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NOMINAL CONVERSION

THROUGH THE YEARS, I HAVE enjoyed D. Michael Quinn's thoughtful, deeply felt, and wonderfully researched inspections of life. And so the first article I read in the May 2005 SUNSTONE was his, "To Whom Shall We Go? Historical Patterns of Restoration Believers with Serious Doubts." I was not disappointed in what he had to say, but I worry that his approach is so sweeping and inclusive that it would lead readers to assume that most of those considered "less active" Church members or outright deserters reached that point through incidents so deeply scaring as to mutilate their belief system.

The article's subtitle suggests that disengaged members carefully studied their beliefs and concluded they could no longer accept perceived injustices or inconsistencies and then fled for their eternal lives. I would have no problems with the article if that approach were limited to a certain set of Restoration believers. But while Quinn correctly notes that persons in the Church's "lost members file" should be somehow noted in any statistical analysis, he incorrectly assumes that "these people apparently do not want to be located because they want no affiliation with Mormonism." He further complicates the issue by including in his inspection of serious doubters early members who did not follow Brigham Young geographically and/or philosophically.

My experience among converts is that disengagement from the Church is far less dramatic and involves many who would be puzzled by suggestions that they rushed to free themselves from some kind of ecclesiastical double talk, philosophic doubts over God's ultimate grasp on them, or anger. Rather, they just—I know this is more boring than Quinn's assessment—dropped out much like a yawning high school truant.

People join churches because they feel the new system addresses some need better than the system or lack of system currently being followed. The need often is not deeply religious. Rather it could be for attention or a place to send their children for religious instruction. They want to find a spouse or a source for financial assistance. They want a church that makes sense, and twice-a-week presentations by LDS missionaries make a great deal of sense. But after baptism, even in the most loving ward, attention dwindles. Even diligent once-a-month home teachers may lack missionary zeal. Yes, children get

two hours of instruction, but at a cost: parents must endure three hours of instruction on a day cherished in many ways as a day off. Financial assistance in a church that requires they first give up 10 percent of their own, often meager, finances? Add the likelihood that these converts are the only Mormons in their extended families and, if African American, face attending a white church (check out the general authorities, audience, and choir at general conference). Psychology, not philosophy, will hold better answers to why most members leave the church.

In short, church membership requires effort considerably beyond many people's past experience with non-church-going or other-church-going, and they lack the endurance or foresight needed to offer a sacrifice today for future promises. Life is tough enough. It's easier to stay in bed, have a leisurely breakfast, take in a ballgame, or shop. Why can't a good Christian socialize in the corner tavern or over a mid-morning cup of coffee? It all sounded fine once. They don't ponder questions raised by the Abraham story, and they don't understand Job except to know that he was patient and that it's certainly better to praise God than curse him. Celestial, terrestrial, teletial? Too complicated. What's wrong with heaven and hell?

Curious about whether my sense of reasons for inactivity jived with reality, I quickly ran through our ward directory, considering each inactive person or family and what I knew about their reasons for not attending church more regularly. I concluded that maybe 14 percent of those we never see in church stay away out of some doctrinal or religious objections or confusion and that 78 percent don't attend because of lack of interest. I am unsure about the other 8 percent.

I truly wish people would arrive at their belief system—whether supportive or in opposition—through the kind of reasoning, prayer, and thorough study Quinn suggests. But I don't think it happens. People on both sides tend to be swept along or aside by tradition, generalities, touchy-feely experiences—or lack of them—gossip, friends, and family.

How much better it would be if all people followed the advice of Hugh B. Brown, quoted in the same SUNSTONE issue, to "admire men and women who have developed the questing spirit, who are unafraid of new ideas as stepping stones to progress."

GARY RUMMLER

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

A DOUBTFUL MODEL

BUILDING ON THE WORK OF JAMES Fowler who builds upon the work of Jean Piaget, Dan Wotherspoon, in his editorial “All We Have” (SUNSTONE, May 2005, 7–9) suggests that there are higher stages of faith just as there are higher stages of cognitive development. At the highest stage, one explicitly doubts and subsequently proves or rejects the beliefs one held at the lower, modal level of faith that is supposedly fostered by organized religion. Presumably, having passed through the Borderlands (to borrow SUNSTONE columnist D. Jeff Burton’s phrase), having come to know and accept God’s will in a new, more profound faith, these more enlightened believers will be the preeminent exemplars of the full spectrum of Christian virtues.

Well, this is an empirically testable hypothesis. For my part, I haven’t seen it. I have yet to see a post-doubt Mormon who is more profoundly Christian than a Spencer W. Kimball or Thomas S. Monson (or the many others like them I have known)—men who, to all outward appearances, languish at the Stage Three modal level Fowler and Wotherspoon describe, having never explicitly doubted, in their adulthood, their childhood faith.

The Fowler/Wotherspoon analysis calls to mind a professor’s wry comment on Abraham Maslow. At the apex of Maslow’s developmental pyramid is the mature, self-actualized humanist, a man remarkably like—Abraham Maslow. I think it no accident that intellectuals would generalize to faith a model that focuses on the stages of intellectual development. But, to echo Boyd K. Packer, the mantle of faith is greater than the intellect. For intellectuals, post-doubt faith is the only available option. I can’t help but doubt their—perhaps subconscious—motives when they make their only faith option the *summum bonum* of religious life.

VAL LARSEN
Harrisonburg, Virginia

BECK MISREPRESENTED

TANIA RANDS LYONS’ REVIEW OF Martha Beck’s latest book, (SUNSTONE Feb 2005) *Leaving the Saints: How I Lost the Mormons and Found My Faith*, leads readers to expect a book filled with “the requisite cast of characters straight out of nineteenth century anti-Mormon exposés: secret rites, blood

atonement, murderous Danites, and, of course, polygamy.” I had read and loved all three of Beck’s previous books and her monthly column in *Oprah* magazine and have consistently found Beck’s writing to be witty and entertaining, but more important, authentic, honest, and empowering. Rands’ review is so negative that I wondered if my impressions about Beck had been wrong. Upon reading the book and carefully examining the review again, however, I have concluded that Lyons has critically misrepresented the book’s story and message.

