend toward a religious mind-set that prizes emotion²⁸ and entertainment²⁹ as major staples of worship. Even when undertaken with evident sincerity, religious gatherings of this sort scarcely rise above the level of a "weekly social rite, a boost to our morale,"³⁰ with perhaps a few exhortations on ethics thrown in. When the Bible is consulted at all, it is too often "solely for its piety or its inspiring adventures"³¹ or its admittedly "memorable illustrations and contrasts" rather than its "deep memories" of spiritual understanding.³² All this has resulted not only in a regrettable "secularization of religious symbolic language,"³³ but also in what Prothero calls a widespread "religious amnesia" that has dangerously weakened the foundations of faith.³⁴ Bloom concludes that since the current "American Jesus can be described without any recourse to theology" we have become, on the whole, a post-Christian nation.³⁵ Similarly, Herberg characterized our national "faith in faith" as a "strange brew of devotion to religion and insouciance as to its content."³⁶ Little wonder that the teaching of the central doctrines of the Gospel has been a significant focus of LDS Church leadership in recent years.³⁷ In this connection, Elder Neal A. Maxwell once remarked: "God is giving away the spiritual secrets of the universe," and then asked: "but are we listening?"³⁸

I am fully conscious of the fact that an understanding of "the doctrine of the kingdom"³⁹ does not come by mere "study" alone, but "also by faith"⁴⁰ as we are asked to give loving and whole-hearted expression in our lives of what we feel and believe. I concur with Elder Marion G. Romney that: "One cannot fully learn the gospel without living it."⁴¹ Indeed, as Elder Dallin H. Oaks has said about the most common way that we receive spiritual understanding: "revelation comes most often when we are on the move."⁴² Such learning "by faith" is the supreme test—and among the sweetest rewards—of discipleship during this mortal "season of unanswered questions."⁴³ Thus, for each of us who love to study the scriptures, there is both encouragement and a warning in the wise words of the Danish Christian philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard:

When you read God's word eruditely—we do not disparage erudition, far from it—but remember that when you read God's word eruditely, with a dictionary, etc., you are not reading God's Word... If you are a learned man, then take care lest with all your erudite reading (which is not reading God's Word) you forget perchance to read God's Word. If you are not learned—ah, envy the other man not, rejoice that you can at once get to the point of reading God's Word! And if there is a desire, a commandment, an order [that you read],... then be off at

28 B. C. Hafen, *Anchored*, p. 3.

29 On the origins of today's "praise and worship" services, "patterned after the rock concert of secular culture," see F. Viola et al., *Pagan Christianity*, pp. 164-166.

30 P. Tillich, cited in R. Coles, *Secular Mind*, p. 5. See also *ibid.*, p. 18.

31 J. E. Seach, *Ancient Texts* 1995, p. vii.

32 M. Barker, *Hidden*, p. 34.

33 J. H. Charlesworth, *Protestant View*, p. 84.

34 S. Prothero, *Literacy*, pp. 105-112.

35 H. Bloom, *Names Divine*, p. 104. See *Endnote P-16*, p. xxxiii.

36 Cited in S. Prothero, *Literacy*, p. 113. See *Endnote P-20*, p. xxxv.

37 See, e.g., H. B. Eyring, Jr., *Power*; S. D. Nardauld, *Principles*, pp. 88-89; B. K. Packer, *Plan of Happiness*; B. K. Packer, *Children*, p. 17; B. K. Packer, *Do Not Fear*, p. 79; B. K. Packer, *Errand*, pp. 307-312; M. K. Jensen, *Anchors*. LDS writers have often noted the fact that "God gave unto [men] commandments, after having made known unto them the plan of redemption" (Alma 12:32, emphasis mine). See *Endnote P-17*, p. xxxiii.

38 N. A. Maxwell, *Cosmos*, p. 2.

39 D&C 88:77.

40 D&C 88:118; cf. D. A. Bednar, *Seek*.

41 M. G. Romney, *Oath*, p. 19; M. K. Jensen, *Anchors*, p. 59. See *Endnote P-18*, p. xxxiv.

42 D. H. Oaks, *Sharing*, p. 7. See also B. C. Hafen, *Anchored*, pp. 3-5.

43 L. B. Wickman, *But If Not*, p. 30.

once to do accordingly. “But,” you perhaps would say, “there are so many obscure passages in the Holy Scriptures, whole books which are almost riddles.” To this I would reply, “I see no need of considering this objection unless it comes from one whose life gives expression to the fact that he has punctually complied with all the passages which are easy to understand.” Is this the case with you? [Thus a godly man must act:] if there were obscure passages, but also clearly expressed desires, he would say, “I must at once comply with the desire, then I will see what can be made of the obscure passages. Oh, but how could I sit down to puzzle over the obscure passages and leave the desire unfulfilled, the desire which I clearly understood?” That is to say: When you read God’s Word, it is not the obscure passages which impose a duty upon you, but that which you understand and with that you must instantly comply. If there were only a single passage you did understand in Holy Scripture—well, the first thing is to do that; but you do not first have to sit down and puzzle over the obscure passages. God’s Word is given in order that you shall act in accordance with it, not in order that you shall practice the art of interpreting obscure passages.⁴⁴

About the 2014 Updated Edition

Thanks to the readers who noted errors in the hardback volume, a first corrected edition of this book was published in softcover and in PDF format soon after the supply of the hardback was exhausted in early 2010. Though print-on-demand services for the softcover edition allowed the book to remain in print, vendor constraints regrettably required the book to be broken up into four volumes (with each volume to be numbered starting at page 1, wreaking havoc with the page numbers of internal cross-references) and to be reduced to a smaller page format. This edition allows the book to return to its original 8 1/2 x 11 page size in two volumes. Unfortunately, printing the book in color in a print-on-demand arrangement currently remains unaffordable. However, in the PDF version of this book, black-and-white versions of images have been updated to color throughout the interior when available.

