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FOUNDATION FOR ANCIENT RESEARCH AND MORMON STUDIES

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland

A Standard unto My People

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Summary:

Elder Jeffrey Holland bears testimony of the Book of Mormon as the keystone of Mormonism. The Book of Mormon is either what it says it is, and Joseph Smith's account of its origin is true, or it and the Prophet are simply discredited. Three great witnesses of Christ in the Book of Mormon are Nephi, Jacob, and Isaiah.

Transcript
Book of Mormon, Jesus Christ

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CES ANNUAL BOOK OF MORMON SYMPOSIUM
9 AUGUST 1994, 7:30 P.M.
BYU MARRIOTT CENTER
Elder Jeffrey R. Holland

My beloved brothers and sisters of the Church Educational System, what a delight it is for Pat and for me to be back with you tonight in a religious education setting. The memories you have given us from our own CES years are deep and cherished. We are grateful for your friendship and associations in a career choice which, in our case, goes back twenty-nine years ago. We loved our years in the CES classroom and applaud your decision to teach and serve there. You know how tremendously rewarding it is, and how delightful your professional association with one another can be. You bring back all of those memories to us tonight.

The past six weeks have been very emotional ones for me, as I'm sure you can suppose. There is no way for me to speak adequately of the spiritual impact and tremendous sense of responsibility and sacred duty which has come into my life. I've been humbled to the depths of my soul and have been divided asunder "both joints and marrow" by the penetrating examination we've undergone--an examination partly at our own hands but an examination more powerfully and more profoundly administered at the hands of the Holy Spirit. I think our highs have been higher and our lows have been lower than at any other time in our life, all of which I am sure you can understand.

I am reluctant to refer to "Gethsemane" because that phrase really belongs only to the sacred and inviolate anguish experienced by the Only Begotten Son of God and him alone. Nevertheless I can frankly say that I have newer and deeper understanding of the great opening passage in that revelation the Prophet Joseph designated as "the olive leaf . . . plucked from the Tree of Paradise." Section 88, verse 6 reads: "He that ascendeth up on high, . . . also . . . descended below all things." I have felt and am still feeling some of those tremendously demanding emotions.

I have been cautioned that this process is not over, nor will it ever fully be so as long as I live. In any case I can certainly testify to you how real and distinct the apostolic calling is, beyond anything else I have ever experienced in life. Thank you for your prayers, your many kindnesses, and for the support you give the Brethren and the office to which I have been called. Obviously when Brother Peterson extended this invitation to me some months ago, neither of us knew that this call would come in the intervening weeks. So tonight when I ask for your faith and your prayers, as speakers routinely do and should, know that I mean that in a way as never before.

Our theme this week is the Book of Mormon and I really am going to get to it, but I want to begin by bearing my testimony of the calling of President Howard W. Hunter as president of the Church and president of the high priesthood. We have sustained a new

prophet, seer, and revelator to lead the Church only twelve times since the death of the Prophet Joseph and we are going to get our thirteenth opportunity at October conference, presumably in a solemn assembly as part of those meetings. Suffice it to say, we are in a moment of significant and profound history. We do well to ponder it, to savor it, and to teach our students something of it--especially when in their youthful lives they will have seen or remembered almost nothing of such earlier transitions in Church government.

Furthermore what we ourselves now take almost for granted was not always so obvious or routine. Can you imagine the consternation, the devastation in the hearts of the Saints at the time of Joseph and Hyrum's martyrdom? How many of those tearful and beleaguered Saints said--or thought--"What do we do now?" Of course the Lord answered their prayers and those questions. It was clear the keys of the kingdom were in the holy apostleship. Indeed the Prophet Joseph had said not long before his death that with their apostolic callings and temple endowments complete, the Twelve could then bear away the kingdom regardless of what might happen to him personally. And so they did for those next three years under Brother Brigham's apostolic leadership. But exactly how and when to reorganize the First Presidency was not so clear, and you are aware of the apostolic interregna which followed not only Joseph's death but that of President Young's and President Taylor's deaths as well.

The limitations of our time tonight and the commanding attraction of the Book of Mormon we are teaching this year do not allow a discourse on "Succession in the Presidency," but I wish to testify personally, from a vantage point which has been uniquely mine these past forty-seven days, that God has again worked his will, placing his hand on Howard W. Hunter, spreading the prophetic mantle of ordained leadership upon his shoulders. This beloved man, who has suffered from almost every imaginable illness and malady, who has lost his beloved first companion as well as their firstborn son, and who has himself been led back from the brink of eternity time and again--this man is, under the sustaining Spirit of the Almighty and the priesthood promises made to the faithful, leading the Church with vigor and vision and authority.

Consider all of this in light of the fact that in April of this year there was great question and concern as to whether or not President Hunter would even be able to participate in general conference. You may remember the delight we all felt when he was able to bear a brief but powerful testimony in something of an impromptu insertion into the conference schedule. Now, just four months later, he is meeting daily in his prophetic capacity with his counselors, meeting also in his regular schedule with the Twelve and other General Authorities, presiding and speaking at any number of public events far and wide, almost all of which are covered closely by the media and frequently involve press conferences and interviews. His has been a whirlwind of demanding duties since the passing of President Benson, yet he has been not only more than equal to the pace and absolutely powerful in his messages, but he has seemed to be steadily strengthened and more invigorated with every passing day.

May I also pay tribute to President Gordon B. Hinckley and President Thomas S. Monson who stand by and with President Hunter, who love him and now serve with him as the other two great presiding high priests in the First Presidency. They have been magnificent in their exemplary willingness to do exactly as their senior apostle, President Hunter, would ask. If that means continuing in the new First Presidency, they respond. They are happy to do so. But if for any reason they were not to have continued, they would have responded, happy to serve in the Quorum of the Twelve.

It has just been absolutely inspiring to watch--a genuine ecclesiastical thrill. For six days (from the death of President Ezra Taft Benson on Monday, May 30, to the ordination and setting apart of President Howard W. Hunter on Sunday, June 4) we have witnessed again a modern apostolic interregnum. You saw some of it at public events like Elder Sterling W. Sill's funeral and much more dramatically at President Benson's funeral, but we were able to see it at first hand, including in our General Authority temple meetings that week.

I testify of this remarkable, divine process, of the men who have been called to lead, including President Boyd K. Packer, acting president of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, and of the divinity behind the revelations which guide us through such times. Can you imagine what would happen in such circumstances at A T & T or General Motors? The infighting would be lethal, the corporate blood-letting incalculable, the confusion suffocating, all while watching the organization spiral downward out of control, perhaps toward destruction.