Lyons’ review is primarily an assault on Beck’s character and credibility, mixed with information from the book. Note that she begins her review by calling into question the veracity of Beck’s first book, *Expecting Adam*, which Lyons said she had loved when she had read it five years earlier. Lyons uses several techniques to discredit Beck’s story. One is to take quotes from different places in the book and put them side by side in an effort to show that Beck’s statements are not internally consistent. For example, Beck is quoted from page 6, “The only conviction I embrace absolutely is this: Whatever I believe, I may be wrong.” Rands then juxtaposes it with a quote from page 21: “Of one thing I am absolutely certain: I haven’t invented a single

thing.” These statements appear to show that Beck is contradicting herself; however, they make sense when read within the story as a whole. Besides, questioning one’s beliefs, which is a sign of open-mindedness, is not the same as inventing facts.

Lyons also focuses on a few peculiar incidents in the book that depict life in Provo, Utah, while ignoring the book’s central theme. For example, she recounts Beck’s assertion that men at BYU were required to wear socks because “ankle hair is an extension of pubic hair.” Lyons also repeats Beck’s story of a bishop telling a woman she’s a second-class citizen, and a hair stylist’s demand that Martha obtain permission from her husband before he’ll cut her hair short. These trivial incidents, which add color to the story, are used to cast doubt on the larger assertions in Beck’s book. Although these particular events are hard to believe, I have lived in Utah (and attended BYU) long enough to accept that they are entirely possible. Perhaps Lyons has done neither.

Lyons also demonstrates a lack of understanding of *Leaving the Saints* when she criticizes Beck’s narrative style. Lyons maintains that Beck has not produced an “independently verifiable truth claim” and faults Beck for not applying qualitative research methods



“I get it! To speak German, I have to talk like Yoda!”

or anthropological principles in her writing. She also criticizes Beck's use of dialogue instead of third-person reporting. Lyons declares, "Of course it makes the story eminently more interesting to read, but I found myself distracted by the knowledge that these detailed conversations...were being reconstructed from memory." She also censures Beck for not providing an "intelligent critique of the [LDS] Church."

In making these criticisms, Lyons seems to have misunderstood the purpose of Beck's book: It is a personal memoir, not a sociology research project nor a formal analysis of Mormon doctrine. Beck is not building a case to be presented in a court of law through "straight description and recorded evidence," as Lyons suggests she should; she's telling *her* story.

Lyons also condemns Beck's "witty, saucy, humorous" style, even though Lyons says she had enjoyed this approach in previous books. Anyone familiar with Beck's work will recognize that her self-deprecating humor is basic to her writing and is not unique to this story. Not only is her style entertaining and engaging, but in this book, it offers an especially welcome relief from the grim reality of the abuse and its effect on Beck, which included persistent anorexia and a desire to commit suicide that Beck says beset her from age six.

Above all, Lyons misses one of the major aspects of *Leaving the Saints* when she assumes that readers must believe that either Beck is a "pathologically devoted liar" or that her father, Mormon apologist Hugh Nibley, was a "pathetic, deeply disturbed man living in his own private hell." Hugh Nibley's brilliance is undisputed, and his voluminous works stand on their own merits. He is deeply admired and respected for his scholarly and personal contributions to BYU and the Mormon church.

But a superior intellect does not automatically translate into effective social skills; in fact, at times, it may mitigate against them. Nibley's personal eccentricities are almost as legendary as his prodigious mental gifts. No one who knew him or his family is surprised that his ability to relate to others did not match his intellectual capacity. These traits do *not* automatically mean that we should believe that he sexually abused his daughter. I am simply pointing out that neither proposition is mutually exclusive. It is entirely possible to respect Nibley's scholarship and writings *and* believe that Martha is telling the truth about her experiences. People who molest children are not evil monsters, as we might like to believe. They are complicated

individuals who cope with internal and external pressures in ways that hurt others.

Again, a major point of Beck's book that Lyons seems to have missed is Beck's sensitivity in discussing her father's vulnerability and the complex set of circumstances that she believes led to his transgressions against her. The central focus of *Leaving the Saints* is how Beck worked through her pain and anger to recognize her father's humanity and to love and forgive him.

Not surprisingly, some LDS Church members and Nibley family members have strongly reacted to *Leaving the Saints*. Lyons reacts strongly as well, for she does not stop at criticizing the book itself but calls into question Beck's sanity and character. Lyons writes, "Was she a bright but deeply mentally disturbed woman with an obsessive need to be admired and a mercenary approach to book publishing? Or...[was] she simply trying to heal and help others break the stifling silence that often surrounds abuse?"

A common saying in Mormonism is "by their fruits ye shall know them." What are Martha Beck's "fruits?" She has built a flourishing career as a life coach (described on National Public Radio as "the best-known life coach in America") and as a writer, including a monthly column in *Oprah* magazine. Is this the picture of a "deeply mentally disturbed woman?" What about the suggestion that Beck has "an obsessive need to be admired and a mercenary approach to book publishing?" I believe that given her successful career, it seems highly unlikely that Beck would be writing such an intensely personal book because she needs the money. Moreover, *Leaving the Saints* is her fourth book, not her first; the other three were all bestsellers. And as Lyons points out, Beck was not the first to publish assertions of her father's sexual abuse. Her brother-in-law's biography of Hugh Nibley mentions Martha's claim, then dismisses its validity.