When I wrote this book, I did not anticipate that there would be additional books of commentary forthcoming in this series. As a result of the 2014 publication of a second book written with the assistance of David J. Larsen (*In God’s Image and Likeness 2: Enoch, Noah, and the Tower of Babel*), I have had to change the title of the present volume to avoid confusion. Many topics treated in volume 2 are updates and expansions of topics treated here in volume 1.

In some cases my study of Enoch, Noah, and the Tower of Babel has led to new perspectives, making corrections and updates to volume 1 desirable. Here and there throughout this new edition, I have made changes accordingly. For example, I’ve updated the discussion of the “drunkenness” of Noah on pp. 592, 731 to reflect a recollection of Joseph Smith’s view (corresponding to the opinions of some ancient and modern exegetes) that Noah “was not drunk, but in a vision.”⁴⁵ Where new sources have been consulted, I have added them to the References section. It is important to understand, however, that my updates to this volume have been selective—a comprehensive reworking of the content of this book must await a true second edition, if that ever becomes possible.

I have made minor stylistic, formatting, and layout changes throughout the book. Although in a few cases a line or a paragraph may have shifted to a new page, page numbers for sections and headings remain identical to the 2010 edition. In order to maintain consistency with previous editions, no new sections of the Excursus have been added and the numbering of previously existing Endnotes and Footnotes remains unchanged. Further suggestions and corrections from readers for future editions will be warmly welcomed.

44 Cited in S. Kierkegaard, *Parables*, p. 80; cf. S. Kierkegaard, *Self-Examination*, 12:318, pp. 28-29. See also J. E. Faulconer, *Dorrien*, pp. 433-435.

45 Joseph Smith, Jr., as reported by William Allen to Charles Lowell Walker (C. L. Walker, *Diary*, 12 May 1881, 2:554).

Endnotes

- P-1 Said the Prophet Joseph Smith: “[H]e who reads [the sacred volume] oftenest will like it best, and he who is acquainted with it, will know the hand wherever he can see it.”⁴⁶
- P-2 Coogan sums up the situation with respect to biblical studies as follows:
- The Bible is probably civilization’s most over-studied book. Since academics have to publish to get jobs and keep them, and since there are fewer and fewer original things to say about the primary texts, biblical studies have often moved, understandably, to the fringes. Enormous amounts of time and energy are spent performing minute analyses of texts, themes and artifacts that more sensible historians regard as insignificant, or on studying studies of the Bible.⁴⁷
- P-3 Nibley reassuringly quipped that “It is better to be ignorant and interested than ignorant and not interested, and there’s no third alternative here. We’re ignorant in any case, so you might as well be ignorant and interested in these things.”⁴⁸ Donald Knuth, a well-known computer scientist, wrote in the preface to his book of Bible commentary: “I can’t say that my scientific background makes me a better Bible student, but I don’t think it’s a handicap either.”⁴⁹ C. S. Lewis, in fact, observed that the perspective of an amateur may sometimes be helpful to other beginners: “The fellow-pupil can help more than the master because he knows less. The difficulty we want him to explain is one he has recently met.” Thus, explained Lewis about his own venture into unfamiliar scholarly territory: “I write for the unlearned about things in which I am unlearned myself... I write as one amateur to another, talking about difficulties I have met, or lights I have gained... with the hope that this might at any rate interest, and sometimes even help, other inexpert readers. I am ‘comparing notes’, not presuming to instruct... The thoughts [this book] contains are those to which I found myself driven in reading the [scriptures], sometimes by my enjoyment of them, sometimes by meeting with what at first I could not enjoy”⁵⁰
- P-4 Thus Malcolm Muggeridge’s poignant question, “Would something like the miracle of Bethlehem even be allowed to happen in our day?”
- In humanistic times like ours, a contemporary virgin... would regard a message from the Angel Gabriel that she might expect to give birth to a son to be called the Son of the Highest as ill-tidings of great sorrow... It is, in point of fact, extremely improbable, under existing conditions, that Jesus would have been permitted to be born at all. Mary’s pregnancy, in poor circumstances, and with the father unknown, would have been an obvious case for an abortion; and her talk of having conceived as a result of the intervention of the Holy Ghost would have pointed to the need for psychiatric treatment, and made the case for terminating her pregnancy even stronger. Thus our generation, needing a Savior more, perhaps, than any that has ever existed, would be too humane to allow one to be born; too enlightened to permit the Light of the World to shine in a darkness that grows ever more oppressive.⁵¹
- P-5 Already in 1905, Chesterton could write: “Atheism itself is too theological for us today.”⁵² Likewise, Taylor provides an eloquent discussion of the process and consequences of the loss of “immediate certainty” of the moral/spiritual in Western culture.⁵³ This point is illustrated by Peterson in his discussion of an essay by Jacob Weisberg that views “reliance upon religious faith in general, not merely Mormonism, ‘as an alternative to rational understanding of complex issues’... Weisberg regards all religious doctrines as ‘dogmatic, irrational, and absurd. By holding them, someone indicates a basic failure to think for himself or see the world as it is.’⁵⁴ More commonly held creeds have simply been granted an unmerited patina of respectability by the sheer passage of time. ‘Perhaps Christianity and Judaism are merely more venerable and poetic versions of the same. But a few cons makes a big difference’⁵⁵ Peterson also cites a critical review of Bushman’s biography of Joseph Smith which implied that Bushman was overreaching himself in crafting a book that tries to make a place for “both inspiration and rational discourse.” Peterson notes the “apparent assumption that rational discourse and inspiration are radically incompatible” and cites the

46 J. Smith, Jr., *Teachings*, 22 January 1834, p. 56.

47 M. D. Coogan, *Gulf*.

48 H. W. Nibley, *Apocryphal*, p. 266.

49 D. E. Knuth, 3:16, p. 2.

50 C. S. Lewis, *Psalms*, pp. 1-2.

51 M. Muggeridge, *Jesus*, p. 19.

52 G. K. Chesterton, *Heretics*, p. 40.

53 C. Taylor, *Secular Age*—see, e.g., pp. 11ff. See also T. Asad, *Construction*, pp. 47-52.

54 See Asad for a view that “the reasons for a person’s attachment to a given way of life, or conversion to another, cannot be reduced to an idealized model of scientific theory building” (T. Asad, *Criticism*, p. 235).