But in the Church? Not a whimper. Not a whisper. Not a sixty-fourth of a second without keys, and authority and prophetic leadership. And all of this given by revelation to a boy prophet leading a church--then--of only a few hundred members. Yet we still guide nine million by those same revelations more than one hundred and sixty years later.

To paraphrase Winston Churchill, "Some boy. Some church."

As an additional element of testimony about President Hunter, let me share with you some of what is shareable about my call. I would not do this everywhere and I won't speak of any details, but I would like to share just a bit in this setting, among friends, as part of my testimony of the calling of a prophet.

Late on the evening of June 22, following our return to our home in Bountiful from a full day here in Provo at the Mission Presidents' Seminar, we received a telephone call. It was from President Hunter. The time was exactly 9:55 p.m. Now, you may be different from me, but I don't get a lot of personal calls at my home from the president of the Church--and certainly not at 10:00 at night. There was no secretary, no Church operator, nothing but that warm and distinct personal voice of our new prophet on the other end of the line.

After some small talk he said this: "I have a meeting of the First Presidency at 8:00 in the morning but I would like to see you briefly before that if that is convenient for you. It won't take too long. Could you drop by my office for a moment at, say, 7:30 a.m.--but only if that is convenient for you?"

Convenient for me? How typical. It was 10:00 p.m., he was still doing Church business and I knew from experience he would be at his desk by 6:30 or 7:00 a.m. at the latest. And he was wondering if 7:30 was "convenient" for me?

I reassured him that I could be at his office whenever he requested it. He then went on with some more pleasant small talk and laughter, after which he again confirmed the meeting time and courteously said, "Good night."

I hung up the telephone really quite calmly. It is not unusual for the senior brethren to request some of us to pop by their offices before morning meetings begin and President Hunter had made it sound so routine and appropriate.

In fact it was so masterfully done that I almost slept that night. Pat, marvelously Church-broken wife that she is, did not ask one single question about why he had called or what he had said in the conversation. Not one single word did she ask! She just went to sleep like a baby, as if the president of the Church called every night!

That next morning President Hunter had, in fact, been in his office for some time when I arrived at 7:15 a.m. He invited me in, chatted with me for a while, then with great strength and a fixed look in those penetrating blue eyes, he issued to me my call. Most of that experience I can't share with you, but it was very powerful and penetrating and overwhelming. He was powerful and penetrating and overwhelming. I wept and he wept with me. He let me recover, with a silence that is so appropriate at such sacred times. I finally gave a response as best I could and he reassured me. We then conversed quietly for a full thirty minutes, with President Hunter giving sweet counsel and continued reassurance. I sat stunned and listening.

As our time together drew to a close, he told me I was to report to the temple at 9:30 a.m. where, he informed me, I was to be ordained and set apart. He then left for his regular 8:00 a.m. meeting of the First Presidency.

At 9:15 a.m. I was waiting, as directed, on the fourth floor of the Salt Lake Temple. Soon President Hunter, President Hinckley and President Monson came in to begin the joint meeting of the First Presidency and Council of the Twelve. In that setting President Hunter conducted the opening business, introduced me to the circle, gave me my formal apostolic charge along with appropriate personal counsel, invited my response, then acted as voice in ordaining me and setting me apart. Following that emotional and unforgettable sequence lasting nearly one-and-one-half hours, I was then invited to sit in the vacant twelfth apostolic chair and President Hunter proceeded to conduct the business of the remaining two hours

or so in that setting. My point is that at the end of a day in which I was absolutely drained, just as emotionally and tearfully exhausted as one could possibly be, President Hunter was apparently getting stronger by the hour--and so it has seemed from that day to this.

It would not have been uncommon, even for a perfectly youthful president of the Church, to have had others do some of what he had done for those five-and-one-half hours that morning. But he did it all! And was powerful! And he kept getting stronger! Through all of this I felt a little like Sidney Rigdon after participating in the receiving of Section 76. You will remember that following that great experience, the Prophet Joseph was hale, hearty, and invigorated while Sidney sat limp and pale, needing some opportunity to recover. As Joseph said of Sidney, so I imagined President Hunter saying of me: "Jeffrey is not as used to this as I am." (Now, if you please, that's as far as I would like my comparison with Sidney Rigdon to go!)

I feel it is part of my personal ministry to bear witness of the miracle that has happened and is happening in the life of Howard W. Hunter. I bear witness that he is, himself, a miracle--evidence of God's hand upon the prophets whom he calls and restores and sustains. Howard W. Hunter was foreordained in the councils of heaven before this world was, and he has been made, fashioned, molded into a prophet of God, as each of his predecessors have been and as each of his successors will be. He has not simply outlived others, nor has he gone through what he has gone through by accident. He is a man of velvet and steel, called of God. That witness is deep and personal with me, confirmed by the very small part I have been privileged to play in the history of his first few weeks in office.

I testify that he is a prophet of God and that the divinity of the work continues. What a loss if we had not lived to see this moment in Church history. How wonderful that the word and will and mind of the Lord is always in force and that the senior apostle is set apart to this sacred office of president of the Church. The work is true and the plan of Church government is perfect. Every contingency has been accounted for. Every fail-safe precaution has been built in from the beginning. It is a marvelous work and a wonder, and I have seen it at close quarters.

Thank the Lord every day of your lives that you belong to this true, and truly remarkable, Church. "Praise to the men who commune with Jehovah"--from the Prophet Joseph Smith, Jr. to the Prophet Howard W. Hunter. I bear solemn and personal witness of their divinely-ordained callings and the remarkable system of Church government over which they preside. From an incomparable 14-year-old in 1820 to an invincible 86-year-old in 1994, it is obvious that age is no issue at all, and that "time . . . is measured [only] unto men." (Alma 40:8.) The governance works and the principles are true. We are led by prophets of the living God.

And that does lead me to our theme tonight--the Book of Mormon. That book and the courses of study we have fashioned around it were my chief delight as a teacher in those

years when I sat where you sit. Furthermore the Book of Mormon continues to be the keystone to my own personal faith just as it does for our LDS theology as a whole.

A good deal has been said about the authorship--and therefore the divine origins--of the Book of Mormon lately, but then there has always been a lot said about it ever since it first rolled off the old E. B. Grandin Press in downtown Palmyra on the twenty-sixth of March, 1830. As a prelude to my own testimony of the divinity of Book of Mormon origins and authorship, let me quote two readily recognizable paragraphs as to the centrality of the book to our faith--its keystone role, if you will.