The contention that Beck has an obsessive need to be admired seems curious as well. In *Leaving the Saints*, Beck describes the consequences of telling her family of the abuse she'd suffered and her sorrow at leaving BYU, Utah, and the LDS church: "Death had come . . . for almost everything familiar: our childhood haunts, our friendships, our jobs, our house, our families." (p 276). She has lost nearly all contact with her parents and siblings. She says, "I still grieve every day for the people and things I lost when I left the Saints" (p. 303). If Beck were really obsessed with getting praise and approval, would she have chosen this path?

Leaving the Saints: How I Lost the Mormons

and Found My Faith is a difficult book for Mormons to read—or review. It is, after all, the story of a woman's spiritual growth and how it took her out of the Mormon religion and brought her a closer connection to God. While Beck ultimately feels compassion for her father and forgives him, our hearing about sexual abuse is troubling, particularly when it involves one of Mormonism's most prominent intellectual icons. It is disappointing but not surprising that Lyons has chosen to mount an attack on author Martha Beck rather than give a true review of the book. I hope that SUNSTONE readers will disregard Tania Rands Lyons's clearly biased and inaccurate book review, and read *Leaving the Saints* for themselves. Though Beck's writing is at times poignant and achingly sad, her story is ultimately joyous and inspiring. She invites us to share the joys and sorrows of her path to peace. Readers will find strength and support for their journey as well.

LARAIN SANDS
Springville, Utah

Tania Rands Lyons responds:

WHEN I AGREED TO WRITE THIS book review for SUNSTONE, I did so under the condition that I could write a personal essay about my experience reading the book, rather than a formal, academic book review. Because of my sense of affinity with Martha's background; my respect for her as a wonderful writer; my understanding of the academic discipline in which she was trained; my own struggles growing up in the rich but imperfect culture of Mormonism; my acquaintanceship with members of the Nibley family who were genuinely baffled by Beck's claims; my feminism, which tends to side with female victims of abuse; the awful, bitter legacy of incestuous sexual abuse in my extended family; and the painful confusion of contradictory accusations of physical abuse in my own family growing up, *Leaving the Saints* was an intensely difficult and personal experience for me.

I realize that most readers of Beck's story will be part of her extensive, well-earned fan base who would be untroubled by an insider's understanding of Mormonism or by contact with members of the Nibley family who have been devastated by Martha's allegations. I also realize that many faithful Mormons who read her book may be looking for an easy out—a comfortable way to dismiss the difficult accusations found there against the Church and the well-respected Hugh Nibley. I tried to avoid this temptation. I wrote my review as a memoir and titled it as such. It

was simply the story of how I struggled with the book and how I came to terms with it through soul-searching, careful reading, research, and interviewing. Since my essay was published, I have heard from victims of incestual abuse who say that Beck's writing rings true to their own experiences. I've also heard from victims of false accusations of abuse (identified as false memory syndrome) who have shared the nightmare of that experience and expressed gratitude for my taking an even-handed approach to Beck's book.

I appreciate Ms. Sands comments and the other responses, positive and negative, that my review generated. I still stand by my review, however, and the process I used to obtain my conclusions. Ms. Sands and I agree on one thing: ultimately each reader will have to make his or her own peace with *Leaving the Saints*.

SAME OLD, SAME OLD

WHAT IS OFF TO SUNSTONE FOR opening its pages for a long-overdue discussion of the concept of paradigm shifts and its application to Book of Mormon studies. Although I found it frustrating and baffling at times, I appreciate Robert Rees's letter to the editor about my essay, "Is a 'Paradigm Shift' in Book of Mormon Studies Possible?" (SUNSTONE, March 2005), which explored the possibility of a non-historical but inspired paradigm for the Book of Mormon. But disappointingly, Rees resorts to personal attack and simply reiterates the apologists' position without responding to the main issues raised in my essay.

Rees portrays himself as the dispassionate, objective, sophisticated, reasonable, balanced scholar caught "somewhere in between" the harsh rhetoric of the apologists and naturalist critics. What Rees evidently fails to comprehend is that his construction of the situation is itself rhetorical, if not purely fictional, because there is no such thing as neutrality, and the use of rhetoric is unavoidable. Indeed, in his *Dialogue* article that he references (vol. 35, no. 3 [Fall, 2002]), Rees links naturalist critics with such language as "extreme," "no more reasonable," "doctrinaire," "contentions," "critical ideologies," "bias," "difficulty seriously considering," "speculative at best," "unexplained," "strains credulity," "assumption," "never satisfactorily demonstrated," "disturbing," "intoxicated with reason," and "too slavishly dependent." His exclusive use of the term "naturalist critics" to describe Book of Mormon skeptics is also rhetorical and apologetic since "naturalism" does not ade-

quately describe all those who question Book of Mormon historicity. Clearly, Rees is not as objective and dispassionate as he thinks and more involved in the debate than he wants to admit.

Rather than respond directly to the issues raised in my essay, Rees implies that I'm narrowminded because I don't allow that "some of us are using our best scholarly skills, our best cognitive and *spiritual sensibilities*, and our most balanced judgment to try to come to terms with this complex and challenging text" (emphasis added). Nowhere do I imply that apologists are insincere. Rather, my discussion is about methodology, and especially about how some apologists have appropriated the arguments of Thomas Kuhn and postmodernists as justification for corrupting the scientific method with "spiritual sensibilities" and privileging positive over negative evidence.

Bewilderingly, Rees practically makes my case for me when, at the end of his letter, he quotes the late Stephen J. Gould's call for "non-overlapping magisteria or domains of authority and teaching" for science and religion. In making this claim, Gould rejects so-called scientific creationism and intelligent design theory as pseudo-scientific. How does this assertion differ from what I'm suggesting is being done in many Book of Mormon discussions? How does Rees not see the irony in his appeal to Gould? And how exactly does Rees's response to me differ from that of the fundamentalists who undoubtedly reject

Gould's suggestion and insist that biblical authority and historicity are inseparable?

