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MISSIONARY DISCOURSE

KUDOS TO JOHN-CHARLES DUFFY ON another solid contribution to the pages of SUNSTONE ("The New Missionary Discussions and the Future of Correlation," September 2005). This is a very perceptive essay, and its interpretations are probably quite correct in general.

Starting at the top of page 33, he considers whether the new missionary approach signals a "retreat" from our recent Christ-centered discourse, which we share with other Christians, in favor of a "Restoration-centered discourse (underscoring our) difference and uniqueness" (as per my own notion of "retrenchment"). He thinks such is not the case, seeing instead "an effort to integrate" Christ-centered (or "evangelical") discourse "with a relatively stronger focus on the Restoration" (page 34; see also notes 30–31). His alternative interpretation and mine are both reasonable. However, as I explained in *The Angel and the Beehive* (University of Illinois Press, 1994, 85–87), the retrenchment motif has always included renewed emphases both on the divinity of Jesus and on the unique LDS claims of Restoration through modern prophets. Such convergence as one might see in recent decades between the LDS and the Protestant evangelicals has taken the form mainly of a Christology that makes much more room for "grace" (as contrasted with "works"), manifesting an unofficial drift toward Protestant neo-orthodoxy (see 177–78; but especially O. Kendall White's book, *Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy: A Crisis Theology* (Signature Books, 1987).

A major oversight in my *Angel and Beehive* was my failure to make completely clear that there are always two "audiences" for official LDS discourse: (1) the *inside* audience that is the main target of *retrenchment* discourse, with its emphasis on the uniqueness of LDS claims, including Restoration and exclusive truth; and (2) the *outside* audience that is the main target of the more "ecumenical" message that the LDS are really not so different from other Christians, believing, as we members do, in Christ and his atonement. Since the missionary enterprise is the half-way station between these two audiences, it makes sense, as Duffy indicates, that the two emphases are combined in *Preach My Gospel*.

ARMAND L. MAUSS,
Irvine, California

BEARING CHRIST'S NAME

IN 1996, MY HUSBAND AND I RECEIVED a gift subscription to *Dialogue*. It came from Arthur Bassett, a very thoughtful ex-missionary with whom we had shared many discussions during his service in the British Mission. That first issue contained an essay by Frances Lee Menlove, "The Challenge of Honesty." Her wisdom, as well as her courage, has served as a source of comfort and inspiration for us ever since.

In the September 2005 issue of SUNSTONE, we read Menlove's devotional from this year's Salt Lake Sunstone Symposium, "Walking the Road to Emmaus." It has moved us so deeply that its message has remained with us, and I find myself fighting tears. She touches on a subject that has troubled me for a long time—"the darkness today that we can't ignore"—our unchristian attitude toward our gay sisters and brothers. But then Frances quotes those wonderful words of Teresa of Avila, "Christ has no body now on earth but yours. . . . Yours are the eyes through which the compassion of Christ is to look out on a hurting world." And this beautiful, loving exhortation serves as a reminder that we are members of a church that bears Christ's name. How can we ignore that and refuse to provide the sanctuary Christ would wish us to represent? Whether we are disciples or strangers in this world, the compassion and love of Christ can be shared and is sorely needed.

Frances Menlove's "Walking the Road to Emmaus" is one of the most meaningful messages I have read in a long time, and it provides the kind of focus that helps us see clearly who we are, just as her essay "The Challenge of Honesty" helped us seek what we really believed. Joanna Gardner's poem for Frances, her mother-in-law, is a wonderful example of understanding, shared pain, and real caring. Thank you for including these in the September SUNSTONE.

IRENE M. BATES
Pacific Palisades, California

THE TUG OF HOME

I LEFT THE CHURCH IN 1986 AFTER almost committing suicide. Toward the end of my time as a Mormon, I had come to believe that the God of Mormonism hated me and saw me as an abomination because I am gay. The only attitudes I heard or read

from Church members or leaders at the time confirmed this belief. I was convinced that I would be automatically excommunicated if Church leaders ever learned of my sexual orientation—whether or not I was a “practicing” homosexual. (Priesthood leaders had told me so.) I had already been disciplined (denied callings, a temple recommend, and the sacrament) for admitting to my bishop that I masturbated. Homosexuality seemed much worse in my mind than that. I believed that without my Church membership and without the love of God, I had no reason to live and had decided to end my life.