The earlier of the two is from the late Bruce R. McConkie and it is familiar to all of us. He said in general conference more than 33 years ago, "The Prophet's expression that 'the Book of Mormon is the keystone of our religion' means precisely what it says. The keystone is the central stone in the top of the arch. If that stone is removed, then the arch crumbles, which, in effect, means that Mormonism so-called--which actually is the gospel of Christ, restored anew in this day--stands or falls with the truth or the falsity of the Book of MormonIf the Book of Mormon is true, our message to the world is truth; the truth of this message is established in and through this book" (Conference Report, April 1961, p. 39.)

A more recent and very powerful comment to the same effect is from President Ezra Taft Benson who said:

The Book of Mormon is the keystone of [our] testimony. Just as the arch crumbles if the keystone is removed, so does all the Church [may I repeat that again, all the Church] stand or fall with the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon. The enemies of the Church understand this clearly. This is why they go to such great lengths to try to disprove the Book of Mormon, for if it can be discredited, the Prophet Joseph Smith goes with it. So does our claim to priesthood keys, and revelation, and the restored church. But in like manner, if the Book of Mormon be true--and millions have now testified that they have the witness of the spirit that it is indeed true--then one must accept the claims of the Restoration and all that accompanies it.

Yes, the Book of Mormon is the keystone of our religion--the keystone of our testimony, the keystone of our doctrine, and the keystone of the witness of our Lord and Savior. (*A Witness and A Warning*, p. 19.)

The significance and implications of those quotes is self-evident, not only as powerful free-standing texts but all the more so as declarations from the lips of the two special witnesses who uttered them. I know of no two men in recent memory who would be less likely to "gamble," so to speak, with the gospel of Jesus Christ than would Ezra Taft Benson or Bruce R. McConkie. They were both quite conservative and conservative people, traditionally speaking, play things--well, conservatively--pretty close to the vest. So to hear

these two remarkably able and gifted and ordained men say something so tremendously bold, so overwhelming in its implications--that everything in the Church--everything--rises or falls on the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon and, by implication, the Prophet Joseph Smith's account as to how it came forth--well, to the uninitiated that can be a little breathtaking. It sounds like a "sudden-death" proposition to me. Either the Book of Mormon is what the Prophet Joseph said it is, or this Church and its founder are false--fradulent--a deception from the first instance onward.

Not everything in life is so black or white, but it seems the authenticity of the Book of Mormon and its keystone role in our belief is exactly that. Either Joseph Smith was the prophet he said he was, who, after seeing the Father and the Son, later beheld the angel Moroni, repeatedly heard counsel from his lips, eventually receiving at his hands a set of ancient gold plates which he then translated according to the gift and power of God--or else he did not. And if he did not, in the spirit of President Benson and Elder McConkie's earlier comments, he is not entitled to retain even the reputation of New England folk hero or well meaning young man or a writer of remarkable fiction. No, and he is not entitled to be considered a fine teacher or a quintessential American prophet or the creator of great wisdom literature either. If he lied about the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, he is certainly none of those.

And let's not have any of the embarrassingly silly suggestion we have heard from some about Joseph earnestly "thinking" he saw an angel and "imagining" he translated from a set of gold plates. Excuse me if I am speechless--absolutely, totally, and bewilderingly incredulous--at such a comment. Is that really said with a straight face? If so, I think we have another candidate for the Flat Earth Society!

I feel about this as C. S. Lewis once said about the divinity of Christ, a comparison which Dean Robert Millett and others have also made. Lewis once said about the divinity of Christ: "I am here trying to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: [that is] 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who is merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic--on a level with a man who says he's a poached egg--or else he would be the devil of hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the son of God; or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon; or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come up with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to." (*Mere Christianity*, pp. 55-56.

I am suggesting that we make exactly that same kind of do-or-die, bold assertion about the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the divine origins of the Book of Mormon. We have to. Reason and rightness require it. So, quite quickly, Elder McConkie's and President Benson's declarations don't seem so bold after all. They are--

well--just logical. Accept Joseph Smith as a prophet and the book as the miraculously revealed and revered word of the Lord it is or else consign both man and book to Hades for the devastating deception of it all, but let's not have any bizarre middle ground about the wonderful contours of a young boy's imagination or his remarkable facility for turning a literary phrase. It seems to me that is an untenable position to take--morally, literarily, historically or theologically.

As the word of God has always been--and I testify again that that is purely and simply and precisely what the Book of Mormon is--this record is "quick and powerful, sharper than a two-edged sword, to the dividing asunder of both joints and marrow." (D&C 6:2.) The Book of Mormon is that quick and that powerful for us. And it certainly is that sharp. Nothing in our history and nothing in our message cuts to the chase faster than our uncompromising declaration that it is the word of God. On this issue we draw a line in the sand.

A recent critic said that our account of and devotion to the Book of Mormon (and, by implication, Joseph Smith's role in producing it) is, and I quote, "the most cherished and unique Mormon belief." (Quoted in "Review of Books on the Book of Mormon," F.A.R.M.S. vol. 6, No. 1, 1994, p. v.) Our collective affirmation here tonight is that we could not agree more heartily, so long as we are allowed to maintain that this is so because the Book of Mormon affirms our yet higher and more sublime belief, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, the Savior and Redeemer of the world.

May I make it very clear where I stand regarding Joseph Smith, a stance taken because of the Book of Mormon. I endorse with all my heart and with the holy office I now hold, indeed with my very life itself, the declaration of John Taylor who 150 years ago last June took four rounds, full bore, from the Prophet Joseph Smith's enemies who had surrounded Carthage Jail. Brother Taylor's life was spared and lived to say of him, "Joseph Smith, the Prophet and Seer of the Lord, has done more, save Jesus only, for the salvation of men in this world, than any other man that ever lived in it. . . . He lived great, and he died great in the eyes of God and his people; and like most of the Lord's anointed . . . has sealed his mission and his works with his own blood." Then including the beloved Hyrum's life as a second witness, Brother Taylor says "The testators are now dead, and their testament is in force." (D&C 135:3, 5, emphasis added.)

I should think that four balls taken at close range from an unfriendly musket or pistol probably qualifies you to bear your testimony about the experience if you want to. I say that that day in Carthage makes John Taylor's testimony unimpeachable. Furthermore I am frank to say, I am offended by anyone who suggests that any hoax could withstand such events then or for these 150 years since then.

A great many of the judgments currently being passed against Joseph Smith are being made from far more comfortable quarters than that second floor of the Carthage Jail which John Taylor tried so valiantly to defend with nothing more than a hickory walking stick. I

was not there, but I would offer to be there--then or now or ever--in defense of the truth--the truth of who Joseph Smith said he was and what I know the Book of Mormon to be.