Ignoring the methodological issues raised in my essay, Rees simply reiterates some of the evidence on both sides of the issue without acknowledging how my discussion reframed the evidence. "It is possible," Rees asserts, "to be impressed with and even challenged by some arguments naturalistic critics make without being fully convinced by their arguments and what they put forth as evidence." But do not the fundamentalists say the same thing about evolution? This is the point I am trying to make in my essay, that the methods some apologists use to resist being "fully convinced" by negative evidence are similar to those used by the creationists, who among other things appeal to Kuhn's "paradigm shift" to justify unorthodox approaches and resist evidence for evolution. Rees sidesteps this issue.

"[I]t is possible," Rees writes, "to think deeply about the implications of recent DNA findings without concluding that we currently have the whole picture of genetic markers." Such an assertion is an example of how a Mormon apologist minimizes the effect of negative evidence. Bible fundamentalists might say that "it is possible to think deeply about the implications of the fossil record without concluding that we currently have the whole picture of pre-historic peoples." Is it "possible" to be unmoved by negative evidence? Yes, of course, and my essay explains why. I quote Barbour's statement that "any

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particular hypothesis can be maintained by rejecting or adjusting other auxiliary hypotheses,” as well as Schick’s and Vaughn’s observation that “no amount of evidence logically compels us to reject a hypothesis.” Rees should seriously consider the “possibility” suggested in the balance of Schick’s and Vaughn’s statement that a time comes when “maintaining a hypothesis in the face of adverse evidence can be manifestly unreasonable.” Determining when that threshold has been crossed will, I suspect, remain a private decision. Meanwhile, the precariousness of Book of Mormon historicity should be acknowledged: there is simply no direct evidence linking the Book of Mormon to ancient America, and the apologists’ case rests on isolated parallels and wishful thinking.

Regardless, Rees’s comment about the implications of DNA evidence fails to acknowledge that (1) Mormon scientists themselves do not anticipate the discovery of Israelite markers; (2) there is no corroborating evidence of a Hebrew presence in Central America; (3) it assumes a highly-questionable limited geography and local colonization theory; and (4) it is an untestable, and therefore *ad hoc*, rationalization.

In his letter, Rees also tries to detract from the real issues when he challenges critics to explain how the uneducated Joseph Smith could have written the Book of Mormon himself. This is nothing but a red herring since the inability to explain how Joseph Smith did it has no probative value in determining whether or not the Book of Mormon is historical. In other words, if it is determined that the Book of Mormon is not history, then speculations about Joseph Smith’s talent or lack of it become irrelevant.

Rees is also quick to label my discussion of “pious fraud” and “inspired fiction” as “disingenuous,” but what other options are there if the Book of Mormon is deemed non-historical? I’m sure the fundamentalists are equally suspicious of Gould’s statement that the “magisterium of religion extends over questions of ultimate meaning and moral value.” However, like Gould, I’m trying to separate the Book of Mormon’s historical claims from its value as a religious, perhaps “inspired,” document. Rees can accuse me of being disingenuous all he wants, but in doing so, he is not attacking my views. Rather, he is being intolerant towards other believers: those within the LDS community who have struggled with these difficult issues and have adopted an inspired fiction paradigm for the Book of Mormon. Neither Rees nor anyone that I’m aware of has yet given a cogent argument as to why such a view of the

Book of Mormon can’t be held.

Rees hyperbolizes: “Had Moses admitted that he made up the Ten Commandments, if the sacrifice of Isaac turned out to be Abraham’s imaginative storytelling, and if the parting of the Red Sea was a fable borrowed from other traditions, we would see these prophets in a much different light than we do.” And how does this statement differ from the fundamentalists’ response to Gould? Paraphrasing Rees, they might argue: “Had Moses admitted that he made up the story of Creation, that it was merely imaginative storytelling, or that it was a fable borrowed from other traditions, we would see Moses in a much different light.” Avoiding that weaker light is precisely the motivation for pious deception. Why? Because, as Rees seems to admit, believing one version instead of another requires more faith. Perhaps Moses was “inspired” to compose the Ten Commandments based on the laws of Hammurabi but decided to tell his people that God wrote them with his own finger because that is what he thought they needed to hear?

DAN VOGEL
Westerville, Ohio

TOO GREAT A LEAP

BLAKE OSTLER’S SECOND ARTICLE addressing Book of Mormon historicity in light of DNA issues, “DNA Strands in the Book of Mormon” (SUNSTONE, May 2005, 63–71), is a serious but wholly unsuccessful effort to defend a theory of Lehite origin and identity which, despite its recent ascendancy, is fraught with problems that Ostler appears not to recognize and clearly does not assess.

As I told Blake when I importuned him on the street about this, certain problems in his article result from his incomprehensible failure to acquire and read my, er, world-famous, unpublished paper presented at the 2004 Salt Lake Sunstone symposium, “The Secrets of NIMs: When the Book of Mormon Was Dictated, Were There ‘Others’ in It?” His article repeats the popular myth, for example, that the theory of Lehite identity adopted by many contemporary advocates of Book of Mormon historicity concerns the “limited geography theory” of the text, a theory Ostler claims was first discussed in the nineteenth century.

The current theory of Lehite identity, however, while it typically assumes a limited Mesoamerican setting, is not even about the narrative’s geographic scope. Rather, it is the result of a separate evolution in understanding regarding the relationship between the Book of Mormon immigrants and the an-

cient indigenous inhabitants of this hemisphere. The general position Ostler is advocating about this relationship has been called by different names, including the Amerindian “Others” theory. The current version claims that, in terms of their biological and genetic identity, a majority of the actors in the Book of Mormon were Amerindians. I’ll refer to it here as the Amerindian Majority Theory, or AMT.