Fortunately, I encountered a more loving, grace-filled conception of God among Protestant and Catholic friends, and as I came to embrace that God, I found hope and a reason to live. Based on the assurances and testimony of these “gentile” friends, I began to pray again and through prayer, experienced a God who “knew me in my inmost parts,” who knew that I was gay because he had created me that way and who accepted me and loved me as I am. I actually had a pretty dramatic “conversion” experience, receiving a vision in which I saw the throne of God and hearing his voice assure me that he had a purpose for me in leaving the Church and that I did not need to fear for my family because he would take care of them. I shortly thereafter was baptized a Lutheran.

I completely cut my ties with Mormonism. To me, it had become so completely associated with negativity and hatred of me as a gay person that it made me physically ill even to think about the Church. I also remembered the rampant anti-intellectualism and the mistreatment of Latter-day Saints I truly admired, such as Mike Quinn. Only after many years of healing did I finally find myself able to begin to reevaluate the faith of my upbringing without the visceral pain, anger, and betrayal. I still sometimes struggle with those feelings.

Last summer, my attendance at the Salt Lake Sunstone Symposium was a kind of turning point. As Holly Welker described in her essay in the September SUNSTONE, “Why I Go to Sunstone,” what I expected to find at the symposium was radically and pleasantly different from what I did find. But more important, also like Holly, I realized that at some fundamental level, after almost twenty years outside the Church, I still felt an almost gut-level connection to it. Even after nearly two decades of having absolutely no visible connection to Mormons, being among Latter-day Saints at the symposium suddenly felt like a homecoming to me. At one presentation—Lavina Fielding Anderson’s critique

of *True to the Faith*—I actually experienced a “burning in the bosom”-type, Holy Ghost presence experience that brought tears to my eyes. It was a deeply unsettling and unexpected experience but something I couldn’t ignore. I am still trying to make sense of it. Was it the Holy Spirit telling me that it was time to return to my people? That the Spirit of God is at work among LDS free-thinkers, bringing about a new “marvelous work and a wonder?” Who knows. But it really opened a kind of door for me.

So I come back to Restoration Christianity first of all grounded in a deep, rock-bottom sense of the utterly unconditional, loving, grace-filled nature of the God proclaimed by Reformation Christianity. Perhaps it was to retrieve that sense of all-encompassing grace that God sent me on my sojourn into Protestantism in the first place. Just as, growing up Mormon, I was taught that other churches had “partial truths,” so I have come to realize that Mormonism has some “partial truths” as well and also has much to learn from other Christians and other faiths. I also come back feeling a bit raw, a bit vulnerable, with a sense that what is most important to me right now is the in-gathering of all God’s children, regardless of who we are, where we are, what doubts or issues we’re struggling with. I’ve also actually had a hunger to come to grips with “issues” I didn’t allow myself to examine before, when I was devout LDS. And I’m a bit dismayed to realize how bitter and raw some of the debates can sometimes turn.

I deeply appreciate Mike Quinn’s essay on doubt in the May 2005 SUNSTONE. The Paul Edwards quotation he cites in particular moves me deeply: “The church is a shell waiting to be opened in search of a pearl. If the shell turns out to be empty, and nothing other than a shell, remember that it has drawn us together....” I also extend a heartfelt thank-you to Frances Lee Menlove for her devotional in the September SUNSTONE. For so long, I was convinced that the only role Latter-day Saints might have in my journey of faith was in my experience of the crucifixion. Now to my delight at symposiums and in the magazine, I find Latter-day Saints with me on the Road to Emmaus.

I enjoyed Blake Ostler’s essay in the May issue as well. Though it would be dishonest not simply to admit that for me, accepting Brent Lee Metcalfe’s view of the Book of Mormon as “American Apocrypha” requires many fewer intellectual gymnastics than trying to conceive of how a literate people would never even write down the name of a single other Native American tribe encountered over the course of a thousand years. I think Latter-day Saints are not only “entitled” as Ostler states, “to read the Book of Mormon in light of the best scientific evidence we have available,” but also not to have to accept a proposition that violates our basic sense of reason or conscience, and that our honestly achieved convictions deserve to be honored. I believe as human beings, we have the right and responsibility to “test all things,” and



“Wow, sign the list and they DO show up for dinner!”

doubt all things, and hold only to that which honest trial has proven. I hope that all of us who have been marginalized in one way or another will extend to others the grace we want for ourselves, and learn to disagree in the context of a grace-filled community where we are all loved and respected. I am glad there are Latter-day Saints such as Brother Ostler who are working so hard to help all of us remain open to all the possibilities. I pray I will never refuse to listen, even when I find it hard to believe.

