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## Imitation Gospels and Christ's Book of Mormon Ministry

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## Imitation Gospels and Christ's Book of Mormon Ministry

Richard Lloyd Anderson

Consumer consciousness hardly protects the buyer of deceptive literature. Historical novels are on the fiction shelves, but some books in the same class are sold as ancient religious documents. Certain publishers keep printing these items simply because they sell. But they well deserve this label: “Warning: This imitation history may be hazardous to your spiritual health—it may warp your sense of logic and accuracy.”

There are many types of apocrypha. The traditional apocrypha of the Old Testament is bound in many Bibles, especially Roman Catholic translations. This could almost be called the “canonical apocrypha”; it is history and literature from Judaism in the intertestamental period. A second collection was discovered at Qumran, and reaches into the New Testament cen-

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tury. These Dead Sea Scrolls include scriptures and interpretations that show expectations of Jewish puritans contemporary with earliest Christianity. A third apocryphal group is the Nag Hammadi Library, postdating the New Testament but containing trace elements from early Christianity. These documents reveal the theology of “off-brand” Christians veering to mysticism and the secret tradition.

Joseph Smith inquired about the first category above and received the answer that the true and false were mingled and needed to be tested by the Spirit. The other two collections just mentioned are in similar time frames, so it is logical to extend such a rule to them. Much of the Dead Sea Scrolls plus the Nag Hammadi find are published in translation now, and they can be readily examined.<sup>1</sup> Popularizers often make exaggerated claims about them, but theories must be tested by the standard of known revelations and history. After all, the Mormon view of seeking the Spirit first involves careful study of existing data. Modern revelation does not suggest that God will reward laziness, but rather that he will supplement the knowledge of the one who diligently studies and inquires (D&C 9:7–8).

There are other categories of ancient apocrypha. R. H. Charles published one large volume of the traditional apocrypha, and a second large volume of Old Testament “pseudepigrapha.”<sup>2</sup> He used this term because the books typically were written under the name of an Old Testament prophet or patriarch. It is well known, for example, that Jude’s quotation on the Lord coming with ten thousand saints comes out of a then-existing Book of Enoch (Jude 14). Some scholars accept the possibility that segments of these pseudepigraphic books might actually descend from the Old Testament personalities whose names appear as authors. Yet the writings are often fanciful, containing strange and endless detail about heavens above heavens.

Another apocryphal category would be the types of books that M. R. James published as the “Apocryphal New Testament.”<sup>3</sup> These voluminous writings from early Christian centuries include imitation Gospels, Acts, and Letters. Some overlap the Nag Hammadi writings, and some are improved stories about Christ and the Apostles, featuring dramatic miracles that exag-

gerate the Bible record. Pious invention seems predominant here. We are in the world of the boy Jesus performing miracles of convenience, whereas the Christ of the Gospels strongly resisted such things. For instance, when Joseph found a beam too short, Jesus miraculously extended it, according to one apocryphal gospel. These categories of Old and New Testament pseudepigrapha can be mined for sensational stories. A book recently published for the Mormon market utilized apocrypha about Christ and the patriarchs, admitting in the preface: "This study is by no means exhaustive or complete, and makes no claim to doctrinal accuracy. The items included have been selected in view of their novel information, and their interesting charm, particularly in reference to the Christian reader."<sup>4</sup>

If testing by the Spirit succumbs to testing by "novel information," we are historically careless. Much of the New Testament apocrypha is obviously religious fiction. In one case we have contemporary proof of pious invention, for its author was disciplined by the Church for faith-promoting dishonesty. Tertullian speaks about the Acts of Paul and Thecla, adding that "the presbyter who composed that writing, as if he were augmenting Paul's fame from his own store, after being convicted and confessing that he had done it from love of Paul, was removed from his office."<sup>5</sup> Is "testing by the Spirit" appropriate in such a case? If the book is known to be fraudulent, or the content gives every evidence that it is, prayer about its truth is empty and perpetuation of its stories a waste of time.

Another apocryphal Christian vein might yield low-grade ore for careful smelting. Early church sources occasionally quote sayings of the Lord that circulated orally or from an unknown written record. Most famous is the "Gospel" saying quoted by Paul in his farewell to the Ephesian elders: "Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). Paul undoubtedly had tradition from Jesus and gave the thought accurately. Several hundred other sayings are attributed to the Lord, enabling a scholar like Jeremias to select out some two dozen "Unknown Sayings of Jesus" that were probably given by Jesus but not preserved in the Gospels.<sup>6</sup> One technique is to ask how the *agrapha*, the "unwrit-

ten” teachings of Jesus, harmonize and correlate with known teachings, an issue which has logical relevance to Jesus’ American ministry.

This survey of apocryphal categories leads to the last and least. This type can only be compared to the ancient fictional gospels; but these are recent and were therefore called “modern apocrypha” by Goodspeed, who included a couple of medieval examples. Since all are later than the New Testament apocrypha of the third century and beyond, when orthodoxy was being defined, it makes sense to take anything from the Middle Ages on as “modern apocrypha.” After listing the fifteen that Goodspeed treated in his revised edition, Enslin simply labels them non-historical: “without exception, they are worthless trash and the rankest forgeries.”<sup>7</sup> But the flaws in source and content so apparent to historians are not as easily seen by the casual reader. Some items on Goodspeed’s list have circulated among Latter-day Saints, occasionally breaking into semi-official publications and pulpit speeches.<sup>8</sup>

Goodspeed pointed out in his prefaces that it is an important service to identify deceptive scriptures. Without actively collecting these, he analyzed over a dozen New Testament counterfeits in his 1931 *Modern Apocrypha* and the 1956 revision, *Famous “Biblical” Hoaxes*.<sup>9</sup> The subject has now been updated by Per Beskow, a Swedish scholar, who emphasizes European origins of many of Goodspeed’s items.<sup>10</sup> Beskow adds several frauds, some of which postdate Goodspeed’s surveys. He also challenges Mormons studying this subject by adding a chapter on the Book of Mormon as modern mythology about Jesus. Thus the following list of invented records invites comparison with the Book of Mormon. Its translation is of course modern, but is it apocryphal in the sense of being non-historical? It will be seen that the Book of Mormon must be sharply distinguished from modern apocrypha in both origin and content.

## MODERN APOCRYPHAL GOSPELS SURVEYED

The following list selects works from medieval or recent times that imitate New Testament narrative about Christ. The list in-

cludes the major pseudo-gospels discussed by Goodspeed and Beskow, adding examples of spiritualist productions. These modern frauds have no documentary connection to antiquity or to the ancient apocryphal categories discussed above. Their origin and content will be summarized before generalizations are made about them.

### The Aquarian Gospel

Current editions profile author Levi S. Dowling, who made a career in the ministry and in religious publishing.<sup>11</sup> In 1908 he printed this radical revision of the Gospels, and he died three years later at age sixty-seven. His widow spoke of forty years of “study and silent meditation” to learn to commune with higher powers and the cosmic record archives.<sup>12</sup> Visel, the Goddess of Wisdom, appeared and authorized Dowling to write the full story of Christ. The book “was transcribed between the early morning hours of two and six—the absolutely ‘quiet hours.’ ”<sup>13</sup> Beginning with the format of the birth narratives, the Aquarian Gospel next fills the unknown years with Jesus’ study and travel to India, Tibet, Persia, Greece, and Egypt. It then proceeds with an enlarged narrative of Jesus’ ministry, expanding the resurrection accounts greatly. Its events in known lands are shallow and contain historical contradictions.

### The Archko Volume

The supposed editor of a large find of writings was William D. Mahan, a Missouri Presbyterian preacher who was disciplined in 1885 by his local presbytery for plagiarizing Lew Wallace’s *Ben Hur* and publishing “Eli’s Story of the Magi” as a fraudulent ancient document. His repentance was all too brief, for a couple of years later he published many more documents on the life of Christ, recollections from the Bethlehem shepherds, a Bethlehem rabbi, Joseph, Mary, Gamaliel, Caiaphas, and Pilate. Proof of borrowing and historical illiteracy is clear.<sup>14</sup> Yet Mahan weakly justified his first work as follows: “It is paying us about 20 dollars per day. . . . The book can’t do any harm, even if it were

false, but will cause many to read and reflect that otherwise would not.”<sup>15</sup> He claimed that his documents came from huge parchments found in the Vatican Library and the library at Saint Sophia in Constantinople. But custodians there denied the existence of such sources, and the scholars who supposedly helped him translate the documents are unknown.

### The Crucifixion and the Resurrection of Jesus by an Eyewitness

This “gospel” about Jesus is narrated by a supposed member of the Essene order, who explains that his white-robed brethren were in the background helping the “experienced physician” Nicodemus keep Jesus alive for a time after the crucifixion. In the mists they were mistaken for angels, and Jesus returned to visit his disciples, who did not know all the facts and thus got the wrong idea that there was a resurrection.<sup>16</sup> The “translation” goes back to a supposed Latin manuscript found in a house in Alexandria formerly belonging to Greek monks and before that to the Essene order.<sup>17</sup> In reality, no one knows of anything older on this document than its German publication in 1849.<sup>18</sup>

### Death Warrant of Jesus Christ

This is the heading of the story and document that circulated in the newspapers of the United States in late 1839, borrowing from its first known appearances in France earlier that year. The news of this alleged discovery came to Nauvoo, where it was printed some two years later.<sup>19</sup> The delay may indicate skepticism, mirrored in the reprinting of the document in the *History of the Church*, where an editor reconstructing Joseph Smith’s attitude gave a cautious endorsement: “Relics like these, properly authenticated, have about them an inexpressible sacredness.” In the first publication of this comment, historian B. H. Roberts indicated that he was skeptical about the “Death Warrant” and emphasized the words “properly authenticated.”<sup>20</sup> This supposed decree of Pilate is mercifully concise, giving six short charges plus the execution order. Newspapers gave the source as a

copper plate in a marble vase in Italy. Goodspeed noted that such a remarkable find was never reported, and such a plate was unknown. The story has been traced to a more elaborate decree of Pilate that was alleged to be a fraud when it was circulated in the sixteenth century.<sup>21</sup>

## The Gospel of Barnabas

Not merely a library curiosity, this document nearing 300 pages is actively distributed by Islamic organizations to picture Jesus as a marvelous prophet but subordinate to Mohammed.<sup>22</sup> The source is described on the title page of the scholarly edition: “edited and translated from the Italian ms. in the Imperial Library at Vienna.” But no ancient source shows that this work existed before the medieval manuscript.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, this gospel quotes definitions of God that postdate early Christianity by many centuries; it is no historical Jesus that tells Philip that God is “incorporeal, uncompounded, immaterial, of the most simple substance.”<sup>24</sup> It jumbles gospel incidents and adds visions and long discourses, including Jesus giving Islamic descriptions of the joys of paradise and the terrors of hell.

The “story line” is that Barnabas had to write to give the true primitive gospel because Paul and others were deceived into “calling Jesus son of God.”<sup>25</sup> And in contradiction to every New Testament list of Apostles, Barnabas is made one of the original Twelve. Moreover, Peter is demoted in the narrative and rebuked as Satan for saying, “Thou art Christ, son of God.” This is an astounding reversal of the historical Matthew, where Jesus called Peter “blessed” for knowing that very truth, which was “revealed” to Peter by “my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 16:16–17).<sup>26</sup> Superimposed on the gospel preaching is the repeated insistence of Jesus that he is not the Messiah, for the true one will come after: “Mohammed is his blessed name.”<sup>27</sup> The purpose of this pseudo-Barnabas is obviously to reduce Jesus to a forerunner for Mohammed, the basic point of view of the Koran. That holy book says of Jesus’ crucifixion, “They did not kill him and they did not crucify him, but one was made to resemble him.”<sup>28</sup> This format is developed in the Gospel of Barnabas as



the story of angels removing Jesus in Gethsemane while the disciples were sleeping, Judas being mistaken for Jesus and crucified, and Jesus finally redelivered to reassure his disciples.

### The Gospel of the Holy Twelve

The medium of receiving this long gospel was the Reverend G. J. R. Ouseley, who left the Church of England and associated with several para-Christian movements before his death in 1906.<sup>29</sup> Some of his writings promoted vegetarianism, also a prominent theme in his revealed additions to the New Testament. His preface is vague and apologetic, speaking of “editors” in the plural but occasionally identifying one “editor.” Thus in one edition the editor-author can be traced only by an obscure note mentioning his other writings.<sup>30</sup> Ouseley’s “explanatory preface” claims that his gospel was “for the first time translated from the Aramaic,” coming from its depository “in one of the monasteries of the Buddhist monks in Tibet.” But this archive source is dropped, since the book was revealed by deceased personalities: “By them it was translated from the original, and given to the editors in the flesh, to be supplemented in their proper places, where indicated, from the ‘Four Gospels’ (A.V.) revised where necessary by the same.”<sup>31</sup> There were ancient apocryphal Gospels of the Twelve, but their known contents have no relationship to this modern gospel.