By way of background, the evolution of LDS beliefs about the relationship between the book’s Israelite immigrants and indigenous Amerindians has occurred in four discernible stages:

STAGE ONE: *Book of Mormon immigrants and descendants inhabit an otherwise empty hemisphere.* This is the view held by Joseph Smith and his contemporaries.

STAGE TWO: *Book of Mormon immigrants and descendants are only a sub-group of hemispheric inhabitants; separate indigenous “others” existed elsewhere in the hemisphere during Book of Mormon times.* B. H. Roberts and Hugh Nibley never moved beyond this stage.

STAGE THREE: *Indigenous “others” become actors in the text, but only on the “Lamanite” side of things. They are only recognized and referenced as generic “Lamanites” by Nephite record keepers.* John Sorenson’s 1985 *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* articulates this position but also suggests that, at some later point, Nephites also mixed with indigenous Amerindians.

STAGE FOUR: *Indigenous “others” become actors in the text on the Nephite side as well.* John Sorenson adopts this position more clearly in 1992 with his article “When Lehi’s Party Arrived in the Land, Did They Find ‘Others’ There?” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, 1 (1992), 1–34. In this view, from the time of Nephi forward, biological Amerindians and their descendants comprise the majority of all actors in the text. (See John L. Sorenson and Matthew P. Roper, “Before DNA,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12, no. 1 [2003], 14.)

Dating the development of the Stage Four AMT a bit more precisely, it was not even suggested that Amerindians might comprise the majority of Nephite, as well as Lamanite,

actors until Sorenson's 1992 article. In his 1985 *An Ancient American Setting*, he is still imagining the indigenous Amerindians as being, for the early Nephites, only mysterious "dark-skinned lurkers in the forest" (p. 84). Moreover, not until Sorenson and Matthew Roper wrote their joint article "Before DNA," is any reference made to the large initial influx of Amerindians needed, among other things, to make possible the construction of the Nephite temple.

Ostler appears not to recognize either that this rather dramatic shift from Stage Three to Stage Four has occurred or why it is necessary. Again, the issue is not the geographic scope of the narrative (hemispheric or limited), upon which Ostler focuses. Nor were any of the above-noted shifts between stages driven by anyone's (much less Book of Mormon critics') naïve failure to appreciate what Ostler refers to as the "hyperbolic" and "overstated" nature of population-size claims made in ancient texts. (See Ostler, "DNA Strands," text and accompanying notes, pages 68–69.)

Rather, as Sorenson observes in his "Others" article, unless an influx of indigenous Amerindians is inferred, serious population-size anomalies inhere in the narrative itself. That is, absent an influx of inferred "others," the Book's narrative results in unrealistic, implausibly high growth rates for the immigrant Israelites. The Book is rescued from this dire alternative, Sorenson believes, by the inferred presence of Amerindian "others" as actors in the text. He then identifies many passages which confirm for him the existence of these "others," though he fails to address either the crucial early "entry point" for these necessary, indigenous actors into the narrative or its implications. If we adopt Sorenson's Mesoamerican location for the book's events, these necessary, inferred actors would be early Mayans. Hence, I have referred to the "others" or "outsiders" that Sorenson (and now Ostler) locate in the text as Necessary, Inferred Mayans, or "NIMs." (Note that nothing in my comments here turns on whether these necessary, inferred "others" are construed to be indigenous Mayans, Mesoamericans, Amerindians, or, under Ostler's view, indigenous "Islanders of the Sea.")

WITH THAT BACKGROUND in mind, a few of the grave problems in Ostler's article can be summarized here. One of the most serious involves his claim that Nephi understood the divine curse of the darkened skin to result from the Lamanites' violation of an Israelite prohibition against intermarriage with in-

digenuous non-Israelites. In addition to the fact that Nephi never mentions or even hints at such a prohibition and that the Deuteronomic code itself suggests a rather permissive approach to the practice (Deuteronomy 21:10–14), the Stage Three situation or "scenario" Ostler assumes for Nephi simply isn't viable. Simply put, by the time Nephi begins his "small plates" account, given the nature of the tasks, pursuits, and accomplishments recounted for his people at 2 Nephi 5, he is already in a Stage Four situation. That is, he and his fellow Israelites are already a minority among the indigenous Amerindians with whom they have merged. Virtually everyone who has thought seriously about this, including historicity advocates, now accepts that view. (For instance, see Sorenson and Roper, "Before DNA," 14.)

Ostler thus recognizes the structural importance of what he dubs the "Great Separation" of the Lehigh families, but not the more fundamental significance of the "Great Leap" from a small family group to a full-blown society that is reported for the Nephites at 2 Nephi 5. It is that leap in the narrative that requires the influx and inferred presence of the NIMs (though for Ostler they might be termed "Necessary, Inferred Islanders"). The insurmountable problem this creates for Ostler's claim that Nephi would have seen intermarriage between indigenous Amerindians and Lamanites as a violation of Israelite law is that, by the time he is making his record, Nephi's own people are composed principally of just such darker-skinned Amerindians. Moreover, given the much larger numbers of such inferred Amerindians among the people of Nephi, as compared to the immigrant Israelites themselves (see "Before DNA," at 14, or my Sunstone "NIMs" presentation), intermarriage with them would have been an obvious necessity for the Nephites as well. Hence, the ideas and beliefs that Ostler attributes to Nephi: (1) that intermarrying with the indigenous "others" constitutes a crime, an "abomination" under Israelite law and (2) that such intermarriage is the reason that Laman and his followers were "cut off from the presence of the Lord," in addition to lacking any basis in the text, are beliefs and opinions it would be nonsensical for Nephi to hold. Ostler's claim that Nephi would see such intermarriage among the Lamanites as a religious "abomination" is also flatly contradicted by Jacob's unqualified praise of marriage as practiced among the Lamanites (Jacob 3:5–7). Apparently oblivious to these problems, the closest Ostler comes to acknowledging them is when he concedes eu-

phemistically that "within one or two generations," the Nephites as well as the Lamanites would have been intermarrying with the indigenous "others" ("DNA Strands," 64).