I'm not sure exactly where God is leading me in relation to the Church. I don't know if, as a "self-avowed, practicing homosexual" who has just celebrated the thirteenth anniversary of my loving relationship with my same-sex life-partner, it is even realistic to think that there will ever be an LDS home for me outside of occasional Affirmation conventions and Sunstone symposiums. And, of course, outside of whatever of community arrives in my mailbox with future issues of SUNSTONE magazine. I'm not quitting my feisty, loving, activist, little United Church of Christ congregation in Minneapolis any time soon though I definitely plan to pay a visit to the nearby LDS ward once in a while to see where the Holy Ghost leads. I am deeply grateful for those of you who have extended a long-exiled brother a welcome-back hug, and I look forward to embarking on some kind of new journey with you all, whatever that turns out to be.

JOHN D. GUSTAV-WRATHALL
Minneapolis, Minnesota

HISTORICAL OR BUST!

IN THE SEPTEMBER 2005 SUNSTONE, Dan Vogel's letter (5–6) and Simon Southerton's essay (70–73) discuss the possibility of Latter-day Saints coming to view the Book of Mormon as inspired but non-historical. Southerton even suggests that the "false dilemma of a 'historical-or-bust' view of the Book of Mormon" is an "extremism" that is "forcing many Latter-day Saints out of the Church" (my emphasis). Vogel and Southerton both raise this issue in the context of discussing DNA, but, of course, the idea that the Book of Mormon might be inspired or even "true" without being historical appeared well before the current DNA hubbub.

I believe, however, that such an approach to the Book of Mormon strikes at the very heart and soul of the Restoration and is entirely unacceptable. Joseph Smith made it clear right from the start that an angel had appeared to him and announced that "there

was plates of gold upon which there was engravings which was engraven by Maroni & his fathers the servants of the living God in ancient days and deposited by the commandments of God and kept by the power thereof and that I should go and get them" (1832 account). The Three Witnesses saw the angel and the plates, heard the voice of God, and specifically testified that the Book of Mormon is "a record of the people of Nephi, and also of the Lamanites, their brethren, and also of the people of Jared." The Eight Witnesses testified in concrete language that they saw the plates and hefted and felt them with their hands and examined the engravings, "all of which had the appearance of ancient work, and of curious workmanship."

Just as the divine delivery of the plates was a historical event that occurred at a specific time and place, the plates themselves relate historical events—most particularly the visit of the resurrected Christ to Lehi's descendants. By relating Christ's actual appearance, the Book of Mormon bears powerful testimony of his mission and of his atonement and also confirms the truth of the New Testament. Therefore, the claim that the Book of Mormon is not historical is first of all a denial of Christ. A fictional Christ appearing to fictional Lehiites hardly testifies of a real atonement. Secondly, it's a denial of Joseph Smith's prophetic calling. For what could it possibly mean to call him a prophet if the key event in his ministry—the event for which the Lord called not two or three witnesses but four or five times that many; the event that ushered in the restoration of all things and was accompanied not by one but by several ancient artifacts; the event canonized and accepted by the Saints as scripture—turns out to be bogus? (I find it interesting that Southerton can devote four pages to the Book of Mormon and the issue of prophetic authority without once mentioning the plates.)

Certainly, thoughtful individuals have reached many different conclusions about Joseph's story of the angel and the plates. Religious belief is an extremely personal thing, and we must all decide for ourselves what we want to believe and what we are capable of believing. I have chosen to believe Joseph's account and consider that belief an article of faith, not a proven fact. If Southerton experienced a crisis of faith when his scientific knowledge collided with his testimony, I empathize with that, just as I empathize with all who question their faith in the face of personal trials: illness, the tragic death of a loved one, or apparently unan-

swered—or unheard—prayers. But such empathy does not require me to compromise my own belief.