As surely as I stand before you tonight and as you sit in this majestic hall, each of us in our own way is a product of that miracle which unfolded from Palmyra to Carthage and continues to unfold yet. I testify that Joseph was and is a Prophet of God and that the Book of Mormon is the most correct of any book on earth, the keystone of our religion. I testify that you and your students will get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book.

I testify out of the certainty of my soul that Joseph Smith entertained an angel and received at his hand an ancient set of gold plates. I testify of that as surely as if I had with the three witnesses seen the angel Moroni or with the three and the eight witnesses seen and handled the plates. I testify that the Book of Mormon has changed my life and gave me my initial and still-abiding provocation to be an active, involved, committed Latter-day Saint.

Much more has happened since those first missionary years, elements of my testimony which I cannot deny now any more than I could deny the Book of Mormon, but in the first instance it was the Book of Mormon that changed my life, told me the gospel of Jesus Christ had been restored, and immersed me in the Church heart and soul. I hold it in a category sacred to me among all the world's literature.

I have read a fair number of books in my day and hope to read a few more. I am not a scholar but once thought I was going to be. I had the beginnings of reasonably good training at some pretty good schools. All of that has changed now, but I believe I still have something of an eye for a penetrating line of prose and I think I can recognize profundity in print when I see it. I say again, the Book of Mormon stands preeminent in my intellectual and spiritual life, the classic of all classics, a reaffirmation of the Holy Bible, a voice from the dust, a witness for Christ, the word of the Lord unto salvation.

The fact that others openly oppose such conviction is, of course, not new. It is as if Mrs. Martin Harris has once again mounted her horse and is riding from house to house throughout the neighborhood "like a dark spirit making diligent inquiry wherever she had the least hopes of gleaning anything, and stirring up every malicious feeling which would tend to subserve her wicked purpose." (*History of Joseph Smith By His Mother, Lucy Mack Smith*, p. 143.) As Professor Dan Peterson said recently of such contemporary efforts, "Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose." ("Review of Books," p. v.) The more things change, the more they stay the same.

And by the way, speaking of Mrs. Harris, if the loss of those 116 pages shared with her was simply the disappearance of some thoughtful, wisdom literature and a few chapters of remarkably deft fiction, as opponents of the Book of Mormon would say, what's the big deal? Why then all that business about Joseph going through the depths of hell, worrying

about whether he was going to get the manuscript back, and fearing the rebuke of God. He is a quick study, they say, a frontier talent. He can just write some more! Let's review some of the emotion of that difficult moment.

When Martin Harris does not return, and does not return, and does not return, Joseph "although he was now nearly worn out, sleep fled from his eyes, neither had he any desire for food, for he felt that he had done wrong, and how great his condemnation was he did not know."

When a fellow traveler inquired about Joseph's gloomy appearance and the cause of his affliction, Joseph thanked him for his kindness and mentioned that he had been caring for a sick wife and child, and that the child had died. As a result his wife was very despondent, but he refrained from giving any further explanation beyond that. When pressed about the situation Joseph replied as before--that he had left his wife in such precarious health that he feared he should not find her alive when he returned; furthermore he had buried his first and only child just days ago, but--note this--"there was another trouble lying at his heart, which he dared not to mention."

Another trouble deeper than those, deeper than a wife who was on the threshold of dying and a son who already had? How deep can such a trouble be, and what could possibly be the nature of it? Well, you and I know.

That next morning 8 o'clock came and went, 9 o'clock, 10 o'clock, 11 o'clock came and went. Finally at half past twelve Martin is seen walking with a slow and measured step toward the house, his eyes fixed remorsefully on the ground. Then he pauses at the gate, drawing his hat down over his eyes. Finally summoning the courage to enter the house, he takes up his knife and fork to eat a proffered noon meal with the Smith family but immediately drops his utensils. Hyrum Smith observes and says, "Martin, . . . are you sick?" Upon which Mr. Harris presses his hands to his head and cries out in a tone of deep anguish, "Oh, I have lost my soul! I have lost my soul!"

Joseph, who had not verbalized his fears until then, springs from the table, crying "Martin, have you lost that manuscript? Have you broken your oath, and brought down condemnation upon my head as well as your own?"

"Yes, it is gone," replied Martin, "and I know not where."

"Oh, my God!" says Joseph, clenching his hands. "All is lost! all is lost! What shall I do? I have sinned--it is I who tempted the wrath of God. I should have been satisfied with the first answer which I received from the Lord; for he told me that it was not safe to let the writing go out of my possession." He then wept and groaned and walked the floor in anguish. At length he tells Martin to go back and search again.

"No," said Martin, "it is all in vain; for I have ripped open beds and pillows; and I

know it is not there."

"Then must I," says Joseph, "return with such a tale as this? I dare not do it. And how shall I appear before the Lord? Of what rebuke am I not worthy from the angel of the Most High?"

The Prophet's mother then adds this final commentary: "I besought him not to mourn so, for perhaps the Lord would forgive him, after a short season of humiliation and repentance. But what could I do to comfort him, when he saw all the family in the same situation of mind as himself; for sobs and groans, and the most bitter lamentations filled the house. However, Joseph was more distressed than the rest, as he better understood the consequences of disobedience. And he continued pacing back and forth, meantime weeping and grieving, until about sunset, when, by persuasion, he took a little nourishment.

"The next morning, he set out for home. We parted with heavy hearts, for it now appeared that all which we had so fondly anticipated, and which had been the source of so much secret gratification, had in a moment fled, and fled forever." (All direct quotes above are from *History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, pp. 124-129.)

Well, my goodness, that's an elaborate little side story. Talk about literary flair and a gift for fiction! Lucy Mack Smith gets a straight "A" right along with her son if this is all an imaginary venture, to say nothing of the terrific performances by Mr. and Mrs. Harris and the entire first generation of the Church. Unless, of course, there really were plates and there really was a translation process going on and there really had been a solemn covenant made with the Lord, and there really was an enemy who did not want that book to "come forth in this generation." (See D&C 10:33.)

Which is only to say what so many have said before: that if Joseph Smith--or anyone else, for that matter--created the Book of Mormon out of whole cloth, that to me is a far greater miracle than the proposition that he translated the book from ancient records with an endowment of divine power to do so.

Has anyone here ever tried to write anything? Have you ever, with your degrees and libraries and computers and research assistants, ever tried to write anything anyone could stand to read?