55 D. C. Peterson, *Reflections*, pp. xxiii-xxiv. See J. Weisberg, *Romney’s Religion*.

reviewer's declaration "that, in order to earn a secular historian's acceptance, 'Smith's revelations would need to be explained materially as a product of his cultural or physical environment.'"⁵⁶

Nonmember historian Jan Shippo's experiences in responding to media questions about Mormonism illustrate the kinds of issues that arise for believers of all faiths in our day:

I remember very well how the voice of one reporter coming across the telephone wire expressed both exasperation and astonishment. "How," he wailed, "can perfectly sane people believe all this crazy stuff?" Because I had spent the first half of the 1980s writing a book designed to answer that very question, I had a ready reply... It usually began with my pointing out that the idea that Joseph Smith found golden plates and had revelations was not any more absurd than the idea that Moses and the Hebrews walked across the Red Sea without getting wet or that Jesus, who was dead, is now alive.⁵⁷

That debates about the reality of Jesus' resurrection are not a new phenomenon of the age of science is emphasized by Wright, who reminds us: "We didn't need Galileo and Einstein to tell us that dead people don't come back to life."⁵⁸

Getting to the nub of the problem, Neusner concludes that "among our colleagues are some who do not really like religion in its living forms, but find terribly interesting religion in its dead ones. That is why an old Christian text, one from the first century for example, is deemed a worthy subject of scholarship. But a fresh Christian expression (I think in this connection of the Book of Mormon) is available principally for ridicule, but never for study. Religious experience in the third century is fascinating. Religious experience in the twentieth century is frightening or absurd."⁵⁹

While not accepting the historicity of the Book of Mormon, non-Mormon scholar O'Dea is one who at least took the book seriously "as a legitimate work of religious literature" and acknowledged that most of the theories of its origin advanced by its critics were unconvincing.⁶⁰ He observed with irony that "the Book of Mormon has not been universally considered by its critics as one of those books that must be read in order to have an opinion of it."⁶¹

P-6 Dickens later spoke admiringly of an uneducated but orderly group of Mormon emigrants he observed in Liverpool, concluding to his own surprise that if he hadn't have known who they were: "I should have said they were in their degree, the pick and flower of England."⁶² "Dickens related his experience to Richard Monckton Milnes, Lord Houghton, who said that he had himself written on the topic of the Latter-day Saints in the *Edinburgh Review* in January 1862. In his article Milnes refers to a House of Commons inquiry in 1854...: 'The Select Committee of the House of Commons on emigrant ships for 1854 summoned the Mormon agent and passenger-broker before it, and came to the conclusion that no ships under the provisions of the 'Passengers Act' could be depended upon for comfort and security in the same degree as those under his administration.... [T]he Mormon ship is a Family under a strong and accepted discipline, with every provision for comfort, decorum and internal peace."⁶³

Dickens' contemporaries John Stuart Mill and Thomas Carlyle also wrote sympathetically about the Mormons. In his 1859 essay *On Liberty*, Mill decried "the language of downright persecution which breaks out from the press of this country, whenever it feels called on to notice the remarkable phenomenon of Mormonism." While characterizing the religion as "the product of palpable imposture," all the more incredible because of its appearance "in the age of newspapers, railways, and the electric telegraph," Mill was not at all partial to the teachings of the Church. However, it deeply concerned him that "its prophet and founder was, for his teaching, put to death by a mob; that others of its adherents lost their lives by the same lawless violence; that they were forcibly expelled, in a body, from the country in which they first grew up; while, now that they have been chased into a solitary recess in the midst of a desert, many in this country openly declare that it would be right (only that it is not convenient) to send an expedition against them, and compel them by force to conform to the opinions of other people." That legitimate means of persuasion could be used to counter its teachings seemed acceptable. "But when the dissentients have conceded to the hostile sentiments of others, far more than could justly be demanded; when they have left the countries to which their doctrines were unacceptable, and established themselves in a remote corner of the earth, which they have been the first to render habitable to human beings; it is difficult to see on

56 D. C. Peterson, *Reflections*, p. xxx. See L. F. Maffly-Kipp, *Who's That*, p. 11.

57 J. Shippo, *Sojourner*, pp. 282-283; cf. R. L. Bushman, *Mormonism*, pp. 113-114.

58 N. T. Wright, *Surprised*, p. 294.

59 J. Neusner, *Vocation*, p. 117.

60 A. L. Mauss, *Near-Nation*, p. 307.

61 T. F. O'Dea, *Mormons*, p. 26.

62 C. Dickens, *Traveler*, 22, 4 July 1863, p. 262.

63 P. E. Kerry, *Carlyle*, pp. 266-267.

what principles but those of tyranny they can be prevented from living there under what laws they please, provided they commit no aggression on other nations, and allow perfect freedom of departure to those who are dissatisfied with their ways.”⁶⁴

In his 1854 draft of *Essay on the Mormons*, Carlyle described Mormonism as “a gross physical form of Calvinism... but in this one point incommensurably (transcendently) superior to all other forms of religion now extant. That it is believed, that it is practically acted upon from day to day and from hour to hour; taken as a very fact, the neglect or contradiction of which will vitiate and ruin all other facts of the day and of the hour. That is its immeasurable superiority.”⁶⁵