The result is 160 pages devoted to Jesus, generally a close adaptation and rearrangement of material from the canonical Gospels. The modern interpolations stress that Jesus was kind to animals and avoided eating flesh. For instance, he set caged birds free and healed a beaten horse. His vegetarianism meant that he ate the Passover meal without any lamb and even avoided the fish of the miracles of the loaves and fishes. Instead, the five thousand were fed with “six loaves and seven clusters of grapes.” The subsequent miracle of feeding the four thousand with loaves and fishes is also changed: Ouseley has a woman on a camel coming by with five melons to furnish the approved diet. The tone of other incidents is sentimental: Jesus is a sort of mythical St. Francis with birds singing to him and animals tamely coming to his feet. Indeed, the teacher benevolent to nature would not

wither the fig tree, so Matthew and Mark are rewritten to have Peter cursing the tree out of narrow spite and being rebuked by Jesus.

This altered messiah gives altered teachings. One version of the Lord's Prayer addresses "our Father-Mother, Who art above and within: hallowed by Thy sacred Name in twofold Trinity."<sup>32</sup> This bisexual God is repeatedly referred to in the Sermon on the Mount, which is severely amended with creative additions and a number of Jesus' other teachings relocated there. Jesus' added pronouncements sound much like those of an Eastern mystic: "I cast the law into the air, and it was made alive by the Spirit of the Living One that filleth all things and dwelleth in every heart."<sup>33</sup> Ouseley recasts the Transfiguration with "twelve rays' as of the sun" breaking out of the cloud of God's presence, and Jesus standing in "the six glories" and giving the new twelve commandments. Moses' ten were largely repeated, with injunctions to protect "all creatures that suffer wrong" and avoid eating flesh or "anything which bringeth disorder to your health or senses."<sup>34</sup>

### The Essene Gospel of Peace

Similar to Ouseley's gospel and possibly influenced by it, the Gospel of Peace was published in English in 1937, but the word *Essene* was added after the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls (which were produced by the Essene community at Qumran). These changes in theory are symbolized by the evolution of the early title, *The Gospel of Peace of Jesus Christ by the Disciple John*, to the present *Essene Gospel of Peace* with no mention of John.<sup>35</sup> A manuscript was claimed from the beginning but with no verification. Yet the current title page is specific: "The Third Century Aramaic Manuscript and Old Slavonic Texts Compared, Edited and Translated by Edmond Bordeaux Szekely."<sup>36</sup> Underneath is a picture of two scrolls lying in rock and dirt. The absence of a caption gives the clear impression that these are Szekely's originals, though in reality they are the two parts of the copper scroll found in cave three at the Dead Sea, a document listing physical locations of buried money and objects.<sup>37</sup> In the first edition Szekely claimed that he had translated "only about a

third of the complete manuscripts which exist in Aramaic in the archives of the Vatican and in old Slavonic in the Royal Archives of the Hapsburgs (now the property of the Austrian Government).”<sup>38</sup> But Per Beskow communicated with both locations with negative results. The head of the Vatican department, where Szekely claimed to work, reported: “This author’s book is known to me, and I can assert categorically that no such manuscript of an Aramaic Gospel is possessed by the Vatican Archives. Moreover, Szekely’s name has not been found in the card index of scholars admitted to the Archives.”<sup>39</sup> This lack of factual support would be expected from an author who wrote a book called *The Discovery of the Essene Gospel of Peace* and devoted less than a paragraph to the actual source and specific circumstances of the discovery.<sup>40</sup>

Publicity notes in the present editions claim nearly a million copies distributed. But the content resembles the mystical gnostic writings of the third century more than the scripture-based Essene writings of the first century. Szekely remained vague until his death on details of how he obtained his information, claiming that the record “speaks for itself” with “profound truths.”<sup>41</sup> The canonical Gospels have movement and story, but this “Essene” gospel stands in one place and philosophizes. It features Jesus the nature healer, teaching health by immersion in the elements of air, sun, and water. The Christ of the Gospels performed healing incidental to his message, but the “Essene” Jesus stresses mystic love and natural healing. Harmony with the elements is the redundant theme here, so foreign to the canonical Gospels. The apex of this pseudo-Essenism is the second prayer to mother earth, set side by side with the Lord’s Prayer: “Our Mother which art upon the earth, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, and thy will be done in us, as it is in thee. . . . And lead us not into sickness, but deliver us from all evil, for thine is the earth, the body, and the health.”<sup>42</sup>

### Letter of Benan

This German work appeared in 1910 as a translation of a Coptic papyrus of the fifth century, the “editor” claiming that he

had worked thirty-four years on the text. Soon after its publication Coptic scholar Carl Schmidt of Berlin publicly requested that the original be produced; when this was not done, he exposed the unhistorical features of the story. It is half romance, built around the recollections of an Egyptian physician Benan, who studied medicine with Jesus when they were young men together in Egypt. Seeking Jesus later, he came to Jerusalem after the Crucifixion, witnessed the Resurrection, and informed the women who came to the tomb. The work is a mere curiosity today.<sup>43</sup>

### Letter of Lentulus

Many medieval copies of this description of Christ are known, but no ancient manuscript or reference in ancient literature has been found.<sup>44</sup> A Roman administrator, Lentulus, supposedly records his impressions of Jesus, but his adoring language sounds more as if from the monastery than from an impressed man of affairs. Many prefaces to the Lentulus description exist, and they are hopelessly contradictory. One calls him “consul of Jerusalem,” an impossible title because the consuls held the top civil positions in the empire and their offices did not appear outside of Rome itself.<sup>45</sup> Other prefaces call Lentulus an “official” in Judea, or governor of Judea. But those appointed over Judea are known, and a Lentulus is not among them. Some copies do not even allege a letter or a Lentulus, but begin, “It is read in the annal-books of the Romans,” which fits with the fact that the description of Jesus in Josephus begins with language resembling this pious tribute.<sup>46</sup>

### Oahspe

A tiny fraction of this “Kosmon Bible” claims to report the historical Jesus. Its author was John Newbrough, a dentist who made a hobby of spiritualism for years. Finally claiming purification to reach the higher spirits, he began his scribal work in 1881 without any record: “One morning the light struck both my hands on the back and they went for the typewriter, for some

fifteen minutes, very vigorously. I was told not to read what was printed. . . . For fifty weeks this continued . . . and then it ceased, and I was told to read and publish Oahspe."<sup>47</sup> The time of day was before dawn, and the coming of daylight terminated the inspiration each day. The result was published in 1882 and reads like a science-fiction view of history, with strange mortal and extraterrestrial beings that control and conflict. Jesus appears incidentally as an astounding contradiction to gospel and Jewish realities: "In the thirty-sixth year of Joshu's age he was stoned to death in Jerusalem by the Jews that worshipped the heathen Gods."<sup>48</sup> The "Es'eans" are the ones who see the star and signs of Jesus' birth, and before the Transfiguration Moses and Elias visit Paradise, which was crowded "by an influx of more than a thousand million visitors for the occasion." Jesus' appearance to Moses and Elias is quite incidental after this celestial scene of vast throngs filing before the divine throne "to be followed by two days' recreation."<sup>49</sup> The narrative picks up earthly events with a brief glimpse of Jesus' condemnation of the "hypocrites and blasphemers," his death by stoning, and the notable absence of his resurrection: "And Jehovih sent a chariot of fire, and bore his soul to Paradise."<sup>50</sup> But everything about Jesus is a tiny speck in the 800-page cosmic handbook, which even notes the Mormons as organized by an inferior, evil God.<sup>51</sup>

### The Occult Life of Jesus of Nazareth

This is essentially a Victorian novel of over three hundred pages of stock adjectives and sentimental clichés. Mercifully resting on library shelves, it was revived by current cosmic spiritualists. That is the only resurrection the book knows, for it ends Jesus' life with the last moments of crucifixion. Reprints were first made by the Progressive Thinker Publishing House, so the portrait of Jesus as the prayerful humanist is not surprising. The second great commandment remains, but the first commandment to "love God" is changed to "know thyself."<sup>52</sup> The incisive challenges of the real Jesus are replaced by didactic dialogues, and gospel events are rearranged to fit the plot of disciples seeking to make their religious leader more than he was for their own glory.

Thus several dramatic healings are rewritten to describe a stooge acting as though he were afflicted, with a naive Jesus thinking he performed healings. Such contrived rewriting merits little attention.

This work is attributed not to written sources, but to “spirits who were contemporary mortals with Jesus while on the earth.”<sup>53</sup> A kind of autobiography of medium Alexander Smyth prefaces the work. He was “nervous” and “of blissful imagination” when young. Strange explosions and sensations of light and inner sound overwhelmed him but disappeared for a time after his marriage. About 1860 direct contact was made with New Testament spirits, resulting in a series of “about forty communications.” These spirits occupied about an hour each day: “Usurping all my mental powers and functions, they produced a series of visions similar to beautiful and well connected dreams.”<sup>54</sup> And the book? “I resolved . . . to write down the most material points of the spirits’ discourse, and afterwards to write them out in full.”<sup>55</sup> The result was the publication of the first edition in 1864, appearing then under the title *Jesus of Nazareth*.

## The Sorry Tale

This justly forgotten novel impressed American reviewers of the World War I generation but can only be reviewed as sterile bombast today. Its notoriety came from author Pearl Curran’s story of receiving dictation of poetry and historical tales from the spirit of a “Puritan spinster” called Patience Worth.<sup>56</sup> The first awe-struck reviews were naively requoted in a recent Mormon journal article. The book is ambiguous about its fictional character, subtitled “A Story of the Time of Christ,” but it contains speeches predicting that “words spoken here without the walls of Bethlehem” shall yet speak “through time and ages.”<sup>57</sup> Supporters of *The Sorry Tale* argued minute historical accuracy for its scenes, so its quality is evaluated here.

Mrs. Curran’s editor stated the plot as follows:

Christ himself is the outstanding and speaking character, though the central figure is a son of the Emperor Tiberius by Theia, a dancing slave, who names him Hatte. He is born outside the walls of Bethle-

hem on the same night in which Christ was born, and the two lives move on parallel paths to the tragedy on Calvary, where Hatte also is crucified, being the person known as the “unrepentant thief.”<sup>58</sup>

This contrived story grinds through five hundred pages of simplistic narrative and tedious dialogue before featuring Jesus. The whole is subvictorian prose at its predictable worst, where tears are dropping jewels and bosoms regularly heave. Despite Mrs. Curran’s claim of “panoramic” moving pictures in her mind, *The Sorry Tale* notably lacks social and physical details. If they are mentioned, the score for accuracy is low. For instance, Mrs. Curran claimed to envision “the ark as it was at that time, restored,” but this relic had long since disappeared from Jewish scripture and history.<sup>59</sup> The Roman governor sat in an oriental court, with “vested virgins” dancing before him, and Jesus shocked the masses by dining with the Pharisees, though they are known in the Gospels and Josephus as popularly respected. The unhistorical “eye of the needle” gate is described, with the physically implausible act of the camel inching through it on his knees.<sup>60</sup>

If this *Tale* cannot recreate settings, what is its picture of Christ? The free and rapid dictation shows a patchwork of events from the Gospels—their historical integrity is flaunted in random chronology and modified message. The canonical five loaves and two fishes diminishes to “two fishes and a loaf,” and the miraculous is next subtracted. Although all Gospels detail how five thousand were physically fed, *The Sorry Tale* gives a sentimental version of how hunger vanished as the crowd was overwhelmed with truth. The close is an unrealistic platitude on Jesus’ lips: “for the body crieth out only when the spirit is barren.”<sup>61</sup> Since the *Tale* reports no resurrection, the natural crescendo of Christ’s teachings is the Last Supper and the Garden, but here the reader meets no suffering Savior. Emotive prose changes the grim night arrest to a pregnant dawn; the bloody sweat is reduced to a footnote while Christ’s insuperable burden becomes a pleasant prayer about “supping sweet the cup.” This storybook Jesus gently wanders back to his Apostles, “pausing to pluck a branch and kiss it, plucking up a stone, to smile and leave it fall.”<sup>62</sup>

*The Sorry Tale* spins overdone human tragedy but fades out the divine tragedy of Christ's atonement for sin. Its Jesus teaches an unstructured "kingdom of love" but drops out the realities of sin and salvation, church and ordinances. Such oversimplified humanism does not match the Christ of the Gospels.