Even if you have my guess is you haven't succeeded at writing anything anyone would read more than once, or say it changed their lives, or say they were willing to leave family and fortune and future for--and then do it. You thought it was tough to have your dissertation committee grill you for a couple of hours. How about tossing your piece of work to the most hostile--and learned--of enemies for, say, 164 years (just to pull a number out of the air). Go ahead. Put that terrific master's thesis of yours out there under a microscope for everyone to kick and gouge and attack for a century or two, and let's see

how marvelous that university-produced accomplishment of yours really was. After a little of that are you still standing by the divinity and immortality of your work? Is anybody still reading it?

In light of all this, as it applies to the Book of Mormon which is still changing human lives and still moving moral mountains, and as one who has tried to write a line or two of both poetry and prose and failed miserably, I want to meet the author of this work whoever it is. I want to praise first hand such a remarkably gifted writer.

Furthermore I'd love to read anything else this elusive figure has ever written. I'd love to talk to the whole research team who must have produced it. If they've got anything else they've ever put their pen to, I'll pay any amount of money to get hold of it. This is writing that moves millions so more of it could certainly make millions. Let's talk contracts. Surely in 164 years there must be someone willing to step forward--you know, the "real" author--claiming credit for such a remarkable document and all that has transpired in its wake. Or at least those descendants of such an author should have come forth by now willing to cashier the whole thing.

Where are they? Well the simple fact of the matter is no other origin for the Book of Mormon has ever come to light because there isn't one. A bad man could not have fabricated such an inspiring book and a good man would not have done so. The real authors died nearly two millennia ago. And Joseph Smith? He was what he said he was, a seer and a revelator, an instrument in the hands of the Almighty translating (but not authoring) that which the Lord said would "hiss forth unto the ends of the earth, . . . a standard unto [his] people." (2 Nephi 29:2.) I testify that the Book of Mormon is true, it is the revealed word of the Lord and the Latter-day standard for his covenant people. It cannot and will not be disproven because it is true. "The testators have been dead for 150 years but their testament is still in force."

Well, that concludes my introduction. Can any of you remain for the actual talk? I promise to be brief. I wish to highlight just two or three ideas which focus on the most central and rewarding and important theme in the Book of Mormon--indeed the theme of the Book of Mormon--the declaration that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Any one of these ideas deserve an entire sermon or at least a full discussion in one of your workshops, but there is no way to do that tonight. I will just hit a highlight or two, highlights you already recognize, and then I will leave it to you to develop them to the length and breadth they deserve.

Let me play the part of your typical student for a minute, and begin groaning almost instantly about all those Isaiah chapters--and right at the beginning of the book at that! "Brother Johnson, this is B-O-R-I-N-G! Do we have to read it? Are you going to test us on it? Like I mean it's not as if Isaiah is modern or anything. Like I'm so sure I can use it on a date or on my mission or something."

I have felt for a long time that we have missed a remarkable opportunity at the very outset of the book--including the Isaiah chapters but not limited to those--to teach what heaven intended to be taught from the first page onward.

You all know something about the Lord's system of plural witnesses--why there is a godhead, why there is a First Presidency, why the Book of Mormon testifies of the Bible, and the Bible testifies of the Book of Mormon, and both will testify of the records of the ten tribes and so forth. Well, along with a whole world of external witnesses to gospel truth, including to the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon, there is what seems to me a very elaborate structure of internal witnesses in the book. Our colleague, Susan Easton Black, in her research identifies some twenty-two men in the Book of Mormon who actually saw the Son of God. And of that group three witnesses stand shoulder to shoulder, right at the outset, to bear special witness, an introductory witness of Christ, if you will, to the reader beginning the Book of Mormon.

Let me give my personal opinion about something--(in fact this whole talk is my personal opinion. Don't blame any of my brethren for its errors!)

At least six times in the Book of Mormon the phrase "for a wise purpose" is used in reference to the making, writing, and preserving of the small plates of Nephi. (See 1 Nephi 9:5; Words of Mormon 1:7; Alma 37:2, 12, 14, 18.) We know one such wise purpose--the most obvious one--was to compensate for the loss of the earlier mentioned 116 pages of manuscript.

But it strikes me that there is a "wiser purpose" than that, or perhaps more accurately a "wiser purpose" in that. The key to such a suggestion is in verse 45 of Section 10. As the Lord instructs Joseph on the procedure for translating and inserting the material from the small plates into what had been begun as the translation of the abridged large plates, he says, "Behold, there are many things engraven upon the [small] plates of Nephi which do throw greater views upon my gospel."

So clearly this was not a quid pro quo in the development of the final Book of Mormon product. It was not tit for tat, this for that--you give me 116 pages of manuscript and I'll give you 142 pages of printed text. Not so. We got back more than we lost. And it was known from the beginning that it would be so. We do not know exactly what we missed in the 116 pages, but we do know that what we received on the small plates was the personal declarations of three great witnesses, three of the great doctrinal voices of the Book of Mormon, testifying that Jesus is the Christ.

I am suggesting here that Nephi, Jacob, and Isaiah are three early types and shadows of Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris, if you will--witnesses positioned right at the front of the book where Oliver, David, and Martin would be positioned--that Nephi, Jacob, and Isaiah are the three great ancient witnesses of the Book of Mormon--or more particularly, the first three great witnesses in the Book of Mormon testifying to the divinity

of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, he who will be the central, commanding, presiding figure throughout the Book of Mormon.

Nephi stresses this idea himself when he writes in the eleventh chapter of 2 Nephi: "And now I, Nephi, write more of the words of Isaiah, for my soul delighteth in his words. For I will liken his words unto my people, and I will send them forth unto all my children, for he verily saw my Redeemer, even as I have seen him. And my brother, Jacob, also has seen him; wherefore, I will send their words forth unto my children to prove unto them that my words are true. Wherefore, by the words of three, God hath said, I will establish my word." Witnesses. Proof. The best evidence in the world of law, eternal or otherwise--eye-witness testimony! (2 Nephi 11:2, 3, emphasis added.)

Then Nephi concludes, "My soul [and he could have said the souls of all three of us] delighteth in proving unto [our] people [the truth of the coming of Christ] that save Christ should come all men must perish." (2 Nephi 11:6.) And by the time we have read Nephi, his brother Jacob, and the prophet Isaiah, these first three great contributors to the book, as we ultimately received it, we and our students have a remarkable foundation in what Nephi calls "the doctrine of Christ." (2 Nephi 31:21.) It is a foundation lifted almost verbatim from the title page of the Book of Mormon itself. After reading Nephi, Jacob and Isaiah we know two things in bold, powerful strokes--(1) that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God and (2) that God will keep his covenant promises with the remnants of the House of Israel. That is precisely what these three teach so emphatically in the Book of Mormon material we have from them.