- P-7 Elder Neal A. Maxwell expressed his “special appreciation for my friends who, though resolutely irreligious themselves, were not scoffers. Instead, though doubtless puzzled by me and their other religious friends, they were nevertheless respectful. I admire the day-to-day decency of such men and women. Though detached from theology, their decency is commendable.”⁶⁶

Among the many *religious* non-Mormon friends is historian Jan Shipps. She put her finger on part of the problem that people encounter in understanding LDS beliefs when she observed that “Mormonism is a really complex theological system... All its parts fit together beautifully. But if you just know a little bit about one of them, or part of them, it seems weird.”⁶⁷ The well-known Vatican astronomer, Guy Consolmagno, found that two religions were universally dismissed by the subjectively-selected sample of scientists and engineers he interviewed as “obviously wrong”: Scientology and Mormonism. However, he also notes a difference between the two: “... no scientist of my acquaintance has ever had something good to say about Scientology—rather ironic, given its name. But as it happens, I know a number of techies who are Mormons, including my thesis advisor at MIT.”⁶⁸ As one who has experienced both the perplexity and the generosity of spirit of his non-LDS colleagues, prominent Mormon historian Richard L. Bushman shared the following:

I have lived an academic life ever since I graduated from Harvard College in 1955 and then later received a Ph.D. in the history of American civilization from that same institution. Since then I have taught at Brigham Young University, Boston University, and the University of Delaware, been visiting professor at Brown and Harvard universities, and now am Gouverneur Morris Professor of History at Columbia University. In these many years as an academic, I have never been belittled for my religious beliefs or felt excluded. I have published books, contributed to conferences, entered into scholarly controversies, and had my share of honors without once feeling that my well-known faith raised a barrier.

Only now and then have I caught a glimpse of the wonder my colleagues must feel that a rational, modern man believes the stories and doctrines of the Latter-day Saints. Soon after I was hired as professor of history and chair of the department at the University of Delaware, a member of the search committee invited me to lunch. While we were driving along, I mentioned my work on a biography of Joseph Smith, the founder of the Latter-day Saint Church. My colleague, doubtless to reassure me, turned quickly and said, “Dick, we took all that into account and decided it didn’t matter.” Apparently he was thinking of the peculiar tic in my intellectual makeup that allowed me to hold these strange beliefs. A similar reaction greeted me on coming to Columbia in 1989. Introduced to a member of the faculty, he said jovially, “Oh, you’re the Mormon,” an entirely amiable remark meant to make me feel at home. But one can imagine the repercussions if a new faculty member at Brigham Young University was greeted with “Oh, you’re the Jew,” or “Oh, you’re the Catholic.”

The extravagant nature of the Latter-day Saint religion probably accounts for the perplexity of my colleagues. Christian and Jewish doctrines, weathered by time, no longer strike people as bizarre or unusual. One can hold to one of the moderate versions of these ancient religions without startling one’s friends. But Joseph Smith saw the angel Moroni less than two hundred years ago and then brought home gold plates and translated the Book of Mormon. These miraculous events, happening so close to home, strain one’s credulity. How can anyone in this day of science and skepticism believe that God sends angels to speak to humans and requires such unlikely acts as the translation of an ancient history with the aid of a Urim and Thummim? My sophomore tutor, the distinguished historian of science,

64 J. S. Mill, *Liberty*, pp. 163-166.

65 Cited in P. E. Kerry, *Carlyle*, p. 270.

66 N. A. Maxwell, *Inexhaustible*, p. 216.

67 M. Luo, *Test*. For an insightful essay charting the historical evolution of charges that Mormonism is not Christian, see J. Shipps, *Sojourner*, pp. 335-357. For general overviews of changes in public perceptions of the Mormons in America, see T. L. Givens, *Viper*; J. Shipps, *Sojourner*, pp. 51-123.

68 G. Consolmagno, *God’s Mechanics*, p. 98. Consolmagno’s masters thesis advisor was John S. Lewis, who joined the Church in Boston while teaching at MIT, and is currently an internationally-respected professor of planetary science at the University of Arizona.

I. B. Cohen, once coyly mentioned to me that many people thought LDS beliefs were pure garbage. He doubtless was trying gently to bring me to my senses after my sheltered upbringing as a member of the Church.⁶⁹

While Mormons regard many of the doctrinal elaborations that occurred during the early centuries of Christianity as unwarranted intrusions of Greek philosophy into the straightforward historical truths of the Gospel, some non-Mormons see LDS theology merely as simplistic and naïve. For example Cahill writes that Mormonism resembles Manichaeism in its philosophical impoverishment, being “full of assertions, but [yielding] no intellectual system to nourish a great intellect.”⁷⁰ While a strong rebuttal of Cahill’s claim could be buttressed with arguments from a long line of scholars, both Mormon and non-Mormon, who have recognized the unique riches of the LDS tradition,⁷¹ such an argument would distract attention from a more central point: Like all religious traditions with which I am personally acquainted, the primary interest of Mormonism is in developing a universal community of saints not an elite cadre of scholars.⁷² In his essay on the *Difference between a Genius and an Apostle*, Kierkegaard eloquently captures this distinction between what he calls a “genius” and an “apostle”:

The genius, an aristocrat of the spirit, has had gifts lavished upon him by nature that distinguish him from his fellows. The apostle may be a commoner, a fisherman, a one-talent man by nature, or he may have ten talents—yet all that he has is dedicated to the service of the Eternal and as such is lifted up. The genius speaks with brilliance and charm. The apostle speaks with authority. The way of the genius is a way closed to all but a few. The way of the apostle is a way open to all as individuals—even to the genius himself if he can forsake the absorbing satisfactions of a brilliant self-sufficiency and be ready to will one thing.⁷³