### The Unknown Life of Jesus Christ

This version was supposedly found in a monastery in the northern Indian area of Kashmir. "The discoverer of the manuscript" was Nicolas Notovitch, who reported breaking his leg and having the manuscript read to him during his recovery about 1878. His native interpreter translated the Pali language, and Notovitch said that he "carefully transcribed the verses as they were read by the Lama."<sup>63</sup> Some sixteen years later the book was published. Notovitch stressed that his source was composite—"fragments" interspersed through old chronicles, on which he had imposed the "character of unity, totally wanting in the original form."<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, these extracts came from "two big volumes in cardboard covers, with leaves yellowed by the lapse of time."<sup>65</sup> With such descriptions of the exact document and the exact monastery, originals or traces should be found, if they existed. But nothing more than the published *Unknown Life* was ever located.<sup>66</sup>

The book begins with the tedious travels of the author; finally he introduces the "Life of Saint Issa," the Eastern adaptation of Jesus' name. Notovitch's "compilation" focuses on the unknown youth of Jesus: it has him leaving Nazareth at age thirteen, then wandering in India as a transcendental teacher until nearly age thirty, when he returns to preach the gospel of goodness and anti-ceremonialism to the Jews. The documented period of the Gospels is then quickly passed over to revoke their conclusion. In this version, Jewish leaders loved Jesus and recommended acquittal at his trial. But Pilate feared revolution and took strong initiative to put him to death. Instead of Pilate's washing his hands in protest over Jesus' innocence, as Matthew reports, this rewrite has Jewish leaders washing their hands to



dramatize their support of the Lord. The overall story contradicts all four Gospels; so does the *Unknown Life's* conclusion that Pilate removed the body from the tomb to keep the people from demonstrating their loyalty to Jesus instead of Rome.

### The Urantia Book

Published in 1955, this massive volume devotes a third of its space to the story of Christ. But of all the imitation gospels surveyed here, this one offers the fewest clues on its origin. The public is simply not told which human being wrote down the information, or the earthly process of receiving it. Yet *Urantia's* introduction admits the obvious, that the New Testament was heavily used, with supplements to fill in the spaces where the Gospels are not complete. This task was supposedly supervised by a celestial committee that relied on "a secondary midwayer who was onetime assigned to the superhuman watchcare of the Apostle Andrew."<sup>67</sup> He started with the Gospels: "As far as possible I have derived my information from purely human sources." When these were not enough, he could go to the "memory resources of my own order of earth creatures," with the backup of "superplanetary sources of information."<sup>68</sup> After this extraterrestrial research, the superhuman board of twelve approved "these narratives and put them in the English language, by a technique authorized by our superiors, in the year A.D. 1935 of Urantia time."<sup>69</sup>

The book attempts to reveal not only the hidden youth of Christ, but also a huge amount of unrecorded information on his life and teachings. This creates admitted tension between the *Urantia Book* and the "imperfect" Gospels, which were infected by acceptance of "Paul's theology of Christianity."<sup>70</sup> Thus the book itself asserts its revisionary nature on the ground that human history was not correctly recorded. And this new revelation modifies the biblical record. For instance, references to the physical nature of Christ's resurrection are deleted, and Andrew, not Peter, is the chief Apostle. Was the book deliberately designed to overawe prospective believers by sheer size? Over seven hundred large-format pages cover the same period of Christ's life

as recorded in the four Gospels, multiplying the length over five times.

The *Urantia Book* replaces the Man of Galilee with a sophisticated world traveler. In the years before Jesus' ministry, the Gospels have him maturing and working in Nazareth. But the *Urantia Book* presents for these years a strange mixture of visiting the main cities of Paul, of supplementary information that reads like Bible dictionary articles, and of sentimental adventures with mechanical predictability. Here neither the trivial nor the sublime resembles history. Bible tone fades in the assignments of the Twelve—Simon Zelotes, for example, “managed the Wednesday programs and also sought to provide for a few hours of relaxation and diversion each day.”<sup>71</sup> In the canonical Matthew account, Jesus tells the Twelve not to go to the Gentiles during his life, but after the Resurrection sends them to “all nations.”<sup>72</sup> But in the *Urantia* view, Christ speaks with monotonous frequency of the equality of Jew and Gentile from his youth through the Resurrection. With the naturalistic bias of *Urantia*, miracles are frequently explained on the ground of psychological impact or misdiagnosis, the latter being the case in two out of the three times that Jesus raised the dead. And *Urantia's* precision exceeds that of all ancient documents, whether in telling that Lazarus came back to life just twelve seconds after Jesus spoke or in sketching Lazarus' later career as “treasurer of the church at Philadelphia” and dying “when 67 years old, of the same sickness that carried him off when he was a younger man at Bethany.”<sup>73</sup>

## THE RESURRECTION MINISTRY IN MODERN APOCRYPHA

Is the New Testament portion of the Book of Mormon an imitation Gospel? In form the answer is clearly no. It supplements the Gospels but is unique as an American Gospel. The Book of Mormon is sharply divided from imitation gospels because it completes rather than competes. Third Nephi sequences the New World ministry after the Gospel resurrection appearances and Christ's ascension at the beginning of Acts. It accepts

the New Testament record as needing no further comment. Thus the Book of Mormon is profoundly Christian in totally supporting the historical Gospels. On the other hand, the modern productions described above ignore or reject biblical testimony of the Resurrection, or rewrite the story with inconsistent additions. The exceptions are the two short older items, the Lentulus description of Christ and the Death Warrant of Jesus Christ—they have inconsistent gospel additions but do not narrate the Resurrection. Some are simply silent on the Resurrection: the *Essene Gospel of Peace* speaks only on the theme of communion with nature, and the *Occult Life of Jesus of Nazareth* continually explains away the miraculous and has Paul's spirit coming to apologize for adding Christology to Jesus' simple message.

The good news of Christ's resurrection is why the Gospels received their name. Yet four counterfeit gospels openly deny that this event physically happened. The anonymous "eyewitness" who wrote *The Crucifixion* used a shadowy band of Essenes to nurse Jesus through a few more weeks of life after the cross; in this book Jesus visited his former friends after his crucifixion, but not in the resurrected state, for he died later and was buried by the Dead Sea. The ascension is contradicted here: "The disciples knelt down, their faces bent to the grass [and] Jesus hastily rose and went away through the gathering mist."<sup>74</sup> Another contradiction of the resurrection record is *Oahspe*, which denies the Crucifixion in favor of stoning and has Jesus taken to heaven like Elijah, but only in "soul." Again, events after the cross are as fanciful as Christ's early wanderings in India in the *Unknown Life*, where Pilate takes the body from the tomb to avoid veneration, and thus "the rumor immediately spread that the Supreme Judge had sent his angels to take away the mortal remains of the saint in whom dwelt on earth a part of the Divine Spirit."<sup>75</sup>

The *Urantia Book* insists on the spirit resurrection in its voluminous revision of Gospel endings. So Jesus' resurrection was the liberation of his soul, which passed from the tomb without disturbing the seal. And the body? Celestial beings had to take the further step of obliterating it. Here Christ has no "flesh

and bones,” as in the New Testament (see Luke 24:39), so physical handling is simply deleted from the *Urantia* record. The historical John reports that Thomas would not believe without seeing and feeling the nail marks on the body, which took place (John 20:27–29). In total contradiction, *Urantia* has Jesus observing that there are “no nail marks on my hands, since I am raised in the form that you also shall have when you depart from this world.”<sup>76</sup> *Urantia* simply adopts modern liberal theology—the Apostles were mistaken at the outset in “changing the religion of Jesus into a new and modified form of religion about Jesus.”<sup>77</sup> Thus “Peter’s eloquence” and the women’s enthusiasm were “changing the gospel of the kingdom—sonship with God and brotherhood with man—into the proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus.”<sup>78</sup>

What is the quality of Jesus’ resurrection message in *Urantia*? It adds a half dozen more Near Eastern appearances, balancing Greeks, Samaritans, Syrians, and Egyptians in developing the picture of Jesus as the eclectic internationalist. But the gospel student meets jarring jargon. Christ instructs the Apostles, “you may tarry . . . while you recover from the shock of the transition from the false security of the authority of traditionalism to the new order of the authority of facts, truth, and faith in the supreme realities of living experience.”<sup>79</sup> In the Gospels Jesus is the master of the arresting aphorism, but in *Urantia* he tediously explains in cosmic platitudes. At the lakeside Jesus asked Peter of his love and gave the terse challenge, “Feed my lambs” (John 21:15), but the *Urantia* imitation struggles to end a didactic paragraph: “If you love me, Peter, feed my lambs. Do not neglect to minister to the weak, the poor, and the young. Preach the gospel without fear or favor; remember always that God is no respecter of persons. Serve your fellow men even as I have served you; forgive your fellow mortals even as I have forgiven you. Let experience teach you the value of meditation and the power of intelligent reflection.”<sup>80</sup> The Lord of the Gospels did not overpreach, nor did he repeat the same question to ten Apostles (John’s Gospel lists only seven present). *Urantia* is obviously a vehicle for long moralizing, thus differing from the authentic John, where

the threefold questioning of Peter nicely relates to his earlier threefold denial. *Urantia* regularly contradicts events in the Gospels, but also mutilates the artful teaching methods of Jesus.

Other imitation gospels do not openly deny the New Testament resurrection, but do redefine it through forced fiction. The *Gospel of Barnabas* keeps up its propaganda for Islam through the resurrection period. The eleven New Testament appearances shrink to three, all conflicting with the Gospels. Also, the appearances are changed to prove that a living Jesus was merely transfigured, not raised from the dead. And Jesus' main message in the Resurrection is the coming "advent of Mohammed, the messenger of God."<sup>81</sup> This is not the historical Jesus, who testified to the Twelve that "all authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth."<sup>82</sup>

The *Archko Volume* features events inconsistent with the canonical ministry. With the melodrama of the late nineteenth century, Caiaphas reports to the Sanhedrin on a private appearance: "Jesus of Nazareth stood before me. My breath stopped, my blood ran cold, and I was in the act of falling, when he spoke." The message was clear enough: "Be not afraid, it is I. You condemned me that you might go free. . . . You have a wicked heart; this you must repent of."<sup>83</sup> Yet after this vision blending Luke and Bible-belt Protestantism, Caiaphas is not quite sure what has happened, writing, "If this strange personage is from God, and should prove to be the Savior we have looked for so long . . . I have no further offerings to make for sin; but I will wait and see how things will develop."<sup>84</sup> Perhaps the modern author was afraid to bring Caiaphas into the fold after giving him such a vision, since conversion of the high priest would surely have been noted in Acts had it happened. More probably, this character was a poorly conceived imitation from the novel *Ben Hur*, a source which the author used on other occasions. There the high priest's group whispers on Calvary: "The man might be the Messiah, and then—but they would wait and see."<sup>85</sup>

Ouseley's *Gospel of the Holy Twelve* heavily rewrites the Bible resurrection accounts. The structure of the four Gospels is maintained, but with freely reversed details, as the following examples will show. The biblical forty-day ministry becomes one

of ninety days.<sup>86</sup> In this vegetarian gospel, Jesus would of course not eat fish; thus the last chapters of Luke and John present modified menus. So Ouseley's Jesus doesn't eat with the Apostles when he appears on the night of the Resurrection, and in the morning mists of Galilee there is no miraculous catch of fish but only a seaside meal of wine, bread, "and a few dried fruits."<sup>87</sup> In Acts, Peter insists that the resurrected Jesus appeared to prepared believers, "not to all the people" (Acts 10:41). But the *Gospel of the Holy Twelve* turns 180 degrees, with Jesus entering the temple on the first day of the Resurrection "clothed in white raiment, bright as light, and in his hand a whip of seven cords." This apparition again drove out the moneychangers, who were converted by this miracle, a contradiction of Christ's principles.<sup>88</sup> Ouseley's gospel adds puzzling appearances of Jesus to the disciples. Historically there were first one hundred and twenty Jerusalem disciples (see Acts 1:15), but in this revision Jesus appears in—the "upper room" and yet speaks to a vast throng, "It is ye, my twelve thousand, who shall save the whole world."<sup>89</sup> The *Gospel of the Holy Twelve* is also deficient in resurrection teachings, where nice English phrases do not correlate with Jesus' historical message. The Jesus of the *Holy Twelve* speaks mystical abstractions: "For by involution and evolution shall the salvation of all the world be accomplished: by the Descent of Spirit into matter, and the Ascent of matter into Spirit, through the ages."<sup>90</sup> Here is a new Jesus of obscurity. Instead of the world of the Bible, there is the world of a spiritualist with theological education. For the crescendo, Mary Magdalene mysteriously disappears as Jesus ascends to heaven, with the obvious result that the male and female elements of divinity are transcendently united. At the end, a supposed Apostles' creed is added, professing faith in the transmigration of souls.