Of course, many witnesses will follow Nephi's, Jacob's, and Isaiah's words. King Benjamin adds a magnificent sermon on Christ almost instantly upon our return to the translation of the abridged large plates. And the book becomes replete with messianic material on nearly every page thereafter--so much so that Alma asks in exasperation at one point, "Behold, my brethren, I would ask if ye have read the scriptures? If ye have, how can ye disbelieve on the Son of God?" (Alma 33:14-15.)

But that marvelous Jacob, surely one of the most unacknowledged or perhaps under-appreciated doctrinal voices in all of scripture, has already made that point, stressing just how replete and extensive the scriptures (at least the early, unexpurgated versions of them) were regarding the Savior and his mission. "We knew of Christ," he says, "and we had a hope of his glory many hundred years before his coming; and not only we ourselves . . . but also all the holy prophets who were before us. . . . None of the prophets have written, nor prophesied, save they have spoken concerning . . . Christ." (Jacob 4:4; 7:11, emphasis added.)

My, how we wish we had all of those plain and precious testimonies which have been stripped from the Biblical record. But at least as readers of the Book of Mormon, we have Nephi, Jacob, and Isaiah to speak to us immediately as personal eye-witnesses of the pre-mortal Savior. They are recipients of marvelous revelations regarding his life and ministry

and of God's covenant relationship with the House of Israel, ancient and modern.

In fact I think you could make a pretty obvious case that the sole purpose of the small plates was to give a platform for these three witnesses. After all, their writing constitutes a full 135 pages of what is only a 145 page record. These three are who they are and saw what they saw and are positioned where they are in the book--for a very "wise purpose" indeed.

I think it would be exciting if the 116 pages of manuscript turned up some day, but if they were delivered to my office tomorrow I would never trade them for the material in the small plates of Nephi, for the "greater views" given through the great prophetic sentinels who stand at the gate of the book as we now have it. So tell your students to stop complaining and get reading--including Isaiah.

Let me suggest another matter on this whole subject of early, powerful, doctrinal declarations of Christ. I am intrigued that more than four-fifths of the Book of Mormon--86% by actual page count--comes out of a period before Christ's personal appearance to the Nephites in his resurrected state.

I am deeply moved by that simple little statistic. I am profoundly, powerfully touched by it. What faith! And what a way to teach us faith. You and I are expected to have faith in a Christ who has already come and lived and walked and talked and been crucified and resurrected. And we have witnesses, believers and non-believers, who saw him and heard him, touching the hem of his garment on one day and feeling the wounds in his hands and feet and side on another.

But these early Book of Mormon people? This keystone record of ours? It deals in remarkable faith of a very special kind, greater it seems to me, than you and I are asked to exert. They had (at least 458 pages worth of them had) not a Christ who had come in the flesh but only the trust and consummate hope of such a Christ who would come--far in the future and after most of them were dead. What godly, believing, stalwart people. I am moved to tears at their trust. And I feel ashamed for our post-advent generations who have so many witnesses and so much evidence, but still do not believe.

How did God work out a fairness doctrine with these who lived before Christ came? What did he do for their CES men and women who, on their summer professional development leave, had no shepherd's field, or upper room, or Sea of Galilee or the steps of St. Peter's at Gallicantu to visit? What should be done for those who could only trust there will be a garden tomb just outside of Damascus Gate, as opposed to the certainty of that fact which all of you have who have visited and prayed and wept at the actual site?

The answer to such a question is yet another contribution made clearly and powerfully by the Book of Mormon, more clearly and more powerfully than in any other book--sacred or secular--upon the face of the earth. Yet sometimes we let this great

doctrinal principle pass by unnoticed--or maybe only unacknowledged--by our students. Follow along with me.

Alma, some three-quarters of a century before Christ was born, posed to his son Corianton this very issue we are raising. In teaching this transgressing boy something about justice, mercy, repentance, the atonement and the resurrection, he says: "Behold, you marvel why these things should be known so long beforehand. Behold, I say unto you, is not a soul at this time as precious unto God as a soul will be at the time of his coming? Is it not as necessary that the plan of redemption should be made known unto this people as well as unto their children? Is it not as easy at this time for the Lord to send his angels to declare these glad tidings unto us as unto our children, or . . . after the time of his coming." (Alma 39:17-19, emphasis added.)

In that little passage of encouragement to a wayward son, Alma gives insight as to the special help God would provide for those who were born before Christ's mortal ministry. Of that portion of Adam's family who lived the first four thousand years with what could of necessity be only an eye to the future Messiah, Alma asks, "Would God not send angels to declare these glad tidings unto us?"

That same doctrine--the answer to Alma's rhetorical question--is at the heart of the great last witness of Moroni who, quoting his father, says, "And now I come to that faith, of which I said I would speak; and I will tell you the way whereby you may lay hold on every good thing. For behold, God knowing all things, being from everlasting to everlasting, behold, he sent angels to minister unto the children of men, to make manifest concerning the coming of Christ; . . ." "Wherefore, by the ministering of angels, and by every word which proceedeth forth out of the mouth of God, men began to exercise faith in Christ." (Moroni 7:20-22, 25, emphasis added.)

I am convinced that one of the profound themes of the Book of Mormon, one which may not yet have been developed enough in our teaching of young people, is the role and prevalence and central participation of angels in the gospel story.

The other morning I was listening to the news while I was shaving--a very risky habit, I acknowledge, because you may lose an ear over any given news report. On one of the news shows an author was being interviewed who had just written a book about belief in God. He was being questioned about whether he personally believed in God.

The author answered with something like this. He said, "If I knew whether or not I believed in God, I wouldn't have had to write this book. I have no idea whether there is a God but I do know that religion has gotten a bad name from people who do things like worship cactus and believe in angels." That was it. That was his whole response. He didn't know whether he believed in God or not but believing in angels was clearly equal to worshipping cactus.

May I suggest to you that one of the things we need to teach our students and one of the things which will become more important in their lives the longer they live is the reality of angels, their work and their ministry. Obviously I speak here not alone of the angel Moroni but also of those more personal ministering angels who are with us and around us, empowered to help us and who do exactly that.

Recently I thumbed through the Book of Mormon almost literally at random to note these passages in various parts of that record. (No, I did not use my computer. I am actually still reading entire chapters of the Book of Mormon, even marking a verse or two with a pencil. I know that seems prehistoric, but forgive me!) Now, back to angels. Setting aside the stories we all remember, like the angel who appears to rebuke Laman and Lemuel, (we set that aside because it's in 1 Nephi and everybody's read 1 Nephi, even some of your students), let's go to absolutely foreign territory for your students--such as 2 Nephi--where Jacob begins to teach.