I am open to the possibility that the statement that the Lamanites are "the principal ancestors of the American Indians" (a claim that seems to be the main target of attacks by both Southerton and Thomas Murphy, even though it was never included in the Book of Mormon text itself) can be revised and rethought. I am not open, however, to jettisoning 3 Nephi 11:10–11. A fictional Book of Mormon is the LDS equivalent of cheap grace—having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof. Historical or bust? Absolutely.

LARRY MORRIS
Salt Lake City, Utah

SIMON SAYS, BUT THAT DOESN'T MAKE IT SO

"Back off man, I'm a scientist."

Dr. Peter Venkman, *Ghostbusters*

IN HIS SEPTEMBER 2005 SUNSTONE article, "DNA UBER-Apologues: Overstating Solutions—Understating Damages," Simon G. Southerton, a plant geneticist who was once an LDS bishop, purports to respond to my articles regarding DNA and the Book of Mormon (and also to a letter by Michael Quinn published as a sidebar within my article, "DNA Strands in the Book of Mormon," SUNSTONE, May 2005). I am glad for the opportunity to respond, because it provides a chance to demonstrate quite definitively that our real disagreement is not about the DNA evidence at all; rather, it is about Southerton's insistence on what I regard as an untenable and naive interpretation of what constitutes doctrine.

I believe Southerton correctly demonstrates an important point on one issue: DNA evidence is a challenge to a certain kind of faith some Church members still harbor. It is a faith easily upset and challenged by scholarship and science because it's based on false assumptions and unrealistic expectations. It's the kind of faith that Southerton insists must be adopted by Latter-day Saints or they are heretics. It is precisely this narrow view of faith—or more precisely the status of assumed cultural over-beliefs not based on a sound view of scripture—that I intend to challenge so that I can suggest that there is a more workable and mature view of faith that doesn't fall prey to such naive expectations.

WHAT SIMON DOESN'T SAY. It is first imperative to understand what the real disagree-

ment is about—and it isn't DNA evidence. Southerton asserts:

In response to letters to the editor about Part I of his essay, Ostler states that recent DNA studies have 'little or no bearing on the question of Book of Mormon historicity.' In taking this stand, Ostler seems to have cast his lot with the works of BYU anthropologist Michael Whiting and others in claiming that various factors such as genetic drift, founder effect, or bottleneck events make it difficult to use DNA to link the small prehistoric Book of Mormon groups with living populations.... Suffice it to say here that Ostler and those who believe these factors make DNA studies irrelevant are mistaken (page 70).

Southerton's assertion here is interesting because he doesn't disagree that it is quite consistent with the DNA evidence that a group the size of Lehi's could land in the New World somewhere and leave no genetic trace! Indeed, in his response to these issues on the Signature Books website, and to which he points readers in his article, Southerton expressly recognizes that this is the case in his response to so-called apologists for the Book of Mormon:

[Apologists for the Book of Mormon claim that] the bottleneck effect, genetic drift, and other technical problems would prevent us from detecting Israelite genes. In 600 BC there were probably several million American Indians living in the Americas. *If a small group of Israelites, say less than thirty, entered such a massive native population, it would be very hard to detect their genes today.* However, such a scenario does not square with what the Book of Mormon plainly states and with what the prophets have taught for 175 years (<http://www.signaturebooks.com/excerpts/Losing2.htm>, emphasis added).

Southerton's SUNSTONE article omits what he acknowledges here, that it is entirely consistent with DNA science that a small group of Lehites could be assimilated into a larger population (as I and the vast majority of LDS scholars who write about the Book of Mormon geography and populations agree) and leave no trace of DNA at all. In fact, the founder effect, genetic drift, and genetic bottlenecks are all recognized to have occurred among Amerindian populations at various times. So I am not the only one to throw in

with Whiting—so does Southerton! What Southerton disputes is not the DNA evidence but how we read the Book of Mormon. He insists that any reading that doesn't affirm that all Native Americans are descendants of Lamanites is heresy—but not because of what the Book of Mormon actually says. No, it is heresy because that is supposedly the "doctrine" LDS prophets affirmed for 175 years. I will discuss shortly why I regard his approach to "doctrine" and scripture in general as naive and entirely untenable.