Only the *Aquarian Gospel's* resurrection account remains to be discussed. It differs from most imitations in creating resurrection appearances outside of Palestine. In doing so it sets up major conceptual conflicts with the New Testament. Luke generalizes to say that Jesus "shewed himself alive" to "the apostles whom he had chosen" (Acts 1:2–3); but the *Aquarian Gospel* corrects the historian to say that Jesus "showed himself alive, not only to the

rulers in Jerusalem, but to the many in the distant parts of the earth.”<sup>91</sup>

The *Aquarian Gospel* adds some nine resurrection appearances distinctly different from those of the Gospel record. They do not reach as far as the New World, but include the places of the early travels of Jesus in the *Aquarian Gospel*. So the resurrected Jesus revisits a feast in India, a council of magi in Persia, the Greek priests in a grove at Delphi, and Egyptian temple priests. He even rescues a Roman couple drowning in the Tiber. This miracle includes the dramatic “walk on the waves” of the three to shore, observed by “a thousand people.”<sup>92</sup> The issue here is not merely whether the narrow Tiber has waves, or whether Roman sources would note a spectacular public miracle. It is that these international appearances are unscriptural: in the New Testament the resurrected Jesus appears only to his disciples, and generally to prepare authorized Christian leaders to proclaim his gospel; but the *Aquarian* Jesus comes to the wrong people with the wrong message. For instance, his final word to a mythical Greek leader was, “Go preach the gospel of the omnipotence of man”—a command without parallel in any known saying of Jesus.<sup>93</sup> And in Egypt the *Aquarian* Christ speaks as a meaningless mystic: the Resurrection supplies “the chemistry of mortal life, the ministry of death, the mystery of deific life.”<sup>94</sup>

The most grating contradiction in the *Aquarian Gospel* is the temple appearance of Jesus to “Caiaphas, Annas, and some other ruling Jews.”<sup>95</sup> It is clear from the early chapters in Acts that these Jewish leaders were completely unconvinced of the Resurrection. So such an exhibition violates history, though there is literary precedent for the Caiaphas manifestation in the earlier *Archko Volume*. The *Aquarian Gospel* obviously used the fraudulent Archko work, since the latter had adapted the *Ben Hur* character Messala to an ex-priest named Massalian, who lived near Bethany and knew Jesus and was “satisfied that Jesus is the Christ.”<sup>96</sup> In the later *Aquarian* version there is also one who lived near Bethany and knew Jesus: “Massalian was his friend and he believed that Jesus was the Christ.”<sup>97</sup> And contradictions further mount as Jesus’ conversation with Peter by the sea includes also James and John, and the three questions to Peter

become a single question to Peter followed by a second and a third to James and John. The *Aquarian* appearances of the resurrected Christ are biblical in the sense of being physical, but that condition is compromised by ambiguous language describing Christ as having been transformed to a reality “like the substance of the bodies of the planes above, which human eyes cannot behold.”<sup>98</sup>

### THIRD NEPHI AS A RESURRECTION RECORD

The above summaries of modern apocrypha have a comparative function. They consistently show glaring discrepancies of style and culture, together with mechanical shallowness. But the message of Third Nephi is always profound, and in historical structure it is plausible to impressive. There are many reasons for that judgment, but most obvious is Third Nephi’s lack of contradiction with Bible events and doctrine. No modern imitation is free from major conflicts with the Gospel record, and the longer the book, the more abundant the contradictions. Eleven of these works are long enough to roughly resemble New Testament Gospels, and seven record some resurrection ministry of Christ. Of these, only three really bear the biblical testimony of a physical resurrection, and one of those in a doctrinally ambiguous manner. But the Book of Mormon witness to Christ’s resurrection is a major characteristic. Furthermore, its American ministry is long enough to produce contradictions—if it is not really history. Christ in ancient America is presented in some thirty-five full pages, with his voice in twenty scriptural chapters. The American ministry furnishes ample material for a major test of the Book of Mormon as a whole.

That is why Beskow’s critique is a silent compliment to Third Nephi. Presenting the Book of Mormon as Joseph Smith’s invention, Beskow devotes a chapter to it as one of the *Strange Tales about Jesus*. Yet none of his criticisms pertain to the central theme of the ministry of Christ. Indeed, the personality and message of the Lord in America well match the closing chapters of the Gospels and the beginning of Acts. But the flaw that Beskow stresses is really a major Book of Mormon strength. He



essentially asks, If the Book of Mormon was translated from plates, where are the plates? The student of modern apocrypha might well be cynical here. Most of these productions claim to come from spirit dictation alone. The few claiming an ancient record share vagaries on the supposed original—seen in a Tibetan monastery or in a Constantinople mosque or at an exclusive viewing in the Vatican library—but on checking, no one can find such manuscripts, and the supposed cooperating scholars do not exist.

Investigation of the Book of Mormon plates, however, does not lead down such blind alleys. True, the ancient plates are not available now, but there is valid theology explaining that. The resurrected Christ was seen and touched by relatively few men and women, with the explanation foreshadowed in Christ's assurance and challenge to Thomas: "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (John 20:29). So Christianity furnishes witnesses who did see (Acts 10:41) that there might be foundation and not mere assumption for belief. Here the Book of Mormon is deeply consistent with Bible Christianity, which asks for belief in the Resurrection on the basis of witnesses.

Leaving that analogy, there are no originals of any Greek or Roman book, including the Gospels. In all of these cases, the question is whether there is a reasonable basis for thinking that originals ever existed. "Discoverers" of modern apocrypha made claims that did not check out. But the Book of Mormon is far different. Beskow admits that Emma Smith felt the plates through a covered cloth and determined that they were of thin sheets of pliable metal.<sup>99</sup> And after quoting the Eight Witnesses' testimony that they had "seen and hefted" the plates, he admits, "Testimony in such serious terms and with such concrete wording seems to have a great weight."<sup>100</sup> It really does outweigh Beskow's counterbalancing questions, all of which have reasonable answers. And this friendly critic knows the unchangeable fact that the Three Witnesses consistently said that they had seen the ancient plates and had heard the voice of God bear record of their correct translation: "There were many who tried to make them confess that it had all been an invention by Smith. But all such attempts failed; the three remained certain of the existence of the plates, however much they became disappointed in Smith."<sup>101</sup>

No apocryphal gospel furnishes any witness who saw its original record, who could be cross-examined concerning it. Like Christ's resurrection itself, the Book of Mormon presents a supernatural claim surrounded by impressive circumstantial evidence. For that reason alone it cannot be buried in the pauper's cemetery of religious frauds. The most careful non-Mormon analyst of Third Nephi admits that the Book of Mormon has genuine "revelatory character." This book and "all such authentic writings should not be confused with spurious gospel forgeries, many of which are discussed by Per Beskow in *Strange Tales about Jesus*."<sup>102</sup> These positive words from former Harvard scholar Krister Stendahl are welcome but faint praise, for his sophisticated study concludes that the Galilean of the synoptic Gospels is transformed by the Book of Mormon into the divine Christ of John's writings.<sup>103</sup> Thus both John and Third Nephi have supposedly theologized Jesus, whose divinity has evolved in both. Stendahl represents the vocal majority of current New Testament scholars, who see all Gospels as formed by the development of stories about Jesus and reflective of the later faith of the Church more than personal eyewitness or recollection. So skepticism of Third Nephi may not be significant when the critics express similar skepticism of canonical Gospels, which must be the base of comparison.

The issue here is weighing the criticism, not the critic, though his premises are highly relevant to his views. A careful and tolerant religious scholar, Stendahl writes from the point of view of a "minimalist," in his case the stance of a Protestant who suspects that much theology about Christ and many ceremonies of the Church developed after the New Testament.<sup>104</sup> Mormons are sympathetic to such concerns, since they believe in a man-made apostasy from the early Church. But their starting point would be the testimony of Jesus' divinity and the basic ceremonies put forth by his Apostles in the book of Acts. Since meaningful dialogue depends on agreement about what the early Church was, it is no wonder that one with Stendahl's views would be skeptical of the historicity of Third Nephi, which agrees with Acts in viewing baptism and other ceremonies as coming from Christ.

It is important to avoid microscopic debate and to meet the main issues that a sympathetic scholar raises. To Stendahl, Third

Nephi and John's Gospel fail as strict history because "everything gets a little more miraculous."<sup>105</sup> The American record has too great a religious impact: "It is the very absorbing of Jesus into the image of a Redeemer and lifting him out of history into a more timeless space as the Revealed Revealer."<sup>106</sup> But the fallacy of such criticism is a static view of Jesus. The same person who early challenged Galileans to think of his divinity through subtle parables could finally speak in terrible judgment of the Jerusalem establishment. The assuring beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount became beatitudes of the two-edged sword in the visions of the Lord in John's Revelation. So the living Christ is not neatly encompassed in the record of his mortal words in early occasions in the synoptic Gospels. His American ministry combines the language of invitation and divine authority in the same blend of the resurrection records ending the Gospels and beginning Acts. Third Nephi is entitled to a fair comparison of like with like. The Gospel containing the Sermon on the Mount ends with the proclamation of the Lord of Glory: "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18, NKJV). This is the "Revealed Revealer," fully shown only in the resurrection ministry. Thus the majestic American Christ contradicts the Galilean teacher only if one forces conflict between early and late Matthew.<sup>107</sup>

The American ministry focuses on another biblical modification—not only the transformed Lord, but the audience of another continent. Stendahl essentially suggests that Joseph Smith "flattened out" specifics in making the Sermon on the Mount more universal, with the result that "altar," "temple," and "Jerusalem" disappear from Jesus' examples.<sup>108</sup> But if the Master of language gave his core message outside of Palestine, would not localisms disappear? An earlier Book of Mormon prophet felt that his people had moved too far from Jewish roots to properly understand Isaiah's metaphors (2 Nephi 25:1). Thus it is consistent to have the Savior delete the shocking hyperbole of cutting off a hand (Matthew 5:30) and substituting the blunt language of inner determination that "ye should deny yourselves of these things" (3 Nephi 12:30). Indeed, Nephi early pointed

tradition away from indirect illustration: “my soul delighteth in plainness” (2 Nephi 31:3).<sup>109</sup>

One of the objective controls on the Book of Mormon is whether its Nephite society possesses full functions common to known societies. Stendahl moves into this area with a sociology-of-religion question where he feels Christ’s American ministry falls short. But if the full Book of Mormon background is examined, the opposite is the case. The objection states essentially that in deleting the expression “scribes and Pharisees” (cp. Matthew 5:20; 3 Nephi 12:20), the Book of Mormon has deleted one of the major characteristics of the Lord, criticism of the self-righteousness of the religious: “I refer to Jesus’ persistent critique of the foibles of religious people. This intrareligious critique strikes me as indispensable in the picture of Jesus.”<sup>110</sup> Stated another way, did Joseph Smith so oversimplify society in a wicked-righteous model that he failed to portray the Christ as a critic of misused religion? The answer involves both the exceptional condition of the Book of Mormon people who heard Christ and the question of what terminology substitutes for Pharisaism. Merely failing to mention the term *Pharisee* is a point in favor of Third Nephi, since that sect developed in Israel in the centuries just before Jesus.

But the Book of Mormon is far from sociologically superficial. The “religious” priests of Noah were the chief enemies of the prophets Mosiah and Alma. The Zoramites thanked God from their tower for his exclusive favor upon them. And many of those who paraded religion belonged to the criminal substructures of society—the secret alliances for gain involved many who were in the most respectable public positions.<sup>111</sup> Whoever wrote the Book of Mormon well understood the everyday forces of selfishness, in spite of 1830 history books, which tended to feature the heroic stories of battles and kings rather than social and economic reality. Yet Christ did not appear to ordinary Nephite society, but rather to a group who had been especially prepared through repentance, baptism, and the destruction of the wicked. Such a thing is conceivable to those who take seriously the events associated with Enoch, Noah, or the judgments in John’s Revela-

tion. So another reason why the American ministry contains no condemnation of Pharisees was that only the humbly righteous beheld their Savior and were taught by him.<sup>112</sup> Nevertheless, a constant religious problem of Book of Mormon society had been “priestcraft,” just as social greed and “secret combinations” had been constant political problems. And the resurrected Savior warned of the return of these evils, among them “priestcraft,” which in the Book of Mormon is specifically defined as exploitation of others in the name of religion (3 Nephi 16:10; 21:19). Thus this deep human problem and divine concern are features of the American ministry.

### “OUT OF HIS TREASURE THINGS NEW AND OLD” (Matthew 13:52)

Depth and dimension permeate Third Nephi but are notably absent from the spurious later gospels. Most are thinly disguised special pleading—making Christ a precursor for Mohammed, promoter of a natural health program, an Eastern mystic, or a cosmic spiritualist. These books mix strange code words and jargon with the known teachings of the Lord. But they are also disconcerting even in the portions that do not conflict with the Gospels, for here they trivialize Jesus into a wordy moralizer. So fictitious gospels must hazard two dangers: contradictions or flattening of dynamic events and vital personality. The gospel forger stands at the crossroads of too much novelty or too little substance.