In the sixth chapter of that book Jacob says that the Lord has now shown him that Jerusalem had in fact been destroyed and that most of those in the city were now either slain or carried away captive. He also says he was shown by the Lord that the Jews should return again and that "the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, should manifest himself unto them in the flesh; and after he should manifest himself they should scourge him and crucify him, according to the words of the angel who spake it unto me. And after they have hardened their hearts and stiffened their necks against the Holy One of Israel, behold the judgments of the Holy One of Israel shall come unto them. And the day cometh that they shall be smitten and afflicted. Wherefore, after they are driven to and fro, for thus saith the angel, many shall be afflicted in the flesh, and shall not be suffered to perish, because of the prayers of the faithful." (2 Nephi 6:8-11, emphasis added.)

A remarkable vision or message or communication from the Lord, and how did it come? By an angel. That same revelation goes on with increasingly powerful messianic prophecy.

Consider this a little bit later. As a prelude to Mosiah 3, that remarkable material I have already alluded to containing some of the most beautiful and poignant passages we have in the Book of Mormon about Christ who will suffer "even more than a man can suffer," King Benjamin says: "And the things which I shall tell you [these things, about Christ] are made known unto me by an angel from God. And he said unto me: Awake; and I awoke, and behold he stood before me. And he said unto me: Awake, and hear the words which I shall tell thee." (Mosiah 3:2-3, emphasis added.) Perhaps more of us, including our students, could literally, or at least figuratively, behold the angels around us if we would but awaken from our stupor and hear the words God is trying to tell us.

In Alma 12, another one of those excellent explications of the plan of redemption and the resurrection and the remission of sins, Alma says, "And after God had appointed that these things should come unto man, behold, then he saw that it was expedient that man

should know concerning the things whereof he had appointed unto them; Therefore he sent angels to converse with them, who caused men to behold of his glory. And they began from that time forth to call on his name; therefore God conversed with men." (Alma 12:28-30, emphasis added.)

In light of Jacob's experience earlier I think there are at least two ways to read that last phrase from Alma--that "God conversed with men." One way is to note that angels came first and then, with men thus spiritually prepared, God conversed directly with them. But another way is to see those phrases as synonymous, that when God sent angels to converse with mortals he was then speaking to them, just as if he were personally doing so.

There are, of course, literally dozens of references to angels in the Book of Mormon, but one or two more will suffice and we will leave the subject for tonight. In Helaman 13 we find Samuel the Lamanite facing great rejection in Zarahemla and about to return to his land, "But behold, the voice of the Lord came unto him, that he should return again, and prophesy unto the people whatsoever things should come into his heart." What he then prophesies--what he says that the Lord "put into his heart"--was that the "sword of justice [hangs] over this people; and four hundred years pass not away save the sword of justice [falls] upon this people. . . . And nothing can save this people save it be repentance and faith on the Lord Jesus Christ, who surely shall come into the world, and shall suffer many things and shall be slain for his people. And behold, an angel of the Lord hath declared it unto me, and he did bring glad tidings to my soul. And behold, I was sent unto you to declare it unto you also, that ye might have glad tidings; but behold you would not receive me." (Helaman 13:1-7, emphasis added.)

Samuel the emissary of the angel, Samuel the missionary with the angelic mission, Samuel who knows what he knows in such power because an angel told him so. (This is, by the way, exactly the same missionary experience Alma has when trying to crack Ammonihah--an angel appears in his moment of greatest rejection and tells him to return, and assists him and Amulek in taking the message to that cold city.) (See Alma 8.)

Lastly, on this note, it is not insignificant to me that when Sherem, the first great anti-Christ we meet in the Book of Mormon, receives his only-too-eagerly-sought-for "sign," he admits before death his dishonesty, confessing to the three great truths he had denied. The three truths he mentions, the three great testifiers Sherem now openly acknowledges are, and I quote, "Christ, . . . the Holy Ghost, and the ministering of angels." (See Jacob 7:17.) An interesting threesome.

No wonder we speak of our missionaries, your sons and daughters, as the angels that they are. "And now when Ammon and his brethren saw this work of destruction among those who they so dearly beloved, and among those who had so dearly beloved them--for they were treated as though they were angels sent from God to save them from everlasting destruction--therefore, when Ammon and his brethren saw this great work of destruction, they were moved with compassion." (Alma 27:4, emphasis added.)

I believe we need to speak of and believe in and bear testimony to, the ministry of angels more than we sometimes do. They constitute one of God's great methods of witnessing through the veil, and no document in all this world teaches that principle so clearly and so powerfully as does the Book of Mormon.

No discussion of Christ in the Book of Mormon would be complete without at least some reference to the remarkable material in 3 Nephi. There is so much there that is so exciting. Let me just share one little insight which is probably commonplace to you.

As the Savior comes to the end of that remarkable first day visiting the Nephites, he says, noting that they are weary and that he needs to leave them for a time, "prepare your minds for the morrow, and I come unto you again." Then to stress that he wasn't leaving for just any casual reason, he mentioned his assignment. "Now I go unto the Father, and also to show myself unto the lost tribes of Israel, for they are not lost unto the Father, for he knoweth whither he hath taken them." (3 Nephi 17:1-4.) Obviously duty had great call upon him at that moment.

But then he casts his eyes around the multitude and the tears in their eyes speak volumes, pleading for him to tarry just a little longer with them. Moved with compassion and without a word spoken, he yields, inviting them to bring forward their sick, their lame, their blind, leprous, withered and deaf, all to be healed at his hand according to their faith and the will of the Father. As miraculous and moving as all that must have been, it is only a prelude to the stunning experience he then has with the children over whom he weeps, blessing them one by one. Angels (there they are again) descend out of heaven in the midst of holy fire and circle round about the children, ministering unto them in glory and grandeur.

What then follows in this saga of spontaneous spiritual majesty is the institution of the sacrament, with all the sacred significance that has.

So we have come through powerful doctrines, overwhelming declarations from the lips of the Son of God himself. We have had our first day with him from 3 Nephi 11 to 3 Nephi 18, personally feeling the wounds in his flesh, hearing the sermon at the temple, learning about the covenant, seeing fiery manifestations of angels capped by the institution of the sacrament.

And then we have this counsel, what I believe is intended to be the jewel in the crown of a day filled with incomparable jewels. At this zenith of the first day, as the sacrament of the Lord's supper is being administered, we get this glistening diamond, this simple, clear imperative. To the Nephite Twelve he says, "I say unto you, ye must watch and pray always, lest ye be tempted by the devil, and ye be led away captive by him.