It is also important to note that Southerton doesn't address any of the textual arguments from the Book of Mormon itself which I give to show that it speaks of others, non-Israelites, who were already present when Lehi landed. He ignores all of these arguments. He doesn't deal with any Book of Mormon text at all (indeed, his article contains only one citation to the Book of Mormon).

However, if one reads the Book of Mormon as I do (and as do the vast majority of LDS scholars who deal with issues of population and geography), then the DNA issue is not very enlightening. Given that any trace of Lehiite DNA could just disappear is consistent with the genetic evidence: we don't even know if we should expect to find any traces of Israelite DNA had there been Nephites and Lamanites. Yet without knowing what the probability is that we should expect to find such mtDNA traces, we have no basis for judging the probability that the lack of such DNA counts for or against the Book of Mormon. End of argument—and Southerton does nothing to respond to my argument except to agree with the assessment of mtDNA evidence on which it is based. Far from being the "smokescreen" about DNA science that Southerton accuses "apologists" of adopting, it is Southerton who engages in a smoke-screen by failing to address the real issue.

WHAT SIMON SAYS. Southerton claims that the DNA evidence and the conclusions that we can draw from it are all well established and entirely in accordance with what other scientists, linguists, anthropologists, and archeologists have been saying for decades:

[I]t is the LDS scholars, not scientists, who have changed their views dramatically. For most of the past century, there has been a virtual consensus among scientists that the ancestors of the Amerindians migrated out of Asia more than 14,000 years ago (71).

This assertion is wildly untrue. There have been radical changes in New World an-

thropology and specifically regarding the origin of the "first Americans." For the entire last century, scientists maintained that Asians migrated in a single migration over the Bering Strait about 11,600 years ago and that the first settlement was in what is present-day Clovis, New Mexico, (reached by a break in the ice flow of the last ice age). Now researchers fairly well agree that earlier migrations occurred from 40,000 to about 14,000 years ago and that they may have been by



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boat along the California and South American coastlands. Instead of Clovis, the first settlement now appears to be near present-day Monte Verde in southern Chile. The evidence also now seems to support the possibility of multiple migrations, and, as Southerton admits, evidence also points to European and African lineages that scientists merely assume must be post-1492. Southerton is far more conclusory and certain about what DNA evidence means than are scientists who deal with human anthropology. And he expresses that certainty in a way that is simply unwarranted by the evidence and state of the DNA science.

But, of course, as I've shown above, the DNA evidence is not the real issue. Southerton admits that a party the size of Lehi's could become genetically lost in the pre-existing population and leave no trace of DNA. So I believe that the real issue is about what the Book of Mormon says—except that is not how Simon sees it. He believes that the real issue is what the LDS prophets have said, and he virtually ignores the text.

However, Southerton does raise two issues that are somewhat related to the text. First, he asks why the Nephites are white if they are intermarrying with Amerindians. The answer is that is the Lamanites that are intermarrying and the Nephites continue to regard intermarriage as a breach of covenant.

There is strong textual evidence that the Lamanites were intermarrying, marked by Nephi's charge that the followers of Laman had breached the covenant and as a result their skin had become darker—and all those who “mix seed” also had the same darker skin. However, there is no reason to believe that the Nephites or those who followed Nephi intermarried and remained among the Nephites. Jacob expressly states that the Lord led the people out of Jerusalem so that he could “raise up unto me a righteous branch from the fruit of the loins of Joseph. . . . Wherefore, my brethren, hear me and hearken to the word of the Lord: For there shall not any man among you have save it be one wife; and concubines he shall have none” (Jacob 2:25-27). Jacob argues that God wants the Nephites to remain a pure line of descendants. Thus, they are prohibited from marrying other wives at a time when the only other available wives would be Native Americans.

The fact that the Nephites do not intermarry, though there are Native Americans who live among them, explains why the Lamanites always outnumber the Nephites in virutally every battle between them for six hundred years. The Book of Mormon is replete with references to the fact that the Lamanites vastly outnumber the Nephites—even when the Nephites are fighting a defensive battle in their own lands. The Lamanites intermarried freely, and so their population grew faster. If a Nephite violated the covenant, say by intermarriage, then such an act would have been tantamount to being shunned by the Nephites and becoming a dissenter who joins the Lamanites. The Book of Mormon is replete with references to Nephite dissenters who go over to the Lamanites. So the Nephites remain white because they rejected intermarriage as a breach of covenant.