Actually, when the text is interpreted in accordance with the inferred social and biological context of Stage Four and the AMT, the problems presented by the one-sided Lamanite curse are even more fundamental than the preceding comments may make clear. Perhaps the most fundamental structural, compositional problem presented by the AMT is best summarized in question form. Given the size of the necessary "influx"



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of Amerindians into both Israelite groups that had to occur before the composition of 2 Nephi 5, why would Nephi structure his founding story of LeHITE identity and Lamanite genesis using a counterfactual account of visible skin color differences between the two groups? Put a bit more broadly, the question is: Within the AMT-dictated social and biological context, how and why would a wholly counterfactual narrative regarding darker-skinned Lamanites and lighter-skinned Nephites first be conceived, and then perpetuated? These questions point out the fundamental incongruity between the AMT-dictated context and the structure of Nephi's account of LeHITE identity. That fundamental incongruity between authorial context and narrative structure renders them logically and practically inconsistent; it is the most basic reason Ostler's argument was doomed to founder.

Ostler's failure to appreciate the significance of the "Great Leap" and the initial population-size anomaly it creates is also reflected in the nature of the textual references he claims are confirming evidence of indigenous "others." For example, he gives four individual examples of evidence in Jacob's record for the existence/presence of the NIMs. What he fails to appreciate is that all the "extra" historical actors he identifies—the "extra" females available for polygamy, the too-large audiences implied for Jacob's two "convocations," and Sherem as well—all result from the very same initial anomaly. Specifically, what constitutes each of Ostler's later actors as "extra"—and simultaneously turns them into "NIMs" (or "Islanders")—is Nephi's narrative preceding the Great Leap: the narrative that yields far too few Israelites to build the temple, fight the wars, raise crops, tend herds, and otherwise inhabit the society. That pre-Leap segment of the narrative is thus the "base-text" of the initial anomaly. It will always yield, each time for the same reason, the deficit of necessary Israelites revealed or implied in the subsequent narrative. So when Jacob condemns polygamy, or Sherem doesn't already know Jacob, what Ostler sponsors as separate, confirming instances of "others" is instead simply a repetition of exactly the same question-begging inference.

Hence, in the context of a debate about the book's historicity, Ostler's accumulation of four "separate" instances of indigenous others in Jacob's record is like re-reading the same astonishing news report in four different copies of the morning paper, and finally feeling reassured about its accuracy. That circularity results in part from ignoring

the fundamental issue presented by any critical assessment of the AMT, which Ostler never recognizes or addresses: Whether the claimed instances of indigenous "others" he and Sorenson identify in the text are indeed references to ancient Mayans/Islanders who animated the world of Nephi and Jacob, or instead are simply Ostler's and Sorenson's own post-hoc, albeit creative, interpretive effort to explain away the initial population-size anomaly in the narrative, as it recurs later in the text.

The challenge for Ostler, accordingly, is to identify some basis in the text for claiming that those new "extra" persons are evidence of indigenous Mayans or Islanders, not just evidence of the "extra" actors who automatically result from the anomaly. To be sure, his "Lamanite curse" argument, if successful, would avoid such circularity and support an inference that Nephi was indeed aware of indigenous "others." For the reasons noted above, however, that argument fails. Ostler's argument also ignores the clear elaboration in the earlier text of the basis and rationale for the curse.

The initial "founding covenant" made with Nephi when the land of promise is first mentioned assures him that, if obedient to the commandments, he will prosper, will be led to a land of promise, and will also be made a "ruler and teacher" over his brethren. If they nevertheless rebel against him, they "shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord" (1 Nephi 2:19–22). And if they rebel against the Lord, Nephi is told, "I will curse them even with a sore curse." Through that rebellion they will also become "a scourge" to Nephi's seed in the land of promise (1 Nephi 2:23–24).

Just as we should expect if we have read that textual prelude, when Nephi eventually reports the curse, he characterizes it as the fulfillment and confirmation of the original founding covenant and divine prophecy regarding the land of promise. In their first act of defiance in the new land, the brothers reject Nephi's desire to "rule over" them because they should rightly "rule over this people," and seek to take his life (2 Nephi 5:2–4). In fulfillment of exactly what was promised and foretold in the founding covenant, which Nephi recites for good measure, by rebelling against him as their ruler and teacher, and refusing to "hearken" unto him, his brothers are indeed "cut off from the presence of the Lord" (2 Nephi 5:19, 20). Just as foretold, Nephi further confirms, the Lord "had caused the cursing to come upon them," and hence they will indeed become "a scourge" to Nephi's people (2 Nephi 5: 21, 25).

Note that nowhere in any of the early conceptual groundwork and foreshadowing provided for the curse, nor in the eventual meticulous characterization of it as the fulfillment of the promises and prophecies made in the founding covenant with Nephi, is anything said or even hinted about intermarriage between Israelites and indigenous peoples or about any prohibition of it. So it is perhaps less puzzling than telling when, unconstrained by the text, Ostler first informs us that such intermarriage "constitutes a particular category of crime: an 'abomination,'" next advises that the crime's penalty is "to be cut off from the Lord's presence," and then fancifully observes: "This is exactly how Nephi treats the same crime when committed by Laman and Lemuel" ("DNA Strands," 64).

ENDING ON A less serious and dreary note, the only evidence of a "crime" here, we might say, involves not an ancient religious "abomination" but a modern infraction we could make up especially for the occasion. We could call it "aggravated eisegesis." The deeply mitigating, extenuating circumstance in this case would be the fundamental incongruity I mentioned above. And by helping illustrate the extent of that incongruity through his creative, doomed argument, Ostler has already performed his community service.