"And as I have prayed among you even so shall ye pray in my church, among my people who do repent and are baptized in my name. Behold I am the light; I have set an

example for you."

Then turning away from the Twelve, he speaks to the multitude, "Behold, verily, verily, I say unto you, ye must watch and pray always lest ye enter into temptation; for Satan desireth to have you, that he may sift you as wheat." Then he invites all of them--to pray in their families, to pray for those investigating the Church--a great sweeping invitation about how broadly we should pray, followed by these words: "Therefore, hold up your light that it may shine unto the world. Behold I am the light which you shall hold up--that which you have seen me do. Behold you see that I have prayed unto the Father, and ye all have witnessed it." (3 Nephi 18:15-24, emphasis added.)

And indeed they have--witnessed Christ at prayer. I quote: "he prayed unto the Father, and the things which he prayed cannot be written, and the multitude did bear record who heard him.

"And after this manner do they bear record: The eye hath never seen, neither hath the ear heard, before, so great and marvelous things as we saw and heard Jesus speak unto the Father;

"And no tongue can speak, neither can there be written by any man, neither can the hearts of men conceive so great and marvelous things as we both saw and heard Jesus speak; and no one can conceive of the joy which filled our souls at the time we heard him pray for us unto the Father." (3 Nephi 17:15-17, emphasis added.)

I can hardly imagine what it might be like to have heard the Savior pray, but I cannot even comprehend what is meant when they say, "no tongue can speak, neither can there be written by any man, neither can the hearts of men conceive" what they saw the Savior pray. It's one thing to hear such a prayer. It's surely something altogether more to see one. What did they see? Well, it can't be written. But suffice it to say that this is the great consummate, concluding example he sets for those people that day, the culminating jewel, the crowning, post-sacramental counsel given to the Twelve and all others who would take up the cross and follow him--they must pray and pray always.

They must pray individually and pray as families. They must pray for the newest member and the littlest child and the most senior citizen among them. And they must pray for those still in the world, those who do not yet have the truth. They must pray for everyone, including their enemies, and those who spitefully use and persecute them. This is the light that they shall hold up. This is the evidence they will give of their faith in their Heavenly Father.

Prayer is worship in both its simplest and most powerful form, as the unknown Zenos taught. (Alma 33:3.) It is "the soul's sincere desire, uttered or unexpressed." ("Prayer Is the Soul's Sincere Desire," *Hymns*, no. 145.) "Therefore hold up your light that it may shine unto the world. Behold I am the light which you shall hold up--that which you have seen me do.

Behold ye see that I have prayed unto the Father, and you all have witnessed it."

The praying Christ. That is the example to which we are to point others. The Christ of humility. The Christ of spiritual communion. The Christ who is dependent upon his Father. The Christ who asks for blessings upon others. The Christ who calls down the powers of heaven. The Christ who is one with the Father in at least one way that we may be united with him as well--through prayer.

Of the many aspects of his life that you teach your students, be absolutely certain you teach them of the praying Christ. Along with putting the scriptures in their hands, there is no more certain help you can give them in this difficult world in which they live and in the increasingly destructive times which they will face. Hold up that light to them--Christ seeking the guidance and support and protection of the Father. Christ submitting, yielding, obeying the will of the Father. That is the light we are to show to the world and you are to show your students. It is the image of Christ praying such unspeakable things.

Give your students this promise as Christ gave it to the Nephite multitude--"And whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, which is right, believing that ye shall receive, behold it shall be given unto you." (3 Nephi 18:20.) They need to believe that. And they will if you believe it.

My concluding testimony tonight is that of Moroni's, surely the loneliest voice in scriptural history. In his isolation, Moroni becomes something of three witnesses in one, speaking to us three times, as it were, in final declaration of the Savior and of this messianic testament for which he will be the last author. His first witness is his conclusion to his father's book, comprising chapters eight and nine of that text. One passage of scripture in that sequence about Christ blessed me at a crucial moment in my life more powerfully and more dramatically than has any other verse of scripture anywhere in the standard works. I would love Moroni forever for that one experience alone, if for no other reason--and there are lots of other reasons.

His second witness comes with the book of Ether--his own comments in that book, following that singular, unparalleled experience of the brother of Jared. Those twenty-eight verses in the third chapter of Ether may well be the single most remarkable encounter with Christ ever experienced by mortal man, and we are indebted to Moroni for preserving it. And what a lesson in meekness that such an unprecedented revelation coming to one of such unparalleled faith does not even give us the name of that prophet to whom it came. What a stunning, silent declaration to a world nearly drowning in a sea of egotism and self-interest.

Moroni's third and final testimony comes in his own concluding book, emphasizing faith in Christ, hope in Christ, the charity of Christ with the prayer that these three great Christian virtues, these consummate Christian principles, will lead us to--purity. "Pray unto the Father with all . . . energy of heart . . . that ye may become the sons [and daughters] of

God; that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is . . . [may we] be purified even as he is pure. Amen." (Moroni 7:48, emphasis added.)

My prayer for you and your students tonight is Moroni's prayer as taught by his Father--a prayer for purity--the purity of Christ--coming to us from our faith and our hope and our charity. May we see him as he is and be like him when he comes. May we be purified as he is pure. "Come unto Christ, and lay hold upon every good gift, and touch not the . . . unclean thing. . . . Yea come unto Christ and be perfected in him, . . . And . . . if ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and deny not his power, then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot." (Moroni 10:30-33.)

The final and ultimate appeal of the keystone of our religion and the most correct book ever written is to touch not the unclean thing, to be holy and without spot--to be pure. And that purity can come only through the blood of that Lamb who bore our griefs and carried our sorrows, the Lamb who was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities, the Lamb who was despised and afflicted, but whom we esteemed not. (See Mosiah 14.)

But for all that we have placed on him, and in spite of stripes he should not have had to bear, and though our sins and stupidity be as scarlet--yet we can be made "white as snow." (See Isaiah 1:18.)

"[Who] are these . . . arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? . . . These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." (Rev. 7:13-14.)

Purity--through the blood of the Lamb. That is what this book pleads for and that is what I pray you will help your students to achieve. Such is God's covenant. Such is Christ's mission. Such is our privilege and our duty and our unmerited opportunity. May you have a marvelous year teaching the Book of Mormon to the youth of the Church, my children and yours, who perchance one day will greet you, clothed in robes of righteousness, whiter and brighter than the noon day sun, there at the pleasing bar of the Great Jehovah, the Eternal Judge of both the quick and the dead. If they do meet you there, surely they will thank you--and so do I. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.