P-8 Several serious LDS studies of the book of Abraham are now available.⁷⁴

P-9 Significantly, non-Mormon scholars W. D. Davies and Krister Stendahl separately noted their common view that “there is no other Christian community or community out of the Judeo-Christian tradition which has as positive and non-anti-Semitic ways of speaking about the Jews as have the Mormons.”⁷⁵

P-10 The way in which my “intellectual conversion” to the book of Moses was added to my spiritual witness recalled for me Elder B. H. Roberts’ description of the greater appreciation he experienced of the Atonement as he finished the writing of a manual on that subject for the Seventy:

[W]hile religion must appeal to and satisfy the emotional nature, it must also appeal to and satisfy the intellect... [T]his late inquiry into that subject has had a wonderful effect upon my own thought and state of mind... It has been a matter of faith with me and knowledge, by the testimony of the Spirit of God to my soul; but upon close inquiry, by deeper delving into the subject, my intellect also gives its full and complete assent... I account it for myself a new conversion, an intellectual conversion, ... and I have been rejoicing in it of late exceedingly.⁷⁶

I could also relate to the experience of Catherine Thomas, who found that needed episodes of spiritual illumination came “in context” through her work of teaching, and following an order and timing which only later became fully apparent:

It was a time of germination. I had always been aware that thoughts came to me that illuminated life and the Gospel. Now I had an outlet for them. My writing began as I felt the need to explain some gospel principle or other to my students... I was always coming at a particular understanding in a way that needed context.⁷⁷

69 R. L. Bushman, *R. L. Bushman*, pp. 79-80.

70 T. Cahill, *Irish*, p. 49.

71 See, e.g., C. L. Blomberg et al., *Divide*; H. Bloom, *American Religion*; R. Jospe et al., *Covenant*; T. G. Madsen, *Reflections*; T. G. Madsen et al., *Human Nature*; T. G. Madsen, *Eternal Man*; S. M. McMurrin, *Theological*; R. L. Millet, *Different*; R. L. Millet, *Vision*; R. L. Millet et al., *Bridging*; R. L. Millet et al., *Claiming*; D. W. Musser et al., *Dialogue*; H. W. Nibley, *Temple and Cosmos*; B. T. Ostler, *Attributes*; B. T. Ostler, *Theism*; B. T. Ostler, *God*; S. J. Palmer, *Mormons and Muslims*; D. L. Paulsen, *Embodiment*; D. L. Paulsen, *Are Christians Mormon*; J. W. Welch, *Worlds*.

72 J. E. Faulconer, *Tracy*; J. Siebach, *Response*.

73 S. Kierkegaard, *Purity*, from Translator’s Introduction, p. 21. For a similar point of view, see H. W. Nibley, *Prophets*. See also J. S. Tanner, *Men and Mantles*, pp. 159-160 and J. L. Kugel, *How to Read*, pp. 679-689.

74 See, e.g., E. D. Clark, *Blessings*; J. Gee et al., *Astronomy*; H. W. Nibley, *Drama*; H. W. Nibley, *Message 2005*; H. W. Nibley, *Abraham 2000*; H. W. Nibley, *Teachings of the PGP*; M. D. Rhodes, *Hor*; J. A. Tvedtnes et al., *Traditions*.

75 K. Stendahl, *Third Nephi*, p. 151.

76 B. H. Roberts, *8 April 1911*, p. 59. Also quoted in T. G. Madsen, *Nine Reasons*, pp. 110-112.

77 M. C. Thomas, *Light*, p. 347.

The way in which the glory of God's work is ultimately revealed in the simple details of texts, events, and godly persons is brilliantly described by Chesterton:⁷⁸

The wise man will follow a star, low and large and fierce in the heavens; but the nearer he comes to it the smaller and smaller it will grow, till he finds it the humble lantern over some little inn or stable. Not till we know the high things shall we know how lowly they are. Meanwhile, the modern superior transcendentalist will find the facts of eternity incredible because they are so solid; he will not recognize heaven because it is so like the earth.

P-11 See Birch⁷⁹ for a vivid description of King's approach to scholarship and classroom style.

P-12 Wrote King:

When I was first brought to read Joseph Smith's story, I was deeply impressed. I wasn't inclined to be impressed. As a stylistician, I have spent my life being disinclined to be impressed. So when I read his story, I thought to myself, this is an extraordinary thing. This is an astonishingly matter-of-fact and cool account. This man is not trying to persuade me of anything. He doesn't feel the need to. He is stating what happened to him, and he is stating it, not enthusiastically, but in quite a matter-of-fact way. He is not trying to make me cry or feel ecstatic. That struck me, and that began to build my testimony, for I could see that this man was telling the truth.⁸⁰

P-13 By this, I do not think that the Prophet meant that a given passage of scripture can be understood in isolation, apart from the context in which it stands. Rather, for example, when he interpreted a parable, his "key" to "ascertain its meaning" was to "dig up the root," i.e., to "enquire [as to] the question which drew out the answer."⁸¹ He was democratic in his desire to have the scriptures unfolded to all, decrying those who supposed that their plain truths were "mystery... and, therefore, are not to be understood." He declared that all the Saints could come to an understanding of such things "if [they] will but open [their] eyes, and read with candor."⁸²

P-14 Buber described this as:

... a disease of the spirit that can lead us to imagine that we already know what we are reading, causing us to blithely and triumphantly read past the text... The spiritual task of interpretation... is to affect or alter the pace of reading so that one's eye and ear can be addressed by the text's words and sounds—and thus reveal an expanded or new sense of life and its dynamics. The pace of technology and the patterns of modernity pervert this vital task. The rhythm of reading must, therefore, be restored to the rhythm of breathing, to the cadence of the cantillation marks of the sacred text. Only then will the individual absorb the texts with his or her life breath and begin to read liturgically, as a rite of passage to a different level of meaning. And only then may the contemporary idolization of technique and information be transformed, and the sacred text restored as a living teaching and instruction, for the constant renewal of the self.⁸³

In an account of a personal incident from his university days, Faulconer describes his introduction to such an approach to reading scripture:

Before studying [Genesis] with Professor Goldman, I memorized doctrines and scanned scriptures for evidence that would support the doctrines I believed. After studying with him I realized that although that kind of scripture study is essential, our learning is vastly improved if it is done against the background of close reading I learned from Professor Goldman...