Further comments on Ostler's article, along with a broader discussion of issues raised by the AMT, are posted at the Zarahemla City Limits website, <<http://home.comcast.net/~zarahemla/>>. You will find them under "Longer Essays."

DAVID A. ANDERSON
Salt Lake City, Utah

Blake T. Ostler responds:

I AM HAPPY TO HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY to respond to David Anderson's letter. I will respond to the arguments in the order Anderson addresses them.

1. *The matter of when "indigenous others" theories arose is a sideshow.* I believe Anderson is correct about the general time frame of the emergence of the "indigenous others" position. However, is it really important? My point in even bringing up when these theories arose is merely to show that they did not appear in order to answer problems presented by arguments from DNA but in response to what the text itself requires. The salient point is that the theses about the presence of indigenous others emerged before the DNA argument appeared. So it is not created

ad hoc to respond to the DNA argument. What is relevant is what the text says. If the Book of Mormon text supports the presence of a large population of indigenous Amerindians already present when Lehi arrived, as I argue, then the DNA arguments are based on a false view of the Book of Mormon. It doesn't matter *when* it is realized that this is what the Book of Mormon text best supports. Anderson's issue about the evolution of the idea of indigenous others is merely a sideshow to the issues I raise.

2. *The "Great Leap" in population sizes Anderson claims is textually uncertain, but even if accepted, it supports my thesis rather than challenges it.* Anderson argues that my entire argument suffers because it doesn't consider the great increase in population numbers prior to 2 Nephi 5. I believe that the text suggests that indigenous others were already present by the time Nephi and his brothers separate from the Laman and Lemuel group in 2 Nephi 5:6. In fact, I had considered including a similar argument to Anderson's but to support *my* position! I ultimately didn't include it in my essay because it seems textually uncertain to me.

In 2 Nephi 5:6, Nephi writes: "I, Nephi, did take my family, and also Zoram and his family, and Sam, mine elder brother and his family, and Jacob and Joseph, my younger brethren, and also my sisters, and *all those who would go with me.* And *all those who would go with me* were those who believed in the warnings and the revelations of God; wherefore, they did hearken unto my words" (emphasis added). Nephi seems to be careful to name all of those in his family and the family of Zoram who went with him—but who were the others who believed in his words who went with him? If they were not family members or Zoram's family, who is left? It could be that Nephi is referring to members of Ishmael's family, but it also seems quite plausible to suggest that the text presumes that at the time Nephi separated from Laman and Lemuel, others besides those who arrived with Lehi's party were present.

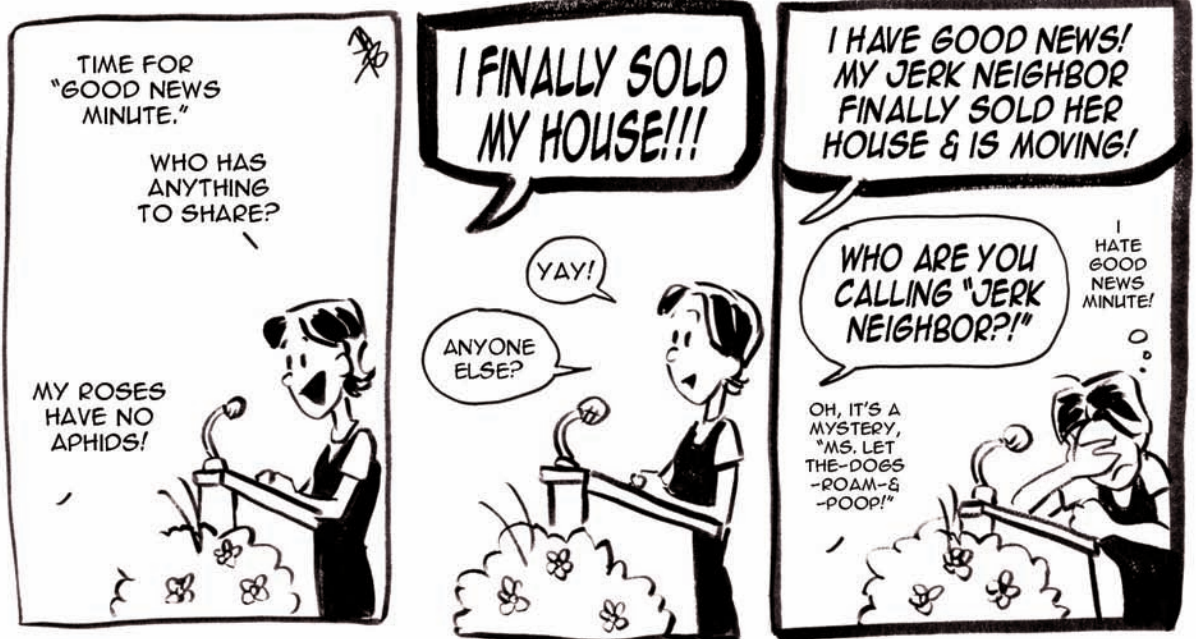
And since all of Anderson's instances showing the presence of indigenous others occur after this Great Separation in 2 Nephi 5:6, they don't challenge my thesis but rather support it.

Anderson also asserts that there is a textual incongruity given "the size of the necessary 'influx' of Amerindians into both Israelite groups before composition of 2 Nephi 5." What is this incongruity? He asserts that it is: "the narrative that yields far too few Israelites to build the temple, fight the wars, raise the crops, tend herds, and otherwise inhabit the society." Here, Anderson is mistaken about the text. Everything he cites to support the pre-Leap anomaly occurs *after* the Great Separation that I identify as the basis in the text for positing indigenous others, not before, as he asserts. In other words, his argument actually supports my thesis—to make sense, the text requires indigenous others.