Southerton also suggests that High Nibley is wrong to argue that the Jaredites traversed the steppes of Asia on their journey to the New World. Southerton argues that Nibley bases his entire view on the assertion that the Jaredites traveled to that quarter “where there never had man been” (Ether 2:5). Well, that isn't Nibley's entire argument. He shows that the movement into the “valley of Nimrod” by the Jaredites would take them in a northeasterly direction into Asia (Ether 2:1). When they continue in their journey, they continue in the same direction (Ether 2:4) which would take them into Asia. Nibley also points to the cultural similarities between the Asiatic nomads of the steppes region and the Jaredites. Southerton asserts that the Book of Ether “gives no details of this lengthy migra-

tion” (72). I agree that it doesn't give us “details,” but it gives us enough to suggest that the people of Jared traveled eastward toward a “seashore” and the “great sea” that would bring them to the New World (Ether 2:13). A simple glance at the map shows that travel through Asia is the only candidate for such a trip.

Southerton also argues that Nibley is wrong to associate Asia with what is described in the Book of Ether because “Nibley's claim about the steppes of Asia being a place largely uninhabited by man prior to the Jaredite migration is wrong; humans have inhabited large portions of central Asia for more than 20,000 years” (72). I am glad that Southerton raised this issue, for this assertion points to a vital fact about how Southerton reads scripture differently than I do—or how Nibley did.

Southerton sees scripture as if it were written from a God's-eye point of view so that if it says there is an area where no man had been, it must mean that no person had ever been in the whole of central Asia before. Since God would know whether anyone had ever been there, if the Book of Mormon asserts that no one had ever been there, it means that if anyone was there, then the book is wrong. However, Nibley and I see scripture as written by humans from a human point of view, though inspired by God. Even today, one could easily travel through the entirety of central Asia without encountering another person. The mere fact that there were small villages located within a vast region of uninhabited area doesn't negate the assertion made by the brother of Jared, because, from his perspective it was true.

WHAT BEST SERVES FAITH? In the concluding section of his SUNSTONE article, Southerton joins what has become a small cottage industry of ex-Mormons who have lost their faith who want to give advice to Mormons about how they can best maintain their faith and also about the shape that such faith should take. Brent Metcalfe, Dan Vogel, Tom Murphy, and Southerton are all ex- or disaffected Mormons who argue that giving up on the historicity of the Book of Mormon will serve Mormons better than believing that it is what it claims to be. Such suggestions sound absurd to me. It takes more than a little arrogance and self-deception to argue that what would not work for them is what would work best for those who maintain their faith. My question to them is: If giving up on the historicity of the Book of Mormon has not proven sufficient for you to maintain your faith, what makes you think that it would

work best for someone else?

I believe Southerton's experience is a very good case study to see whether his suggestions have merit. Southerton was a bishop in Brisbane, Australia, when he ran across an article by a BYU professor who suggested that members who didn't believe in a worldwide flood were deficient in faith. That article upset Southerton because he didn't believe in a worldwide flood (presumably because such a belief is scientifically untenable). So he began to search on the internet about what other Latter-day Saints believe on that issue. While researching, he found the DNA results about Amerindians. As he tells the story, he went to bed one night in August of 1998 a believer and woke up the next morning a dissident critic. He immediately abandoned his post as bishop and became inactive. (See <http://www.exmormon.org/whyift125.htm>.)

Southerton's experience is instructive to me for several reasons. First, I would expect a scientist to rigorously look at various possibilities and assess them after extended, careful study, thinking, and analysis. Apparently all of Southerton's critical thinking, research, and hard work occurred one night while he was sleeping. I am puzzled by his response to such evidence. Had he looked a little harder, he would have seen that many of us who consider ourselves faithful Latter-day Saints don't believe in a worldwide flood and even question the authorship of the Pentateuch. Many of us, I included, accept the JPED theory of the Pentateuch (or some version of it). We believe there very likely was a flood but that it wasn't worldwide. It could appear that way to those involved in the flood, however, since there was water as far as they could see.