New Testament scholar Edgar J. Goodspeed did not include the Book of Mormon in his two editions about modern apocrypha.<sup>113</sup> In them he exposed the superficiality of the spurious. For example, this is how he evaluated Notovitch's *Unknown Life of Jesus Christ*:

The whole cast of the book is vague and elusive. It presents no difficulties, no problems—whereas any really ancient work newly discovered bristles with novelties and obscurities. Here the message of Issa is a pallid and colorless morality, amiable and unobjectionable enough, but devoid of the flashes of insight and touches of genius

that mark the early Gospels. Historically and morally the book is commonplace. It identifies itself with no recognized type of primitive thought; it does not strike out [on] one of its own, but shows a superficial acquaintance with the leading New Testament ones, somewhat blurred together.<sup>114</sup>

This is the difference between the shallow production and the profound classic, which rewards repetition with new insights. The Book of Mormon is in the latter category, demonstrating originalities within limits of known realities. Students of historical literature know that authenticity in a document is shown as much by packaging as by content. And Third Nephi displays several ancient patterns of teaching. There, for example, Jesus stresses baptism as part of the message of salvation. Yet Bible scholar Stendahl considers baptism to be a secondary creation of Christianity; for him Third Nephi is unhistorical when “Jesus has also become the founder of a church and the promulgator of its ordinances.” How does he handle Matthew’s explicit references to Christ’s establishing a church (Matthew 16:18; 18:17)? By viewing these and baptismal references as a subsequent overlay on genuine information surviving from Jesus’ day. Stendahl explains this viewpoint in commenting on Jesus’ command to teach and baptize all nations (Matthew 28:19–20). This commission is supposedly in later terminology, “the language of the church,” for “neither Matthew nor any of the other Synoptics describes Jesus as practising baptism.”<sup>115</sup>

The most visible scholars use this reasoning, but easy agreement can prevent careful thought. Literary excavations of various strata in the Gospels exist merely in scholars’ theories, not in hard evidence. No one disputes the synoptic report that Jesus was baptized, but why would he insist on an ordinance for himself that he would not teach to others? Two passages in John have the Apostles baptizing crowds under the direct supervision of Jesus (John 3:22; 4:1–2), though many scholars sidestep this by their exaggerated polarity of the synoptics as historical and John as theological. But Matthew was written in Jesus’ era and obviously intends a significant statement by opening the ministry with Jesus’ baptism and closing it with Jesus’ final instruction to bap-

tize all. Indeed, Matthew's specific term here is not simply "teach all nations," but specifically "make disciples of all nations," the better wording of most modern translations following the Greek text. The command to baptize immediately follows (Matthew 28:19), showing that for Matthew a disciple was a believer who had been baptized. The same definition is used by John, who wrote that "Jesus made and baptized . . . disciples" (John 4:1). Since Matthew defines a "disciple" as having been baptized, this is clearly relevant when he prefaces the Sermon on the Mount with the statement that "his disciples came unto him, and he . . . taught them" (Matthew 5:1–2). Third Nephi contains a profound harmony in the Lord's beatitude on baptism, which prefaces his New World sermon (3 Nephi 12:2). Here the American ministry makes explicit what is implicit in the Near East ministry. Even if scholars do not yet recognize the latter, the proof is there—what is lacking is not the Book of Mormon.

Third Nephi is interwoven with other distinctive early Christian vocabulary. One impressive group includes the terms for God's revelation and the meaning of Christ's gospel. Since *gospel* is a Greek term that gained late religious use, it is absent from the Old Testament. In the Book of Mormon it is largely absent from the pre-Christian era, except for the founding generation of Nephi, who had seen Christ and his preaching by vision. What are the pre-Christian terms for God's revelation? *Revelation* and *reveal* were emphasized by Joseph Smith in his teaching and inspired dictation; yet these are not used much in the Book of Mormon or in the Old Testament. The same thing is true with the nouns *message* and *doctrine*. On the other hand, the verb *teach* is quite frequently used throughout both the Bible and the Book of Mormon. But there are some Old Testament words that far exceed others in expressing God's message to men: *command/commandment*, *way*, and *word* of the Lord are all used hundreds of times, significantly spilling from the Old into the New Testament. The Book of Mormon accurately mirrors these proportions, with hundreds of instances of *command/commandment* and *word* of the Lord, and scores of uses of *way* of the Lord. Joseph Smith was not verbally sophisticated, but the Book of Mormon follows the Old Testament word map in these cases.

As in the Bible, the term *gospel* in the Book of Mormon centers on Christ and his message. And on examination there is a harmony between the definitions of the “gospel” in the New Testament and those in Third Nephi. This is not easily apparent, for the Protestant tradition is to see *gospel* as expressing forgiveness to those who believe in Christ. But there is more. All can see that Paul knew the gospel as the “power of God unto salvation” (Romans 1:16), but what specific beliefs or actions were involved? I was a plodding M.A. candidate when I sought a simple answer across the writings of the New Testament. Assuming a fundamental unity, I carefully gathered all doctrines that were associated with *gospel*, *preach the gospel*, and their New Testament synonyms. The results of this study were consistent within various types of New Testament writings. Those doctrines that were regularly associated with *gospel* and its equivalents were Christ’s work of atonement, resurrection, and judgment, and man’s response of faith, repentance, baptism, and the reception of the Holy Spirit. This project increased my respect for Third Nephi, for after months of reading the “gospel” contexts in Greek, I found that the result remarkably fit the Savior’s succinct statement of the gospel in ancient America (3 Nephi 27) and his pre-Sermon on the Mount declaration of his “doctrine” (3 Nephi 11).<sup>116</sup>

Did such “first principles and ordinances” really go back to Christ in the New Testament? Scholars have missed an obvious point. In the synoptic Gospels John the Baptist proclaims the coming kingdom through repentance and baptism, with the promise of the Holy Ghost. But they also have Jesus preaching “the gospel of the kingdom” (Matthew 4:23; Mark 1:14). Was not such parallel terminology designed to say that Jesus followed John the Baptist in requiring baptism to enter the kingdom?<sup>117</sup> Third Nephi throws new light on the New Testament by putting together its doctrinal parts into a coherent whole. Many scholars now seek layers of development in the New Testament, but a synthesis found in all layers shows a unified message from the outset.

As noted earlier, the form of an ancient document frequently authenticates its content. For over three decades Hugh Nibley has shown that the Book of Mormon consistently displays Hebrew



practices. And Third Nephi shares these characteristics. Since the most Jewish Gospels are Matthew and John, the American Gospel is in character to be allied with them. But Third Nephi transcends them in the heightened scriptural consciousness of audience and speaker. "Thus it was fulfilled" passages interlace Matthew and John. Jesus also read Isaiah in the synagogue and pronounced himself as the fulfillment, but that is only in Luke (Luke 4:16–21). This "Gentile Gospel" only hints at Jesus' scriptural resurrection teaching, at which time he took Moses and the prophets for his text and "expounded unto them . . . the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27; cp. verse 44). But this hardly prepares a reader for Third Nephi, nor would all of the above be the model for the American Christ as the quoter-expounder.

Third Nephi records marvelous miracles, but most are suggested in awe rather than belabored in over-description. The reader of modern apocrypha should come to Third Nephi more conscious of the restraint of the record than the "glitter in the Christmas tree" that Stendahl feared was there.<sup>118</sup> The twenty chapters containing the primary record of Jesus' visitation in America roughly divide as follows: about 10 percent contains the words he spoke from the heavens at the outset; about 25 percent describes the miracles and events of his personal ministry in four appearances; and about 65 percent consists of his sermons on his gospel, personal righteousness, and the future of his church and Israel. This shows that Third Nephi does not seek to highlight the miraculous but soberly records the Lord's message. Furthermore, sermons contain a heavy "quote and expound" mode of teaching that dramatic writers would avoid as deadly dull. Such material is concentrated mainly after the spiritual endowments of the second American appearance; it includes chapters 20 through the beginning of 26, just about one-fourth of the New World ministry.

The Dead Sea Scrolls validate the role of the master teacher as interpreter. This is not some random analogy, but a historical parallel of remarkable relevance. Their meticulous scribes reproduced scores of sacred books over some two centuries during which they existed as a puritan community in the harsh desert

near Jerusalem. Their writings included rules of the order, devotional prayers and psalms, and prophecies of the Messiah and the restoration of Israel. They also left copies of the entire Old Testament, collections of proof texts, plus a half-dozen books of commentary applying the writings of Isaiah and minor prophets to the apostasy of Israel and the faithfulness of the Dead Sea sect.<sup>119</sup> Similar commentaries on Isaiah and the prophets are strewn through the Book of Mormon, climaxing in the quotation-exposition portions of the Savior's ministry just mentioned. The literal methods of the Dead Sea community present special features. They either gather prophecies and develop a message from these short verses, or work with detailed fulfillment by quoting whole chapters.

These Qumran writings contain one unusual type of annotation: "They are not commentaries in the modern sense of the term. Their keyword is, in Hebrew, *peshet*, and *peshet* means properly the interpretation of a dream or the unravelling of a puzzle."<sup>120</sup> Thus they apply the hidden meaning of the scriptures to the Qumran group by means of long quotations handled verse by verse: "The *peshet* are a group of sectarian writings that present, section by section, continuous commentaries on biblical books."<sup>121</sup> The Old Testament books are written out but regularly interrupted with comments on fulfillment, typically introduced by the ritual phrase, "the interpretation concerns." In other words, the community looked to its spiritual leaders to teach the sense and application of the prophets. Most comments follow prophet extracts, though sometimes they introduce them—a pattern similar to that found in Book of Mormon commentaries. Both Qumran and Nephite literatures are similar not only in treasuring their own prophecies and psalms, but also in devoting a large block of writing to biblical quotation and explanation. In neither culture are their leaders free to speak without reviewing their scriptural heritage in detail, as the best-preserved Qumran *peshet* indicates:

And God told Habakkuk to write down the things that are going to come upon the last generation, but the fulfillment of the end-time he did not make known to him. And when it says, "so that he can

run who reads it," the interpretation of it concerns the Teacher of Righteousness, to whom God made known all the mysteries of the words of his servants the prophets.<sup>122</sup>

Scholars often view the Teacher of Righteousness as the historic founder of that sect, but some also see this title as a continuing office. The Qumran utilized scripture at the saturation level in a literalistic mode and associated it with their own community's situation. They saw Habakkuk's prophecies against Babylon, for instance, as speaking of their enemies, and they applied prophecies of vindication in that book to God's favor upon them. It is certainly not clear that Qumran applications were mere allegory, though that is a possibility. To summarize, their commentaries are crafted in two ways: (1) consecutively, wherein the sequence of scripture controls the interspersed comments, and (2) logically, wherein a common theme controls a collection of texts. In the latter, the Dead Sea community is less distinctive, though their myopic use of general scriptures for their own group regularly stands out. In this selection pattern, assembled proof-texts witness the coming Messiah and other compilations stress the power of the righteous in the latter-day judgments of God. For instance, the Melchizedek fragment links nine prophecies from the Pentateuch, Psalms, and Isaiah in a prophetic explanation of the coming of the messianic era.

The Book of Mormon concordance outlines both interpretive types above. The early Nephite prophets used *liken* for their application of Old Testament themes to their own people, often in the fashion of parallels rather than in strict historical context, displaying a definite resemblance to the scriptural expositions of Qumran. Another correlation is the favored status of Isaiah, quoted most intensively in the Book of Mormon and stressed at Qumran, where texts and also interpretations of Isaiah were preserved. Early Book of Mormon prophets display an awareness of the larger meaning of prophecy and also its narrower application to their own "branch," transplanted to a continent away from the trunk of Israel. Thus the founder Nephi, who quotes more chapters of Isaiah than any Book of Mormon personality, surveys his interpretation: "I did read unto them that which was

written by the prophet Isaiah, for I did liken all scriptures unto us” (1 Nephi 19:23). An example of Nephi’s teaching gathers a half-dozen passages from the Pentateuch and Isaiah on the Messiah’s mission and the latter-day gathering of his people, insisting that “it meaneth us in the days to come, and also all our brethren who are of the house of Israel” (1 Nephi 22:6). The Qumran parallels raise a serious question about why the Book of Mormon so well fits recently discovered ancient literature.