However, while I accept that there were indeed already indigenous others present in the text by the time the issue of intermarriage with others by Laman and Lemuel's followers arises (as seems quite necessary in any event), I think the evidence Anderson cites is uncertain. Let's take the textual instances he thinks require a large population of unidentified others. How many people does it take to build a temple that has the same layout as the temple of Solomon but smaller? (2 Nephi 5:16) Well, temple shrines having the same general layout as the much larger temple of Solomon have been found at several places, including Shechem, Beth Shean, and elsewhere that are quite small and could easily be

built in a short period of time by three or four people. No need for a large population here. However, if a large number of indigenous others left with Nephi when he departed in the Great Separation, then certainly others would be available to assist him. What of the wars Anderson claims? Well, there just aren't any wars reported in the text prior to 2 Nephi 5:6. There are only squabbles between brothers. How many people does it take to raise crops? Not many. How many does it take to watch herds? Not many. The evidence Anderson cites just won't support his assertion of a population anomaly.

3. *Anderson's demands for express statements about who the indigenous are is unreasonable.* Anderson claims that the fact that the text assumes the presence of others somehow presents a challenge: "The challenge for Ostler . . . is to identify some basis in the text for claiming that those new 'extra' persons are evidence of indigenous Mayans or Islanders, not just evidence of the 'extra' actors who automatically result from the anomaly." Yet such a demand is patently unreasonable. He argues that the text logically requires a large population of others to make sense of the events in it—thus supporting my thesis—however, he claims that unless the text expressly states who these others are and expressly acknowledges that they are non-Lehites, such a large population of Lehites must be seen as problematic for the text. However, a moment of reflection will show that this basic argument is logically fallacious. To provide textual evidence that there are indigenous others who are non-Lehites and non-Israelites already present



JEANETTE ATWOOD

when Lehi arrives, it isn't necessary for the text to expressly say that the others are non-Lehites or non-Israelites.

4. *Anderson's arguments against the evidence I provide for intermarriage with non-Israelites are fallacious.* Anderson says he finds my argument for intermarriage unconvincing, yet he doesn't deal at all or respond in any way to the evidence itself. So why does he believe that the argument for intermarriage is unconvincing? Because "the insurmountable problem [the assumed great leap in population numbers] creates for Ostler's claim that Nephi would have seen intermarriage between indigenous Amerindians and Lamanites as a violation of Israelite law, is that by the time he is making his record, Nephi's own people are comprised principally of just such dark-skinned Amerindians." Where is Anderson's textual support for this claim? He cites none, and I can't imagine what he has in mind. Nephi makes no reference or inference to dark-skinned Nephites—and even the fact that there may have been indigenous Amerindians among Nephi's people doesn't require or even suggest that they interbred or intermarried at the time in question. But even if Anderson's claim were logical, how would it be a problem? Nephi mentions others who left with him in the Great Separation, so there is textual evidence that suggests the possibility of non-Lehites in his party before any of the events Anderson cites that supposedly require others. Anderson's argument is based on a series of nonsequiturs.

Yet Anderson follows these claims with the assertion that any notion of intermarriage with indigenous populations as being an abomination and breach of covenant is "nonsensical for Nephi to hold." Why so? Because "intermarriage with others would have been a necessity for Nephites themselves." This is a nonsensical claim. Just because a lot of people are doing something doesn't mean that it doesn't violate covenants. As an Israelite, Nephi would disapprove of intermarriage with non-Israelites even if many of those who followed him married others during his lifetime (though there is no textual support for the view that Nephi's followers had begun intermarrying during his lifetime). But even if they had begun to intermarry, why would this be a problem? Doesn't it just support my thesis that the text requires the presence of others to make sense of it? Anderson doesn't dispute the four instances where I show that the text mentions others already present who are not Lehites.

Citing Jacob 3:5–7, Anderson also asserts that the notion that intermarriage is an

"abomination" is "flatly contradicted by Jacob's unqualified praise of marriage as practiced by the Lamanites." Is Anderson serious? Jacob clearly and flatly states that marrying additional wives is an "abomination" and breach of covenant (Jacob 2:10, 16, 28, 31)—which I demonstrate is a term in Hebrew thought that refers to intermarriage with non-Israelites. Further, in this passage, Jacob isn't approving of "marriage as practiced by the Lamanites" but of the fact that they love their wives and children without practicing plural marriage. In fact, Jacob says nothing about their marriage practices except that they don't practice polygamy. Anderson's reading of the text is once again based on non-existent textual assumptions about what the text supposedly says.

Anderson's final argument that intermarriage as a breach of covenant is not convincing because "nowhere in any of the conceptual foreshadowing provided for the curse, nor in the eventual meticulous characterization of it as the fulfillment of the promises and prophecies made in the founding covenant with Nephi, is anything said or even hinted at about intermarriage between Israelites and indigenous peoples or any prohibition of it." This is what we lawyers refer to as a "diversionary argument," an argument that is correct as far as it goes but misdirects the jury away from the actual evidence. Anderson simply ignores the textual evidence that I cite. The text expressly refers to "mixing seed" as a breach of covenant, and mixing seed is clearly a reference to intermarriage and expressly says that those who do so will be "cut off from the presence of the Lord," which is the penalty for breach of covenant (as Anderson admits). See 2 Nephi 5:20–23. So Anderson is simply mistaken if he believes that pointing to lack of evidence for intermarriage elsewhere in the text shows that it is not mentioned in the texts that I cite.

Unlike Anderson, I don't have a reference to an anti-Mormon website where I have posted my arguments to refer readers to, but I suggest as places to start the articles located at <http://www.fairlds.org/apol/ai195.html> and <http://farms.byu.edu/publications/reviewvolume.php?volume=15&number=2>.



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