The heart of [this approach] is asking questions—asking questions of the scriptures and letting them answer, asking questions about details rather than about abstractions and generalities. What does "dominion" mean? Why does Adam say what he does in the way that he does? What does the form of his answer to God suggest? Why is the story told in this order rather than another? Often Professor Goldman's questions had no single, correct answer. Even when he had a plausible answer to one of his questions, he never assumed that he knew everything he needed to know. He might ask the same questions today that he asked a year ago and criticize his previous answers. He focused on questioning in a productive way rather than on merely answering, but asking those questions naturally led to ideas I had never considered. It surprised me how often such questions about details led to insights into my life.

78 G. K. Chesterton, *William Blake*, p. 210.

79 A. J. Birch, *King*.

80 A. H. King, *Joseph*, p. 288.

81 J. Smith, Jr., *Teachings*, 29 January 1843, pp. 276-277.

82 *Ibid.*, December 1835, p. 96.

83 Cited in M. Fishbane, *Spirituality*, p. 12.

As I imitated Professor Goldman, I began to wonder if my understanding of the Gospel was adequate. That too became a source for questions. To see whether the scriptures would refine my understanding, I began to ask questions like, I have always heard that such and such is true and I have always believed that this passage of scripture teaches that doctrine. Does it? Such questioning often showed me that my knowledge of the scriptures was shallow, that the verses I had used as supports for doctrines I believed not only supported those doctrines but also had a great deal to teach me.⁸⁴

As a result of his experiences, Faulconer gives the following guidance to scripture readers:

Assume that the scriptures mean exactly what they say and, more important, assume that we do not already know what they say. If we assume that we already know what the scriptures say, then they cannot continue to teach us. If we assume that they mean something other than what they say, then we run the risk of substituting our own thoughts for what we read rather than learning what they have to teach us... [A]ssume that each aspect of whatever passage we are looking at is significant and ask about that significance. To assume that some things are significant and others are not is to assume, from the beginning, that we already know what scripture means. Some things may turn out to be irrelevant, but we cannot know that until we are done.⁸⁵

Similarly, Wright comments that if you read in this way:

... the Bible will not let you down. You will be paying attention to it; you won't be sitting in judgment over it. But you won't come with a preconceived notion of what this or that passage has to mean if it is to be true. You will discover that God is speaking new truth through it. I take it as a method in my biblical studies that if I turn a corner and find myself saying, "Well, in that case, that verse is wrong" that I must have turned a wrong corner somewhere. But that does not mean that I impose what I think is right on to that bit of the Bible. It means, instead, that I am forced to live with that text uncomfortably, sometimes literally for years (this is sober autobiography), until suddenly I come round a different corner and that verse makes a lot of sense; sense that I wouldn't have got if I had insisted on imposing my initial view on it from day one.⁸⁶

By way of contrast, Kugel notes the "subtle shift in tone" that has come with "the emphasis on reading the Bible [solely] in human terms and in its historical context" without the counterbalance provided by traditional forms of scripture reading:

As modern biblical scholarship gained momentum, studying the Bible itself was joined with, and eventually overshadowed by, studying the historical reality behind the text (including how the text itself came to be). In the process, learning from the Bible gradually turned into learning about it. Such a shift might seem slight at first, but ultimately it changed a great deal. The person who seeks to learn from the Bible is smaller than the text; he crouches at its feet, waiting for its instruction or insights. Learning about the text generates the opposite posture. The text moves from subject to object; it no longer speaks but is spoken about, analyzed, and acted upon. The insights are now all the reader's, not the text's, and anyone can see the results. This difference in tone, as much as any specific insight or theory, is what has created the great gap between the Bible of ancient interpreters and that of modern scholars.⁸⁷

P-15 About the abandonment of ancient modes of biblical interpretation, Kugel observes:

What [modern exegetes] generally share (although there are, of course, exceptions) is a profound discomfort with the actual interpretations that the ancients came up with—these have little or no place in the way Scripture is to be expounded today. Midrash, allegory, typology—what for? But the style of interpretation thus being rejected is precisely the one that characterizes the numerous interpretations of Old Testament texts by Jesus, Paul, and others in the New Testament, as well as by the succeeding generations of the founders of Christianity...

Ancient interpretive methods may sometimes appear artificial, but this hardly means that abandoning them guarantees unbiased interpretation... At times, [modern] interpretations are scarcely less forced than those of ancient midrashists (and usually far less clever).⁸⁸

84 J. E. Faulconer, *Study*, pp. 6-7.

85 *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

86 N. T. Wright, *Authoritative*. See Berlin's seven principles of biblical hermeneutics for a detailed description of such an approach to scriptural understanding (A. Berlin, *Search*).

87 J. L. Kugel, *How to Read*, p. 666.

88 *Ibid.*, pp. 674, 676; cf. M. Barker, *Christmas*, pp. 29-30.

- P-16** Since at least the time of Norman Vincent Peale's *The Power of Positive Thinking* (1952), a parade of quasi-religious books have, in the words of Prothero:

... preached therapy more than theology, happiness rather than salvation. Then, as today, debating (or even discussing) religious doctrines was considered ill-mannered, a violation of the cherished civic ideal of tolerance, so it was difficult for children to learn or for adults to articulate what set their religious traditions apart from others.⁸⁹

Current interest in contemplative practice has caused "spiritual but not religious" folks to rediscover such neglected resources inside Christianity and Judaism as centering prayer and Kabbalah. But it has also led them to Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, and other Asian religions in search of various forms of meditation, yoga, and tai chi... Here too, however, the trend is toward religion stripped down to its "essentials"—essentials that in this case are confined almost entirely to the experiential or moral dimensions. This development is well advanced in the American Buddhist community, where some have argued that Buddhism can get along just fine without such staples as karma and reincarnation. "Buddhism Without Beliefs," as this movement has been called, aims to distill the Buddhist life down to nothing more than one's favorite sitting or chanting practice, and then to put that practice at the service of such American preoccupations as happiness.