Now if it was okay as a bishop to believe that the flood was not worldwide, despite the fact that earlier LDS prophets clearly believed in a worldwide flood, why must we believe that LDS prophets' opinions about the Lamanites have the status of "scripture"—something that must be believed if one is to avoid being a heretical Latter-day Saint? I wrote my 1987 article, "The Book of Mormon as a Modern Expansion of an Ancient Text," to address just such nonsensical notions of revelation and scripture.

Southerton follows this by nonsensically arguing that we must reject the historicity of the Book of Mormon not because of what the text says, but because of what many Latter-day Saints have believed about it. I acknowledge that for those who have unrealistic expectations about what a person who becomes a prophet knows, my suggestion that a prophet could err must be unsettling. Yet such faith *should* be challenged because it is

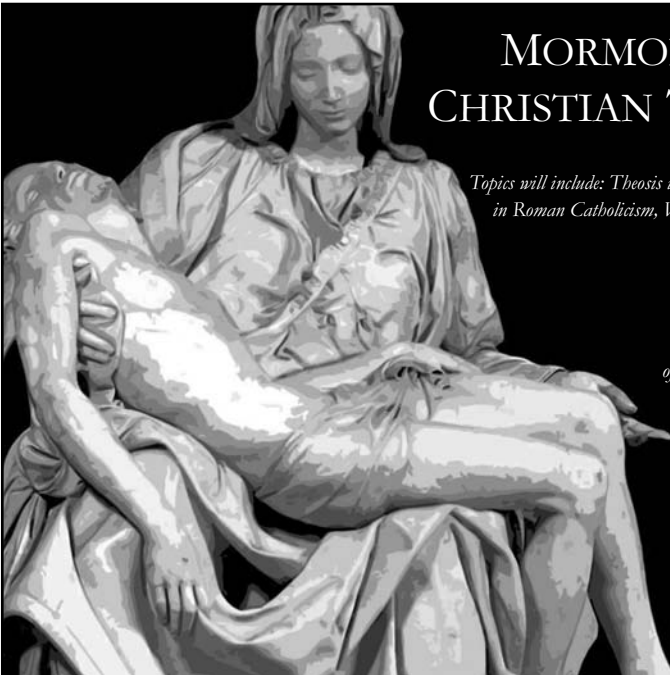
not realistic. Perhaps challenging it should be done more gently than I have sometimes done, but that's a question of temperament, not logic. Southerton's approach puzzles because it is standard LDS doctrine that prophets can err, that a prophet is a prophet only when speaking as a prophet, that we don't know it all already because there is still a lot to be revealed, that "doctrine" is what is contained in scripture accepted by common consent of the Saints, and so forth. Thus, Southerton's assertions that the Church faces "a major contradiction in doctrine and scientific finding" arises only because he includes in "doctrine" what just isn't doctrine but prophets' personal views that change over time.

In this regard, a wise statement made by Wendy Ulrich at the August 2005 FAIR conference seems quite appropriate:

I am particularly interested in the impact of betrayal on religious belief, because it seems to be at the heart of matters that cause people the most grief about the Church. I have noticed that many of the people I have known who have left the Church did not do so because they believed too little, but because they believed too much. In their excessive idealism, they have held Church leaders or God to expectations which were inevitably disappointed, and they have felt betrayed. They have not believed God when He told them that ours is a lonely, dreary world where we

will surely die, and they have chosen instead to believe another version of reality, one which claims that they can be protected from being molested, disappointed, or made afraid. They have been angry at God or other Church leaders for not keeping promises which God has not, in fact, made. I note with interest that of all the names for the Savior in holy writ, He is never called the Preventer. Agency is the plan, and this means that all of us, including Church leaders, learn by our mistakes and are subject to misinformation, blindness, hubris, and error. The old joke is too often true: In the Catholic church everyone says the pope is infallible but nobody believes it; and in the Mormon church everybody says the prophet is fallible but nobody believes it. (To read Ulrich's full remarks, see <http://www.fairlds.org/pubs/conf/2005UlrW.html>.)