Shifting to the Qumran consecutive commentary noted above, its close counterpart appears in the teachings of the American Christ. Although several modern apocrypha exploit the Dead Sea community by claiming Essene origin, ten pages at random from Qumran would show such pretensions to be empty. But without fanfare, portions of Third Nephi simply fit a distinctive ancient mold. To restate, Qumran’s consecutive form is named from their repetitive word for interpretation, *peshet*, which “has come to mean in modern parlance a special Essene type of commentary on a continuous text of some prophet or psalm.”<sup>123</sup> Specifically, their Habakkuk commentary has about a 40 percent ratio of continuous scripture to about 60 percent commentary, monotonously alternating from one to the other. The Isaiah texts are fragmentary but contain more scripture and less commentary. The arrangement is so unusual in early Christian or Jewish writing that its use in Third Nephi reads like a literal translation of an ancient document. As observed, a major segment of Jesus’ New World teaching is biblical exposition. This is introduced by the close quotation-explanation of Isaiah 52:1–5, dropping only verses 4 and 5. This is the second section of the longest recorded American sermon, whose theme is the latter-day gathering of Israel. It begins with a warning of judgments on gentile nations in the New World if they do not accept the gospel when it is restored. That first portion is characterized by the broader commentary form of applying various scriptures to the theme, as a combination of passages from the Pentateuch and Micah are repeated and explained to the American Israelites to whom Jesus was speaking. Then follows the Isaiah 52 *peshet* (on the point that Jerusalem will indeed be reestablished), which can be diagrammed as follows:

Isaiah	Comment or Quotation	3 Nephi
	C: Promise of remembering Israel at gospel restoration: "Then shall"	20:29–32
52:8	Q: Watchmen rejoice	20:32
	C: "Father" will gather and reestablish Jerusalem: "Then shall they"	20:33–34
52:9–10	Q: Sing the song of redemption, for the earth shall know the "Father's" salvation	20:34–35
	C: Unity of the Father and the Son—"And then shall be brought to pass"	20:35–36
52:1–3	Q: Redemption of Zion, Jerusalem	20:36–38
	C: Brief clarification: "Verily, verily, I say unto you"	20:39
52:6	Q: "my people shall know . . . I am he that doth speak"	20:39
	C: Brief clarification: "And then shall they say"	20:40
52:7	Q: How beautiful are the messengers of salvation	20:40
	C: Brief clarification: "And then shall a cry go forth"	20:41
52:11–15	Q: Gather in purity with God's protection—appearance of God's "exalted" servant	20:41–45
	C: Fulfillment "as the Father has commanded me"—"Jerusalem . . . shall be the land of their inheritance"	20:46

Judging historical records is like evaluating people—there are many marks of quiet reliability that add up to trust. No modern

apocryphal gospel pictures Christ as an expounder of the prophets, but when he appears in this role in Third Nephi, he speaks in a known idiom of ancient Judaism, alternating prophetic verses with interpretive explanations. The Qumran “commentaries” generally quote a part of a verse, one verse, or up to three verses, with interspersed explanations. Early Christian literature has some examples of a chain of quotations with comments, but does not display the above explication of one prophet that makes the Qumran *pesharim* highly unusual. It is improbable that Joseph Smith stumbled onto this teaching form, since the Qumran *peshar* style is distinctive enough to rate a special article in the 1971 *Encyclopaedia Judaica*.

The expounder is prominent in Qumran and Nephite cultures. The Habakkuk commentary view of the Teacher of Righteousness was given above, a philosophy mirrored in other Dead Sea documents. All scripture pointed to the fulfillment of God’s plans for the called and tested, and that community leader had the mantle of inspiration to declare the inner meaning of the prophets. Jesus stands at the summit of Nephite tradition in closing the Sermon on the Mount and then unfolding the meaning of his own prophecy regarding “other sheep” (John 10:16; 3 Nephi 15:21) as beyond the understanding of the original Jewish audience, but really including the American appearance and even other descendants of Israel (3 Nephi 16:1–2). Later, the Savior’s great commentary discourse is finished with the picture of the Master of the scriptural heritage: “And he did expound all things, even from the beginning until the time that he should come in his glory” (3 Nephi 26:3). The exposition patterns of the Book of Mormon and the Dead Sea community are mirror images, and part of a larger set of correlations for the Book of Mormon as a whole. Years ago Nibley listed thirty-four impressive ones in history, terminology, and theology.<sup>124</sup> Similar parallels between Qumran and the New Testament forced scholars to debate direct relationships, and the favored view is that correlations developed from common Jewish roots, not Christian borrowing from Qumran. Similarly, the Dead Sea commentaries and Third Nephi appear as cousins. The Gospels describe Jesus’ message to Jews under rabbinic, legalistic leadership. But the

Dead Sea discovery showed another Judaism based more closely on prophetic tradition. The Nephite story clearly begins on the latter model. Thus Jesus' American quotation sermons match what would be expected for that "people of the book."

## THE AMERICAN CHRIST

Third Nephi centers on what Christ did and said. This is also central to the four Gospels, each of which gives unique insights into the person and message of the Master. This final section will suggest some ways in which Third Nephi accomplishes the same goal. Though many New Testament scholars stress differences, I see a nice balance between uniqueness and correlation in the Gospels, one in which Third Nephi shares. John is most often seen as the theological black sheep in the little flock of unpretentious traditions about Jesus. But such a conclusion can be reached only by an arbitrary sorting out of what one chooses to consider original history in the synoptic Gospels. Like John, each of them gives special insights into the nature of Jesus' person and preaching. Third Nephi also throws its precious glow on the Master in the ancient room where he is partially lit by low but steady lamps.

This paper's recurring theme is that Third Nephi has a depth not found in the manufactured, oversimplified apocryphal gospels. We have examined the impressive framework of the American appearance of Christ; but the appearance itself illuminates Jesus' person and message in a way that would be expected of a newly discovered record. The account of his American ministry is of readable length and must be experienced to be judged. Commentaries could easily be developed longer than its score of chapters, but they could not substitute for a direct examination of the Nephite Gospel. Here is the most important test, and also the most subjective. That is why this study first concentrated on the structure of the record, its vocabulary, and its social and literary patterns. These have been weighed and not found wanting. But although Third Nephi has impressive patterns of form, what is its contribution? It verifies and clarifies Christ's worldwide message—and does the same things for Christ himself.

Human personality projects a wide rainbow of colors. And under anyone's definition, Jesus was a person of extensive range. Sunday School art shows his tenderness, at times making him insipid. But quality portraits probe his depths. "He knew what was in man" (John 2:25)—he knew firsthand the struggle and isolation of life as well as warm acceptance. The Christ of Third Nephi is the victor over temptations and trials, not the glorified stage prop of modern apocrypha. The divine tragedy of rejection is the theme of the opening and closing words of Christ to the Nephites. At the outset his voice from heaven sorrowed at the rebellious who had perished in American Sodoms and Gomorrah. Then he descended and spoke of "that bitter cup which the father hath given me," insisting that he had "glorified the Father . . . in all things from the beginning" (3 Nephi 11:11). John's Revelation reveals the triumphal Savior at the final judgment, but Third Nephi records the poignant voice of divine suffering just after his sacrifices for mankind had been accomplished.

One mark of genuineness in the Four Gospels is their intimacy in reporting the feelings of the Lord. The Fifth Gospel maintains this standard. Witness the tender scene where he hesitated to leave after delivering his New World sermon, saying, "My bowels are filled with compassion towards you" (3 Nephi 17:6). This was followed by manifestations of intense reciprocal love between the Nephites and their Savior, who healed the afflicted and gathered the children around him in blessing. Yet this sweet incident with his faithful disciples reminded him of those who were lost: "Jesus groaned within himself, and said: Father, I am troubled because of the wickedness of the people of the house of Israel" (3 Nephi 17:14). Great literature holds this tension between joy and sorrow because it reflects the exacting balance of real-life experiences. While modern imitations specialize in the heavenly happy ending, Third Nephi is painted in the lights and shadows of the masters. Just as Luke depicts Jesus weeping over Jerusalem in his triumphal entry, so Third Nephi is embroidered with disappointment as the glorified Christ prophesies: "But behold, it sorroweth me because of the fourth generation . . . for they will sell me for silver and for gold" (3 Nephi 27:32).



In Third Nephi the Savior who had recently suffered for the world's sins resonated within at the spiritual needs surrounding him. Mark's Gospel uniquely shows Christ's physical concern for children in picking them up in his arms (Mark 9:36; 10:16). The American Gospel adds the individuality of his attention: "And he took their little children, one by one, and blessed them, and prayed unto the Father for them" (3 Nephi 17:21). In Galilee Jesus felt the physical hunger of the multitudes before they were miraculously fed, and in America he respected their mental and emotional limits after a prolonged discourse. "I perceive that ye are weak, that ye cannot understand all my words," so he asked them to return home to "ponder" and to "pray" (3 Nephi 17:2–3). Matthew notes how the multitude marveled at the close of the Sermon on the Mount; after delivering his New World sermon, Christ told the Nephites to think over its meaning. There are special insights of Jesus' empathy in each Gospel. Mark specializes in eyewitness detail on Jesus' reactions, and Third Nephi notes his body language at the beginning of the American sermon: "He stretched forth his hand unto the multitude, and cried unto them" (3 Nephi 12:1). Later he would encourage them to imitate his invitations, stressing that he had not turned anyone away as that special group of hundreds came up "one by one" (3 Nephi 11:15) to feel his flesh and return his loving gaze (3 Nephi 18:25). His feelings were projected as he "did smile upon them," without doubt a true expression of Jesus' love but one not recorded in any other Gospel (3 Nephi 19:25, 30).

Are there any better insights to a personality than the direction of inner longings? The Nephite record shows an eternal being still needing the solace and strength of prayer. There the resurrected Savior is seen still shouldering the emotional burden of caring for all peoples, and the Godhead operating as a council of companionship. Luke especially stresses Jesus' prayers, and he records the only post-resurrection prayer in the New Testament—the blessing upon the evening meal at Emmaus (Luke 24:30). Far beyond this, Third Nephi stresses that during his American ministry Jesus called upon his Father in "great and marvelous" prayers (3 Nephi 17:16–17). He pleaded for comfort in his sorrow for the wickedness of Israel (3 Nephi 17:14), and he

appealed for future blessings on innocent children (3 Nephi 17:21) and faithfulness on the part of their parents (3 Nephi 17:17). Moreover, he thanked the Father for giving spiritual powers to his disciples (3 Nephi 19:20) and prayed for the spiritual effectiveness of the Church and its ordinances (3 Nephi 19:21). And as in John 17, he sought for the conversion and faithfulness of the pure in heart (3 Nephi 19:23, 28). The above petitions go beyond the exemplary prayer of the Sermon on the Mount and the ceremonial prayer establishing the sacrament of bread and wine in portraying a personality of breadth, a challenging likeness of the Lord.

Christ's expansive emotions are also etched in tears of joy. Modern fabrications can picture the triumph of the Resurrection but offer no basis for the weeping of a glorified being. Even the canonical Gospels cautiously disclose Jesus' mortal tears—only at the triumphal entry and at the raising of Lazarus, though Paul knew of Jesus' tears in trial, probably Gethsemane (Hebrews 5:7). The sorrow of Lazarus' family and friends precipitated Jesus' sorrow (John 11:35–36). Jesus' empathy for his Nephite Church was similar. Twice their tears of love and gratitude are mentioned (3 Nephi 17:5, 10), and twice his responsive "compassion" (3 Nephi 17:6–7). In the midst of their prayers and full faith, and the blessing of their children, Jesus himself wept after exclaiming, "And now behold, my joy is full" (3 Nephi 17:20–22). In daily life such joyful tears are the release of the long strain of expectation, the fulfillment of hope. One would hardly expect Jesus to lack the emotions expressed by idealistic mortals. So a significant dimension of Third Nephi is the Lord of experience. Christ's character there has substance and actuality.

There are personal tests for Christ's teachings in Third Nephi. One is perspective—the consistency of the overall message with the Gospels. The essence of the Sermon on the Mount is not simply inner righteousness but also outer conduct in harmony with inner motivation. After the Beatitudes, the Sermon insists on high performance in moral responsibilities. In closing it challenges hearers to do—an extremely important concept throughout the sermon and equally important in Jesus' discourse at the Last Supper (John 14). There the concept of "keeping the com-

mandments” is also highlighted, just as it is in Jesus’ final words on duties after baptism (Matthew 28:19–20). Theologians can set up a false conflict between inner commitments and outer commandments, but they are consistently balanced in the Gospels and also in Third Nephi. On the Galilean mount Jesus would not accept the Pharisees who “say, and do not” (Matthew 23:3; 5:19–20). The same principle was expressed to the American multitude as a clear condition: “Except ye shall keep my commandments . . . ye shall in no case enter the kingdom of heaven” (3 Nephi 12:20). But the American teachings wholly guard against a manipulative externalism. Christ gives the command of repentance: “Come unto me with full purpose of heart” (3 Nephi 18:32). Every Gospel has its equivalents of the “pure in heart” spoken of in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:8). And in Third Nephi the Lord continually stresses the challenge of the spirit within: “Suffer none of these things to enter into your heart” (3 Nephi 12:29).

Every authentic Gospel shows consistency of message in a subtle variety of terms. Thus computers can hardly be programmed to identify the exact language of Jesus for a number of reasons: paraphrases of his words in authentic records, his own adaptation of language to different audiences, and (not the least) his own creative variations. The last point is shown in his many methods of teaching. And Palestinian forms of Jesus’ message are generally mirrored in the American teachings. The reasonable exceptions, among a well-prepared audience in which enemies were not present, are less frequent use of dialogue and minimal use of parables. These modifications also appear in the biblical resurrection teachings. Yet the Master Teacher clearly speaks throughout Third Nephi, challenging with thought-provoking questions (3 Nephi 27:2, 27), presenting organized sermons, repeating key elements of those sermons on other occasions, and presenting flashbacks of his ministry as object lessons. As discussed earlier, the American Christ also explains the scriptures, prophecies, and teaches by prayer. Here is another area in which Third Nephi avoids the monochrome of modern imitations.