The tendency to shirk from doctrine is particularly pronounced in the "multi-religious America" camp. Here even the minimal monotheism of the Judeo-Christian-Islamic model must be sacrificed since many Buddhists don't believe in God and many Hindus believe in more than one. The only common ground here seems to be tolerance itself. When pluralists gather for interreligious dialogue, their discussions always seem to circle back to ethics... [without] a whisper of theology.⁹⁰

- P-17** Also of relevance is the significant effort currently being devoted to *The BYU New Testament Commentary*:

Approved by the BYU administration and its Board of Trustees..., the project foresees the production of fifteen volumes of commentary on individual books of the New Testament.

The public announcement reads as follows:

The Board of Trustees of Brigham Young University has recently approved the publication of a multi-volume commentary on the New Testament. A broad-based team of Latter-day Saint scholars have joined forces to produce the set. Planned to take about ten years to complete, this fifteen-volume series will combine the best ancient linguistic and historical evidence with Mormon interests and doctrinal perspectives... This commentary will be the first to combine scholarly expertise and Mormon scripture. Each book in the New Testament will be examined word by word. In addition, relationships between the New Testament and the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants will be carefully examined.

The commentary will be not just another scholarly commentary, but particularly a Latter-day Saint Commentary. It will focus on passages of particular interest to Latter-day Saints; it will draw from all the LDS standard works; and we strive for it to be written with inspiration... [Part] of our purposes is to demonstrate the proper treatment of text transmission and translation—that is, to make use of what seems to be correct and offer alternate meaning for what seems to be incorrect. Each volume will contain substantial introductory and contextual material where questions of provenance, setting, authorship, intent and purpose will be addressed. Discussion of manuscript tradition and transcription will also be considered, as well as thematic or topical questions contained in the text being examined. The actual commentary will address the text as found in the King James Version. Pericopes, that is sections of the text divided into similarly-themed verses, generally no more than a dozen at a time, sometimes fewer, will be treated verse by verse, and word by word. Analytical commentary will be offered in terms of linguistic analysis, including alternative translation possibilities based on literal Greek meanings of words, historical background, and theological significance. Where issues of textual transmission arise, consultation will be made of Greek texts unavailable to the King James translators, some newly discovered and of early date, others the synthetic product of 400 years of additional research, textual comparison, and new discovery. Sources for linguistic considerations will include not only well known recent translations of the New Testament, but importantly the Joseph Smith Translation in what places

89 S. Prothero, *Literacy*, p. 113; cf. C. Lasch, *Revolt*, pp. 216ff.

90 S. Prothero, *Literacy*, p. 117

New Testament passages are addressed. Standard scholarly commentaries such as the *Anchor Bible Commentary* or *Sacra Pagina*, as well as many scholarly monographs and articles, will also be consulted. When Greek is cited it will be transliterated into the Roman alphabet used in English so as to be accessible to our readers. In this vein, both Greek and Latin references will be given in the original language and in a translated English form. For purposes of interpretation and comment, consideration will be given to writings spanning two thousand years from Apostolic Fathers and pre-Nicene Christian authors to the important truths revealed in latter-day scripture and the teachings of leaders of the Restoration from the time of Joseph Smith to the present day. Historical background, as it pertains to particular New Testament passages, will provide detailed discussion of the world at the time of Christ from cultural, political, and legal perspectives.

A Board of five editors, all senior and experienced BYU professors, directs the project.⁹¹

P-18 Elder Neal A. Maxwell wrote that:

... gaining knowledge and becoming more Christlike “are two aspects of a single process.”⁹² This process is part of being “valiant” in our testimony of Jesus. Thus, while we are saved no faster than we gain a certain type of knowledge,⁹³ it is also the case, as Richard Bushman has observed,⁹⁴ that we will gain knowledge no faster than we are saved... [B]ehaving and knowing are inseparably linked.⁹⁵

P-19 Similarly, C. S. Lewis writes:

Most of us [should be] less urgently concerned with the Pauline question [of why it is theoretically impossible for us to perfectly obey the moral law] than with [the practical implications of] William Law’s simple statement: “if you will here stop and ask yourselves why you are not as pious as the primitive Christians were, your own heart will tell you that it is neither through ignorance nor inability, but purely because you never thoroughly intended it.”⁹⁶

Kugel echoes the same spirit from a Jewish perspective:

In Judaism, Scripture is ultimately valued not as history, nor as theology, nor even as the great, self-sufficient corpus of divine utterances—all that God had ever wished to say to man. Judaism is not fundamentalism, nor even Protestantism. What Scripture is, and always has been, in Judaism is the beginning of a manual entitled *To Serve God*, a manual whose trajectory has always led from the prophet to the interpreter and from the divine to the merely human. To put the matter in, I admit, rather shocking terms: since in Judaism it is not the words of Scripture themselves that are ultimately supreme, but the service of God (the “standing up close”) that they enjoin, then to suggest that everything hangs on Scripture might well be described as a form of fetishism or idolatry, that is, a mistaking of the message for its Sender and the turning of its words into idols of wood or stone... For Judaism, the crucial element has always been the imperative that Scripture’s very existence embodies... the basic divine commandment reflected in Deuteronomy’s exhortation “to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul”⁹⁷ and similar pronouncements. To flesh out this commandment was the purpose of all of Scripture and all later interpretation. With such a purpose foremost, the Bible’s original component texts easily lent themselves to flexible reinterpretation.... The Bible, it seems to me, remains the most accessible... basic program for the service of God in daily life....