I suggest that faith is best served by reasonably distinguishing between scripture or official doctrine and merely cultural overbeliefs accepted by the Saints. Rather than throwing the baby out with the bathwater—in Southerton's case, throwing out the historicity of the Book of Mormon along with erroneous views of some Latter-day Saints—I suggest that Latter-day Saints are entitled to have their beliefs informed by science but must always realize that scientific findings and theories are always tentative and subject



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to revision. I suggest that Southerton's position will not work because it ignores that DNA evidence cannot tell us about a small group of Lehighites who arrived in a New World already populated by Amerindians. Southerton's argument commits the logical fallacies of "hasty generalization" and the "undistributed middle," in addition to the fact that the argument doesn't have a logically valid structure. This is the argument I made in Part I of my series. That Southerton fails to address it suggests to me that he realizes he jumped off the ship of the faithful too early and abandoned his post as bishop based on poor thinking done in his sleep.

My final gripe with Southerton is his assertion that apologists are forcing people like him out of the Church. He asserts that "many apologists are not only misrepresenting the molecular research but also creating a climate that is forcing many Latter-day Saints out of the Church" (70). And later, "But wouldn't it temper the damage to prophetic authority if today's prophets were to act boldly in reiterating strong faith in a miraculous Book of Mormon without forcing a particular interpretation of what that might mean?" (72). The notion that Southerton and others are being forced out of the Church is a remarkable example of a refusal to accept accountability for one's decisions. The Church hasn't forced any interpretation but has followed Joseph Smith and his revelations which assert that the Book of Mormon is the record of ancient peoples. The Church didn't force me to take any position on the Book of Mormon; I do so freely, by choice. And so does Southerton and those he claims are being "forced" out of the Church. The reality is that I know several faithful Latter-day Saints who hold temple recommends but reject Book of Mormon historicity or still question it. The difference is that they haven't called United Press International to claim that they are being excommunicated for writing books instead of for their admitted adultery. They haven't written books attacking the Church and the Book of Mormon.

Even now, Southerton does not affirm what he says that he wants the prophets to affirm. He doesn't say that the Book of Mormon is miraculous or inspired. On the blogs for ex-Mos, Southerton puts on quite a different face. He is two-faced on this issue, presenting one face for those who attack the Church openly (and often in the most vile language imaginable) and yet another face for the readers of SUNSTONE. How can Southerton say that he should be excommunicated for attacking the Book of Mormon

because his work on that is so much more damaging to the Church than is his admitted adultery, and then turn around and claim that the Church should change to allow people like him room to remain in the faith. This is a man who was begging to be kicked out of the Church so he could publicize his position to wrench a change out of the Church. He was begging to be kicked out because he is dangerous to the faith of the faithful, and yet he turns around and purports to give spiritual advice to faithful Saints, telling them they are best served by throwing out the Book of Mormon for what it claims to be. Is such a view really something that can be asserted in good faith and without massive doses of self-deception?

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BOOK OF MORMON DISCUSSION MOVING TO THE SUNSTONE BLOG

THE PAST FIVE issues of SUNSTONE, including this one, have hosted an important and extended discussion about the Book of Mormon. Prompted initially by Blake T. Ostler's challenge to the conclusions some scholars draw about the relevance of recent DNA studies of present-day Amerindians to the Book of Mormon historicity debate, the exchanges carried out in rejoinder essays and the letters to the editor section have been vigorous and informative. Given the vital importance of the Book of Mormon to LDS theology and Mormonism's sense of identity as a faith tradition, SUNSTONE has been pleased to devote significant space in its pages to this issue. And we're very grateful to the writers who have contributed to our understanding of the issues in this debate.

Based on subscriber feedback as well as our staff's own sense that the broader issues of this discussion have been well represented in SUNSTONE pages, the letters to the editor here, and the essays by Kevin Christensen and R. Dennis Potter (pages 66–73) will serve as the close to this discussion in the magazine for at least the next several issues or until significant new angles of inquiry appear.

The decision to close the discussion in SUNSTONE has been made easier by the recent launch of SunstoneBlog.com, a blog in which we have created a space for this discussion of the DNA challenge to Book of Mormon historicity to continue. As the letter exchanges and monographs demonstrate, many matters in this discussion still remain that allow for a great range of interpretive disagreement, and the blog format is well-suited for this kind of direct interaction over specifics.

I look forward to chatting with you in the "Bloggernacle"!

DAN WOTHERSPOON
Editor, SUNSTONE