Third Nephi is especially impressive in the pointed sayings woven into discourse and dialogue. Incisive thoughts reflect a

decisive mind. In the Gospels, Jesus feathered straight arrows. New Testament studies are filled with theories on the vivid pronouncements of Jesus, often assuming an evolution in the stories accompanying them or in the summary truths Jesus gave. But lines from Shakespeare and common-sense proverbs have circulated from generation to generation without change. Likewise, the quotability of Jesus' spiritual axioms ensures their essential accuracy when recorded in the four Gospels. These sayings typically express a call for commitment in forceful terms:

Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in and shall not be able (Luke 13:24).

I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled? (Luke 12:49.)

These vivid challenges embedded in sermons and dialogue are stylistic signs of Jesus. They differ from religious proverbs in blending insight with the tension of the eternal. The beginning of this paper noted the continuation of Jesus' sayings in quotations by Paul and by the Christian fathers. Here scholars seek some basis for judging whether these free-floating sayings have historical credibility, since they are not in canonical Gospels. To be considered authentic, the quotation should come from an early source with probable access to authentic information about Christ. But given this condition, how can one separate folklore from responsible tradition? That forces a judgment after first determining these "genealogical" credentials. Then comes the question: is the saying "conceivable in the mouth of Jesus, in view of what the canonical Gospels make known to us of his thought and spirit"?<sup>125</sup>

There are many terse and wholesome utterances, utterly unobjectionable and free from the bias of dubious theology or the tinsel of fantasy, which have appeared to many critics as not inappropriate to the Jesus of the canonical Gospels.<sup>126</sup>

The first half of this paper gave sample quotations from modern apocrypha, showing that their language typically displays platitudes, wordiness, or unfocused mysticism. But Third Nephi joins the four Gospels in the spiritual light reflecting from vivid sayings of the Lord. These are not in obvious positions in the

American Gospel, but are spread evenly throughout Christ's teachings as the spontaneous utterances of one who typically sums up his message in concise urgency:

Old things are done away, and all things have become new (3 Nephi 12:47).

Therefore, whoso remembereth these sayings of mine and doeth them, him will I raise up at the last day (3 Nephi 15:1).

Behold, I am the law, and the light (3 Nephi 15:9).

Behold, I am the light which ye shall hold up—that which ye have seen me do (3 Nephi 18:24).

And if it so be that the church is built upon my gospel, then will the Father show forth his own works in it (3 Nephi 27:10).

Because a main goal of scholarship is discovery, studies continue to gather and weigh the non-canonical sayings of Jesus. Out of several hundred possibilities, from one to two dozen are usually selected on the double basis of location in a responsible historical source plus tone reminiscent of Jesus. Third Nephi contains many more vivid sayings than the examples given above. But if these are mingled with other uncanonical words from early sources, they measure up with those most favored in possessing the "terseness and aptness very characteristic of Jesus's mode of speech."<sup>127</sup> The objective element is style, the close resemblance to Jesus' patterns of expression.

The chasm between Third Nephi and modern apocrypha is sheer and uncrossable, and this conclusion would be even more vivid if the modern gospels had been analyzed in the same detail as Third Nephi. But few who read them would consider the result worth the effort, for their publication circumstances have dated them as clearly as the architecture of their period. Their tone moves from medieval adoration to Victorian sentimentality to abstract spiritualism to cosmic jargon. Their obvious motivations are like those of the ancient non-historical apocrypha that grew like tares in the early Christian centuries. In both eras, there are two main types: first, what Ropes calls "religious romances," pious props to the faith with insipid miracles and meaningless divine signs;<sup>128</sup> second, inventions to justify changes of the faith—historical "commercials" in mismatched period costume.

Jutting above these wastelands of eroded credibility is Third Nephi, joined hard to the granite ridge of the canonical Gospels.

This well deserves the status of a Fifth Gospel on the basis of its realism. Its translation from an ancient record is verified by witnesses of integrity, not by the same standard as secular discovery but equal to the credible resurrection testimonies. And Third Nephi correctly produces an authentic Jewish context. One weakness on first glance turns out to be an impressive strength. The reader of the Book of Mormon soon encounters its dullest parts, the long Isaiah quotations, which crop up again in the Third Nephi account of the Savior's American ministry. So this Book of Mormon criticism is telling: "The wording is stereotyped, the events monotonous."<sup>129</sup> But low scores in literature may be high ones in history, for this is also a perfect description of the commentary sections of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Since the Qumran community and the Nephites were both preoccupied with scriptural fulfillment, there is great cultural accuracy in the quotation mind-set in Third Nephi, as well as remarkable correlation in the methods of quotation. Third Nephi passes more reality checks than can be summarized here, including an authentic social model in which the enemies of religion include not only the opposers but also the misusers. The author of Third Nephi understood both Jewish society and the nature of social organization.

Since Christ is the center of this American Gospel, the depth of his personality is especially impressive when contrasted with the flat icon of modern apocrypha. In Third Nephi Jesus exhibits the range of joy and sorrow that reflects the full soul of Him who had suffered and descended to share. That record matches the quality of the ancient Gospels in harmonious but distinctive aspects of Christ, his words, and his message. An example blending method and content is the succinct saying, a clear sign of Jesus' teachings in the canonical Gospels and in free-circulating quotations from him in early Christian sources. Christ's American ministry is impressive in the same sense in which the four Gospels teach timeless truth in authentic historical and cultural settings of first-century Judaism. Millions have believed the Book of Mormon, including intelligent students and informed scholars of ancient languages and civilizations, an indication that the record is not easily classified among modern frauds.<sup>130</sup> Because there are complex accuracies within Third Nephi, the theory is

weak that it was produced by uneducated Joseph Smith or marginally educated Solomon Spaulding in the nineteenth century. Could a color-blind weaver match a sophisticated Scottish tartan? Twice in his prologue the Apostle John insisted that Christ possessed both grace and truth. Third Nephi offers a Savior of overwhelming grace, whose resurrection words challenge and penetrate. And the earthen vessel holding this treasure is historically truthful in every area in which it can be tested.

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## Notes

1. See Theodor H. Gaster, trans., *The Dead Sea Scriptures*, 3d ed. (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1976); James M. Robinson, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1977).

2. R. H. Charles, ed., *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913). The *Pseudepigrapha* is now updated by James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2 vols. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983, 1985).

3. Montague Rhodes James, trans., *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924, 1953). This is still most useful for translations of full works. See also Edgar Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha, Volume One: Gospels and Related Writings*, ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher and R. McL. Wilson (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1959).

4. Marcus Von Wellnitz, *Christ and the Patriarchs: New Light from Apocryphal Literature and Tradition* (Bountiful, Utah: Horizon Publishers, 1981).

5. Tertullian, *On Baptism* 17, trans. S. Thelwall, in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Co., 1968), 3:677.

6. Joachim Jeremias, *Unknown Sayings of Jesus*, trans. Reginald H. Fuller (London: SPCK, 1948).

7. M. S. Enslin, "Agrapha," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), 1:56.

8. Cp. footnotes in the discussion below of the Death Warrant of Jesus Christ and the Letter of Lentulus.

9. Edgar J. Goodspeed, *Modern Apocrypha* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1931). This was superseded by his *Famous "Biblical" Hoaxes*

(Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1956), which added several more pseudo-gospels to his treatment. I have eliminated one of Goodspeed's items from my discussion, "The Gospel of Josephus," the author of which "is said to have admitted that the work was a creation of his own." *Famous "Biblical" Hoaxes*, p. 79.

10. Per Beskow, *Strange Tales about Jesus: A Survey of Unfamiliar Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983).

11. Current editions are little changed from earlier editions and contain a biographical page on the author after the title page, which is the basis of the information given on him here. See *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ* (Santa Monica, Cal.: Devorss and Co., 1972).

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 14–15, part of the introduction by Eva S. Dowling, "scribe to the messenger."

13. *Ibid.*, biographical page after title page.

14. For full information on Mahan's life and the parallels to the novel *Ben Hur*, see Richard Lloyd Anderson, "The Fraudulent Archko Volume," *Brigham Young University Studies* 15 (1974): 43–64.

15. W. D. Mahan to Rev. J. A. Quarles, Nov. 13, 1884, quoted in Anderson, p. 44.

16. This narrative is taken from *The Crucifixion and the Resurrection of Jesus by an Eyewitness* (Los Angeles: Austin Publishing Co., 1919; reprint ed., Glendale, Cal.: Unarius Science of Life, 1968).

17. *Ibid.*, p. 21 ("Foreword of the German Translators").

18. Beskow discusses this early German edition, and a related one concerning Jesus' birth and youth. See pp. 43, 118 n.8. See Beskow, p. 44 for the radical contradictions between the humanistic theology of the "Essene" document and the scriptural theology of the real Essenes, whose writings are included in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

19. *Times and Seasons* 2:564–65 (Oct. 1, 1841). This reprints an article published in a Washington, D.C., paper, *The Madisonian*, Nov. 27, 1839, a date when Joseph Smith and his party were in the nation's capital to seek redress for the Missouri expulsion. That printing attributed the article to the *Philadelphia Gazette*, which is given as the source in the *Times and Seasons* reprint. In turn the eastern articles borrowed from the *Courier des Etats-Unis*, which no doubt used the French newspapers that spread this story in the spring of 1839. See Beskow, pp. 16, 112 n. 13.

20. Joseph Smith's manuscript history was recorded to the fall of 1838 at the time of his death in 1844. The history was completed by his assistants, and scholar Dean C. Jessee took the time to determine that this article was added to the manuscript on Oct. 1, 1844, by secretary Thomas Bullock. Since the sentence about "properly authenticated"



appeared at that time, it might represent Joseph Smith's attitude from scribes who knew him—they were simply using the earlier *Times and Seasons* as a source for their history. This part of the history was not published until this century, under the editorship of Roberts. See the current reprint of Joseph Smith, ed., *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1949), 4:420–22. Although Elder Rudger Clawson used the Pilate document publicly (Conference Report, April 1927, p. 81), the official position of the Church was the caution expressed by Roberts in the *History*.

21. See Beskow, pp. 18ff. and his notes. Cp. Edmund F. Sutcliffe, "An Apocryphal Form of Pilate's Verdict," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 9 (1947):436–41. Among many errors, this document calls Pilate "Governor of Lower Galilee," when even the Gospels note that Herod Antipas ruled Galilee.

22. Lonsdale and Laura Ragg, trans., *The Gospel of Barnabas* (Cedar Rapids, Iowa: Unity Publishing Co., 1980). Textual passages quoted in this article are from this currently available edition, which indicates a printing of 28,000 since 1973.

23. The source citation comes from the 1907 edition, published at Oxford by Clarendon Press. An ancient Gospel of Barnabas is named, but since nothing is known of it, it cannot be connected with the Ragg translation. See Hennecke 2:67, and James, p. 23; James calls it "a forgery of the late fifteenth or sixteenth century."

24. See the 1980 Unity edition, p. 18; cp. p. 120.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 88–89.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 123.

28. This is Alfred Guillaume's translation of Koran 4:157 in *Islam*, 2d ed. (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1956), p. 196. Cp. H.A.R. Gibb, *Mohammedanism* (New York: Mentor Books, 1955), p. 52 (on the Koran and Jesus): "The crucifixion is rejected as a Jewish fable, another in his semblance having been crucified in his stead."

29. Beskow, pp. 71–72, 125 n. 91. Most of this biographical profile comes from research by the public library at Brighton, England, where Ouseley lived in his final two decades.

30. See *The Gospel of the Holy Twelve* (reprint ed., London: John M. Watkins, 1956), p. 196, which mentions the editor's former work "Palingenesia, or Earth's New Birth," identified in the Library of Congress and British Museum printed catalogues as by Ouseley. The 1956 edition of *The Gospel of the Holy Twelve* is cited in following notes.