We have seen that, since ancient times, the trajectory of being God’s servants inevitably led from words of God to merely human words, and that the latter have had a great deal to do with the essence of the Bible, turning all of it into a manual of “what to do.” So, while I could not be involved

91 J. F. Hall, *Translated Correctly*.

92 C. T. Warner, *Truth*, p. 1490.

93 J. Smith, Jr., *Teachings*, 10 April 1842, p. 217; cf. Alma 12:30.

94 R. L. Bushman, *Faithful History*, p. 18.

95 N. A. Maxwell, *Inexhaustible*, pp. 212-213. See also A. S. Miller, *Atonement and Testimony*.

96 C. S. Lewis, *Pain*, p. 59. See W. Law, *Serious Call*, 2, p. 57. On the other hand, one might also admire those who, in an artless and unconscious manner, simply do good out of their very nature—or even out of a spontaneous burst of repentance, as in the delightful French Christmas story *La Pastorale des Santons de Provence*. There it was said of the miserly Roustido, following an sudden and uncharacteristic act of kindness inspired by the presence of the Christ child and His Mother: “Il venait de gagner le paradis sans le faire exprès” (= “He had just won a spot for himself in Paradise without knowing it.”) (Y. Audouard, *Pastorale*, p. 76).

97 Deuteronomy 10:12.

in a religion that was entirely a human artifact, it would, in theory at least, be enough for me if God said what He is reported to have said in Exodus and Deuteronomy: “Do you want to come close to Me? Then do My bidding, become My employees.” The fleshing out of that primal commandment takes place in Scripture and outside of Scripture, and it is all one sacred precinct; indeed, the divine presence suffuses every part of it.⁹⁸

The idea of the primacy of service must, of course, be tempered by the knowledge that God's call to action “always comes through the filter of human understanding, and God asks for a creative, loving response on our part, not mere compliance.” McLachlan compares it to the call one might see in the face of a loved one. “Whether and how I will respond” to such an encounter “is up to me.”⁹⁹

Augustine phrased his approach to this issue in terms of a balance:

No man has a right to lead such a life of contemplation as to forget in his own case the service due to his neighbor; nor has any man a right to be so immersed in active life as to neglect the contemplation of God.¹⁰⁰

However, I resonate more strongly with the view of Elder Bruce C. Hafen who argues that “a ‘balanced’ approach simply won’t be enough when we encounter the most demanding experiences of our spiritual growth. When we find ourselves stretched to our extremities, we need a new level from which to draw more deeply on our Hebrew roots than our Greek roots.”¹⁰¹ To adopt such a perspective is not to devalue the life of the mind in religion, but rather, with C. S. Lewis, to reject the idea:

... which lingers in the mind of some modern people that cultural activities are in their own right spiritual and meritorious—as though scholars and poets were intrinsically more pleasing to God than scavengers and bootblacks... The work of a Beethoven and the work of a charwoman become spiritual on precisely the same condition, that of being offered to God, of being done humbly “as to the Lord.”¹⁰²

P-20 As an example, Prothero cites a statement by Eisenhower to a Soviet official in a December 1952 meeting that “our form of government has no sense unless it is founded in a deeply felt religious faith, and I don’t care what it is.”¹⁰³ The same fierce loyalty to an abstract “idea” of God divorced from any particulars is expressed more prosaically in an off-the-street comment made to a sociologist by a high-school student in the Middle West, “Yeah, we smoke dope all over, in our cars, walking around before class, anytime, but that doesn’t mean we don’t believe in God or that we’ll let anybody put God down.”¹⁰⁴

P-21 Efforts have been made to bridge this gap through books that explain the meaning of specific symbols used in scripture and temple worship. However, most of us not only struggle with the meaning of individual concepts and symbols, but also—and perhaps more crucially—in understanding how these concepts and symbols fit together as a whole. Scriptural and temple symbols and concepts are best understood, not in isolation, but within the full context of teachings to which they belong.

In this respect, Chesterton has compared our position to that of a “sailor who awakens from a deep sleep and discovers treasure strewn about, relics from a civilization he can barely remember. One by one he picks up the relics—gold coins, a compass, fine clothing—and tries to discern their meaning.”¹⁰⁵ But the essential meaning is to be found not so much in the individual relics as in a grasp of the milieu that produced them.

98 J. L. Kugel, *How to Read*, pp. 685, 687, 689. The primacy of good deeds vs. *Torah* study was a matter of debate among the Jewish Sages. For example, according to one among them, the first question that will be addressed to man on Judgment Day is “Have you dealt honestly in the conduct of your business?” and the second question will be “Did you set fixed times for the study of *Torah*?” Another sage, however, stated: “Man’s trial will begin with an examination of his study of *Torah*” (A. J. Heschel, *Heavenly Torah*, p. 206).

99 J. McLachlan, *Reply*, p. 209.

100 Augustine, *City*, 19:19, p. 413; cf. *Pirke Avot*: “Anyone whose wisdom exceeds his good deeds... [is like] a tree whose branches are numerous but whose roots are few; then the wind comes and uproots it and turns it upside down” (M. Lieber, *Pirke Avos*, 3:22, p. 201).

101 B. C. Hafen, *Reason*, pp. 27-28. See S. Kierkegaard, *Fear*, pp. 20, 79-100, 189-192: “the teleological suspension of the ethical”; cf. discussion in R. Coles, *Secular Mind*, pp. 15-20.

102 C. S. Lewis, *Learning*, pp. 55-56.

103 S. Prothero, *Literacy*, p. 113.

104 P. Fussell, *Class*, p. 150.

105 P. Yancey, introduction to G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, p. xiii.