31. Ibid., pp. iii–iv.
32. Ibid., p. 31 (19:3).
33. Ibid., p. 115 (69:12).
34. Ibid., pp. 72–73 (46:1–21).
35. For publishing details, see Beskow, p. 127 n. 106.
36. Edmond Bordeaux Szekely, *The Essene Gospel of Peace, Book One* (n.p.: International Biogenic Society, 1981).
37. The picture on Szekely's title page is a reversed image of that appearing in Millar Burrows, *The Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: The Viking Press, 1955, 1968), plate vii. For the translation of this strictly geographical document, see John Allegro, *Treasure of the Copper Scrolls* (New York: Doubleday, 1960).
38. Szekely, *Essene Gospel, Book One*, foreword, reprinted from the 1937 edition.
39. Msgr. Martino Giusti to Per Beskow, Oct. 3, 1979, quoted in Beskow, p. 129 n. 121.
40. Edmond Bordeaux Szekely, *The Discovery of the Gospel of Peace: The Essenes and the Vatican* (n.p.: International Biogenic Society, 1977). The title reproduces the same misleading picture indicated in n. 37 above, and p. 54 contains the only sentences in the whole book on manuscripts.
41. Szekely, *Essene Gospel, Book One*, foreword.
42. Ibid., p. 43.
43. For details, see Goodspeed, *Famous "Biblical" Hoaxes*, pp. 50–57. This is the only work in this study for which secondary information is relied upon. Goodspeed is highly responsible and gives good details of Benan's plot.
44. James (p. 477) finds no manuscript earlier than the thirteenth century.
45. Mormon researchers O. Preston Robison and Christine H. Robison think the Lentulus description is plausible because a Lentulus was a consul during the mature life of Jesus. *Christ's Eternal Gospel* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1976), pp. 54–56. The argument is the equivalent of claiming that a forged Lincoln letter is authentic because there was a Lincoln—the real issue is the quality of the supposed letter. Their Cambridge version of the Lentulus description calls him “consul of Jerusalem,” though other copies do not. Jerusalem had no Roman magistrate, only the general supervision of the sub-governor or prefect at Caesarea, the office held by Pilate and others, but not by any known Lentulus. The consul Lentulus was involved in Roman and German affairs and had no known contact with the Jews. This descrip-

tion appeared as a contributed item in the *Deseret News* on Feb. 19, 1898, was used in the 1927 conference talk referred to in n. 20 above, and has been circulated among Mormons widely on a private basis. For a fuller summary of the apocryphal nature of this document, see Richard Lloyd Anderson, "Questions Frequent in Quest for Description of the Savior," *Church News*, Dec. 22, 1973, p. 6.

46. For possible connections to the Slavonic version of Josephus, see Robert Eisler, *The Messiah Jesus and John the Baptist* (London: Methuen and Co., 1931), p. 396.

47. Preface to *Oahspe*, 1932 ed., quoted in Herbert W. Schneider, *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), 7:449. Newbrough's quoted words are paraphrased in an abridgement, *Testament for the New World: Being Seven Books, Containing Essential Spiritual Wisdom from Oahspe* (Los Angeles: Kosmon Press, 1945), p. vii.

48. *Oahspe: A Kosmon Bible in the Words of Jehovih and His Angel Ambassadors* (London: Kosmon Press, 1975), p. 643 (v. 52).

49. *Ibid.*, p. 708 (vv. 4–9).

50. *Ibid.*, p. 709 (vv. 37–40).

51. *Ibid.*, p. 748 (vv. 7–8). This evil being sought power by promising "that all good Mormons would . . . rule over some planet." He also sought to enlarge his rule by teaching that one's heavenly kingdom would be in proportion to the size of "numerous progeny."

52. Alexander Smyth, *Jesus of Nazareth; or A True History of the Man Called Jesus Christ* (Philadelphia: Alexander Smyth, 1864), p. 216 (ch. 21).

53. *Ibid.*, title page.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 35, introduction. Other materials are quoted here in sequence from p. 11.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

56. Pearl Lenore Curran, "A Nut for Psychologists," in Walter Franklin Prince, *The Case of Patience Worth* (Boston: Boston Society for Psychic Research, 1929), p. 393. For a short statement of supernatural origin, see the preface of Casper S. Yost, ed., *The Sorry Tale* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1917), also indicated on the title page as "by Patience Worth, communicated through Mrs. John H. Curran."

57. *Ibid.*, pp. 22–23. See the similar prophecy on page 636 and note that the other publications of "Patience Worth" were either poems or novels.

58. Casper S. Yost, "The Problem of Knowledge," in Prince, p. 380.

59. Curran in Pierce, p. 395.
60. See Yost, ed. *The Sorry Tale*, p. 149 (governor's court), p. 568 (forbidden Pharisees), p. 592 (kneeling camels).
61. *Ibid.*, pp. 578–79.
62. *Ibid.*, p. 612.
63. Nicholas Notovitch, *The Unknown Life of Jesus Christ*, trans. Alexina Loranger, (Chicago: Rand, McNally and Co., 1894). p. 9. The “discoverer” phrase is on the title page. The first edition was published in French this same year and is indexed in the Library of Congress.
64. *Ibid.*, p. 153.
65. *Ibid.*, p. 96.
66. For the search and failure to confirm Notovitch's story or the existence of the manuscripts, see Goodspeed, *Famous “Biblical” Hoaxes*, pp. 10–14, and also Beskow, p. 121 nn.71–72.
67. *The Urantia Book* (Chicago: Urantia Foundation, 1955), “The Parts of the Book,” facing the copyright page, which indicates that the 1981 edition is an unchanged reprinting.
68. *Ibid.*, p. 1343.
69. *Ibid.*, p. 1319.
70. *Ibid.*, p. 1342.
71. *Ibid.*, p. 1547. Remaining members of the Twelve have precise job descriptions sounding like management assignments of a modern corporation.
72. Cp. Matthew 10:5–6 and 15:24 with 28:19.
73. *Urantia Book*, pp. 1846, 1849.
74. *The Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus by an Eyewitness*, p. 90.
75. *Unknown Life*, p. 145.
76. *Urantia Book*, p. 2043.
77. *Ibid.*, p. 2051.
78. *Ibid.*
79. *Ibid.*, p. 2043.
80. *Ibid.*, p. 2047.
81. *Gospel of Barnabas*, p. 271.
82. Matthew 28:18, New King James Version. Jesus uses the Greek term meaning “authority” (*exousia*), which is so rendered by all major committee translations now.
83. *Archko Volume*, p. 126.
84. *Ibid.*, pp. 126–27.

85. Lew Wallace, *Ben Hur: A Tale of the Christ* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1908), p. 549. The previous page pictures the “altered behaviour” of the high priest and his following, who “began to lose their confidence” when darkness descended at the Crucifixion.

86. *Gospel of the Holy Twelve*, pp. 152 (19:1), 159 (95:1).

87. *Ibid.*, p. 149 (89:3).

88. *Ibid.*, pp. 145–46 (86:1–6).

89. *Ibid.*, pp. 148–49 (88:8).

90. *Ibid.*, p. 149 (88:12).

91. *Aquarian Gospel*, p. 268 (182:28).

92. *Ibid.*, p. 264 (178:21).

93. *Ibid.*, p. 263 (178:14).

94. *Ibid.*, p. 264 (178:42).

95. *Ibid.*, p. 261 (177:1).

96. *Archko Volume*, p. 91; cp. pp. 86–87.

97. *Aquarian Gospel*, p. 240 (163:26).

98. *Ibid.*, p. 264 (178:37).

99. Beskow, p. 36. For the source quotations on Emma handling the covered plates, see Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1981), pp. 28–29.

100. Beskow, pp. 37–38.

101. *Ibid.*, p. 38. For support of this conclusion, see the Anderson study cited in note 99 above.

102. Krister Stendahl, *Meanings: The Bible as Document and as Guide* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), p. 99.

103. Comments just quoted introduce his essay, “The Sermon on the Mount and Third Nephi in the Book of Mormon,” reprinted without changes in *Meanings*. In the present article, quotations from Stendahl’s essay will be cited from that source and from its original publication in Truman G. Madsen, ed., *Reflections on Mormonism: Judaeo-Christian Parallels* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, Religious Studies Center, 1978). These works will be cited by short titles only.

104. *Reflections*, p. 153; *Meanings*, p. 112.

105. *Reflections*, p. 150; *Meanings*, p. 109.

106. *Reflections*, p. 151; *Meanings*, p. 110.

107. In judging Third Nephi, there is the question of the changed status of Jesus, just discussed, and also his personal creativity, which

may well be stereotyped in the style of early records. Stendahl defines John as emphasizing personal belief in Jesus, but “Come unto me” is in Matthew 11:28–30 in a powerful context of authority from the Father. The synoptic Gospels use a more indirect form of leading to the personalized Christ, whereas John intensifies the effect by collecting a number of personifying teachings—the historical Jesus can be behind both strategies of writing about him. The same is true of the synoptic quotation of one “verily” and John’s doubling of it. In real life Jesus could well have varied between the two expressions, but the habit of quoting this repetitive expression developed differently in the synoptics than in John. The doubled “verily” is seen by Stendahl as Third Nephi’s “transposition into revelatory speech style” (*Reflections*, p. 150; *Meanings*, pp. 109–10). More correctly, the American Christ uses the single or double “verily” in about equal proportions, a pattern which could be closer to probable variation in his earthly life.

108. *Reflections*, p. 146; *Meanings*, p. 105.

109. Since the Book of Mormon cultural pattern is away from sophistication in metaphor, there is a consistency in Jesus’ phrases of explanation in two beatitudes. Stendahl is skeptical of one, that those who hunger and thirst after righteousness “shall be filled with the Holy Ghost” (3 Nephi 12:3). Since the Greek word in Matthew 5:6 is *chortázō*, a word with strong physical implications of eating to the fill, the Book of Mormon use is “rather unnatural” and therefore an uninformed gloss (*Reflections*, p. 142; *Meanings*, p. 102). But Jesus specialized in verbal surprises in the Gospels. As far as the technical point is concerned, the Septuagint also uses *chortázō*, for “filled” in a spiritual sense: “For he satisfies the empty soul, and fills the hungry soul with good things” (Psalm 106:9, LXX; 107:9, KJV).

110. *Reflections*, p. 151; *Meanings*, p. 110.

111. For a survey of the intensity of secret crime in mature Nephite society, see Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1964), ch. 27, “The Way of the Wicked.”

112. Such preparation is the significant background for perceptive comment on Jesus’ appearing to a multitude of 2,500 (3 Nephi 17:25). Stendahl sees this as part of the expansion pattern of pious commentary (*Reflections*, p. 141; *Meanings*, p. 101). The real issue is not numbers but worthiness to receive such a manifestation. Paul’s “above five hundred brethren at once” (1 Corinthians 15:6) who saw the Lord were apparently prepared leaders who were to bear testimony of that experience. And there are clear suggestions that the Nephite multitude were the more righteous of those remaining, a special group out of the special group that survived the judgments of destruction preceding Christ’s

American appearance. Thus the basis of worthiness in Third Nephi strikingly differs from the modern apocrypha, which have Jesus indiscriminately appearing to unbelievers and even opponents.

113. Apparently, Goodspeed was familiar with the Book of Mormon, since he gave graduate classwork to LDS religion teachers at Brigham Young University during the summer of 1930, before either of his modern apocrypha editions was published. Ernest L. Wilkinson, ed., *Brigham Young University: The First One Hundred Years* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1975), 2:287–88. Goodspeed later recalled “lecturing in Provo” and visiting the tourist sites around Utah, which probably included Temple Square in Salt Lake City. Edgar J. Goodspeed, *As I Remember* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1953), p. 141.

114. Goodspeed, *Famous “Biblical” Hoaxes*, p. 8.

115. Krister Stendahl, “Matthew,” *Peake’s Commentary on the Bible*, ed. Matthew Black and H. H. Rowley (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1962), p. 798. The evaluation of baptism in Third Nephi is in *Reflections*, p. 152; *Meanings*, p. 111.

116. See Richard L. Anderson, *Euangelion—A Study in New Testament Context* (M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1957). Besides context, the study used apostolic reminders of conversion doctrines, such as 1 Corinthians 15:1–4 and Hebrews 6:1–3, both of which have clear correlations to Third Nephi chapters 11 and 27.

117. John’s letters are preoccupied with what Jesus taught at the “beginning,” and his Gospel written at this same period defines Jesus’ baptismal ministry as exceeding that of John the Baptist (John 3:22–23). In this context he reports Jesus as requiring even Jewish leaders like Nicodemus to enter God’s kingdom through repentance and baptism (John 3:3–5).

118. *Reflections*, p. 154; *Meanings*, p. 113.

119. In Gaster’s collection, see especially the collections of Old Testament texts, pp. 443–51, and the formal commentaries on Isaiah, Hosea, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Psalms, pp. 299–332.

120. *Ibid.*, p. 299.

121. Maurya P. Horgan, *Pesharim: Qumran Interpretations of Biblical Books* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1979), p. 248.

122. *Ibid.*, p. 16, commentary on Habakkuk 2:2–3.

123. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “Further Light on Melchizedek from Qumran Cave 11,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 86 (1967): 26.

124. Hugh W. Nibley, *Since Cumorah: The Book of Mormon in the Modern World* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1967), pp. 299–302.

125. J. H. Ropes, "Agrapha," in James Hastings, ed., *A Dictionary of the Bible*, Extra Volume (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1904), p. 344.

126. M. S. Enslin, "Agrapha," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* 1:56.

127. Roderic Dunkerley, *Beyond the Gospels* (Hammondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1957), p. 112.

128. Ropes, p. 343.

129. Beskow, p. 34.

130. A raw estimate of the number of copies of the Book of Mormon printed to date is 30,000,000, based on correspondence of October 12, 1983, to the author from William James Mortimer, director of the LDS Printing Services Division. For one example of an educated reaction to Third Nephi, see the experience of a Roman Catholic nun upon reading chapters 11 through 28: "The words of the Savior were absolutely beautiful; they rang true with every word that passed before my eyes." Tammy Lavena Tobin, "Truly the Word of God," *Ensign*, December 1983, p. 20.